

CRANBROOK

ARCHIVES

Cranbrook Writers' Guild

Records, 1967-2008
(bulk dates, 1980-1993)
3.5 lin. ft.

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| Processing: | Original processing by Kendra A. Frost, May 1996; new materials added and collection reprocessed by Cheri Y. Gay, March 2010 |

History

The Cranbrook Writers' Guild (CWG) was incorporated in 1970 as a non-profit organization. The major programmatic objective was continuing the four-day Cranbrook Writers' Conference first held in 1967 as a special project of the literature committee of the Michigan State Council for the Arts. Promising student writers from Michigan colleges were sponsored for four days of workshops and seminars led by established professional writers. State appropriations for the writing conference were withdrawn in 1969, motivating the formation of the Cranbrook Writers' Guild to search for alternate conference financing.

The Guild, separate in structure from the Cranbrook Educational Community, was comprised of a volunteer Board of Trustees who determined membership qualifications, dues and privileges, and held regular meetings. Henry Scripps Booth was influential in the early formation of the Guild and served as president of the Board. Ivabell Harlan and Frank Angelo, managing and associate executive editor of the Detroit Free Press, also served as presidents.

A conference director was appointed to handle student applications and general conference business. Professional writers participating in the conferences included Joyce Carol Oates, Elmore Leonard, Stuart Dybek, Donald Hall, Robert Hayden, Edward Hirsch, Gary Gildner, Thomas Lynch and Madison Smartt Bell.

In 1973 the Cranbrook Writers' Guild drafted guidelines for the presentation of a literary award to honor distinguished Michigan writers. Bruce Catton was the first recipient of this award in 1974. Subsequent awards were given to Theodore Roethke, John Voelker and Elmore Leonard.

Fund raising activities to support the writers' conference included the sponsorship of literary programs such as "An Evening with Erma Bombeck" in 1987 and "Authors on Stage," solicitations for corporate support, and auctions of donated articles, often literary in nature.

The Guild was legally dissolved as a non-profit corporation on March 11, 2008. In September 2008 they gave their remaining funds to Springfed Arts, a Michigan non-profit organization, with the stipulation that the funds support "The Cranbrook Writers' Guild Fiction Chair" at the annual Springfed Writers Retreat.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Cranbrook Writers' Guild reflect the activities of a small volunteer organization dedicated to the support of Michigan student writers and to the promotion of writing in general. Records document organizational planning, fund raising,

publicity, and the programs and conferences sponsored by the Guild and are arranged in five series: **Administrative, Finances, Correspondence, Programs, and Publications.**

The **Administrative** series documents the organization's beginning, background, membership, meeting minutes and dissolution. Trustees are identified beginning in 1970 and the first membership list is 1984. Board member identification continues through 2005. Meeting minutes give detailed description of the organization's agendas and planning over its 30-plus year history.

The **Finances** series includes budgets and treasurer's reports, fundraising solicitations and grant appeals, with some complete applications. These records offer insight into the budget of the organization from 1972 to 2007 and efforts to secure funds within the Cranbrook Educational Community, as well as from external donors. Financial information pertaining to specific programs, including the annual Writer's Conference, is organized with those programs.

Correspondence, arranged chronologically, covers 1971-2007 and for the most part is general in nature. Again, communication related to specific events or topics, such as fund solicitation, or programs, is kept with that topic.

The largest series of the collection is **Programs**, for that was the main function of the CWG. It is comprised of files maintained annually documenting the work of the organization, including literary programs, publicity, scattered minutes and correspondence relating to the year's programming. The records were maintained chronologically, although there is often considerable overlap between years. The early files contain some records created by Howard Scripps Booth, including the presentation script of the literary award to Bruce Catton. Later records include files on specific events such as the 1987 evening with Erma Bombeck.

One of the most notable programs was the Literary Auction, held mainly from 1990-1993, whose material includes solicitations from some notable authors for donations of autographed books, rare books, original artwork, memorabilia, and goods and services. Tallies for recording auction bids, item descriptions and sales receipts are included in the documentation. Of note are signed letters from humorist Erma Bombeck, W.D. Snodgrass, Jim Harrison and Lilian Jackson Braun responding to requests for auction material. Authors on Stage, 1994-2004, was another ongoing, successful program which included collaborations with the Birmingham Village Players. The annual Writer's Conference, the program on which the CWG was founded, was held from 1967-2007, and includes early invitation lists from 1968 to 1978, correspondence and information on participants, and published writings by participants from the majority of the conferences. Of note is the file for 1999 which includes fiction and poetry samples from applicants. In 1991 the conference broke with Cranbrook and was held in Brighton, Michigan.

Photographs from the collection, such as negatives and contact sheets of visiting authors (including some publicity photos), photographs of various events and students and filed in the archives' photograph collection. A CD included with the additional collection materials has assorted records and files from 2003-2006.

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