Herlihy, James Leo.

James Leo Herlihy letters to Edward P. Mitchell
1947-1953

Abstract: This collection of letters and postcards, written by author and playwright James Leo Herlihy (1927-1993) to his friend Edward P. Mitchell, contains updates on his life in New York City, including his writing and his financial difficulties; and is accompanied by a life mask of Herlihy and a sculpture created by Herlihy.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 099, F920
Creator: Herlihy, James Leo.
Title: James Leo Herlihy letters to Edward P. Mitchell
Inclusive Dates: 1947-1953
Extent: 14 items
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 099, F920, James Leo Herlihy letters to Edward P. Mitchell, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 63, F920: Shelved in SPEC MSS 099 manuscript boxes; Removals: Shelved in SPEC Vault MSS 099

Location: Special Collections, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/


Processing: Processed and encoded by Anita Wellner, July 2012.

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Biographical Notes

James Leo Herlihy

American author, playwright, and actor James Leo Herlihy was born on February 27, 1927, in Detroit, Michigan.

After completing high school Herlihy served in the U.S. Navy. With the benefits earned through the G.I. Bill, Herlihy attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina, in 1947 and 1948. At Black Mountain he studied literature, music, and art (particularly sculpture), with faculty who included M. C. Richards, Merce Cunningham, Anais Nin, John Cage, and William De Kooning. Anais Nin and M. C. Richards became Herlihy's lifelong friends.

In 1948 Herlihy moved to California and studied at Nin's Pasadena Playhouse College and began his acting career in theaters on the West Coast. Two highlights of his theatrical career were his roles in Edward Albee's Zoo Story (which he performed in Paris and Boston in 1963) and in the film Four Friends (1982).

The Pasadena Playhouse produced Herlihy's first plays: Streetlight Sonata (1950) and Moon in Capricorn (1953). In 1953, Herlihy collaborated with his teacher William Noble on the play, Blue Denim, which had a successful run on Broadway in 1958 and was adapted into a film in 1959.

Herlihy was also successful as a fiction writer. In 1952, the Paris Review published a short story that would become the title work of Herlihy's 1959 collection, The Sleep of Baby Filbertson and Other Stories. His first novel, All Fall Down (1960), was followed by Midnight Cowboy in 1965, which was later adapted into an Academy Award-winning film starring Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman.

In the late 1960s Herlihy taught acting and writing at many institutions, including playwriting courses at City College, New York (1967-68), and he served as distinguished visiting professor at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, in 1983.

Edward P. Mitchell

Edward P. Mitchell was a friend of Herlihy's, having met in Los Angeles, California in 1952. For three months Mitchell and Herlihy shared an apartment near Hollywood & Vine in Los Angeles.

Edward Mitchell was originally from Philadelphia and attended Drexel University. Mitchell did bio-chemical research for Smith-Kline-French before changing careers to construction and forming his own business in San Diego.

At the age of 85, Mitchell currently resides in San Diego, California.

Sources:


Information derived from telephone conversation between Edward P. Mitchell and Rebecca Johnson Melvin on April 12, 2012.
This collection of letters and postcards, written by author and playwright James Leo Herlihy (1927-1993) to his friend Edward P. Mitchell, contains updates on his life in New York City, including his writing and his financial difficulties; and is accompanied by a life mask of Herlihy, an abstract painting, and a sculpture created by Herlihy.

The four postcards and five letters, as well as one fragment of a letter, were written in 1952 and 1953, just after Herlihy moved from Los Angeles, California, to New York City. Each posting is addressed to his friend Edward P. Mitchell, with whom he had shared an apartment in Hollywood. His close friendship with Edward Mitchell is evident in the frequent inquiries in his letters regarding Mitchell’s life, his ease in seeking financial assistance from Mitchell, and in the fact that he entrusted Mitchell with his artwork when he left in Los Angeles.

The letters reveal Herlihy's efforts to find a suitable job, his financial struggles, and his writing. He mentioned quitting a job reading cheap novels for a publisher, living on unemployment, and his loneliness. Herlihy wrote of returning to Homewood, Illinois, and of his mixed reactions to New York City. In an early letter he wrote of how difficult he found the poverty and filth of New York City, but later he would write of liking New York because of people he seemed "to have something in common with."

Almost every letter written by Herlihy included a reference to current writing projects, from finishing a new 7000-word story to collaborating on a play with Bill Noble. He reported that his play, The Moon in Capricorn, was playing summer stock at Chestertown, New York, and that he continued to work on a novel. In a subsequent letter Herlihy noted that the novel was finished and that he had begun typing the manuscript and seeking a publisher. The final postcard in the collection, dated July 4, 1953, noted a move to Black Mountain College in August.

Also part of the collection are a portrait photograph of Herlihy, which dates from his affiliation with the Pasadena Playhouse in the early 1950s, and two examples of Herlihy's sculpting. Herlihy had studied sculpture at Black Mountain College and these three pieces, a life mask of the author's face, an abstract painting on wood, and a sculpted figure of a female nude, illustrate his artwork.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Herlihy, James Leo--Correspondence.

Mitchell, Edward P.--Correspondence.

Topical Terms

Playwrights, American--Correspondence.

Novelists, American--Correspondence.

Sculptors, American--Correspondence.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.

Photographs.

Postcards.

Sculpture (visual work)

Life masks.

Paintings (visual works)

Occupation

Authors.

Playwrights.

Artists (visual artists)

Personal Contributors

Mitchell, Edward P., correspondent.

Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 099 Miscellaneous Literary and Historical Manuscripts.

MSS 344, James Leo Herlihy papers
Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Publicity photograph of Herlihy, before 1952 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)
8” x 10” black and white photograph.

Autograph postcard signed, 1952 April 14 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)

Typed letter signed with envelope, 1952 April 21 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)
Portion of the left margin cut out.

Autograph letter signed with envelope, 1952 May 31 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph letter signed with envelope, 1952 June 9 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)

Typed letter signed with envelope, 1952 August 10 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (2 p.)

Typed letter (incomplete) signed with envelope, 1952 September 2 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)
Only page 2 is present in the collection.

Typed letter signed with envelope, 1953 May 17 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (2 p.)

Typed postcard signed, 1953 June 15 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)

Typed postcard, 1953 June 17 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)
Typed postcard signed, 1953 July 4 [Box 63 F920]
1 item (1 p.)

Plaster life mask of Herlihy's face, circa 1947-1950 [Box 63 F920] (Removed to SPEC Vault MSS 099)
1 item (11" x 6" x 6")

Small sculpted figure of female nude, circa 1947-1950 [Box 63 F920] (Removed to SPEC Vault MSS 099)
1 item (9" x 8" x 7")

Small abstract painting on wood, 1948 [Box 63 F920] (Removed to SPEC Vault MSS 099)
1 item (11.5" x 8.75" x .25")

On the verso Herlihy has printed his name, 1948 and Black Mountain.