

**The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary,
Columbia University in the City of New York**

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Donald Laverne Benedict Papers, 1939-2006



Portrait of Donald Laverne Benedict, circa 1960s. UTS: Donald Laverne Benedict Papers 1939-2006, series 4, box 1, folder 2. The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Rebecca Nieto, January 2017

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Summary Information

Creator: Donald Laverne Benedict, 1917-2008
Title: Donald Laverne Benedict Papers, 1939-2006
Inclusive dates: 1939-2006
Bulk dates: 1990-2002
Abstract: UTS B.D. 1948; conscientious objector in WWII; community and racial justice activist; founder, East Harlem Protestant Parish; ordained minister in the United Church of Christ; Executive Director of the Community Renewal Society; Co-founder, Protestants for the Common Good. Materials consist of correspondence, administrative materials; personal writings and drafts of publications; autobiographical material; ephemera; photographs.
Size: 15 boxes, 7 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway

New York, NY 10027

Email: burkespecial@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance:** The Donald Laverne Benedict Papers were donated by Ann C. Benedict in 2010. This collection was processed as part of a large group of material that was organized in 2016/2017 during an archival processing grant funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkespecial@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying. Note: Materials in Series 2, Box 5 include sensitive case study documentation, correspondence, and personal information relating to individual people who were or are incarcerated; these materials are inaccessible for research, denoted by the **[Restricted]** designation in the contents listing.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, UTS: Donald Laverne Benedict Papers 1939-2006, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Reverend Donald (“Don”) Laverne Benedict was a leading advocate and social justice activist within the United Church of Christ, and a transformative leader in urban ministries in New York and Chicago over a long and prolific career.

Reverend Benedict was born on September 12, 1917 in Detroit, Michigan. Much of Reverend Benedict’s writing on his childhood hinges on quotidian events like sleigh riding with his father over Ohio winters, losing fights at sleepaway camp, and nearly “committing murder” during his first experience driving a car. These moments were punctuated by telling firsthand observations of racial and class relations in the predominately working and lower middle-class Midwestern contexts of his youth, cities like Detroit, Tecumseh, Canton, and Youngstown. These experiences informed Benedict’s early interest in what he would like refer to as a lifelong “pilgrimage in action and reflection” in his spiritual and community activities.

Reverend Benedict would stay in Michigan for his undergraduate work, earning his Bachelor’s degree in Urban Sociology from Albion College in 1939 before immediately going on to pursue graduate studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York. His graduate education was interrupted when Benedict was arrested among a group of conscientious objectors to the draft in 1940, including classmates David Dellinger and George Houser. Benedict was sentenced to two terms at Danbury Correctional Facility beginning in 1940. As Benedict recounts in his narrative “Jail to Army”: “I finally decided after two weeks in solitary that it made a difference who won the war. I called the Warden and told him I was ready to register for the draft”.

Benedict's enlistment was followed by delayed court proceedings, and while on parole he briefly re-entered the ministerial community as an interim pastor at a Detroit Methodist Church (1941-1942) even enrolled in courses at Chicago Theological Seminary while working as an orderly at a nearby hospital (1944). On the advice of a mentor, Benedict soon decided to enlist in the Air Force, serving in Guam and Iwo Gima before the end of the war in 1945. While serving in the Pacific, Benedict was eventually ranked First Sergeant in the 29th division, described himself as committing himself to the Veterans Affairs Committee and softball team, respectively, and was honorably discharged in 1946. Following Benedict's military service, he was readmitted to Union, graduating with a Doctorate of Ministry in 1948 with a focus in Ethics and Society.

The immediate postwar years marked the formal beginning of Reverend Benedict's work in urban ministry. In 1947, Benedict, along with his wife Ann and fellow Union alumni and community members – notably Archie Hargraves and Bill Webber – founded the East Harlem Protestant Parish, a singular interdenominational ministry that organized to foster community life and ecumenical ministry in socioeconomically marginalized communities in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York City. In 1948, Reverend Benedict was ordained in the United Church of Christ. Reverend Benedict's connections to his fellow EHPP founders guided much of his beyond New York, including founding the West Side Organization with Archie Hargraves in 1952, followed by Benedict's bid for a seat on the New York City Council in 1953.

The Benedicts eventually set their sights on ministerial work outside New York, first in northeastern Ohio in the mid-1950s when they were actively involved in forming the Inner City Protestant Parish in Cleveland. By 1960, the couple had also worked to reestablish the First Congregational Church in Chicago, which was renamed Saint Paul's UCC and would be a congregation that would stay very close to the Benedicts throughout their lives. The couple would settle into Chicago both personally and professionally, as this city would become the context for the Benedicts' lifelong activism and ministry.

Having observed the Detroit Race Riots in his twenties, and firsthand the extremes of the Second World War and solitary confinement, Reverend Benedict was positioned early on to fold social justice into his spiritual life. On settling in Chicago in the early 60s, Benedict undertook a number of initiatives and co-founded several significant organizations, often collaborating with Ann and fellow ministers with similar politics. Even after his formal retirement in 1982, Reverend Benedict was involved with a remarkable number of community organizations. Most, if not all, of these initiatives were created with the intention to cooperate with historically and systematically marginalized communities using education and empowering programs and practices guided by social justice. Some of Reverend Benedict's positions in these organizations include:

Executive Director, the Community Renewal Society, 1960-1982

National Director of the Urban Emphasis Program of the United Church of Christ, 1964-1965

President, Church Federation of Greater Chicago

Co-Founder, Urban Training Center for Christian Mission

Founder, Urban Academy in Chicago

Co-Founder, *The Chicago Reporter*

Agenda Committee, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Movement in Chicago

In retirement [abridged]:

Volunteer Pastor, Peoples Church, 1982-1984

Chairman, Ethics Task Force under Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, 1984-1986

Executive Director, Clergy and Laity Concerned Anti-Racism Institute, 1986-1989

Co-Founder, Protestants for the Common Good (1995)

Co-Founder, Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago (1998)

Particular areas of interest to Reverend Benedict were systemic violence perpetrated on communities of color, specifically black men and women, justice for victims of police brutality, reentry and rehabilitation activism, urban housing, education reform, post-9/11 legislation, job sharing and advocacy for the unemployed, and systematic roots of the prison industrial complex. All these commitments surface in the papers compiled in this collection through administrative records, personal correspondence, recollections and autobiographical writings, ephemera and research files.

In addition to his many community ties, Reverend Benedict published a number of editorials and articles in periodicals such as *Christian Century* and *Commerce and Renewal*, gave interviews and oral histories, and published the autobiography, *Born Again Radical*, with Pilgrim Press in 1982.

Reverend Benedict received two honorary degrees: a Doctorate of Divinity honoris causa from Albion College in 1966, and a L.H.D. honoris causa from Elmhurst College in 1969. Benedict was also honored with the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Union Theological Seminary in 1996. Following a rich and progressive career in his communities and his parishes, Reverend Benedict died in Rutland, Vermont on September 4, 2008 at ninety years old.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Don Benedict Papers consist mainly of textual materials including reports and administrative materials (most annotated) from organizations that Reverend Benedict either helped found or was a driving member of. Notably, many of the materials in this collection are autobiographical in nature, including oral history transcripts, memoir notes and working drafts and manuscripts of Benedict's memoirs. Also included here is ample correspondence, research and casework materials that will be of value to researchers interested in examining Benedict's ethics and perspective in his politics and activism, and how these convictions informed his ministry. The collection is divided into series that demonstrate the interwoven nature of Benedict's community social justice work to his ministry with the United Church of Christ.

The collection is organized in 4 series:

- **Series 1: Ministry and Community Social Justice, 1960-2006 (7 boxes, 3.5 lin. ft.)**
This series consists entirely of textual materials, most arranged by organizations with which Reverend Benedict was involved.

- **Series 2: Casework and Research, 1965-2006 (5 boxes, 2.25 lin. ft.)**
Materials are related to specific areas of interest organized by subject, as well as restricted materials pertaining to people who were incarcerated and whose cases Reverend Benedict, the JCGC and PCG were actively involved with.
- **Series 3: Writings, 1961-2006 (2 boxes, 1 lin. ft.)**
Series 3: Writings consist both of personal, unpublished and drafts of Benedict's writings, including collated and paginated drafts and notes toward *Born Again Radical*.
- **Series 4: Personal, 1939-2006 (1 box, 0.25 lin. ft.)**
These materials consist of photographs, correspondence, ordination materials, versions of Reverend Benedict's curriculum vitae (CV), Bachelors diploma from Albion College, and commemorative certificates.

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Any items in an advanced state of deterioration were placed in Mylar envelopes.

Further Sources

Much biographical information on Reverend Benedict can be found in his own personal writings and recollections of his life events in Series 3 and 4 of this collection.

The [East Harlem Protestant Parish Papers](#) at the Burke Archives offer comprehensive archival documentation surrounding the Parish, its founders, constituents, and effect on the rich East Harlem Community throughout the life of the organization.

The [Alumni Directory of the Union Theological Seminary](#) contains biographical information on Reverend Benedict's ecumenical work and affiliation to Union as a 1948 graduate.

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Series 1: Ministry and Community Social Justice, 1960-2006

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1	1	2	Chicago Defender Summit to Improve Chicago's Criminal Justice System, 2000
1	1	3	Chicago Ecumenical Study Trip to Southern Africa (CESTSA) – Peoples' Republic of Mozambique Strategy and Program for Economic Rehabilitation, 1989-1992
1	1	4	CESTSA – Ephemera and Planning, 1990-1991
1	1	5	CESTSA – Correspondence and Meeting Notes, 1991
1	1	6	CESTSA – Programs and Flyers, 1991
1	1	7	Chicago Historical Society – Correspondence, 2000
1	1	8	Chicago Metro Ethics Coalition, 1998
1	1	9	Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) Course – Production and Distribution of Electric Power, 1988
1	1	10	CTS Alumni Association Speech – Christian Discipleship in the 21 st Century, 1997
1	1	11	CTS – Grant Proposal, 200?
1	1	12	Chicago Urban League – Education Sabbath Committee, 1995
1	1	13-14	Christian Council on Urban Affairs – Community-Police Relations, 1999 2000
1	1	15	Community Renewal Society (CRS) – Philosophy, 1963
1	1	16	CRS Board Retreats and Meeting Agendas, 1969-1970
1	1	17	CRS – Board Workshop on Critical Choices, 1975
1	1	18	CRS – Reflections on the Goals and Strategies of the CRS (Speech), 1976
1	1	19	CRS Annual Dinner (Speech), 1977
1	1	20	CRS Correspondence and Clippings, 1978-2000
1	1	21	Chicago Reader Profile on CRS and Don Benedict, 1979
1	1	22	CRS – Speeches [1984]
1	1	23	CRS/PCG – Notes and Draft Statement on Affirmative Action, 1995-2006
1	1	24	CRS – Correspondence, 1997-2008
1	1	25	CRS – Steering Committee of JCGC, 2000
1	2	1	CRS – Correspondence Regarding Archie Hargraves Fund, 2002
1	2	2	CRS – Life in Covenant with Illinois Conference of the UCC, 2003
1	2	3	CRS – Investigation re: Black Strategy Center, Undated
1	2	4	East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP) – 50 th Anniversary, 1998
1	2	5	EHPP – Don Benedict Reflections, 1998
1	2	6	EHPP – 50 th Anniversary Reflections, 1998
1	2	7	Group Ministry Administrative Report at Youngers, 1959
1	2	8-9	Illinois Conference UCC, 1974-2005
1	2	10	Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago (JCGC) – History, 1995-2001

Series 1: Ministry and Community Social Justice, 1960-2006

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1	2	15	JCGC – Correspondence, Petitions and Event Planning, 2000-2005
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1	2	20	JCGC – Funding Proposal (Operations and Planning), 2000
1	2	21	JCGC/Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, 2001
1	2	22	JCGC – First Defense Legal Aid Memos Regarding Chicago Police, 2001
1	2	23	JCGC – Municipal Codes and Police Violence, 2002
1	3	1	JCGC – Police Accountability Actions and Reforms, 2002
1	3	2	JCGC – Spring Mobilization, 2002
1	3	3	JCGC – Summary of Police Misconduct Allegations, 2002
1	3	4	JCGC – Correspondence, 2004-2005
1	3	5	JCGC – A Suggestion for the Donors Forum, Undated
1	3	6	Metropolitan Mission – Overview, Undated
1	3	7	Protestants for the Common Good (PCG) – Joyce and MacArthur Foundation Grants (Summaries) [1994-1995]
1	3	8	PCG – Convention Planning, 1995
1	3	9	DLB Remarks at PCG Steering Committee and Advisory Council – The Task Ahead, 1995
1	3	10	PCG Press, 1995
1	3	11	PCG Steering Committee Agenda and Minutes, 1995
1	3	12	PCG Media Strategy, 1995
1	3	13	PCG Correspondence, 1995-2006
1	3	14-21	PCG Board of Directors and Committee Minutes, 1995-2004
1	4	1	PCG Board of Directors and Planning, 2005-2006
1	4	2	PCG Methodist Temple Meeting [1996]
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1	4	7	Writings and Calls to Action, 1999-2000
1	4	8	PCG/Chicago Tribute Correspondence, 2000
1	4	9	PCG Meeting Minutes, 2000
1	4	10	PCG/Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago, 2000-2006
1	4	11	PCG Board – UCC Program, 2004-2005
1	4	12	PCG – Pamphlets and 5 th Anniversary, 2001-2004
1	4	13	Relationship of PCG to Critical Political Issues, 2001
1	4	14	PCG – Don Benedict Statement on Chicago Police/Illinois Anti-Terrorism Act, 2001
1	4	15	PCG Membership and Affiliation, 2002
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Series 1: Ministry and Community Social Justice, 1960-2006

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1	4	22	PCG Clergy Workshop and Luncheon – Whose God? The Influence of Faith-Based Advocacy in Springfield, 2006
1	5	1	PCG Funding and Clippings, 2006
1	5	2	PCG – Meetings and Clippings, 2006
1	5	3	PCG – Articles of Incorporation [Draft], Undated
1	5	4	PCG – Officer List and Steering Committee, Undated
1	5	5	PCG – Organization Structure and Operating Plan [Working Draft], Undated
1	5	6	St. Pauls UCC – Political Reflection Task Force (Agendas), 1995
1	5	7	St. Pauls UCC – Civic Committee Press Conference, 1995
1	5	8	St. Pauls UCC – Wider Church Relations Committee, 1995
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1	5	18	Ann [Benedict] – UCC and Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing, 2002
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1	5	22	WSO Speeches, 1973
1	5	23	WSO Correspondence and Funding, 1984
1	5	24	WSO Gifts to Chicago Historical Society, 2000-2004
1	5	25	WSO Correspondence and Research for Book, 2002
1	5	26	WSO – Archie Hargraves Fund, 2002
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1	6	1	Don Benedict Fund Appeal, 1995
1	6	2	Benedict-Lovell Event Honorary Committee, 2001
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1	6	4-6	Campaign for City Alderman (Chicago), 1987
1	6	7	Consultation on Criminal Justice – Meeting Contacts and Chicago Police Materials, 1999-2001
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Series 1: Ministry and Community Social Justice, 1960-2006

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1	6	13	Program Analysis in Relation to Goals [198?]
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1	7	1	Liberating the Oppressed (Wilmette), 1973
1	7	2	Charge from the Community (Park Manor), 1977
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1	7	7	Rebel With a Cause, 1977
1	7	8	The Right to Employment (Napperville), 1977
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1	7	15	The Legacy of Two Black Men in a White City (Nazareth UCC), 1988
1	7	16	Calling for the Common Good, 1994
1	7	17	Commitment Without Fanaticism (SW Vermont UCC), 1996
1	7	18	St. Pauls UCC – Sermons, 1996
1	7	19	The Nurture and Care of a Pastor [199?]
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1	7	21	The Arrogance of Power, Undated
1	7	22	The Future of the City, Undated
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2	1	2	Al Qaeda, 2001
2	1	3	A Broken System at Work – Preliminary Report on the Death Penalty in Illinois [1999]
2	1	4	Campaign Materials on Indeterminate Sentences, 2003
2	1	5	Chicago City Council – Amendments to Ordinances, 1987
2	1	6	City of Chicago Police Board – Meeting Agendas and Minutes, 1998
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2	1	8	Chicago Police Department, 1999-2001
2	1	9	Chicago Sun-Times Clippings, 1986
2	1	10-11	Chittenden School District Trial [Vermont], 1996-1998
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Series 2: Casework and Research, 1965-2006

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2	1	19	Employment Research and Development Institute, 1994
2	1	20	Ethics Task Force – Clippings, 1966
2	1	21	Ex-Offenders Bill, 2003-2004
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2	2	3	Illinois Community Chaplains Council – Memo, 200?
2	2	4	[Restricted material, see series 2 box 5]
2	2	5	Illinois Death Penalty, 2002
2	2	6	Illinois Department of Corrections – Memos and Correspondence, 2000.
2	2	7	Illinois Department of Corrections, 2002
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2	2	9	Justice Department and Civil Rights – Cases, 2000
2	2	10	Mayor Daley [Response], 2001
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2	2	12	Menard Correctional Center – Correspondence and Notes, 2000
2	2	13	Mumia Abu Jamal, 2000
2	2	14	Nat Piggee/Walter Wilcox Correspondence, 2002
2	2	15	Palestine, 2003
2	2	16	Police and Business [Notes], 200?
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2	2	18	Prison Advocacy – For Action in Togetherness Hold Fast (F.A.I.T.H.), 2000
2	2	19	Prospect Heights UCC/Clippings on Compassion, 1982-1983
2	2	20	Public Education and Welfare in Illinois, 1993-1995
2	2	21	Religious Right, 2001
2	2	22	Research Notes, Undated
2	2	23	Reverend John H. Crawford, 2001
2	2	24	Riots, 1965-1966
2	3	1	Sorrento Discussion on Democratic Discourse, 1994
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2	3	3	Tainted Justice – A Struggling Mom, and Entombed Son and a Supermax Prison, 2001
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3	1	3	EHPP Beginnings Part I – God's Abandoned Children [196?-198?]
3	1	4	Chapter 5 Draft [handwritten] – Housing [196?]
3	1	5	Chapter Drafts – Chicago Business Industrial Projects/ Chicago City Missionary Society, 198?-200?
3	1	6	Community Renewal Society Memoir – Partial Draft [198?-200?]
3	1	7	Early Years – Interview with Dr. Coffin/Late Albion/Early UTS, 199?
3	1	8	Chapter 1 Draft – East Harlem, 199?-200?
3	1	9	Autobiography Drafts – pp.319-344 with gaps [199?-200?]
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3	1	13	Chapter Two – The Role and Function of the Community Renewal Society Draft, Undated
3	1	14	Chapter Three – Division of Bridge Building [Community Renewal Society], Undated
3	1	15	Chapter Three – Good Fences Make Good Neighbors?, Undated
3	1	16	Chapter Five – Division of Resources in Housing [Community Renewal Society], Undated
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Series 3: Writings, 1961-2006

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3	2	6	Chicago Metro Ethics Coalition – Proposed Public Hearing on Police Brutality [Draft], 1998
3	2	7	The Christian and Criminal Justice [Interview], 2001
3	2	8	Christian Discipleship in the 21 st Century, 1997
3	2	9	David Dellinger – Prophet Teacher and Friend, 200?
3	2	10	Friendly Town, Undated
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3	2	12	Letter to the Editor – Dennis Byrne/Chicago Sun Times, Undated
3	2	13	Martin Luther King, Jr. / Mayor Richard Daley – Meeting Narrative [1966]
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3	2	19	Relation of Religion to Politics [199?]
3	2	20	[Remarks to Chicago Police Board], 1994-1998
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3	2	22	Chapter 4 – Sheep Without a Shepherd [196?]
3	2	23	Towards Responsible Freedom [1968]
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4	1	2	Portrait Photograph [196?]
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4	1	4	City of Chicago – Invitation to Mayoral Inauguration Reception, 1983
4	1	5	UCC Certificate of Retirement, 1983
4	1	6	DLB Oral History Transcript – Volume II, 1990
4	1	7	60 th High School Reunion Scrapbook, 1995
4	1	8	CV and Biographical Profile, 1996-2000
4	1	9	UCC Ordination Anniversary Certificate, 1998
4	1	10	Correspondence and Archival Photocopies Relating to 1947 Presidential Pardon, 2004
4	1	11	Correspondence – Bernard Brown to DLB/Richard Leuke, 2000
4	1	12	Correspondence – Don Keating to DLB, 2000
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Series 4: Personal, 1939-2006

Series Box Folder Contents

4	1	14	Untitled 7" Recording, Undated
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