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## Charles Frizzell Collection

1977-2018

3 boxes (0.75 linear foot)

Call no.: PH 081



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ABSTRACT

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**Background on Charles Frizzell**

## BIOGHIST

For more than three decades, Charlie Frizzell was a cherished Homo sapiens Berkeley landmark. Whether it was shmoozing with Charlie at a party, joining him on an anti-war march, chatting with him at the Cheese Board, or just bumping into him around town, it was always a treat. His calm and gentle demeanor was contagious and even a brief encounter with Charlie would lower your blood pressure and brighten your mood.

One of Berkeley's abundant East Coast immigrants, Charlie was born and grew up in Massachusetts. His initial taste of Berkeley actually came in 1961, when he decided to check out the West Coast following his college sophomore year. Charlie got a job as a Wells Fargo teller at the College and Ashby branch and made a few close friends, but wasn't yet ready for the cross-continental leap. After a trip to Mexico, he returned to Massachusetts in 1962.

Charlie had become interested in photography at 14, on his first job at a camera shop. However, his passion for shooting photos truly blossomed during a four-year apprenticeship he entered in 1964 with the respected commercial photographer, Bob O'Shaughnessy, the man Charlie dubbed his "guru." As his skills developed, Charlie started using his camera to document the burgeoning folk music revival scene in and around Cambridge, Mass. His talents were soon recognized and Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Mose Allison were among the top musicians Charlie was photographing. There were also gigs doing album covers for such popular performers as Geoff and Maria Muldaur, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, and Doc Watson.

Eventually, his Berkeley connections and curiosity about the Bay Area folk music scene brought Charlie west again, and for a while he shuttled between coasts. Then, in 1973, the call of adventure beckoned Charlie once more. This time it took him for an amazing ocean voyage on a 40-foot sailboat from Berkeley through the Panama Canal and across the Atlantic to England.

His incredible cruise completed, Charlie headed back to the Bay Area. And the very day he resurfaced in Berkeley, Polly came into his life. Shows what a lengthy spell at sea can do for romance. Here's how Polly, an accomplished musician and ceramicist, remembers the beginnings of her 30-year love affair with Charlie:

"We got together really fast and got married really fast -- it was love at first sight. What first drew me to him was that we went to this place full of musicians who were egomaniacs and there was something about Charlie's presence that made everyone feel they could let down their guard. All these guys who would normally compete would connect."

Charlie's striking photos of Polly's ceramic pieces were much admired by the local crafts community and in addition to ceramics he began focusing his lens on modern glass art. Before long, his meticulous attention to detail and aesthetic sensibilities made him the photographer of choice for such prominent glass artists as Peter Mollica, Richard Marquis and John Lewis. His images of stained glass and glass sculpture appeared in numerous museum catalogues, art books, and magazines, and Charlie's reputation reached the point that many considered him the premier glass photographer in the country.

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n 1990, Charlie joined the Cheese Board collective and became a familiar face behind the counter at Shattuck and Vine. A natural for Berkeley's famed worker collective, Charlie's mellowing influence was particularly appreciated during the group's sometime fractious meetings. As one Cheese Boarder told me, "you could rely on Charlie to be a voice of reason and clarity and we'll miss him terribly." Charlie's photos are featured in the Cheese Board's acclaimed recipe book published in 2003.

When I last saw Charlie, he was in the hospital battling an obstinate infection. So weak he had difficulty getting out of bed and even speaking, he nonetheless hadn't lost his spark or concern for those around him. And when a visiting friend worried her car was short on gas, Charlie was quick with directions to the nearest gas station. I mentioned my visit to an old buddy of Charlie's, Sam, who recounted his conversation with a nurse on Charlie's floor. Showing him the way to Charlie's room, the nurse commented on Charlie's constant stream of visitors and said she assumed he was some famous politician. Sam told me his instinctive retort was "No, not a politician, just the nicest man in the world."

Charlie Frizzell died of complications from a liver transplant on May 29, 2004. He gave the planet 63 wonderful years. His wife Polly, two sisters, Louise Ambrose and Jane Carey, brother, David Frizzell, as well as other family members, his Cheese Board collective comrades, and wide and diverse circle of friends will always treasure fond memories of this terrific guy.

## Scope of collection

SCOPE.

# Inventory

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UNITTITLE

1929

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SCOPE

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of Betsy Siggins, Oct. 2018.

### Related Material

Selected images have been digitized and may be [viewed online through SCUA's digital repository, Credo](#).

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, July 2018.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use [\(More information\)](#)

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Employers' associations--Massachusetts  
Massachusetts--Economic conditions--20th century  
Montague Farm Community (Mass.)

### Contributors

Frizzell, Charles, 1941-2004 [\[main entry\]](#)

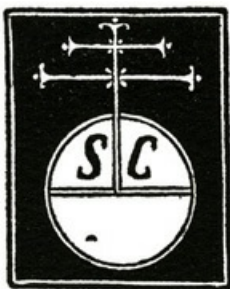
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Folk music

Photographs



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