

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

“Turn Every Page”: Inside the Robert A. Caro Archive **October 24, 2021 – ongoing**

Selected PR Images

The New-York Historical Society presents “Turn Every Page”: Inside the Robert A. Caro Archive, the first public exhibition drawn from the complete holdings of the author whose works on Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson are regarded as masterpieces of modern biography and history. The ongoing exhibition includes never-before-seen highlights from the archive—which New-York Historical acquired in 2019—that provide an intimate view of the country’s premier chronicler of political power through his research notebooks, news clippings, handwritten interview notes, scrapbooks, photographs, original manuscript pages, and one of his Smith Corona typewriters.

Robert A. Caro

Photo credit: Dima Gavrysh / Bloomberg via Getty Images

*Robert A. Caro graduated from Princeton University and was later a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. For six years, he worked as an investigative reporter for Newsday. His most recent book is *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing*, a memoir of his experiences as a researcher and writer that offers a firsthand perspective on the process and personal impact of writing his landmark books. Currently, he is at work on the fifth and final volume of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. He lives in New York City with his wife, the writer and historian, Ina Caro.*



Smith Corona, Canada

Electra 210 typewriter, circa 1970s

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

Typewriters continue to play fundamental roles in Caro’s writing process. This is less motivated by an aversion to technology than a recognition of the typewriter’s utility as a tool that complements his methodical approach to research and writing. For Caro, speed is a liability and why notes to himself like “Don’t rush!” make regular appearances in his papers.



Photograph of Robert Caro, ca. 1960

Silver gelatin print

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society



Caro went to work at Newsday on Long Island, a relatively new paper noted for its investigative prowess. Newsday gave his curiosity room to grow, and new fields, people, and issues to examine, explore, and sometimes expose. His editor, Alan Hathaway, taught him the imperative to be relentless about sources, to “turn every page,” to track down every lead.

Robert A. Caro

“Alone on the Desert, Her Dream Fades”

Newsday, January 8, 1963

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society



Perhaps Caro’s most influential work during his years at Newsday was the investigative series, “Misery Acres,” a withering expose of fraudulent real estate schemes luring retirees into purchasing properties in undeveloped deserts and swamps in Florida, Arizona and elsewhere. A lack of basic infrastructure forced a 74-year-old widow to carry a water bucket a mile-and-a-half back to her “tiny shack crudely made of boards.”

Robert A. Caro

Typed notes for “Anatomy of a \$9 Burglary”, 1964

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society



“Anatomy of a \$9 Burglary” is among Caro’s best early writing. When police arrested a criminal, all signs indicated a simple case of burglary and petty larceny. Instead, Caro unearthed the story of those affected by the accused’s crimes, especially that of his forbearing wife. Few articles better demonstrate his gift for plumbing the true depth of a story, or his use of powerful concluding lines and paragraphs.

Robert A. Caro

Robert Moses interview notes, ca. 1970

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

Caro's biographies rely on hundreds of interviews that invigorate his writing and add critical perspectives. The Power Broker alone included no less than 522. Getting people to speak openly requires skill. An effective tactic for Caro, especially with his most reluctant subjects, is to never break a silence.



Robert A. Caro

“Planning Calendar,” 1971

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

Caro's monumental biographies require an astounding level of commitment. Although he enjoys considerable autonomy, it means he must encourage productivity through structure and habit. Among his strategies is a tool he has employed since writing The Power Broker: a daily word count with a goal of 1,000 words per day.

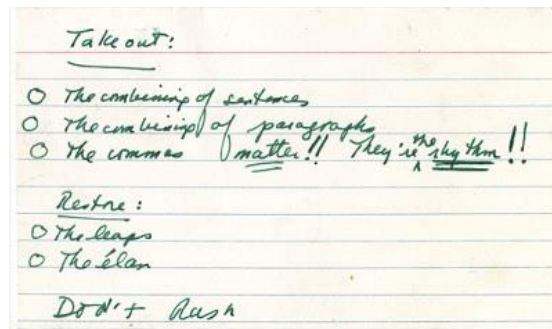


Robert A. Caro

“Take out” note, undated

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

Caro's notes to himself as he writes evidence his conviction that great nonfiction writing should strive to express itself as artfully as great works of literature.

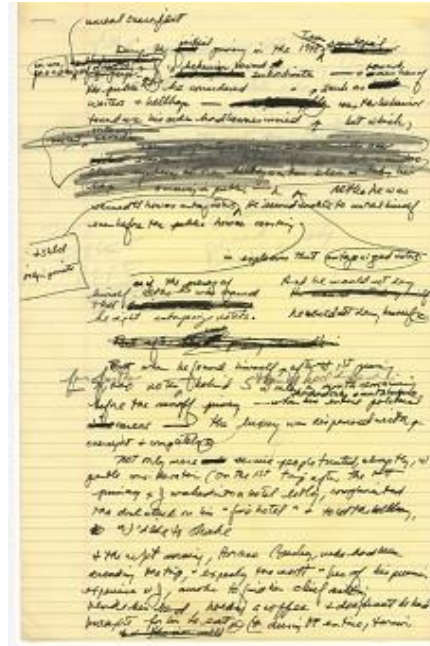


Robert A. Caro

A page from Caro's manuscript draft of *Master of the Senate*, circa 1990

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

Part of Caro's self-discipline are two technological constraints: he drafts in longhand and then uses a Smith Corona electric typewriter to prepare final drafts. Both work to slow and measure the pace of composition. Both require a degree of effort foreign to the computer.



Robert A. Caro

Detail, *Typed draft manuscript page for *Passage of Power* with Caro's edits, 2012*

Robert A. Caro Archive, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society

At Princeton Caro learned the importance of the mots justes, or "the right word," a mantra that drives the intensive editing of his manuscripts before publication.



