

JAMES FEATHERSTON PAPERS

Mss. 4812

Inventory

Compiled by
Keerthi Chandrashekar

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

2023

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SUMMARY

Size	1.5 linear feet
Geographic Locations	Louisiana; Mississippi; Texas
Inclusive Dates	1863–2000
Bulk Dates	1963–2000
Languages	English
Summary	Materials relating to the career of James Featherston, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and LSU journalism professor. Collection contains correspondence, journalism articles, book reviews, photographs, and items related to his professorship at LSU.
Access Restrictions	None
Reproduction Note	May be reproduced
Copyright	For those materials not in the public domain, copyright is retained by the descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. Copyright law.
Related Collections	None
Citation	James Featherston Papers, Mss. 4812, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack Location(s)	Z:5, OS:F

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

James Shoaf Featherston (also known as "Jim") was an LSU journalism professor for 24 years starting in 1970 before retiring in 1994, six years before his death on October 19, 2000. Born January 2, 1923, in Memphis, TN to James Wood Featherston and Sally Mai Shoaf, Featherston would win the 1954 Pulitzer Prize for "Local Reporting-Edition Time" along with the rest of the staff of the *Vicksburg Post-Herald* for the paper's coverage of a deadly tornado that struck Vicksburg, MS on December 5, 1953. After working at the *Vicksburg Post-Herald* from 1951–1954, he joined the *Jackson Daily News* in Jackson, MS for six years as a reporter and feature writer where he covered major events such as the Emmett Till trial and the school integration efforts in Little Rock, AR. His next stop was the *Denton Record Chronicle* in Texas where he worked as city editor for two years before landing as the state editor for the *Dallas Times Herald*, a post he occupied from 1962–1970. It was at the *Dallas Times Herald* that Featherston did some of his most recognizable work, such as covering the John F. Kennedy assassination (he was present at the motorcade when the president was shot) and the Jack Ruby trial.

In his late teens, Featherston worked as a deckhand on a Mississippi River dredge boat and as an engineering aide with the U.S. Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg. During World War II, he joined the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and flew 27 combat missions while being based in France. He was a waist-gunner on B-26 medium bombers for most of the missions and would continue flying reconnaissance missions as a radio operator on B-17 aerial photography flights in Africa while stationed in Dakar, Senegal before exiting the armed forces with an Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters. After the war, Featherston earned a bachelor's degree in journalism with a minor in history from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX in 1950 and later earned a master's degree in journalism with a minor in education from East Texas State University in 1969 during his last two years at the *Dallas Times Herald*.

Featherston married Billie Gwendolyn Stiles in 1949 and they had a daughter, Diane Featherston Worrell on August 24, 1951. Billie died on April 28, 2013, and Diane followed soon after, passing away on May 16, 2017.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The James Featherston Papers contains materials relating to Featherston's career as a journalist in Mississippi and Texas and later as a journalism professor at Louisiana State University. Items include personal and professional correspondence; news articles and book reviews written by Featherston published in newspapers and magazines; drafts and manuscripts for stories; articles about Featherston; photographs taken by Featherston and others; and various miscellaneous ephemera.

Of special note is the inclusion of materials relating to the Kennedy assassination, including Featherston's recollection of being present at the motorcade that day and his reporting on the trial of Jack Ruby. This collection also includes materials related to his reporting on the Little Rock integration, the Emmett Till trial, and an original copy of the December 6, 1953 issue of the *Vicksburg Post-Herald* about the deadly tornado that struck Vicksburg the day before that Featherston won a Pulitzer Prize for.

LIST OF SERIES

Series I. Correspondence, 1952–2000, undated

Series II. John F. Kennedy Assassination, 1963–1993, undated

Series III. Journalism Career, 1953–1994, undated

Series IV. LSU, 1973–1994, undated

Series V. Articles about Featherston, 1971–1995, undated

Series VI. Military, 1993–2000, undated

Series VII. Photographs, 1952–1999, undated

Series VIII. Miscellaneous, 1863–1974, undated

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I. Correspondence, 1952–2000, undated

This series contains correspondence spanning from the beginning of Featherston's career as a journalist all the way up until his death in 2000, with the majority of correspondence in the 1990s. Most of the correspondence is personal in nature, usually between former colleagues, students, and friends. Many of them involve checking in with each other, exchanging newspaper clippings, greetings/holiday cards. Letters with former colleagues usually center on reflecting on their old places of work, updates on former colleagues, and inquiries about the journalism school at LSU.

Included are letters spanning decades from 1993 Manship School of Hall of Fame Honoree Joseph A. Reaves III, who graduated from LSU with a B.A. in journalism in 1972 and was a student of Featherston. Reaves' letters detail his life traveling as a foreign correspondent around the world for *UPI* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Correspondence also covers some of Featherston's professional career discussing prospective projects with publishers and filmmakers about potential manuscripts and documentaries.

Alongside numerous letters congratulating Featherston on retirement after 1994 and the establishment of the Featherston Scholarship at LSU for journalism students in 1994, a letter from Featherston's cousin, Brenda Fischler, on September 14, 1986 contains an attached diagram of the Featherston family tree.

Series II. John F. Kennedy Assassination, 1963–1993, undated

This series references a monumental event in Featherston's career when he was present alongside the motorcade when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas. At the time, Featherston was working for the *Dallas Times Herald* and was stationed along the motorcade route tasked with calling in color information from the courthouse to the *Times Herald* office as well as catching rolls of film from *Times Herald* photographer Bob Jackson and running them back for development.

Most articles in this series about Kennedy involve Featherston recalling his experience that day and refuting there was a conspiracy to kill the president (while also stating his displeasure with the Warren Commission's Report). In a November 20, 1983 article, "I Heard the Shots," (*Baton Rouge Advocate Sunday Magazine*) Featherston recounts his role in that day's events and offers reflections on the assassination and the Jack Ruby trial (also included are two undated draft manuscripts of the article with slight variations). Other articles written by Featherston in this series include his coverage of the trial of Jack Ruby, the nightclub owner who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, from December 1963 to December 1966.

This collection also includes a laminated facsimile of the *Dallas Morning News* from November 22, 1963, about President's Kennedy's visit that day; two *Newsweek* issues from 1993 revisiting

the assassination for the 30-year anniversary and the release of Oliver Stone's movie, *JFK*; and materials relating to the "Reporters Remember: 11/22/63" conference on November 20, 1993 for journalists to recall their experiences that day.

Miscellaneous documents include a tax exemption form for royalties from a German newspaper for a Jack Ruby article, some printed stills from the Zapruder film, and Vol. 6 of the "Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy," part of the Warren Commission Report.

Series III. Journalism Career, 1953–1994, undated

This series contains articles written by Featherston published over the course of his career from the 1950s to the 1990s. Articles from the 1950s and 1960s are mostly published hard news stories in the newspapers *Vicksburg Post-Herald*, *Jackson Daily News*, *Denton Record Chronicle*, and the *Dallas Times Herald* while his later career consists of more feature stories in publications such as the *Dallas Times Herald Sunday Magazine* and the *Baton Rouge Advocate Sunday Magazine*.

Manuscripts include drafts of stories such as "What Really Happened at Sumner, Mississippi" about the Emmett Till murder; "Why They Leave," Featherston's 1969 term paper about job turnover rates in journalism for his master's degree; his experience covering the Vicksburg tornado in 1953 that led to the *Vicksburg Post-Herald's* Pulitzer Prize; the Little Rock integration crisis; and D-Day survivors living in Baton Rouge in the 1980s.

Included are a number of book reviews written by Featherston; research materials pertaining to Wilbert Rideau, a prisoner at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola and journalist best known for his work as editor for *The Angolite* beginning in the 1970s; two reporter's notebooks with handwritten notes; and miscellaneous memos and in-office newsletters from various publications he worked for.

Of special note is an original copy of the *Vicksburg Post-Herald* from December 6, 1953 containing the paper's coverage of the deadly tornado that had struck the day before.

Series IV. LSU 1973–1994, undated

This series contains materials related to Featherston's career at LSU as a professor at the School of Journalism (later renamed theanship School of Journalism in 1985 and then theanship School of Mass Communication in 1992). Included are teaching materials such as handouts on different writing/article styles and journalism ethics; lectures and speeches on notecards; spelling list of common words; a sample feature writing assignment; information on accessing Louisiana public open records; and a course description for J-3002 Feature Writing along with a sample final quiz.

Also included are materials put together by Featherston seeking a promotion to Associate Professor in 1978–1979. This packet contains the scholarly article "Making Offset History in Opelousas," letters recommending Featherston for the promotion to Dr. Ronald G. Hicks,

Featherston's curriculum vitae at the time, and the April 23, 1979 issue of LSU's *For Your Information: An Administrative Report to the Faculty and Staff* outlining promotion and tenure policy. Scholarly articles are "Government in the Sunshine: A Review of Louisiana's Open Meetings Laws," "An Overview of International Communication," and "Diffusion of Innovation in a News Room."

This series also has newspaper articles and a flyer about the announcement of the Featherston Scholarship in 1994, a list of initial donors to the scholarship, and miscellaneous LSU documents.

Of special interest are items pertaining to the 1976 defamation lawsuit brought against Featherston by former student Kip Holden (who would then go on to become mayor of Baton Rouge from 2005–2016). These items include correspondence between Featherston and his lawyers, the full court transcript from January 22 and January 23, 1976, and newspaper articles about the lawsuit.

Series V. Articles about Featherston, 1971–1995, undated

This series contains articles written about Featherston in various publications such as newspapers, magazines, and LSU publications such as the *Gumbo* yearbook. Articles usually focus on his experience covering the Kennedy assassination, his Pulitzer Prize, or his professorship at LSU.

Series VI. Military, 1993–2000, undated

This series pertains to Featherston's career in the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) during World War II. Items include a number of congratulatory letters to Marilee Barfield for her book *Days Not Forgotten* about her husband Barwick O. Barfield's experiences in the USAAF during World War II and his time as a prisoner of war in Europe forwarded to Featherston as thanks for his help with the memoir; five monthly issues of *The Boomerang News*, a newsletter for the 320th Bomb Group & Wing Reunion Association, between December 1997 and January 2000; and mail order forms from Boomerang Publishers selling World War II memorabilia such as insignias, books, and clothing. Also included is the 56th anniversary 320th Bomb Group and Wing Reunion roster from September 1998 and a list of combat missions flown by the 443 Bombardment Squadron, 320 Bomb Group.

Series VII. Photographs, 1952–1999, undated

Photographs vary between ones taken by James Featherston to ones taken of him in his career as a journalist and some personal photographs, mostly from 1999. Photographs from his journalism career show him working at the *Vicksburg Post-Herald*, *Jackson Daily News*, *Denton Record-Chronicle*, and the *Dallas Times Herald* between 1952 and 1968. These photographs show Featherston in the newspaper offices, out in the field, and goofing off. They also include photographs taken by Featherston himself, often of city officials or other politicians such as U.S. Representative Sam Rayburn and former Mississippi Governor J.P. Coleman.

Of special note are photographs taken of (and by) Featherston when he covered the Little Rock integration crisis in 1957 and the last known photograph of President John F. Kennedy before he was shot in 1963 in which you can see Featherston on the far left behind the president's car. The photograph of Kennedy and Featherston is accompanied by his press badge for the day.

Personal photographs show Featherston throughout the years either by himself or with family and friends.

Series VIII. Miscellaneous, 1863–1974, undated

This series contains various cards held by Featherston throughout the years such as press passes, deputy sheriff appointments, membership cards to various organizations, and his honorable discharge from the army. Other items in this series include his invitation to the 1950 commencement at Southern Methodist University where he earned his bachelor's degree in journalism; sheet music for "Hand in Hand" by Dave Deutsch; reflections of Featherston's 40th class reunion which he could not attend; a facsimile of the July 2, 1863 issue of *The Daily Citizen* from Vicksburg, MS; and a copy of an altered photograph given to Featherston by his students photoshopping their faces into the crowd in the famous last photo of John F. Kennedy before he was assassinated that shows Featherston in the crowd on the far left.

INDEX TERMS

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<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents (with dates)</u>
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<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents (with dates)</u>
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