

Guide to the John Godfrey Papers

YCAL MSS 1617



Compiled by Kolbe Resnick

December 2023

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 1617

CREATOR: Godfrey, John, 1945-

TITLE: John Godfrey Papers

DATES: 1966–2022

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 6 linear feet (17 boxes)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.45 Gigabytes 5 2.3 inch floppy disks (0.18 gigabytes) and 1 USB flash drive (2.27 gigabytes)

LANGUAGE: English (Latin script)

SUMMARY: The John Godfrey papers consists of correspondence, manuscripts, drafts, notebooks, ephemera, photographs, and audiovisual materials. The collection consists of both physical, analog materials and born digital materials. The collection documents Godfrey's personal life and career as a poet, revealing his writing process and evolution through drafts, letters, journals, notes, and emails. The collection also includes materials showing his relationships with some of the most recognizable figures of the second generation of the New York School poets, poets involved with the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, as well as figures from other artistic circles in New York from the 1960s to 2022. The material, along with the structure of the collection's organization, reveals his writing process, his inspirations, drafts of poems, editing, and selection process (for publication). Many of the materials are accompanied by Godfrey's handwritten contextualizing notes detailing their relation to Godfrey's published and unpublished works, his personal life, and connections between works in the collection.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.godfrey>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.godfrey>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Granary Books on the Alfred Z. Baker Fund, 2022.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The John Godfrey papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

John Godfrey Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

Biographical / Historical

Poet, educator, and nurse John Godfrey was born in Massena, NY in 1945. Following a childhood spent moving around the country with his family, he attended Princeton University, receiving his BA in 1967. At Princeton he began writing and publishing poems, heavily influenced by the poets of the New American Poetry. This brought him to the East Village in Manhattan, where he continued to write and immerse himself in the literary and artistic circles of the ensuing decades. He became involved with the Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, New York, using their mimeograph machine to publish his first two books, *26 Poems* (1971) and *The Music of the Curbs* (1972) (he went on to teach workshops at the Poetry Project on and off from 1974 until 1983). Since then, he has published more than 16 poetry collections and chapbooks, all by small presses. In addition, his work has been featured in numerous journals and magazines, including *The Paris Review*, *Sal Mimeo*, *The Chicago Review*, *New American Writing*, *Vanitas*, *Talisman*, *1913*, *New Hunter's Review*, *Cruel Garters*, and *A Gathering of Tribes*. Godfrey also has numerous collaborations with artist Alex Katz.

In 1984 he was named a General Electric Foundation Fellow, followed by a Foundation for Contemporary Arts grant in 2009. In 2013 he was awarded a fellowship by the Z Foundation.

Godfrey earned a BS in Nursing from Columbia University in 1994, and began a career as a pediatric nurse, working largely with HIV/AIDS patients at hospitals in the Flatbush and East Flatbush neighborhoods of Brooklyn, NY. He retired from nursing in 2011.

Scope and Contents

The John Godfrey Papers consists of correspondence, notebooks, manuscripts, photographs, writings from contemporaries as well as flyers, gallery announcements, and other ephemera. Also included is a VHS of a reading at Attitude Art in 1987. Digital material consists of computer files, JPGs, manuscript material, personal and work-related documents, and a significant amount of email correspondence with other poets and contemporaries including John Ashbery, Charles Bernstein, Steve Dalachinsky, Richard Hell, Barbara Henning, Erica Hunt, Susan Howe, Alex Katz, Bernadette Mayer, Duncan McNaughton, Alice Notley, Maureen Owen, Anne Waldman, and Lewis Warsh, among others. The paper material covers the years 1966-2022 with the bulk of the material dating from 1985-1997. Born digital material covers 1993-2022. Transferred to the Beinecke on five floppy disks and one USB flash drive, the computer files consist of manuscript poems, drafts, digital proofs and layouts, photographs, artwork, personal documents, and personal and professional correspondence.

Arrangement

Arranged into five series: Series I. Correspondence, 1968-2020 Series II. Drafts of work, 1966-2020 Series III. Ephemera, circa 1986-2016 Series IV. Photographs and audiovisual, circa 1980-2006 Series V. Computer media, 1993-2022

The collection has been processed to retain the original order the collection was in when it arrived at the Beinecke. Materials within folders retain the original order.

Prior to arriving at the Beinecke Library, the John Godfrey papers was compiled and organized by the creator, with assistance from Granary Books. The collection arrived with a prospectus detailing the history of the materials and the strategy behind the construction and arrangement of the collection. Extensive notes accompany almost every folder in the collection, highlighting Godfrey's writing process, contextualizing the materials within his career and process, as well as describing what the materials pertain to, if not immediately clear. For this reason, the decision was made to keep the collection in the order it was in, to maintain the structure and contextualization of materials Godfrey intended.

Collection Contents

I: Correspondence, 1968–2020

Series I. contains correspondence with contemporary poets, authors, friends, and family members. Documented in the correspondence is Godfrey's close relationships with other poets and artists as well as their admiration for his work. Also included is correspondence and journal entries from his extended travels in Thailand during the late 1980s and legal correspondence following a car accident in 1986.

The written correspondence is a small part of the overall correspondence. The majority will be found in the email sub-series, which holds over 4,500 emails and covers the years 2013–2022, documenting Godfrey's relationships with other New York City poets, artists, and scholars. Topics range from book reviews, publication correspondence, business emails, personal updates, health-related questions posed to Godfrey from his peers, and event announcements. The emails also provide a snapshot of the New York literary community's life and adaptation during lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when many in-person events were canceled or moved online.

Arranged in original order.

b. 1, f. 1	Ashbery, John	2008–2012
b. 1, f. 2	Berkson, Bill	2008–2021
b. 1, f. 3	Cohen, Joseph Arthur	1986–1988
b. 1, f. 4	Collom, Jack	1986–2016
b. 1, f. 5	Hollo, Anselm	2001
b. 1, f. 6	Katz, Alex	2008–2019
b. 1, f. 7	MacNaughton, Duncan	1988–2020
b. 1, f. 8	Mayer, Bernadette	2019–2020
b. 1, f. 9	North, Charles	2003–2019
b. 1, f. 10	Schlesinger, Kyle	2019–2020
b. 1, f. 11	General correspondence	1968–2020
b. 1, f. 12	[Sarah and Norton]	undated
b. 1, f. 13	Brodey, Jim	circa 1982
b. 1, f. 14	Koethe, John	1969–1970
b. 1, f. 15	Godfrey, Christina	1990–1992
b. 1, f. 16	Jones, Patricia Spears	1990
b. 1, f. 17	Family correspondence	circa 1983–1985

Emails

465,376,288 bytes

2013–2022

Covering the years 2013–2022, John Godfrey's email inbox includes correspondence with many notable figures in the literary and artistic circles of New York and beyond. Topics range from book reviews, publication

correspondence, business emails, personal updates, health-related questions posed to Godfrey from his peers, and event announcements. The emails also provide a snapshot of the New York literary community's life and adaptation during lockdown due to the covid-19 pandemic, when many in-person events were canceled or moved online. Most frequent correspondents include Ron Padgett, Angelica Clark, Bill Berkson, Alice Notley, Peter Schjeldhal, Richard Hell, Simon Pettet, and Greg Masters. Other correspondents include Penny Arcade, John Ashbery, Vyt Bakaitis, Micah Ballard, Joshua Beckman, Alan Bernheimer, Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Sheelagh Bevan, Elizabeth Botten, Garret Caples, Charlotte Carter, Miles Champion, John Coletti, Susan Coolidge, Kyle Dacuyan, Steve Dalachinsky, Jane Dalrymple-Hollo, Alan Davies, Thomas Devaney, Martha Diamond, Lila Dlaboha, Joan Fagin, Olivia Funk, Cliff Fyman, Peter Gizzi, Ted Greenwald, David Henderson, Barbara Henning, Bob Holman, Alex Katz, Vincent Katz, Basil King, John Koethe, Michael Lally, Theodora Lang, Annabel Lee, Duncan McNaughton, Elinor Nauen, Susan Noel, Kevin Opstedal, Phoebe Ozun, Laurie Price, Carter Ratcliff, Kit Robinson, Karin Roffman, Harris Schiff, Kyle Schlesinger, Simon Schucha, Ann Stephenson, Nick Sturm, Stacy Szymaszek, Tony Towle, Morgan Vo, Anne Waldman, Lewis Warsh, Marie Warsh, Trevor Winkfield, John Yau, Don Yorty, Bill Zavatsky, among others. Also included with the emails are over 600 attachments (many in the form of .jpg and .doc) of images and documents, including drafts, manuscripts, proofs/layouts for publications, gallery checklists, and flyers.

Restricted fragile material. Access copies of digital files may be requested. Consult Public Services for further information.

Prior to being transferred to the Beinecke, John Godfrey's emails were curated and arranged by Godfrey and Granary books to remove any mass marketing or irrelevant emails. Godfrey sent two .mbox files arranged into "Inbox" and "Sent", that consist of a total of 4,533 emails dating from 2013 to 2022. The .mbox files were included on the USB flash drive supplied by Granary with the computer media. Godfrey's emails were processed by Beinecke staff using the email appraisal software, ePADD.

II: Drafts of work, 1966–2020

Series II. Drafts of work includes autograph and typed manuscripts of poems, written on a variety of writing surfaces, including notebooks, sketchbooks, loose sheets of paper, envelopes, and notecards. The writings consist of individual poems, completed manuscripts, journal entries, essays, drafts, reviews, tributes, blog posts, collaborations, and notes of inspiration. Individual poems selected, considered, and rejected for larger works, some with significant edits and markings are included and in most cases noted by Godfrey.

Arranged in original order.

b. 2, f. 1	<i>Bodybuilding</i> , typescript	circa 2015
b. 2, f. 2	<i>Mull's Least Moan</i> , typescript	undated
b. 2, f. 3	<i>The City</i> [translation], typescript	2016
b. 2, f. 4	Essays, poems, typescript	1983–2016
b. 2, f. 5	Notebook	2013 January– 2014 May
b. 2, f. 6	Notebook	2019–2021
b. 2, f. 7	Thailand journal	1989
b. 2, f. 8	Notebook	2017–2019
b. 2, f. 9	Notebook	2016 July–2017 October
b. 2, f. 10	<i>Scarecrow Dollar</i> [<i>A Torch for Orphans</i>], autograph manuscript	undated
b. 2, f. 11	Archives of American Art blog	circa 2020
b. 2, f. 12	<i>Nifty Walls</i> , typescript	circa 2019
b. 2, f. 13	Notes	undated
b. 2, f. 14-16	Poems, typescript, corrected	1985–1987
b. 2, f. 17	<i>Midnight on Your Left</i> , typescript, corrected	1987
b. 2, f. 18	<i>City Keeps</i> , photocopied poems with notes, corrections	2016
b. 3, f. 1	Poems, typescript	1969
b. 3, f. 2-3	Poems, typescript	2011–2014
b. 3, f. 4	<i>Fool Around</i> , typescript	2015 January
b. 3, f. 5-6	<i>Torch for Orphans</i> , typescript, corrected	circa 2015
b. 3, f. 7	<i>Private Lemonade</i> , <i>City of Corners</i>	2002–2008
b. 3, f. 8	"Blurb works"	circa 2014-2018
b. 3, f. 9	Review of <i>Poems for the Entire Family</i>	1994

b. 3, f. 10-11	<i>Midnight on Your Left</i> , typescript	1987
b. 4, f. 1-6	Poems, typescript	circa 1965-1969
b. 4, f. 7	Notebook	1972
b. 4, f. 8	Notebook	circa 1970 May
b. 5, f. 1	Notebook	1971 January– 1971 April
b. 5, f. 2	Notebook	1970
b. 5, f. 3	Notebook	1969 October– 1970 January
b. 5, f. 4	Notebook	1968 August– 1968 September
b. 5, f. 5	Notebook	1972 April–1973 January
b. 5, f. 6	Notebook, college writing	1966–1967
b. 5, f. 7	Notebook, Princeton	1967 April–1967 June
b. 5, f. 8	Notebook, poems, drafts	1974 May–1975 January
b. 6, f. 1	Notebook	1976
b. 6, f. 2	Notebook	1975
b. 6, f. 3	<i>Ardor</i> , typescript, corrected	1975–1976
b. 6, f. 4	<i>Questioning Spooks</i> , photocopy typescript, corrected	1972–1973
b. 6, f. 5-10b. 7, f. 1-12b. 8, f. 1-5	Poems, typescript, corrected	1970–1989
b. 8, f. 6	Notebook, poems	1981
b. 8, f. 7	Poems	undated
b. 8, f. 8	[Piece on Holly Solomon's 98 Green St. Project Readings]	2020
b. 8, f. 9	<i>Twelve Poems</i> , typescript	2013
b. 8, f. 10	<i>Private Lemonade</i>	circa 2003
b. 8, f. 11	[Judy Gallion's sketchbook], writings, drafts	1987–2003
b. 8, f. 12	<i>Singles and Fives</i> , manuscript material	circa 2012
b. 8, f. 13	<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i> , manuscript material	2008–2011
b. 8, f. 14	<i>City of Corners</i> , manuscript material	2005–2007

b. 8, f. 15	Poems, typescript	1998–2002
b. 8, f. 16	<i>Private Lemonade</i> , manuscript material, corrected	1998–2001
b. 9, f. 1	Notebook	1978–1979
b. 9, f. 2	Notebook	1982–1986
b. 9, f. 3	Notebook	1985
b. 9, f. 4	Notebook	1979–1984
b. 9, f. 5	Notebook	1986–1988
b. 9, f. 6	Notebook	1987–1988
b. 9, f. 7	Notebook	2010 September–2012 November
b. 9, f. 8	Notebook	1980 January– 1981 June
b. 10, f. 1	Notebook	circa 2010–2013
b. 10, f. 2	Notebook	2013 July–2014 March
b. 10, f. 3	Notebook	2012–2015
b. 10, f. 4	Notebook	1999 March
b. 10, f. 5	Notebook	2006 August– 2009 June
b. 10, f. 6	Notebook	1989
b. 10, f. 7	Notebook	1976
b. 10, f. 8	Notebook [<i>City of Corners</i>]	2004 November– 2006 April
b. 10, f. 9	Notebook [<i>Torch for Orphans</i>]	circa 2015–2018
b. 10, f. 10	Notebook	circa 2015–2020
b. 10, f. 11	Notebook	2015 January
b. 10, f. 12	Notebook [<i>Dabble</i>]	1977
b. 11, f. 1	Notebook [Thailand]	1988
b. 11, f. 2	Notebook [<i>Torch for Orphans</i>]	2015
b. 11, f. 3	Notebook, diary	1988–1989
b. 11, f. 4	Notebook	2012–2015

b. 11, f. 5	Notebook [<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i>]	2009 June–2010 August
b. 11, f. 6	Notebook [<i>City of Corners</i>]	2003–2004
b. 11, f. 7	Notebook [<i>Rhodia File, Tiny Gold Dress</i>]	2008 February–2009 June
b. 11, f. 8	Notebook [<i>Rhodia File</i>]	2006–2008
b. 11, f. 9-10b. 12, f. 1	Poems, typescript	1993–1997
b. 12, f. 2-4	Poems [<i>Push the Mule</i>]	1993–1997
b. 12, f. 5-7	Poems, typescript	undated
b. 12, f. 8-9	<i>Push the Mule</i> , typescript, uncorrected	circa 1997
b. 12, f. 10	<i>Push the Mule</i> , typescript, corrected	circa 2001
b. 12, f. 11	<i>James Brodey, 1942-1993</i> , typescript	1993
b. 12, f. 12	<i>Going to See Allen Ginsburg Read Poems</i> [translation], typescript	1993
b. 12, f. 13	<i>Push the Mule</i>	1993–1997
b. 12, f. 14	<i>He Touches the Rain</i> , typescript	1995
b. 13, f. 1	Poems, typescript	circa 2002-2004
b. 13, f. 2	<i>Dabble</i> , typescript	circa 1981
b. 13, f. 3	<i>Dabble</i> , typescript	1976 September 16
b. 13, f. 4	<i>Domes</i> [manuscript by John Koethe]	undated
b. 13, f. 5	Poems [autograph manuscript, written on blank envelopes]	2006
b. 13, f. 6-7	Poetry notecards	circa 2010-2014
b. 14, f. 1	Poems, autograph manuscripts	2015–2016
b. 14, f. 2-3	Poetry notecards	2017–2018
b. 14, f. 4	<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i> , typescript, uncorrected	2011
b. 14, f. 5	<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i> [first choices]	circa 2011
b. 14, f. 6	<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i> [second choices]	circa 2011
b. 14, f. 7	<i>Tiny Gold Dress</i> [rejected]	circa 2011
b. 14, f. 8-9	Poems, drafts	undated
b. 14, f. 10	<i>At the Stroke of Katz, Sharp</i>	2016
b. 15, f. 1-3b. 14, f. 11-12	Poems, typescript	undated

b. 15, f. 4	Poems [Katz monoprints]	2009
b. 15, f. 5	Poems, notes	circa 1978-2004
b. 15, f. 6	<i>City of Corners</i> , typescript, uncorrected	circa 2008
b. 15, f. 7	<i>Midnight on Your Left</i> , typescript, uncorrected	1982-1987
b. 15, f. 8	Poems, typescript	undated

III: Ephemera, circa 1986-2016

Series III consists of flyers, blank postcards, and gallery announcements as well as clippings featuring reviews of some of Godfrey’s publications.

Arranged in original order.

b. 15, f. 9	Ephemera	1986–2016
b. 15, f. 10	Clippings	undated

IV: Photographs and audiovisual, circa 1980-2006

Series IV contains professional portraits of John Godfrey with some photographs of family and friends. Also included is a VHS tape with a recording of a live reading Godfrey gave at Attitude Art in New York City in 1987.

Arranged in original order.

b. 15, f. 11	Photographs	circa 1980-2006
b. 16	Reading at Attitude Art [VHS tape] Restricted fragile material. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	1987 February 28

V: Computer media, 1993–2022

Computer files consist of manuscript poems, drafts, digital proofs and layouts, photographs, artwork, personal documents, and personal and professional correspondence.

Restricted fragile material. Access copies of digital files may be requested. Consult Public Services for further information.

Born-digital materials were transferred to the Beinecke on five floppy disks and one USB flash drive and accessioned through the Yale University's Digital Accessioning Support Service (DASS) in 2022. Disk images were created from the materials and Beinecke staff processed the materials using Quick View Plus and FTK (Forensic Toolkit) Imager software. Since the selection of files and their arrangement was completed by Godfrey prior to transfer, no work was done to remove or rearrange files on the disks and all metadata has been largely left intact with file manifests generated upon receipt of the material.

b. 17	Computer files <i>2,271,301,462 bytes</i> Contains drafts of poems, manuscripts, flyers, artwork for collections, photographs, proposals, as well as personal documents.	2014–2022
b. 17	Johnny G <i>40,378,988 bytes</i> Contains journal entries from early on in Godfrey's nursing career.	1993
b. 17	G Man Chez Sois <i>39,338,159 bytes</i> Contains drafts of poems, notes.	2018
b. 17	G Verse <i>32,098,567 bytes</i> Contains untitled files and folders from Godfrey's desktop.	1999
b. 17	Chez G <i>34,202,375 bytes</i> Contains drafts of poems, notes.	1995–2000
b. 17	Pushing the Mule <i>33,447,493 bytes</i> Contains a draft of <i>Push the Mule</i> .	circa 2001

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

American poetry -- 20th Century
American poetry -- 21st century
Poets, American -- 20th Century
Poets, American -- 20th Century -- Archives
Poets, American -- 20th Century --
Correspondence

Genres / Formats

Born digital
Electronic mail

Names

Ashbery, John, 1927-2017
Berkson, Bill, 1939-2016
Katz, Alex, 1927-
Koethe, John, 1945-
Mayer, Bernadette
Notley, Alice, 1945-
Padgett, Ron, 1942-
Warsh, Lewis, 1944-

Acquired From

Granary Books, Inc.