

William F. Charters South Sea Islands Collection
Special Collections and Rare Books, Irwin Library, Butler University



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William F. Charters spent his adult working life in Indianapolis. In 1924, he read Frederick O'Brien's *White Shadows in the South Seas*, and was deeply moved by the author's praise for passing native civilizations. Book collecting was a fashionable activity of the age, and Charters responded to O'Brien's plea to help preserve the irreplaceable records of South Pacific peoples and cultures, especially since they themselves kept few or no written records. With great vigor and in short time, he built a collection, mostly of English and American works or translations into English, that would preserve early written records and accounts of civilizations and cultures that were quickly changing, often disintegrating under the influence of traders, empire builders, missionaries, and foreign administrators.

In 1931, shortly before his death, Charters gave his collection of some 2,000 volumes to Butler University, with certain conditions. Since then, the collection has grown to more than 3,000 titles and has been fully cataloged. Recent scholarly material has been added in order to keep alive and increase the collection's research value.

Books and serials range from early circumnavigators' and explorers' accounts to later and current studies in anthropology, ethnology, socioeconomics, government, history, literature, music, the arts, natural history, and other fields. The collection includes such bibliophilic gems as a first edition of William Bligh's

A Voyage to the South Seas (1792) and the early scientific memoirs and bulletins of the famous Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. There are examples of early printing presses used in the Pacific Islands, missionary reports, and literary and biographical accounts of life in the South Seas.

Interested researchers can obtain a selected, annotated catalog on-site. The following description of the collection is taken from the contents page of the catalog:

- ◆ Significant Voyages
 - Circumnavigation; Scientific, Whaling, and Missionary Voyages; Military and Buccaneersing Expeditions
- ◆ In Search of Knowledge, Wonder, and Adventure
 - Selected Accounts of Early Naturalists
- ◆ In Search of Souls and Salvation
 - Selected Missionary Accounts
- ◆ Intrepid Voyagers
 - Western Women in the South Pacific: A Selection, Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century
- ◆ Pacific Languages
 - Vocabularies, Dictionaries, and Grammars, Texts, Linguistics
- ◆ “So Much That Is New”
 - A Selection of Post-Charters Additions to the Collection