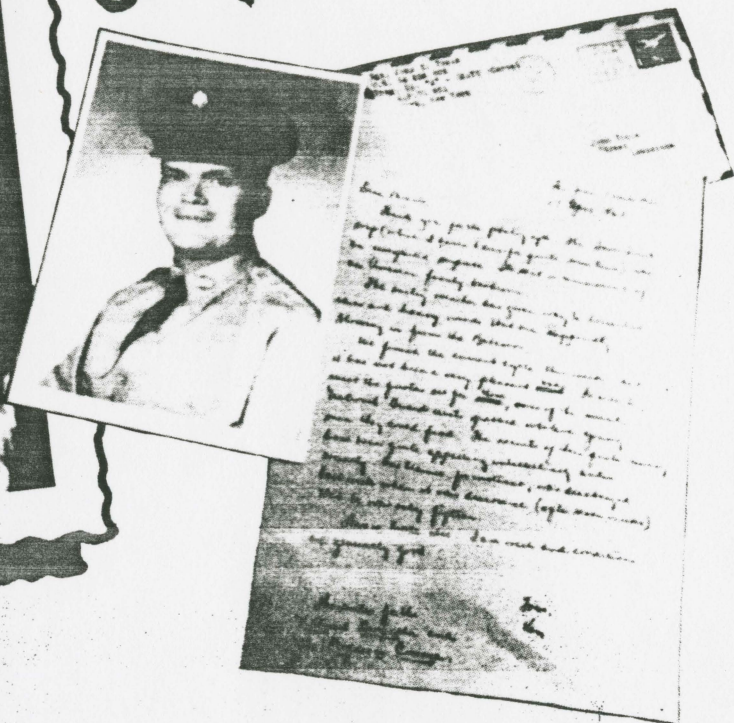




A CONFEDERACY of DUNCES

John Kennedy Toole memorabilia includes, left to right, snapshots of young 'Kenny' in front of Dinwiddie Hall and as a soldier in Puerto Rico, where he wrote *A Confederacy of Dunces* (logo at top); a letter to his parents from Puerto Rico.



Toole Papers leave trace of tragic genius

Thelma Ducoing Toole kept boxes of scrapbooks, pictures and letters pertaining to her only son—"my genius son," she always said. That boy couldn't bring a test home without his mother sticking it in a box somewhere to keep.

Now, those papers—the John Kennedy Toole Papers—have been donated to Howard-Tilton Memorial Library as a bequest of Mrs. Toole, who died in 1985, and from her legatees—John Geiser, Douglas Crawford, Kenneth Holditch, Peter Jaeger and Robert Kim.

The papers are housed in the library's manuscripts and rare books department and will be open to the public once they are catalogued, according to librarian Bill Meneray. He says he isn't sure when the cataloguing process will be completed.

The late John Kennedy Toole is famous for his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*,

written in 1963 while he was stationed in Puerto Rico with the Army and published posthumously by Louisiana State University Press in 1980.

The novel, set in New Orleans, depicts the travails of Ignatius J. Reilly,

One scrapbook contains several pictures of a young 'Kenny' Toole standing in front of Gibson Circle. His mother always wanted him to go to Tulane.

whom novelist Walker Percy described in a foreword to the book as "a slob extraordinaire, a mad Oliver Hardy, a fat Don Quixote, a perverse Thomas Aquinas rolled into one."

"By no means a lesser virtue of Toole's novel is his rendering of the

particularities of New Orleans," Percy wrote—"its back streets, its out-of-the-way neighborhoods, its odd speech, its ethnic whites...."

Toole, a native of New Orleans, received a B.A. degree from Tulane in 1958 (graduating Phi Beta Kappa with honors in English) and an M.A. degree from Columbia in 1959. He taught English at Hunter College in New York City and later at St. Mary's Dominican College in New Orleans while he was enrolled again at Tulane as a doctoral student.

His efforts to interest major publishers in *Dunces* met with initial promise but were ultimately rejected. He became depressed and committed suicide in 1969 at the age of 32.

Thelma Toole worked tirelessly for 10 years to get the novel published. In 1976, she presented it to Percy, who was then teaching at Loyola. Percy brought it to the attention of LSU Press, which eventually published it.

Dunces was an instant critical success. It went through several editions in the U.S. and has been translated into nine foreign languages. It won the Pulitzer for fiction in 1981.

The Toole Papers is a collection of correspondence, manuscripts, scrapbooks, photographs, books and memorabilia relating to John Kennedy Toole, his mother and his book, according to Meneray.

Among its contents are several letters Toole wrote to his parents while he was in Puerto Rico that refer to the book in progress. Other materials concerning *Dunces* include printer's copies, galley proofs, foreign-language editions and reviews. Two unpublished short stories and four poems by Toole also are included.

One scrapbook contains several pictures of a young "Kenny" Toole standing in front of Gibson Circle. "His mother always wanted him to go to Tulane," says librarian Bill Nanez.

—Bill Bowden