

*Special Collections, Texas Christian University*

**Guide to the  
Ellis Amburn Papers**

**Manuscript Group 12**

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Fort Worth, Texas

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## Overview of the Papers

<b>Creator</b>	Amburn, Ellis
<b>Title</b>	Ellis Amburn papers, 1916-2005 (inclusive), 1973-2000 (bulk).
<b>Physical description</b>	5.0 linear ft.
<b>Arrangement</b>	Arranged in two series: I. Subject Files, 1916-2005. II. Writings, 1992-2002.
<b>Biographical sketch</b>	Ellis Edward Amburn was born on August 2, 1933 in Jermyn, Texas. Amburn, raised in Fort Worth, Texas, graduated from Texas Christian University in 1954 with a B.A. in Journalism and English. After moving to New York City, he conducted graduate work in English at Columbia University until 1957. In 1960, Amburn entered the book publishing industry and during his career he achieved the position of editor-in-chief at Delacorte Press and editorial director at Putnam's. In addition to his career in publishing, Amburn worked as a ghostwriter for well-known figures. Since 1990, he has written biographies of Jack Kerouac, Warren Beatty, Buddy Holly, Janis Joplin, Roy Orbison, Jack Nicholson, and Elizabeth Taylor.
<b>Summary</b>	The papers document Ellis Amburn's career in the publishing industry and as a biographer. The papers consist of professional correspondence, photographs, research materials, press clippings, promotional materials, and manuscripts of his published works. Included in the papers are personal correspondence and biographical information that provide limited information about Amburn's personal history.
<b>Provenance</b>	Gift of Ellis Amburn in honor of his mother, Mrs. Belma Amburn, 1983, 2001, and 2005.
<b>Terms governing use</b>	Copyright has not been transferred to Texas Christian University.
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**For further  
Information**

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## Biographical Sketch

Ellis Edward Amburn was born on August 2, 1933 in Jermyn, Texas. Amburn, raised in Fort Worth, Texas, attended Poly High School and graduated from Texas Christian University in 1954 with a B.A. degree in Journalism and English. While at TCU, Amburn served as editor of the student newspaper, *The Skiff*, from 1953-54. He credited his time at *The Skiff* for his move from Fort Worth to the media hub of New York City. When editing *The Skiff*, Amburn attracted national attention when he attacked Senator Joseph McCarthy, leader of the extreme movement to expose suspected Communists in the federal government, in his editorial column, "Campus Potpourri". The day after he graduated from TCU, *Newsweek* magazine, which took note of his editorial, flew Amburn up to their offices in Times Square, New York, to work as a reporter. By the early sixties, Amburn had made the transition from reporter to publishing editor at several well-known publishing houses. Over the next four decades, Amburn oversaw many bestsellers at some of New York's famous publishing houses, and by the early nineties he had become a notable biographer.

During his time at *Newsweek* from 1954 to 1957, Amburn did graduate work in English at Columbia University with a specialty in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature. After serving as a sergeant in the U.S. Army from 1958 to 1960, Amburn worked as a literary agent for one year. His experience as a literary agent allowed him to begin a career in the book publishing industry. In September 1960, he began as a first reader at G.P. Putnam's Sons in New York for Lois Dwight Cole, the editor who discovered *Gone With the Wind*. The following spring, Amburn was promoted to assistant editor at Coward-McCann, a Putnam subsidiary. During his time at Coward-McCann, Amburn rose to the office of executive editor, vice president, and secretary of the board of directors. In addition, he edited such works as the 1962 edition of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and author Jack Kerouac's later works. Moreover, he befriended and was editor for Paul Gallico, whose novel, *The Poseidon Adventure*, ushered in the disaster genre.

In 1971, Amburn resigned from Coward to become editor-in-chief of Delacorte Press. He served in this capacity at Delacorte Press for seven-and-a-half years. In 1978, Amburn moved to the publishing house of William Morrow where he served as Senior Editor and oversaw the production of many bestsellers. In 1980, Amburn returned to G.P. Putnam's Sons publishing house where he attained the role of editorial director. During this time, Amburn was editor for such well-known authors as Belva Plain, Dame Muriel Spark, Joshua Logan, John le Carré, and James Jones.

In addition to his career as an editor, Amburn worked as a ghostwriter for Priscilla Presley, Kim Novak, Peggy Lee, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and Shelley Winters whose autobiography, *Shelley: Also Known as Shirley*, was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list in 1980. In 1990, he produced his first biography on singer, and fellow Texan, Roy Orbison, titled *Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story*. This biography led to further works which included *Pearl: The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin* in 1993, *Buddy Holly: The Real Story* in 1995, *Subterranean Kerouac: The Hidden Life of Jack Kerouac* in 1997, *The Most Beautiful Woman in the World: The Obsessions, Passions, and Courage of Elizabeth Taylor* in 2000, *The Sexiest Man Alive: A Biography of Warren Beatty* in 2002, and, under the pseudonym Edward Douglas, *Jack: The*

*Great Seducer*, a biography of Jack Nicholson, in 2004. His books have been published in England and, in translation, throughout the world.

In 2007, the TCU Shieffer School of Journalism inducted Amburn into its Hall of Excellence “for consistently maintaining and demonstrating the highest standards of professionalism in the field of communication.”

## **Description of the Papers**

The papers document Ellis Amburn’s career in the publishing industry and as a biographer. The papers are arranged into two series, titled Subject Files and Writings. Series I includes correspondence, press clippings, photographs, and promotional materials related to Amburn’s career. Series II is comprised of manuscripts of Amburn’s published works. Although a majority of the materials in the collection focus on Amburn’s career and his biographical works, there is a small amount of personal correspondence, photographs, and biographical information within the papers that provide limited information about Amburn’s personal history.

## Series I. Subject Files, 1916-2005

The series includes correspondence (personal and professional), press clippings, photographs, promotional material, financial documents, audio tapes, research materials, and biographical information. The series is arranged alphabetically by subject. The correspondence, arranged alphabetically by last name, and press clippings comprise a majority of the materials within this series. A large amount of the correspondence is from well-known literary and Hollywood figures, and the press clippings are almost entirely related to Amburn's biographical works. The promotional materials, financial documents and professional correspondence provide an insight into the book publishing industry. The limited biographical information provides a glimpse into Amburn's personal history and some of the photographs feature Amburn himself with his friends from the publishing community.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Biographical information			
Photographs			
Amburn, Ellis (featured)	1982; undated	1	1
Celebrities and writers [see also oversized materials in box 6]	1982; undated		2-3
Publicity	1962-2000; undated		4-5
Royalties and agreements	1989-2000		6
<i>Buddy Holly: The Real Story</i> (published in 1995)			
Book tours and promotion	1995-1996; undated		7
Correspondence	1992-1999		8-10
Expenses and memorandums	1993-1995; undated		11
Interviews on audio cassettes			
	1992-1993		12-13
	1994-1996; undated	2	14-15
Photographs	1993; undated		16

<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>
<i>Buddy Holly</i> , continued			
Research materials [biographical information]	1959-1993; undated	2	17
Reviews and publicity	1995-1997; undated		18-20
Correspondence			
Baxter – Buscaglia	1962-1998; undated		21
Carole – de Ribes	1977-1996; undated		22
Dilworth – Gallico	1973-1990		23
Giroux – Guest	1974-1982		24
Hawley – Howard	1965-1984; undated		25
Isherwood – Kean	1972-1983; undated		26
Kerouac, Jack	1964-1967		27
Koppel – Lederer	1964-1983; undated		28
Logan, Joshua	1973-1980; undated		29
Lunt – Montgomery	1971-1998; undated	3	30
Moore – Perreault	1965-1998; undated		31
Plain, Belva	1978-1982; undated		32
Puzo – Skinner	1974-1994; undated		33



<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>
Correspondence, continued			
Spark, Muriel	1983-1984; undated	3	34
Stiefel – Vreeland	1975-1983; undated		35
Wallace – Wouk	1972-1983; undated		36
Unidentified	1971-1983		37
<i>Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story</i> (1990)			
Correspondence and publicity	1989-1993; undated		38
Photograph permissions	1989-1990		39
Research materials [photographs]	1988-1990; undated		40-43
Dundy, Elaine			
Correspondence	1995-1999		44
Writings	1994-1996		45
Haber, Joyce			
Correspondence/illustration	1974-1977; undated	4	46
<i>The Users</i> outline	undated		47
<i>The Most Beautiful Woman in the World: The Obsessions, Passions, and Courage of Elizabeth Taylor</i> (2000)			
Correspondence	1998-2000; undated		48-50
Photograph permissions and photographs	1998-1999; undated		51
Promotion and interviews	2000; undated		52

<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
<i>The Most Beautiful Woman in the World</i> , continued			
Reviews and publicity	2000	4	53
<i>Pearl: The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin</i> (1993) [see also oversized materials in box 6]			
Correspondence	1990-2001; undated		54
Publicity	1993-1996; undated		55
<i>The Sexiest Man Alive: A Biography of Warren Beatty</i> (2002)			
Correspondence	1984-2005		56
Photographs (photocopies)	undated		57
<i>Shelley: Also Known as Shirley</i> (1980)			
Correspondence, author's notes, and publicity	1978-1980; undated		58
<i>Subterranean Kerouac: The Hidden Life of Jack Kerouac</i> (1997)			
Correspondence	1995-2001; undated		59-62
<i>Out</i> magazine	1998		63
Research materials			
Interviews on audio cassettes	1962-1998; undated	5	64-67
Interviews (written)	1978-1995; undated		68
Newspaper clippings	1938-1990; undated		69-70

<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
<i>Subterranean Kerouac</i>			
Research materials, continued			
Notes and biographical information	1916-1969; undated	5	71
Photographs	1968-1995; undated	6	72-75
Photographs [negatives]	undated		76-77
Photographs [photocopies]	undated		78
Photographs [slides]	undated		79
Posters, brochures and illustrations	1988-1996; undated		80
Reviews and publicity	1997-1999		81
Oversized materials			
Biographical information	undated		82
<i>Pearl: The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin</i> [photographs]	1986; undated		83

## Series II. Writings, 1992-2002

This series includes the manuscript drafts of Amburn's published works. The manuscripts contain edit marks and revisions made by Amburn and his editors. Some of the manuscripts are accompanied by, or contain within them, the editors' comments and legal changes suggested by the publishing house's legal department. The materials in this series are arranged alphabetically by the biographical work's title. In addition, the series includes some inserts drafted by Amburn for his published works or materials that were chosen to be omitted.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
<i>Buddy Holly: The Real Story</i> (published in 1995) [edited manuscripts]	undated	7	1-10
<i>Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story</i> (1990) [edited manuscript]	undated	8	11-16

<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>
<i>The Most Beautiful Woman in the World: The Obsessions and Passions, and Courage of Elizabeth Taylor</i> (2000)			
Amburn's revisions	1999	8	17-21
Editors' comments	1999-2000; undated	9	22
Edited manuscripts	2000; undated		23-34
Legal changes	1999	10	35
<i>Pearl: The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin</i> (1993)			
Amburn's revisions	1992; undated		36
Editors' comments	undated		37
Edited excerpts	undated		38
Omitted materials	undated		39-40
<i>The Sexiest Man Alive: A Biography of Warren Beatty</i> (2002)			
Amburn's inserts	undated		41
Amburn's revisions	2002		42-46
Editors' comments and legal changes	2001-2002; undated		47
Editors' revisions	2001	11	48-54
Omitted materials	undated		55
<i>Subterranean Kerouac: The Hidden Life of Jack Kerouac</i> (1997) [edited manuscript]	1997-1998; undated	12	56-64