



The Wittliff Collections

Guide to the Charles Portis Accessions.

1958-2012

Collection UPWC-24079

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Portis, Charles
Title:	Guide to the Charles Portis Accessions.
Dates:	1958-2012
Abstract:	The papers of novelist and journalist Charles Portis, spanning 1955-2012, includes manuscripts and heavily revised drafts of all five published novels, most notably <i>True Grit</i> , as well as screenplays, articles, research files, and nearly 400 pages of an unfinished novel set in Veracruz. Also present are photographs, correspondence with family, friends, and fellow writers, handwritten “quarter-notes,” travel receipts, and personal materials.
Identification:	UPWC-24079
Extent:	7.5 Linear Feet, 13 boxes (Including one oversize box.)
Language:	English
Repository:	The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

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Biographical Notes

Born in 1933, Charles Portis grew up in Southern Arkansas, a region bordering Louisiana and Texas known as ArklaTex. He enlisted in the US Marine Corps at age eighteen and saw combat in Korea. After his discharge, he enrolled at the University of Arkansas. “You had to choose a major, so I put down journalism,” he said later. “I must have thought it would be fun and not very hard, something like barber college.” After graduating, Portis rose quickly as a journalist and in 1960 was hired by the venerable New York Herald Tribune. In New York he met and dated Nora Ephron, who remained a lifelong friend, praising Portis’s “spectacular and entirely eccentric style.” At the Herald Tribune, Portis wrote memorable dispatches from the front lines of the civil rights movement. In 1964, Portis quit journalism and returned to Arkansas to write novels. In 1966 he published *Norwood*, which tells the story of a wannabe country singer from Texas who travels to New York and falls in with a series of odd characters. The book became an immediate success and was later made into a 1970 film starring Glen Campbell. In 1968 Portis published his second novel, *True Grit*, an American classic that has twice been made into major films. The 1969 movie, starring John Wayne as US Marshall Rooster Cogburn, won the legendary actor his only Academy Award. The 2010 Coen Brothers film was nominated for ten Academy Awards and grossed over \$250 million worldwide. After *True Grit*, Portis would publish only three more novels: *The Dog of the South*, *Masters of Atlantis*, and *Gringos*. Each is regarded as a brilliant tour de force, but none were bestsellers in the vein of *True Grit*. His sporadic output, combined with his aversion to publicity and his home base in Arkansas, led Portis to become mostly forgotten by the literary establishment. At one point in the 1990s, most of his work fell out of print. Then the reappraisals began. In an influential 1998 *Esquire* essay, critic Ron Rosenbaum extolled Portis as “Perhaps the most original, indescribable *sui generis* talent overlooked by literary culture in America.” After reading Rosenbaum’s essay, Tracy Carns, publications director for Overlook Press, set about acquiring rights to publish all of the novels. Thus began a wave of recognition for Portis’s work that has continued to grow, drawing in new generations of writers, critics, and readers. In 2020, after Portis’s death, accolades poured in from *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Harper’s*, *The Paris Review* and others, all publishing major retrospectives that championed his work. In 2023, Portis’s collected writings were released in the prestigious Library of America series, enshrining him as part of the American canon.

Scope and Contents

When Portis died, he left no indication that he'd saved any of his manuscripts or letters. It seemed the author intended to remain as low-key in his afterlife as he had been during his lifetime. Then, in 2022 a remarkable discovery was made in the basement of a Little Rock home. Workers went into a crawl space to do HVAC work and found huge stacks of papers. Portis, as it turned out, had preserved an archive after all. The recovered materials, which amount to thirteen banker's boxes, include the manuscripts for all his novels. Most notable are the heavily edited drafts of *True Grit* that show just how hard Portis worked to make the voice of his unforgettable narrator, Mattie Ross, pitch perfect for her time and place. Portis's papers also include photographs, personal materials, and voluminous correspondence with friends, family, and fellow writers. Also present are extensive research files, screenplays, articles, and nearly 400 typed pages of a final, unfinished novel set in Veracruz. Demonstrating Portis's writing methodology, the archive also contains many hundreds of the author's hand-written "quarter- notes" — letter-sized pages he folded to fit in his shirt pocket so he could jot down observations or thoughts. As a coda, the archive holds hundreds of receipts documenting Portis's restless travels through Texas and Mexico.

Administrative Information

Physical Location

Materials may be stored off-site. Advance notice is required for use:

<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/makearesearchappointment.html>.

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchase, 2024.

Preferred Citation

Charles Portis Accessions, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

Conditions Governing Use

Materials from the Wittliff Collections are made available for use in research, teaching, and private study. The user assumes responsibility for determining copyright status, obtaining permission to publish, and abiding by U.S. copyright laws.

<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/visit/policies/publication.html>

Controlled Access Headings

- Authors, American -- 20th century
- West (U.S.) -- In literature

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: 2024-079

Box Folder

1	1	Norwood – complete draft, undated
1	2	Norwood – draft, incomplete & multiple versions, undated
1	3	Norwood – clippings, book, undated
1	4	Norwood – clippings, film, undated
1	5	True Grit – complete draft (1 of 2), undated
1	6	True Grit – complete draft (2 of 2), undated
1	7	True Grit – draft “from loose sections”, undated
1	8	True Grit – early outlines and loose pages, undated
1	9	True Grit – incomplete draft, undated
1	10	True Grit – proof, Overlook Press edition, undated
1	11	True Grit – notes, undated
1	12	True Grit – research, undated
1	13	True Grit – book PR, undated
1	14	True Grit – 1969 film PR, 1969
1	15	True Grit – 1969 and 2010 film PR, 1969;2010
1	16	True Grit – 2010 film PR, 2010
1	17	True Grit – Coen Brothers screenplay, undated
1	18	Rooster Cogburn screenplay (proposed True Grit sequel), undated
2	1	The Dog of the South, undated
2	2	The Dog of the South, undated
2	3	The Dog of the South - clippings, undated
2	4	The Dog of the South – movie notes, undated
2	5	Masters of Atlantis – full draft, undated
2	6	Masters of Atlantis – draft fragments, undated
2	7	Masters of Atlantis – notes, undated
2	8	Masters of Atlantis – clippings, undated
2	9	Gringos – draft, copyedited (1 of 2), undated
2	10	Gringos – draft, copyedited (2 of 2), undated
2	11	Gringos – draft complete (1 of 2), undated
2	12	Gringos – draft complete (2 of 2), undated
2	13	Gringos – draft, wording, phrases, undated
2	14	Gringos – cover proof, undated
2	15	Gringos – notes, undated
2	16	Gringos – notes, undated

2 17 Delray's New Moon - stage play. Bound typescript, May 13, 1994
2 18 Delray's New Moon - stage play. Bound photocopy, undated
2 19 Delray's New Moon - notes, undated

3 1 "That New Sound from Nashville" (Saturday Evening Post) clippings, 1966
3 2 "An Auto Odyssey Through Darkest Baja" (Los Angeles Times draft and galley proof, 1967
3 3 "An Auto Odyssey Through Darkest Baja" – research and notes, undated
3 4 "An Auto Odyssey Through Darkest Baja" – photos, undated
3 5 "Traveling Light" (Norwood serialized, Saturday Evening Post), 1966
3 6 "Our Town" columns by Portis. Arkansas Gazette, early 1960s
3 7 Portis clips, New York Herald Tribune, early 1960s
3 8 "Your Action Line" (New Yorker), 1977
3 9 "The Forgotten River" – clipping, undated
3 10 "Nights Can Turn Cool in Viborra" (The Atlantic), 1992
3 11 "I Don't Talk Service No More." Draft (The Atlantic), 1966
3 12 "Motel Days" drafts, undated
3 13 "Motel Days" (Oxford American), 2003
3 14 "The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth" – drafts, undated
3 15 "The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth" (Oxford American), 2005
3 16 Escape Velocity clippings, undated
3 17 Unpublished article on J. William Fulbright, notes, undated
3 18 Unpublished Rex Stout article – notes, undated
3 19 Unpublished mystery, drafts, undated
3 20 Untitled western screenplay by Portis, 1974
3 21 Drafts of unpublished story, undated
3 22 Unpublished novel set in Veracruz ("The Woman from Nowhere" Drafts (1 of 4), undated
3 23 Unpublished novel set in Veracruz ("The Woman from Nowhere" Drafts (2 of 4), undated
3 24 Unpublished novel set in Veracruz ("The Woman from Nowhere" Drafts (3 of 4), undated
3 25 Unpublished novel set in Veracruz ("The Woman from Nowhere" Drafts (4 of 4), undated
3 26 Mexico, notes, undated
3 27 2 spiral notebooks with notes for unpublished novel set in Veracruz, undated

4 1 Unpublished novel/unfinished novel - notes, undated
4 2 Unpublished novel/unfinished novel – quarterfold notes (1 of 3), undated
4 3 Unpublished novel/unfinished novel – quarterfold notes (2 of 3), undated
4 4 Unpublished novel/unfinished novel – quarterfold notes (3 of 3), undated
4 5 Notes, uncategorized – 3 legal pads, undated
4 6 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated
4 7 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated
4 8 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated

4 9 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated
4 10 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated
4 11 Notes, uncategorized – 5x7 pads, undated
4 12 Notes, uncategorized – loose pages (1 of 2), undated
4 13 Notes, uncategorized – loose pages (2 of 2), undated

5 1 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (1 of 10), undated
5 2 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (2 of 10), undated
5 3 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (3 of 10), undated
5 4 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (4 of 10), undated
5 5 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (5 of 10), undated
5 6 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (6 of 10), undated
5 7 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (7 of 10), undated
5 8 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (8 of 10), undated
5 9 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (9 of 10), undated
5 10 Notes, uncategorized – quarterfolds (10 of 10), undated
5 11 Research – alien abduction, undated
5 12 Research – astrology, undated
5 13 Research – baseball, undated
5 14 Research – bats, undated
5 15 Research – Bonnie and Clyde, undated
5 16 Research – Borgias, undated
5 17 Research – brain, undated
5 18 Research – butterflies, undated
5 19 Research – cancer, undated
5 20 Research – carbon dating, undated
5 21 Research – catechisms, undated
5 22 Research – Catholics, undated
5 23 Research – cattle mutilation, undated
5 24 Research – chiropractic / Dr. David Daniel Palmer, undated
5 25 Research – Cinco de Mayo, undated
5 26 Research – coffee, undated
5 27 Research – coins, undated

6 1 Research – Day of the Innocents, undated
6 2 Research – dead zone, undated
6 3 Research – demons / devil, undated
6 4 Research – debt restructuring, undated
6 5 Research – drugs, undated
6 6 Research – El Pital, undated
6 7 Research – evaporative cooler, undated
6 8 Research – exorcism, undated
6 9 Research – food, undated
6 10 Research – guns, undated

6 11 Research – hypnosis, undated
6 12 Research – jellyfish, undated
6 13 Research – landscape architecture, undated
6 14 Research – liberty ships, undated
6 15 Research – maps, Mexico, undated
6 16 Research – maps, US states and regions (1 of 2), undated
6 17 Research – maps, US states and regions (2 of 2), undated
6 18 Research – maps, ocean currents, undated
6 19 Research – mediums / spiritualists, undated
6 20 Research – Mexican folk characters, undated
6 21 Research – Mexico, undated
6 22 Research – military, undated
6 23 Research – music, undated
6 24 Research – names/ genealogy, undated
6 25 Research – Ottomans, undated
6 26 Research – pirates, undated
6 27 Research – plumed serpent, undated
6 28 Research – possession, undated
6 29 Research – Pretty Boy Floyd (Tulsa World & Tribune clips), undated
6 30 Research – pyramids of Teotihuacan, undated
6 31 Research – quantum physics, undated
6 32 Research – real estate, undated
6 33 Research – red tide / brown tide, undated
6 34 Research – rosary, undated
6 35 Research – San Juan de Ulúa, undated
6 36 Research – Sanborn’s Guides to Mexico (photocopies of covers only – originals removed due to mold damage), undated
6 37 Research – shipping / ships, undated
6 38 Research – signal communication / Signal Corps, undated
6 39 Research – Spanish language newspaper clips, undated
6 40 Research – travel guides and phrase books (1 of 2), undated
6 41 Research – travel guides and phrase books (1 of 2), undated
6 42 Research – tattoos, undated
6 43 Research – tongues, speaking in, undated
6 44 Research – tourism, Huichol culture & peyote, undated
6 45 Research – typewriters, undated
6 46 Research – Ukraine royalty, undated
6 47 Research – Veracruz, undated
6 48 Research – Virgin de Guadalupe, undated
6 49 Research – wisdom literature, undated
6 50 Research – World War I, undated
6 51 Research – witches, witchcraft, occult, undated
6 52 Research – The Age of Constantine, undated

6 53 Research – Woodrow Wilson - Veracruz, undated
 6 54 Research – an ethnography of a chiropractic clinic, undated
 6 55 Research – the case against chiropractic, undated
 6 56 Research – between Hitler and Mussolini, undated
 6 57 Research – the Black Arts (black magic), undated
 6 58 Research – Carlota – a Confederate Colony in Mexico, undated
 6 59 Research – the Ciano Diaries, undated
 6 60 Research – conquest, undated
 6 61 Research – criminal man, undated
 6 62 Research – examination of criminals, undated
 6 63 Research – General Jo Shelby, undated

7 1 Research – History of Magic and Experimental Science, undated
 7 2 Research – Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World, undated
 7 3 Research – Liberty Ships (World War II), undated
 7 4 Research – Galveston and the U-Boats 1942-1943, undated
 7 5 Research – Mexico's armed forces, undated
 7 6 Research – Daniel Defoe, undated
 7 7 Research – Carl Jung, undated
 7 8 Research – psychiatrist Karl Menninger, undated
 7 9 Research – Guatemala by Anthony Daniels, undated
 7 10 Correspondence, business, undated
 7 11 Correspondence, business, 1965
 7 12 Correspondence, business, 1966
 7 13 Correspondence, business, 1967
 7 14 Correspondence, business, 1968
 7 15 Correspondence, business, 1969
 7 16 Correspondence, business, 1998
 7 17 Correspondence, business, 2000-2003
 7 18 Correspondence, business (1 of 3) includes Gringos screenplay commissioned by Stephen Purvis, 2004
 7 19 Correspondence, business (2 of 3) includes Gringos screenplay, 2004
 7 20 Correspondence, business (3 of 3), 2004
 7 21 Correspondence, business, 2005
 7 22 Correspondence, business, 2006-2009
 7 23 Correspondence, business, 2010-2011
 7 24 Correspondence, business, 2012

8 1 Correspondence, general, 1958-1965
 8 2 Correspondence, general, January-March 1966
 8 3 Correspondence, general, April-August 1966
 8 4 Correspondence, general, September-December 1966
 8 5 Correspondence, general, January-April 1967
 8 6 Correspondence, general, April-December 1967

8 7 Correspondence, general, January-June 1968
8 8 Correspondence, general, July 1968
8 9 Correspondence, general, August-December 1968
8 10 Correspondence, general, January-May 1969
8 11 Correspondence, general, June-December 1969
8 12 Correspondence, general, 1970-1971
8 13 Correspondence, general, 2000
8 14 Correspondence, general, 2001
8 15 Correspondence, general, 2002
8 16 Correspondence, general, 2003

9 1 Correspondence, general, 2004
9 2 Correspondence, general, 2005
9 3 Correspondence, general, 2006
9 4 Correspondence, general (1 of 2), 2007
9 5 Correspondence, general (2 of 2) includes bound proof of Roy Blount's Long Time Leaving: Dispatches from Up South, 2007
9 6 Correspondence, general, 2008
9 7 Correspondence, general, 2009
9 8 Correspondence, general (1 of 2), 2010
9 9 Correspondence, general (2 of 2), 2010
9 10 Correspondence, general (1 of 2), 2011
9 11 Correspondence, general (2 of 2), 2011
9 12 Correspondence, general, 2012
9 13 Correspondence, general Bill Whitworth/New Yorker, undated
9 14 Correspondence, general (1 of 3), undated
9 15 Correspondence, general (2 of 3), undated
9 16 Correspondence, general (3 of 3), undated
9 17 Correspondence, general - scans printed by Jonathan Portis, undated

10 1 Correspondence, family, 1962-1965
10 2 Correspondence, family, 1966-1970
10 3 Correspondence, family, 2000-2010
10 4 Correspondence, condolences re: Portis's death, 2020
10 5 Portis oral history (from Arkansas Gazette Oral History Project conducted by the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas), undated
10 6 Photographs of Portis, undated
10 7 Passports / ID cards, undated
10 8 Writings about Portis (1 of 2), undated
10 9 Writings about Portis (2 of 2), undated
10 10 Congressional Record Tribute, undated
10 11 Awards – Arkansas Writers Hall of Fame, undated
10 12 Awards – Oxford American Best of the South, undated
10 13 Awards – Porter Prize, undated

10 14 Awards – Porter Prize programs, undated

10 15 Portis business cards, undated

10 16 Overlook press catalogs, undated

10 17 Paperback book jackets for Bloomsbury ed of *True Grit* and *The Dog of the South*, undated

10 18 Cassette film soundtracks for *True Grit* and *Norwood*, undated

10 19 Two unmarked cassettes (possibly blank), undated

10 20 Artifacts – custom log embosser for “Library of Charles Portis.” Soap box from Hacienda Cabo San Lucas, undated

11 1 Classroom Use – University of Montana / Charles Portis Appreciation Society, undated

11 2 Classroom Use – *The Dog of the South* / Rutgers, undated

11 3 Classroom Use – Gringos / East Brunswick (NJ) High School, 2001

11 4 Classroom Use – Gringos / East Brunswick (NJ) High School, 2002

11 5 Classroom Use – Gringos / East Brunswick (NJ) High School, 2003

11 6 Classroom Use – “I Don’t Talk Service No More” student film by Katrina Whalen, 2011

11 7 Classroom Use – *True Grit* letters from students and teachers, undated

11 8 Classroom Use – Masters of Atlantis / Rutgers, 2001

11 9 Classroom Use – Masters of Atlantis / Rutgers, 2008

11 10 US Marine Corps – Portis memorabilia (Soldier’s Handbook, etc.), undated

11 11 US Marine Corps – Company H-3-5 newsletters, 1999-2001

11 12 US Marine Corps – Company H-3-5 newsletters, 2002-2011

11 13 US Marine Corps – printouts and clippings, undated

11 14 Writings by others – *Gomer Pyle, USMC* script: “A Date with Camp Henderson”, undated

11 15 Writings by others – Electric Literature No. 1, 2009

11 16 Writings by others – galley proofs: *Little Boy Blues* by Malcolm Jones, undated

11 17 Writings by others – *The Black Hat Confessions*, Books I and II, undated

11 18 Royalties and Payments, 1969;1997

11 19 Royalties and Payments, 2000-2003

11 20 Royalties and Payments, 2004-2006

11 21 Royalties and Payments, 2007-2009

11 22 Royalties and Payments, 2010

11 23 Royalties and Payments, 2011

11 24 Royalties and Payments, 2012

12 1 Financial – tax-related, undated

12 2 Financial – banking (1 of 3), undated

12 3 Financial – banking (2 of 3), undated

12 4 Financial – banking (3 of 3), undated

12 5 Financial – social security & misc, undated

12 6 Financial – tax info (1 of 2), 1971

12 7 Financial – tax info (2 of 2), 1971

12	8	Financial – travel-related bills/receipts (1 of 4), undated
12	9	Financial – travel-related bills/receipts (2 of 4), undated
12	10	Financial – travel-related bills/receipts (3 of 4), undated
12	11	Financial – travel-related bills/receipts (4 of 4), undated
12	12	Financial – general bills/receipts (1 of 2), undated
12	13	Financial – general bills/receipts (2 of 2), undated
13	1	“That New Sound from Nashville.” Saturday Evening Post, February 12, 1966
13	2	“Traveling Light” (Norwood excerpt, pt 1) Saturday Evening Post, June 18, 1966
13	3	“Traveling Light” (Norwood excerpt, pt 2) Saturday Evening Post, July 2, 1966
13	4	True Grit excerpt. Saturday Evening Post, June 1, 1968
13	5	“An Auto Odyssey Through Darkest Baja.” Los Angeles Times, February 26, 1967
13	6	True Grit clippings, undated
13	7	Harpers. “The Keys to Veracruz” from the unpublished novel, Woman from Nowhere by Charles Portis, pg 60, 2025-04