



The Wittliff Collections

Guide to the Larry McMurtry Collection 1968–1987-1991

Collection SWWC-014

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	McMurtry, Larry
Title:	Guide to the Larry McMurtry Collection
Dates:	1968–1987-1991
Abstract:	The bulk of this collection is comprised of the original typescript for McMurtry's essay, "Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen," which includes handwritten corrections by the author.
Identification:	SWWC-014
Extent:	.25 Linear Feet, 4 folders
Language:	English
Repository:	The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

Table Of Contents

Biographical Notes	3
Scope and Contents	5
Administrative Information	6
Immediate Source of Acquisition	6
Conditions Governing Access	6
Conditions Governing Use	6
Preferred Citation	6
Physical Location	6
Related Materials	6
Controlled Access Headings	6
Detailed Description of the Collection	7
Series I: Works, 1984-1985	7
Series II: Correspondence, 1968, 1987-1991	7

Biographical Notes

Novelist, essayist, and screenwriter Larry McMurtry was born June 3, 1936 in Wichita Falls, Texas. He grew up on a ranch just outside of Archer City and graduated from Archer City High School in 1954. He attended North Texas State University (B.A. 1958), then Rice University (1954, 1958-60, M.A. 1960), and studied for one semester outside of Texas at Stanford University as a Stegner Fellow (1960-61).

McMurtry published his first novels while working as an English instructor at Texas Christian University (1961-62), Rice University (1963-65), George Mason College (1970), and American University, (1970-71). In 1962, he won the Texas Institute of Letters Jesse M. Jones award, and in 1964, he won a Guggenheim grant. In 1970, he bought a rare-book store in Washington D.C.'s Georgetown neighborhood, named it Booked Up, and relocated to run the store. A second Booked Up was opened in Archer City, Texas, in 1988.

His first seven novels were all set in Texas, some in the country, some in urban settings. The first three were made into movies. Despite the critical and popular success of “Hud” (*Horseman Pass By*) and “The Last Picture Show,” for which McMurtry wrote the Academy award winning screenplay (1972), he perceived a lack of appropriate recognition for his work in general. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he wore a t-shirt which read “Minor Regional Novelist,” to help make this point. McMurtry’s urban trilogy, set in contemporary Houston, *Moving On* (1970), *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers* (1972), and *Terms of Endearment* (1975), all deal with love and marriage, and are examples of McMurtry's ability to consistently create a strong sense of place, characters, and dialogue. *Terms of Endearment* would later be translated into Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish, and made into a very popular movie by the same name (1983), starring Jack Nicholson, Shirley MacLaine, John Hurt, and Debra Winger. Following this trilogy, McMurtry looked outside of Texas for settings: *Somebody’s Darling* (1978) set in Hollywood, California, *Cadillac Jack* (1982) set in Washington D.C., and *The Desert Rose* (1983) set in Las Vegas. These novels involve characters seeking meaning in urban life and were not as critically or commercially successful as McMurtry’s novels set in Texas.

In 1985, McMurtry published *Lonesome Dove*, the story of two ex-Texas Rangers who take on a cattle drive from Texas to Montana. This novel won McMurtry a Pulitzer Prize, as well as

widespread critical and commercial success. The novel was brought to the small screen in 1989, in a very popular television mini-series of the same name, making McMurtry even more of a household name. Since writing *Lonesome Dove*, McMurtry has continued to write novels set in both contemporary and historical Texas with characters grappling with old and new lifestyles and values. These novels have been commercially successful, although not to the same degree as *Lonesome Dove*. McMurtry announced that he would retire from novel writing with the 1999 novel *Duane's Depressed*, however he published a biography on Crazy Horse and an autobiographical reminiscence, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen*, in the same year.

McMurtry passed away March 25, 2021.

Scope and Contents

The bulk of this collection is comprised of the original typescript for McMurtry's essay, "Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen," which includes handwritten corrections by the author (circa 1984-1985). Correspondence includes one 1968 letter to McMurtry from Harper's magazine returning his manuscript, "Take My Saddle from the Wall: A Valediction," a letter from McMurtry to Bill Wittliff, and two to former Southwestern Writers Collection Curator, Dick Holland. These letters date from 1987-1991 and relate to the acquisition of this collection.

Books, including many foreign language editions of McMurtry's novels, have been cataloged separately.

Additional items relating to Larry McMurtry housed at the Wittliff Collections include the Lonesome Dove Television Miniseries Archives. This collection includes a typescript of McMurtry's 1972 screenplay, "Streets of Laredo," which later became the basis for his novel *Lonesome Dove*. Also present in the Southwestern Writers Collection is a copy of the novel *Daughter of The Tejas* by Ophelia Ray, which is reputed to have been written by McMurtry, a 12"x 30" oil painting by Shannon Stirnweis that served as cover art for the novel *Lonesome Dove*, and an acrylic painting by Bruce Wolfe for McMurtry's novel *Texasville*. Bill Wittliff's collection includes photographs of McMurtry and broadsides for McMurtry's *In a Narrow Grave*, (published by Wittliff's Encino Press.)

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Larry McMurtry, 1988.

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Materials from the Wittliff Collections are made available for use in research, teaching, and private study. The user assumes responsibility for determining copyright status, obtaining permission to publish, and abiding by U.S. copyright laws.

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

Preferred Citation

Larry McMurtry Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

Physical Location

Materials may be stored off-site. Advance notice is required for use:

<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/makearesearchappointment.html>.

Related Materials

Additional McMurtry material can be found at the University of Texas, Permian Basin, and at the University of North Texas at Denton.

Controlled Access Headings

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

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Works, 1984-1985

Box	Folder	
1	1	"Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen," typescript with corrections (83 pages)
1	2-3	Photocopies (2)

Series II: Correspondence, 1968, 1987-1991

1	4	Correspondence, contacts include <i>Harper's Magazine</i> (1968), Bill Wittliff (1987), and Richard Holland (1988, 1991)
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