



Will Roger Peterson: *Burning Man* Collection CAE1607

Introduction/Abstract

This archive contains materials related to Burning Man, the annual art event and temporary community program held every year in the Black Rock Desert during the last week in August, which had its origins in the 1980s at Baker Beach in San Francisco. Materials include participant and program ephemera, photographs, design documents, and press.

Biographical Note: Will Roger Peterson

Will Roger discovered Burning Man in 1994 through his life partner, Crimson Rose, a dancer and fire artist. Together and with other Burning Man founders they co-founded Black Rock City, LLC, which has overseen the Burning Man event for more than twenty years. Roger founded and managed the Black Rock City Department of Public Works—a team of several hundred people responsible for the annual pre- and post-event construction, logistics, and production. He is a founding member of the Burning Man Project, which he now chairs, and is Vice-President of the Friends of the Black Rock/High Rock. He also served as Chairman of the Sierra Front—Northwestern Great Basin—Resource Advisory Council. He worked for nearly twenty years at the Rochester Institute of Technology as a photo chemist, administrator, Associate Professor and Assistant Director.

Scope and Content

Burning Man is “an annual art event and temporary community based on radical self-expression and self-reliance,” according to its website. The festival is held annually during the last week of August, on the Black Rock Desert playa one hundred miles north of Reno. Attendance has grown from the low hundreds in the early 1990s to more than 70,000 in 2015.

The roots of the event began with the burning of objects on the summer solstice by sculptor Mary Graubeger, a friend of Larry Harvey’s girlfriend, on San Francisco’s Baker Beach in the early 1980s. In 1986, Harvey erected a 9-foot tall wooden figure. In 1990, the then 40-foot figure was drawing so many attendees for the burning of “The Man” that police outlawed the event. A separate event had been planned by members of the Cacophony Society on the Black Rock Desert for that year, “Zone Trip #4, A Bad Day at Black Rock,” which was billed as a Dadaist and situationist performance happening. Harvey joined forces with the Cacophony Society and the first burn of the Man was held on the playa in 1990.

As Wikipedia describes it (accessed May 1, 2013): “Michael Mikel, another active Cacophonist, realized that a group unfamiliar with the environment of the dry lake would be helped by knowledgeable persons to ensure they did not get lost in the deep dry lake and risk dehydration and death. He took the name Danger Ranger and created the Black Rock Rangers. Thus, the seed of Black Rock City was germinated, as a fellowship, organized by Law and Mikel.... Drawing on experience in the sign business and with light sculpture, John Law prepared custom neon tubes for the Man in 1991 so it could be seen as a beacon at night.” Materials include photographs, journals, plans, design documents, press materials, administrative materials, and festival ephemera including posters, entrance tickets, newsletters, wrist bands, stickers, and aerial photographs from each year by Will Roger Peterson.

This archive is currently in process.