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**ROBERT L. PENN PAPERS**

PAPERS 1967-2001  
(bulk dates 1989-1999 )  
Quantity 1.5 linear ft.

**ACQUISITION:** This collection was donated to the Archives and Special Collections by his son, Robert Quanah Penn.

**ACCESS:** This collection is open for research without restrictions except for some restricted photographs.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** Photographs are in Box 3 and Box 4. Some photographs are restricted for FERPA.

**VISUAL MATERIAL:** Visual Material is found in Box 2

**AUDIO MATERIAL:** Audio Material is found in Box 2.

**PRINTED MATERIAL:** Printed Material is in Box 1 and Box 2

**COPYRIGHT:** Copyright for the works of art (posters, cover art, calendars, poetry, etc.) is held by the Penn family. Patrons must contact Robert Quanah Penn, the executor of the Penn estate, for written permission.

**PROCESSED BY:** Andrea M. Peterson, March 2006, updated May 2007 by Gayla Koerting, updated 2010 by Doris Peterson

**ACCESSION #:** RC98-0003

## History

Robert (Bobby) Penn was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on 3 May 1946. His father Arthur Penn was a registered member of the Omaha tribe, and his mother Cornelia Stead Penn was a registered member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Due to familial difficulties, Penn and his siblings became wards of the state, and Penn spent most of his youth in boarding schools and foster homes.

In 1966 Penn's high school principal, aware of Penn's interest in art, informed him of the Oscar Howe summer workshop. The principal encouraged Penn to apply, and Penn was accepted to the workshop, where he learned from nationally renowned, Yanktonai artist, Oscar Howe. This became an important moment in Penn's life.

When Penn attended the University of South Dakota in 1966, he became a work-study assistant to Oscar Howe. Although Penn was a naturally gifted artist, Howe provided Penn with the formal instruction needed to master essential techniques. They developed a close relationship built on respect, something which allowed Penn to develop his own distinct style.

Following graduation from the University of South Dakota, Penn experimented with teaching. By 1986, Penn had lived and worked at the Sinte Gleska College, the University of South Dakota, the Red School House (St. Paul, MN), the Santee Community College, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College, and the Mary College in Bismark. He then moved to Boulder, Colorado, where he studied engraving and decided to dedicate himself to painting full time.

By this time, Penn had three children (Quanah, Buddy, and Jaime Lee). Drinking had become a problem in his life, and although he was establishing himself in the Native American art community, Penn could not support himself financially. After much soul searching and reflection on his career, Penn moved back to South Dakota to explore his talent on a more spiritual level. Penn realized that he no longer had to be successful in the galleries to be satisfied and successful as an artist.

In 1988 Penn married artist Altadena dela Cruz. Dela Cruz cared for Penn through his lung ailments and nearly fatal case of meningitis. The security and stability that the relationship gave Penn allowed him to focus on his work and explore the spiritual and philosophical perspective he had gained over the years.

On 7 February 1999 Penn passed away at the age of 53 after a long battle with lung ailments. Before his death, Penn had established himself to become a nationally respected and renowned, deeply spiritual Sioux artist.

## The Significance of Robert Penn's Artwork by John A. Day, May 2006

Bobby Penn's art ranged widely in media, technique and style including both highly representational and non-objective work. Penn was a master of many media including oil and acrylic painting, watercolor painting, pastel drawing, and printmaking demonstrating an impressive technical virtuosity in them all. His subject matter dealt primarily with traditional Indian themes and autobiographical material. Penn earned a national reputation as one of the leading American Indian artists on the Northern Plains, and his work is contained in many public and private collections across the nation.

## Scope and Content Note

The Robert Lee Penn Papers contain materials which describe the life and work of Robert Penn. Most of the collection is photocopies or digital copies of audio cassette tapes or video tape. The collection is divided into nine series: **Printed Materials, Typescripts, Manuscripts, Correspondence, Ephemera, Miscellaneous, Media and Photographs.**

The **Printed Materials** contain largely newspaper and periodical articles providing biographical information on Robert Penn as well as information concerning his art.

Additional periodicals feature Penn's work on their covers or in their pages. In addition, there are exhibition announcements, exhibition programs, book excerpts, calendars featuring Penn's work, and posters.

The **Typescripts** contain biographical information and information concerning Robert Penn's passing.

The **Manuscripts** contain poems written by Robert Penn.

The **Correspondence** is divided into two sub-series: Incoming and Other. The incoming series contains letters from institutions thanking Penn for his contribution to publications and organizations. The other series contains a letter from Alta dela Cruz Penn to Rick Geyerman, who was writing an article on Robert Penn.

The **Ephemera** include photocopies of note cards with Penn's work and an unidentified wood cut.

The **Miscellaneous** materials contain Penn's business cards and notes for a media relations file.

The **Media** portion of the collection contains CD's and DVD's of interviews with Robert Penn, the dedication of a Robert Penn mural, and a digital copy of a photograph of Robert Penn.

Many of the **Photographs** show Penn with his work or Penn working with students at the Oscar Howe Institute. Photographs of Penn with the students are restricted for FERPA.

### **Additional Resources**

John Day Collection on Robert (Bobby) Penn, Richardson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, The University of South Dakota.

*Robert Penn Retrospective*. Organized by the University Art Galleries, University of South Dakota: Vermillion, SD, June 1993. (Chilson Collection ND237.P46A41993)

*Vision Quest: Men, Women & Sacred Sites of the Sioux Nation* (An Interactive CD-Rom Featuring the Photographs of Don Doll, S.J.) (Computer Software & Files / 1<sup>st</sup> floor, E99.D1 D652 1996)

### **Related Subjects**

Penn, Robert Lee, 1946-1999

Indian Art—North America

Howe, Oscar, 1915-1983

Oscar Howe Institute

Box No.	Description
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**Box 1**

## PRINTED MATERIALS

Articles and Press Releases Concerning Penn's Passing  
(photocopies)

- "Renowned SD Native American Artist Robert Penn Dies at 53,"  
Press Release from University of South Dakota, 9 February  
1999 (2 copies)
- "Acclaimed Contemporary American Indian Artist Robert Penn  
Dies," *Argus Leader*, 10 February 1999
- "Renowned Artist Robert Penn Dies; Funeral Saturday," *Plain  
Talk*, 12 February 1999
- "Indian Painter Robert Penn, an Omaha Native, Dies at 53,"  
*Omaha World-Herald*, 13 February 1999
- "Painter Robert Penn, Omaha Native, Dies at 53," *Omaha World-  
Herald*, 13 February 1999
- "South Dakota Artist Robert Penn Dies at 53," *Volante*, 17  
February 1999
- "American Indian Artist Robert Penn Dead at 53," *Indian  
Country Today*, 22 February – 1 March 1999
- "Renowned SD Native American Artist Robert Penn Dies," *The  
South Dakotan*, 1 March 1999
- "An Indian, an Artist: Robert Penn Proved to Be Unique in Both  
Those Roles," *Rapid City Journal*, 7 March 1999
- "His Art Gave His Life Definition and Meaning," *South Dakota  
Hall of Fame*, Fall 1998

Articles and Press Release Concerning Penn's Retrospective  
(photocopies)

- "Retrospective Marks Homecoming for Artist, USD Grad Robert  
Penn," Press Release from the University of South Dakota,  
24 May 1993
- "Penn Talks through His Art," *Argus Leader*, 27 May 1993
- "Penn Retrospective Opens," *Aviso*, 2 June 1993
- "Robert Penn Retrospective Exhibit Opens," *Plain Talk*, 11 June  
1993
- "Retrospective Marks Homecoming for Artist, USD Grad, Robert  
Penn," *Plain Talk* (?), 1993 (?)
- "Exhibition Will Reunite Artist with University," *Yankton Daily  
Press and Dakotan*, 1993 (?)
- "Sioux Indian Museum Opens Penn Retrospective," *Rapid City  
Journal*, 3 April 1994
- "Robert Penn Retrospective," Unknown, No Date
- Untitled, Press Release by John A. Day at the University of South  
Dakota, n.d.

## Miscellaneous Newspaper Articles and Press Releases (photocopies)

- "Totality of Native American Experience Is Reflected in  
Contemporary Indian Art," *Volante*, 14 November 1972
- "Robert Penn," *USD Medicine*, September, 1975
- "Medical Artist Applies Modern Technic to Ancient Art From"  
*USD Medicine*, April 1976
- Untitled, *The Sioux City Sunday Journal*, 28 December 1969
- "Contemporary Plains Indian Art on Display at the Natural  
History Museum and Aquarium, Golden Gate Park," from  
the California Academy of Sciences, 10 January 1984
- "Indian Artist at Knife River," *Beulah Beacon*, 13 September  
1984

Box No.	Description
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**Box 1, continued**

## PRINTED MATERIALS, continued

Miscellaneous Newspaper Articles and Press Releases  
(photocopies), continued

- “Indian Artist Gives Workshop,” *The Hazen Star*, 13 September 1984
- “Visiting Artist,” *San Marcos Courier*, 13 April 1988
- “Visiting Sioux Artist Robert L. Penn,” *Canyon Shopper*, 15 June 1988
- “Noted Sioux Artist Offers 6 Day Show,” *Red Rock News*, 15 June 1988
- “Library Observes Special Week,” *Plain Talk*, 11 April 1989
- “Cultural Fanfare,” *Plain Talk*, 13 April 1989
- “A Vision Shared: Art Intervenes in Penn’s Troubled Life,” *Argus Leader*, 28 September 1990
- “Exhibits of Indian Artwork to Fill Galleries,” *Argus Leader*, 26 May 1991
- “Bicultural Life Shapes Art,” *Rapid City Journal*, 23 June 1991
- “Oscar Howe Institute Teaches Young Native American Artists,” *Plain Talk*, 27 June 1991
- “Ten Participate in Oscar Howe Art Institute,” *Aviso*, 17 July 1991
- “Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute Reinstated,” *The South Dakotan*, July 1991
- “New Tribal Arts Display Worth Seeing,” *Argus Leader*, 16 August 1991
- “Penn to Receive Governor’s Award,” *Plain Talk*, 30 January 1992
- “Oscar Howe Institute Gives Artists Opportunity,” *Plain Talk*, 9 July 1992
- “Artist, USD Graduate Robert Penn Masters His Creativity,” Press Release from the University of South Dakota, 17 June 1993
- “Penn’s Art Conveys Old Ways,” *Indian Country Today*, 30 June 1993
- “Penning Art: Oscar Howe Protégé [sic] Masters His Creativity,” *The South Dakotan*, July 1993
- “USD Graduate Recalls Woodstock As Pinnacle of ‘60s Thought,” Press Release from University of South Dakota, 1 August 1994
- “Bob Penn – Old West Trail Show,” Press Release from University of South Dakota, 12 August 1994
- “USD Native American Artists Part of French Cultural Exchange,” Press Release from the University of South Dakota, 16 March 1995
- “Artistically Speaking: Robert, Alta Penn Hold First Joint Exhibit at MMC,” *Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan*, 4 November 1995
- “Native American Awareness Days Scheduled March 25-31,” *Aviso*, 20 March 1996
- “Hall of Fame Pays Tribute” and “Robert Penn, Emerging from the Shadow of Oscar Howe,” *Chamberlain-Oacoma Register*, 1 October 1998
- “New Artwork on Display at Center,” Unknown, No Date
- “Paintings Featured,” Unknown, No Date

Box No.	Description
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**Box 1, continued**

## PRINTED MATERIALS, continued

Miscellaneous Newspaper Articles and Press Releases  
(photocopies), continued

- “Photo Feature: Contemporary ‘Traditional Style’ Lakota Dancers,” Unknown, No Date
- “The World of Robert Penn,” Unknown, No Date [not found 8 August 2010]

## Periodicals with Articles on Penn (photocopies)

- “Vitae: Robert Penn,” *Minnesota Monthly*, March 1991
- “South Dakota Artists: Bob Penn, Painter,” *South Dakota Magazine*, July/August 1991
- “1992 Governor’s Awards in the Arts: Robert Penn & Brother C.M. Simon, S.J.,” *The Bulletin* (Institute of American Indian Studies, University of South Dakota), August 1992
- “Governor’s Awards in the Arts,” South Dakota Arts Council, Fiscal Year 1992, 1 July 1991-30 June 1992
- “Vermillion Artist Wins Creative Achievement Award,” *The Arts*, Summer 1992
- “Classic Contemporary Native American Art,” *Women’s Edition, The Magazine for Metropolitan Women*, April 1994
- “The Journey of Robert Penn,” *Signals*, July/August 1994
- “Tribe Sends Representatives to Recognize LaFlesche & Penn,” Omaha Tribe of Nebraska Annual Report 1994, January 1995

## Periodicals with Penn Art (photocopies)

- Program Guide: Public Television and Radio in South Dakota*, May 1983
- Program Guide: Public Television and Radio for South Dakota*, February 1990 (on back cover)
- Arts*, October 1992

## Miscellaneous Periodical (photocopies)

NEBRASKAland Magazine, January/February 1984

## Programs with Penn Cover Art (some are photocopies)

- Upward Bound ’67, 1967
- The Eighth Annual National Indian and Alaska Native Health Conference, 27-30 October 1986
- Native American Books for USD Book & Supply, May 1988
- Resource Packet for the Red School House, n.d.
- Heart of the Earth Contest Pow Wow, 25-27 May 1990
- Heart of the Earth Contest Pow Wow, 22-24 February 1991
- Heart of the Earth Survival School’s 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Contest Pow Wow, 27-29 March 1992
- Heart of the Earth Survival School & American Indian OIC 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Contest Pow Wow, 26-28 February 1993

Box No.	Description
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**Box 1, continued**

## PRINTED MATERIALS, continued

## Miscellaneous Programs (some are photocopies)

- Altadena de la Cruz Penn: Works on Paper and Nancy Losacker: Sculpture, Coyote Student Center Art Gallery at the University of South Dakota, 3 April 1989 – 5 May 1989
- The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Cultural Awareness Days and Wacipi, University of South Dakota, 6-9 April 1989
- Northern Plains Tribal Arts, Sioux Falls, S.D., 28-30 September 1990
- 1992 Governor's Awards in the Arts, Pierre, S.D., 13 February 1992
- Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 11 October 1992 – 3 January 1993
- Oscar Howe Native American Art Institute, University of South Dakota, 14-26 June 1998
- Robert Penn & His Art: A Slide Lecture by Alta Penn, University of South Dakota, 26 June 1998 (2 copies)
- 1998 South Dakota Hall of Fame Honor Ceremonies, Mitchell, S.D., 25-26 September 1998
- The Art of Robert Penn, W.H. Over Museum, University of South Dakota, 1998 (2 copies)
- Oscar Howe Native American Summer Art Institute, University of South Dakota, 13-25 June 1999 (2 copies)
- Tribute to Robert Penn by Dean John Day and Patricia Kelly, University of South Dakota, 26 March 1999
- Exhibition Announcements (some are photocopies)
- Announcement for Robert Penn Exhibition at Sioux Indian Museum and Crafts Center (Rapid City, S.D), 23 June 1974 – 27 September 1974
- Invitation to the Exhibition "Homecomings: Native American Artists," at North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks, N.D.), 10 October 1985
- Announcement for Robert Penn Exhibition at Sioux Falls College, 14 October 1991
- Announcement for Robert Penn Exhibition at Dahl Central Gallery (Rapid City, S.D.), 1 June 1991
- Announcement for Robert Penn Retrospective at the Warren M. Lee Center for Fine Arts (University of South Dakota), 1 June 1993 – 25 June 1993
- Announcement for Robert Penn Exhibition "Shades of Evolution" at First People's Gallery (Minneapolis, M.N), 23 October 1993 (2 copies)
- Announcement for Robert Penn Exhibition "Transcending Both Worlds" at American Indian Contemporary Arts (San Francisco, Ca.), 7 October 1994 (2 copies)
- Traveling Exhibition Catalogue (photocopies)
- Vision of Hope: A Traveling Sioux Art Show in Commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre
- Art Catalogue (photocopies)
- Indigena Fine Art Publishers, Ltd.

Box No.	Description
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**Box 1, continued**

## PRINTED MATERIALS, continued

## Book Excerpts (photocopies)

“Robert Penn: Art and Self” from *The American Indian Speaks* (1969) edited by John R. Milton

“Robert Penn” from *Who’s Who among the Sioux* (1988) by T. Emogene Paulson and Lloyd R. Moses

“Contemporary or Modern Sioux Arts” from *An Illustrated History of Arts in South Dakota* (1989) by Arthur Amiotte

## Calendars Featuring Penn’s Work (photocopies)

Sioux Art Calendar 1989

Sioux Art Calendar 1990

Sioux Art Calendar 1991

A Catholic Charities 1992 Calendar

Rosebud Reservation 1994 Calendar

## Posters (photocopies)

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pow Wow presented by the Tiospaye Council, 9 & 10, April 1994

The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual USD Wacipi, 30 & 31 March 1996

**Box 2**

## TYPESCRIPTS

## Biographical Typescripts (photocopies)

“Robert Penn,” Unknown Author, n.d.

“Robert Penn,” Unknown Author, n.d.

“Robert L. Penn (Wicahpi) – Sioux Artist,” Unknown Author, n.d.

“Robert Penn,” Unknown Author, n.d.

“Robert Penn, Prairie Edge, Rapid City, S.D., n.d.

## Typescripts Concerning the Life and Work of Penn (photocopies)

“Robert Penn: A Short Biography by Wayne S. Knutson,” draft to the biography in *Robert Penn Retrospective*, organized by the University Art Galleries at the University of South Dakota)

“Introduction,” draft by John A. Day to the introduction in *Robert Penn Retrospective*

“Lakota Painter: Robert Penn,” Unknown Author, n.d.

“The World of Robert Penn,” by Frederick J. Dockstader, n.d.

“The Circle of Generations: Robert Penn (Oscar Howe to Robert Penn to Quanah Penn & Others)” by Patty Kelley, April 1998 (2 copies)

“Penn, Jr., Robert: Bobby Penn, Best of the Plains,” by Bruce Hope, December 2001

## Typescripts Concerning Robert Penn’s Passing (some are photocopies)

Robert Lee Penn Eulogy by John A. Day, 13 February 1999

Funeral Service Program for Robert Lee Penn, 13 February 1999 (2 copies)

27<sup>th</sup> Annual University of South Dakota Wacipi: Honoring Our Elders (Tankaka Oyate ki wicagluonihanpi) 27-28 March 1999 (2 copies)

Box No. Description**Box 2, continued**

## MANUSCRIPTS

Poetry by Robert Penn (photocopies)

"Bobby's Prayer (Wicahpi)" (2 copies), ca. late 1997

"Hunters," n.d.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Incoming (photocopies)

Tom Westhoven (St. Joseph's Indian School)

9 February 1989

Charles D. Swick (Coordinator, Oscar Howe Art Contest and Exhibit)

5 April 1989

Pat Cook (Vermillion High School)

24 April 1989

Evan M. Maurer (Minneapolis Institute of Arts)

30 January 1992

Evan M. Maurer (Minneapolis Institute of Arts)

4 March 1992

David B. Waine (Indigena Fine Art Publishers, Ltd.)

25 May 1993

Lisa M. Bellanger (Heart of the Earth Survival School),  
n.d.

Other (photocopies)

From Alta Penn to Rick Geyerman

10 June 1992

## EPHEMERA

Note Cards (2) (photocopies)

Unidentified Woodcut (photocopy)

## MISCELLANEOUS

Robert Penn's Business Cards (2) (photocopy)

Notes for Media Relations file (photocopies)

## MEDIA

Gold CD's

Interview on Oscar Howe, Interviewing Robert Penn by KRSW  
Radio Worthington, MN on 21 April 1989 and Interview of  
Robert Penn with Jody Ahern, of the Minnesota Monthly  
on December 1990. Digital copy of audio cassette tape June  
2006.Interview at Skye Housers at Rosebud on Saturday, 26 August  
1986. Digital copy of audio cassette tape June 2006.Photograph of Robert Penn with chin resting on fist with buffalo  
skull and crow painting in background, photo by Don Doll,  
S.J., 1993, copyrighted work. Digital copy created by  
Microtek Scanner 18 May 2007.

Box No.	Description
<b>Box 2, continued</b>	<p>MEDIA, continued</p> <p>Gold DVD's</p> <p>Humanics Lecture and Dedication of Robert Penn Mural, Springfield College, Springfield MA(?), Martin Dossick and Mark St. Pierre, 1 May 1995. Digital copy of VHS video cassette tape.</p> <p>Interview with Robert Penn, KSFY-TV Positively Dakota, 3 November 1995. Digital copy of VHS video cassette tape.</p> <p>Interview with participates of the Oscar Howe Summer Institute [OHSI], KSFY-TV, 28 June 1996. Digital copy of VHS video cassette tape.</p>
<b>Box 3</b>	<p>PHOTOGRAPHS</p> <p>Black and White</p> <p>Robert Penn with unidentified painting, Coyote Student Center Art Show, 30 September 1983</p> <p>Robert Penn at the USD Tiospaye Student Council Wacipi, 1989 (2 copies)</p> <p>Robert Penn at his retrospective, June 1993, Photo by Steve Lang (2 copies)</p> <p>Robert Penn and <i>Lakotah</i>, June 1993</p> <p>Robert Penn and <i>The Sisters</i>, June 1993, Photo by Steve Lang</p> <p>Robert Penn with self portrait <i>Waiting for You to Go Away</i>, June 1993, Photo by Steve Lang</p> <p>Robert Penn Describes Aspect of <i>The Hide Painter</i>, a Tribute to Oscar Howe, June 1993, Photo by Steve Lang</p> <p><i>Eagle Staff</i>, 1989 (Collection of Dale and Barbara Clement, Rapid City)</p> <p>Robert Penn works under tutelage of Oscar Howe, Photo by Maxine Burnett (<i>Sioux City Journal</i>, 28 December 1969), Photo Is Printed Backwards</p> <p>RESTRICTED Black and White</p> <p>Robert Penn with students at Oscar Howe Institute</p>
<b>Box 4</b>	<p>PHOTOGRAPHS</p> <p>Color</p> <p>Robert Penn in studio with paintings, September 1994, Photo by Steven Lang</p> <p>Robert Penn with five unidentified individuals</p> <p>Gerald Ford at Native American Cultural Center, ca. 1998</p> <p>RESTRICTED Color</p> <p>Robert Penn with students at Oscar Howe Institute undated (21)</p>