



## William S. Burroughs Newspaper Clippings Collection (S0575)

**Collection Number:** S0575

**Collection Title:** William S. Burroughs Newspaper Clippings Collection

**Dates:** 1936-1952, 1965, 1983

**Creator:** Thomas, Kenn, 1958-2023

**Abstract:** The William S. Burroughs Newspaper Clippings Collection contains newspaper accounts of incidents from St. Louis author William S. Burroughs's life.

**Collection Size:** 0.01 cubic foot  
(1 folder)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [stlouis@shsmo.org](mailto:stlouis@shsmo.org).

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**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *William S. Burroughs Newspaper Clippings Collection* (S0575); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

**Donor Information:** The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Kenn Thomas on July 11, 1997 (Accession No. SA3267). An addition was made on February 14, 2013, by Kenn Thomas (Accession No. SA4118).

**Processed by:** Processed by AJ Medlock and Isaac Alexander, October 2023

### Biographical Note:

William Seward Burroughs was born on February 5, 1914, to Mortimer Burroughs and Laura (nee Lee) Burroughs in St. Louis City, Missouri. Named after his grandfather, the inventor of the Burroughs Adding Machine, Burroughs lived in St. Louis City's West End throughout his early

life. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Harvard in 1936 and married his first wife, Ilse (nee Herzfeld) Burroughs (1900-1982), a year later in Athens, Greece. Having fled Nazi Germany to escape persecution, Herzfeld asked Burroughs to marry her because her visa was set to expire. At the time, Burroughs identified as homosexual and divorced Ilse in 1946 after the war ended.

Burroughs pursued jobs in various fields throughout his early life, working as a detective, journalist, and pest exterminator, and briefly served in the United States Army during World War II. In 1946, Burroughs met Joan (nee Vollmer) Burroughs (1924-1951), who eventually became his common-in-law wife; together, they had one child, William S. Burroughs III. During a 1951 party in Mexico City, Mexico, Burroughs shot and killed his second wife, claiming it was a ‘William Tell Act,’ in which an individual shoots an apple or other object off someone’s head with a weapon in a display of marksmanship. He later claimed that the gun had accidentally misfired. Burroughs subsequently fled Mexico and returned to the United States. The Mexican authorities charged Burroughs with homicide and gave him a two-year suspended sentence.

After years of battling his addictions to alcohol and narcotics, Burroughs became sober in 1957. He became notable for writing novels focusing on numerous themes, including addiction and magic, in such famous novels as *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Dope Addict* (1955), *Naked Lunch* (1959), *Nova Express* (1964), *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), and the *Place of Dead Roads* (1983). William S. Burroughs died of a heart attack on August 2, 1997, in Lawrence, Kansas.

### Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into one folder.

### Scope and Content Note:

The William S. Burroughs Newspaper Clippings Collection contains newspaper clippings recounting notable moments from William S. Burroughs’ life. The clippings describe his graduation from Harvard, his questioning as a witness in a 1944 murder of a Washington University instructor in New York City, and the 1951 incident where he shot and killed his wife. Also included are an extensive 1965 interview from *The Paris Review* and a 1983 feature written by Kenn Thomas about his life and career as a writer in the Beat Generation. The materials in this collection are arranged chronologically from 1936-1952, 1965, and 1983.

### Container List:

f. 1 Newspaper clippings, 1936-1952, 1965, 1983

### Index:

Index Term	Folder
Authors, American--20 <sup>th</sup> century	1
Beats (Persons)	1
Burroughs, Joan Vollmer, 1924-1951	1
Burroughs, William S., 1914-1997	1

Index Term	Folder
Novelists, American--20 <sup>th</sup> century	1