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# Guide to the Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Papers 1918-2009



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## **Descriptive Summary**

<b>Identifier</b>	ICU.SPCL.MILLSRJ
<b>Title</b>	Mills, Ralph J., Jr. Papers
<b>Date</b>	1918-2009
<b>Size</b>	4 linear feet (8 boxes)
<b>Repository</b>	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

**Abstract** Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (1931-2007) was a poet, critic and teacher. The Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Papers span the years 1918-2009, but are concentrated in the 1950s-2000s. The collection documents his work as a poet and critic, and also contains small amounts of material related to teaching and family life. The collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, publications, biographical material, photographs, audio recordings and digital material.

## **Acknowledgments**

The Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Papers were processed and preserved as part of the "Uncovering New Chicago Archives Project," funded with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

## **Information on Use**

### **Access**

Series V: Photographs, Audio and Digital, does not include access copies for part of the material in this series. Researchers will need to consult with staff before requesting material from this series.

The remainder of the collection is open for research.

### **Citation**

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Mills, Ralph J., Jr. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

### **Biographical Note**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (1931-2007) was a poet, critic and teacher. Born on December 16, 1931 to Eileen and Ralph J. Mills, he grew up in Lake Forest, Illinois and was interested in music and poetry as a child. Mills was educated at Lake Forest College (B.A. 1954) and Northwestern

University (M.A. 1956, Ph.D. 1963); he also attended Oxford University during his graduate studies.

Mills began teaching literature in 1957 as a graduate student at Northwestern. Before completing his Ph.D., he moved on to the University of Chicago in 1959, serving on the Committee on Social Thought. It was during his time at University of Chicago that he met Helen Harvey, then a student. They married in 1959. In 1965, Mills left University of Chicago for the University of Illinois-Chicago, where he taught poetry among a variety of other subjects from 1965-1997. He became Professor Emeritus of English in 1997.

As a poet, Mills worked in a terse, observative style influenced by the Objectivist movement. His volumes of poetry won numerous awards, including the the Society of Midland Authors prize for poetry (*Living with Distance*, 1979), the Carl Sandburg prize for poetry (*March Light*, 1983) and the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award (*Grasses Standing: Selected Poems*, 2000). Mills is also noted for his critical essays on twentieth-century poets such as Theodore Roethke and Richard Eberhart. A collected volume of these works, *Essays on Poetry*, was published in 2003. His other books of criticism include *Contemporary American Poetry* (1965) and *Cry of the Human: Contemporary American Poetry* (1975); Mills also published editions of Theodore Roethke and David Ignatow.

Mills passed away on August 18, 2007 in Park Ridge, Illinois. He was survived by his wife, Helen Harvey Mills, and their children and grandchildren.

### **Scope Note**

The Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Papers span the years 1918-2009, but are concentrated in the 1950s-2000s. The collection documents his work as a poet and critic, and also contains small amounts of material related to teaching and family life.

Series I: Biographical and Personal, contains biographical statements, curricula vitae, and bibliographies. It also includes lists of books in Mills's library, interviews with Mills, reviews of his work, and a small amount of publicity material from poetry readings. Personal material in this series consists of teaching materials, appointment books, family correspondence, copies of birth certificates, a passport and a nametag.

Series II: Correspondence, spans the years 1958-2009, and contains incoming correspondence along with a small number of outgoing letters. Included in this series are files of correspondence with Richard Eberhart, Theodore Enslin, and Theodore Roethke. A file of general correspondence, arranged chronologically, includes letters and postcards from colleagues such as Wallace Fowlie, Stanley Kunitz, Denise Levertov, John U. Nef, Henry Rago, David Ignatow

and Lucien Stryk. Also included is one folder of correspondence of Helen Harvey Mills, which contains a letter from Ralph Mills, Jr., sent early in their relationship.

Series III: Writing and Editing, documents Mills's work as a poet, critic and editor. Files are arranged chronologically from 1955-2003, and include sample copies of periodicals and monographs, reprints, manuscripts, proofs, notes and associated correspondence.

Series IV: Writings by Others, is arranged alphabetically by author, and includes publications and manuscripts by other authors. Included in this series are typescripts of poems by David Ignatow and Mark Perlberg. Correspondence, annotations, or laid-in notes are included with many of the writings in this series.

Series V: Photographs, Audio and Digital, is organized by format. This series includes photographs of Ralph J. Mills and his friends and family members. There are also several photographs of an unidentified event, possibly at Dumbarton Oaks: Identified are John U. Nef, Jr.; Ward Just and his wife; Ralph and Helen Mills; James Douglas; Charles Moraze and his wife; Bruce Phemister; the wife of Frank Lloyd Wright; Robert Richman; and Jacques de Bourbon-Busset.. Audio material includes a 1976 reel tape recording of the WFMT radio program "The Name and Nature of Poetry," hosted by Paul Carroll and with Mills as guest. Also included are CDs of performances of Alexander Nohai-Seaman compositions using Mills's poems, and a DVD produced as a memorial to Mills.

## **Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Anania, Michael. Papers

## **Subject Headings**

- Mills, Ralph J.
- American poetry -- 20th century -- History and criticism
- English poetry -- 20th century -- History and criticism
- Poetry -- study and teaching
- Poets, American

## **INVENTORY**

### **Series I: Biographical and Personal**

**Box 1**

**Folder 1**

Curricula vitae, biographical statements and bibliographies, circa 1990s

**Box 1**

**Folder 2**

Bibliographies and list of books in personal library, 1994-2000

**Box 1**

**Folder 3**

List of books in personal library, circa 2000

**Box 1**

**Folder 4**

Interviews, 1988-2003

**Box 1**

**Folder 5**

Reviews, 1978-1994

**Box 1**

**Folder 6**

Publicity material for poetry readings, circa 1980s-1999

**Box 1**

**Folder 7**

Syllabi and teaching evaluations, 1967-circa 1970s

**Box 1**

**Folder 8**

Appointment books, 1998-1999

**Box 1**

**Folder 9**

Copies of birth certificates, family correspondence, passport and nametag, 1931-circa 1990s

**Series II: Correspondence**

**Box 1**

**Folder 10**

Eberhart, Richard, 1963-1967

**Box 1**

**Folder 11**

Enslin, Theodore, 1985-1986

**Box 1**

**Folder 12**

Enslin, Theodore, 1987-1990

**Box 2**

**Folder 1**

Roethke, Theodore, 1958-1963

**Box 2**

**Folder 2**

General, 1962-1967

- Belitt, Ben
- Doggett, Frank
- Fowlie, Wallace

- Gardner, Isabella
- Hartman, Geoffrey
- Kunitz, Stanley
- Levertov, Denise
- Malkoff, Karl
- Nef, John U.
- Pack, Robert
- Rago, Henry
- Taylor, John
- Unidentified correspondents

**Box 2**

**Folder 3**

General, 1974-2006

- Berg, Stephen
- Chesterton, Joan
- Elshtain, Eric
- Fay, Steve and Pam
- Goldberg, Bertrand
- Heller, Michael
- Herrera, Miriam
- Ignatow, David
- Jacob, John
- Johnston, Devin
- Just, Ward
- Lake Forest College
- Marshall, Donald G.
- Mechaca family
- Ohio University Press/Swallow Press
- Paschen, Elise
- Rosenberg, Milt
- Schuler, Robert
- Stryk, Lucien
- Taylor, John
- Zawacki, Andrew
- Unidentified correspondents

**Box 2**

**Folder 4**

General, undated

- Fowlie, Wallace
- Gardner, Isabella
- Murray, G.E.
- Luisa

**Box 2**

**Folder 5**

Helen Harvey Mills, circa 1953-2009

- Canuel, Mark

- Castle, Latham and Georgie
- Jacob, John
- Mack, Donna
- Mills, Ralph J., Jr.
- Riker, Martin

### **Series III: Writing and Editing**

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 6**

Literary criticism course notes, 1955

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 7**

"E.E. Cummings' Attitudes," Gemini, periodical, 1957

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 8**

"Faulkner's Essential Vision," Gemini, periodical, 1957

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 9**

"Wallace Stevens: The Image of the Rock," Accent, periodical, 1958

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 10**

"The Poetry of Edwin Muir," Accent, periodical, 1959

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 11**

"The Poetry of Innocence: Notes on E.E. Cummings," English Journal, periodical, 1959

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 12**

"Wallace Stevens and the Poem of Earth," Gemini, periodical, 1960

#### **Box 2**

##### **Folder 13**

"Char and Michaux: Magicians of Insecurity," Chicago Review, periodical, 1961

#### **Box 3**

##### **Folder 1**

"Edwin Muir's Poetry: An Introductory Note," The Newberry Library Bulletin, periodical, 1963

#### **Box 3**

##### **Folder 2**

"Four Voices in Recent American Poetry," The Christian Scholar, periodical, 1963

#### **Box 3**

##### **Folder 3**

"Eden's Gate: The Later Poetry of Edwin Muir," The Personalist, reprints, 1963

#### **Box 3**

##### **Folder 4**

"Theodore Roethke," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, periodical, 1963

#### **Box 3**



**Folder 5**

"Richard Eberhart," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, periodical, 1966

**Box 3**

**Folder 6**

"Trance and Craft: Introductory Note on Robert Graves' Poetry," Poem, periodical, 1968

**Box 3**

**Folder 7**

"The Poetry of James Dickey," TriQuarterly, periodical, 1968

**Box 3**

**Folder 8**

W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Edwin Muir, lecture notes, circa 1960s

**Box 3**

**Folder 9**

"A Pig, and Several Poets," Poetry, periodical, 1971

**Box 3**

**Folder 10**

"Poems of the Deep Mind," Tennessee Poetry Journal, periodicals, 1971

**Box 3**

**Folder 11**

"Funerals," "For Vallejo," "At the End of the Wars," "Nerve Gas," Kayak, periodical, 1972

**Box 3**

**Folder 12**

"A Last Poem," Crazy Horse, periodical, 1974

**Box 3**

**Folder 13**

Inscape, periodical, 1976

**Box 3**

**Folder 14**

"A Blessing," Moons and Lion Tails, periodical, 1976

**Box 4**

**Folder 1**

"A Bridge," "Variation on Apollinaire," "Stumps," Northeast, periodical, 1978

**Box 4**

**Folder 2**

"In this Attic," "Winter's End," "The Second Life," Slow Loris Reader, periodical, 1978

**Box 4**

**Folder 3**

Living with Distance, monograph, 1979

**Box 4**

**Folder 4**

"Gone," Dacotah Territory, periodical, 1980

**Box 4**

**Folder 5**

"For Lorine Niedecker in Heaven," Madison Review, periodical, 1981

**Box 4**

**Folder 6**

March Light, certificate of copyright registration, 1983

**Box 4**

**Folder 7**

"The Poetry of James Dickey," The Imagination as Glory: The Poetry of James Dickey, photocopied article, 1984

**Box 4**

**Folder 8**

"Was It," Mississippi Valley Review, periodical, 1984

**Box 4**

**Folder 9**

"A Fall Song," Sparrow Poverty Pamphlets, periodical, 1984

**Box 4**

**Folder 10**

Each Branch, proof, 1986

**Box 4**

**Folder 11**

"March Days," "For John Perlman," "Follow That," Longhouse, periodical, 1986

**Box 4**

**Folder 12**

"Even if," "By the / road," "11/9," Spoon River Quarterly, periodical, 1987

**Box 4**

**Folder 13**

"7/9," "8/10," Tar River Poetry, periodical, 1988

**Box 4**

**Folder 14**

"Low," "Someone Else," Panoply, periodical, 1988

**Box 4**

**Folder 14**

A While, proofs, 1989

**Box 4**

**Folder 15**

A While, proofs, 1989

**Box 5**

**Folder 1**

Manuscripts, circa 1980s

**Box 5**

**Folder 2**

"An Eye Out," "Poem with a Line by Larry Eigner," Wire, periodical, 1990

**Box 5**

**Folder 3**

"Wind-/Less," "Grey/Layered," "In this Kind/of Wind," "The Moons," "Right/Now," "Dawn,/This," "Three for the Wind," "4/10," "Beginning With," "Water Lilies," "Even In," "'Common' Yarrow's," "Sky of," "Watching the," Wire, periodical, 1990-1991

**Box 5**

**Folder 4**

"In this Kind/Of Wind," "First Day of," "A Night's," Private, periodicals, 1991

**Box 5**

**Folder 5**

"Evening Song," Illinois Review, periodical, 1993

**Box 5**

**Folder 6**

tel-let, chapbook, 1993

**Box 5**

**Folder 7**

"Dead Poet," "Skeins,/twists," "Yellow/ashes," "Split/twigs," "Moon,/the clear star-,"  
Object Permanence, periodical, 1995

**Box 5**

**Folder 8**

Sky Swept, photocopied manuscript, 1995

**Box 5**

**Folder 9**

"October/Cool," Tar River Poetry, periodical, 1997

**Box 5**

**Folder 10**

Illinois poetry anthology, correspondence and manuscripts, 1997

**Box 5**

**Folder 11**

In Wind's Edge, photocopied manuscript, circa 1997

**Box 5**

**Folder 12**

Notes, circa 1997-1998

**Box 5**

**Folder 13**

Manuscripts, 1998-circa 2000

**Box 5**

**Folder 14**

Notebook, 1999-2000

**Box 5**

**Folder 15**

Manuscripts, circa 1990s

**Box 5**

**Folder 16**

Manuscripts, circa 1990s-2000s

**Box 5**

**Folder 17**

Manuscripts and notes, circa 1990s-2000s

**Box 5**

**Folder 18**

Manuscripts and notes, circa 1990s-2000s

**Box 6**

**Folder 1**

Grasses Standing: Selected Poems, manuscripts, 1998-circa 2000

**Box 6**

**Folder 2**

Grasses Standing: Selected Poems, selections lists and draft tables of contents, circa 2000

**Box 6**

**Folder 3**

Grasses Standing: Selected Poems, manuscript, circa 2000

**Box 6**

**Folder 4**

Grasses Standing: Selected Poems, manuscript, circa 2000

**Box 6**

**Folder 5**

Grasses Standing: Selected Poems, cover design proofs, circa 2000

**Box 6**

**Folder 6**

Manuscripts and notes, circa 2001

**Box 6**

**Folder 7**

Essays on Poetry, draft table of contents, circa 2003

**Box 6**

**Folder 8**

Essays on Poetry, draft front matter, circa 2003

**Box 6**

**Folder 9**

Poetry in the 1960s, notes, undated

**Series IV: Writings by Others**

**Box 6**

**Folder 10**

Browning, Preston M., Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," reprint, undated

**Box 6**

**Folder 11**

Browning, Preston M., Jr., correspondence, drafts, reprints and photocopied article, 2006-2007

**Box 6**

**Folder 12**

Doggett, Frank, "This Invented World: Stevens' 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,'" reprint, 1961

**Box 6**

**Folder 13**

Eliot, T.S., Collected Poems 1909-1935, monograph, 1936

**Box 6**

**Folder 14**

Eliot, T.S., Four Quartets, monograph, 1955

**Box 6**

**Folder 15**

Hartman, Geoffrey H., "The Heroics of Realism," reprint, undated

**Box 6**

**Folder 16**

Heller, Michael, *In the Builded Place*, monograph, 1989

**Box 6**

**Folder 17**

Ignatow, David, correspondence and manuscripts, 1972

**Box 6**

**Folder 18**

Lawrence, D.H., "Poetry of the Present," photocopied introduction, 1918

**Box 6**

**Folder 19**

Padgett, Abigail, "The Ally Way," review, circa 2004

**Box 6**

**Folder 20**

Perlberg, Mark, "For a Dead Lady," manuscript, undated

**Box 7**

**Folder 1**

Stevens, Wallace, *Collected Poems*, monograph, 1955

**Box 7**

**Folder 2**

Stryk, Lucien, *Where We Are: Selected Poems and Zen Translations*, monograph, 1997

**Box 7**

**Folder 3**

Turnbull, Gael, *Residues*, chapbook, 1976

**Box 7**

**Folder 4**

Yeats, W.B., *Collected Poems*, 1955

**Series V: Photographs, Audio and Digital**

**Box 8**

**Folder 1**

Mills family, photographs, circa 1930s-1960s

**Box 8**

**Folder 2**

Unidentified event, photographs, circa 1960s

**Box 8**

**Folder 3**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr., photographs, circa 1974-1977

**Box 8**

**Folder 4**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr., photographs, circa 1970s-1980s

**Box 8**

**Folder 5**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr. with family and friends, photographs, circa 1970s- 1990s

**Box 8**

**Folder 6**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr. and friends at party, photographs, 1988

**Box 8**

**Folder 7**

Ralph J. Mills, Jr. and Michael Anania at book signing, photographs, circa 1994

**Box 8**

**Folder 8**

Mills home on Astor Street, Chicago, photograph, undated

**Box 8**

**Folder 9**

Comics display, Musée de la Bande Dessinée, Brussels, photograph, undated

**Box 8**

**Folder 10**

"The Name and Nature of Poetry," reel tape, 1976

**Box 8**

**Folder 11**

Cassette tape, undated

**Box 8**

**Folder 12**

Performances of Alexander Nohai-Seaman compositions, compact discs, undated

**Box 8**

**Folder 13**

"A Celebration of the Life of Ralph J. Mills, Jr.," DVD, 2007

**Box 8**

**Folder 14**

"Lake Forest College 2007 Sesquicentennial Alumni Directory," CD-ROM, circa 2007