Preston Jones
Papers, 1940-1988
Bulk: 1963-1979

Collection 009

33 boxes (22 linear feet), plus 5 oversize, one duplicate box

Acquisition: Donated by Mary Sue Jones
Access: Open for Research
Processed by: Gwynedd Cannan, Nov. 1993; Inventory Rev. by Brandy Harris, 2005
Biographical Note

Playwright Preston Jones is best remembered for *A Texas Trilogy*, an evocative depiction of small town Texas life. Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on April 7, 1936, Preston developed an interest in the dramatic arts while attending the University of New Mexico. Though he graduated with a BA in education in 1960 and took a teaching position, drama professor Eddie Snapp continued to encourage Preston to study theater and steered him toward Baylor University in Waco, Texas. At the time, the Baptist school’s Drama Department was headed by Snapp’s former Yale classmate, Paul Baker, a nationally known figure in regional and experimental theater. Preston applied successfully to Baylor and while waiting to enroll, worked for the highway department in Colorado City, Texas, the place which later formed the basis for Bradleyville, the setting for *A Texas Trilogy*.

Preston completed his coursework at Baylor but before he could receive his degree, Paul Baker and the Baylor University administration had a falling out over the production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Baker moved his entire department to Trinity University in San Antonio in 1963 and Preston followed, receiving his Master’s there in 1966. His thesis was a dramatization of the novel by David Grubb, *The Night of the Hunter*.

In 1959, Paul Baker became director of the newly formed Dallas Theater Center (DTC) which he headed in conjunction with his position as a drama department chairman. Baker invited Preston to join the DTC during his first year as a student at Baylor thus beginning the association with an important regional theater that lasted until the end of his life. In line with Baker’s philosophy of non-specialization, Preston performed all duties in the theater: actor, director, stage manager, ticket taker, etc. As an actor, he appeared in *Julius Caesar, Journey to Jefferson, Medea, A Streetcar Named Desire, What Price Glory*, and *The Girl of the Golden West*. He played the stage manager in *Our Town* and Henry Drummond in *Inherit the Wind*. Preston’s directing projects included *Under the Yum-Yum Tree, Barefoot in the Park* and *The Knack*. Preston was to credit this varied experience in the theater for his success in writing material for the stage.
It was through the Dallas Theater Center that Preston met his second wife, Mary Sue Birkhead Fridge. The two worked together in many Dallas Theater productions where Mary Sue was assistant director to Paul Baker as well as a popular actress and designer. Mary Sue, for her part, provided Preston with encouragement and support in his writing endeavors. Preston's admiration for his wife's talent was oft expressed. "I never belonged on the same stage as that woman," he told John Anders of the *Dallas Morning News* (July 5, 1992).

In 1972, Baker appointed Preston managing director of Down Center Stage, a smaller workshop theater in the Center. Jones wished to provide a stage for new works but the lack of good material inspired him to begin writing what became the *Trilogy*. The first of the three plays, *The Knights of the White Magnolia*, premiered at the Down Center Stage on December 4, 1973. *Lu Ann Hampton Laverty Oberlander* followed on February 5, 1974 and *The Oldest Living Graduate* in November of that year. Baker chose *Knights* and *LuAnn* (*Graduate* had not yet been completed) along with other original plays by resident playwrights to be presented in a spring showcase, Playmarket 74. Producers, agents and critics from around the world were invited to view these works, among them literary agent Audrey Wood and director Alan Schneider. Wood, who had discovered, among others, Tennessee Williams and William Inge, became Preston's agent and Schneider eventually directed the *Trilogy* in Washington, D.C. and New York City. In 1975, the three plays were performed together for the first time on the main stage of the Dallas Theater Center under the title, *The Bradleyville Trilogy*. That same year the American Playwright's Theater, which promotes the production of new works in theaters around the country, chose *Knights* as one of their offerings. In 1976, the renamed *A Texas Trilogy* played at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. to popular and critical acclaim. Preston received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to write a play for the American bicentennial and the Golden Apple Award from Cue magazine. After these initial successes, the *Trilogy* opened September 1976 on Broadway to a lukewarm response, closing after three weeks.

Preston returned to Dallas resuming the varied tasks required of members of the company but by no means resting on his laurels as a playwright.
His *A Place on the Magdalena Flats* played at the Dallas Theater Center in 1976 while the *Trilogy* wound its way from Washington to New York. *Santa Fe Sunshine* premiered at the Dallas Theater Center April 9, 1977. That same year, Preston won the Outer Critics Circle Award for the *Trilogy* and staged a tribute to Lady Bird Johnson on her 65th birthday. In 1978, Preston created the one-act *Juneteenth* for the Actors' Theater in Louisville, Kentucky, forming the plot around Black Texans' annual celebration of emancipation. This play was later presented with other one-acts on PBS's "Earplay" series under the title *Holidays*. In 1979, *Remember* was on the boards. While working on rewrites, Preston was also crafting a screenplay of the *Trilogy* for producer Hal Wallis.

Preston was slated to appear as the Duke of Norfolk in the Dallas Theater Center's production of *A Man For All Seasons* under Mary Sue's direction when he was suddenly taken ill and hospitalized. He died September 9, 1979 after surgery on a bleeding ulcer.

See also:
Scope and Contents

The Preston Jones papers span the years 1940 to 1988. The archive contains typescripts, set designs, playbills, props, clippings, magazines, articles, letters, photographs, personal items (pipes, glasses, keys, a stuffed bear collection, etc.), mementos (World War I items, ticket stubs, "good show" gifts, etc.), awards, posters, school records, sculptures, scrapbooks, audiotapes, videotapes, T-shirts, and athletic equipment. Most of the material was saved by Preston's widow, Mary Sue Jones. Mary Sue kept files on Preston and his career in several different file groups. These file groups have been rearranged and consolidated into chronological order within subjects. The records are comprised of five series: Early Years and Dallas Theater Center, Plays, Professional Files, Publicity Files, and Illness and Death. The series chronicle Preston's personal and professional life, from his childhood in New Mexico through his days as a successful playwright.
Series Descriptions

Series I: Early Years and Dallas Theater Center, 1940-1983.
Boxes 1-4

This series outlines Preston Jones' life before he became known as a playwright. It begins with photographs, articles and memorabilia of his father, James "Jawbone" Jones. It continues with boyhood photographs, yearbooks, memorabilia and drawings from his elementary school, high school, and college in New Mexico. Class notes, designs, school records, and diplomas represent his master's work in playwrighting from Baylor University in Waco and Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. Scrapbooks and photographs of Mary Sue and Preston's honeymoon trip to Europe in 1964 and subsequent trips and vacations to Europe and Colorado are present. Jones was an enthusiastic player of darts and baseball, and equipment from both sports is included here. His intense interest in World War I, in which his father had served, is well documented by pamphlets, photographs, slides, medals, posters, and military memorabilia as well as sculptures Preston made out of coffee stirrers, many of which represent World War I scenes. Included too in this series are personal items: wallets, slides, programs, posters, pipes, and other paraphernalia. Finally there is material on Jones' career at the Dallas Theater Center in the form of scrapbooks, audiotapes and photographs.

Boxes 4-20

This series is organized into 3 subseries: Unproduced Writings; A Texas Trilogy; and Post-Trilogy plays. Many of the files reflect Mary Sue's filing system but the material has been consolidated and reorganized by play in chronological order.

The group Unproduced Writings contains manuscripts of Preston Jones' unproduced plays. Included is his thesis adaptation of The Night of the Hunter.

The three plays of the trilogy in the second subseries were performed together for the first time at the Dallas Theater Center in 1975 as the Bradleyville Trilogy. They played again as A Texas Trilogy in May 1976 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C. and at the Broadhurst Theater in New York in September 1976. The first set of files refers to the three plays as a unit and contains playbills, posters, set designs, reviews, clippings and screenplay drafts. There is considerable documentation of the Washington and New York productions--promotional articles, photographs, reviews, playbills, congratulation notes, memorabilia (t-shirts, Algonquin hotel mementos) and interviews. Preston's Teddy Bear collection is included here. His favorite was a small teddy bear named Fred, an ever-present good luck talisman that was buried with him.

Knights was the first completed play of the Trilogy, premiering at the Down Center Stage in the Dallas Theater Center on December 4, 1973. This subseries
contains the handwritten versions of the play along with successive drafts and rewrites. Also included are props, costumes, playbills, programs, clippings, reviews, and interviews. The material is arranged by format (scripts, props, programs, clippings) in chronological order.

Preston Jones began *LuAnn* before the other two plays of the *Trilogy*, inventing as he did so the connecting thread, the town of Bradleyville. *LuAnn* was the second of the three plays to be completed, premiering in February of 1974. This subseries contains scripts and rewrites, programs, clippings, reviews, photographs and a video of the University of Minnesota 1980s production.

After *Knights* and *Luann* had been presented, Preston Jones wrote the final play of the *Trilogy*, *The Oldest Living Graduate*. It premiered at the Down Center Stage November 1974. In 1980, *Graduate* was presented live on television costarring Henry Fonda, Cloris Leachman, George Grizzard, and Harry Dean Stanton. This set of files contains the scripts and rewrites, clippings, reviews, and photographs. Included is a video of the 1980 telecast along with clippings and reviews.

Preston Jones turned to his native New Mexico as the inspiration for the three plays written after the *Trilogy*. In 1975, Jones began writing *A Place on the Magdalena Flats*, also titled *The Plains of St. Augustine*, which examines the relationship of two brothers working their New Mexican ranch during the 1956 drought. *Santa Fe Sunshine* is a comic play about an artist's colony. *Remember* concerns an actor reminiscing on his past during a visit to his boyhood home. Included here also are records on *Juneteenth*, a one-act play commissioned by the Actor's Theatre in Louisville, and a tribute to Lady Bird Johnson on her 65th birthday, scripted and staged by Preston. This subseries contains handwritten and typed drafts and rewrites, programs, photographs, set designs, memorabilia, clippings of reviews and publicity, and audio and videotapes.

Boxes 21-25

This series contains journals, address books, correspondence, contracts, royalty payments, articles, clippings and photographs. The major part of the material relates to *A Texas Trilogy* and is made up of communications with agents, fans, and theaters concerning options on the plays. Included is correspondence with Hal Wallis in regard to the movie production of the *Trilogy*.

Boxes 25-28

This series contains materials on the promotion of Preston Jones' theatrical career especially in regard to the *Trilogy*. It includes photographs, clippings, reviews, articles, interviews and videotapes, providing information on aspects of the author's life, career, and writing methods.
Boxes 29-33

Jones died unexpectedly in September of 1979 after surgery for bleeding ulcers. This series contains documents concerning Jones’ medical care and cause of death, obituaries, the funeral service, the memorial fund established at the Dallas Theater Center, sympathy cards, Christmas cards, acknowledgments from Mary Sue Jones, correspondence and reports on the estate.
# Container List

## Series I: Early Years and Dallas Theater Center, 1940-1983.

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**Unproduced Writings, 1966, n.d.**

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### Series II: Plays, continued

**Unproduced Writings, continued**

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**A Texas Trilogy, Complete, 1973-1979, n.d.**

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#### Series II: Plays, Continued

**A Texas Trilogy, Complete, continued**

7 6 Awards, 1976-1977
7 *Texas Trilogy* programs and poster, 1976-1977

8 1 London production, clippings, reviews, and correspondence, 1977-1978
2 Photographs-Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Houston, framed needlecraft map of Texas
3-4 Magazine articles about Jones, programs, 1977-1978
5 Gift, *The Teddy Bear Book*, compiled by Peter Bull
6 Bradleyville screenplay
7 Bradleyville screenplay, second draft with handwritten notes
8 Bradleyville screenplay, second draft
9 Other productions, clippings, correspondence, and programs, 1978-1979

**Trilogy: The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia, 1973-1979, 1984, 1988.**

10 First copy, handwritten

9 1 Handwritten copy
2 Typed copy with revisions
3 Bound 1973 version
4-6 1973 version
7 1973 version with handwritten revisions
8 Actor’s copy (L.D.)
9 Second mimeo printing, 5th rewrite, May 16, 1974
10 Corrected version, May 20, 1976

10 1 Script for New York production, copyright 1973
2 Props
3-4 Programs, posters, 1973-1977
5 Reel to Reel of Preston Jones’ Interview by Studs Turkel, Feb. 19, 1976
6 Reviews of early Dallas productions through Arena Stage, 1973-1976
7-8 Reviews, articles, programs, and correspondence,
1975-1979, 1984

11  1  Penn State productions, 1977, 1984

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Series II: Plays, Continued

Trilogy: The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White
Magnolia, continued

2-3  To Craig Anderson, copies of articles written about
Jones after his death and reviews of Knights,
1988


4  1st draft, 2nd rewrite, 1973
5  Handwritten draft, April 1973
6  Rewrites, hand-drawn map of Bradleyville
7  Rewrites, photocopies
8  Typed copy with handwritten notes
9  Dallas Theater Center version, 1974
10-11  New York version, 1974

12  1  Script, corrected May 20, 1976
2  Script, corrected May 20, 1976 with new inserts
3  Annotated script
4  Programs, correspondence, 1977
5  Reviews, clippings, photos, 1974-1980, 1985
6  University of Minnesota, Twin Cities video, 1981-1982


7  First copy, handwritten
8  Photocopy with corrections
9  Bound photocopy
10  Rewrites

13  1  Rewrites of part with photocopies
2  Script, July 1975
3  Script, July 1975, with rewrites
4  Script, July 1975
5  The Arts: Years of Development, Time of Decision,
   with suggested program and time schedule,
   Sep. 29, 1975
6. Script, July 1976, with rewrites
7. Programs, reviews, correspondence
8. Photographs, programs, Austin, Los Angeles, and Midland, 1976-1978
9. NBC Live Telecast with Henry Fonda, April 7, 1980, video

**Series II: Plays, continued**

_Triology: The Oldest Living Graduate, continued_

10-11. NBC Live Telecast, clippings, reviews, correspondence, 1980

14. 1. NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
2. NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1979-1982
3-4. NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
5. NBC Live Telecast press information package, photos, 1980
6-7. NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, 1980
8. NBC Live Telecast clippings, reviews, correspondence, 1980
9. Los Angeles production, clippings, reviews, 1980
10. Other productions, clippings, reviews, 1980
11. Louisville production, clippings, reviews, 1980

_Post-Triology Plays: A Place on the Magdalena Flats, 1975-1979, n.d._

12. Script, Handwritten, 1st and 2nd versions

15. 1. Script, handwritten, copyright 1975
2. 3rd draft, handwritten, copyright 1975
3-4. Copies of handwritten script
5. Photocopy of revised version with corrections
6. Handwritten rewrites
7. Photocopy of handwritten rewrites
8. Rewrites
10-11. Working scripts, photocopies

16. 1. Dallas Theater Center version with handwritten rewrites
2. First Santa Fe version
3-4. Second Santa Fe version
5. June 1977 rewrite
6. 1977 summer version without Act 3, Scene 3
Three copies of 1977 summer version with Act 3, Scene 3

*The Plains of St. Augustine*, under the title *A Place on the Magdalena Flats*, February 1978, handwritten

*The Plains of St. Augustine*, under the title *A Place on the Magdalena Flats*, February 1978, typed

**Series II: Plays, continued**

Post-Trilogy Plays: *A Place on the Magdalena Flats*, continued

11 Revised script, July 1979

1-5 Revised script, July 1979

Programs, 1975-1977

Photographs, set designs, memorabilia

Dallas Theater Center production, reviews and articles, 1976

Other reviews and articles, 1977-1979


Handwritten script, n.d.

Handwritten script, original copy, n.d.

Handwritten scripts, first and second writings, n.d.

Notes and fourth copy, n.d.

Unrevised script, n.d.

Photocopies, n.d.

Photocopy of final working copy, n.d.

Working copy, final, n.d.

Additional copies, n.d.

Programs, 1977

Articles, reviews, 1976-1978

Chocolate Bayou production, reviews, 1980


Photocopy of handwritten script

Scripts, copyright 1978

Audiotape, *Holidays: A Quartet of Plays* by Guare, Jones, Terry, and Hailey, n.d.

Louisville production, PBS “Earplay,” 1979-1980
Post-Triology Plays: Lady Bird Johnson Tribute

3 Program, invitation
4 Copy of play, correspondence relating to event, photo of Jones with Lady Bird
5 LBJ Ranch mementos

Box Folder

Series II: Plays, continued


6 First version, June 10, 1978
7 Handwritten copy, copyright 1978
8 First typed copy
9 Photocopy
10 Rewrites
11 Supplementary pages, handwritten Oct. 4, 1978 to March 11, 1979
12 Handwritten third version minus unchanged Act 1
13-14 Other copies
15 Script, March 11, 1979

20 1 Corrected version, March 11, 1979
2 Corrected sections
3-9 Other 1979 scripts
10 Glenn Allen Smith and other letters, 1976-1988
11 Program, Reviews, 1979


21 1-2 Journals and address books, 1975-1978
3-8 Professional correspondence, A-U, 1974-1979

22 1 Professional correspondence, V-Z, 1974-1979
2 Empty files
3 Preston and Mary Sue Jones’ clipboards
4-6 Miscellaneous writings by or about Preston Jones, 1976-1978
7 Facts for resumes, Preston and Mary Sue Jones
8-9 Correspondence between Jones and International Creative Management, 1974-1979

23 1 American Playwrights Theatre, contract and correspondence, 1974-1975
2 Wood, Baker and Dallas Theater Center contracts
and correspondence, 1974-1976
3 Dramatists Guild, publications and correspondence, 1972-1978
4 Hill and Wang, Publishers, contracts and correspondence, 1976-1978
5 Royalty Payments, 1977
6 Dramatist Play Service, correspondence, 1976
7-10 Various Contracts, Mary Sue and Preston Jones, 1963-1986

Box Folder

Series III: Professional Files, continued

11 NBC/Graduate contracts and correspondence, 1980
24 1 American Place Theater, 1973-1974
2 Arena Theater and Alan Schneider, correspondence and newsletters, 1974-1979
3 Texas Trilogy, photographs and negatives, 1976
4 JFK Center, correspondence, 1975-1980
5 Play outlines, cast descriptions, 1976
7 American Place Theater, contracts and correspondence, 1976-1979
8 Texas Commission on the Arts, correspondence and newsletters, 1975-1979
9 Hal Wallis, correspondence, 1976, 1978
10-11 Libraries, correspondence, 1974-1981
12 Media, correspondence, 1974-1979
13 P.E.N., an Association of Writers, letter, 1977
14 Texas Institute of Letters, correspondence and newsletters, 1975-1976
15 Rockefeller Foundation, correspondence, 1974-1977

25 1 LBJ Library, includes correspondence with Lady Bird Johnson, other printed materials, 1977
2-4 Theaters, correspondence, 1974-1979
5 Universities, correspondence, 1976-1979
6-7 Audience and Fan response to plays with copies of Jones’ replies, 1974-1979


8 Interview dress notes, checkbook, n.d.
9 Photographs of Preston Jones and his sculptures, n.d.
10 Photos of Preston Jones, clippings, n.d.
### Series IV: Publicity, continued

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| 28  | 1       | Texas Committee for the Humanities radio spot and highband TV dub, 1979 |
|     | 2       | Essays about Preston Jones, n.d. |
|     | 3       | Articles, photos, correspondence, programs, 1984 |
|     | 4       | Articles, programs, costume designs, schedules, 1984-1986 |

### Series V: Jones’ Illness and Death, 1979-1983.

| 29  | 1       | Preston Jones’ medical and death records, including concerns about malpractice and Preston and Mary Sue’s will and testaments 1979 |
|     | 2       | Articles on Preston Jones’ death, September 1979 |
|     | 3       | Funeral service, 1979 |
|     | 4-8     | Clippings on death, 1979 |
|     | 9-11    | Photocopies of articles about Jones’ death |

| 30  | 1       | Preston Jones’ Memorial Scholarship Fund, 1979-1981 |
|     | 2-8     | Mary Sue’s correspondence relating to Preston and his work, 1976-1981 |
|     | 9       | Donations to Memorial Fund, 1980-1981 |
10  Copies of typed thank-you letters, 1979
11  Miscellaneous clippings related to Cable TV, 1979-1980

31  1  Get well cards and letters for Preston Jones, 1979
2    Notebook on Preston Jones’ Funeral, 1979
3    Visitor’s Book, Preston Jones’ Funeral, 1979
4    Flower cards, 1979
5-8  Sympathy cards and letters, 1979

32  1-6  Sympathy cards and letters, 1979

Box  Folder

Series V: Jones’ Illness and Death, continued

33  1  Sympathy cards, 1979-1980
2    Theatre Southwest on Preston’s death, October 1979
3-4  Christmas cards, 1979
5    Malouf Lynch & Jackson, Attorneys at Law, estate file for Preston Jones, 1979-1983, also past correspondence with firm, 1975-1979

Series VI: Oversized Materials

34  Two Army helmets, WWI paraphernalia, wooden fraternity paddle, New Mexico flag
35  WWI paraphernalia (knapsack, canvas gas mask kit), sports equipment
36  Personal items (pipes, glasses, coins, etc), Texas Trilogy memorabilia, sports equipment, Preston Jones’ sculptures, part of Jones’ teddy bear collection
37  Texas Trilogy memorabilia, Mary Sue Jones’ personal items (key chains, teapot, paintings, etc.), props from various plays, part of Preston Jones’ teddy bear collection

Duplicates

38  Oversized-Duplicates of playbills, magazines, press clippings, and five plays: A Place on the Magdalena Flats, Remember, The Oldest Living Graduate, Santa Fe Sunshine, and Juneteenth
Appendix

Following is a list of books selected from the library of Preston and Mary Sue Jones. The first set of books reflects Preston Jones’ interest in World War I, an interest that figured in his playwriting and artwork. The second set of books deals primarily with the art and literature of the southwest.

World War Collection


Remarque, E.M. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1958.


**General**

Brown, M. *Condensed History of Texas for Schools*. Dallas: Published by the Author, 1895.


