



The Wittliff Collections

Guide to the Billy Lee Brammer Papers 1946-1993

Collection SWWC-007

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Brammer, Billy Lee
Title:	Guide to the Billy Lee Brammer Papers
Dates:	1946-1993
Abstract:	The Billy Lee Brammer Papers document his writing career (including <i>The Gay Place</i> and its unfinished sequel <i>Faustian Days</i>) along with various articles.
Identification:	SWWC-007
Extent:	1.5 Linear Feet, 3 boxes
Language:	English
Repository:	The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

Table Of Contents

Biographical Notes	3
Administrative Information	6
Conditions Governing Access	6
Immediate Source of Acquisition	6
Physical Location	6
Preferred Citation	6
Conditions Governing Use	6
Related Materials	6
Controlled Access Headings	6
Detailed Description of the Collection	7
Series I: Writings, 1959-1963	7
Series II: Critical/Biographical Papers, 1950-1993	7
Series III: Nadine Eckhardt Papers, 1951-1985	7
Scope and Contents	5
Administrative Information	6
Conditions Governing Access	6
Immediate Source of Acquisition	6
Physical Location	6
Preferred Citation	6
Conditions Governing Use	6
Related Materials	6
Controlled Access Headings	6
Detailed Description of the Collection	7
Series I: Writings, 1959-1963	7
Series II: Critical/Biographical Papers, 1950-1993	7
Series III: Nadine Eckhardt Papers, 1951-1985	7

Biographical Notes

Billy Lee Brammer was born April 21, 1929, in Dallas, Texas. He graduated from North Texas State College in 1952 with a degree in journalism. Brammer was a reporter for the *Corpus Christi Caller Times* and the *Austin Statesman*, where he won a press award for excellence in writing in 1952. In 1954, he won the Texas Associated Press Managing Editors Contest for a feature sports story written for the same paper (newly titled the *Austin American-Statesman*). As the *Statesman* reported in its January 10, 1954 issue, the prize-winning story was written in Brammer's "usual unusual style."

In 1955, Brammer became an associate editor of the *Texas Observer*, a magazine of liberal dissent at a time when in Texas "the impulse for dissent scarcely existed" (*Texas Observer*, August 25, 1961). There he attracted the attention of Texas Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson, who invited him to join his staff. While employed by Johnson in Washington, D.C., Brammer began working on his first and only published novel, *The Gay Place*. The book was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1961 to wide critical acclaim.

The Gay Place (reissued by Texas Monthly Press in 1978 and by Vintage Press in 1984) is where Brammer's literary reputation rests. The book consists of three novellas, all revolving around politics, all dominated by the larger than life, omniscient, manipulative Governor Arthur Fenstermaker. Brammer told friends Fenstermaker was a composite, but the character is largely reminiscent of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Willie Morris calls *The Gay Place* a "symphony of politics and sex and ambition and the immense Texas landscape [that] remains the great authentic modern novel we have yet of the state" (*Texas Observer*, Mar 3, 1978).

In 1959, after the still-unfinished *The Gay Place* had been bought by Houghton Mifflin, Brammer left Johnson's staff to work for the economist Eliot Janeway. *Time* hired him in 1960 to cover civil rights issues from the magazine's Atlanta office. Brammer quit the *Time* job in 1961 and thereafter never held sustained employment. He began a sequel to *The Gay Place* titled *Fustian Days*, but it was never completed. Though he did write several articles, Brammer never followed up the promise of his first book. Several reasons have been put forth for his writing block: disappointment at being barred from access to Johnson, who was displeased with *The Gay Place*; the overwhelming success of his first novel; and drug abuse. Brammer at one

point gave his own explanation in a letter dated August 23, 1968 to Larry L. King - the problem was "getting hanged-up with attempts at over-perfection, compounded by uptight-making realization that [one] is really on [one's] own and has to be-god-effing mother produce as fulltime free-lance typewriter fella." (King Papers, The Wittliff Collections)

Various friends tried to help Brammer produce again. Fellow Texan and writer Larry L. King lobbied magazine editors into giving Brammer assignments. Texas columnist Jay Milner hired him as a journalism professor at Southern Methodist University in 1969 and then got him a position as a writer-in-residence at Bowling Green. William Broyles signed him on as a contributing editor for *Texas Monthly*. In 1976, Brammer's former wife, Nadine Eckhardt, asked him to help her write a memoir. Brammer took these offers in earnest, but after an initial spurt of activity he always drifted off. He held numerous other jobs for short periods of time, among them rock and roll promoter, dishwasher, and cook.

Those who knew Brammer remember him fondly and with admiration. Filmmaker Robert Benton testified, "Bill was one of the most charming, charismatic people I've ever met in my life. And he could talk about anything ... "(*Austin Chronicle*, March 26, 1993). Jay Milner, in his syndicated newspaper column, portrayed Brammer as having been a "soft-spoken, gently lecherous, incredibly widely read, avid rock aficionado, ultimately rather seedy bon vivant, neurotic little man ("Remembering Billy Lee Brammer, a man of the Sixties" 1993). Willie Morris reminisced that he was "kind, unselfish, and giving of the things he knew - a sweet, gentle man, a teller of stories who never knew how to attitudinize" (*Texas Observer*, Mar 3, 1978). Brammer, tongue-in-cheek, did his own summing up in 1976: "Bestowed from birth with a Lucy-in-the sky twinkle and irreverence for everything, bounced around the sub-culture after leaving LBJ, writing unfinished masterpieces by the score, ingesting hogsheads of drugs and acquiring a local image as the best approximation of guru and human wonder around" (Brammer Papers, The Wittliff Collections).

Brammer married Nadine Ellen Cannon (Nadine Eckhardt) on April 22, 1950 while both were students at North Texas State College. They had three children, Sidney Gail, Shelby Ellen, and William Raoul. The two were divorced in 1961. In 1963, Brammer married Dorothy Brown; they were divorced in 1969. Brammer died of a drug overdose on February 11, 1978.

Scope and Contents

The archive contains book manuscripts, newspaper clippings, tear sheets, correspondence, photographs, and Brammer's high school baseball uniform pants. Included in the collection are the typed manuscripts of *The Gay Place*, and the unfinished sequel to that work, *Fustian Days*; newspaper and magazine articles written by Brammer; reviews for *The Gay Place*; and letters which describe Brammer's tenure as a Johnson staff member, his marriage to Nadine Eckhardt, and his writing.

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donations by William Broyles, Nadine Eckhardt, Sidney Brammer, Bill Wittliff, Bud Shrake, and Paul Cullum. Some items were purchased.

Physical Location

Materials may be stored off-site. Advance notice is required for use:
<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/makearesearchappointment.html>.

Preferred Citation

Billy Lee Brammer Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

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<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/visit/policies/publication.html>

Related Materials

See the Nadine Eckhardt Papers (Collection 105).

Controlled Access Headings

- Authors' spouses
- Authors, American -- Texas -- 20th century
- Political fiction, American

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Writings, 1959-1963

Box	Folder	
1	1-6	The Gay Place
1	7	Come and Join the Dance
1	8-12	Fustian Days
1	13	Texas Observer articles, 1961, 1963
1	14	Drafts and notes

Series II: Critical/Biographical Papers, 1950-1993

2	1-2	Clippings about Brammer and his work , 1952-1978, 1993
2	3	Correspondence, 1959 - 1973
2	4	Photos and realia

Series III: Nadine Eckhardt Papers, 1951-1985

2	5-13	Correspondence , 1951-1961
3	1	Brammer College Records, Air Force application
3	2-5	The Gay Place file, 1957-1985
3	6	Brammer chronology , 1976
3	7	LBJ chronology, 1955-1957