

A Guide to The Papers of Fredson Thayer Bowers, [1595-1902], 1922-1992

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September 18, 2025 Restriction originally placed on a portion of the correspondence is longer in effect and has been lifted.

Descriptive Summary

Accession number

12730-a

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

The Papers of Fredson Thayer Bowers contain ca. 12,000 items.

Repository

Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Open for research use.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

The collection is a consolidation of gift acquisitions received in the Manuscript and Special Collections Departments of the University of Virginia over the period 1950-94 from: Fredson Bowers, the Estate of Fredson T. Bowers, Matthew J. Bruccoli, John Denniston, George W. Williams and Jo-Ann Boydston.

Preferred Citation

The Papers of Fredson Thayer Bowers, Accession #12730-a, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

Biographical/Historical Information

Fredson Thayer Bowers was born in New Haven, Connecticut on April 25, 1905. Although he was the only child of Fredson Eugene Bowers and Hattie May Quigley, he grew up with two half-sisters (the children of his mother's previous marriage) and a stepfather, Charles K. Groesbeck, who his mother married after his father's death in 1911.

Bowers entered Brown University at age 16 after graduating from New Haven General High School in 1921. His study interests were in English literature and music, both of which he pursued with vigor. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and participated in a variety of literary, music and student activity clubs. He edited the school newspaper and served on the boards of student publications. He played the Hawaiian guitar, the saxophone and led a jazz band. On November 11, 1924, at age 19, while still an undergraduate, he married Hyacinth Adeline Sutphin, a Smith College graduate and member of a New York Social Register family.

Bowers graduated from Brown in 1925 and spent the next nine years at Harvard doing graduate study and raising a family. A son, Fredson, was born in 1927, a daughter, Joan, in 1931, and twin sons, Peter and Stephen, in 1934. Bowers taught English, tutored in modern languages and developed a passion for breeding, showing, judging and writing about Irish wolfhounds. He earned his Ph.D in February, 1934 and the next year went to England on scholarship.

In 1936, following an episode of marital problems that had led to a divorce, Bowers took an instructorship at Princeton. He taught freshman English and did editing work on Thomas Dekker until he accepted an offer from Dean James Southall Wilson to serve as acting assistant professor at the University of Virginia, which remained his home for the rest of his life. At the University of Virginia, Bowers taught English along with 17th and 18th century novels and a course in introductory bibliography. In 1942, he married Nancy Hale, and relocated with her to wartime Washington, D.C. where he served as a Naval Commander supervising the deciphering of enemy codes.

Bowers' impressive scholarship during his early years in Charlottesville resulted in his recognition as a preeminent authority of bibliographical analysis. His ideas and methods broke new ground and challenged established principles and methods in descriptive bibliography and textual criticism. In this period, he inaugurated the publication of *Studies in Bibliography* which he personally edited for more than 40 years and developed into a journal of worldwide repute. In 1949, he published *Principles of Bibliographical Description*, which became and remains a major resource in the history of bibliography. His prestigious lectures and the voluminous output of his published essays and research together with his activities on and leadership of professional associations marked him as a dynamic scholar in his field. As a teacher of boundless energy and as an active and innovative chairman and dean, Bowers built the English department at the University of Virginia into one of the best in the United States. Bowers still found time to teach summer courses at the University of Chicago and to pursue his hobbies: writing music reviews each week for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and publishing articles about his beloved wolfhounds and his philatelic interests.

During his later career years, Bowers turned his scholarship skills in textual criticism to editing the works of post-medieval writers. He published dozens of edited volumes (60 between 1960 and his death) creating distinct expressions of technique and methodology that became recognized among many as the "Bowers school of editing." He continued producing large numbers of essays, lectures and reviews beyond his retirement in 1975.

Throughout his notable career, Bowers was the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions. Among the many were honorary degrees from Clark and Brown Universities and the University of Chicago. He received the Gold Medal of the Bibliographical Society in London and his own University of Virginia recognized his many achievements with its highest honor, the Thomas Jefferson Award as well as two endowed chairs, the Alumni Professorship of English (1957-68) and the Linden Kent Memorial Professorship (1968-75, 1975-91 (Emeritus)). Bowers also held appointments to the Fulbright, Guggenheim, Rosenbach, Woodrow Wilson National and the Academy of Arts and Sciences fellowships. In 1974, Bowers was honored by his former Virginia and Chicago students at a retirement dinner and in 1985, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, his colleagues organized an international conference on bibliography and editing in his name at the University of Virginia.

Nancy Hale, whose health had been failing for several years, died in 1988 and Bowers, who had also begun suffering with major health problems, died a few years later on April 11, 1991, at age 86. Following cremation, his ashes were buried next to the grave of Nancy Hale at Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain, Boston.

Scope and Content Information

The Papers of Fredson Thayer Bowers contain ca. 12,000 items (45 shelf feet) that span the years 1595-1992, with the bulk concentrated in the period 1922-1992. The items relating to pre-twentieth century dates consist primarily of photo and electrostatic copies (EC's) of printed literary texts that Bowers used in his editing work. Among these, the largest portion are copies of Stephen Crane stories that appeared in newspapers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Arrangement

Processing Information

The original classification numbers (listed below) of all previous acquisitions in this collection have been redesignated under a single consolidated classification number: 12730-a

Manuscript numbers: 3491; 5164; 5219; 5219-a; 5691,-a-ac,-ae,-ag-ai,-ak-al; 10204-q

Record Group numbers: RG-21/30.771 (.772) (.781) (.801) (.811) (.871) (.872) (.881-.884) (.891) (.901) (.902) (.911-.913) (.921) (.922) (.924) (.941) (.951) (.971)

Organization

Group I (Correspondence) contains letters, notes and letter drafts. The arrangement, in keeping with Bowers' filing order, lists a portion of the correspondence chronologically by date and another portion, alphabetically by the correspondent's name. The access restriction originally placed by the donor, Matthew J. Brucoli, on a section of correspondence has been lifted.

Group II (Writings), comprising almost 90% of the collection, includes material consisting of copy texts, manuscripts, proofs, background research and related correspondence that Bowers used in the development of his published works. This large volume of material has also been arranged in format and chronology similar to that employed by Bowers in listing his writings. An updated version of that listing with the totality of Bowers' publications, titled, "Fredson Thayer Bowers: A Checklist and Chronology," by Martin C. Battestin may be found in *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 46, (1993) 155- 186.

Group III (Academic and Personal), the remainder of the collection, contains personal memorabilia and material relating to Bowers' academic activities. The arrangement of the Bowers papers mirrors both the breadth of his writing and the incisiveness of his analytical and descriptive methodologies. The material is replete with autograph comments, notations and emendations. Many of the manuscripts and proofs show autograph editing that served as new text for revised publication of the originals. The correspondence with those with whom Bowers worked on his many projects, particularly his former student and later assistant and collaborator, Matthew J. Brucoli, gives a penetrating insight into the detailed and often laborious task of critical bibliographical editing.

Items of special interest include: A bound typescript of Bowers' 1928 Harvard course-thesis; an autograph manuscript of Walter Wilson Greg's seminal essay, "The Rationale of Copy-Text;" Warren Chappell illustrated letters; John Ciadi and Elder Olson poetry; Shakespeare lecture notes of James Southall Wilson; the manuscript and typescript of Bowers' unpublished lecture, "The Ideal Record Collector" and an unpublished checklist (compiled by John Denniston) that catalogues the almost 1200 classical music reviews that Bowers wrote for the Richmond Times-Dispatch between 1939-67.

Microfilm and video recordings have been transferred to the appropriate custodial sections of the University

of Virginia Special Collections Department where they are identified as part of these papers under the following location indicators:

microfilm of Stephen Crane's original manuscripts and story texts and a thesis on his poetry (M-1362-1364); microfilm of the poem, "The Conceited Pedlar," and the play, "The Queene of Corsica," by Thomas Randolph (M-1680); microfilm of articles by Bowers concerning Thomas Dekker's writings, particularly, "Old Fortunatus," and on "Variant readings in some early English plays." (M-1682); microfilm of the dramatized version of Andrea Guarna's "Bellum Grammaticale" (M-1938); videorecordings in the Eminent Scholar/Teachers: Shakespeare Video Series of Bowers' lectures, "Death in Victory: Shakespeare's Tragic Reconciliations" and "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge" (VC-33, 34).

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Group I: Correspondence

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1980-82

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1986-87

1988-90, n.d.

Named:

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Scope and Content

Barrett, Clifton Waller, 1955

Barrol, J. Leeds, 1971-75

Blayney, Peter W., 1974

Boydston, Jo-Ann, 1965-90, n.d. (3 folders)

Brodsky, Louis D., 1978-89, n.d.

Bruccoli, Matthew J., 1971-90, n.d.

Chappell, Warren (with illustrations), 1976-87

Ciardi, John (with poetry) 1960

Box 3

Scope and Content

Clark, Leonard, 1953

Cook, Don L. 1979-81, n.d.

Flannagan, Roy, 1989

Gainesbarry, J., 1971

Greetham, David C., 1986-90, n.d.

Greg, Walter Wilson, 1953

Grier, Philip M., 1974-77
Hamblin, Robert W., 1978-80
Howard-Hill, Trevor H., 1957-89
King, Robert T., 1971-75
Kolve, V.A., 1980
Kvarnes, Robert G., 1977
Levin, Harry Tuchman, 1982
Miscellaneous correspondence (other than bowers), 1967-71
Reiman, Donald H., 1983-85
Rosowski, Susan J., 1983-84
Rowse, A. Leslie, 1973-85
Shillingsburg, Peter, 1987-88
Tanselle, G. Thomas, 1976-90, n.d.
Turner, Robert, 1959-90
Vander Meulen, David L., 1984-88
Williams, George W., 1971-89, n.d.

General 1961-78

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Scope and Content

Named: Bowers, Nancy Hale (with Brucoli), 1959-84

Brucoli, Matthew J. (with Fredson Thayer Bowers), 1963-87, n.d. (6 folders) (with others), 1967-76

Group II: Writings

Books (Manuscript Material and Proofs)

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Manuscript material n.d.

Box 5

Textual and Literary Criticism 1959

Box 5

Manuscript material ca.1957-59

Box 5

Proofs 1957-59

Box 5

**Hamlet as Minister and Scourge and Other Studies in Shakespeare and Milton
1989**

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Manuscript material 1980-89, n.d.

Box 6

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Box 6

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The Bibliographical Way 1959

Box 6

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Box 6

Proofs 1959

Box 6

Editions (Copy Texts, Manuscript Material, Proofs, Background)

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The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker 1953-1961

Box 7

Copy texts: Vol. II 1604-08, n.d.

Box 7

Manuscript material: Vol. III 1954

Box 7

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Vol. IV 1951-59, n.d.

Box 8

Extent (3 folders)

Proofs: Vol. III, 1954

Box 8

Extent (2 folders)

Vol. IV 1960

Box 8

Background: Related correspondence 1955-59, n.d.

Box 8

The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne 1962-1988

Box 9

Copy texts: Vol. IV ca. 1860, n.d.

Box 9

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Box 10

Vol. III 1962-63, n.d.

Box 10

Vol. IV 1962-65, n.d.

Box 10

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The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon 1966-[].

Box 12

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Vol. IV n.d.

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Box 21

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Box 29

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Extent (6-7 of 7 folders)

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Box 44

Extent (1-4 of 10 folders)

Box 45

Extent (5-10 of 10 folders)

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The Works of William James 1975-1988.

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Box 77

Leon Kroll: A Spoken Memoir, with Nancy Hale 1983

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Background: Related correspondence 1969, 1980

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**"Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists," Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol 58
1987**

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The Cambridge Edition of the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald 1991- .

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Text analyses: The Beautiful and the Damned 1988-89

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"Herbert's Sequential Imagery: 'The Temper'" n.d.

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"What Shakespeare Wrote" n.d.

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"Hal and Francis in King Henry IV, Part I" n.d.

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"Death in Victory: Shakespeare's Tragic Reconciliations" n.d.

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"Old Wine in New Bottles: Problems of Machine Printing" n.d.

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"Practical Texts and Definitive Editions" 1965-68, n.d.

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"Authority, Copy, and Transmission in Shakespeare's Texts" n.d.

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Box 91

Extent (3 of 3 folders)

Manuscripts and proofs 1968, n.d.

Box 91

King Henry IV, Part II

Box 91

Copy texts and proofs 1600, n.d.

Box 91

King Henry V

Box 91

Copy texts and related correspondence 1981, n.d.

Box 91

King Lear

Box 91

Copy texts n.d.

Box 91

Manuscript material 1984, n.d.

Box 91

King Richard II

Box 92

Copy texts n.d.

Box 92

Manuscript material 1972-73, n.d.

Box 92

Extent (2 folders)

King Richard III

Box 92

Manuscript material 1959, n.d.

Box 92

Love's Labor's Lost

Box 92

Copy texts and manuscript material n.d.

Box 92

Measure for Measure

Box 93

Copy texts 1951, n.d.

Box 93

Extent (2 folders)

Manuscript material n.d.

Box 93

Extent (1 of 3 folders)

Box 94

Extent (4 of 4 folders)

Proofs n.d.

Box 94

The Merchant of Venice

Box 94

Copy texts and manuscript material n.d.

Box 94

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Box 94

Copy texts n.d.

Box 94

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Box 94

Copy texts, manuscript material and proofs n.d.

Box 94

Othello

Box 94

Copy texts n.d.

Box 94

Manuscript material 1959

Box 94

Romeo and Juliet

Box 95

Copy texts and manuscript material 1609, n.d.

Box 95

The Taming of the Shrew

Box 95

Copy texts 1972, n.d.

Box 95

The Tempest

Box 95

Copy texts 1972, n.d.

Box 95

Titus Andronicus

Box 95

Copy texts manuscript material 1611, n.d.

Box 95

Tragedy of Coriolanus

Box 95

Copy texts and proofs n.d.

Box 95

Troilus and Cressida

Box 96

Copy texts 1609-23, n.d.

Box 96

Extent (1-4 of 6 folders)

Box 97

Extent (5-6 of 6 folders)

Manuscript material n.d.

Box 97

Twelfth Night

Box 97

Manuscript material and related correspondence 1972, n.d.

Box 97

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Box 97

Copy texts n.d.

Box 97

Manuscript material and proofs 1972, n.d.

Box 97

Non-academic Writings (Print Material and Manuscripts)

Box 97

Published articles (EC's):

as an Undergraduate 1923-25

Box 97

on Dogs 1934-76

Box 97

on Stamps 1956-58

Box 97

Unpublished:

Box 97

Extent (AMs and Ts)

"The Ideal Record Collector" 1961

Box 97

Fredson Thayer Bowers's music reviews of classical records 1939-67

Box 97

Extent (checklist)

Group III: Academic and Personal

Articles and off-prints: on bibliography 1949-90, n.d.

Box 98

Extent (6 folders)

on Bowers' writings 1967-88, n.d.

Box 99

on Shakespeare 1940-89, n.d.

Box 99

Extent (5 folders)

Honors:

Box 100

Clark University, Doctor of Letters Degree 1970

Box 100

Extent (EC)

University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson Award 1971

Box 100

Extent (EC)

University of Chicago, Doctor of Humane Letters Degree 1973

Box 100

Extent (with photo)

University of Virginia, career celebration keepsake 1974

Box 100

Eightieth-birthday conference tributes 1985

Box 100

Extent (Tss)

Julian P.Boyd Award, Association for Documentary Editing 1986

Box 100

Memorabilia:

Box 100

Course thesis (Ts), "The Authorship of a Hundreth Sundrie Flowres" 1928

Box 100

Memorial Tributes:

Box 100

Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand 1991

Box 100

Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook 1991

Box 100

Documentary Editing, "In Memorium" by Jo-Ann Boydston, September, 1991

Box 100

"Reminiscences and Personal Recollections" by Fredson T.Bowers, Jr. 1991

Box 100

Date and address books, miscellaneous cards and ID's 1964-90, n.d.

Box 101

Passports 1939-75

Box 101

Wine list, Villa Serbelloni 1969

Box 101

Yearbooks, The Irish Wolfhound Club of America 1927-65

Box 101

Miscellany:

Box 102

Cancelled personal checks 1976

Box 102

Loose and unidentified manuscript material 1976, 1989, n.d.

Box 102

Extent (5 folders)

Miscellaneous printed material 1968-88, n.d.

Box 103

Photographs and prints 1971, n.d.

Box 103

Professional association material 1967-82, n.d.

Box 103

Extent (2 folders)

Publication contracts 1963-84, n.d.

Box 103

Newsclippings: 1954-88 n.d.

Box 103

Writings by other authors:

Box 103

"Life Cycle of the Snowman," by Rudy Shackleford 1969-74

Box 103

"Poems for Fred and Nancy," by Elder Olson 1957, n.d.

Box 103

"The Rationale of Copy-Text," by W.W. Greg (with correspondence) 1948-50, n.d.

Box 103

"Infamous Woman: The Life of George Sand," by Joseph Barry 1976

Box 104

Extent (bound proof)

"Now and Another Time," by Shelby Hearon 1976

Box 104

Extent (bound proof)

"The Spectator Bird," by Wallace Stegner 1976

Box 104

Extent (bound proof)

"A Vein of Riches," by John Knowles 1978

Box 104

Extent (bound proof)

"The Woman Said Yes," by Jessamyn West 1976

Box 104

Extent (bound proof)

"Old Powder Man," by Joan Williams 1966

Box 104

Extent (page proof):

Autograph notes of James Southall Wilson on Shakespeare 1938-ca. 1954, n.d.

Box 104

Teaching file:

Box 105

Reference card index on general bibliography n.d.

Box 105

(on variants in Shakespeare) n.d.

Box 106

Shakespeare quiz Q & A's 1939-54, n.d.

Box 107

Extent (2 folders)

Student analyses of Shakespeare 1963-73, n.d.

Box 107

Extent (4 folders)

Student dissertations 1973-79

Box 107

Extent (1 of 3 folders)

(2-3 of 3 folders)

Box 108

Textbooks with Fredson Thayer Bowers' notes and marginalia 1933-41

Box 108

Extent Oversize

Copy Texts: Works of Christopher Marlowe, Vol. II 1598, 1622

Box 108

Extent (2 folders)

Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. III 1894-99

Box 108

Extent (5 folders)

Proof: Hamlet as Minister and Scourge 1989

Box 108

Extent (2 folders)

Poster: Fredson Thayer Bowers' lecture, Ohio State University 1968

Box 108