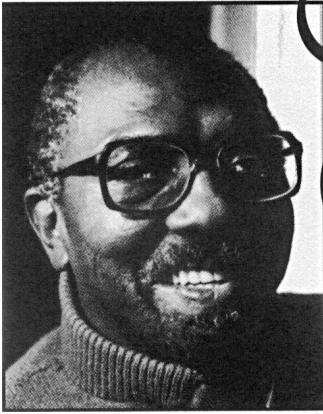


Guide to the Etheridge Knight Collection

Special Collections and Rare Books, Irwin Library, Butler University



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Summary

Volume of Collection

28 manuscript boxes

Collection dates

1965–91, bulk 1982–91

Provenance

Etheridge Knight estate, Janice Knight and Fran Quinn, literary executors

Copyright

held by Etheridge Knight estate and publishers

Citation

Etheridge Knight Collection, Special Collections and Rare Books, Irwin Library, Butler University

Biographical Sketch

Etheridge Knight was born on April 19, 1931, in Corinth, Mississippi. In 1947, two years after dropping out of school in the eighth grade, Knight joined the army. He saw active duty in the Korean War, during which he received a shrapnel wound. By the time he was discharged from the army in 1957, Knight was suffering from addictions to drugs and alcohol. He turned to crime to support his habit, and in 1960 was arrested for robbery. While serving an eight-year prison term in the Indiana State Prison Knight wrote poetry. Renowned poet Gwendolyn Brooks met Knight during a prison visit and encouraged his writing. In 1968 Knight saw his first book published, *Poems from Prison* (Broadside Press).

Knight entered into a successful period during the early 1970s, enjoying Popularity and recognition. He led Free People's Poetry Workshops (including one in Indianapolis), gave numerous readings, and was a poet in residence at the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Hartford, and Lincoln University. His critical acclaim included a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (1972) and a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation (1974). He continued to be plagued, however, by his addictions, and periodically sought treatment from veterans' hospitals.

The next decade saw the publication of two volumes of poetry, including *The Essential Etheridge Knight* (1986), which brought together pieces from his five volumes of poetry. In 1989 Knight once again led a Free People's Poetry Workshop in Indianapolis, which ran until his death. He worked with Butler University's Writer's Studio in 1990, the same year that he earned a bachelor's degree in American poetry and criminal justice from Martin Center University in Indianapolis. On March 10, 1991, Knight died from lung cancer. The Etheridge Knight Festival of the Arts was held in Indianapolis in 1992 and 1993, and in 1993 the Indiana Arts Commission posthumously awarded Knight the Governor's Arts Award.

Scope and Content

This collection contains the personal and literary papers in Etheridge Knight's possession upon his death. Some items date as far back as 1965, but most fall into the period from 1982 to 1991. A collection of Knight's earlier literary and personal papers is housed at the Ward M. Canaday Center at the University of Toledo.

The bulk of this collection is received correspondence, although there is a series of letters written by Etheridge Knight. The received correspondence has been subdivided into two categories: personal and professional. The professional correspondence has been further subdivided into two categories: publication and vocation. Mixed in with the personal correspondence are poems and other manuscripts either sent to Knight or given to him during his numerous Free People's Poetry Workshops.

Most of Knight's published work was written prior to 1982, so the vast majority of his manuscripts are collected at the Canaday Center. This collection does, however, include some poem manuscripts and a few drafts of short stories, essays, and a book review—most of which remain unfinished. Some of the titled poems are slightly revised photocopies of previously published poems, some are

most likely handwritten copies of previously published poems, while others are various drafts of published and unpublished poems. There are also poetic fragments, which are virtually all unpublished.

Box 19 contains prison materials, which include informational documents from various organizations, news clippings pertaining to prison life and penal reform, and letters from committees and organizations with which Knight was involved. The collection includes a large amount of promotional material (posters and news releases) concerning Knight's poetry readings and other literary events, as well as feature newspaper articles on Knight from across the country. There is also a section of photographs of Knight, his family, and his friends. The photographs are largely undated. Photocopies of Knight's complete military records are also included in the collection (submitted by the archivist, June 1997), however most of the original records were damaged in a 1973 fire at the U.S. Army Department of Records in St. Louis, making the photocopies virtually illegible.

The original state and organization of the papers was one of complete disarray. The literary executors of Etheridge Knight's estate made a preliminary attempt to organize the papers into broad categories, but a large portion of the collection remained unordered. Because there was no useful preexisting organizing principle, and because the papers were, for the most part, arbitrarily stored in boxes, no effort was made to retain the collection's original arrangement, with one exception: The Preparation for *The Essential Etheridge Knight* subseries remains in its original order. Dates listed for a piece of correspondence are taken from the actual letter, or from the postmark on the corresponding envelope if the letter was undated. Personal correspondence is arranged alphabetically by the recipient's last name (letters from EK) or alphabetically by the sender's last name (letters to EK) with letters from groups listed last. The professional correspondence is arranged alphabetically according to institution or agency.

An item by item list of materials is available on-site.

Container List

Box	Folder	Contents
1	1-8	Poem manuscripts, fragments, 1971-89
1	9-14	Preparation for <i>The Essential Etheridge Knight</i> , circa 1986
2	1-4	Published poems, 1965-90
2	5	Essays

Etheridge Knight Collection, page 4

Box	Folder	Contents
2	6-7	Interviews
2	8	Reviews
2	9	Short stories
2	10	Workshop ideas
2	11-14	Letters from Etheridge Knight (EK), 1965-90
3	1-21	Letters to EK, Abdul Ta Ha, Tacuma to Bass, Madeline Tiger, 1983-91
4	1-19	Letters to EK, Bassin, Joan to Czury, Craig, 1982-90
5	1-17	Letters to EK, Daglish, Malcolm to Fullwood, Steven G., 1983-90
6	1-18	Letters to EK, Gallagher, Tess to Everem, Esther, 1975-91
7	1-17	Letters to EK, Jacobi, Roger E. to McAnally, Bambata, 1975-91
8	1-18	Letters to EK, McAnally, Mary to McKim, Elizabeth, 1981-91
9	1-17	Letters to EK, McKim, Elizabeth to Ortiz, Ramon, 1975-91
10	1-21	Letters to EK, O'Leary, Tomas to Randolph, Frank, 1969-91
11	1-17	Letters to EK, Randolph, Frank to Robertson, Carol Ann, 1978-88
12	1-18	Letters to EK, Robertson, Carol Ann to Ryan, John B., 1982-91
13	1-13	Letters to EK, Sadler, Janet Noel to Stepto, Robert, 1982-90
14	1-12	Letters to EK, Stepto, Lamont B. to Turner, Seneca, 1983-90
15	1-15	Letters to EK, Vadeboncoeur [sp?], Aime to groups, 1981-91
16	1-6	Professional correspondence to EK, anthologies, 1980-91
16	7-8	Professional correspondence to EK, periodicals, 1973-90
16	9-13	Professional correspondence to EK, manuscripts, 1983-91
16	14	Professional correspondence to EK, royalties, 1979-90
17	1-11	Professional correspondence, readings, American Poetry Center to Ym/YWHA, 1969-90

Etheridge Knight Collection, page 5

Box	Folder	Contents
17	12-13	Professional correspondence, university residencies, Arlington Public Schools to Yale University-Saybrook College/ACES, 1982-90
17	14-15	Professional correspondence, colony residencies, Blue Mountain Center to Yaddo, 1984-89
17	16-21	Professional correspondence, arts/humanities organizations, American Academy of Poets to Quaker US/USSR Committee, 1978-90
18	1	Publicity, publications, 1990, undated
18	2-6	Publicity, readings, Afrikan Poetry Theatre, Inc., to Writers Resource Center of Toledo, 1979-90
18	7-9	Newspaper articles, <i>Black Scholar</i> to <i>Woodstock Times</i> , 1979-92
19	1-13	Prison materials, correspondence, and information, 1968-90
20	1	EK personal and military records, 1974-97
20	2-6	EK health records, 1982-91
20	7-10	Health and Medical information
21	1	Financial and Legal Records, banking information, 1985-89
21	2	Financial and Legal Records, court documents, 1984-90
21	3	Financial and Legal Records, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration, 1989-90
21	4	Financial and Legal Records, housing records, 1989-91
21	5	Financial and Legal Records, Last Will and Testament, 1990
21	6-8	Financial and Legal Records, legal contracts and correspondence, 1979-90
21	9	Financial and Legal Records, miscellaneous creditors, 1978-89
21	10	Financial and Legal Records, public and private financial assistance, 1983-98
21	11-12	Financial and Legal Records, telephone bills, 1983-90
21	13	Financial and Legal Records, travel expenses, 1986-87
21	14-16	Financial and Legal Records, tax records, 1983-90
22	1	Photographs of EK, undated
22	2	Photographs of family, undated
22	3	Photographs of Elizabeth McKim, undated
22	4	Photographs of Carol Ann Robertson, undated
22	5	Photographs of Deta Galloway, undated
22	6-7	Photographs, miscellaneous
22	8-12	Addresses and phone numbers

Etheridge Knight Collection, page 6

Box	Folder	Contents
23	1	Miscellaneous Newsletters, pamphlets, newspapers
23	2-3	Miscellaneous PR for other artists and events
23	4-8	Miscellaneous articles, poems, essays, etc.
24		Miscellaneous artifacts
25	1-4	Unidentifiable correspondence
25	5-9	Unidentifiable artistic texts