

# Guide to the Kenneth Donaldson Papers

MS 1677



compiled by Mike Strom

July 2000

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New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	4
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	5
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Series I: Correspondence, 1952-1975 .....	6
Series II: Legal Documents, 1955-1978 .....	7
Series III: Hospital Records, 1943-1972 .....	8
Series IV: Publicity, 1971-1982 .....	9
Selected Search Terms .....	10

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 1677

**CREATOR:** Donaldson, Kenneth

**TITLE:** Kenneth Donaldson papers

**DATES:** 1943-1982

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 5.5 linear feet

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers consist of correspondence, legal documents, hospital records, and publicity materials. They document Kenneth Donaldson's years as a patient at the Florida State Hospital, his efforts to obtain his release from the hospital, and the media coverage of him after his release and of his victory in the Supreme Court. Correspondence includes Donaldson's communication with friends, legal advisors, and medical staff.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1677>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1677>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Beverly A. Reaves, 1995.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

Copyright is held by Beverly Reaves for the unpublished works authored or otherwise produced by Kenneth Donaldson. After her lifetime, copyright passes to Yale University. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

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## Preferred Citation

Kenneth Donaldson Papers (MS 1677). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

Kenneth Donaldson was born on May 22, 1908, in Erie, Pennsylvania. His birth name was William Kenneth Donaldson and he was the son of William and Marjorie Donaldson. He grew up in Erie, Cleveland, and Syracuse, New York, and attended Syracuse University for a year and a half. He married after he left school and he and his wife, Olive, had three children: David, Beverly, and Peter.

In 1943, after suffering a nervous breakdown, Donaldson was committed to the Marcy State Hospital in Marcy, New York, for four months. Donaldson felt he was the victim of slander and harassment, maintaining that people made derogatory comments about him behind his back, tampered with his mail, and put medication in his food. In an attempt to escape these perceived threats, he changed his name to Kenneth McCullough in 1953 and again in 1955 to Kenneth Donaldson. Now divorced, Donaldson moved from town to town and held several different jobs. In 1956, he was admitted to Philadelphia General Hospital and was treated for paranoid schizophrenia.

Upon his release from Philadelphia General Hospital in 1956, Donaldson went to visit his parents in Florida. In December 1956, his parents signed an inquisition of incompetency authorizing the police to arrest him. Donaldson was committed to the Florida State Hospital in Chattahoochee in January 1957 and was re-diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. Soon after, he began his attempts to obtain his release from the hospital by filing a series of petitions in a Florida district court for a writ of habeas corpus, claiming illegal imprisonment. He met with little or no success for years until the New York Civil Liberties Union agreed to represent him in court and, upon the advice of legal counsel, he convinced a doctor not affiliated with the Florida State Hospital to come to Chattahoochee to examine him.

The Florida State Hospital discharged Donaldson in 1971, quite possibly as a hedge against pending legal action. His case against the hospital, *Donaldson v. O'Connor*, reached the Supreme Court in 1975. The Court decided in favor of Donaldson, ruling that the hospital violated his civil liberties by keeping him hospitalized without providing treatment. In addition, the Court's decision upheld a lower court's order that two doctors at the Florida State Hospital pay damages to Donaldson amounting to \$20,000. Donaldson wrote of his experiences in *Insanity Inside Out*, published in 1976. He toured the United States during the late 1970s, championing the rights of patients in mental hospitals and promoting his book. Kenneth Donaldson died on January 5, 1995 in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

## **Scope and Contents**

The papers consist of correspondence, legal documents, hospital records, and publicity materials. They document Kenneth Donaldson's years as a patient at the Florida State Hospital, his efforts to obtain his release from the hospital, and the media coverage of him after his release and of his victory in the Supreme Court. Correspondence includes Donaldson's communication with friends, legal advisors, and medical staff.

The papers primarily document the life of Kenneth Donaldson during the years 1957 to 1971 when he was a patient at the Florida State Hospital. The papers provide insight to Donaldson's struggle to obtain his release from the hospital and a case study of the treatment of people suffering from, or perceived to be suffering from, mental illness during the 1950s and 1960s. Legal documents consist of petitions, depositions, transcripts, briefs, and opinions. Aside from a police identification card issued by the Miami Police Department in 1956, there are no original photographs of Donaldson in the papers.

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## **Arrangement**

Arranged in four series: I. Correspondence, 1952-1975, II. Legal Documents, 1955-1978, III. Hospital Records, 1943-1972, IV. Publicity, 1971-1982.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1952-1975

The series is arranged chronologically and consists largely of letters sent and received during Donaldson's time at the Florida State Hospital. The correspondence documents the relationships between Donaldson and his family and his attempts to obtain his release from the hospital. Of particular value is Donaldson's correspondence with George Stallings, a Florida State Representative who took an interest in Donaldson's case, and with Morton Birnbaum and Bruce Ennis, the lawyers who worked on the case and presented it before the Supreme Court.

Correspondence between Donaldson and his longtime friend, John Lembcke, has been separated from the rest of the correspondence. This correspondence is noteworthy because, as Lembcke was the one person Donaldson trusted through the years, it provides a more personal view of Donaldson during his time at the Florida State Hospital. Because Lembcke dealt with Donaldson's financial affairs, the section also includes a small number of financial documents consisting of a bank book, dividend statements, and deposit slips.

General		
b. 1, f. 1-16	1952-1964 June	1952-1964 June
b. 2, f. 17-30	1964 July-1966 May	1964 July-1966 May
b. 3, f. 31-46	1966 June-1970 May	1966 June-1970 May
b. 4, f. 47-55	1970 June-1973 December A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1970 June-1973 December
b. 4, f. 56-62	Lembcke, John	1964-1975, undated

**Series II: Legal Documents, 1955-1978**

Legal documents are arranged by court proceeding beginning with Donaldson's petitions for a writ of habeas corpus and culminating in Supreme Court opinions regarding his case. For each court case there may be court petitions, depositions, transcripts, briefs, and opinions. The series also includes a police identification card and name change affidavits.

b. 5, f. 1	Gadsden County (Florida) Court	1963-1969
b. 5, f. 2	Florida Appellate Courts	1963, 1969
b. 5, f. 3-6	Supreme Court of Florida	1960-1969
	U.S. District Court	
b. 5, f. 7-15	Petitions	1965-1972
b. 6, f. 16-17	Petitions	1973-1978
b. 6, f. 18-21	Discovery	1971-1976
b. 6, f. 22-28	Depositions	1971-1976
b. 7, f. 29-44	Trial transcripts	1972
b. 7, f. 45-46	U.S. District Court of Appeals	1965-1973 June
b. 8, f. 47-48	U.S. District Court of Appeals	1973 June-1975
	U.S. Supreme Court	
b. 8, f. 49-52	Petitions	1960-1970
b. 8, f. 53-57	Briefs	1970-1975
b. 8, f. 58	Amicus curiae briefs	1970
b. 9, f. 59-60	Amicus curiae briefs	1974
b. 9, f. 61	Opinion	1975
b. 9, f. 62-68	Legal research	1960-1975, undated
b. 9, f. 69-71	Amicus curiae briefs [related cases]	1973
b. 9, f. 72	Miscellaneous legal documents	1955-1963

**Series III: Hospital Records, 1943-1972**

Hospital records are organized in rough chronological order according to a numbering system devised by Donaldson. The numbers appear in the upper right hand corner of the documents. The series begins with documentation from Marcy State Hospital and Philadelphia General Hospital. The bulk of the series is comprised of records from the Florida State Hospital. Donaldson's medical record and the correspondence between the doctors and his family are particularly revealing because they document the doctors' evaluation of him. Additional correspondence regarding Donaldson's hospitalization can be found in Series I.

b. 10, f. 1	Marcy State Hospital	1943, 1954-1957, 1972
b. 10, f. 2	Philadelphia General Hospital	1956, 1966-1972
Florida State Hospital		
b. 10, f. 3-4	Donaldson medical record	1956-1971
b. 10, f. 5-17	General	1956-1971
b. 11, f. 18-25	General	1956-1971
b. 11, f. 26	Reports	1954, 1970

**Series IV: Publicity, 1971-1982**

Arranged by format and in rough chronological order, the series includes newspaper clippings, magazine articles, book reviews, conference programs, public appearance announcements, awards, and a copy of his book. Publicity chronicles Donaldson's time as a celebrity, after the Supreme Court decision when he conducted a book tour. Georgetown University included his case in a conference called Basic Issues of the Therapeutic State. The Yale University Law School studied the possible effects of the Supreme Court decision on the Connecticut Valley Hospital.

b. 12, f. 1-7	Articles	1974-1980
b. 12, f. 8	Awards/honors	1977
b. 12, f. 9-18	Clippings	1971-1982
b. 13, f. 19-33	Clippings	1971-1982
	Conferences	
b. 14, f. 34-35	Georgetown University conference	1975
b. 14, f. 36	Yale University project	1976
b. 14, f. 37	<i>Insanity Inside Out</i> English	1976
b. 14, f. 38	Printed material A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1976-1977
b. 14, f. 39-41	Public appearances	1973-1980

## **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**

Human rights  
Insanity (Law) -- United States  
Mental illness  
Psychiatric hospital care

### **Names**

Donaldson, Kenneth