James A. Michener papers
circa 1925-1990s, 50 linear feet

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Leu and Anastasia Matijkiw through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories using information provided by the James A. Michener Art Museum Archives

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit
September 19, 2016
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# Summary Information

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<th>Repository</th>
<th>James A. Michener Art Museum Archives</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Creator</strong></td>
<td>Michener, James A. (James Albert), 1907-1997</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>James A. Michener papers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>circa 1925-1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent</strong></td>
<td>50.0 Linear feet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>James A. Michener (1907-1997) was a best-selling American author of more than forty books, a large number of which were historical novels based in specific locations around the world where Michener had traveled. Michener was known for his extensive research of each location's history, culture, and geology. Michener was a generous philanthropist and donated over one hundred million dollars to various educational programs, arts related institutions, and other organizations. James A. Michener papers, circa 1925-1990s, consist of correspondence, financial records, personal documents, large amounts of photographs and negatives, audio and audio visual materials, documents from organizations with which Michener was involved, printed matter and published materials, artwork, objects, and various other materials.</td>
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Biographical/Historical Note

James A. Michener (1907-1997) was a best-selling American author of more than forty books, a large number of which were historical novels based in specific locations around the world where Michener had traveled. Michener was known for his extensive research of each location's history, culture, and geology. Michener was a generous philanthropist and donated over one hundred million dollars to various educational programs, arts related institutions, and other organizations.

James A. Michener (1907-1997) was born in 1907 in New York, New York. Michener claimed that his birth date and biological parents were unknown. Brought up as a Quaker in Doylestown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Michener believed that he was raised by an adoptive mother. After graduating from Doylestown High School in 1925, Michener attended Swarthmore College in Delaware County, PA and graduated with the highest honors in 1929. Following graduation, he traveled and studied throughout Europe for two years and then worked in several teaching positions in the following years. He earned a master's degree from Colorado State Teachers College (now University of Northern Colorado). He married his first wife, Patti Koon, in 1935 and went on to teach for one year at Harvard University in Massachusetts.

Michener was called to active duty for World War II and traveled throughout the South Pacific with the United States Navy. In 1962, Michener unsuccessfully ran as a Democratic candidate for a seat in the United States House of Representatives. Later, he served as the Secretary for the 1967-1968 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention. Michener's writing began during World War II while serving in the South Pacific. Not long after, he wrote "The Tales of the South Pacific" and it was published in 1947. This book later became the basis for the Broadway and film musical "South Pacific. Tales of the South Pacific" won a Pulitzer Prize in 1948. That same year, Michener divorced his wife, Patti, and married his second wife, Vange Nord. In 1959, Michener's novel "Hawaii," based on his extensive research from living several years on the islands, was published and became an immediate best-seller. Most, if not all, of his subsequent novels were based on detailed historical, cultural, and geological research conducted during his travels, resulting in over four dozen historical novels, including "Centennial," a novel about Colorado, "Texas," "Alaska," and "Chesapeake." During his lifetime, Michener sold an estimated 75 million copies of his fiction and non-fiction books worldwide.

Michener's success made him a wealthy man, but he was a philanthropist and gave away large amounts of his money. His third and final wife, Mari Yoriko Sabusawa, whom Michener married in 1955, directed her husband's donations, which totaled more than $100 million. Among the beneficiaries were the University of Texas, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and Swarthmore College. He supported many different groups, including NASA. From 1979 to 1983, he was a member of the Advisory Council to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Other positions he held included appointments as cultural ambassador to various countries and volunteering with the International Broadcasting Board. As the result of his philanthropic service, Michener was awarded many medals, plaques, honorary degrees, and other memorabilia. He was an avid collector of Japanese prints, as well as souvenirs from all over the world. In connection with his books and articles, he visited most of the countries in the world, staying long enough to become familiar with the customs and the people.
Michener's wife, Mari, passed away in 1994. In October of 1997, Michener ended his dialysis treatment and died of kidney failure at the age of 90. He is buried in Austin, Texas and is honored by a monument at the Texas State Cemetery.

Bibliography:

Scope and Content Note

James A. Michener papers, circa 1925-1990s, consist of correspondence, financial records, personal documents, large amounts of photographs and negatives, audio and audio visual materials, documents from organizations with which Michener was involved, printed matter and published materials, artwork, objects, and various other materials.

Correspondence in the collection documents Michener's professional life and personal life. One portion of correspondence includes letters from James A. Michener to Lester Trauch, a boyhood friend and fellow 1925 classmate, and associate editor for The Daily Intelligencer (Doylestown, PA); Ernestine Harman; Mrs. Michael Greenebaum (Mrs. Bertha Wadt), an active member of the League of Women Voters who had a life-long interest in politics and supported many Democratic candidates for office; and former Bucks County Commissioner Lucille M. Trench.

There is a portion of materials in the collection relating to Michener's involvement with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The materials date from 1979 to 1983 when Michener served as a member of the Advisory Council to NASA. James A. Michener had a life-long fascination with travel, exploration and science. His knowledge of NASA programs and issues served as the groundwork for his 1982 novel, Space, a fictionalized account of the United States space program, highlighting manned spaceflight. Michener also initiated the NASA College Scholarship Fund to assist NASA employee dependents pursuing education in science and engineering.

There are many photographs in the collection, including travel photographs; photographs of Michener taken by others, such as Jack Rosen and Stephen Barth; birthday and other celebratory event photographs; school class photographs; and other images documenting Michener and his life. Many of the photographs in this collection are undated and unidentified. A portion of photographs includes prints, negatives, contact sheets, and slides, 1962-1997, with images of James A. Michener and his wife, Mari Sabusawa Michener. Most of these images relate to Michener as traveler, writer and citizen. Included are photographs from James A. Michener Day, Doylestown (May 1985); publicity images; Michener's 89th and 90th birthday parties; and several images of Mari. Another portion of photographs consists of 88 photographs and 3 graphic titles from location filming of the miniseries Centennial, a television adaptation of Michener's book of the same name. James and Mari Michener appear in several of the photos from the production, along with several well-known actors from the production. Centennial, published in 1974, traces the development of a fictional plains town, Centennial, in northeast Colorado.
from prehistory to the early 1970s. Colorado, known as the Centennial State, gained statehood in 1876. The novel was adapted to a twelve part TV miniseries in 1978 by screenwriter/producer John Wilder and James Michener. It aired on NBC from October 1978 to February 1979. The miniseries had a budget of $25 million dollars and broadcasted for 26 viewing hours, at the time, a huge budget and the longest miniseries. The miniseries was nominated for several awards, including a Best Actor Golden Globe for Richard Chamberlain's portrayal of Alexander McKeeag, and for Best Television Series Golden Globe Drama in 1979. The miniseries, filmed in several parts of Colorado and other locations, spans Centennial's history from the mid-1700s to the early 1970s. The miniseries had over 100 cast members with speaking parts and featured star-studded actors such as Michael Ansara, Raymond Burr, Richard Chamberlain, Robert Conrad, Barbara Carrera, Richard Crenna, Timothy Dalton, Sharon Gless, Andy Griffith, Mark Harmon, Gregory Harrison, David Janssen, Alex Karras, Brian Keith, Sally Kellerman, Stephen McHattie, Lois Nettleton, Donald Pleasence, Adrienne La Russa, Lynn Redgrave, Clive Revill, Pernell Roberts, Robert Vaughn, Dennis Weaver, Anthony Zerbe, and Stephanie Zimbalist. George Clooney had his acting debut as a teenage extra in one of the episodes. James A. Michener lived in Greeley, CO while he attended a teachers college there during the late 1930s and was familiar with the area. Michener later spent time in Colorado researching *Centennial* and included a variety of historical source material in his tale of the American West.

There are several published materials, including books and magazines; newspaper clippings about Michener and his career/activities; Doylestown High School Yearbook; pamphlets and ephemera; and other materials. There are two editions (#146/510 and #282/510) of *The Modern Japanese Print, An Appreciation with Ten Original Prints by Hiratsuka Un'ichi, Maekawa Sempan, Mori Yoshitoshi, Watanabe Sadao, Kinoshita Tomio, Shima Tamami, Azechi Umetaro, Iwami Reika, Yoshida Masaji, Maki Haku* by James A. Michener. There are also four albums of Michener's personal stamp collection. The albums are marked Australia/Hong Kong, Laos/Malaysialand, Hungary/Japan, and Pakistan/Wallis, respectively. These albums reflect the extensive traveling that Michener did throughout his lifetime.

Other materials in the collection include personal documents, including diplomas from Doylestown High School and Swarthmore College; financial records; publishing agreements, 1950s-1985; political campaign materials; documents from the Bucks County Council for the Arts; an audio recording of Michener reading *Tales of the South Pacific* and other audio materials; ten videos of the James A. Michener Writing Series, six half-hour interviews with Michener, and other audiovisual materials; awards and proclamations received during Michener's lifetime, including honorary degrees, plaques, and other items of recognition; original artwork such as works on paper by Charles Shaw, Larry Rivers, and Don Daly and other types of artwork, including paintings; and other materials. There are objects, textiles, including several souvenirs from travel in the collection.

More detailed finding aids, biographical notes, or inventories for individual portions of this collection may be available on-site or on the Archives' finding aid page: http://www.michenerartmuseum.org/collections-research/archives/finding-aids/.

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**Administrative Information**

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Publication Information
James A. Michener Art Museum Archives

Conditions Governing Access Note
Contact James A. Michener Art Museum Archives for information about accessing this collection.

Immediate Source of Acquisition Note
Gift of James and Mari Michener

Processing Information Note
Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2014-2016 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact James A. Michener Art Museum Archives directly for more information.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials Note


Talbot County Free Library, Maryland: James A. Michener Chesapeake Collection

University of Miami Special Collections: James A. Michener papers, 1985-1989, ASM0134

University of Northern Colorado: James A. Michener Collection (The bulk of Michener's writing and publishing materials are located here.)

The University of Texas at Austin, Briscoe Center for American History: James A. Michener *Texas Project Archive*, 1981-1992
Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Bucks County (Pa.)
- Doylestown (Pa.)

Personal Name(s)

- Michener, James A. (James Albert), 1907-1997

Subject(s)

- Authors
- Philanthropists
- Travel