

# Harry Chapin Collection



**Music Division, Library of Congress  
Washington, D.C.  
2024**

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/perform.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/2014572485>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/eadmus.mu024019>

Prepared by the Music Division of the Library of Congress

Finding aid encoded by Jada Twitty, 2024 June

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Harry Chapin Collection

**Inclusive Dates:** circa 1960-2022

**Bulk Dates:** 1973-1990

**Creator:** Coan, Peter M.

**Creator:** Chapin, Harry

**Extent:** approximately 1,000 items

**Extent:** 10 containers

**Extent:** 4.25 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/2014572485>

**Summary:** Harry Chapin (1942-1981) was an American singer-songwriter and philanthropist. Primarily active in the 1970s, he was known for songs written in a narrative style, such as "Cat's in the Cradle" and "Taxi." Chapin was also one of the founders, along with Bill Ayres, of the World Hunger Year organization, now known as WhyHunger. This collection consists of interviews, writings, photographs, song and poetry books, scrapbooks, and clippings pertaining to Chapin's personal life, career, and philanthropy, collected by Peter Coan, author of *Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story*.

## Acquisition Information

The Harry Chapin Collection was acquired in two accessions. The bulk of the materials, compiled by biographer Peter Coan, were purchased from a manuscript dealer in 2009. Harry Chapin's son, Jason Chapin, donated an addition to the collection in 2023.

## Accruals

Further accruals are expected.

## Processing History

Pamela Murrell, Janet McKinney, and Jada Twitty processed the Harry Chapin Collection in 2019 and 2024. Some items in the collection have undergone mold remediation. Jada Twitty created the finding aid in 2024.

## Transfers

Sound and video recordings from the Harry Chapin Collection were transferred to the Library of Congress National Audio-Visual Conservation Center, where they are identified as part of the Harry Chapin Collection (MAVIS nos. 17190 and 17192). An inventory of this material is available in the Music Division's collection file.

## Copyright Status

Materials from the Harry Chapin Collection are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

## Access and Restrictions

The Harry Chapin Collection is open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Music Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Certain restrictions on using or copying materials may apply.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item, date, container number], Harry Chapin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Sketches

### Harry Chapin

Date	Event
1942 December 7	Born Harry Chapin in New York City to notable Jazz drummer and music educator James "Jim" Chapin and Jeanne Elspeth
1958	Began performing in Greenwich Village with brothers Tom and Steve as The Chapin Brothers
1960	Enrolled in the Air Force Academy for three months, then Cornell University
1961	Left Cornell Began working in the film industry at Drew Associates
1963	Re-enrolled in Cornell
1965	Left Cornell again Returned to performing folk and rock music with his brothers and his father Chapin moved to Los Angeles to work in the film industry with Cayton Inc.
1967	Cayton's documentary boxing film, <i>Legendary Champions</i> , released. It was awarded the New York and Atlanta film festival gold prizes and nominated for an Academy Award for Best Feature Documentary Traveled to Ethiopia with Jim Lipscomb to research a documentary on the World Bank's impact on developing nations Left the film industry Returned to New York City to write a musical, <i>The Night That Made America Famous</i>
1968	Married Sandra Campbell Gaston (1934-) and moved to Huntington, New York Worked as a free-lance documentary film-maker Produced and directed short films for IBM and Time-Life
1970	Worked with Jim Lipscomb to create documentary <i>Dual in the Wind</i> and as a freelancer on several other film projects Began writing songs in a narrative form. Brothers Tom and Steve Chapin performed his music Encountered a woman he dated in the past while in New York City to obtain a taxi license – the inspiration for the song "Taxi"
1971	Returned to songwriting, formed a band to support him in performing his own music, and performed as the opening act for his brothers Signed with Elektra Records
1972	Released the single "Taxi," which reached no. 24 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart Released albums <i>Heads and Tales</i> and <i>Sniper and Other Love Songs</i>
1973	Released the album <i>Short Stories</i>
1974	Released the album <i>Verities and Balderdash</i> , which included the song "Cat's in the Cradle" (with lyrics by Sandra Chapin) "Cat's in the Cradle" went to number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart
1975	Released the album <i>Portrait Gallery</i> Chapin's recording of "Cat's in the Cradle" nominated for the Grammy for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance Founded non-profit organization World Hunger Year (WHY) with radio personality Bill Ayres
1975	<i>The Night That Made America Famous</i> opened on Broadway. It was nominated for two Tony Awards and two Drama Desk Awards Met biographer Peter Coan, who proposed to write Chapin's biography

1977	Through WHY and the Food Policy Center, lobbied for the formation of a Presidential Commission on World Hunger and was subsequently appointed to the commission by President Jimmy Carter Held benefit concert "Four Together -- Concert for World Hunger" with Gordon Lightfoot, James Taylor, and John Denver in Olympia Stadium in Detroit, Michigan
1981 July 16	Died at age 38 in a car accident <i>en route</i> to a concert in East Meadow, New York
1987	Posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for his work to end world hunger
2011	"Cat's in the Cradle" inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame

### **Peter Coan**

Peter Morton Coan (1956-) is an American author who has written for the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Travel and Leisure*, and *World Tennis* magazines. He met Chapin in 1975 after sending a three-page letter requesting to write his biography. Coan traveled with Chapin for seven years, working as his chauffeur and conducting interviews and research. After Chapin's death in 1981, Coan and Chapin's widow, Sandra Chapin, litigated the rights to Chapin's biography. Following the settlement, the biography was published in 1990.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Harry Chapin Collection spans from about the 1960s to 2008, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1973 to 1990. The documents primarily consist of materials Peter Coan used to write Chapin's biography, *Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story*, including transcriptions of Coan's interviews, clippings, articles, scrapbooks, and photographs relating to Chapin's life and career. Published copies of the biography are also included. The collection also contains several of Chapin's lyric notebooks, as well as correspondence and a film script.

## **Organization of the Harry Chapin Collection**

The collection is arranged in six series:

- [Biography Project Files, 1973-2008 and undated](#)
- [Personal Effects, circa 1960-1978 and undated](#)
- [Photographs, 1972-1981](#)
- [Clippings, 1974-2008](#)
- [Scrapbooks, 1966-1988](#)
- [Realia, 2022](#)

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### **People**

Ayres, Bill.  
Chapin family.  
Chapin, Harry--Archives.  
Chapin, Harry.  
Coan, Peter M.  
Seeger, Pete, 1919-2014.  
Snyder, Tom, 1936-2007.

### **Organizations**

World Hunger Year--History.

### **Subjects**

Folk-rock music--United States--History and criticism.

Philanthropists--United States--Biography.  
Singers--United States--Biography.

**Titles**

*Harry Chapin papers*

**Form/Genre**

Albums (Books)

Articles.

Biographies.

Books.

Clippings (Information artifacts)

Drafts (Documents)

Interviews.

Notebooks.

Personal correspondence.

Photographs.

Screenplays.

Writings (Documents)

## Description of Series

### Container

### Series

BOX 1-3

#### Biography Project Files, 1973-2008 and undated

These materials were compiled by Peter Coan for the purpose of writing Harry Chapin's biography, *Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story*. There are interviews with Chapin and other notable individuals, such as Bill Ayers, Pete Seeger, Tom Snyder, and Chapin family members; articles; and clippings relating to Harry Chapin. Also included are published copies of the biography, Coan's fan mail, and drafts of the biography's epilogue.

Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

BOX 3-5, 10

#### Personal Effects, circa 1960-1978 and undated

The materials in this series were created by Harry Chapin. Included are his writings, such as draft lyric notebooks, published lyrics and songbooks, a songwriting workshop transcript, and a film script. Also present are copies of correspondence Chapin wrote during his time abroad.

Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

BOX 6, 10

#### Photographs, 1972-1981

The images in this series depict Harry Chapin's personal and professional life, from his childhood until his death in 1981. Included are photographs, slides, negatives, and contact sheets. Original titles were maintained.

Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

BOX 4

#### Clippings, 1974-2008

This series consists of newspaper and magazine clippings related primarily to the life and career of Harry Chapin, his non-profit organization World Hunger Year (WHY), and Coan's biography. Also included are clippings detailing the legal proceedings between Coan and Sandra Chapin following Harry Chapin's death.

Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

BOX 7-9

#### Scrapbooks, 1966-1988

Peter Coan compiled the three scrapbooks in this series. They contain clippings related to the life and career of Harry Chapin, as well as correspondence and the police report of Chapin's fatal car accident.

Arranged chronologically.

BOX 5, 10

#### Realia, 2022

This series contains several medals and pins donated by members of Harry Chapin's family.

The items commemorate what would have been Chapin's 80th birthday, as well as the 50th anniversary of the release of his song, "Taxi." Also included is an autographed tour t-shirt.

Arranged alphabetically by item.

# Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-3	<b>Biography Project Files, 1973-2008 and undated</b> These materials were compiled by Peter Coan for the purpose of writing Harry Chapin's biography, <i>Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story</i> . There are interviews with Chapin and other notable individuals, such as Bill Ayers, Pete Seeger, Tom Snyder, and Chapin family members; articles; and clippings relating to Harry Chapin. Also included are published copies of the biography, Coan's fan mail, and drafts of the biography's epilogue. Arranged alphabetically by folder title.
BOX/FOLDER 1/1	America's Ten Outstanding Young Men of 1977 nomination form, 1975-1977
BOX/FOLDER 1/2	Articles, 1976, 1978 By Peter Coan and Geof Hewitt
BOX/FOLDER 1/3	Concert programs, 1976 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 1/4	Concert schedules, 1976-1981
BOX/FOLDER 1/5	<i>Conscience of America: The Years Between</i> , 1976 TV script
BOX/FOLDER 1/6	Correspondence between Coan and Chapin, 1975-1976 Interviews
BOX/FOLDER 1/7-10	With Harry Chapin, 1974-1981 and undated With others
BOX/FOLDER 1/11	List of interviewees, undated
BOX/FOLDER 1/12	Ayers - Cayton, 1976-1981 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 1/13	Chapin family, 1975-1982 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/1	Christgau - Holzman, 1976-1978 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/2	Jacob - Murray, 1977-1981 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/3	Nader - Rivera, 1976-1977 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/4	Rockwell - Wilkes, 1976-1981 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/5	Unidentified and miscellaneous interviews, 1974-1982 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/6	James Chapin biography, undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/7	Joel Whitburn's Record Research, 1973-1974
BOX/FOLDER 2/8	"On the Road" tour book, circa 1970 Research correspondence
BOX/FOLDER 2/10	General, 1976-2008 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/9	Chapin, Mary, 1975-1977
BOX/FOLDER 2/11	Rejection letters, 1977-1978 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 2/12	World Hunger Year letters from Harry Chapin, 1976 and undated <i>Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story</i>
BOX/FOLDER 2/13	Epilogue, undated Draft
BOX/FOLDER 2/14	Epilogue, undated Final version
BOX/FOLDER 2/15	Fan mail, 1991-2000
BOX/FOLDER 3/1	Press materials, circa 1987-1990
BOX/FOLDER 3/2	Previous title and cover, undated

## Biography Project Files, 1973-2008 and undated

Container	Contents
BOX/FOLDER 5/1-2	Published copies, circa 1987-1990
BOX/FOLDER 3/3	Theatrical production programs, 1975-1981
BOX/FOLDER 3/4	Websites, undated
BOX/FOLDER 3/5	World Hunger Year, 1977-1982
BOX 3-5, 10	<b>Personal Effects, circa 1960-1978 and undated</b> The materials in this series were created by Harry Chapin. Included are his writings, such as draft lyric notebooks, published lyrics and songbooks, a songwriting workshop transcript, and a film script. Also present are copies of correspondence Chapin wrote during his time abroad. Arranged alphabetically by folder title.
BOX/FOLDER 10/1	Concert souvenir tour book, 1980 Correspondence
BOX/FOLDER 3/6	Chapin, Sandra, undated
BOX/FOLDER 3/7	Ethiopia, 1968
BOX/FOLDER 3/8	Rome, circa 1960s Lyric drafts
BOX/FOLDER 3/9-13	Composition notebooks A - E, undated
BOX/FOLDER 3/14	Loose manuscript pages, undated Published lyrics
BOX/FOLDER 3/15	<i>Living Room Suite</i> , circa 1978
BOX/FOLDER 3/16	<i>Looking . . . Seeing</i> , circa 1975 Drawings by Rob White
BOX/FOLDER 3/17	<i>Portrait Gallery</i> , circa 1975
BOX/FOLDER 3/18	<i>Verities and Balderdash</i> , circa 1974
BOX/FOLDER 4/1	Songwriting Workshop manuscript, 1976
BOX/FOLDER 4/2	<i>Tomcat</i> , undated Original film treatment
BOX 6, 10	<b>Photographs, 1972-1981</b> The images in this series depict Harry Chapin's personal and professional life, from his childhood until his death in 1981. Included are photographs, slides, negatives, and contact sheets. Original titles were maintained. Arranged alphabetically by folder title.
BOX/FOLDER 6/1	Backyard concert at home in Huntington, New York, 1975
BOX/FOLDER 6/2	Behind the Scenes, President Jimmy Carter, 1975-1981
BOX/FOLDER 6/3	Childhood to 1975 and career launch, 1972-1975 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 6/4	Harry Chapin in Andover, New Jersey, family compound, 1976
BOX/FOLDER 6/5	Harry Chapin (plus band, brothers, and Pete Seeger) in performance, 1975-1981
BOX/FOLDER 6/6-8	Miscellaneous, undated Slides; negatives; contact sheets
BOX/FOLDER 10/2	Mississippi River Festival, 1975



## Photographs, 1972-1981

Container	Contents
BOX/FOLDER 6/9	<i>Night That Made America Famous</i> and <i>Somethin's Brewin' in Gainesville</i> Broadway shows, 1975 and 1980
BOX 4	<b>Clippings, 1974-2008</b> This series consists of newspaper and magazine clippings related primarily to the life and career of Harry Chapin, his non-profit organization World Hunger Year (WHY), and Coan's biography. Also included are clippings detailing the legal proceedings between Coan and Sandra Chapin following Harry Chapin's death. Arranged alphabetically by folder title.
BOX/FOLDER 4/3	<i>Taxi: The Harry Chapin Story</i> , 1983-1990
BOX/FOLDER 4/4	Tributes and obituaries, 1981-2008 and undated
BOX/FOLDER 4/5	World Hunger Year, 1974-1978 and undated
BOX 7-9	<b>Scrapbooks, 1966-1988</b> Peter Coan compiled the three scrapbooks in this series. They contain clippings related to the life and career of Harry Chapin, as well as correspondence and the police report of Chapin's fatal car accident. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 7	Scrapbook A, 1966-1974
BOX 8	Scrapbook B, 1975-1977
BOX 9	Scrapbook C, 1978-1988
BOX 5, 10	<b>Realia, 2022</b> This series contains several medals and pins donated by members of Harry Chapin's family. The items commemorate what would have been Chapin's 80th birthday, as well as the 50th anniversary of the release of his song, "Taxi." Also included is an autographed tour t-shirt. Arranged alphabetically by item.
BOX/FOLDER 5/3	Medals and pins, 2022 <i>Note:</i> Commemorates 80th birthday anniversary and 50th anniversary of "Taxi" and "Circle"
BOX 10	T-shirt, Chapin "On Tour," undated Autographed