

**RENÉ NEVILS AND DEBORAH HARDY PAPERS**  
Mss. 4794  
Inventory

Compiled by  
Caroline Richard

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections  
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library  
Louisiana State University Libraries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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Proper acknowledgement of LLMVC materials must be made in any resulting writing or publications. The correct form of citation for this manuscript group is given on the summary page. Copies of scholarly publications based on research in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections are welcomed.

## SUMMARY

<b>Size.</b>	2 linear feet; 1 compact disc
<b>Geographic locations.</b>	Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, California, Puerto Rico
<b>Inclusive dates.</b>	1865-2001
<b>Bulk dates.</b>	1979-2000
<b>Language.</b>	English
<b>Summary.</b>	Research gathered and conducted by René Nevils and Deborah Hardy while writing <i>Ignatius Rising: The Life of John Kennedy Toole</i> .
<b>Organization.</b>	Organized into series: I. Correspondence; II. Interviews; III. Printed Materials and Photographs; IV. Topical Files; V. Research Process and Writings.
<b>Restrictions on access.</b>	Access to negatives requires the permission of a curator.
<b>Related collections.</b>	None.
<b>Copyright.</b>	Copyright is retained by the donors (René Nevils and Deborah Hardy) for a term of 25 years from signature of the deed of gift (10/26/2001). Permission to publish must be obtained from the donors/creators of items within the collection (specifically oral history interviews) until 25 years after signing of the deed of gift.
<b>Citation.</b>	René Nevils and Deborah Hardy Papers, Mss. 4794, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
<b>Stack locations.</b>	34.; OS:N; AA:

### BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

In 2001, René Pol Nevils and Deborah George Hardy published *Ignatius Rising: The Life of John Kennedy Toole*. After conducting several interviews with contemporaries of the writer, publishers, friends, and family members, as well as searching through correspondence, records, photographs, and newspaper clippings, Nevils and Hardy pieced together the first biography of John Kennedy Toole, the New Orleans-born author of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, who died eleven years before his book was published in 1980.

### SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of the research gathered and conducted by René Nevils and Deborah Hardy while writing *Ignatius Rising: The Life of John Kennedy Toole*. It includes copies of correspondence from Les Phillabaum, the director of Louisiana State University (LSU) Press at the time *A Confederacy of Dunces* was published. Letters between Phillabaum and Thelma Toole, Ken Toole's mother, document the publication process and provide insight into the life of her son. Letters from Walker Percy, the writer who brought the book to Phillabaum, discuss Percy's efforts to get the book published, and include a copy of his letter to Thelma Toole after having read the book for the first time (1976). Also included are copies of letters between Ken Toole and Robert Gottlieb from Simon & Schuster discussing publication of *A Confederacy of Dunces* in 1965, as well as correspondence concerning permission to reprint these letters in 2001.

Interviews conducted by Nevils and Hardy make up a good deal of the research. They met with childhood friends, fellow professors, and former students of Ken Toole. Recordings as well as written summaries of the interviews are included. Genealogical information about Toole's family and census data from New Orleans are present, including copies of baptismal certificates and the marriage license of Toole's parents. Documents such as the missing person report filed by Thelma Toole and a copy of her son's death certificate provide information about Ken Toole's disappearance and death in 1969.

Notebooks, scrap paper, and emails between Nevils and Hardy document the writing and research of their biography of Toole, and multiple drafts of the manuscript are included.

**LIST OF SERIES**

**Series I. Correspondence, 1961-2001**

**Series II. Interviews, 1960-2001, undated**

**Series III. Printed Materials and Photographs, 1950-2000, undated**

**Series IV. Topical Files, 1865-1994, undated**

**Series V. Research Process and Writings, 1994-2001**

## SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

### Series I. Correspondence, 1961-2001

Correspondence consists of copies of letters, mostly from people who played a part in the publication of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Some letters were written in 1965 by John Kennedy Toole, hoping to have his book published by Robert Gottlieb at Simon & Schuster. Correspondence through the 1970s and 1980s begins with Thelma Toole and Walker Percy discussing what publication options are available for the book. Letters then appear from Les Phillabaum and LSU Press. Subjects cover information about Ken Toole's life, editing the book, and legal rights to its profits. They also show the role Thelma Toole played in the publication process. Included is the act of assignment granting Thelma Toole full rights to the book (1979). Correspondence through the 1980s and early 1990s concerns film rights for *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Many letters are written to film producer Scott Kramer from Thelma Toole about a movie version of the book, and some letters are from international filmmakers looking to acquire permission to adapt the book. The most recent letters are from 2001 and involve permission to reprint letters from Robert Gottlieb for the use of Nevils and Hardy's *Ignatius Rising*.

### Series II. Interviews, 1960-2001, undated

Nevils and Hardy conducted numerous interviews with friends and acquaintances of Ken Toole. Included are names and addresses of possible interviewees, letters asking for information or requesting to set up an interview, and summaries of the interviews. Some of the subjects include Joel Fletcher, a friend from Toole's teaching days in Lafayette, Louisiana; David Kubach, an acquaintance from the army; and several fellow professors and former students. Also included is a videotaped interview (on VHS) of Thelma Toole by Louis Alvarez in 1983 for a documentary examining New Orleans accents.

An asterisk (\*) indicates an audio interview is available. Otherwise, there is only a written summary of the interview. Audio interviews are available on a patron access compact disc (DVD-R).

The full list of interviewees is as follows: Nikki Barranger, Kent Carroll and Herman Graf\*, Clayelle Dalferes, George Deaux, Ralph Diaz\*, Joel Fletcher, John Geiser\*, Dr. C. Gorman\*, Robert Gottlieb, Emily Dietrich Griffin, Susan Taliaferro Grossman\*, Pat Holmes Guizerix, Father Hauth, Ruth Lefranz Kathman\* (audio only), Jane McGee Kingsmill\*, David Kubach\*, Chuck Layton\*, Jean Ann Jollett Marks\*, Sister Mary Beatrice, Lucy Maycock\*, Fred Mish\*, Anthony Chestnutt Moore\*, Elmore Morgan\*, Carmine Palumbo and Robert Byrne, Mrs. Walker Percy, Les Phillabaum\* (audio only), Donald Pizer, Nicolas (Nick) Polites\*, Dave Prescott, Pat Rickels\*, Barney Rossett\*, Imelda Ruhlman\*, Owen Scott and Mary Lou Kelly\*, Sid Snow, Charlene Sperling Stovall, and Kent Taliaferro\*.

**Series III. Printed Materials and Photographs, 1950-2000, undated**

These materials include copies of newspaper articles about Toole's life and stories of the publication of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, as well as a copy of Thelma Toole's obituary. Other printed materials consist of reviews of the book, programs for the stage production at LSU (1993), an LSU Press bulletin (2000), and a newsletter from the Southwestern Louisiana Institute (SLI; now University of Louisiana at Lafayette) English Department where Toole taught. Several journal articles regarding dementia and other mental illnesses are also included as research material. Photocopies of photographs show Ken Toole as a child, as a teacher in the army, and with various friends. A photocopy of his picture in the SLI yearbook (1960) and copies of his cartoons published in Tulane University's newspaper can be found (1956-1957), as can a book of poetry by David Kubach (1979).

Also included in the series are actual photographic items, including prints, 35mm negatives, and contact sheets. Prints are organized in the following sets: set 1 contains shots of Paul A. Ducoing, Jr.'s grave; set 2 contains shots of an unidentified man, most likely Ralph Diaz, and of a restaurant at Popp's Ferry in Biloxi, Mississippi; set 3 contains shots of an unidentified man; set 4 contains a shot of a blue house; set 5 contains shots of the House of Joy in New Orleans; set 6 contains shots of the Ignatius J. Reilly Statute in New Orleans; set 7 contains shots of an unidentified home, a man, and a Brambach piano; set 8 contains more shots of Paul A. Ducoing, Jr.'s grave and unidentified houses; set 9 includes shots of the plaque on the Toole-Hecker House; set 10 includes shots of Barney Rossett at Blue Moon Press in New York City, Kent Carroll and Herman Graff in New York City, and "John and Deb."

In addition to the print sets, there are also 35mm negatives of print sets 1 through 9; copy prints of John Kennedy Toole's pictures in the 1954 Alcée Fortier High School yearbook *The Tarpon* and a copy print of the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity at Tulane in 1955; and other unidentified 35mm negatives with corresponding contact sheets.

**Series IV. Topical Files, 1865-1994, undated**

Genealogical information includes New Orleans census data, excerpts from directories and almanacs, and copies of Ken Toole's birth certificate (1937), baptism certificate (1938), and the marriage license of Mr. and Mrs. Toole (1926). Documents concerning Toole's disappearance and death consist of copies of the missing person report filed by Thelma Toole in 1969, a copy of Ken Toole's death certificate, his obituary in both New Orleans and Biloxi newspapers, and his succession.

**Series V. Research Process and Writings, 1994-2001**

This series covers such subjects as sources, including lists of names, addresses, and interviewees, and notes discussing the bibliography of *Ignatius Rising*. Email exchanges among René Nevils, Deborah Hardy, and Nicola Mason of LSU Press, notes concerning ideas and contacts, and three spiral notebooks document the research process of the authors. Also included are lists of quotations to be used as epigraphs and notes discussing their placement in the book. Two audio cassettes of publicity pieces are found in the series, entitled: "*Confederacy of Dunces*" Melissa

Gray NPR News Morning Edition (August 16, 2000); Writers' Forum 2001, WBRH-FM 88.3, Karen Celestan, host, René Pol Nevils (June 10, 2001). Finally, multiple drafts of *Ignatius Rising* in various states of revision are included.



## INDEX TERMS

Materials relating to these people, places, and things can be found in the series indicated, as represented by their numbers.

Biographies (literary works)	I-V
<i>A Confederacy of Dunces.</i>	I-III, V
Genealogies (histories)	IV
Gottlieb, Robert, 1931-	I, V
Interviews.	II
Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, La.). Press.	I-III, V
New Orleans (La.)--Social life and customs--20th century.	I-V
Percy, Walker, 1916-1990.	I, V
Phillabaum, Leslie E.	I-III, V
Toole, John Kennedy, 1937-1969.	I-V
Toole, Thelma.	I-V
Tulane University.	II-III

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u> <u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder(s)</u>	<u>Contents</u>
			<b>Series I. Correspondence, 1961-2001</b>
34:	1	1-2	Les Phillabaum, 1978-1991.
		3	Thelma Toole, 1961-1984.
		4	Walker Percy, 1976-1986.
		5-6	Thelma Toole and Les Phillabaum/LSU Press, 1979-1983.
		7	Robert Gottlieb, 1964-1965, 2001.
		8-9	Film rights/Scott Kramer, 1980-1993.
			<b>Series II. Interviews, 1960-2001, undated</b>
		10	Interview and photograph permissions, 1994-2001.
		11-12	Requests for interviews/information, 1993-1994.
		13	Interview summaries for Barranger to Diaz, 1994-1998, undated.
		14	Interview summary for Joel Fletcher, 1960-2000, undated.
		15-16	Interview summaries for Geiser to Morgan, 1960-2000.
		17	Interview summary for Carmine Palumbo/Robert Byrne, 1995-2000.
		18	Interview summary for Nick Polites, 1994-2000.
		19	Interview summaries for Percy to Taliaferro, 1994-2000.
	6	--	Videotape (VHS): Thelma Toole interview by Louis Alvarez, 1983.
AA:	--	--	Compact disc 1 (DVD-R): Audio files of interviews (MP3s), circa 1994-2000.
			<b>Series III. Printed Materials and Photographs, 1950-2000, undated</b>
34:	1	20-24	Printed materials, newspaper clippings, and photocopies of photographs, 1950-2000, undated.
OS:N	--	1	Copy of article "Odyssey Among the Dunces: The Brief Life of John Kennedy Toole" from the <i>Times-Picayune</i> , October 25, November 1, 1981; copies of various articles concerning movie rights and stage productions, 1981-1994, undated.
34:	4	1-10	Photographic print sets 1-10, undated.
		11	Copy prints from <i>The Tarpon</i> , 1954; copy print of Delta Tau Delta Fraternity at Tulane, 1955.
		12	Contact sheets with corresponding 35mm negatives, circa 1994.
	5	1-9	33mm negatives of photographic print sets 1-9, undated.
			<b>*RESTRICTED</b>

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder(s)</u>	<u>Contents</u>		
34:	1	25	<b>Series IV. Topical Files, 1865-1994, undated</b>		
		26	Genealogy, 1865-1937, undated. Documents about Toole's disappearance and death, 1969-1994.		
	6	--		<b>Series V. Research Process and Writings, 1984-2000, undated</b>	
			27	Sources, references, 1994-2000.	
			28-29	Authors' notes, emails, 1984-2000, undated.	
			30-32	Authors' notes, notebooks, undated.	
			33	Epigraphs/afterword, 2000.	
			--	Publicity cassette tape: " <i>Confederacy of Dunces</i> " Melissa Gray NPR News Morning Edition, August 16, 2000.	
			--	Publicity cassette tape: Writers' Forum 2001 WRBH-FM 88.3, Karen Celestan, host, René Pol Nevils, June 10, 2001.	
			2	1-5	Drafts of <i>Ignatius Rising</i> , circa 1994-2001.
			3	1-4	Drafts of <i>Ignatius Rising</i> , circa 1994-2001.