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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 compositions 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 Alpaca's on a ranch in Mackay. After reading F. P. D. Moreno's, Potts wanted to be an author but later, while attending Idaho State University, was convinced to be a poet by his mentor Ed Dorn. Taking the advice to heart, Potts career as a poet began in 1963 when his first poem was published in the periodical Wild Dog.


Potts was a renowned counter-culture poet in Berkeley until he was hospitalized for psychosis in 1968. In the 1970s while in Salt Lake City, he re-established himself as a poet and essayist as well as published many of his early writings including two-part memoir Volga Brava. After moving to Walla Walla, Washington, he worked in real estate to ensure his family's financial security. His renewed contact with the Idaho West of his youth resulted in important books of poetry in the 1980s, and his work developed further following his study of Japanese and Mandarin Chinese in that decade. His books include Little Lord Shiva (1968); Volga Brava (1977); Rocky Mountain Man (1978); How the South Finally Won the Civil War (1985); Lost River Mountain (1986); Across the North Pacific (1982); and El Tem plo (2005).

Potts' describes himself as a 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.

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
   II) Record found— add new holdings and notes
   a) no record— pat on for cataloging
   III) Quality Control

Tracking:
- Cataloged in OCLC
- Unique material such as Publisher Proofs
- Added Information in Cataloging Records
   - Notes for special aspects, limited editions, etc
   - Local notes for inscriptions, signatures, special numbering
   - Collection, gift, & purchase notes
- Poetry press & Publisher headings

Highlights

- The Charles Potts Collection contains a wide variety of materials, including short books of poetry, vanity publishers with special binding paper, inscriptions and/or signatures, and wide variety of publications in informal formats & collated in unique ways. Some non-book items such as flash cards, wood cuts, etc. are also included.

- The workflow includes assigning call numbers, labeling, folder & box, searching Sierra (ILS) for existing record, and recording new holdings and notes. Quality Control is also included.

- The collection is cataloged in OCLC, with added information in cataloging records such as notes for special aspects, limited editions, etc. Local notes for inscriptions, signatures, special numbering, and collection, gift, & purchase notes are also included.

- Poetry press & Publisher headings are also included.