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Finding Aid to the Catherine Cater Papers

Cater, Althea Catherine, 1917-2015

Althea Catherine Cater papers, 1917-2001

1.25 linear ft.

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OVERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY

Althea Catherine Cater was born in New Orleans on March 18, 1917. Named after her aunt Althea, she has been called by her middle name, Catherine, all of her life. Her father, James Tate Cater, was a mathematician and dean of Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama. Her mother, Daisy Frances Rochon Cater, died when Catherine was still a young child. Following her mother's death, Catherine spent some time with relatives in Chicago and New York, before returning to live with her father in Talladega. She spent most of her youth and teen years on the Talladega campus, attending the elementary and high schools there. Her father was dean of the integrated Talladega College at a time when integration was a very controversial issue. Catherine has memories of her family rushing to hide her under a bed as the Ku Klux Klan marched through campus. However, she also remembers her father's admiration of W.E.B.

DuBois, with whom he had studied at Atlanta University, and Langston Hughes, who included a poem by Catherine in one of his anthologies. Catherine was deeply influenced by her father, who promoted some of the most progressive ideas in education at the time. He and Catherine were both inspired by the ideas of Robert Maynard Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago and later head of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. Hutchins “believed that anyone with normal capacities can read and appreciate the great books, and understand and communicate great ideas” (*Howard Binford’s Guide*, Sep. 1983, p.21).

Catherine entered the undergraduate program at Talladega College in 1934, majoring in English literature and minoring in philosophy. Following her graduation from Talladega in 1938, she enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to pursue graduate studies. At the University of Michigan, she earned her Master of Arts degree in English Language and American Literature, graduating in 1939. Disappointed to find that few jobs existed for a woman who wished to teach at an integrated college, Catherine returned to the University of Michigan to attend library school, graduating in 1940 with a Bachelor of Arts in Library Science. Her first full time job after college was at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she worked as a circulation librarian and taught freshman English classes. After three years at Fisk, she was awarded the prestigious Rosenwald Fellowship, which provided money for her to continue her studies. Again returning to the University of Michigan, Catherine received a Doctorate of Philosophy in English Language and Literature in 1945. Armed with her new doctorate degree, she obtained a teaching job at Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan. In the fall of 1948, Catherine resigned from Olivet when the school came under attack for engaging in Communist “un-American” activities. She next moved to Moorhead, Minnesota, to teach at Moorhead State Teachers College. Catherine worked as a reference librarian and taught English classes at the Moorhead school, which changed its name to Moorhead State College (MSC) in 1957, and then to Moorhead State University (MSU) in 1975. In 1962, Catherine left Moorhead to take a teaching job at North Dakota State University (NDSU) in Fargo, North Dakota. At NDSU, she taught English and humanities classes, becoming a full professor there in 1963. In the spring of 1982, Catherine “retired” from NDSU, and was made Professor Emeritus of English. Her retirement has not kept Catherine from teaching, however; in fact, since 1982, she has continued to teach at least one class each semester. In 2001, NDSU awarded her an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in recognition of her dedication to teaching and her promotion of the humanities.

No matter where she has spent her time, Catherine has always been an energetic presence. While attending the University of Michigan, she worked for three summers at a camp for deprived children in Milton Junction, Wisconsin. The camp, run as an affiliate of Lincoln Center in Chicago, took in children of different races from the poorest parts of inner-city Chicago. Working with psychologist Theodore Dreikurs, Catherine acquired several new theories on teaching and children, such as the idea that all children can work out their problems if they have a positive sense of self-esteem. At Olivet College, whose faculty she joined in 1945, Catherine became involved in numerous protests when the liberal school was attacked for alleged Communist activity and accused of anti-American attitudes during the McCarthy era. Students and many faculty members protested vigorously when four members of the faculty were fired. Catherine resigned from Olivet at the beginning of the 1948 school year (but not effective until the end of spring semester 1949), so that she would be free to participate in protests during the 1948-1949 school year. After her resignation, she became part of a group of rebel faculty who aspired

to start their own college in New York. However, they were unable to earn enough money for the New York charter and the group eventually broke up and went in different directions. Catherine went to MSC in Moorhead, where she became involved in a number of campus activities. She headed the MSC campus radio committee, chaired the Fine Arts Series, and was active in Fargo-Moorhead's Open Forum, which brought prominent speakers to the area, such as the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead. Catherine also became heavily involved with the Modern Languages Association (MLA) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), serving as a member of the national ACLU Advisory Council. She has lifetime memberships to both the MLA and ACLU. After Catherine came to NDSU in 1962, she presided over the Faculty Senate, led the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, and started the Scholars Program. Catherine has received many awards and honors over the years for her efforts, including such honors as the Robert Odney Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1976, the Vogel Faculty Award in English in 1978, the Temple Beth El award in 1987, and the Distinguished Educator award from the NDSU Blue Key Fraternity in 1998.

Catherine has often expressed her strong belief that a good college education is important not just for obtaining jobs, but also for students' overall well-being. She believes students are best served through an interdisciplinary approach to education. She remarked to writer Nancy Hanson in 1982: "My interests lie outside the realm of academic disciplines, little pill boxes into which knowledge is fitted. My concern lies with questions that need to be answered, which can't be tackled through any one discipline but which can be approached through many" (*Howard Binford's Guide*, Sep. 1983, p.24). Catherine's devotion to teaching and commitment to student learning has been evident throughout her career. Her greatest love has been the humanities, of which she is a tireless promoter. At NDSU, Catherine was part of the group that established the school's humanities major, which grew out of the Tri-College Humanities Forum. She helped create NDSU's Scholars Program in 1968 and directed it for over a dozen years. In the Scholars Program, highly motivated students take research-intensive interdisciplinary courses, which are designed to teach them to work independently and think creatively. The program is affiliated with the Upper Midwest Honors Council and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), both of which Catherine has presided over as president. Catherine also has headed the NCHC Honors Semesters committee and has served as publications chair of the NCHC, which established one of its first chapters in the Midwest on the NDSU campus. To recognize Catherine's advocacy of humanities in higher education, the Catherine Cater Humanities Lecture Series was established at NDSU in 1986. The Series sponsors guest speakers and programs that focus on specific topics in the humanities. In November of 2000, a silent auction was held to benefit the Catherine Cater Lecture Series; Catherine donated many personal items, including family heirlooms, jewelry, and antiques, to the fundraiser. Every year, a select group of students continues to enter NDSU's Scholars Program, a living tribute to Catherine's devotion to the humanities.

Outside of teaching, Catherine enjoyed traveling when she can. She traveled through much of Europe, studying in Ireland, France, England, and Sweden. She had also been to the Turkish coast, Hong Kong, China, the Soviet Union, Mexico, Thailand, and other various places. One of her favorite destinations was London, where she could study Greek mythology (a favorite topic of hers) at the British Museum. Over the years, Catherine had also traveled within the United States, working on post-doctoral studies at Columbia University in New York and at the University of California at Berkeley. She has also participated in summer literary sessions at Kenyon College in Ohio.

Catherine was divorced in 1951 from Cornelius Golightly, and has gone by her maiden name (Cater) since then. Her father died in May of 1958. Catherine passed away in 2015 in Fargo.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Althea Catherine Cater papers, artificially created from a donation by the college of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at NDSU, document the many activities and accomplishments that have marked Catherine's life from her days as a toddler in Alabama to her present life in Fargo. The collection reflects Cater's deep love for teaching and her continuous interest in the humanities. The papers are divided into eleven series: **Biographical Materials Series**, **Research Papers Series**, **College Degrees Series**, **Newspaper/Magazine Articles Series**, **National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Series**, **Talks Series**, **Official Correspondence Series**, **Travel Series**, **Art Prints and Christmas Cards Series**, **Awards Series**, and **Photos Series**.

The [Biographical Materials Series](#) includes papers related to her parents and to her aunt, Hattie Cater Haynes, her father's oldest sister. Catherine lived with Hattie Cater Haynes for a little while when she was a young child. The [Interview Sub-Series](#) contains materials from an interview of Catherine Cater conducted by Hannah Vanorny on April 13, 2005, at Catherine's home in Fargo. Two cassette tapes, a list of the questions asked, and a synopsis of the interview make up the sub-series. In the interview, Catherine discusses her childhood, her family, her teaching experiences, and other aspects of her life.

The [Research Papers Series](#) consists of three papers written by Catherine in college. The papers, which include both her master's and doctoral theses, all have literary themes.

The [College Degrees Series](#) contains all five college degrees Catherine has earned. These include her bachelor's degree (1938) from Talladega College; her master's degree (1939), library degree (1940), and doctorate degree (1945) from the University of Michigan; and her honorary doctorate degree (2001) from NDSU.

The [Newspaper/Magazine Articles Series](#) consists of articles about Catherine and some of her activities. Three of the articles specifically describe Catherine's life and her love of teaching. The article titles are reflective of this theme. They are: "Cater: 'infect one another with the desire to learn' (1977); "Catherine Cater: Her Former Students at Moorhead State and NDSU Repeatedly Describe Her as 'A Great Teacher' (1983); and "All in the name of learning" (2000). "Respect for U.S. declines, Dr. Mead tells F-M Forum" (1959) is an article about anthropologist Margaret Mead's trip to Moorhead as part of the Fargo-Moorhead Open Forum lecture series, which Catherine helped organize. "Silent Auction to benefit Cater lecture series" (2000) describes a fundraiser held to benefit the Catherine Cater Lecture Series, which was founded in 1986. "Excerpts" is a short list of quotes by Catherine published in the first issue of *NDSU Magazine* (Fall 2000). The 1978 "Tri-College University" newsletter contains a photo of Catherine under the "Faculty" section (part 3, p. 7).

The [National Collegiate Honors Council \(NCHC\) Series](#) papers demonstrate Catherine's heavy involvement in this honors organization. The series displays Catherine's talent for writing. She wrote and edited a number of articles for various NCHC publications over the years, including *A Handbook on Honors Semesters*, *The National Honors Report*, and *Forum for Honors*. In 2000, an entire issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)*, entitled: "Liberal Learning in the New Century: A Festschrift for Catherine Cater," was dedicated to Catherine. The series also contains a scrapbook Catherine put together after the Tenth Annual Conference of the NCHC, held at Washington State University in 1975. The scrapbook contains clippings and photographs from the event.

The [Talks Series](#) features just a few of the talks Catherine has given during her career. The 26th Annual Faculty Lectureship Award, which Catherine received in 1982, represents one of NDSU's most esteemed honors. Her speech for the occasion (entitled "Fire & Rock") focused on a topic in mythology, a favorite subject of hers. Materials from Catherine's Faculty Lectureship speech include a cassette tape of her talk, several newspaper articles about the occasion, and a program from the event. Also included in this series is a newspaper article describing Catherine's speech at the annual Phi Kappa Phi banquet in 1960, and the text from an undated speech given by Catherine entitled, "Yet Generations Remain the Same."

The [Official Correspondence Series](#) consists of just two letters; both are from 1948 and both concern original pieces of writing by Catherine. The first letter (June 4, 1948) is from editor Lorenzo Greene, writing to confirm Catherine's decision to submit an article to the *Midwest Journal*. The second letter (July 27, 1948) is a note from the Permissions Department of Doubleday & Company requesting permission to include Catherine's poem, "Here and Now," in a 1949 book of poetry compiled by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes.

The [Travel Series](#) contains papers demonstrating Catherine's love of travel. The series includes two passports (1959, 1964), a *Swedish For Tourists* booklet (1955), two certificates of vaccination (1959, 1960s), and an Air Letter to Catherine from Bonnington Hotels in London (1971). The postcards in the series feature just a few of the places that Catherine has visited, including such diverse locations as England, South Carolina, Mexico, and SeaWorld. Also in this series is a keychain from "The London Room."

The [Art Prints and Christmas Cards Series](#) contains postcard-sized prints of art by such famous artists as Diego Rivera and Pablo Picasso, as well as Christmas cards (and letters) from Catherine's numerous friends and family members.

The [Awards Series](#) showcases the many awards that Catherine has won over the years. The series contains both certificates and plaques. A newspaper article, program, and speech notes describe the two awards Catherine has received from the NDSU Blue Key Honor Society: the Blue Key Doctor of Service Award (1970) and the Blue Key Distinguished Educator award (1998). Certificates document Catherine's acceptance of the Robert Odney Award for Excellence in Teaching (1976), the Close Up Award (1992), and the Mortar Board National Honor Society's "Preferred Professor" award (1993). The series contains nine plaques: the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Woman of the Year award (1973), an NCHC award for serving as president of the organization (1974-75), the Robert Odney Award for

Excellence in Teaching (1976-this came with a certificate also), the Century II Prairie Club award (1981/82, 1982/83), the Century II Pioneer Club award (1987-88), the Temple Beth El award (1987), the Outstanding Campus Communicator award from Pi Kappa Delta (1993), the Liberty Bell Award (1995), and the President's Bronze Medallion from NDSU. This series also contains the Woksape Lifetime Achievement Award clock from the North Dakota Humanities Council, and a paperweight honoring Cater as a "Gunkelman Award Nominee" (1993). The Mary McCannel Gunkelman Recognition Award is given to an individual on campus who contributes to creating a satisfying and happy environment for NDSU students.

The [Photos Series](#) (1917-2001) contains pictures of Catherine from infancy to older adulthood. The series includes photos of Catherine's family, her friends, and her colleagues. There are also pictures from Catherine's travels all over the world. Other photographs include shots of the NDSU College Quiz Bowl team and pictures from William Faulkner's life provided by *Historical Graphics* photography (1973-1974). Many of the people in the photos are unidentified and, except for the travel photos, most of the pictures are undated.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

BOX 1

1 Finding Aid

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS SERIES:

- 2 St. Martinville, Louisiana – town where Catherine's mother grew up – tourist guide, short historical message from the St. Martinville Evangeline Museum, St. Martinville brochure
- 3 Funeral announcement for James Tate Cater (Catherine's father) – May 1958
- 4 Hattie Cater Haynes – marriage certificate between Hattie and Charles Henry Haynes (1920), Hotel Training School diploma (1940), death announcement (1979)

Interview Sub-Series:

- 5 Two cassette tapes of the interview (April 13, 2005)
- 6 List of questions
- 7 Synopsis of interview

RESEARCH PAPERS SERIES:

- 8 "Four Voices Out of the South" – English Proseminar 211g – 21 pages – date unknown – published in the *Michigan Review*.
- 9 Masters thesis - "Keats, Endymion, and the Critics" – University of Michigan - 31 pages - May 1939
- 10 Doctoral thesis – University of Michigan - topic: the attitudes of five Southern fiction novelists "in terms of their individual approaches to social problems" - 257 pages - 1945

COLLEGE DEGREES SERIES:

- 11 Bachelor of Arts - Talladega College – June 6, 1938
- 12 Master of Arts - English Language and Literature – University of Michigan – June 17, 1939
- 13 Bachelor of Arts in Library Science – University of Michigan - June 15, 1940
- 14 Doctor of Philosophy - English Language and Literature - October 20, 1945
- 15 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from NDSU – degree, short profile of Cater in the Annual Spring Commencement booklet, *Spectrum* article: “Two at SU to receive honorary doctorates” (April 10, 2001, p.4) - May 12, 2001

NEWSPAPER/MAGAZINE ARTICLES SERIES:

- 16 “Respect for U.S. declines, Dr. Mead tells F-M Forum” - *Western Mystic* (Moorhead State College newspaper) – story on Margaret Mead’s lecture for the Fargo-Moorhead Open Forum, organized by Catherine – includes photo of Margaret Mead and Catherine - March 12, 1959
- 17 “Cater: ‘infect one another with the desire to learn’ – by Ellen Kosse – *Spectrum* - February 8, 1977, p. 6
- 18 “Tri-College University: A Study” – newsletter – includes photo of Catherine on page 7 – December 1978
- 19 “Catherine Cater: Her Former Students at Moorhead State and NDSU Repeatedly Describe Her as ‘A Great Teacher’ – by Nancy Edmonds Hanson – *Howard Binford’s Guide to Fargo, Moorhead, and West Fargo*. v.15, n.3 (September 1983), p. 19-22, 24, 28, 34
- 20 “Excerpts” – list of quotes written by Catherine - *NDSU Magazine* – v.1, n.1 (Fall 2000), p. 16-17
- 21 “Silent Auction to benefit Cater lecture series” - *Spectrum* - November 3, 2000, p. 3
- 22 “All in the name of learning” – by Conor Shenk – *Spectrum* - November 3, 2000, p. 4

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL (NCHC) SERIES:

- 23 *A Handbook on Honors Semesters* - as Coordinator for the Scholars Program at NDSU, Catherine edited this handbook and wrote the Foreword
- 24 Tenth Annual Conference of the NCHC - Washington State University – Oct. 23-25, 1975 – “The Many Faces of Honors” – Catherine (president of NCHC at the time) assembled a scrapbook of the event featuring brochures and photos
- 25 *The National Honors Report* (NCHC publication) – Winter 1986 – article by Catherine on p. 17-18 entitled: “A Brief Consideration of Honors Research”
- 26 *Forum for Honors* (NCHC publication) – Summer 1987 – v.17, n.4 - article by Catherine on p. 52 entitled: “The Guilford Forum in Retrospect”
- 27 *Forum for Honors* – Winter/Spring 1991 – v.20, n.3 - Catherine wrote the Introduction and is listed as a member of NCHC Executive Committee
- 28 *The National Honors Report* – Winter 1991 - article by Catherine on page 7 entitled: “A Humanist’s View of Twenty-five Years of NCHC”
- 29 *The National Honors Report* – Spring 1996 – front page article by Catherine entitled: “Balancing the Role of Faculty and Administrators: An Honors Conundrum”
- 30 National Collegiate Honors Council Conference - Renaissance Orlando Resort, Florida – October 27-31, 1999 - program - the Forum 2 talks featured those people who had agreed to write for the upcoming JNCHC “Festschrift” Spring/Summer 2000 issue honoring Catherine

- 31 *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* – Spring/Summer 2000 – v.1, no.1 – the issue was in honor of Catherine and was entitled: “Liberal Learning in the New Century: A Festschrift for Catherine Cater”
- 32 *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* – Fall/Winter 2000 - v.1, no.2 – article about Catherine on p. 87 by Paul Homan entitled: “A Humanist in Honors: Another Look at Catherine Cater”

TALKS SERIES:

- 33 Guest speaker at annual Phi Kappa Phi banquet – speech title: “Footnote to Daedalus” – *Spectrum* (May 13, 1960, p.4) article - May 5, 1960
- 34 26th Annual Faculty Lectureship Award – speech title: “Fire & Rock” – cassette tape of lecture, two newspaper articles (*Fargo Forum*, March 1, 1982, p.7), lecture program, typed text of the speech, lecture invitation - February 23, 1982
- 35 “Yet Generations Remain the Same” – typed speech given by Catherine – unknown occasion

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE SERIES:

- 36 Letter from editor Lorenzo Greene (Jefferson City, Missouri) confirming Catherine’s promise to submit an article to the *Midwest Journal* – June 4, 1948
- 37 Letter from the Permissions Department of publisher Doubleday & Company, Inc., requesting permission to include Catherine’s poem, “Here and Now,” in a 1949 book of *Modern Negro Poetry*, compiled by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes – July 27, 1948

TRAVEL SERIES:

- 38 Passports (2) – issued May 25, 1959 and April 15, 1964 – includes two photos of Catherine
- 39 Assorted travel materials: *Swedish For Tourists* booklet (1955) – two certificates of vaccination (records of shots from 1959, 1960s) – Air Letter to Catherine from Bonnington Hotels in London (April 6, 1971)
- 40 Postcards of: London - Charlotte, North Carolina - Mexico - South Carolina flowers - Winthrop College (Rock Hill, South Carolina) buildings – Olivet College in Michigan - SeaWorld
- 41 “The London Room” keychain - includes photo of Catherine

ART PRINTS AND CHRISTMAS CARDS SERIES:

- 42 Small art prints - Diego Rivera, Pablo Picasso, Metropolitan Museum of Art
- 43 Christmas cards – two from 1998, the rest are unknown years

AWARDS SERIES:

- 44 Blue Key Doctor of Service Award from NDSU Blue Key Fraternity – typed text of speech about Catherine given by good friend, roommate, and fellow NDSU professor Delsie Holmquist during Blue Key Banquet – 1970
- 45 Robert Odney Award for Excellence in Teaching - certificate - May 11, 1976
- 46 Close Up Award – certificate - in recognition of Catherine’s “time, efforts and leadership in contributing to the success of the 1992 Southeast Regional Close Up Program”
- 47 Mortar Board National Honor Society’s “Preferred Professor” award – certificate - 1993

- 48 Blue Key Distinguished Educator award – Distinguished Educator Banquet program (December 3, 1998), *Spectrum* article (December 4, 1998, p.1) – 1998
- 49 Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Woman of the Year award – plaque – 1973
- 50 NCHC award – to honor Catherine for serving as national president of the organization from 1974-75 and “for her efforts in putting Fargo on the map” – plaque
- 51 Robert Odney Award for Excellence in Teaching – plaque - May 11, 1976
- 52 Century II Prairie Club plaque – sponsored by NDSU Alumni Development - 1981/82, 1982/83
- 53 Century II Pioneer Club plaque – sponsored by NDSU Development Foundation - 1987-1988
- 54 Temple Beth El award – plaque – “for showing understanding, exemplifying tolerance and fostering sensitivity among all people in our community” – September 12, 1987
- 55 Outstanding Campus Communicator award from Pi Kappa Delta – plaque - 1993
- 56 Liberty Bell Award – plaque – 1995
- 57 President’s Bronze Medallion from NDSU – awarded for “extraordinary generosity, leadership and personal commitment to North Dakota State University” – date unknown
- 58 Paperweight commemorating Catherine as a “Gunkelman Award Nominee” – 1993
- 59 Gavel

PHOTOS SERIES [NDSU Photo Collection]

- 1 Catherine as a baby and toddler – many of these include photos of Catherine’s mother also – undated [68]
- 2 Catherine’s mother - Daisy Rochon Cater – undated [7]
- 3 Catherine as a young woman and later in life – undated [35]
- 4 Photographs of Catherine from the Blue Key Fraternity – undated [4]
- 5 Catherine with friend and housemate Delsie Holmquist –1955, 1983, some undated [13]
- 6 Catherine with Dr. Richard Bovard, NDSU English professor – 1983 [1]
- 7 Catherine with Dr. Johannes Vazulik, NDSU Professor – 1983 [1]
- 8 Catherine with others at an Honors Program meeting – College of New Rochelle, New York – 1999 [8]
- 9 Catherine with Connie Battreal Abrook – MSU Class of 1957 – photo taken in February 2001 [1]
- 10 Travel/Tourist photos – from Mexico, Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, England, Austria, Nova Scotia, and other unidentified places – 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1961, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1994, 1996, some undated [119]
- 11 William Faulkner prints from *Historical Graphics* photography – 1973-1974 [16]
- 12 NDSU College Quiz Bowl Team – Catherine was the coach – undated [3]
- 13 The Mulkern family – friends of Catherine’s – 1998, 2000 [4]