
Paul Bowles correspondence with John Widdicombe
1929–1975
(bulk dates 1929–1935)

Abstract: The Paul Bowles correspondence with John Widdicombe comprises 49 letters and postcards reflecting the long-lasting friendship Bowles maintained with Widdicombe, whom Bowles met during his brief time as a student in Virginia. While on his travels, Bowles posted letters from various locations abroad, which ranged in content from news about musical and literary acquaintances, such as Aaron Copland or Gertrude Stein, to sketches of local nationals and their culture.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 604
Title: Paul Bowles correspondence with John Widdicombe
Inclusive Dates: 1929–1975
Bulk Dates: 1929–1935
Extent: .3 linear ft. (49 items)
Language: Materials in English and French.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 604, Paul Bowles correspondence with John Widdicombe, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes (1 inch)

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/

Source: Purchase, 2008.

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Biographical Notes

Paul Bowles

The American composer and author Paul Frederic Bowles was born in New York City on December 30, 1910. Before abandoning college at the University of Virginia, Bowles befriended John Widdicombe. The two men corresponded until the 1970s.

In 1929, no longer attending the University of Virginia, Bowles began his life of travels with a trip to Paris, where he hoped to establish himself as a poet. Back in New York in 1930, he studied composition with Aaron Copland, whom he also accompanied to Yaddo, Paris, Berlin, and Tangier. With the support of Copland and Virgil Thomson, Bowles found work in New York writing music and scores for ballet and theater. His successful career as a composer took off in the Depression with work for the Federal Theater Project (including music for Orson Welles's Horse Eats Hat) and the Federal Music Project. Bowles became one of the preeminent composers of American theater music, producing works for William Saroyan, Tennessee Williams, and others.

In 1938, Paul Bowles married the aspiring writer Jane Auer, who shortly achieved critical acclaim for her first novel, Two Serious Ladies (1943). Inspired by his wife's success and her dedication to writing, Bowles began his own career as an author, eventually surpassing his already successful reputation as a composer. After the 1940s, he produced numerous works of fiction, essays, travel writing, poems, autobiographical pieces, and other works. Among Bowles's best-known fictional works are the novels The Sheltering Sky (1949), Let It Come Down (1952), The Spider's House (1955); and an early short story collection, The Delicate Prey and Other Stories (1950). A 1989 reprint of The Sheltering Sky and Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 film version of the novel, starring Debra Winger and John Malkovich, revived international interest in Bowles, the writer.

Bowles was also known for his work as a translator. He bestowed the title "No Exit" upon Jean-Paul Sartre's Huis Clos and his 1946 translation of that play remains the standard version for English language productions. During the 1940s, Bowles translated the poems and stories of a wide variety of European and Latin American authors. Bowles taped and transcribed from the Moghrebi tales by Mohammed Mrabet and several other Moroccan story tellers; and he also translated the Guatemalan author Rodrigo Rey Rosa. Bowles translated several works related to North African culture and geography, and wrote introductions and prefaces to photographic collections, travel writing, and stories by other authors.

Paul and Jane Bowles spent much of their married life traveling throughout the world. In the late 1940s they made Tangier, Morocco, their permanent home. Major figures in the world of letters and the arts and international "society" frequently visited them there. Jane Bowles died in 1973, and Bowles continued to reside in Tangier until his death on November 18, 1999.

John Widdicombe

Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, John Widdicombe was a member of the Widdicombe furniture-making family. While studying at the University of Virginia, he met an aspiring composer, Paul Bowles, and despite
distance, the two maintained a friendship through letters for several decades. Widdicombe and Bowles made plans to visit, often realizing those visits, which included Widdicombe's trip to Morocco, where Bowles eventually settled.

Widdicombe was friend to many artistic and literary figures, including Iris Barry, Elizabeth Bowen, Joe Brewer, and Muriel Draper. After serving in the Second World War, Widdicombe held several government positions and settled in southern Vermont.

Sources:


Scope and Content Note

The Paul Bowles correspondence with John Widdicombe comprises 49 letters and postcards, 1929 to 1975, reflecting the long-lasting friendship Bowles maintained with Widdicombe, whom he met during his brief time as a student at the University of Virginia. While on his travels, Bowles posted letters from various locations abroad, which ranged in content from news about musical and literary acquaintances, such as Aaron Copland or Gertrude Stein, to sketches of local nationals and their culture. A few letters from Widdicombe, one from Jane Bowles, and a few from Jeffrey Miller are included in the collection. Several of the letters in this collection were reproduced in Jeffrey Miller's *In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles*.

In letters to Widdicombe, Bowles mentioned meeting Gertrude Stein, and in one particular letter, he wrote, “You will find my articulation gone to the four winds now that I am here with g.s. she is fabelhaft, wunderbar, inouie, all of it” (F2 June 25 1931). In a letter written years later, most likely in response to one of Widdicombe’s questions, Bowles refuted that he was a character in one of Stein’s novels. Throughout the collection, Bowles referenced Aaron Copland, frequently mentioned music and performances, and shared any news he heard concerning contemporary composers such as Stravinsky. In very detailed sketches, Bowles described various countries and its peoples, such as France, Morocco, and Columbia.

One letter from Jane Bowles to John Widdicombe is found in Folder 5. In addition to Bowles's letters, several exchanges occurred in the 1970s between Widdicombe and Jeffrey Miller, a biographer who initiated the correspondence in order to collect Bowles’s letters, which he later published in his book *In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles*. 
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**

Bowles, Paul, 1910-1999--Correspondence.
Widdicombe, John--Correspondence.
Bowles, Jane Auer, 1917-1973--Correspondence.
Miller, Jeffrey, 1943---Correspondence.
Copland, Aaron, 1900-1990.
Stein, Gertrude, 1874-1946.

**Topical Terms**

Authors, American--20th century--Correspondence.
Composition (music)--History--20th century.

**Geographic Names**

Paris (France)--Description and travel--Sources.
Fès (Morocco)--Description and travel--Sources.

**Form/Genre Terms**

Correspondence.

**Occupation**

Composers.
Authors.
Travelers.

**Personal Contributors**

Widdicombe, John, correspondent.
Miller, Jeffrey, 1943-, correspondent.
Related Materials in this Repository

MSS 163 Paul Bowles papers
MSS 164 Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno papers related to Paul Bowles
MSS 323 Paul Bowles letters to William Saroyan
MSS 324 Paul Bowles letters to John Martin

Publication Note

Arrangement

The letters are arranged chronologically in two series: I. Paul Bowles letters and II. Correspondence regarding Jeffrey Miller's book.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Paul Bowles letters, 1929–1974

Correspondence from various locations abroad on topics ranging from musical and literary acquaintances to local nationals and their culture. All letters from Paul Bowles to John Widdicombe unless otherwise noted.

1929–1931 10 items

Autograph letter signed, 1929 January 1 [Box 1 F1]
2 pp. with envelope
From Washington, DC. Referencing parties in Washington, art exhibition, shared purchases, etc.

Autograph letter signed, 1929 August 4 [Box 1 F1]
1 p. with envelope
From Jamaica. Brief note.

Autograph letter signed, 1929 September 10 [Box 1 F1]
1 p. with envelope
From Jamaica. Brief note.

Autograph letter signed, 1929 December 22 [Box 1 F1]
2 pp. with envelope
From Jamaica. Referencing Dutton’s, his living situation, Martha Marsh, future travel plans, returning to University of Virginia (“the Dean told me to return”).

Autograph letter signed, 1930 June 13 [Box 1 F1]
1 p. with envelope
From Princeton. Referencing his plans with Aaron Copland, Bedford, travel plans.

Autograph letter signed, 1930 September 19 [Box 1 F1]
2 pp. with envelope
From Yaddo. On Yaddo letterhead. Referencing his work with Copland (“my music is going to be infinitely improved by even this short sojourn”), his music compositions, life at Yaddo.

Autograph letter signed, 1930 November 25 [Box 1 F1]
6 pp. with envelope


Autograph letter signed, 1930 December 10 [Box 1 F1]

2 pp. with envelope

From Jamaica. Regarding travel plans, shared acquaintances, Joe Brewer, Donald Angus, Carl Van Vechten, "The Messenger" (University of Richmond's literary magazine).

Typed letter, 1931 January 23 [Box 1 F1]

1 p. with envelope

From New York. Re: impossibility of meeting before departure, referencing Richard Thoma, trip to Berlin.

Autograph postcard signed, 1931 March 13 [Box 1 F1]

1 postcard

From Jamaica. Regarding his departure and illness.

1931–1932 7 items

Autograph letter signed, 1931 April 15 [Box 1 F2]

1 postcard

From Paris. "I had tea with Gertrude Stein … she is quite swell." The Sitwells, Cocteau ("who is remarkable with a mind like a tropical aquarium.") Copland.

Autograph postcard signed, 1931 May 27 [Box 1 F3]

1 postcard

From the Netherlands. Referencing his stay at Krishnamurti's house ("too fantastic for description"), Gertrude Stein.

Typed letter, 1931 July 2 [Box 1 F4]

2 pp. with envelope
From Germany. Referencing shared friends (Charles Henri Ford, Richard Thoma), visit to Gertrude Stein, Copland, Stravinsky, Igor Markevitch, Hindemith, other composers, Alfred Kreymborg.

Autograph letter signed, [year unknown] April 1 [Box 1 F5]
3 pp. with envelope

Aboard the Holland-America Line to France. In French. Thanking Widdicombe for funds.

Typed letter, 1931 July 25 [Box 1 F6]
3 pp. with envelope

From France. Extensive discussion of his time with Gertrude Stein in Bellay- her readings, visitors (Picasso, Copland), plans to visit McAlmon, Boyles, Cocteau, Stravinsky and others, a poem dedicated to Widdicombe, shared friends.

Typed letter, 1932 March 22 [Box 1 F7]
2 pp. with envelope

From Paris, on "In the Loggia Lemon Pyjamas are forbid" letterhead. Referencing dispute with Gertrude Stein, Aragon, Breton, Cocteau ("chinamen living with him and many knives on the floor"), music scene in Paris, Richard Thoma, war news, "god damn America and her justice."

Autograph postcard signed, 1932 April 28 [Box 1 F8]
1 postcard

Widdicombe to Bowles, returned. Regarding travels.

1933–1924 7 items

Autograph letter signed, 1933 October 9 [Box 1 F3]
2 pp. with envelope

From Jamaica. Looking for news from his friend in New York?

Autograph postcard signed, 1933 December 4 [Box 1 F3]
1 postcard

From New York. Regarding an upcoming party in New York City.

Typed letter signed, 1934 September 20 [Box 1 F3]
From Fez. Detailed discussion of his exploration of Fez, Chleuh boys, native music, "most beguiling experiences," new acquaintances (Abdallah), encounters and fights with Arab men, "Mr. Williams."

Typed letter, 1934 October 5 [Box 1 F3]

4 pp. with envelope

From Fez. Describing his time in Fez ("will soon be finished…"), mention of his relationship with "Williams" and "Brown," asking advice about plans to go to the UK, "Our Spahis are departed," theatrical performances, Andalous music.

Typed letter, 1934 October 27 [Box 1 F3]

3 pp. with envelope

From off Tenerife. Describing his difficulties boarding a ship bound for Colombia, long discussion of problems with "Mr. Williams," his travels in Morocco, civil unrest in Morocco, Chleuh dancing, plans for travel in South America.

Autograph postcard signed, 1934 November 23 [Box 1 F3]

1 postcard

From Colombia. "Quel folie! A country without a civilized thought … What Morocco would be like if there were no French there and if all the Arabs dressed in Palm Beach suits." Description of jungles, etc.

Typed letter, 1934 December 4 [Box 1 F3]

3 pp. with envelope

From San Jose de Guatemala. "the sun shines on the sharks. The Chinamen lean over the deck-rails catching fish: Oh ee yo mow high ow!" News of his travels and problems in Colombia, encounters with locals, food, vignettes of ship passengers.

1935–1939 8 items

Typed letter, 1935 December 18 [Box 1 F4]

1 p. with envelope

From Baltimore. Relating news of his work "Venus and Adonis" (film), Bruce Morrissette, "Pierre," readings on Morocco.
Typed letter signed, 1935 May 13 [Box 1 F4]

1 p. with envelope

From Jamaica. Relating his desire to travel on a cruise in the Caribbean, Askews, Editions de la Vipere, Chick Austin and concert in Hartford, his readings, "German madwoman." Enclosed in a small photograph of the German woman.

Autograph letter signed, 1935 October 28 [Box 1 F4]

4 pp. with envelope

From New York, on Editions de la Vipere letterhead. Referencing his musical work, living situation, shared friends (Copland, Houseman, Joe Brewer, Julien Levy, Mary O., Othman, Pierre, Fletcher, Berman), "Gertrude is always lying."

Typed letter, 1937 December 12 [Box 1 F4]

1 p. with envelope

From the Chelsea Hotel, New York. Regarding upcoming opera, assorted musical work, referencing a commission from de Basil, possible travel plans.

Autograph postcard signed, 1937 May 14 [Box 1 F4]

1 postcard

From Tapachula. "Madness accentuated by leopards and iguanas and lightning." Travel in Guatemala.

Typed letter, 1938 November 9 [Box 1 F4]

1 p. with envelope

From New York. Referencing David Campbell, Aaron Copland, "Hilton," "here life is really vomity. I am having a Max Ernst movie made for me, to do music about."

Autograph letter signed, 1939 September 19 [Box 1 F4]

2 pp. with envelope

From Murray Hill Hotel. Regarding missed visit, Mary Oliver, "Everyone sits around drunk."

Autograph letter signed, 1939 November 4 [Box 1 F4]

2 pp. with envelope

From Brooklyn. Recalling a dream he had about Widdicombe, his writing space in Brooklyn, references to the war and to R. Firbank and other writers.
1940–1952 7 items

Typed letter signed, 1940 November 9 [Box 1 F5]
1 p. with envelope
From New York. Referencing his Twelfth Night production, his home in Taxco, his wife Jane and Mary Oliver, Latouches, Fez ("mad throughout, rococo, grandiose, sinister, diseased, unquenchable"), future travels.

Typed letter, 1940 December 14 [Box 1 F5]
1 p. with envelope
From New York. Reference to Widdicombe's visit, his "show," Dali.

Autograph letter signed, 1941 February 2 [Box 1 F5]
2 pp. with envelope
From New York. Jane Bowles to Widdicombe (and "Ralph") thanking them for hospitality in Richmond and referencing her plans to go to Mexico, her flight with La Touche, Mrs. Perkins.

Autograph letter signed, 1951 June 30 [Box 1 F5]
1 p. with envelope
From Tangier. Regarding his return home from Spain, travels in Morocco, Jan, new Jaguar.

Typed letter signed, 1952 March 4 [Box 1 F5]
1 p. with envelope

Typed letter signed, 1952 May 29 [Box 1 F5]
2 pp. with envelope
From Colombo. Recounting his departure from Ceylon, reminiscences about the Hotel Bellevue and Fez, reference to G. Stein, plans to go to Italy, riots in Morocco, "Janie is in Hollywood."

Typed letter signed, 1952 October 20 [Box 1 F5]
1 p. with envelope
Series I.

From Tangier. Referencing his acquisition of Taprobane in Ceylon, his desire to return, his opera for Libby Holman, plans for Madrid, his Jaguar and chauffeur.

1972–1974 6 items

Typed letter signed, 1972 December 25 [Box 1 F6]
1 p. with envelope

From Tangier. Referencing Jane in hospital, his autobiography, Peggy Guggenheim, Westminster (Vermont).

Autograph letter signed, 1974 March 18 [Box 1 F6]
1 p. with envelope

From Tangier. Looking forward to visit of Widdicombe in Tangier.

Typed letter signed, 1974 July 5 [Box 1 F6]
1 p. with envelope

From Tangier. Thanks for gifts sent, changes in weather, etc.

Typed letter signed, 1974 August 27 [Box 1 F6]
1 pp.

From Tangier. Biographical notes on M. Mrabet for upcoming gallery show in US, Joella Levy, translations, Antaeus.

Typed letter signed, 1974 October 4 [Box 1 F6]
1 p. with envelope

From Tangier. Regarding exhibition on Mrabet's work in US, his translations, Ramadan.

Typed letter signed (carbon), 1974 November 18 [Box 1 F6]
1 p. with envelope

Regarding Widdicombe's unsuccessful attempts to sell works by M. Mrabet, travel plans. With envelope from PB.

Series II. Correspondence regarding Jeffrey Miller's book, 1974–1975 5 items

Paul Bowles letter re Miller project, 1974 May 21 [Box 1 F7]
Series II.

1 p. with envelope

Xerox letter of support for the collected letters project.

Typed letter signed, 1974 November 27 [Box 1 F7]

1pp.

Jeffrey Miller to Widdicombe regarding Paul Bowles bibliography and book of letters.

Holograph pages and clippings, undated [Box 1 F7]

16 pp.

Holograph pages in the hand of John Widdicombe relating to Paul Bowles - either drafts of letters or notes.

Typed letters signed, 1975 March 2 and March 9 [Box 1 F7]

2 pp. with envelope

Jeffrey Miller to Widdicombe relating to book of letters.