Lew Welch Papers

Finding aid prepared by Special Collections & Archives
Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Lew Welch Papers
Identifier/Call Number: MSS 0013
Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive
La Jolla, California, 92093-0175
Languages: English
Physical Description: 2.6 Linear feet (6 archives boxes and 1 card file box)
Date (inclusive): 1943 - 1971
Abstract: The papers of an important member of the West Coast Beat poetry community. Lew Welch's papers include correspondence, poetry, prose, plays, essays, songs, scrolls, and notebooks. The collection as a whole contains information pertaining both to Welch's personal battle with recurring depression as well as his struggle to construct a Beat poetry that might do justice to his notion -- inherited from his hero, William Carlos Williams -- of "The American Idiom."
Creator: Welch, Lew

Scope and Content of Collection

The Lew Welch Papers document the life of an important member of the West Coast poetry community. The materials cover the period 1943 to 1971 and are organized into four series: 1) CORRESPONDENCE; 2) WRITINGS; 3) REVIEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS; and 4) PERSONAL AND BUSINESS RECORDS.

SERIES 1: CORRESPONDENCE

The CORRESPONDENCE series is organized alphabetically, and includes materials from Donald Allen, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen. Of particular biographical importance are the 18 folders containing letters from Welch's mother, Dorothy Brownfield Welch. Mrs. Welch wrote her son regularly from 1943 to his death in May 1971.

SERIES 2: WRITINGS

The WRITINGS series is subdivided into sub-series of "poetry," "essays," "prose and plays," "scrolls," "songs," and "notebooks." Within the "Poetry" subseries are notes, revisions, and alternate versions of Welch's published material, as well as those poems that remained unpublished. The subseries "Essays" includes carbons and xeroxes of Welch's pieces for The San Francisco Oracle and The Realist. Also included are pieces entitled "Expose the Bones of Rhetoric," "Language is Speech," and "The Use of Poetry," each of which provide the reader with a clear understanding of Welch's strategies for constructing a poetry in the "American idiom." Also included in this subseries is an essay dedicated to William Carlos Williams ("Early Poems and Long Thing for WCW," 1950), as well as Welch's 1950 Reed College BA thesis, "The Writing of Gertrude Stein: Its Nature and Principles." The "Notebooks" subseries is highly useful as a passage-key into the inner workings of Welch's writing praxis. Included are 10 notebooks, each containing notes, rough drafts, and outlines -- the materials from which later poems were generated. Of particular historical importance is the 1971 spiral-bound notebook with an entry dated 14 May 1971: this is believed to be Welch's final note before his suicide or disappearance into the wilderness.

SERIES 3: REVIEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The REVIEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS series contains xeroxes and originals of reviews both of Welch's work and by Welch on other poets' work. Included are xeroxes and originals of announcements for readings at the San Francisco State Poetry Center, San Quentin Prison (with Richard Brautigan), and others.

SERIES 4: PERSONAL AND BUSINESS RECORDS

The PERSONAL AND BUSINESS RECORDS series contains miscellaneous documents such as Welch's Grove Press contracts and his Pacific Coast Clerks Union book. Of particular interest is a photocopy of a "Statement of Opposition" to the Vietnam War. The statement is endorsed by Welch, Robin Blaser, Jack Spicer, Gary Snyder, Robert Creely, Robert Duncan, and Joanne Kyger, all of whose names appear typed, but not signed. The photocopy itself is signed by Philip Whalen and Allen Ginsberg, and is dated 15 July 1965.

Although the bulk of the collection was acquired from Donald Allen in 1974, additional materials were received from Allen in 1978. The later additions have been integrated with the materials from the first accession.

Biography

Although Lewis Barrett Welch's life was marked by uncertainty and a lack of permanent goals, he gained an enduring position in the world of literature through his writings and personal influence.

Welch was born 16 August 1926 in Phoenix, Arizona, to Lewis Barrett Welch Sr. and Dorothy Brownfield Welch. Mrs. Welch was the daughter of a wealthy Phoenix surgeon. Lew Welch claimed that he began suffering mental breakdowns while still
a baby, about which he once told David Melzer, "I went to the loony bin when I was fourteen months old... It is the world's record. Even among my beat generation friends. I have the world's record. I copped out, I went crazy, split, I said 'forget it!'"

Following the birth of Welch's sister his parents marriage broke up, and Dorothy Welch moved the family to California in 1929. Welch was three at the time, and for most of his childhood his mother moved from town to town in California. He attended schools in Santa Monica, Coronado, La Mesa, and El Cajon. In Palo Alto Welch finished high school.

While still in school Welch enlisted in the Air Force, and he entered the Force following graduation. He spent less than a year in the service and then returned to California, where he enrolled at Stockton Junior College. While at Stockton he met James Wilson, a teacher who encouraged him to write. It was Wilson who suggested that Welch study at Reed College, a school in Oregon with a reputation for a progressive faculty and student body.

Welch entered Reed College in 1948, and the following year moved into a house with Gary Snyder; the following year they were joined by Philip Whalen. By the fall of 1949 Welch was co-editor of the school's literary magazine and was writing constantly. He wrote his senior thesis on Gertrude Stein and graduated in 1950.

The period following Welch's graduation was marked by turbulence. During the summer of 1950 he planned to move to Chile, and he asked his mother for a $1000 loan for the trip. By fall he had changed his plans and remained in Oregon. Late in the year he met William Carlos Williams, who was to become Welch's hero. Welch went to visit Williams in New Jersey and ultimately rented an apartment in New York City. His initial enthusiasm for the city soon diminished, however, and after a brief stay in Florida he moved to Chicago. There he enrolled in the Master's program at the University of Chicago. Again, he quickly became discouraged and depressed, and in 1951 suffered a nervous breakdown.

Welch dropped out of school and began undergoing psychoanalysis.

He lived a relatively tranquil life for the next five years, and in 1953 he went to work preparing ads for Montgomery Ward. Shortly thereafter he married Mary Garber.

For a number of years Welch showed his poetry only to close friends. With the emergence of the Beat movement, however, Welch's friends Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder began receiving national attention. Welch's desire to devote himself completely to his poetry was revived. He transferred to the Oakland office of Montgomery Ward and soon became a part of the San Francisco poetry scene. In 1958 he was fired from his job. His marriage fell apart soon after.

At the same time, however, Welch's poetry was beginning to meet with some success. Donald Allen included one of Welch's poems in The New American Poetry -- the important anthology published in 1960. That same year Welch's first book, Wobbly Rock, was published. He was drinking heavily during this time, but he continued to write extensively. For a time he lived with his mother in Reno, Nevada, and then in a cabin in the Trinity Alps. He moved back to San Francisco in 1963, and in 1965 published three books.

In 1965 Welch began teaching a poetry workshop offered through the Extension program of the University of California at Berkeley. Despite his burgeoning success, Welch's bouts with depression and heavy drinking continued. After the breakup of another relationship in 1971 Welch returned to the mountains. On 23 May 1971, Gary Snyder went up to Welch's campsite and found a suicide note in Welch's truck. Despite an extensive search, Welch's body was never recovered.

Publication Rights
Publication rights are held by the creator of the collection.

Preferred Citation
Lew Welch Papers, MSS 13. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego.

Acquisition Information

Restrictions
Original scrolls located in Box 7 are restricted; photocopies must be used instead. The most fragile scroll, a 1961 version of "Din Poem," has been scanned. The digital version may be viewed, upon request, in the Special Collections & Archives reading room.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Allen, Donald, 1912-2004 -- Correspondence
Brautigan, Richard -- Correspondence
Brownfield, Dorothy -- Correspondence
Doyle, Kirby -- Correspondence
Moore, Marianne, 1887-1972 -- Correspondence
Snyder, Gary, 1930-- -- Correspondence
## CORRESPONDENCE

### Box 1, Folder 1
- Allen, Donald

### Box 1, Folder 2
- Baker, Richard

### Box 1, Folder 3
- Brautigan, Richard
- Brownfield, Dorothy [Welch's mother]

#### Box 1, Folder 4-10
- 1943 - 1950

#### Box 1, Folder 11
- 1950. Includes handwritten sections from poems "In my middle youth..." and "I David, arm in the sling" in letter dated 1 Feb. 1950. TS of poems "Monologue of one whom the spring found unaccompanied...," "Fragments," "Corinna's Gone A-Praying" in letter dated 21 March 1950

#### Box 1, Folder 12-14
- 1951

#### Box 1, Folder 15

#### Box 1, Folder 16
- 1957 - 1959. Includes TS of "Note from Pioneer on a Speck in Space" in letter dated 21 July 1957

#### Box 2, Folder 1
- 1960 - 1961. Includes outline of autobiographical novel (3 pps) dated April 1960; 1 TLs (1 p.) from Ms. Brownfield to Emil Garber (Mary's father)

#### Box 2, Folder 2-3
- 1962 - 1964. Includes TS of "Birthday Poem, with Instructions to his Mother," dated 8 May 1963

#### Box 2, Folder 4
- 1971

#### Box 2, Folder 5
- Miscellaneous. 1 TLs to LW from Robert Jones, clerk of Cal. Poetry Reading Circuit, dated 12 June 1969, 1 TLs (3 leaves) to Dorothy B. from Mary Welch dated 15 December 1957

#### Box 2, Folder 6
- Cuddy, Terry (Prisoner at San Quentin)

#### Box 2, Folder 7
- Doss, John

#### Box 2, Folder 8
- Doyle, Kirby [all are letters from Welch to Doyle]

#### Box 2, Folder 9
- Durand, Robert

#### Box 2, Folder 10
- Hausman, Gerald

#### Box 2, Folder 11
- Hawley, Robert (editor of Oyez Press)

#### Box 2, Folder 12
- KitKitDizze - Miscellaneous letters and notes concerning Welch's projected home in the Sierras

#### Box 2, Folder 13
- Korte, Sister Mary

#### Box 2, Folder 14
- Koller, James

#### Box 2, Folder 15
- McClure, Michael

#### Box 2, Folder 16
- Martin, John

#### Box 2, Folder 17
- Moore, Marianne

#### Box 2, Folder 18
- Murphy, Pat

#### Box 2, Folder 19
- Olsen, Charles

#### Box 2, Folder 20
- Ring of Bone - Miscellaneous correspondence and Grove Press Contract for Welch's proposed publication

#### Box 2, Folder 21
- Rago, Henry (editor of Poetry Magazine)

#### Box 2, Folder 22
- Saijo, Albert

#### Box 2, Folder 23
- Saleh, Dennis

#### Box 2, Folder 24
- Schevill, James (San Francisco Poetry Center)

#### Box 2, Folder 25
- Shoemaker, Jack (editor of Maya Press)

#### Box 2, Folder 26
- Simon, John Oliver

#### Box 2, Folder 27
- Snyder, Gary
### CORRESPONDENCE

| Box 2, Folder 28 | Thompson, Marilyn and Bari |
| Box 2, Folder 29 | University of California at Davis - Letters concerning readings at UC Davis |
| Box 2, Folder 30 | University of California at Santa Barbara - Letter concerning readings at UCSB, from Ruth Cole |
| Box 2, Folder 31 | University of Utah/John Vernon - Letter concerning reading |
| Box 2, Folder 32 | Upton, Charles |
| Box 2, Folder 33 | Welch, Lew - 1 ALs draft to Philip Whalen; 1 TLs to Will Peterson; 1 TLs carbon to Welch's mother; 1 MS -- thought by Don Allen to be part of an enclosure to a letter to James Wilson which is perhaps related to Welch's poem "Invention Against Invention" |
| Box 2, Folder 34 | Whalen, Philip |

### WRITINGS

#### Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 3, Folder 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 2</td>
<td>&quot;Brandy's Wedding&quot; (crossed out) or &quot;Poem MSS&quot; - Miscellaneous drafts of poems from various periods with some carbons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 3</td>
<td>&quot;Fishing&quot; folder - &quot;Section for Fish Poem&quot; typescript; prose account of salmon fishing, typescript with holograph revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 4</td>
<td>&quot;For Consideration (For Sure)&quot; - Poems in TS, some carbons. Includes TS of The Mountain Poems and Leather Prunes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 5</td>
<td>&quot;Invention Against Invention&quot; - Typescript with holograph dedication to Charles Olsen and revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 6</td>
<td>&quot;Late Poems from Ring of Bone&quot; - TS drafts and holograph drafts, various stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 7</td>
<td>Leather Prunes - Poem drafts, some on napkins, some carbons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 8</td>
<td>&quot;1963&quot; - TS and MS, includes versions of &quot;A Letter for Robert Duncan,&quot; and &quot;Invention Against Invention&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 9</td>
<td>The Mountain Poems and Spring Rain Revolution at the Forks - Early versions of Hermit Poems and The Way Back. TS, signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 10</td>
<td>On Out: Selected Poems 1950 - 1960 - TS, clean carbon, inscription to LW's wife and signature on title leaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 11</td>
<td>&quot;Our Lady of Defeated Love&quot; - Drafts of poem. Holograph draft of preface to &quot;Cement&quot; and one MS poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 12</td>
<td>Ring of Bone - Some carbons, slight holograph, TS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 13</td>
<td>&quot;Small Book to Break the Rain&quot; - TS with holograph revisions from 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 14</td>
<td>Spring Rain Revolution at the Forks and Hermit Poems - TS, some carbons, with corrections, signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 15</td>
<td>Trip Trap - Single typed sheet formed by joining several sheets together. TS of book prepared by Welch, Albert Saijo, and Jack Kerouac. Believed typed by Kerouac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 16</td>
<td>&quot;The Wanderer&quot; - With the I-Ching throw upon which the poem is based, holograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 17</td>
<td>The Way Back - TS including carbon; holograph poem by Gary Snyder, &quot;The Four Vows,&quot; annotated by Welch</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Miscellaneous and untitled poetry
Miscellaneous papers - “A Farewell Note to God, Should He Exist.” Preface, 1 page fragment from larger preface to Ring of Bone. Proposed table of contents for Ring of Bone. Miscellaneous cards including short prose notes. Leaves from small notebook containing maps and drawings. Assorted notebook fragments and leaves, addresses, and lists. "Across Space and Time" by Charles Olsen, 1 page TS of Olsen piece from Set no. 1

Miscellaneous poems - MSS ("Poetry Workshop Joyce Brians" crossed out). Miscellaneous poems and TS with various dates. Some holograph revisions and one poem in holograph. Includes draft of "Words to That Effect" and proposed table of contents for On Out

Drafts of "Final City - Tap City" - Includes carbon of printed version
Early Poems and Long Thing for William Carlos Williams - Long essay about Welch's own poetry, dedicated to WCW (1950)
Expose the Bones of Rhetoric - TS draft in scroll format
Greed - San Francisco Oracle essay, xerox and photocopy of various versions with published version and photocopy of letter to editor
How to Survive in The United States - TS
Language is Speech - TS of essay
Uses of Poetry - TS draft
Writings of Gertrude Stein: Its Nature and Principles - Reed College BA thesis, May 1950, carbon TS; inscribed by LW to his mother

Fiction - Miscellaneous TS prose. 8 sections with carbons, mostly from scrolls which have been broken down and pasted together
First draft, long scroll format
Second and third drafts. TS, corrected
Twins - TS of play (incomplete)

Very long early version and holograph poem on scroll. Heavily taped from pieces 1961

Restrictions
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 7</td>
<td>Late Urban Love of Peter Held - Typed scroll, draft of prose with carbon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Restrictions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restrictions Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 1</td>
<td>Photocopies of high-acid and taped scrolls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 2</td>
<td>Graffitti and Supermarket - Words and music, on stencil with original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 3</td>
<td>Songs - TS and MS, including holograph version of “Supermarket” music; some carbons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 4</td>
<td>Pages from black looseleaf notebook - Early poems, rough drafts of long poems, prose drafts, letters with poems from other poets, including three from Philip Whalen and one from Gary Snyder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 5</td>
<td>Brown silk-covered notebook - Hermit Songs in holograph, calligraphed by Welch including design, dedication and two holograph poems by Philip Whalen 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 6</td>
<td>Ledger, “The Fisherman’s Notebook,” signed - Various notes on three pages with five pages of notes for projected book of poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 7</td>
<td>Looseleaf notebook from early San Francisco period Spiral-bound notebooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 8</td>
<td>7 X 8 1/2, 3 pps., with entries of notes for poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 9</td>
<td>4 X 6, 18 pps., notes for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 10</td>
<td>4 X 6, 35 pps., notes, including journal kept in Big Sur 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 11</td>
<td>3 X 5, looseleaf, 8 pps., Forks of Salmon period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 12</td>
<td>List of supplies on rear page for construction of house. Single entry dated 14 May 1971 (in front), believed to be the last note made by Welch before his disappearance 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 1</td>
<td>8 1/2 X 11, 9 pps., “tentative structure for I, Leo and other works”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 2</td>
<td>Miscellaneous documents, announcements, sections from magazines, broadsides, gathered by Welch, announcing readings. Includes review of Welch’s plays from San Francisco Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 4</td>
<td>Publicity - Clippings of Ralph Gleason's San Francisco Chronicle column, 26 October 1966. Original clippings and negative of Grover Sales’ review of Welch’s “One Man Plays” reading, from San Francisco Magazine. Xerox of “Final City” from Oracle, no. 34, 1968. Xeroxes of San Quentin News item on Welch and Brautigan reading at prison. College of Marin reprint of article on Welch from Independent Journal (1968). Program notes for San Francisco State College Poetry Center reading, 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 5</td>
<td>Reviews Writ by Me - Drafts of reviews of Philip Whalen’s On Bear’s Head and Richard Brautigan’s In Watermelon Sugar, including final published version from San Francisco Chronicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 6</td>
<td>Reviews, ephemera, and broadsides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 7</td>
<td>Contract for Pacific Coast Clerks, subsidiary of International Long Shoreman’s and Warehouseman’s Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 6, Folder 8</td>
<td>Funeral record of LW’s father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Lew Welch Papers**

MSS 0013
| Box 6, Folder 9 | Greeley, Colorado - Folder containing information, correspondence, and documents pertaining to Welch's residency at Colorado State College at Greeley, Colorado |
| Box 6, Folder 10 | Grove Press letters and contracts |
| Box 6, Folder 11 | List of equipment purchased & page of doodles and drawings 1962 - 1963 |
| Box 6, Folder 12 | Permission correspondence and forms |
| Box 6, Folder 13 | UC Extension - Miscellaneous papers relating to Welch's teaching at UC Berkeley Extension. Contains poems written by students, contracts, and a letter drafted by Welch to Elspeth Smith (Director of UC Extension program) concerning his classes. Also, a letter of complaint about Welch from student and E. Smith's response |
| Box 6, Folder 14 | Statement of opposition to Vietnam War - Welch's name appears on statement (typed), but is not signed 1965 |
| Box 6, Folder 15 | Sturm, Rogers and Co. Guns catalog |