

# A Guide to the Billy Edd Wheeler "John Brown" Collection, 1974

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1974



A Collection in University Archives, McConnell Library, Radford University AC 028

University Archives, McConnell Library, Radford University

2013

## History

**Processed by:** Gene Hyde

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Billy Edd Wheeler "John Brown" Collection, 1974

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**Author:** Gene Hyde

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## Profile Description

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## Descriptive Summary

### Collection number

AC 028

### Language

English

### Abstract

Billy Edd Wheeler is a noted playwright and songwriter. He was born in 1932 in Boone County, West Virginia, and attended Warren Wilson College, Berea College, and Yale Drama School. Contains play, correspondence, and commentary originally bound in a metal-tabbed binder. The documents have been removed from the binder and placed in folders. The binder is also included in this collection.

### Creator

Wheeler, Billy Edd

**Extent**

1.0 Linear Feet (1 archival box).

**Repository**

University Archives, McConnell Library, Radford University

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions**

An appointment for research is required. Collection is open for research. No interlibrary loan.

**Use Restrictions**

There are no restrictions.

**Acquisition Information**

Purchased from Lorne Bair Rare Books in March 2013. Originally from the estate of Fred Newbraugh of Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. Newbraugh was Secretary of Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association. Newbraugh's comments about the play are found in Folder 2 of this collection.

**Processing Information**

Processed by Gene Hyde, March 2013

Encoded by Aaron Spelbring, October 2016

**Preferred Citation**

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## Accruals

No accruals are expected.

## Biographical Information

Billy Edd Wheeler is a noted playwright and songwriter. He was born in 1932 in Boone County, West Virginia, and attended Warren Wilson College, Berea College, and Yale Drama School.

Wheeler has written numerous plays, including several long-running outdoor dramas: "Hatfields and McCoys", staged in Beckley, West Virginia; "Young Abe Lincoln," in Lincoln City, Indiana; and "Johnny Appleseed," in Mansfield, Ohio. He is also the author of books on Appalachian humor and several volumes of poetry.

He has had considerable success as a songwriter, and his songs have been covered by the Kingston Trio, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash, Kenny Rogers, O.C. Smith, Hank Snow, Judy Collins, and many others. His best known songs include "Jackson," "Coward of the County," and "Ode to the Little Brown Shack Out Back." Wheeler has also recorded his own songs.

## Scope and Content

Contains play, correspondence, and commentary originally bound in a metal-tabbed binder. The documents have been removed from the binder and placed in folders. The binder is also included in this collection.

Folder 1 contains Act I and a synopsis of Act II of the play "John Brown" by Billy Edd Wheeler, circa 1974. The play appears to be an attempt to capitalize on the success of Wheeler's "The Hatfields and McCoys" with a similar outdoor drama based on the life and career of radical abolitionist John Brown, to be performed outdoors in or near Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, the site of Brown's famous Armory Raid. The manuscript consists of a finished Act I (60pp) and a two-page Synopsis for an as-yet-unwritten Act II, but the play was apparently never completed or produced.

Folder 2 includes minutes and correspondence related to the play. Correspondents include C. Leslie Golliday, President of the Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association; Fred T. Newbraugh, Secretary of the Association; Ewel Cornett, composer and member of the Board of Directors of the WV Historical Drama Association (Beckley); and actor Don Somers, a member of the Reading Committee. Also included are minutes of an October 10, 1974 meeting between the Board of Directors of the Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association and the West Virginia Historical Drama Association of Beckley. The material in this folder provides strong clues as to why the project went unfinished: in the words of Fred Newbraugh, Secretary of

the Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association (a group apparently formed for the sole purpose of passing judgment on this project), "John Brown [is not] the proper subject for a historical drama in this area ... if I can draw an analogy between some modern day John Browns I would look at ...[the] man [who recently] seized the Washington, D. C. Federal Court House and held it several days with hostages ... [or] ... an airplane hijacker."

The remainder of the correspondence describes differences between the Eastern Panhandle group and its sister organization in southern West Virginia, Historical Drama Association of Beckley (which was at this time in its fourth season of producing Wheeler's highly successful *Hatfields and McCoy's*). Correspondence between representatives of the two groups grows increasingly heated, with accusations of usurpage of responsibility and "undemocratic" proceedings, finally culminating in a face-to-face meeting between the two groups in Berkeley Springs, the minutes of which are included.

- Notes culled from a description by Lorne Bair.

## Subject Headings

Wheeler, Billy Edd

Brown, John, 1800-1859

## Contents List

### "John Brown," 1974

**Box 1**

**Folder 1**

#### **Scope and Content**

Book and Lyrics by Billy Edd Wheeler, Music by Ewel Cornett. Act I (60 pages) plus Synopsis of Act II (2 pages)

### Correspondence and other materials 1974

**Box 1**

**Folder 2**

#### **Scope and Content**

19 pages of meeting minutes and correspondence relating to the possible production and staging of the play. Correspondents include C. Leslie Golliday, President of the Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association; Fred T. Newbraugh, Secretary of the Association; Ewel Cornett, composer and member of the Board of Directors of the WV Historical Drama Association (Beckley); and actor Don Somers, a member of the Reading Committee. Also included are minutes of an October 10, 1974 meeting between the Board of Directors of the Eastern Panhandle Historical Drama Association and the West Virginia Historical Drama Association of Beckley.

### Binder 1974

**Box 1**

**Folder 3**