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The Charles Potts Collection: Cataloging a Cultural Movement

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The Charles Potts Collection: cataloging a cultural movement

Presented by Becky Steen and Kurt Alan Meyer
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Charles Potts

Counter-culture poet, activist, entrepreneur, and publisher, Charles Potts donated his personal poetry library and papers to Utah State University’s Special Collections and Archives in 2011. During his time at Berkeley, Potts describes himself as a revolutionary hippie in the counter-culture poetry scene. Overall, this great American poet has spent nearly 50 years as an author of numerous books containing collections of his post-modern poetry as well as full length novels and even a screenplay.

Potts was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, in 1943 and grew up raising Appaloosa horses on a ranch in Mackay. After reading Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Potts wanted to be an author, but later, while attending Idaho State University, he was convinced to be a poet by his mentor Ed Dorn. Taking the advice to heart, Potts started a poetry magazine in 1968 called The In Progress which was later renamed The In Progress Tube. In 1969, Potts started a poetry company called Total Poetics which published the first issue of The In Progress tube and featured work by Charles Bukowski.

In the late 1960s, Potts started Tsunami Inc. which is known for publishing The Temple, Gu Si, El Tem plo, a quarterly publishing organization and producing Walla Walla Poetry Parties, which started in 1990. In addition to the Poetry Parties, the bookstore he also founded the Temple Bookstore, located literally in an old masonic temple in Walla Walla, Washington, where he also spent many years organizing poetry readings and taking part in the local poetry scene. Overall, this great American poet has spent nearly 50 years as an author of numerous books containing collections of his post-modern poetry as well as full length novels and even a screenplay.

The poster below is part of the Charles Potts Collection, but helps demonstrate the importance and impact of pop culture. The poster is a mock-up created by a student in the Special Collections and Archives class at Utah State University, and was created to show the breadth and depth of the Charles Potts Collection.

Cataloging the Collection

Nature of Collection:
- Short books of poetry
- Vanity publishers with special binding paper
- Inscriptions and/or signatures
- Wide variety of publications in informal formats & collated in unique ways
- Some non-book items: flash cards, wood cuts, etc.

Workflow:
I) Student worker’s process collection
   a) assign call numbers
   b) label, folder & box
   c) Search Sierra (ILS) for existing record
   d) Record found— add new holdings and notes
II) Cataloged by U Library Cataloging and Metadata Services Department staff—Kurt Alan Meyer & Anna Maria Arnljots
III) Quality Control

Unique materials such as Publisher Proofs
- Added Information in Cataloging Record
  a) Notes for special aspects, limited editions, etc
  b) Local notes for inscriptions, signatures, special numbering
  c) Collection, gift, & purchase notes
  d) Poetry genre & Publisher headings

Highlights

- Trolling
- Tracking
- Unique materials such as Publisher Proofs
- Added Information in Cataloging Record
- Notes for special aspects, limited editions, etc
- Local notes for inscriptions, signatures, special numbering
- Collection, gift, & purchase notes
- Poetry genre & Publisher headings