

## **Finding Aid to the Robert Chesley Papers, 1965-1990 (1993-06)**

### **Extent:**

12 cartons, 2 oversize boxes, 2 oversize folders (14.7 linear feet)

### **Access:**

The collection is open for research.

### **Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], [Name of Series], Robert Chesley papers, 1993-06, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

### **Publication Rights:**

Copyright was not transferred to the GLBT Historical Society.

### **Processed by:**

Willie Walker; finding aid updated by Marjorie Bryer in March 2011. Funding for processing this collection was provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

### **Creator:**

Chesley, Robert, 1943-1990

## **Biographical Information**

Robert Chesley was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1943. He moved to San Francisco in 1976 and became theater critic for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. Chesley's first one-act play, "Hell, I Love You," was produced at Theatre Rhinoceros in 1980. His play "Night Sweat" was the first full-length drama dealing with the AIDS crisis to be produced in New York. It had extended runs in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Chesley wrote over 30 full-length and one-act plays. One of his most successful works was "Jerker." It had a long run in New York and generated controversy with the Federal Communications Commission when it was aired on Pacifica Radio's KPFK. Chesley died of AIDS in 1990. The Robert Chesley Award for Lesbian and Gay Playwriting, given annually by Publishing Triangle, is named in his honor.

## **Scope and Content of Collection:**

The Robert Chesley papers document his life as a playwright, theater critic and sexual outlaw. The collection is divided into eight series: Correspondence; Journals and "Crazy Books"; Writings, including plays, short stories, novels, and journalism; Writings by Others; Subject Files; Personalia; Photographs and Posters; and Audio. Highlights include nearly 20 years of correspondence and over 10 years of personal diaries, drafts of plays and materials related to his prolific career as a journalist and theater critic, and souvenirs from his sexual encounters. There is very little related to Chesley's career as a musical composer. Chesley died of AIDS in 1990 at the age of 47.

## Container List:

### **Series 1: Correspondence, 1974-1990.**

**Physical Description:** Cartons 1-4, Carton 10, 1 folder

**Arrangement:** Arranged chronologically by Chesley; additional correspondence arranged alphabetically.

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of personal and professional correspondence, primarily incoming but with outgoing as well. Some folders contain hand drawn monthly calendars, where Chesley has listed daily events. Correspondents include his sister Joan Apodaca and other family, friends and business associates. There is also significant correspondence about one of Chesley's fetishes, men in tights.

Carton 1, Folders 1-31: 1974-December 1981

Carton 2, Folders 1-36: January 1982-December 1984

Carton 3, Folders 1-39: January 1985-March 1988

Carton 4, Folders 1- 33: April 1988-December 1990, undated

Carton 4, Folder 34: Alice B. Toklas Demo. Club/Allan Bérubé WWII Project, 1975, 1984-1985

Carton 4, Folder 35: Correspondence about Reviews, 1978

Carton 4, Folder 36: Brett/NY Native, 1981

Carton 4, Folders 37-39: Correspondence about Tights, Super Pals, Guys in Tights, 1982-1988

Carton 10, Folder 47: Tom Volk, 1987-1989

### **Series 2: Journals and Crazy Books, 1979-1990.**

**Physical Description:** Cartons 5-6

**Arrangement:** Arranged chronologically

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of personal journals kept by Chesley between 1979 and 1990. Many include ephemera, some have been recopied and indexed.

Carton 5, Folders 1-5: Journals, February 6, 1979-June 29, 1981

Carton 5, Folders 6-12: Recopied Journals July 3-October 1, 1981

Carton 5, Folder 13: Recopied Journal, October 1-11, 1981, with Index for August 8- October 2, 1981

Carton 5, Folder 14: Journal (not part of recopied series), October 27, 1981-March 2, 1982

Carton 5, Folder 15: Recopied Journal, December 29, 1981-January 19, 1982, with Index for December 29, 1981-January 13, 1982

Carton 5, Folders 16-28: Recopied Journals, January 22, 1982-May 27, 1984

Carton 5, Folders 29-38: Crazy Books, January 21, 1984-November 25, 1985

Carton 6, Folders 1-18: Crazy Books, August 2, 1985-November 7, 1990

### Series 3: Writings, 1975-1990.

**Physical Description:** Cartons 7-9, Carton 10, 14 folders

**Arrangement:** Original order was maintained

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of fiction and journalism in New York City and San Francisco. There are typescripts, manuscripts, drafts and notes of plays, novels, novellas, short stories and poetry written by Chesley, as well as his theater reviews; articles about the arts, gay life and politics; news clippings of published work, interviews and notes. There is a small amount of related material mixed in, including artwork, correspondence, ephemera related to his productions and news clippings.

Carton 7, Folder 1:	<u>For the Kids</u> (in notebook) (1981)
Carton 7, Folder 2:	<u>The Good Neighbor or Bold Jack or Secret Love, A Domestic Melodrama</u> , includes 5-1/4" floppy disk
Carton 7, Folders 3-6:	<u>Hell, I Love You</u> , includes draft with handwritten notes, intro, versions of <u>Home</u> , <u>Fuck</u> and <u>Crash</u> and revised version, 1979-1981
Carton 7, Folder 7:	<u>Daffodils, A Dog's Life</u>
Carton 7, Folder 8:	<u>Vanishing Act</u>
Carton 7, Folder 9:	<u>Happy V.D.</u> (1981)
Carton 7, Folder 10:	<u>Dear Friends and Gentle Hearts</u> (1981)
Carton 7, Folder 11:	<u>April First</u> (1982)
Carton 7, Folders 12-13A:	<u>For the Kids: A Tragi-comedy in Three Acts</u> (1981) Typed draft, final typed draft, includes artwork by Kimble Mead, ephemera
Carton 7, Folder 14:	<u>A Christmas Card</u> (1980)
Carton 7, Folders 15-16:	<u>Gentle Annie (Freddy's Last Fling)</u> , 1980
Carton 7, Folder 17:	<u>Laughter and Tears</u> (1983)
Carton 7, Folders 18-20:	<u>Stray Dog Story: A Fairy Tale for Adults</u> (1981) Typed original, photocopy of the galleys, bound version, ephemera
Carton 7, Folder 21:	Unproduced early one acts (1981-1982)
Carton 7, Folder 22:	Miscellaneous one act plays (1981-83)
Carton 7, Folder 23-25:	<u>Nocturnes</u> (1981) Performance art in collaboration with Christopher Beck, Typed text, performance script, souvenir scripts with photos by Mark Chester, ephemera
Carton 7, Folder 26:	<u>Breaking Up: Fragments</u>
Carton 7, Folders 27-28:	<u>Beatitudes: A Farce and a Prayer</u> (1985) Typed draft, Handwritten draft and notes
Carton 7, Folders 29-30A:	<u>Come Again</u> , includes Final draft with 1987 preface
Carton 7, Folders 31-36:	<u>Night Sweat</u> , early typed draft, final draft with artwork, final draft of artwork, handwritten draft (two notebooks), second version, San Francisco ending and Hanky Code Anthem, program, 1984-1985
Carton 7, Folder 37:	<u>Jerker or The Helping Hand . . .</u> (1985), includes program
Carton 7, Folders 38-40	<u>Pigman</u> (A Comedy in Three Acts), Handwritten draft and notes,

Carton 8, Folders 1-3:	early typescript, revised, December 1985-September 1986 <u>Dog Plays</u> (1989) Typed manuscript, final typed draft, including scores by Stephen Foster, photocopies
Carton 8, Folders 4-11:	<u>Cassandra: The Marriage Closet</u> (1989), rough draft, notes for 1987 forward, revised typescript
Carton 8, Folders 12-17:	<u>Creaming: Nylon/Rubber/Spandex</u> Erotic novel, Original copy, typed draft and notes, introduction, excerpts published in <u>Drummer</u>
Carton 8, Folder 18:	<u>Lisa's Feet</u> , Novella
Carton 8, Folder 19:	<u>If a Man Will But Take Me by the Hand . . . A Porn Novel</u>
Carton 8, Folders 20-23:	<u>Fool</u> (July - Oct., 1981), original typed manuscript
Carton 8, Folders 24:	<u>Counting: A Heavy Trip</u> Erotic fantasy, manuscript
Carton 8, Folder 25:	<u>The Imposter: A Domestic Nightmare</u> , typescript
Carton 8, Folder 26:	Untitled manuscript, no date
Carton 8, Folder 27:	Short story about Puppy and the Dancer, undated, with photographs of Robert Yohn
Carton 8, Folder 28:	Poetry, manuscripts and typescripts, 1976-1977
Carton 8, Folder 29:	<u>Theological Virtues</u> and other stories
Carton 8, Folder 30:	<u>Tights</u> , Chapter 1, two versions
Carton 8, Folder 31:	<u>Counting</u> , <u>My Little Friends</u> , handwritten drafts, typescript, published story
Carton 8, Folder 32:	<u>Laughter and Tears: A One-Act Play</u>
Carton 8, Folder 33:	<u>Williamson or The Ambiguities</u> (1978)
Carton 8, Folder 34:	<u>Stories and Fairytales</u> (1982 - 83)
Carton 8, Folders 35-37:	Short stories
Carton 8, Folder 38:	<u>Madeleine de Lucien</u> (play), manuscript, notes
Carton 8, Folders 39-41:	<u>Jerker</u> —Alaska production, artwork, FCC ban, 1986-1987
Carton 8, Folder 42:	<u>Hard Plays</u> , <u>Stiff Hearts</u> —publishing agreement and related materials, 1990
Carton 9, Folder 1:	<u>Gay Gym I</u> [no author listed—may not be by Chesley]
Carton 9, Folders 2-3:	Collected Journalism, 1976-1978
Carton 9, Folder 4:	<u>The Advocate</u> . 1979 September 23
Carton 9, Folder 5:	Ridiculous Theater Co. Interview with Lola Pashalinsky and Black-eyed Susan
Carton 9, Folder 6:	Article "The Defeat of Intro. 384," <u>Gaysweek</u>
Carton 9, Folder 7:	Article <u>The Advocate</u> . 1978. 15 November, Notes on "New York Gay Businesses"
Carton 9, Folders 8-9:	Notes for Gay Theater, 1983, "Gay Theater for the 90's" (12/11/89), hand written text, typescript
Carton 9, Folder 10:	Collected Journalism 1977
Carton 9, Folder 11:	"Erotic Liberation and Censorship" (1987)
Carton 9, Folder 12:	Interview, June 30, 1979 R.C., Robert Wallace, and Robert Patrick at Phebe's [sic]

Carton 9, Folder 13:	Interview Edward Swift
Carton 9, Folder 14:	Interview Doric Wilson, January 8, 1979
Carton 9, Folder 15:	Robert Patrick interview, includes correspondence, notes, clippings, photographs, circa 1979
Carton 9, Folder 15A:	Arthur Bell, reporter—article, notes
Carton 9, Folder 16:	Larry Kramer, 1978 interview
Carton 9, Folder 17:	Obits—Ethyl Eichelberger and Vito Russo
Carton 9, Folder 18:	Gay and Lesbian Community Services—typescript; Intro 384 Defeated, 1978
Carton 9, Folders 19-20:	Organization CLGR (Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights), 1977-1978
Carton 9, Folder 21:	Organization Purple Stages (1987)
Carton 9, Folders 22-26:	Theater Reviews, New York City, 1976-1981, “International Stud,” notes
Carton 9, Folder 27:	Miscellaneous Book, TV, Theater Reviews, includes drafts, correspondence, 1976-1978, undated
Carton 9, Folders 28-32	San Francisco Bay Area Theater—writings, reviews, correspondence, 1979-1980
Carton 9, Folders 33-34:	Theater Reviews, Periodicals, 1979-1981
Carton 9, Folder 35:	Letters to the Editor re: Chesley Reviews
Carton 9, Folder 36:	Typescript of article “Gaiety: A Male Burlesque”
Carton 9, Folder 37:	Notebook notes and drafts, Ethyl Eichelberger and Mark Chester; short story “The Dark Place”
Carton 9, Folder 38:	Ethyl Eichelberger
Carton 9, Folder 39:	Writings on “My Fetish” of Men’s Tights
Carton 9, Folders 40-41:	“Who the Bigots Are”/“Keeping an Apartment: Where Does Discrimination Begin?”—Williamson Henderson notes, writings, <u>Gayweek</u> , 1978
Carton 10, Folder 1:	Writings on Music, 1975-1976
Carton 10, Folder 2:	Vernon E. Berg III Navy Case and Lawrence Gibson, <u>Get Off My Ship</u> , 1976
Carton 10, Folder 3:	Fragments
Carton 10, Folder 4:	Writings about Mark I. Chester
Carton 10, Folder 5:	Writings, notes re: Scott O’Hara, 1987
Carton 10, Folder 6:	[Notes, drafts—early journalism, New York City, for <u>Gay Community News?</u> ], 1976-1978
Carton 10, Folder 7:	Gay Mugging article, 1978
Carton 10, Folder 8:	Miscellaneous Articles
Carton 10, Folder 9:	Inventory of Books Read, 1978-1990
Carton 10, Folder 10:	Representative Fred Richmond Sex Scandal--notes, research, ephemera
Carton 10, Folder 11:	Miscellaneous Notes, Research, New York City, 1970s
Carton 10, Folder 12:	Miscellaneous Typescripts of Articles

Carton 10, Folders 13-14: News Clippings of Chesley's Articles and Interviews with and Reviews of Chesley's Work, 1976-1990

#### **Series 4: Writings by Others, 1978-1989**

**Physical Description:** Carton 10, 45 Folders

**Arrangement:** Arranged alphabetically

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of typescripts and signed published copies of works by friends and colleagues of Chesley's. Includes some correspondence.

Carton 10, Folder 15:	<u>Ariadne</u> by Paula Barish
Carton 10, Folder 16:	"Bear Poems," 1980
Carton 10, Folder 17:	<u>Priscilla's Play</u> by Guy Bishop
Carton 10, Folder 18:	<u>Dreams of the Sleepers</u> (Kirk/Spock fiction) by Alice Fegan Black, 1985
Carton 10, Folder 19:	Poems by Perry Brass, 1986, undated
Carton 10, Folder 20:	<u>Tell</u> by Victor Bumbalo
Carton 10, Folder 21:	<u>Adam and the Experts</u> by Victor Bumbalo
Carton 10, Folder 22:	"Telling Tales" (Reading & Songs) by Jimmy Louis Camicia, 1987
Carton 10, Folder 23:	Poems by Mark Chester, includes artwork
Carton 10, Folders 24-26:	<u>A Scary Christmas Eve</u> , <u>Secrets in a Young Man's Heart</u> , <u>The Narcissus Flower Has Many Colors</u> (1989) by John Chism
Carton 10, Folder 27:	Performance piece <u>About Scott</u> (1989) by Howard Cruse
Carton 10, Folder 28:	Stories by Lorna Doran, 1979
Carton 10, Folder 29:	Writings by Robert Goldstein, 1985-1988
Carton 10, Folder 30:	Writings by Lawrence Mass
Carton 10, Folder 30A:	Paula's Account of [ODB], 1980s
Carton 10, Folder 31:	<u>Punch in His Time</u> a play by Douglas J. Penick,
Carton 10, Folder 32:	<u>The Network</u> a screenplay by John Preston, 1987
Carton 10, Folder 33:	<u>Warren</u> , a play by Rebecca Ranson, circa 1984
Carton 10, Folder 34:	"Lola" by R. Bogaert Smith
Carton 10, Folder 35:	Poems and Short Stories by Owen Lou Wilson
Carton 10, Folders 36-37:	Writings by Gary James Wood, 1988, undated
Carton 10, Folders 38-44:	<u>Application to Study with Allen Ginsburg</u> , <u>The Glory Hole Poems</u> , <u>The Fire Island Journal</u> (September 2-December 16, 1978), Poetry reading "Southern Gay Neo-Realism," <u>Poirot in Exile</u> (1982), by Cal Yeomans, <u>Swamp Play # 2</u> by Cal Yeomans and Introductory Comments by Jeff Weiss, <u>Rest in Peace, Queen</u> or <u>Berna Returns to the Stage</u> (January 15, 1982) by Cal Yeomans
Carton 10, Folder 45:	<u>Useful Poems \$17</u> by Jerry Zientara, 1982

#### **Series 5: Subject Files, circa 1976-1989**

**Physical Description:** Carton 10, 5 Folders, Carton 11, 21 Folders

**Arrangement:** Arranged alphabetically

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of materials related to Chesley's artistic, political and sexual interests.

Carton 10, Folder 47:	Chester, Mark I.
Carton 10, Folder 48:	COINTELPRO, 1979-1980
Carton 10, Folder 49:	Dance and Theater, 1980-1989
Carton 10, Folder 50:	Dykstra, Dirk – Drawing, 1983
Carton 10, Folder 51:	Ephemera
Carton 11, Folder 1:	Fetish—Leather, Bondage, S/M
Carton 11, Folders 2-7:	Fetish—Men in Tights
Carton 11, Folder 8:	Fiasco Drawings, 1982
Carton 11, Folder 9:	Gay/Lesbian Parenting, Custody
Carton 11, Folder 10:	Gay and Lesbian Theatre Alliance Statement of Purpose
Carton 11, Folder 11:	"Gay Light" newspaper, Syracuse, NY, 1979
Carton 11, Folder 12:	Gay Theater
Carton 11, Folder 13:	Miscellaneous [Research?], 1970s
Carton 11, Folder 13A:	Xeroxes by Phillip [Cove] from Photos of Scott O'Hara
Carton 11, Folders 14-18:	Questionnaires on Gay Men's Sexuality, S/M, Social Support, 1977-1983
Carton 11, Folders 19-20:	Stonewall Society—Gay Community Center in Poughkeepsie, Gay Liberation, NY State; Forum on Homosexuality with Barbara Gittings—speech, correspondence, ephemera, 1976-1978

#### **Series 6: Personalia, circa 1976-1989**

**Physical Description:** Carton 11, Oversize Box 2

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists of personal documents, calendars, artifacts and pubic hair clippings kept in repurposed spice jars. According to contemporaries of Chesley's, the latter were possibly collected by Chesley's friend John Pfeleiderer and kept by Chesley after Pfeleiderer's death.

Carton 11, Folder 21:	Copies of Personal Documents
Carton 11, Folder 22:	Astrological Chart
Carton 11, Folder 23:	Divorce Papers, Robert Casey Chesley and Jean Chesley, 1976
	Small box with buttons and pins
	Small box with phone book pages
	Ring-Standard Calendars, Mary Sage Shakespeare, 1982-1989
Oversize Box 2:	[Pubic] hair clippings

#### **Series 7: Photographs and Visual Materials, 1965-1990**

**Physical Description:** Carton 11, 27 folders-Carton 12, Oversize Box 1, Oversize Folders 1-2

**Arrangement:** Unarranged

**Scope and Content Note:** Consists primarily of photographs but there are also posters from

Chesley's plays. Includes snapshots, Polaroids, color slides, contact sheets and negatives of Chesley, his friends and his fetishes. Some of the photographs were removed from correspondence; correspondents include Mark I. Chester (1983). Includes an [incomplete] inventory of subjects. His sister Joan identified some photos but most are unlabeled.

Carton 11, Folder 24:	Inventory of Photos
Carton 11, Folder 25:	Photographs of Chesley and Friends identified by his sister Joan, circa 1985-1990
Carton 11, Folder 26:	Chesley Wedding, 1965
Carton 11, Folders 27-31:	Photographs removed from correspondence, 1978-1983
Carton 11, Folder 32:	Dancers—Zalkind and Burke, Daniker and Arnaud
Carton 11, Folder 33:	Eureka Theatre, Bay Theatre Collective, circa 1980
Carton 11, Folder 34-44:	Photographs of Chesley, Friends, Fetishes, Parties, Performances
Carton 11, Folders 45-46:	Contact Prints, Letters and Notes from Rink
Carton 11, Folders 47-49:	Negatives
Carton 11, Folder 50:	Duplicates
Carton 12:	Unsorted photographs, negatives and color slides (3 boxes)

Oversize Box 1: photos are in labeled folders--including photos of a book signing at the Ambush, taken by Robert Prouzan; contact sheets of photos of Chesley and photos taken by Mark I. Chester; snapshots; drawing of Chesley; "Tribute to a Dog"; circa 1975-1985

Oversize Folder 1:

Portrait (b&w photo), 1987 [photo by Powers, subject may be Geoff Mains]  
Ethyl Eichelberger as "Nefert-iti", Agosto Machado as the great "Aten" at A Clear Space, photo by Peter Hujar—small poster/handbill  
Theatre Rhinoceros poster for Chesley's "Night Sweat," undated  
Open Door Theater poster for Chesley's "Stray Dog Story," undated  
Posters for "Jerker" – for European premier at the Gate Theatre Club in London, at the Bum Steer in Phoenix (1998) and at Theatre X in Milwaukee (2 copies)  
Signed Nina Glaser poster, 1984

Oversize Folder 2:

Drawings by C.C. Fish, Art Mainar, Robert Roberts and others, 1986, undated  
Mark I. Chester photographs, including "Francesco and Momo," Nocturnes Collage, 1983, undated  
"Self-Portrait," photograph, undated

### **Series 8: Audio, 1961-1986.**

**Physical Description:** Carton 12, Oversize Box 3

**Arrangement:** Unarranged

**Scope and Content Note:** Includes audiotapes of Chesley reading his plays, interviews by

Chesley, classical music, recordings of meetings, incoming messages (see list).

Carton 12: LP Record of Gustav Holst's "The Planets" by Sir Adrian Bolt and the Vienna State Opera and Academy Chorus, 1970—cover features men in tights

Oversize Box 3:

Audiotapes are 60 minutes unless otherwise specified.

undated

Robert Chesley reading Pigman, Act I & II 6/3/86

Robert Chesley reading Pigman, Act III 6/3/86

CARDS undated

The Uproar Tapes undated

Birds of Sorrow, Transformations 1961, 1985

Edward Swift interview by R. Chesley (90 min) 9/14/78

Albert White (90 min) undated

Queersville (90 min) 6/7/87

Janet Carter (90 min) undated

Janet Carter 8/27/85

Janet Carter (90 min) undated

Janet Carter I & II 8/27/85

Various Musical Selections undated

Doric Wilson (90 min) 1/8/79

Dantes Publication Issues on Credit by Examination, GWC of NYCC (90 min) 11/8/78

Greek Liturgical Music undated

Larry Kramer (90 min) undated

Gene Paul Rickard 1984

Strauss undated

Berg & Gibson 12/18/78

Brahams, Schubert undated

Ravel, Debussy undated

Sr Mish undated

Unmarked undated

Ravel Trio undated

Skylark undated

David Goodstein at WSDG ("wrong speed, so it sounds funny; but important tape – Goodstein's 'unkempt, unemployable politicians' quote) (2 tapes) 1977?

Stonewall Chorale, Calvin Hampton Live or Die – A Ceremony of Healing, Avery Fisher Hall 1983

Donna Summer, ABC News Nightline "New Political Activism in the Gay Community" (90 min) 1982

Dennis Altman (90 min) undated

Rosy Black Life 1980

Arthur Bell (90 min) 11/6/78

GWC of NYCC (90 min) (3 tapes)  
Incoming Message Cassette (2 tapes)

11/8/78  
undated

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