Harris, Mark, 1922-2007.

Mark Harris letters to Martha Harris
1951–2005
(bulk dates 1992–1999)

Abstract: The Mark Harris letters to Martha Harris is a collection of letters, printed emails, faxes, and photographs that were shared over a period of fifty years between author Mark Harris and his sister Martha Harris. The letters contain updates on family news, advice to Martha on education, publishing and writing, reflections on Mark's career as writer and professor, and his shared diary entries through which the two siblings attempt to reconstruct childhood memories.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 605
Title: Mark Harris letters to Martha Harris
Inclusive Dates: 1951–2005
Bulk Dates: 1992–1999
Extent: .6 linear ft. (2 manuscript boxes)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 605, Mark Harris letters to Martha Harris, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
Shelving Summary: Boxes 1-2: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes
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: Gift of Martha Harris, 2009, 2011.
Processing: Processed and encoded by Christopher La Casse, September 2009; updated 2011.
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Biographical Notes

Mark Harris

American author Mark Harris was born November 19, 1922, in Mt. Vernon, New York.

Following military service from 1943–1944, Harris became a journalist and worked on a variety of newspapers and magazines for the remainder of the decade, including the Daily Item (Port Chester, NY, 1944–1945), PM (New York, NY, 1945), the International News Service (St. Louis, 1945–1946), and in Chicago for the Negro Digest and Ebony (1946–1951). Harris remained active as a journalist for most of his writing career.

Harris completed his first novel, Trumpet to the World, while he was employed in St. Louis; it was published in 1946. Two years later, Harris enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Denver and eventually went on to receive a master's degree in English (1951) from Denver, as well as a Ph.D. in American Studies (1956) from the University of Minnesota. Harris's dissertation focused on the life and work of the American literary radical Randolph Bourne.

Even while he attended school, Harris continued to write fiction. He produced three additional novels, all of which were published by the time he received his Ph.D. Following the receipt of his doctorate, Harris began a long, productive career as a college educator teaching at San Francisco State College (1954–1968), Purdue University (1967–1970), California Institute of the Arts (1970–1973), the University of Southern California (1973-1975), the University of Pittsburgh (1976–1980), and Arizona State University-Tempe (1980–2001).

Harris may be best known for his fictional work, Bang the Drum Slowly (1956), the second volume in his trilogy devoted to the fictional baseball player, Henry Wiggen. Harris adapted this novel into a screenplay for the 1973 movie of the same name. Several of Harris's novels have received critical acclaim, notably, Something about a Soldier (1957), Wake Up Stupid (1959), The Goy (1970), and Killing Everybody (1973).

In addition to his work as a novelist, Mark Harris has produced a variety of works in other literary genres. His critical contributions include editing the poems of Vachel Lindsay in Selected Poems of Vachel Lindsay (1963) and the journals of James Boswell in Heart of Boswell (1981).

Harris has written biographies that include Vachel Lindsay's City of Discontent (1952), and Saul Bellow's Saul Bellow: Drumlin Woodchuck (1980). Harris's autobiographical books include Mark the Glove Boy; or, The Last Days of Richard Nixon (1964), an account of Harris's coverage of Nixon's unsuccessful California gubernatorial campaign; Twentyone Twice: A Journal (1966), an account of Harris' experiences in Sierra Leone as a member of the Peace Corps; and finally, Best Father Ever Invented: An Autobiography of Mark Harris (1976), which chronicles his life from late adolescence up to 1973.

Martha Harris

Martha Harris, sister of American author Mark Harris, was born in 1933 in Mt. Vernon, New York. After Martha Harris graduated from high school, she and her mother moved to Minnesota to live with her brother Mark's family. She later relocated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was active in the Social Workers Party.
Sources:


Scope and Content Note

The Mark Harris letters to Martha Harris consists of letters, printed e-mails, faxes, and photographs that were shared over a period of fifty years between author Mark Harris and his sister, Martha Harris. The correspondence contain updates on family news, advice to Martha on education, publishing and writing, reflections on Mark's career as writer and professor, and his shared diary entries through which the two siblings attempt to reconstruct childhood memories.

The Harris siblings often shared thoughts on the social and political climate occurring at the time of their correspondence, which includes comments on racism, poverty, the Gulf War of 1991 and of 2003, and Guantanamo prison. The two also shared detailed reactions to books, making frequent recommendations.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Harris, Mark, 1922-2007--Correspondence.
Harris, Martha--Correspondence.

Topical Terms

Authors, American--20th century--Correspondence.
Publishers and publishing--United States--History--20th century.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.
Photographs.

Occupation

Authors.

Personal Contributors

Harris, Martha, correspondent.

Related Materials in this Repository

MSS 101 Mark Harris papers
Arrangement

The letters are arranged chronologically by date.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Letters, 1951 March–1968 November [Box 1 F1]

22 items

Letters regarding Martha's 18th birthday and life decisions; advice on education; political awakening; family matters such as the arrival and naming of Martha's first-born, Jacob, and the birth of daughter Jamileh; legal matters concerning their father's will; references to Mark's teaching, baseball books, the student movement on his campus, a return to novel writing, and an autobiographical work about his "Nixon experience." Newsclipping related to Vachel Lindsay laid in with 1952 letter.

Letters, 1973 April–1973 December [Box 1 F2]

11 items

Two photographs of Anthony, Henry, and Hester (Mark's children), letters regarding Mark's new job, the release of the new novel, Killing Everybody, and the premier of the film, Drum. Also included: Martha's attempt at publishing children's fiction, hand-written letter from "Aunt" Ruth Finkelstein, and a copy of a review by Gail Rock.

Letters, 1974 May–1975 August [Box 1 F3]

7 items

Exchange of letters concerning political and social stances, Mark's "identity" within the academy, Martha's acceptance into the Pratt Institute Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and Mark's move to Pittsburgh.


11 items

Correspondence that Mark sent from Arizona in which he encourages Martha to write, provides feedback to one of her stories, advice on where to submit short fiction, and how to select an agent. Also included: a list of faculty from the writing program at the University of Pittsburgh and their publications, a copy of Mark's bibliography, two photographs whose subjects are Mark, Jacob, and Hester.

Letters, 1984 January–1986 July [Box 1 F5]

9 items

References to family matters, visiting acquaintances, a photograph, and Mark's habits as a diarist.


7 items

Letter to Martha detailing the plot outline of Mark's manuscript, a letter exchange between Mark and the University of Delaware's Special Collections, and a clipping of an article about baseball written by Mark Harris in The New York Times.

5 items

Series of letters through which Mark and Martha share memories of their parents, references to the Iraq War, and a clipping that is the review of Mark's book, *Speed*.

Letters, 1993 January–1993 October [Box 1 F8]

8 items

References to politics, the ease of letter writing with the word processor, modern medical technology, memories from childhood, and an exchange of letters with Juliet Levin.

Letters, 1994 March–1995 November [Box 1 F9]

4 items

Mark's memories as a boy at camp, references to a telephone interview conducted by Said concerning Mark's writing habits, clippings related to social causes, a detailed advice in response to Martha's story.

Letters, 1996 January–1996 April [Box 1 F10]

21 items

Print-offs of e-mail exchanges concerning updates on children, Mark's writing and students, Said's interest in writing, a letter from the Harris children regarding Mark and Josephine's 50th wedding anniversary.


10 items

Letters, print-offs of e-mail exchanges, and clippings, concerning family updates, writing progress, book recommendations, and commentary on excerpts from Mark's diaries.

Letters, 1997 January–1997 October [Box 2 F12]

14 items

Letters and several print-offs of e-mail exchanges, concerning family updates, politics, Alger Hiss, comments about e-mail and letter writing, and retirement from the University.


9 items

Letters and faxes concerning plans for travels and family visits, family updates, writing and publishing, an updated bibliography, and a letter to Martha signed "Jo" (Josephine Harris).

Letters concerning racism, politics, Twain's influence on Mark's writing, book recommendations, dated excerpts from diary, and clippings about Ernest Gaines.

Letters , 1999 January–1999 May [Box 2 F15]

9 items

Letters mention birth of grandchild, shared memories of their father, book reflections and advice on book agents, a flier announcing Mark's new book, clipping of Mark's article on Joe Dimaggio, and a letter from Martha.

Letters , 2000 June–2001 April [Box 2 F16]

3 items

Letters discuss Ring Lardner, Jr., and Norman Mailer, the media and baseball pitcher John Rocker; and other thoughts on baseball.

Letters , 2002 February–2003 October [Box 2 F17]

5 items

Letters and faxes concerning Mark's move to California, family visits, reflections on books, and a letter from Martha that mentions political and social issues such as Guantanamo prison and immigration.

Letters , 2004 June–2004 December [Box 2 F18]

5 items

Letters discuss Iraq War, reflections on reading habits and society, and difficulties writing.

Letters , 2005 January–2005 December [Box 2 F19]

6 items

Letters discuss trouble with memory and mental decline; a story written to his grandson Eli; visits to family and family news.