Wilson, Robert A. (Robert Alfred), 1922- , compiler.

Robert A. Wilson John Wieners collection
1958-1988

Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 555
Creator: Wilson, Robert A. (Robert Alfred), 1922-, compiler.
Title: Robert A. Wilson John Wieners collection
Extent: 1 linear foot and oversize removals (3 boxes)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 555, Robert A. Wilson John Wieners collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Boxes 1-3: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes; F6, F7: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize galleys; Removals: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize galleys

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


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John Wieners

American poet John Wieners (1934-2002) is identified with both the Black Mountain School as well as the Beats. His poetry contains themes of drug abuse and mental illness, as well as a concern for women's rights, gay rights, and other social issues.

Wieners was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1934. He received his A.B. from Boston College in 1954. With encouragement from poet Charles Olson (1910-1970), Wieners attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina from 1955-1956, where he studied writing with poets Robert Creeley (1926-2005) and Robert Duncan (1919-1988). Wieners is also identified with the American Beat poets, having spent time in San Francisco at the height of the movement in the late 1950s. Wieners's first collection of poems, *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958), was written in San Francisco and became an instant sensation with the Beats.


Struggles with substance abuse and mental anguish over the course of his life led to periods of institutionalization for Wieners in 1959, 1969, and at various times in the early 1970s. Yet Wieners continued to write and publish, gaining insight and inspiration from those difficult times, and the early 1970s was a prolific time for Wieners. During his time at an institution in 1969, Wieners composed *Asylum Poems* (1969). 1970 saw the publication of *Nerves*, Wieners's first international volume. Wieners was also very active in promoting political causes, taking part in the antiwar movement, speaking out against racism, and campaigning for gay and women's rights. *Cincinnati Pike, Or Behind the State Capitol* (1975) was another landmark piece for Wieners, and combines a wide variety of media and poetic forms.


Wieners died on March 1, 2002, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Robert A. Wilson

As the proprietor of The Phoenix Book Shop, Wilson interacted and was friends with many authors whose work he sold, printed, and later collected. Wilson provided encouragement and support, both artistic and financial, to many of the authors who frequented his shop and with whom he formed lifelong friendships.

In addition to selling books by the avant-garde and contemporary writers of the 1950s and 1960s, Wilson also published works out of The Phoenix, including his own bibliographies of some of those writers, Christmas keepsakes, and collections of poetry by authors such as Marianne Moore, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, and Diane di Prima. The first work published by Wilson and his colleague James Carr was John Wieners’s *Ace of Pentacles* (1964).


**Sources:**


Scope and Content Note


The collection offers examples of Wieners's writing process, as he was a writer who often revised his work. Personal letters in the collection reflect the business relationship and close, encouraging friendship that formed between Wieners and Wilson. The letters refer to Wieners's concern for the publicity and longevity of his works and his often difficult financial situation; they additionally mention many of Wieners and Wilson's mutual friends and acquaintances, mostly poets and authors involved with the Beat movement and the Black Mountain School, such as LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Diane di Prima, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, James Carr, and Allen Ginsberg. A number of the items in the collection are accompanied by Post-it notes bearing brief descriptions in Wilson’s hand.

The Robert A. Wilson John Wieners collection is arranged in four series: I. Works; II. Correspondence; III. Publicity, reviews, and critical writings about John Wieners; and IV. Photographs and ephemera. Series I. comprises materials related to John Wieners's works in a variety of genres, both published and unpublished. The series demonstrates various stages of Wieners’s work as well as his range as an author. Material includes manuscripts, page and galley proofs, mock-ups, signatures, printing bills, clippings and printed works, and dummies.

Series II. consists of the correspondence from Wieners to Robert A. Wilson, excepting a few items, recipients of which have been noted. Items of interest include postcards from Wieners to Wilson and Marshall Clements from Spoleto, Italy, where in 1965, several Beat poets gathered to share their work. Another highlight of this series is the postcard dated January 13, 1970, sent from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to Wilson after the funeral service of poet and co-founder of Black Mountain College, Charles Olson (died January 10, 1970), signed by Wieners, Allen de Loach, and Allen Ginsberg. Material is arranged chronologically.

Series III. includes items relating to publicity, reviews and critical writings about John Wieners’s work; critical reception of his work, a topic of conversation in his correspondence with Wilson, was a source of concern and interest for Wieners.

Series IV. includes photographs, mostly of Wieners, and sheet music of “Autumn in New York” inscribed to Wilson from Wieners.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**


**Corporate Names**

Phoenix Book Shop.

**Topical Terms**

Poets, American--20th century.

Authors, American--20th century.

Beat generation--California--San Francisco.

Beat generation--Poetry.

**Form/Genre Terms**

Correspondence.

Manuscripts.

Page proofs.

Galley proofs.

Sheet music.

Photographs.

Mock-ups.

Clippings (information artifacts)

Periodicals.

Fliers (printed matter)

**Occupation**

Authors.

Poets.

Collectors.
**Personal Contributors**


Wilson, Robert A. (Robert Alfred), 1922-

**Related Materials in this Repository**

MSS 138 John Wieners papers

MSS 481 Robert A. Wilson collection

MSS 369 Robert A. Wilson collection related to James Purdy

MSS 626 David Haselwood, John Wieners, publisher's files for *The Hotel Wentley Poems*
Arrangement

I. Works
II. Correspondence
III. Publicity, reviews, and critical writings about John Wieners
IV. Photographs and ephemera
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Works, 1958-1986

Series I. comprises materials related to John Wieners's works in a variety of genres, both published and unpublished. The series demonstrates various stages of Wieners's work as well as his range as an author. Material includes manuscripts, page and galley proofs, mock-ups, signatures, printing bills, clippings and printed works, and dummies.

*The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958), 1958, 1965 3 items

**Autograph postcard**, 1965 May 18 [Box 1 F1]

Wieners to Robert Wilson, asking for the photostats of *The Hotel Wentley* manuscripts "so I could revise them for future publication. I'm hot on this now, and know I could do good work on them … "

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*Hotel Wentley Poems* typescript manuscript, 1958 [Box 1 F1]

16 pages

Six of the original eight poems (lacking "A Poem for Tea Heads" and "A Poem for Museum Goers"). Mostly typed in red ink, with minor corrections throughout; each dated and autographed by Wieners. "Poem for Painters" shows considerable re-working.

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*Hotel Wentley Poems* typescript manuscript, 1965 [Box 1 F1]

11 pages

Seven of the eight poems appearing in the revised 1965 edition (lacks "Poem for Early Risers"; "A Poem for Tea Heads" was re-titled "A Poem for Vipers" for the revised edition). Wieners annotated the first leaf: "This is the printer's/publisher's copy from which type was set and which bears his corrections."

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*Ace of Pentacles*, 1964 [Box 1 F2]

2 items


*Unhired*, 1968, undated 3 items

**Publisher's proof/mock-up of booklet**, undated [Box 1 F3]

Booklet in brown wrappers. Inscribed by Wieners but unsigned.

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First proof of "Long Distance", 1968 February 25 [Box 1 F3]
1 page
Copy #1 of 3 with this rejected title.

"Unhived" [sic] proof , 1968 March 10 [Box 1 F3]
1 page
Proof of "Unhired" misspelled as "Unhived."

11 pages

"Larders" , 1970 and undated [Box 1 F5]
2 items
Two sets of page proofs from Ferguson Press with Wieners's name misspelled. The first proof (from envelope) is dated 24 February 1970. The other proof's date is not discernible from the accompanying envelope.

Selected Poems, undated [Box 1 F6] (Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize galleys)
1 item
First set of undated galley proofs of Selected Poems, corrected by Wieners for the London publisher Jonathan Cape, Limited. This item preceded the publication of the 1972 Selected Poems. Noted in Wilson's hand as "the controversial galley proofs." Wieners had dealt directly with Cape for a volume of his collected works, a move unknown to Wilson; copyright and legal issues arose involving plans Wilson had for a volume of Wieners's collected works to appear after Ace of Pentacles (published by Wilson and James Carr in 1964) had gone out of print. At the time of the "controversial galley proofs," many copies of the volume were still available

Behind the State Capitol: Or Cincinnati Pike (1975 , undated

Corrected galley proofs , undated [Box 1 F7] (Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize galleys)

Set of unbound signatures , undated [Box 1 F8]

Signatures in "blues" format that served as a test run for printing; portions appear to be missing.


Page proofs , undated [Box 1 F9]

Letter to Wilson from Black Sparrow Press , 1986 [Box 2 F9]
Letter from Black Sparrow Press offering the reproduction proofs of *John Wieners' Selected Poems*.

Unidentified manuscripts, undated [Box 2 F10]

Unidentified manuscripts in Wieners's hand. The first item is a small 4x6 sheet of paper of penciled notations on both sides. Some of the notes refer to Charles Olson and were perhaps notes from a lecture of Olson's at Black Mountain College, where Wieners was a student from 1955-1956. The second item, a one-page manuscript with accompanying envelope, is titled "Our Way of Life/To Ron G." It begins "Every constitution dictated intimate/decisive alternate collections."

Plays, 1961 and undated 2 items

"A One Act Scene", 1961 [Box 2 F11]

8 pages

Typescript manuscript inscribed "1961 New York Poets Theatre/84 E/10th St/directed by James Waring."

"Of Asphodel, In Hell's Despite", undated [Box 2 F11]

15 pages

Mimeographed typescript for a production at Judson Theatre.

*The Lanterns Along the Wall*, 1972 [Box 2 F12]

3 items

Includes printing receipts, typescript manuscript with autograph corrections, and a dummy.

Journals and periodicals, [1961]-1985 [Box 3 F13]

4 items

Copies of journals and periodicals in which John Wieners's work appears.

**Series II. Correspondence, 1962-1988**

Series II. consists of the correspondence from Wieners to Robert A. Wilson, excepting a few items, recipients of which have been noted. Items of interest include postcards from Wieners to Wilson and Marshall Clements from Spoleto, Italy, where in 1965, several Beat poets gathered to share their work. Another highlight of this series is the postcard dated January 13, 1970, sent from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to Wilson after the funeral service of poet and co-founder of Black Mountain College, Charles Olson (died January 10, 1970), signed by Wieners, Allen de Loach, and Allen Ginsberg. Material is arranged chronologically.

Correspondence, 1962-1965 [Box 3 F14]
Majority of correspondence is from Wieners to Robert Wilson. Other correspondents include LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Alan Marlowe, and Marshall Clements.

Correspondence, 1967-1988 [Box 3 F15]

Correspondence from Wieners to Wilson. Also includes an undated note in Wieners's hand which appears to be a grocery list.

Series III. Publicity, reviews, and critical writings about John Wieners, 1965, 1982, undated

Series III. includes items relating to publicity, reviews and critical writings about John Wieners's work; critical reception of his work, a topic of conversation in his correspondence with Wilson, was a source of concern and interest for Wieners.

Reviews and critical writings, 1965, 1982 and undated [Box 3 F16]

3 items

Includes a review of Ace of Pentacles by Denise Levertov, a review of Behind the State Capitol by Charles Shively and what appears to be Raymond Foye's entry on Wieners for the special Beats volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography, The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America (1983).

Fliers and advertisements, undated [Box 3 F17]

8 items

Fliers for Wieners's New York readings and publishers' advertisements; includes a postcard announcing publication of Wieners's The Hotel Wentley Poems with penciled notes in Wieners's hand, the verso of which bears Wieners's inscription of "The Rose of Peace" by W.B. Yeats.

Series IV. Photographs and ephemera, 1965, circa 1982 and undated

Series IV. includes photographs, mostly of Wieners, and sheet music of "Autumn in New York" inscribed to Wilson from Wieners.

"Autumn in New York" sheet music, undated [Box 3 F18]

Sheet music of "Autumn in New York" by Vernon Duke. Inscribed by Wieners: "To Bob Wilson from John"; sent to Wilson from Wieners as a suggested title for the volume that became Ace of Pentacles.

Photographs, 1965, circa 1982 and undated [Box 3 F19]

8 items

Eight photographs, mostly of the author. Locations include the Phoenix Bookshop and Spoleto, Italy. Also included is one photograph of actress Greta Garbo, on which Wieners has inscribed: "Can we use this as a picture of the author?"