Descriptive Summary

Languages: English

Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive
La Jolla 92093-0175

Title: Tram Combs Papers

Identifier/Call Number: MSS 0123

Physical Description: 4 Linear feet (10 archives boxes)

Date (inclusive): 1946-1964

Abstract: Papers of Tram Combs, writer and bookseller. Combs lived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1940s and was associated with many well-known writers. In 1951 he moved to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, where he owned and operated a bookstore. Combs was active in Gay literary circles and contributed to early Gay periodicals such as the Mattachine Review and One. Materials in the collection date from the late 1940s through 1964 and include correspondence, writings, and photographs.

Scope and Content of Collection

Dating from the late 1940s through 1964, the papers document the life, writings, and thought of Tram Combs. The collection includes Combs' personal revelations about his life as a writer and Gay person in the 1950s and early 60s. In addition, the papers provide unusual insights into Gay politics and literary infighting in the United States and the Virgin Islands.

Combs himself organized his own papers quite thoroughly. He often wrote notes explaining how the papers were originally created and how and why the materials were arranged as they were. Arranged in six series: 1) CORRESPONDENCE, 2) NOTEBOOKS AND WORKING SHEETS, 3) TYPESCRIPTS OF VERSE, 4) AUTHOR'S COLLECTION OF SERIALS, 5) WRITINGS OF OTHERS, and 6) PHOTOGRAPHS.

Biography

Elisha Trammel (Tram) Combs, Jr. was born 25 September 1924 in Riverview, Alabama, the son of Elisha Trammel, a cotton mill superintendent, and LaFaye Hunt Combs. Elisha Jr. was educated in Southern schools until 1936, when his family moved to San Francisco.

As a young man, Tram was primarily interested in botany, physics, and chemistry. While serving in the U.S. Army Air Force he attended University of Washington in 1943 and 1944. He received a certificate of professional competence in meteorology from University of Chicago in 1945. Combs left the air force in 1946 after serving as a meteorologist and becoming a second lieutenant. For the next two years he attended Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (studying electronics engineering) and the University of California, where he received an A.B. in physics in 1948.

From 1948-51 Combs worked as an oil chemist at the Tidewater-Associated Oil Company in Avon, California. Also during the late 1940's he began to write poetry under the guidance of Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Hart and Josephine Miles. Discovering his inclination towards writing and the arts, Combs abruptly changed careers in 1948, becoming the owner and manager of Island Studios, a photographic studio in the Bay Area.

In 1951 Combs moved to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. There, using his talents as a bibliophile, linguist, and poet, he managed and owned Tram Combs Books - a bookshop specializing in the literature and history of middle and southern Americas. Combs also involved himself in community, cultural and political activities in St. Thomas. He served as a founder and trustee of the Virgin Islands Art Museum (1955-56), helped to develop a Boy Scouts of America chapter, worked on building a local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and participated in disaster relief work. He was an active member of the Gay literary community, both in the Virgin Islands and the U.S., and he regularly submitted articles and suggestions to Gay periodicals such as Mattachine Review and One.

Combs earned the respect of noted contemporary poets such as Kenneth Rexroth and William Carlos Williams -- both of whom wrote forewords to Combs' first book. However, Combs' writing never received public acclaim or commercial success. Some critics complained of his verse's sentimental tone, overabundance of private references, and modifying clauses. Others praised his verbal compression, his unusual typography, his detailed attention to nature and fellow human beings, and his honest, intense, but quiet voice. As William Carlos Williams wrote, "It is in the construction of a verse about an island sunset, that the reader will find what is hidden for him there; not what he thinks he will find but something surprising, amazingly simple and altogether delightful."

Preferred Citation

Tram Combs Papers

MSS 0123
CORRESPONDENCE

Scope and Content of Series
Series 1) CORRESPONDENCE

Although it comprises a relatively small portion of the collection, the correspondence is fascinating in that both sides of many exchanges are present. Combs kept carbon copies of even his most mundane letters. Many of these letters are lengthy, gossipy, and full of interesting personal, political and literary trivia. Major correspondents include Auerhahn Press, D. Clark, James Boyer May, the Mattachine Society (one of the first Gay liberation organizations), Robert I. Nesmith, Alan Priest, Gerd Stern and Knute Stiles. The correspondence with Clark is particularly revealing of Combs' personal life and feelings. Combs' letters to Gonzalo Segura include Combs' opinions of the activities of the Mattachine Society. The series is organized alphabetically by correspondent.

Although the collection contains references to Combs's extensive correspondence with William Carlos Williams, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Jonathan Williams and Kenneth Patchen, these letters are not included. It is likely that this correspondence was sold prior to UCSD's acquisition of the papers.
Box 1, Folder 14  Chumbly, Harold 1959 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 15  Clark, D. (Dolores Corinne) 1956 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 16  Combs, Elisha and LaFaye 1954 - 1958
Box 1, Folder 17  Combs, Larry H. and family 1957 - 1958
Box 1, Folder 18  Corretjer, Don Antonio 1955 - 1956
Box 1, Folder 19  Crowe, Donald 1959 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 20  Daniel, Albert E. 1953 - 1955
Box 1, Folder 21  Dejoel, Miriam (Koshland) 1951 - 1963
Box 1, Folder 22  Delattre, Henri 1959
Box 1, Folder 23  Der Kreis/The Circle 1957
    General note
    See also CORRESPONDENCE - Allen Luther
Box 1, Folder 24  Dettman, Preston (Winston Book Service) 1958 - 1963
Box 1, Folder 25  Dickson, Pratt (a.k.a. Manfred Wise) 1959
Box 1, Folder 26  Donovan, Laurence 1958 - 1959
Box 1, Folder 27  El Corno Emplumado 1962 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 28  Eversen, Ron 1958 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 29  Fleischer, Justin 1953 - 1955
Box 1, Folder 30  Folkways Record (Moe Asch) 1953 - 1954
Box 1, Folder 31  Ford, Kenneth 1959 - 1964
Box 1, Folder 32  Genesis West 1963
Box 1, Folder 33  Gidlow, Elsa 1958 - 1959
Box 2, Folder 1  Harcourt, Brace and Company (Margaret Marshall) 1959
Box 2, Folder 2  Hart, Lawrence 1951 - 1963
Box 2, Folder 3  Hedley, Leslie Woolf 1959 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 4  Hodes, Ida 1958 - 1962
Box 2, Folder 5  Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Ricardo Alegria, director) 1955 - 1958
Box 2, Folder 6  Jerome, Jud 1963 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 7  John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation 1957 - 1958
Box 2, Folder 8  Kwock, C.H
Box 2, Folder 9  Lee, Nanying and Kem 1955 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 10  Liberation (Bayard Rustin, ed.) 1951
Box 2, Folder 11  Library of Congress 1957 - 1959
Box 2, Folder 12  Mattachine Society, Inc. (Hal Call and Don Lucas, eds.) 1955 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 13  May, James Boyer 1958 - 1959
Box 2, Folder 14  McGahey, Jeanne 1959
Box 2, Folder 15  MChugh, Vincent 1961
Box 2, Folder 16  McKenna, Rollie 1961 - 1963
Box 2, Folder 17  McNail, Stanley 1962
Box 2, Folder 19  Moreno, Ralph R. 1964
Box 2, Folder 20  Nachshen, Brian 1963 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 21  Nesmith, Robert I. 1953 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 22  New Gnu Press 1962
Box 2, Folder 23  Nichols, Clinton 1960
Box 2, Folder 24  Norman (full name unknown) 1959
Box 2, Folder 25  One, Inc. (One Magazine) 1954 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 26  Ostroff, Anthony 1960
Box 2, Folder 27  Pagan, Bolivar 1955 - 1959
Box 2, Folder 28  Poetry Center (San Francisco State College) 1959 - 1965
Box 2, Folder 29  Pomeroy, Ralph 1964
Box 2, Folder 30  Priest, Alan 1961 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 31  Radhakrishnan, S. 1959
Box 2, Folder 32  Ramlov, Preben 1963 - 1964
Box 2, Folder 33  Redl, Harry and Anne 1959
Box 2, Folder 34  Renaissance (John Bryan, ed.) 1962 - 1963
Box 2, Folder 35  Roman Books, Inc. 1963 - 1964
Series 2) NOTEBOOKS AND WORKING SHEETS

NOTEBOOKS AND WORKING SHEETS contains jottings and drafts of poems in manuscript form. The description - Working Sheets - was used by the poet himself, who used that title for all working drafts of his verse. The materials are arranged chronologically wherever possible. Undated working papers were placed in a separate folder.

Box 3, Folder 14-15

Notebook of verse - Drafts of poems arranged and explicated by Combs 1946 - 1950

Working sheets

Box 3, Folder 16

1951 - 1958

Box 3, Folder 17

Undated

Series 3) TYPESCRIPTS OF VERSE


A) Published Books: Typescript copies and revisions (some with annotations) of four of Combs' major works. These items are organized chronologically by book title. Materials from Saints Thomas' and Francis' cities songs o' Tram and Briefs: poems are not found in this collection.

B) Unpublished Books: Combs' compilation of three large collections of poetry, along with lengthy Christmas cards containing verse. These works are arranged by title and date.

C) Miscellaneous Poems: Includes a notebook of some of Combs's earliest poems, collected and arranged by the poet and entitled "Combs Poems: thru 1950." Also in this subseries is an extensive collection of miscellaneous typescripts of poems dating from 1951 to 1964 and arranged chronologically. Curiously, there are fewer typescripts for the years 1955 and 1956. This may be due to the fact that Combs was busy helping to found the Virgin Islands Museum during that time.

Published Books

Pilgrim's Terrace (1957)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3, Folder 18</td>
<td>Working papers - Carbon copy of typescript with explanatory note 1948 - 1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>3, Folder 19</td>
<td>Author's early typescript version - Carbon copy 1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>4, Folder 1</td>
<td>Author's early typescript version - Typescript with annotations 1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>4, Folder 2</td>
<td>Author's proof pages 1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>General note</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Carbon copy of typescript</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>St. Thomas/Poems (1965)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Author's early typescript version - Includes pencil drawings 1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Draft with editor's annotations, typeset 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Extra signature pages, typeset ca. 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bond copy with cover 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>4, Folder 11-12</td>
<td>Working papers from which final version prepared - Includes annotation, typescripts, carbon copies of typescripts ca. 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Early version - Includes some instructions by author, two carbon copies of typescript undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>First re-edited version</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Carbon copies of typescript 1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>5, Folder 3</td>
<td>Sketch for rami binding and sample cloths from R. Bruckman</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Poems of God - Author's typescript version with extra notes ca. 1955</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Journey-Man's Vision - Author's early version with typesetting instructions 1959 - 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>General note</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Three carbon copies of typescript</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ink - Author's early typescript version ca. 1967</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Christmas cards</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Includes selected poems - Hand-assembled 1955</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>&quot;This year's up - roar for the next&quot; - Hand-assembled, includes photograph 1955</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>&quot;The Christmas Clutch&quot; - Hand-assembled, includes photograph 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Combs Poems: thru 1950 - Drafts of poems with photographs &quot;pertinent to the poems,&quot; typescripts, manuscripts 1945 - 1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Miscellaneous typescripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>1952 - 1958</td>
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AUTHOR'S COLLECTION OF SERIALS
Scope and Content of Series
Series 4) AUTHOR'S COLLECTION OF SERIALS
Includes relatively obscure periodicals which contain published versions of Combs' writing, as well as reviews of Combs' work. These items are arranged alphabetically by serial title.

List of periodical publications by Combs - Chronological list compiled by Combs ca. 1963
Between Worlds, no 3. 1962 - Contains five poems by Combs
Bim, vol. 8-9, nos. 30-33 - Contains selected verse by Combs 1960 - 1961
Home Journal, no. 825, - Contains two poems for Mis' Wallace 1956
Liberation, vol II, nos. 6 and 10 - First contains Combs' 'Dinosaur' poem, and the second has the corrected version of it 1957 - 1958
MATTACHINE REVIEW - Contains supplemental insert with some of Combs' verse 1959
One: Homosexual Viewpoint - Contains love poem, sort of 1959
Poetry, vol. 96 no. 4 - Contains review of Ceremonies in Mind by R. Sward 1960
San Francisco Review, vol. 1 no. 2 - Contains "Pieces" 1959
Sparrow, no. 13 - Contains review of Comb's Ceremonies in Mind by J. Weil 1960
Trace, no. 30 - Contains review written by Combs 1959
Virgin Islands Carnival Brochure - Includes article by Combs 1959

WRITINGS OF OTHERS
Scope and Content of Series
Series 5) WRITINGS OF OTHERS
Composed of Combs' small collection of what appears to be his friends' and students' writings. It is arranged alphabetically by author.

Barlow, R. H. Work submitted for Emily Chamberlain Cook Prize in Poetry 1942
Hoffman, John. Journey to the End - Copied from copy owned by Gerd Stern ca. 1963
Kostolefsky, Joseph. Home Again, Home Again
Langston, Eve. The Puppy
Molnay, Thomas. Leo Shestov - A Man Outraged by Reality
Norris, Robert. Skulls and Sedan Chair
Ryan, John Allen. Selected poems - Copied by Combs 1950 - 1958
Toesca, Maurice. Esperanza - Translated by Francis Carmody

PHOTOGRAPHS
Scope and Content of Series
Series 6) PHOTOGRAPHS
Includes both prints and negatives. Most of the images are snapshots of Combs' family and friends, along with many scenes from the Virgin Islands.

Tram Combs
Family members
Tram Combs Books Shop
Friends of Combs
Miscellaneous - Snapshots
Photographic postcards