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Fred W. McDarrah, Photographer, Dies at 81

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Fred W. McDarrah, a self-described square who as a longtime photographer for The Village Voice documented the unwashed exploits of the Beat generation, and as an enterprising freelance talent agent rented out members of that generation (washed or unwashed) to wide-eyed suburban society gatherings, died on Tuesday at his home in Greenwich Village. He was 81.



Fred W. McDarrah in his office in an undated photo.



Fred W. McDarrah Mr. McDarrah photographed Robert F. Kennedy on a tour of a slum on the Lower East Side.

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Fred W. McDarrah

Bob Dylan, all in black, in Sheridan Square in January 1965.



Fred W. McDarrah

Jack Kerouac reading from his novel "On the Road" in 1959.

Mr. McDarrah died in his sleep, his family said. At his death, he was the consulting picture editor for *The Voice*, with which he had been associated for half a century.

Joining *The Voice* in the mid-1950s as an ad salesman, Mr. McDarrah soon became its staff photographer. (For many years he was its only staff photographer.) He famously shot a generation of young hopefuls who had come to New York to make their reputations — hopefuls named Kerouac and Warhol and Dylan and Joplin. Later the picture editor at *The Voice*, Mr. McDarrah was a mentor to a generation of fine young photographers, among them Sylvia Plachy.

Though Mr. McDarrah's work often hung on gallery walls, critics considered him more photojournalist than artist, an assessment with which he cheerfully agreed.

"If somebody called me a fine arts photographer I'd laugh them out of the room," he told *The East Hampton Star* in 1999.

As a photojournalist, Mr. McDarrah chronicled the city — in particular the Village — in all its postwar bohemian splendor. He shot jazz clubs and coffeehouses; concerts and poetry readings; sit-ins, be-ins, love-ins and teach-ins. He captured famous faces, like Norman Mailer and William S. Burroughs; now-vanished places, like the Peace Eye Bookstore on Avenue A; and historic moments, like the

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Stonewall uprising in 1969. Among his best-known images is a 1965 portrait of Bob Dylan in Sheridan Square, dressed all in black and saluting the camera.

Frederick William McDarragh was born in Brooklyn on Nov. 5, 1926. Visiting the 1939 World's Fair as youth, he bought a Univex camera on impulse for 39 cents. In World War II he served as an Army paratrooper, remaining in Japan at war's end to photograph the American occupation. In 1954 he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from New York University.

Mr. McDarragh is survived by his wife, Gloria Schoffel McDarragh, whom he married in 1960; two sons, Patrick, of Litchfield, Conn., and Timothy, of Loretto, Pa., and New York City; and three grandchildren.

Many of his photographs were published as book-length compilations, among them "The Beat Scene" (Corinth Books, 1960); "New York, N.Y." (Corinth Books, 1964); and, in collaboration with his wife, "Beat Generation: Glory Days in Greenwich Village" (Schirmer Books, 1996). Mr. McDarragh was awarded a Guggenheim grant for his work in 1972.

As Mr. McDarragh's renown as a Beat chronicler grew, his second, inadvertent career took shape. One day in the late 1950s, according to several news accounts of the period, a breathless Scarsdale matron phoned him at his office. Did Mr. McDarragh know where she might rent a real live Beatnik, not too dirty, to read poetry at a party she was giving?

Mr. McDarragh, who by this time knew hundreds of Beatniks (a few scrubbed and all needing cash), happily complied, and a going concern was born. Shortly afterward, he placed the following advertisement in *The Voice*:

add zest to your tuxedo park party ... rent a beatnik. completely equipped: beard, eye shades, old army jacket, levis, frayed shirts, sneakers or sandals (optional). deductions allowed for no beard, baths, shoes, or haircuts. lady beatniks also available, usual garb: all black.

Calls flooded in. For \$15, *The New York Mirror* reported in 1960, the client got one Beat and a half-hour of poetry. Two hundred dollars bought three Beats, who read poetry, answered questions, played the guitar and, of course, the bongos. Mr. McDarragh, who took a small commission and let the artists keep the rest, supplied Beats for school groups, photo shoots, meetings and catered affairs in and around New York for about two years, till the early 1960s.

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As an agent, Mr. McDarrah was careful to protect the talent from the clientele. He would not procure lady Beats for bachelor parties. Nor would he rent a Beat of any kind to a children's party. He once turned down a request from a scoutmaster looking to hire, for a speaking engagement, any Beatnik who was a former Eagle scout. (Mr. McDarrah's refusal in this case may have owed simply to the sheer impossibility of filling the order.)

He also took pains to protect the clientele from the talent. In an interview with *The Mirror* in 1960, Mr. McDarrah described the personal, if highly atypical, habits of the Beats in his stable:

"They always behave, and drink moderately, if at all," he said. "I see to that."