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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 the author of numerous books containing compilations 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 F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mark Twain, Potts wanted to be a writer, but later, while attending Idaho State University, was convinced to be a poet by his mentor Ed Dorn. Taking the advice to heart, Potts signed with poet Jack Kerouac's publishing company, City Lights, and released his first book of poetry, How to Write Poetry, in 1965.

Potts was a renowned counterculture 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 summer Volga Rivers. 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 re-awakened in important books of poetry in the 1960s and his work developed further following his study of Japanese and Mandarin Chinese in that decade. His books include Little Lord Shiva (1968); Valga Krusa (1977); Rocky Mountain Man (1978); How the South Finally Won the Civil War (1984); Last River Mountain (1989); Across the North Pacific (2001) and East (2003).

He also founded the Temple Bookstore, located literally in an old masonic temple in Walla Walla, Washington, where he also spoked up to twice a week. Finally, the bookstore hosted the Temple School of Poetry. The Temple Bookstore closed in 2002.

In the late 1980s, Potts started Tsunami Inc. which is known for publishing The Temple, Gu St, El Templo, a quarterly publishing poetry often containing poetry translated from Chinese and Spanish. Potts was also the president and founder of Palouse Management Inc., a real estate company where he worked as a broker.

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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:
1) Student worker's process collection
   a) assign call numbers
   b) label, folder & box
   c) Search Sierra (ILS) for existing record
2) No record
   a) cataloging staff member, Amanda Willson
   b) label, folder & box
   c) Search Sierra (ILS) for existing record
3) Record found— add new holdings and notes
   a) No record- pass on for cataloging

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

Highlights