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Special Collections Department**

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Ronald Alford collection

Title: Ronald Alford collection

Collection No: MSS.435

Extent: 0.75 cubic feet

Inclusive Dates: 1949-2002

Abstract: The collection includes a variety of materials related to the careers of Ronald "Butch" Alford with the Associated Press' Memphis Bureau and Memphis Board of Review. It also includes materials related to Alford's service as a volunteer public relations professional during presidential visits to Memphis in 1976 and 1978.

Donor: Ronald Alford, Germantown, Tennessee, November 2004

Processed by: James E. Montague, 2005; Brigitte Billeaudeau, 2016.

Access: Open to all researchers.

Language: English

Preferred Citation: Ronald Alford collection, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: December 2016

Biographical information

Ronald “Butch” Alford (1941-2016) served in the Air Force and received a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and a Master of Education degree from Memphis State University. He worked as a copyboy and reporter for the *Commercial Appeal* before joining the staff of the Associated Press in August 1965. It was during this period when the erroneous report that James Meredith had been shot dead was issued by the Associated Press instead of the correct report that “James Meredith had been shot in the head.” This collection includes various accounts of that incident.

Alford served as assistant public information director at Memphis State University and later as the first information director of Shelby State Community College. He was also information director with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Alford served on the Memphis Board of Review which was created in 1968 to prevent the dissemination of obscene materials to juveniles. During his tenure, the board was sued by several movie exhibitors for violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The court ruled that the Memphis Board of Review was powerless to enforce the city’s anti-obscenity ordinance.

Scope and contents

This collection includes a variety of materials related to the careers of Ronald “Butch” Alford. Much of the collection focuses on two periods of time in Alford’s life: his position at the Associated Press’ Memphis Bureau and his time working on the Memphis Board of Review. This collection includes materials related to Alford’s service as a volunteer public relations professional during President Ford’s visit to Memphis in 1976 and President Carter’s visit to Memphis in 1978.

Along with materials related to Alford’s careers in news media and public relations, there are accounts from others in the public relations field that cover the James Earl Ray trial, the death of Elvis Presley, and some of the history of public relations in Memphis, Tennessee.

Subject terms

Alford, Ronald
Associated Press
Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
Ford, Gerald R., 1913-2006
Meredith, James, 1933-
Motion pictures—Censorship—United States—History
Public Relations Society of America—Tennessee—Memphis

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

Series 1: Employment with the Associated Press

- 1 Alford's account of events that resulted in the erroneous reporting of James Meredith's death, c2002.
- 2 Various press accounts reporting the shooting of James Meredith, c1966.
- 3 Associated Press letter written by Thomas Aden to Sam Blackman, General News Editor re: The erroneous report that James Meredith was killed at Hernando, Mississippi, 1966 June 6.
- 4 1966 June 5-11 edition of *AP Log* with coverage of James Meredith story.
- 5 Memo to staff by Sam Blackman re: The James Meredith shooting and reporting procedures, 1966 June 21.
- 6 Letters from Alford's peers re: The James Meredith story, 1966 June 9-16.
- 7 Correspondence, press reports, newspaper articles, and an excerpt from a book that is related to the false reporting of James Meredith's death, c1966 and undated.
- 8 1966 June 17 edition of *Life* magazine with coverage of James Meredith's march in Mississippi.

- OS1 *The New York Times*, Section 4, Sunday June 12, 1966.

- OS1 Oversized photocopy of the *New York Times*, section 4, Sunday, June 12, 1966.

- 9 Author unknown, "Apology Made for Meredith Death Report," *Editor and Publisher*, 1966 June 11.
- 10 Author unknown, "The "Death" Blunder," *Time*, 1966 June 17.
- 11 Meredith, J. "A challenge to change: We as black Americans must not forget the past, but negative attitudes will only cloud our future," *Newsweek*, 1997 October 6, clippings and news stories from unknown publications about James Meredith post 1966.

- OS1 News report from unknown source, circa 1966.

- 12 Alford's letter to Thomas Aden re: resignation from the Associated Press, 1966 June 16.
- 13 Copy photograph and photocopied image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others.
- 14 Forty-six color images of the memorials located on the University of Memphis campus.

Series 2: Memphis Board of Review

- 15 Letter to Fred L. Davis, Chairman Council of the City of Memphis from Mayor Wyeth Chandler re: Memphis Board of Review appointments, 1972 December 12; Letters to Ronald S. Alford from William C. Boyd, director of Public Service re: The Memphis Board of Review, 1973 January- March; Certificate of appointment to the Board of Review; Clipping from unknown publication announcing Alford's appointment to the

- Board of Review.
- 16 List of review board members with contact information.
 - 17 Minutes of the Memphis Board of Review meetings, 1973-1975.
 - 18 Stock letters, forms and official documents used by the Memphis Board of Review; indecency ordinance for the City of Memphis, copy of Memphis Code Sec. 22-23.1 thru 31.15
 - 19 Memphis Board of Review theater assignment sheets, 1972-1975.
 - 20 Evaluation forms used by members of the Memphis Board of Review.
 - 21 Motion Picture Association of America, *1972: A Review of the World of Movies*, 1973 January.
 - 22 Letter to Theatre owners and managers from Las Savell, Chairman Memphis Board of Review re: violations to Memphis' ordinance on obscenity, 1972 November 29.
 - 23 Unnumbered ordinance to amend language in Chapter 22 of the code of ordinances of the City of Memphis, two copies.
 - 24 Unnumbered ordinance to amend language in Chapter 22 and 31 of the code of ordinances of the City of Memphis and a partial copy of Memphis Code 22-39, four copies.
 - 25 Letters to Members of Board of Review from Ross B. Clark II, staff attorney re: the motion picture "Tommy" and rules and procedure of the Board of Review, June to July 1975.
 - 26 Letters from the Memphis Board of Review to the Motion Picture Exhibitors of Memphis re: movie ratings for movies reviewed by the board, 1974-1975.
 - 27 WHBQ-TV 13, Editorials re: Memphis Board of Review to determine what television programs can be allowed on Memphis television stations, January 26- February 1, 1973; two copies of each.
 - 28 Photocopied clippings from the *Commercial Appeal*, *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and *Showtime* related to the Memphis Board of Review's activities and the movie "Last Tango in Paris."
 - 29 Letter from Maria Cisneros, *Time* magazine, to Las Savell re: the film "Last Tango in Paris," 1973 February 20.
 - 30 Clippings from the *Commercial Appeal*, *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, and *TV Guide* related to Memphis Board of Review and censorship.
 - 31 Letter to Memphis Board of Review from Joe Pipkin, Mid-South Coliseum chairman re: policy on performances at the Mid-South Coliseum, 1974 January 15.
 - 32 Letter to Wyeth Chandler, Mayor of Memphis, from Las Savell, chairman re: complaints about Rock and Roll performances at the Mid-South Coliseum, April 25, 1973.
 - 33 *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press-Scimitar* articles concerning Rock and Roll concerts and Memphis' juvenile obscenity ordinance.
 - 34 Documents and a *Memphis Press- Scimitar* clipping related to the resignation of George Morrow from the Memphis Board of Review, circa August 1973.
 - 35 Clippings from the *Commercial Appeal* and correspondence re: proposed changes to Memphis City Ordinance regarding juvenile access to obscene materials, 1974-1975.
 - 36 Original drawing, prints, and clippings of *Commercial Appeal* editorial cartoons by artist Draper Hill
 - 37 Clippings from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and *The Best Times* by Edwin Howard, 1974-1978, 2002.

- 38 Letter to the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* from Las Savell, re: 1974 April 2 article by Edwin Howard, 1974 April 3.
- 39 Letters from citizens in support of the Memphis Board of Review, 1974 February - March.
- 40 Opinions from Memphis City Council members Fred Davis, Bob James, and Jack McNeil concerning the Memphis Board of Review, undated.
- 41 Clippings from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal* relating to a lawsuit filed by national film distributors against the Memphis Board of Review citing that Memphis' enforcement of an obscenity ordinance is unconstitutional, 1974-1976.
- 42 Legal documents and correspondence related to the case Allied Artists et al vs. Memphis Board of Review, 1974-1976.
- 43 Clippings from the *Commercial Appeal* and the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* about Lloyd Binford; Lyons, D. "To See or Not to See: The Legacy of Lloyd Binford," *The Downtowner Magazine*, 2002 February, two copies.
- 44 Tucker, D.T. "Remembering Film Row: Lights! Camera! Action!," *The Downtowner Magazine*, 2002 February.

Box 2

Series 3: Public Relations

- 1 Alford's handwritten notes and transcription of Senator Albert Gore, Sr.'s statement to the *Memphis Press Scimitar* at Memphis State University's commencement, 1969 January 25.
- 2 Alford, R. "Presidential visits to Memphis," undated.
- 3 Contents of a notebook compiled by Alford as a public relations volunteer during President Gerald Ford's visit to Memphis, 1976 May.
- 4 Contents of a notebook compiled by Alford as a public relations volunteer during President Jimmy Carter's visit to Memphis for the 1978 Democratic Party mini convention held December 8th through 10th. Copy of President Carter's speech to the convention included in the contents.
- 5 Charles F. Holmes' account of working as press liaison and advisor to Sheriff Bill Morris throughout the trial of James Earl Ray, undated.
- 6 Baker, M. B. "Dateline: Memphis, August 16, 1977," *Public Relations Journal*, undated typed article that was originally published in 1977 October.
- 7 Stansbury, M.L. "PR Practitioner Reflects on Progress in Memphis," undated.
- 8 Photocopied articles from a special public relations edition of the *Memphis Business Journal*.
McGraw, J. "PR pros balance client loyalty with doing 'the right thing.'" *Memphis Business Journal*.
Miller, K. "PR can enhance profits by building internal unity." *Memphis Business Journal*.
Lattimore, D. "Ethical standards a foundation for PR profession since 1954." *Memphis Business Journal*.
Holmes, C.F. "Memphis PRSA chapter grew from early successes." *Memphis Business Journal*.

Milligan, T. "Author gives U of M's PR program 'premier' status." *Memphis Business Journal*.

- 9 Memphis Chapter of the PRSA, Memphis Image Survey Summary, undated.
- 10 VIPR (Very Important Public Relations folks) meeting attendee list, 2001 October 6.
- 11 50th Anniversary Committee Meeting Agenda of the Memphis Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, Saturday, 2001 October 6.
- 12 Program from Golden Gala of the Public Relations Society of America Memphis Chapter, 2002 April 26.

Series 4: Miscellaneous

- 13 Letter to Mr. Alford from Clarence Saunders dated May 9, 1949, thanking Mr. Alford for his letter regarding a visit to Keedoozle.
- 14 Newspaper clippings about Clarence Saunders, founder of the Piggly Wiggly and Keedoozle stores and the original owner of the Pink Palace.
- OS1 Porteous, C. "Keedoozle's doors open to throng: surprisingly low prices found," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, Section Two, Page 15, Thursday, 1948 August 19.
- Coppock, P.R. "Mid-South Memories: Pioneer's Ideas Sometimes went Keedoozle," *The Commercial Appeal*, 1973 July 29.
- The Daily Helmsman*, vol. 57 no. 1, 1993 January 15.
- The Commercial Appeal*, "The appeal of Memphis, a retrospective of 15 decades, April 21, 1841-1991," section J, 1991 April 21.