



ArchivesSpace

a community served by †Lyrasis

David Abrahamsen papers 4078348

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on January 14, 2025.

Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor
Columbia University, Mail Code 1127
535 W. 114th St.
New York, NY 10027

Business Number: (212) 854-5153

Fax Number: (212) 854-1365

rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/rbml/index.html>

Table of Contents

Summary Information	3
Biographical sketch	3
Scope and Content	4
Arrangement	5
Administrative Information	5
Controlled Access Headings	6
Collection Inventory	7
Series I: Correspondence	7
Series II: Subject Files	7
Series III: Research Projects	8
Subseries III.1: David Berkowitz	8
Subseries III.2: Jack the Ripper	8
Subseries III.3: <i>Nixon vs. Nixon</i>	9

Summary Information

Repository:	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Creator:	Abrahamsen, David, 1903-2002
Title:	David Abrahamsen papers
ID:	4078348
ID:	MS#0004
Date [inclusive]:	1906-1990
Physical Description:	1.26 linear feet 3 document boxes
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The David Abrahamsen Research Files consist primarily of drafts and notes for Abrahamsen's studies on Jack the Ripper and Richard Nixon. Correspondence with David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam serial killer, is also held in the collection.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); David Abrahamsen papers; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biographical sketch

David Abrahamsen was a forensic psychiatrist, author, and psychoanalyst who was known for his books analyzing the personalities of major criminals, such as Jack the Ripper and David Berkowitz (Son of Sam). Abrahamsen was born on June 23, 1903 in Trondheim, Norway. He received his medical degree in 1929 from the Royal Frederick University in Oslo. After working at several clinics in Europe, Abrahamsen immigrated to the United States. In 1942, he began working as a lecturer and research associate at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. He also maintained a private practice. From 1949 to 1953, Abrahamsen was Chair of the Columbia University Forum for the Study and Prevention of Crime. Throughout his long career, Abrahamsen was affiliated with a number of institutions such as the New School for Social Research, Yale Law School, the Foundation

for the Prevention of Addictive Disease, and multiple hospitals. He was also a prolific writer, penning over ten books and many articles on criminal behavior. David Abrahamsen died in May 2002 at the age of 98.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biographical sketch

Abrahamsen is perhaps best known for this involvement in the Son of Sam trial. In 1977, David Berkowitz was arrested for committing a series of six murders in New York City. David Abrahamsen was called in to assist the Brooklyn district attorney in determining whether or not Berkowitz was mentally fit to stand trial. Abrahamsen concluded that Berkowitz was competent and the trial moved onward. Berkowitz was sentenced to 365 years in prison and corresponded with Abrahamsen through two of those years. This correspondence allowed Abrahamsen to publish several scientific papers analyzing Berkowitz's personality. Abrahamsen also researched and psychoanalyzed Jack the Ripper which resulted in the book *Murder and Madness: The Secret Life of Jack the Ripper* (1992). Using police reports and medical records, Abrahamsen attempted to deconstruct the motivation behind the killings as well as to point toward potential suspects.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biographical sketch

Nixon vs. Nixon is an analysis of former president, Richard Nixon. Relying primarily on interviews with individuals who knew Nixon at various points in his life, Abrahamsen presented a portrait of a very troubled individual. Although unable to actually interview Nixon in person, Abrahamsen used secondary research to supplement his analysis.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Content

The David Abrahamsen Research Files document analyzes conducted by Abraham on the criminal mind, in particular Jack the Ripper, Richard Nixon, and the Son of Sam killer, David Berkowitz. The bulk of the records are research notes, drafts, and articles written by Abrahamsen. There is a small amount of correspondence.

The papers relate primarily to the research and interviews which Abrahamsen conducted while writing Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy, and to his close relationship and correspondance with convicted multiple murderer David Berkowitz. There are over 140 letters to Abrahamsen from Berkowitz, who was known as "Son of Sam" and the "44-Calibre Killer" for the succession of killings of young people in New York City in the mid-1970s.

The papers also reflect Abrahamsen's interest in psychologist Otto Weiniger, in politics (particularly Adlai E. Stevenson's 1952 campaign) and in other famous crimes such as the Leopold/Loeb kidnapping and murder of Bobby Franks.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in three series.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor
Columbia University, Mail Code 1127
535 W. 114th St.
New York, NY 10027

Business Number: (212) 854-5153

Fax Number: (212) 854-1365

rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/rbml/index.html>

Revision Description

File created. xml document instance created by Lea Osborne xml document instance updated by Catherine C. Ricciardi EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. 2009-10-01 2009-10-06 2011-04-21 2019-05-20

Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

Restrictions on Access

This collection is located off-site. You will need to request this material at least three business days in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

Reproductions may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Curator of Manuscripts, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML). The RBML approves permission to publish that which it physically owns; the responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

Ownership and Custodial History

Gift of Dr. David Abrahamsen, 1982.

Processing Information

Previously finding aid prepared by Mary B. Bowling, 1 March 1982. Papers were reprocessed with additional accessions integrated in September 2009 by Lea Osborne.

Accruals

Materials may have been added to the collection since this finding aid was prepared. Contact rbml@columbia.edu for more information.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Controlled Access Headings

- Criminal psychology
- Murder -- Case studies
- Psychiatrists
- Drafts (documents)
- Personal correspondence
- Photographs
- Abrahamsen, David, 1903-2002
- Berkowitz, David Richard, 1953-

- Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994

Collection Inventory

Series I: Correspondence, 1938-1981

Scope and Contents

Most of the letters in Series I are from David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam serial killer. Written while incarcerated in Attica, Berkowitz corresponded regularly with Abrahamsen over a two year period. Much of the subject matter consists of Berkowitz trying to self-analyze about why he committed crimes. Abrahamsen continuously asked questions about Berkowitz's family, his upbringing, and his relationships with other people. There are a few letters from Jessamyn West, a distant relative of Nixon who assisted Abrahamsen while he was working on his book *Nixon vs. Nixon*.

Title/Description	Instances	
Berkowitz, David		
1979 February-July	box 1	folder 1
1979 August-1980 February	box 1	folder 2
1980 March-1981 January	box 1	folder 3
1981 February-August	box 1	folder 4
B1945-1947	box 1	folder 5
E through G, 1938-1949, 1957-1958, 1967, 1938-1949, 1957-1958, 1967	box 1	folder 6
L1945-1965	box 1	folder 7
M through O, 1945-1952	box 1	folder 8
S through T, 1945-1952, 1974, 1945-1952, 1974	box 1	folder 9
West, Jessamyn, 1974-1976	box 1	folder 10

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series II: Subject Files, 1906-1978

Scope and Contents

This small series contains documents with related correspondence concerning Adlai Stevenson's presidential run, articles written by psychologist Otto Weininger, and printed material from a conference sponsored by Columbia University for the study and prevention of crime. Abrahamsen presented at the conference and there are copies of his talk.

Title/Description	Instances	
Columbia University Forum for the Study and Prevention of Crime, 1949	box 1	folder 11

Stevenson, Adlai, 1952-1953	box 1	folder 12
Weininger, Otto, 1906, 1929-1947, 1978, 1906, 1929-1947, 1978	box 1	folder 13

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series III: Research Projects, 1944-1990

Scope and Contents

Series III is the largest series of the collection and is comprised of files regarding three research projects: *Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy*, *Confessions of Son of Sam*, and *Murder and Madness: The Secret Life of Jack the Ripper*.

Subseries III.1: David Berkowitz, 1979

Scope and Contents

Interviews of David Berkowitz along with writings by him are held in this subseries.

Title/Description	Instances	
Childhood, 1979	box 1	folder 14
Starkweather Excerpts with Notes, 1979	box 1	folder 15
Interview, 1979 May 17	box 1	folder 16
Notarized Affidavits, 1979 May 17	box 1	folder 17

Subseries III.2: Jack the Ripper, 1944-1990

Scope and Contents

The majority of the records in this subseries are drafts of Abrahamsen's manuscript. These drafts are heavily edited and illustrate the process Abrahamsen went through in order to create the final product. Correspondence with research institutions and medical doctors in England, research notes, and articles regarding personality and crime (many written by Abrahamsen) are also in this subseries.

Title/Description	Instances	
Articles, 1944-1952, 1982, 1944-1952, 1982	box 1	folder 18
Correspondence, 1988-1989	box 1	folder 19
Drafts		
Chapters 1 through 3, undated, 1984 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 1	folder 20 to 21
Chapter 3, undated	box 1	folder 22
Chapter 4, undated	box 1	folder 23
Chapter 5, undated, 1989	box 1	folder 24

Chapter 6, undated	box 1	folder 25
Chapters 6 through 8, undated <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 1	folder 26 to 27
Chapter 7, undated	box 1	folder 28
Chapter 8, undated, 1990	box 1	folder 29
Footnotes, undated	box 1	folder 30
Research Files, undated, 1981-1990 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 1	folder 31 to 32
Subseries III.3: <i>Nixon vs. Nixon</i> , 1960-1977		box 2
Scope and Contents		
<p>Subseries III.3 is composed of research files with accompanying notes, correspondence with individuals who had some connection with Richard Nixon, early photographs of Nixon's family, and a draft of the manuscript with edits. Of interest are a series of interviews conducted by Abrahamsen with people who knew Nixon as a child and an adult, including a White House correspondent and Nixon's longtime campaign manager.</p>		
Title/Description	Instances	
Correspondence, 1975-1976	box 2	folder 1
Draft, 1977 <u>Physical Description:</u> (3 Folders)	box 2	folder 2 to 4
Nixon Film: 5 Five minute spots, undated <u>Physical Description:</u> 1 film reels (16mm) 1-800ft reel, color, sound	box 3	
Interviews, 1975-1976	box 2	folder 5
Photographs, undated, 1960s-1970s, undated, 1960s-1970s	box 2	folder 6
Research Files, 1970s	box 2	folder 7

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)