The Robert A. McGaw Papers
MSS 275
8.5 linear feet

Special Collections and University Archives
Jean and Alexander Heard Library
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee
Robert A. McGaw Papers

Biography

Robert Armistead McGaw served on the Vanderbilt University administration staff for 31 years from 1948 to 1979. He started his career at Vanderbilt as assistant to Chancellor Harvie Branscomb in charge of publications, the first person to fill such a role at the University. In 1964 he was appointed Secretary of the University by Alexander Heard, and held that position until his retirement in 1979.

McGaw was born in Nashville, TN March 25, 1914 to Samuel M. and Bonnie Howard McGaw. A product of Nashville public schools, he graduated from Hume Fogg High School in 1931. Accepted into Vanderbilt University, he only attended for 1 year before he went to work at the Nashville Banner in the sport department under Vanderbilt Alumnus Fred Russell. In 1936 he went work at Methodist Publishing House where he served as magazine editor, advertising manager, and director of personnel and public relations. He stayed at Methodist Publishing House till his move Vanderbilt, with the exception of the leave of absence he took to serve in the United States Marine Corps as a celestial navigator in the Pacific Arena of WWII.

In addition to his job as Secretary of the University, McGaw was also the executive secretary of Alumni relations, director of information and publications, and chief editor and designer of Vanderbilt publications. As a designer McGaw was responsible for creating the Vanderbilt shield, stationary, and diploma. Two significant works he wrote and published for Vanderbilt were Vanderbilt: A Brief History (1973) and The Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History (1978).

Outside of Vanderbilt, McGaw was an active member in Nashville society. He was a charter member of the Metro Historical Commission, a member of the Tennessee Historical Society and the Old Oak Literary Club, for which he wrote many essays and served as secretary for 40 years. He was also a lifelong member of West End Methodist Church. McGaw had one son, John Early McGaw, with his wife Elizabeth Early McGaw. He died of cancer on June 30, 2003 at the age of 89.

Scope and Content Note

The Robert A. McGaw Papers are comprised of four series; Vanderbilt University, Designs, Writings and WWII. The papers follow closely McGaw’s career and are important to anyone interested in the history of the university. Of special note is the Design Series where McGaw assisted in re-designing the symbols of the university in the 1970s.
Box 1
Vanderbilt Papers, A-H

1. Allard, David Preston 1995
2. Annual Announcement, Vanderbilt 1876-83
3. Art, examples of Vanderbilt, undated
4. Athletics 1992-93
6. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” 1977
7. Centennial, Vanderbilt 1973-75
9. Colors, Vanderbilt 1949-97
11. Friends of the Library 1979-97
13. Fugitives & Agrarians Plaques 1969
15. Gary Gore Retirement 1996
16. “Hands Across the Sea” Schools of Nashville 1950

Box 2
Vanderbilt Papers, I-M

1. Inauguration, Vanderbilt 1875
2. Rudolph Kampmeier Department of Medicine 1979-80
5. Letterhead, Vanderbilt 1995
7. Living Endowment 1938-53
8. Map Collection, Catalog & Contributions 1988-98
9. Map Collection, Correspondence 1988
10. Map Collection, Newspaper 1988
11. Map Collection, Correspondence & misc. 1988
12. Robert A. McGaw at Vanderbilt to 1948

Box 3
Vanderbilt Papers, M-S

1. Robert A. McGaw at Vanderbilt 1962-79
3. Mims, Puryear 1954-98
4. Nashville Historic Markers 1973
5. Oak Leaves & Acorns, undated
7. Old Gym becomes Art Gallery 1962
8. Photographic Archive 1980
9. Pictures at Vanderbilt, undated
11. Sarratt Commons Art – Alphabets, undated
12. Madison Sarratt letter to R. Forrestor 1972
13. Seal, Vanderbilt, undated
14. Secretary of the University 1963-79
15. Semi-Centennial of Vanderbilt 1925

Box 4
Vanderbilt Papers, S-T

1. Shield Origins 1954-95
2. Shield, Vanderbilt University, requests for adoption 1952
3. Songs of Vanderbilt 1897-1976
4. Special Collections Correspondence 1967-91
5. Symbols of Vanderbilt, undated
6. Television News Archive 1984

Box 5
Vanderbilt Papers, U-Z

1. “Uncommon Men” Vanderbilt Magazine 1999
2. United Nations Visits Vanderbilt 1976
5. Vanderbilt, Cornelius “In Memoriam” 1877
6. Vanderbilt History & Purpose 1908-79
7. Vanderbilt Miscellaneous, undated
8. Vanderbilt Misc. Printed Pieces, undated
11. Vanderbilt Stadium 1949
12. Vanderbilt Television News Archive, undated
14. West End Amoco 1996-98
15. Witham, C. letters to Vanderbilt President & Robert A. McGaw 1963
16. Wyatt, Joe B. 1983-95
Box 6
Designs, A-E

1. Chronological list of Designs by Robert McGaw 1977
2. Alumni Association 1948-58
3. Apartments for Married Students 1962
4. Art Drama Music 1971
5. Art Gallery, Vanderbilt 1962
6. Astronomy at Vanderbilt 1961
7. Ballet Festival 1964
8. Belle Meade Mansion 1964
10. Benton Chapel Organ 1971
11. The Black Student at Vanderbilt 1970
13. Brazil President Dutra 1949
14. Calendar, Vanderbilt 1957
15. Capitol Dots & Lines 1956-57
16. Campus Maps 1952, 58, 65
17. Carmichael Portrait 1949
18. Centennial 1973-75
19. Chancellor’s Collar 1978
20. Chancellor’s Cup 1963
21. Christianity & Democracy 1950
22. Christmas Cards 1947-76
23. Code of By-Laws 1960
24. Commencement Program 1950
25. Dedication of Science Center 1965
26. Diploma 1973
27. Divinity School Dedication 1960
28. Dyer Observatory 1953
29. Emeritus Faculty Tray 1973
30. Engineering School Information 1949

Box 7
Designs, F-P

1. Faculty Assembly 1962-82
3. The Fugitives 1956 & 69
4. Fulfilling the Conception of a Grand University 1974
5. General Information, Vanderbilt 1963
6. Goodpasture & Morgan 1962
7. Graduate School Almanac 1968
8. Avery Handly Catalogue 1960
9. Alexander Heard Installation 1963
10. Alexander Heard Speeches 1963-70
12. History Department News Letters 1963 & 76
13. Horn, Stanley F. Tennessee’s War 1965
14. Law School Dedication 1963
15. Major Benefactors of Vanderbilt 1961
16. Medicine, School of Rules & Procedures 1967
17. Memorial Gymnasium 1st Sale of Tickets 1952
18. Methodist Publishing House 1941, 48
19. Monday Evening Lectures 1949
20. Nashville Community Playhouse “Eve of St. Mark” 1942
21. Nursing, School of 1949
22. “Occasion Honoring Faculty for Books Published” 1976
23. Phi Beta Kappa certificate 1969
24. Pilcher, Cobb in Memoriam 1949
25. Plaque Underwood 1979
26. “Please Let It Be” 1970
27. President of the United States , JF Kennedy 1963
28. Proceedings Harold Vanderbilt Statue 1965
29. Psychotherapy & Ministry Spring Convocation Religion, School of 1951

Box 8
Designs, R-Z

1. Rand, Frank C. In Memoriam 1950
2. Resolutions by Vanderbilt Board of Trust 1970-76
3. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary 1950
4. Shield Vanderbilt 1964
5. Stadium Expansion 1948
6. State of the University 1952
7. Stationary 1964
8. Stevenson Center 1969
9. Sutherland Prize 1977
10. Television News Index & Abstracts 1972
11. Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association 1968
12. “These Hundred Acres” undated
15. “Vanderbilt Divinity School: a history” 1958
16. “Vanderbilt in France” 1961
17. Vanderbilt Gazette 1962
18. Vanderbilt Miscellany 1950-76
19. “Viewpoint” 1959
20. “Wages, Prices, Profits and Productivity” 1959
22. Wills, Jesse “A Diversity of Interests” 1976
23. Wills, Jesse “Early & Late: Fugitive Poems & Others” 1959
24. Wills, Jesse “Meditations On the American Indian” 1971
25. Wills, Jesse “Nashville & Other Poems” 1973

Box 9
Writings, A-F

1. Alumni Association (about) 1952-55
2. “An Arrowhead Speaker” short story 1931
4. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” 2nd edition 1982-84
5. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” 1st edition 1973
6. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” Manuscript Development 1964-71
7. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” comments 1964-77
8. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” Documentation, undated
9. “A Brief History of Vanderbilt” McGaw Notes, undated
11. “City of Cedars” 1953
12. “Duty” the United Daughters of the Confederacy 1951
14. First American Bank, undated
15. First American Bank report designs, undated
16. First American annual reports 1957-66
17. “Five Objects that Seem to be Perfectly Designed” 1959

Box 10
Writings, G-P

1. Notes on Grassmere’s Place in Nashville History 1986
2. “Harpeth River” 1972
3. “Hume-Fogg Remembered” 1992
4. Jackson, Andrew remarks at grave 1975
5. Johnson, Andrew bust remarks at State Capitol 1979
7. “Methodist Publishing House” 1940
8. Methodist Unification the Carolinas 1939-1998
9. “Minutes of the Past 82 Years” at Old Oak Club 1970
10. “Molecular Biology” 1961
11. Nashville Banner articles 1932-36
12. “Nashville’s First Settlers” 1979
15. “Never Out of Training” from The Target 1937
18. “Peabody & Alfred Leland Crabb” 1977
19. “Perfect Design Violin” 1961-76
20. Plaque-Heiman, Adolphus 1973

Box 11
Writings, R-W

1. Radio Script WSM 1932
4. “The Roman Alphabet” 1950
5. “Semper Fi and All That: A Marine Corps Memoir” 1994
6. “Some Memories of Nashville Boyhood” 1989
7. Stevenson Center 1998
9. Articles from Vanderbilt Alumnus 1949-55
10. Vanderbilt History 1958
11. Vanderbilt Hustler articles 1931-32
12. West End Methodist Church History 1969
13. West End Methodist Church “Needlework Symbols” 1977-79
14. West End Methodist Church Sanctuary Organ 1983
15. Women’s National Book Association Award Ceremony in honor of Mary Stahlman Douglas remarks 1978

Box 12
Writings, “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History”

1. Vanderbilt Campus Architects & Architecture 1945-89
2. Campus Buildings 1957-67
3. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Cataloging & Copyright 1978-80
4. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Changes 1978
5. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Comments 1979-95
6. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Corrections 2nd Printing 1979
7. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Credits & Permissions 1974-79
8. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” 1978-83
10. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Index 1978
11. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Jacket, undated
12. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” The Land 1974-79
15. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Footnotes, undated

Box 13
Writings, “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History”
1. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Promotion 1978-89  
2. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” South Campus 1910-78  
3. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Specification/Typography  
4. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” Urban Renewal 1966  
5. “Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History” A Century of Campus Architecture 1964-77

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| Navigational Charts and Maps of WWII |
| Original pen and ink sketch of the Vanderbilt Mace |

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