

Special Collections at the Alkek Library Texas State University-San Marcos

# A Guide to the Paul Porter Collection of Katherine Anne Porter

1940-1998 (Bulk dates: 1980-1990)

**Collection 032** 

## **Descriptive Summary**

Creator:	Porter, Paul
Title:	Paul Porter Collection of Katherine Anne Porter
Dates:	1940-1998 (Bulk dates: 1980-1990)
Abstract:	This collection ranges in date from 1940-1998 (bulk 1980-1990) and
	features correspondence, recipes, notes, photographs, invitations to
	KATHERINE ANNE PORTER conferences and dinners, published
	materials, and an artifact.
<b>Identification:</b>	Collection 032
Extent:	1 box (0.5 linear feet)
Language:	English
<b>Repository:</b>	Southwestern Writers Collection, Special Collections, Alkek Library,
	Texas State University-San Marcos

### **Biographical Sketch**

Katherine Anne Porter, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winning author, was born Callie Russell Porter in Indian Creek, Texas, in 1890. She was one of five children. Her mother, Mary Alice Jones Porter, died during childbirth in 1892, leaving the Porter children to be raised by their father, Harrison Boone Porter. Mr. Porter took the children to Kyle, Texas, in his native Hays County, to live with him and his mother, Catherine Anne Skaggs Porter. The young Ms. Porter attended Kyle public schools. The family was very poor, but her grandmother proved to be a very strong and resourceful woman, making a deep impression on Ms. Porter. In 1901, when Ms. Porter was eleven years old, her grandmother died. Not long afterwards, in 1904, the family moved to San Antonio, where Ms. Porter attended the Thomas School. She studied acting at this time, and performed in several summer stock productions.

In 1906, at sixteen, Porter married John Henry Koontz of Inez, Texas. Mr. Koontz' family was Roman Catholic, and Ms. Porter converted to that faith in 1908. The marriage did not last. Ms. Porter left Mr. Koontz and Texas in 1914, heading north to Chicago to pursue her interests of writing and acting. Apparently it was around this time that she took her grandmother's name, Katherine Anne. The divorce from Mr. Koontz became final in 1915, the same year in which she became very ill with tuberculosis. She returned to Texas, recovered from her illness, and in 1917, worked for the *Fort Worth Critic*, covering theatrical and social events. Soon afterwards, in 1918, Ms. Porter moved to Denver, Colorado, not to return to Texas for close to fifteen years. In Denver, she reviewed books and theatrical performances for the *Rocky Mountain News*. During this period she became nearly fatally ill with an influenza which was sweeping the nation. This experience with grave illness served as the background for her short novel, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

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During 1919-1920, she worked in New York City as publicist for a motion picture company, wrote stories for the children's magazine *Everyland*, and met several Mexican artists who encouraged her to write journalistic works on Mexico. She traveled to Mexico for the first time in 1920, during the time of the Obregon Revolution, and she made many more trips to Mexico during the 1920s. Her first published short story, "Maria Concepcion", appeared in 1922, and was soon followed by other short stories and essays, poetry and book reviews. She was married briefly to Ernest Stock, an English World War I pilot, from 1925-1926. In 1927, she became very interested in the Sacco and Vanzeti case in Mexico, but she would not publish the story of this experience until 1977, in "The Never-Ending Wrong".

"Flowering Judas", one of her most well known short stories, was published in 1930. She was living in Mexico at this time, and met Eugene Pressly, whom she married in Paris in 1933. Around this time, she returned to Texas for a family visit. She also traveled to Paris and Germany during the turbulent 1930s. In 1936, she moved back to America and finished "Noon Wine" and "Old Mortality", and began work on "Pale Horse, Pale Rider". The next year, she and Mr. Pressly separated. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Porter went to New Orleans and became involved with Albert Erskine of *The Southern Review*. She and Mr. Erskine were married in April, 1938.

During this time began Paul Porter's relationship with his aunt. In 1937, when Mr. Porter was 15 years of age, Ms. Porter visited his family in Houston. One year after this first acquaintance, Paul Porter wrote to his aunt, initiating a vital correspondence which continued until Ms. Porter suffered several strokes in 1976. (For more information regarding the beginnings of the relationship between Ms. Porter and her nephew, see Paul Porter's essay *in "Katherine Anne Porter and Texas : An Uneasy Relationship*," Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1990.)

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Throughout their nearly forty years of visits and warm correspondence, Ms. Porter gave Paul Porter books and literary magazines, offering him an education along with her very long letters.

While Ms. Porter's friendship with her nephew grew over the years, her writing career also continued to flourish. In 1939, J. Frank Dobie's *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver* and Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* were both nominated for fiction awards by the Texas Institute of Letters. Dobie won the prize, leaving Ms. Porter feeling insulted and bitter. (Porter was later awarded the Texas Institute of Letters fiction prize for her 1962 novel, *Ship of Fools*.) In 1940, Porter and Erskine separated, and Ms. Porter moved to Saratoga Springs, New York, to continue her writing, beginning what would become *Ship of Fools*. In 1945, she began taking work as a Hollywood scriptwriter, and in 1948 began teaching at various universities including Stanford, the University of Michigan, Washington and Lee, and the University of Liege.

In 1958, rumors circulated to the effect that Harry Ransom, of the University of Texas at Austin's Humanities Research Center, was planning to name a building or at least a room for her at the University. Ms. Porter was very enthusiastic about these reported plans, and accepted an invitation to visit the University. She even considered moving to the area, but the agreement with UT fell apart. Ms Porter was once again disappointed in Texas.

In 1959, Ms. Porter, supported by Ford Foundation grant, moved to the Washington, D.C. area, where she continued to work on *Ship of Fools*, which was published in 1962. In 1965, she published *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, which won a Pulitzer Prize Award. She also received honorary doctorates from many universities, and was very much in demand for lectures and teaching positions. In 1966, she received an honorary degree from the University of Maryland at College Park, and in that same year she made the decision to donate her personal papers and library to UMCP. Paul Porter has also donated significantly to the KATHERINE

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ANNE PORTER papers at UMCP. The university named a room for Ms. Porter, which was opened on May 15, 1968.

In 1976, Ms. Porter suffered a series of strokes. Her last book, "The Never Ending Wrong", an account of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in Mexico, was published in 1977. Ms. Porter died on September 18, 1980. Paul Porter carried her ashes to

Indian Creek, which were buried alongside her mother's grave, in the Indian Creek Cemetery, near Brownwood, Texas.

Since Porter's death, her reputation as a "Texas" writer has grown even though she herself had fled the state and felt unappreciated by it. Critic A.C. Greene,

writing in *The Fifty Best Books on Texas*, calls *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* "the best Texas fiction ever written." Greene also concludes that he "always thought it strange [that] she was so bitter in her disavowal of things Texan but did so many of her best stories with a Texas background." (Greene, A. C. *The Fifty Best Books on Texas*. Dallas: Pressworks, 1982. p.33)

Katherine Anne Porter's return to Texas has now come full circle. A historical marker has been erected in Kyle, Texas, celebrating her career. Her childhood home there has recently been purchased by a preservation group, and the house will be restored for use as a museum and a residence for visiting writers at Southwest Texas State University. The 1998 Texas Writers Month poster, hung widely across the state's libraries and bookstores, featured Ms. Porter.

## **Scope and Content Note**

This collection ranges in date from 1940-1998 (bulk 1980-1990) and features correspondence, recipes, notes, photographs, invitations to KATHERINE ANNE PORTER conferences and dinners, published materials, and an artifact. Items of note include 1946 correspondence from Ms. Porter to Paul Porter, encouraging Mr. Porter to attend college, and describing her days at the C-Bar-H Ranch in California. Correspondence in 1981 between Paul Porter and Ms. Porter's publisher, Arthur Thornhill of Little, Brown, and Co., relates to an unauthorized biography of Ms. Porter by Enrique Hank Lopez. Other materials include several of Ms. Porter's handwritten recipes, a note regarding her astrological chart, a crystal paperweight engraved with her initials. Photographs include several images of Ms. Porter, as well as a photograph of Glenna Goodacre molding the sculpture of Ms. Porter which now stands at Sea World of Texas' "The Texas Walk".

# **Administrative Information**

## **Access Restrictions**

Open for research.

## **Preferred Citation**

Paul Porter Collection of Katherine Anne Porter, Southwestern Writers Collection, Texas State University-San Marcos

## **Acquisition Information**

Gift donated by Paul Porter, 1991.

## **Processing Information**

Processed by Amanda Oates, 2000; inventory revised by Alan Schaefer, 2010.

### **Notes to Researchers**

See also the Roger L. Brooks Collection of Katherine Anne Porter (SWWC Collection 031)

# **Detailed Description of the Collection**

### Series 1: Correspondence (1946-1981)

### Box Folder

1	1	Letter to Paul Porter from Katherine Anne Porter, 1946
	2	Sweet Was the Song – song booklet inscribed to Paul Porter from Katherine Anne
		Porter, 1958
	3	Paul Porter / Little, Brown, and Co., 1981
	4	Letter to Katherine Anne Porter from Ida Baird, 1971

#### Series 2: Notes (undated)

1 5 Porter's astrological chart

#### Series 3: Recipes (undated)

1 6 "A Real Mexican Dinner" Guacamole, Mole Poblano, Red Beans and Rice

### Series 4: Photographs (ca. 1940-1980)

1	7	Katherine Anne Porter, age 85, photo by Paul Porter (8x10, color)
		Katherine Anne Porter, by George Platt Lynes, undated (8x10, b&w)
		Katherine Anne Porter, Glenway Wescott, and Monroe Wheeler, undated
		2 photos by Paul Porter (4x4, color)
		Glenna Goodacre molding Katherine Anne Porter sculpture, which was featured
		at Sea World of Texas' "The Texas Walk" (3x5, color, plus one photocopy
		of image)
		Bouquet of flowers given to Katherine Anne Porter by an interviewer, inscribed
		by Katherine Anne Porter (3x3, color)
		Historical marker featuring Katherine Anne Porter, in Kyle, TX, undated 2 photos
		(3x5, color)

### Series 5: KATHERINE ANNE PORTER Conferences and Dinners

1 8 Programs and invitations

### Series 6: Published materials by Porter (1932)

1 9 "The Cracked Looking-Glass", short story as published in May 1932 *Scribners Magazine* 

### Series 7: Published materials regarding Porter (1962-1998)

- 1 10 Clippings, 1962-1998
  - 11 Clippings, undated Essays
  - 12 Givner, Joan, 1969-1984
  - 13 Gretlund, Jan Nordby (inscribed to Paul Porter, 1983)
  - 14 Roselie, Raymond (inscribed to Paul Porter, 1965)
  - 15 Spence, Jon (inscribed to Katherine Anne Porter, 1974)

### Series 8: Artifacts (undated)

1 16 Crystal paperweight belonging to Porter, engraved with her initials