



The Wittliff Collections

Guide to the Preston Jones Papers **1940-1988 (Bulk dates: 1963-1979)**

Collection SWWC-009

Descriptive Summary

Creators:	Jones, Preston, 1936-1979; Jones, Mary Sue
Title:	Guide to the Preston Jones Papers
Dates:	1940-1988 (Bulk dates: 1963-1979)
Abstract:	The collection chronicle Preston Jones personal and professional life, from his childhood in New Mexico through his days as a successful playwright.
Identification:	SWWC-009
Extent:	22 Linear Feet, 42 boxes
Language:	English
Repository:	The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

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Biographical Notes

Playwright Preston Jones is best remembered for *A Texas Trilogy*, an evocative depiction of small town Texas life. Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on April 7, 1936, Preston developed an interest in the dramatic arts while attending the University of New Mexico. Though he graduated with a BA in education in 1960 and took a teaching position, drama professor Eddie Snapp continued to encourage Preston to study theater and steered him toward Baylor University in Waco, Texas. At the time, the Baptist school's Drama Department was headed by Snapp's former Yale classmate, Paul Baker, a nationally known figure in regional and experimental theater. Preston applied successfully to Baylor and while waiting to enroll, worked for the highway department in Colorado City, Texas, the place that later formed the basis for Bradleyville, the setting for *A Texas Trilogy*.

Preston completed his coursework at Baylor but before he could receive his degree, Paul Baker and the Baylor University administration had a falling out over the production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Baker moved his entire department to Trinity University in San Antonio in 1963 and Preston followed, receiving his Master's there in 1966. His thesis was a dramatization of the novel by David Grubb, *The Night of the Hunter*.

In 1959, Paul Baker became director of the newly formed Dallas Theater Center (DTC), which he headed in conjunction with his position as a drama department chairman. Baker invited Preston to join the DTC during his first year as a student at Baylor thus beginning the association with an important regional theater that lasted until the end of his life. In line with Baker's philosophy of non-specialization, Preston performed all duties in the theater: actor, director, stage manager, ticket taker, etc. As an actor, he appeared in *Julius Caesar*, *Journey to Jefferson*, *Medea*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *What Price Glory*, and *The Girl of the Golden West*. He played the stage manager in *Our Town* and Henry Drummond in *Inherit the Wind*. Preston's directing projects included *Under the Yum-Yum Tree*, *Barefoot in the Park* and *The Knack*. Preston was to credit this varied experience in the theater for his success in writing material for the stage.

It was through the Dallas Theater Center that Preston met his second wife, Mary Sue Birkhead Fridge. The two worked together in many Dallas Theater productions where Mary Sue was

assistant director to Paul Baker as well as a popular actress and designer. Mary Sue, for her part, provided Preston with encouragement and support in his writing endeavors. Preston's admiration for his wife's talent was oft expressed. "I never belonged on the same stage as that woman," he told John Anders of the *Dallas Morning News* (July 5, 1992).

In 1972, Baker appointed Preston managing director of Down Center Stage, a smaller workshop theater in the Center. Jones wished to provide a stage for new works but the lack of good material inspired him to begin writing what became the *Trilogy*. The first of the three plays, *The Knights of the White Magnolia*, premiered at the Down Center Stage on December 4, 1973. *Lu Ann Hampton Laverty Oberlander* followed on February 5, 1974 and *The Oldest Living Graduate* in November of that year. Baker chose *Knights* and *LuAnn* (*Graduate* had not yet been completed) along with other original plays by resident playwrights to be presented in a spring showcase, Playmarket 74. Producers, agents and critics from around the world were invited to view these works, among them literary agent Audrey Wood and director Alan Schneider. Wood, who had discovered, among others, Tennessee Williams and William Inge, became Preston's agent and Schneider eventually directed the *Trilogy* in Washington, D. C. and New York City. In 1975, the three plays were performed together for the first time on the main stage of the Dallas Theater Center under the title, *The Bradleyville Trilogy*. That same year the American Playwright's Theater, which promotes the production of new works in theaters around the country, chose *Knights* as one of their offerings. In 1976, the renamed *A Texas Trilogy* played at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. to popular and critical acclaim. Preston received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to write a play for the American bicentennial and the Golden Apple Award from Cue magazine. After these initial successes, the *Trilogy* opened September 1976 on Broadway to a lukewarm response, closing after three weeks.

Preston returned to Dallas reassuming the varied tasks required of members of the company but by no means resting on his laurels as a playwright. His *A Place on the Magdalena Flats* played at the Dallas Theater Center in 1976 while the *Trilogy* wound its way from Washington to New York. *Santa Fe Sunshine* premiered at the Dallas Theater Center April 9, 1977. That same year, Preston won the Outer Critics Circle Award for the *Trilogy* and staged a tribute to Lady Bird Johnson on her 65th birthday. In 1978, Preston created the one-act *Juneteenth* for the Actors' Theater in Louisville, Kentucky, forming the plot around Black Texans' annual celebration of emancipation. This play was later presented with other one-acts on PBS's "Earplay" series under the title *Holidays*. In 1979, *Remember* was on the boards. While

working on rewrites, Preston was also crafting a screenplay of the *Trilogy* for producer Hal Wallis.

Preston was slated to appear as the Duke of Norfolk in the Dallas Theater Center's production of *A Man For All Seasons* under Mary Sue's direction when he was suddenly taken ill and hospitalized. He died September 9, 1979 after surgery on a bleeding ulcer. See also: Busby, Mark. *Preston Jones*. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University Western Writers Series No. 58, 1983.

Scope and Contents

The Preston Jones papers span the years 1940 to 1988. The archive contains typescripts, set designs, playbills, props, clippings, magazines, articles, letters, photographs, personal items (pipes, glasses, keys, a stuffed bear collection, etc.), mementos (World War I items, ticket stubs, "good show" gifts, etc.), awards, posters, school records, sculptures, scrapbooks, audiotapes, videotapes, T-shirts, and athletic equipment. Most of the material was saved by Preston's widow, Mary Sue Jones. Mary Sue kept files on Preston and his career in several different file groups. These file groups have been rearranged and consolidated into chronological order within subjects. The records are comprised of five series: Early Years and Dallas Theater Center, Plays, Professional Files, Publicity Files, and Illness and Death. The series chronicle Preston's personal and professional life, from his childhood in New Mexico through his days as a successful playwright.

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Mary Sue Jones.

Physical Location

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

Preferred Citation

Preston Jones Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

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

Related Materials

Mary Sue Jones Papers (Collection 9A) and the Paul and Kitty Baker Papers (Collection 35).

Related Materials

Books from the library of Preston and Mary Sue Jones have been cataloged and the records are searchable through the Alkek Library online catalog.

Controlled Access Headings

- Authors, American -- Texas -- 20th century
- Drama
- Dramatists -- Texas

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Early Years and Dallas Theater Center, 1940-1983

Box	Folder	
1	1	Preston Jones' family, including genealogy
1	2	James B. (Jawbone) Jones' signed gavel board
1	3	School memorabilia, unsigned sketches, 1940-1958
1	4	Highlander Yearbooks, school photos, 1954
1	5	University of New Mexico yearbook, 1956
2	1	School records, degrees
2	2	Directing Notebook, 1962
2	3	Watercolor paintings
2	4	Trinity University Master of Arts degree, 1966
2	5	Journals from European vacations, souvenirs, 1964
2	6	Photos and negatives, US vacations, 1975
2	7	Soldiers: A World-wide History of Men at Arms, book by Richard Boward
2	8	War plane pamphlets
2	9	Slides of Preston Jones' sculptures and US Signal Corps Photographs from WWI
3	1	WWI photos, mementos, photos of Preston Jones' sculptures
3	2	Father's war medals and patches, Jones' sculptures
3	3	Wallets, membership cards, photos, and maps
3	4	Shaving kit, memorabilia, personal items
3	5	Playbills, art books, sketches
3	6	Various printed materials
4	1	Letters, cards, pamphlets, 1977-1983
4	2	Preston and Mary Sue Jones' scrapbook material
4	3	Photographs, memorabilia, 1960-1979
4	4	Cassette tapes of Preston Jones in The Price, and The Happy Hunter, 1971

Series II: Plays, 1966-1988, undated

Unproduced Writings, 1966, undated

4	7	Two unfinished plays: The Education of Junior and Over There, undated
4	8-9	The House, undated
4	10	The Night of the Hunter thesis, 1966
5	1-2	The Night of the Hunter thesis, 1966

5	3	Bound copy of The Night of the Hunter, 1966
5	4	The Black Iota, undated
5	5	The Police Station, undated
5	6	Red Grover, on Thanksgiving, undated
5	7	Up Above the Soda Dam, undated

A Texas Trilogy, Complete, 1973-1979, undated

5	8	Rewrites, map of Bradleyville
5	9	Programs, posters, set designs
5	10	Early productions, clippings, 1973-1979
5	11	Later productions, clippings, 1973-1979
6	1	Later productions, clippings, 1974-1976
6	2	SR No 254 Senate Proclamation, photos, March 5, 1975
6	3	Kennedy Center promotion materials, clippings, and programs
6	4	Photographs, Kennedy Center production , April 1976
6	5	Kennedy Center Reviews, 1976
6	6	Kennedy Center memorabilia
6	7-8	Arena Theater & New York Opening, correspondence, 1974-1977
6	9	Washington and New York memorabilia
6	10	New York reviews, 1975-1977
7	1	Stories and interviews, national
7	2	Playbills from other plays
7	3	Postcards, magazine articles about Trilogy, 1976
7	4	Magazines, 1976-1977
7	5	Royalty statements, 1976
7	6	Awards, 1976-1977
7	7	Texas Trilogy programs and poster, 1976-1977
8	1	London production, clippings, reviews, and correspondence, 1977-1978
8	2	Photographs-Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Houston, framed needlecraft map of Texas
8	3-4	Magazine articles about Jones, programs, 1977-1978
8	5	Gift, The Teddy Bear Book, compiled by Peter Bull
8	6	Bradleyville screenplay
8	7	Bradleyville screenplay, second draft with handwritten notes
8	8	Bradleyville screenplay, second draft
8	9	Other productions, clippings, correspondence, and programs, 1978-1979

Trilogy: The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia, 1973-1988, undated

8	10	First copy, handwritten
9	1	Handwritten copy

9	2	Typed copy with revisions
9	3	Bound version , 1973
9	4-6	Version, 1973
9	7	Version with handwritten revisions, 1973
9	8	Actor's copy (L.D.)
9	9	Second mimeo printing, 5th rewrite, May 16, 1974
9	10	Corrected version, May 20, 1976
10	1	Script for New York production, 1973
10	2	Props
10	3-4	Programs, posters, 1973-1977
10	5	Reel to Reel of Preston Jones' Interview by Studs Turkel, February 19, 1976
10	6	Reviews of early Dallas productions through Arena Stage, 1973-1976
10	7-8	Reviews, articles, programs, and correspondence, 1975-1979, 1984
11	1	Penn State productions, 1977, 1984
11	2-3	To Craig Anderson, copies of articles written about Jones after his death and reviews of Knights, 1988

Trilogy: LuAnn Hampton Lavery Oberlander, 1973-1985

11	4	1st draft, 2nd rewrite, 1973
11	5	Handwritten draft, April 1973
11	6	Rewrites, hand-drawn map of Bradleyville
11	7	Rewrites, photocopies
11	8	Typed copy with handwritten notes
11	9	Dallas Theater Center version, 1974
11	10-11	New York version, 1974
12	1	Script, corrected, May 20, 1976
12	2	Script, corrected with new inserts, May 20, 1976
12	3	Annotated script
12	4	Programs, correspondence, 1977
12	5	Reviews, clippings, photos, 1974-1980, 1985
12	6	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities video, 1981-1982

Trilogy: The Oldest Living Graduate, 1975-1982

12	7	First copy, handwritten
12	8	Photocopy with corrections
12	9	Bound photocopy
12	10	Rewrites
13	1	Rewrites of part with photocopies
13	2	Script, 1975
13	3	Script with rewrites, 1975
13	4	Script, 1975

13	5	The Arts: Years of Development, Time of Decision, with suggested program and time schedule, September 29, 1975
13	6	Script with rewrites, July 1976
13	7	Programs, reviews, correspondence
13	8	Photographs, programs, Austin, Los Angeles, and Midland, 1976-1978
13	9	NBC Live Telecast with Henry Fonda video, April 7, 1980
13	10-11	NBC Live Telecast, clippings, reviews, correspondence, 1980
14	1	NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
14	2	NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1979-1982
14	3-4	NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
14	5	NBC Live Telecast press information package, photos, 1980
14	6-7	NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
14	8	NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, correspondence, 1980
14	9	Los Angeles production, clippings, reviews, 1980
14	10	Other productions, clippings, reviews, 1980
14	11	Louisville production, clippings, reviews, 1980

Post-Trilogy Plays: A Place on the Magdalena Flats, 1975-1979, undated

14	12	Script, handwritten, 1st and 2nd versions
15	1	Script, handwritten, 1975
15	2	3rd draft, handwritten, 1975
15	3-4	Copies of handwritten script
15	5	Photocopy of revised version with corrections
15	6	Handwritten rewrites
15	7	Photocopy of handwritten rewrites
15	8	Rewrites
15	9	First typed draft, letter from Audrey Wood, 1975
15	10-11	Working scripts, photocopies
16	1	Dallas Theater Center version with handwritten rewrites
16	2	First Santa Fe version
16	3-4	Second Santa Fe version
16	5	Rewrite, June 1977
16	6	Summer version without Act 3, Scene 3, 1977
16	7	Three copies of summer version with Act 3, Scene 3, 1977
16	8	The Plains of St. Augustine, under the title A Place on the Magdalena Flats, handwritten, February 1978
16	9-10	The Plains of St. Augustine, under the title A Place on the Magdalena Flats, typed, February 1978
16	11	Revised script, July 1978
17	1-5	Revised script, July 1978
17	6	Programs, 1975-1977

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| 17 | 7 | Photographs, set designs, memorabilia |
| 17 | 8 | Dallas Theater Center production, reviews and articles, 1976 |
| 17 | 9 | Other reviews and articles, 1977-1979 |

Post-Trilogy Plays: Santa Fe Sunshine (The Eye of the Beholder), 1976-1980, undated

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| 17 | 10 | Handwritten script, undated |
| 17 | 11 | Handwritten script, original copy, undated |
| 18 | 1 | Handwritten scripts, first and second writings, undated |
| 18 | 2 | Notes and fourth copy, undated |
| 18 | 3 | Unrevised script, undated |
| 18 | 4-5 | Photocopies, undated |
| 18 | 6 | Photocopy of final working copy, undated |
| 18 | 7 | Working copy, final, undated |
| 18 | 8-9 | Additional copies, undated |
| 18 | 10 | Programs, 1977 |
| 18 | 11 | Articles, reviews, 1976-1978 |
| 18 | 12 | Chocolate Bayou production, reviews, 1980 |

Post-Trilogy Plays: Juneteenth, 1978-1980, undated

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| 18 | 13 | Photocopy of handwritten script; Scripts, 1978 |
| 19 | 1 | Audiotape, Holidays: A Quartet of Plays by Guare, Jones, Terry, and Hailey, undated |
| 19 | 2 | Louisville production, PBS "Earplay" , 1979-1980 |

Post-Trilogy Plays: Lady Bird Johnson Tribute, undated

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| 19 | 3 | Program, invitation |
| 19 | 4 | Copy of play, correspondence relating to event, photo of Jones with Lady Bird |
| 19 | 5 | LBJ Ranch mementos |

Post-Trilogy Plays: Remember, 1978-1988, undated

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|----|-------|--|
| 19 | 6 | First version, June 10, 1978 |
| 19 | 7 | Handwritten copy, 1978 |
| 19 | 8 | First typed copy |
| 19 | 9 | Photocopy |
| 19 | 10 | Rewrites |
| 19 | 11 | Supplementary pages, handwritten, October 4, 1978 - March 11, 1979 |
| 19 | 12 | Handwritten third version minus unchanged Act 1 |
| 19 | 13-14 | Other copies |
| 19 | 15 | Script, March 11, 1979 |
| 20 | 1 | Corrected version, March 11, 1979 |
| 20 | 2 | Corrected sections |
| 20 | 3-9 | Other scripts, 1979 |
| 20 | 10 | Glenn Allen Smith and other letters, 1976-1988 |

20 11 Program, Reviews, 1979

Series III: Professional Files, 1963-1986

21	1-2	Journals and address books, 1975-1978
21	3-8	Professional correspondence, A-U, 1974-1979
22	1	Professional correspondence, V-Z, 1974-1979
22	2	Empty files
22	3	Preston and Mary Sue Jones' clipboards
22	4-6	Miscellaneous writings by or about Preston Jones, 1976-1978
22	7	Facts for resumes, Preston and Mary Sue Jones
22	8-9	Correspondence between Jones and International Creative Management, 1974-1979
23	1	American Playwrights Theatre, contract and correspondence, 1974-1975
23	2	Wood, Baker and Dallas Theater Center contracts and correspondence, 1974-1976
23	3	Dramatists Guild, publications and correspondence, 1972-1978
23	4	Hill and Wang, Publishers, contracts and correspondence, 1976-1978
23	5	Royalty Payments, 1977
23	6	Dramatist Play Service, correspondence, 1976
23	7-10	Various Contracts, Mary Sue and Preston Jones, 1963-1986
23	11	NBC/Graduate contracts and correspondence, 1980
24	1	American Place Theater, 1973-1974
24	2	Arena Theater and Alan Schneider, correspondence and newsletters, 1974-1979
24	3	Texas Trilogy, photographs and negatives, 1976
24	4	JFK Center, correspondence, 1975-1980
24	5	Play outlines, cast descriptions, 1976
24	6	Robert Whitehead Productions, correspondence , 1975-1980
24	7	American Place Theater, contracts and correspondence, 1976-1979
24	8	Texas Commission on the Arts, correspondence and newsletters , 1975-1979
24	9	Hal Wallis, correspondence, 1976, 1978
24	10-11	Libraries, correspondence, 1974-1981
24	12	Media, correspondence, 1974-1979
24	13	P.E.N., an Association of Writers, letter , 1977
24	14	Texas Institute of Letters, correspondence and newsletters, 1975-1976
24	15	Rockefeller Foundation, correspondence, 1974-1977
25	1	LBJ Library, includes correspondence with Lady Bird Johnson, other printed materials, 1977
25	2-4	Theaters, correspondence, 1974-1979
25	5	Universities, correspondence, 1976-1979
25	6-7	Audience and Fan response to plays with copies of Jones' replies, 1974-1979

Series IV: Publicity, 1974-1986

25	8	Interview dress notes, checkbook, undated
25	9	Photographs of Preston Jones and his sculptures, undated
25	10	Photos of Preston Jones, clippings, undated
25	11	A Texas Trilogy reviews, programs, invitations
26	1	Smithsonian, and photo proofs, October 1976
26	2	Special issue of Time magazine, September 27, 1976
26	3	Magazines featuring Preston Jones, 1976
26	4	Articles, photographs, clippings, 1976-1978
26	5	Correspondence, clippings, photos, notes, 1976-1978
26	6	Articles, clippings, various printed materials, 1979
26	7	Articles, clippings, 1974-1976
26	8	Photographs: A Texas Trilogy, Hal Wallis, 1977
27	1	Articles, reviews, 1977
27	2	Articles, interviews, reviews, 1978-1979
27	3	Articles, reviews, 1976-1979
27	4	PBS tape, KERA, Dallas, original print
27	5	Theatre Southwest, magazine and cassette tape, 1978
27	6	Articles, news photos, correspondence, 1976-1981
27	7	Programs, certificate from governor of Alabama, articles, correspondence,, 1975-1981
27	8	Articles, 1981
28	1	Texas Committee for the Humanities radio spot and highband TV dub, 1979
28	2	Essays about Preston Jones
28	3	Articles, photos, correspondence, programs, 1984
28	4	Articles, programs, costume designs, schedules, 1984-1986

Series V: Jones' Illness and Death, 1979-1983

29	1	Preston Jones' medical and death records, including concerns about malpractice and Preston and Mary Sue's will and testaments, 1979
29	2	Articles on Preston Jones' death, September 1979
29	3	Funeral service, 1979
29	4-8	Clippings on death, 1979
29	9-11	Photocopies of articles about Jones' death, 1979
30	1	Preston Jones' Memorial Scholarship Fund, 1979-1981
30	2-8	Mary Sue's correspondence relating to Preston and his work, 1976-1981
30	9	Donations to Memorial Fund, 1980-1981
30	10	Copies of typed thank-you letters, 1979
30	11	Miscellaneous clippings related to Cable TV, 1979-1980

31	1	Get well cards and letters for Preston Jones, 1979
31	2	Notebook on Preston Jones' Funeral, 1979
31	3	Visitor's Book, Preston Jones' Funeral, 1979
31	4	Flower cards, 1979
31	5-8	Sympathy cards and letters, 1979
32		Sympathy cards and letters, 1979
33	1	Sympathy cards , 1979-1980
33	2	Theatre Southwest on Preston's death, October 1979
33	3-4	Christmas cards, 1979
33	5	Malouf Lynch & Jackson, Attorneys at Law, estate file for Preston Jones, also past correspondence with firm, 1975-1983

Series VI: Oversized Materials, undated

34	Two Army helmets, WWI paraphernalia, wooden fraternity paddle, New Mexico flag
35	WWI paraphernalia (knapsack, canvas gas mask kit), sports equipment
36	Personal items (pipes, glasses, coins, etc), Texas Trilogy memorabilia, sports equipment, Preston Jones' sculptures, part of Jones' teddy bear collection
37	Texas Trilogy memorabilia, Mary Sue Jones' personal items (key chains, teapot, paintings, etc.), props from various plays, part of Preston Jones' teddy bear collection
38	Duplicates of playbills, magazines, press clippings, and five plays: A Place on the Magdalena Flats, Remember, The Oldest Living Graduate, Santa Fe Sunshine, and Juneteenth
39	Duplicates of Plays
40	2 sculptures made of wooden sticks
41	2 sculptures made of wooden sticks