

Faulkner left his mark on UVA



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The majority of Faulkner's lectures while a writer in residence were recorded and have now been digitally archived—more than 1,690 minutes. Courtesy Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

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Sixty years ago, on February 15, 1957, Nobel Prize-winning author William Faulkner arrived at the University of Virginia to assume his role as the first Balch Writer In Residence. Strolling through the Academical Village in his patent overcoat and collegiate tweed suit, the Mississippi gentleman smiled quietly at the throng of officials, cameramen and students, puffing his pipe and embracing the position that was to mark the beginning of five years spent in Charlottesville, until his death in 1962.

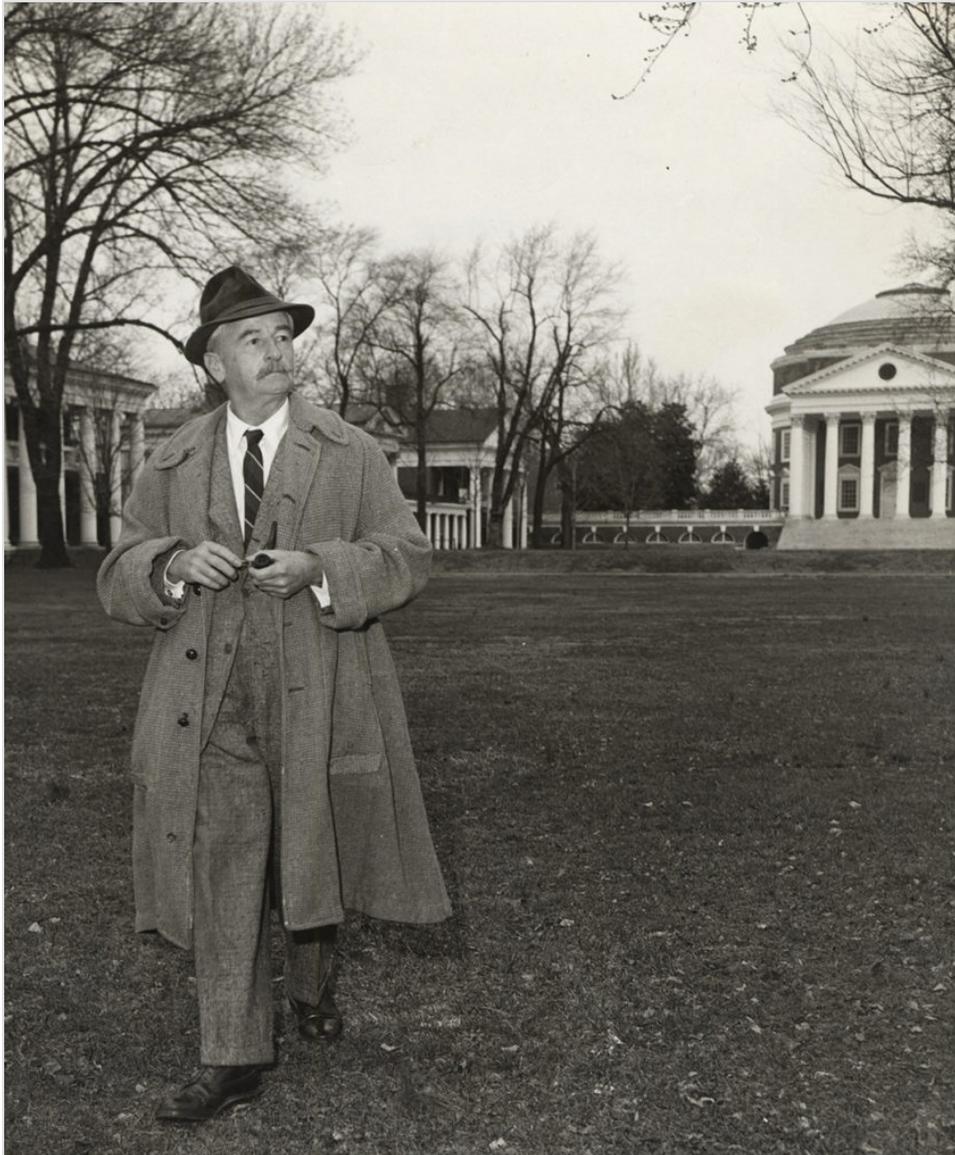
At the ensuing press conference, the 59-year-old author—whom, at that point, had also won a Pulitzer (1955) and two National Book Awards (1951 and 1955)—said his goal for the residence was to instruct students interested in literature and creative writing “out of my experience as a writer, and to help create an atmosphere.”

Ironically, in the lead-up to Faulkner’s selection as the university’s first writer in residence, there was considerable debate surrounding the decision, much of which had to do with fears concerning exactly the kind of “atmosphere” he might create. After a bequest from Emily Clark Balch, which her will dictated should be used to stimulate the “appreciation and creation of American literature,” the university decided to use the funds to establish the WIR position. “They knew that Faulkner’s only child, Jill, was living in Charlottesville with her husband, Paul, who was a law student at UVA, and, as the couple had just recently had their first child, Faulkner and his wife were visiting the area quite a bit,” says UVA professor of English and distinguished Faulkner scholar Stephen Railton. “So, some people in the English department—and especially the younger scholars—got tremendously excited, and began to argue, ‘He’s already here, so why don’t we ask him to do it?’”

Only, there was a problem. While some were thrilled by the prospect of a Faulkner residency, others—including then university president Colgate Darden—worry about the author’s well-known reputation as a drinker. And there was, after all, a precedent. “He’d been invited to the college in the 1930s and had basically stayed drunk the whole time,” said Railton. “He missed events and didn’t conduct himself well, and many of the older faculty members remembered that—essentially they were afraid he’d come here and not take it seriously and embarrass them.”

However, the former camp ultimately won out. “He took the post extremely seriously and went above and beyond in the performance of his duties,” said Railton. “He stood up in front of audiences and was a Southern gentleman, patiently answering question after question, saying ‘yes

ma'am' or 'yes sir,' and treating even the stupidest inquiries with dignity and respect. He was very polite and very sincere in his desire to make himself and his work accessible.”



(http://www.c-ville.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Faulkner2_AlbertAndShirleySpicalCollectionsLibrary.jpg)

William Faulkner often strode Grounds at UVA in his trademark tweed coat with a pipe in hand.
Courtesy Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

During the two years he spent in residence, Faulkner kept office hours, consulted with university scholars on the topic of contemporary American literature, wrote the

better part of his novel *The Mansion* and visited English classes to answer questions about his books and the process of writing, and discuss philosophy, current affairs and just about anything else. In this latter capacity, between February 1957 and May 1958, he spoke at 36 different public events, gave two formal addresses, read a dozen times from eight of his works and answered more than 1,400 questions from audiences ranging from UVA students and faculty to local citizens and women's groups. Additionally, the Nobel laureate traveled to other regional institutions—including the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington and Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg (which was, at that time, the state's women's college)—addressing audiences there as well.

The bulk of these sessions were captured on reel-to-reel recordings, which, working with more than 60 scholars, university staffers, alumni and media representatives, Railton compiled and digitally archived about a decade ago. Entitled "Faulkner at Virginia," the resulting website collection contains more than 1,690 minutes—that's 28-plus hours—worth of dialogue. "We owe the existence of these tapes to Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, the members of UVA's English department who were most involved with Faulkner's residency," Railton wrote in his introduction to the ambitious project. "It was their idea to record the sessions, and after getting the author's consent, it was almost always one or the other of them who ran the tape recorder they carried around to the events." Augmenting the recordings are explanatory narratives courtesy of Railton, letters and historical press clippings, as well as student and faculty essays offering personal accounts of Faulkner's time at the university.

"I give you the mausoleum of
all hope and desire... I give it
to you not that you may
remember time, but that you
might forget it now and then
for a moment and not spend

all of your breath trying to
conquer it.” William Faulkner,
The Sound and the Fury

“He said he loved it here and actually published a humorous essay explaining that he loved Virginians because they were ‘snobs,’” Railton says. “He was so committed to making a good impression that, when a lady out in Albemarle County took offense to his statements and wrote him a letter demanding to know what he meant by the comments, he wrote her back explaining that it was actually meant as a kind of laudatory joke. ...He was trying to be a very good citizen of the community. And I think everyone would agree the decision proved an excellent one.”

Illustrative of the usefulness of Railton’s project is our ability to experience first-hand Faulkner’s response to the snob scandal. After being questioned during a lecture about the statement, his reply was telling, especially because it was received with frequent punctuations of laughter. “A snob is someone who is so complete in himself and so satisfied with what he has that he needs nothing from anybody,” Faulkner told the audience. “That when a stranger comes up, he can accept that stranger on the stranger’s terms, provided only the stranger observe a few amenities of civilization. That’s what Virginians do. They never push at me. They want nothing of me. They will offer me their hospitality and they will accept me. All I have to do is just behave reasonably.”

Concerning “the atmosphere” Faulkner cultivated, Railton points to a personal essay composed by English major and 1959 graduate Gerald Cooper, the central premise of which described how Faulkner’s presence at the college “made students more likely to realize that there was a larger world and other ways of thinking and acting about it and in it.”

“It’s difficult for students in the 21st century to imagine what a great gulf existed between the Grounds and the larger worlds of government, commerce and especially the arts, before the advent of mass communications,” wrote Cooper in his 2010 essay. “No national media coverage originated in Charlottesville, and even Washington, D.C., offered little or no live theater, at least until the Kennedy Center opened in 1971. Thus, to have a person of international stature in the world of letters—a Nobel laureate—walking the Grounds daily over a period of months and years demonstrated that the University of Virginia had not lost sight of the world-class ambitions of its founder.”

Commemoration

Seeking to honor the diamond anniversary of Faulkner’s arrival, working with two graduate assistants and other staffers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library curator Molly Schwartzburg put together the exhibition “Faulkner: Life and Works,” which opened in early February and will run until July 7. It features artifacts from the university’s William Faulkner Collection, which is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in the world. The collection is massive—spanning numerous floor-to-ceiling stacks in both the library’s vault and archive—and encompasses materials donated by three major collectors and more than 50 smaller ones.

Of the contributors, Linton Massey, who was a friend of Faulkner’s and the executor of his personal manuscripts and papers, was the heaviest hitter by far. “He saw early and clearly how brilliant was the work of his fellow Southerner and how lasting his achievement would be,” wrote Joseph Blotner, describing Massey in the catalog of an earlier Faulkner exhibit. “Had it not been for this perception he could not have begun in time the labor that would make this the greatest of all Faulkner collections.”

Regarding the exhibit's curation, Schwartzburg said it was a daunting undertaking. "It had been 40 years since we'd done a full-on Faulkner blowout and, when we were trying to figure out how to approach the material, it was intimidating, overwhelming and humbling to try and decide how to fit everything into one room," she said, addressing an auditorium packed beyond seating capacity at the exhibit's February 28 open house. However, the team eventually decided on a two-pronged approach.

On the one hand, lining the gallery's walls were about a dozen glass cases harboring objects, photographs and documents that tell the story of what Schwartzburg described as Faulkner's various personae. "We looked at the person he was when he came to this community and decided to look closely at some of the major components of his life that people might not know about," she said. "We drew these out and isolated them so that even those who didn't know the work—or maybe they encountered it in high school and found it to be unappealing or inaccessible...we wanted there to be something here for everyone."

With personae ranging from the Hollywood screenwriter, British Royal Air Force airman, illustrator, hunter, to the self-proclaimed "White Southerner" and U.S. State Department spokesman, the displays provide an intimate window into Faulkner's world and interiority. "It's just incredible to be able to see this acclaimed Southern author positioned within the historical framework of his time," said 30-year-old Charlottesville native and aspiring writer Joshua Humphries, commenting on the show's "White Southerner" display. "You see this Nobel Prize winner struggling to handle racial issues and discuss segregation. ...I never realized how he was sort of homeless between lands—where, on the one side, he was too integrationist for Southern tastes and, on the other [leaning toward gradual integration], too conservative in the eyes of Northerners. ...I think seeing how he undertook this kind of gut-wrenching intellectual grappling profoundly humanizes the man and makes him all the more interesting."

In addition to the personae, the gallery's center casements hold what, for Faulkner nerds and connoisseurs, are the archives' crown jewels: pages from original manuscripts including, yes, selections from *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

"It's amazing that he liked it here so much that he bequeathed his papers and manuscripts to the university," said Schwartzburg, who studied English literature at Harvard and earned a Ph.D. in English and American literature from Stanford. "It has allowed UVA to become the world's premier center for Faulkner studies, with scholars traveling here from all around the world to study and access the archives. ...In part, that's what this exhibit is meant to celebrate: pulling out those treasures

Family ties

But Faulkner's legacy in Charlottesville extends beyond the university grounds. Indeed, his daughter, Jill Faulkner Summers, continued living in the area with her husband, Paul—with whom she had three children, Paul III, Cathy and Boc—until her death at the age of 74 in early 2008. Described by her children as dignified and reticent, and by her colleagues as the exemplary Southern lady, Jill made a career of her father's passion for fox hunting. After becoming master of hounds at Farmington Hunt Club in 1968—her father had joined and very much enjoyed the club during his tenure at UVA—she maintained the position until her death, becoming the longest-serving lady master in the history of North America.

"Horses were her life," said Farmington's current master of hounds, Pat Butterfield, who worked alongside Jill beginning in 1980. "She set the standard of what we should try to be like and how we should conduct ourselves. She wasn't some kind of 'lady of the manor' or anything like that—she polished her own boots, mucked her own stalls, turned out the horses herself and was just very hands-on with everything. ...She was one of very few



(http://www.c-ville.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/JillSummers_CathySummers.jpg)

Jill Faulkner Summers, William Faulkner's only child, was master of hounds at Farmington Hunt Club from 1968-2008 and was the longest-serving lady master in the history of North America. Photo by Cathy Summers

women in her position in the country and was definitely an innovator in her field.”

Meanwhile, in 1987, Paul III and his brother founded The Blue Ridge Brewing Co. in Charlottesville. “We were the state’s first microbrewery and restaurant,” says 60-year-old Paul. “We’d actually invested in a San Francisco company first, but then, when we discovered that you

could pull it off here, we decided to move the operation back home. ...Unfortunately, while we went at it for 13 years, it turned out we were a little ahead of our time.”

After selling the brewery and restaurant in 1999, Paul entered the wine industry and served as the vineyard manager at Kluge Estates, cellar master at Barboursville Vineyards and estate manager at Blenheim Vineyards before planting his own vines and establishing Knight’s Gambit Vineyard on his parents’ White Hall farm in 2003. Regarding his passion for spirits, he shrugged and cited a bit of family history. “While it was well-known that my grandfather liked to drink and preferred bourbon, not a lot of people know he was a big wine aficionado,” Paul says. “He loved a good bottle and had the kind of vintages imported to Mississippi that would probably run you between \$1,500 and \$2,000 for a bottle of equivalent quality today.”

Of Faulkner’s influence on his life, although Paul doesn’t remember much—his grandfather, whom he knew as “Pappy,” died when he was just 6 years old—he did offer this: “People knew that we were his grandkids, and while my parents raised us to be cognizant of the luck of having such a famous and talented grandfather, they emphasized the importance of being our own people. It was always up to us to make our own way and not ride on his coattails.”

Living history

Leaving the Faulkner exhibit and strolling northeast from UVA’s Alderman Library toward Rugby Road under the cover of an umbrella on a cool and rainy night, the knowledge that the great writer once walked this very route home imbues the air with a kind of, well, Faulknerian magic. “I was once teaching a class on Faulkner in Rouss Hall and suddenly it struck me, ‘My goodness, he once stood here in this very spot addressing students on his own work,’” confides Railton. “It was a very profound feeling, to experience myself as part of a kind of lineage that, I hope, will live on well beyond my lifetime.”

Notable works

William Faulkner authored 19 novels (three of which landed on the Modern Library's list of the 100 Best Novels), more than 100 short stories and numerous plays, screenplays and poems. Here's a rundown of some of Faulkner's best-known works:



<http://www.c-ville.com/uploads/2017/03/SoundAndFury> Wikimedia Commons.jpg) **The**

Sound and the Fury (1929): His fourth novel was Faulkner's favorite of all his published works (and named No. 6 on the Modern Library's list). Divided into four sections and told from four different perspectives, the book requires patience and persistence on the reader's part as the subject matter deals with painful themes.

As I Lay Dying (1930): Faulkner said he wrote the 59 chapters that comprise this novel in four-hour bursts over the course of just six weeks. It's ranked 35th on the Modern Library's list.

A Rose for Emily (1930): Although Faulkner is remembered for his novels, he was also a master of the short story, and since *A Rose for Emily* was first published in *The Forum*, it has become one of the most anthologized American short stories.

Light in August (1932): Race and identity are at the heart of this novel, which comes in at No. 54 on the Modern Library's list.

Absalom, Absalom! (1936): This novel's claim to fame is that it contains one of the longest sentences in literary history: just under 1,300 words.

The Reivers (1962): The last of Faulkner's novels to be published before his death, *The Reivers* is a coming-of-age story with a protagonist similar to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.