

# Joseph S. Butts Papers, 1931-1971

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Butts, Joseph Shirey.
<b>Title</b>	Joseph S. Butts Papers
<b>Dates</b>	1931-1971 (inclusive) 1931 1971 1931-1957 (bulk) 1931 1957
<b>Quantity</b>	1.2 cubic feet, including 3 photographs, (2 boxes)
<b>Collection Number</b>	MSS Butts
<b>Summary</b>	The Joseph S. Butts Papers consist of research data, laboratory notebooks, and reprints of scientific publications documenting the biochemistry and agricultural chemistry research of Butts as a graduate student and professor at the University of Southern California in the 1930s and as a faculty member at Oregon State College. Butts was a faculty member at Oregon State from 1939 until his death in 1961.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Oregon State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives Research Center</a> Special Collections and Archives Research Center 121 The Valley Library Oregon State University Corvallis OR 97331-4501 Telephone: 541-737-2075 Fax: 541-737-8674 <a href="mailto:scarc@oregonstate.edu">scarc@oregonstate.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	Collection is open for research.
<b>Languages</b>	English

---

## Biographical Note

Joseph Shirey Butts was a Professor of Agricultural Chemistry at Oregon State College from 1939 until his death in 1961 and department head from 1946 until 1961. His research interests included metabolism of carbohydrates, amino acids and fatty acids, ketosis, and growth-promoting properties of amino acids. He was also active in nutrition research and peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Joseph Butts was known for his work as a teacher and administrator, soldier, scientist, and scholar. At the time of his death, he was known as one of OSU's most widely-travelled staff members, having served as a consultant in almost every section of the world. He was an international authority in biochemistry, agricultural chemistry, and the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Butts was born in Goshen, Indiana on December 14, 1903. He obtained his BS in Agricultural Chemistry from the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida (1926); his MS from Fordham University in New York City, New York (1929); and his PhD in biochemistry from the University of Southern

California (1933), under the advisement of Harry J. Deuel, Jr. In 1938, he traveled to the University of Leipzig and was a “visiting worker” at the Cardiff City Mental Hospital in Cardiff, Wales.

Before beginning his studies at the University of Southern California, Butts was an Instructor in Chemistry at Massachusetts State College (1928-1929). In addition to his coursework and doctoral research at USC, he worked as an Assistant in Biochemistry, Instructor in Biochemistry, Assistant Professor of Biochemistry, and an Associate Professor of Biochemistry. Butts came to Oregon in 1939 to take a position as a professor of biochemistry. Serving as the head of the Agricultural Chemistry Department from 1946 to 1961, he increased the number of full-time staff nearly five-fold, brought in outside contracts from the Atomic Energy Commission and the Surgeon General’s Office, and enthusiastically supported the expansion of the Physics Chemistry building.

Butts was one of the first civilians to leave OSU when the U.S. entered World War II. He first went to Washington, D.C., to the Surgeon General’s Office, where he served as a Nutrition Officer in an advisory capacity. He seized the opportunity to travel to England with the Eighth Air Force as a Nutrition Officer. While in England, he also acted as a liaison officer with former scientific colleagues who were on the British civilian nutritional advisory boards. After the war, he stayed in Active Reserve and was honorably retired in 1960 after nearly thirty years service. He was one of only a few Colonels in the Medical Service Corps.

Following his return to OSU’s campus after World War II, he was one of three selected from the State of Oregon to go to Oak Ridge to become acquainted with the “Manhattan Project” of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). In 1952, Butts was asked to do a two-year assignment in Europe with the AEC’s National Biology and Medicine Laboratory, serving as an Assistant Chief in the Biology Branch of the Division of Biology and Medicine. Immediately following that tour, he was picked to be the U.S. representative at a six-week atomic energy exhibit in Germany for the State Department; the focus was on peace-time atomic energy utilization. During 1957, he was on a one year special assignment in Western Europe, representing the Office of European Economics under the International Atoms for Peace Program; this program was headquartered in Paris and was dedicated to the study of the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Following this assignment, he worked with the office of European Economic Cooperation on the Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy. This position included travelling to 19 European countries to establish research programs.

However, Dr. Butts’ work was not confined to the field of atomic energy. In 1955, he was a member of a special nutrition survey team that reviewed nutritional problems and programs of the armed forces in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan; he returned to Iran in 1956 as a leader of a special U.S. nutrition survey team. He was also a U.S. representative at the first Armed Force International Nutrition Conference in Turkey. His services as a consultant on a national and international level were varied, including with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense, and the Surgeon General.

Butts died in New Delhi after contracting a fatal case of amoebic dysentery while working with the school milk program for children. He was in India on assignment for the FAO to establish an accelerated program in foods and nutrition. Butts was eulogized as an unselfish, congenial person who was dedicated to increasing the understanding of science and developing higher standards of living throughout the world.

## Content Description

The Joseph S. Butts Papers consist of research data, laboratory notebooks, and reprints of scientific publications documenting Butts' research activities while a graduate student and faculty member at the University of Southern California and as faculty member in agricultural chemistry at Oregon State College.

The research data and laboratory notebooks document experiments conducted in the laboratory at the Cardiff City Mental Hospital in 1938, work at the University of Southern California in the 1930s, work on radio isotopes in 1949-1952, Vitamin E analyses in 1955, research on spring wheat (project 315) in 1956-1957, and research data for crop and feed analyses in 1945-1955.

The collection includes a bound volume of reprints and typed manuscripts of papers written by Butts, his doctoral advisor Harry J. Deuel, Jr., and others during his graduate studies and faculty years at the University of Southern California in the 1930s.

The collection also includes several laboratory notebooks documenting work in 1965-1971 on project 201. These may reflect continuation of Butts' work by other researchers.

The three photographs are portrait prints of Butts' colleagues or collaborators. One is of a colleague at the University of Leipzig; the second is of a member of the U.S. Army Signal Corps; and the third is unidentified.

## Use of the Collection

### Preferred Citation

Joseph S. Butts Papers, Oregon State University Archives, Corvallis, Oregon.

## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The materials were transferred from the Agricultural Chemistry Department in 1991 and 1993.

### Related Materials

Extensive documentation of agricultural chemistry research programs at Oregon State is available in the [Agricultural Experiment Station \(RG 025\)](#) and the Agricultural Chemistry Department (RG 081) Records. The Archives' holdings also include the papers of several other agricultural chemists, including J.R. Haag, [R.H. Robinson](#), and Paul Weswig. The [Science Research Institute Records \(RG 014\)](#) document biochemistry research programs at Oregon State.

---

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Agricultural chemistry--Oregon.  
Agriculture--Research--Oregon.  
Biochemistry--Research.  
Radioisotopes in agriculture.

Vitamin E--Research.

**Corporate Names :**

University of Southern California--Research.

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Photographic prints.

**Other Creators :**

**Personal Names :**

Deuel, Harry J. (Harry James), 1897-1956.

(creator)

**Corporate Names :**

Oregon State College. Agricultural Experiment Station.

(creator)

Finding aid prepared by Tiah Edmunson-Morton and Elizabeth Nielsen.  
2009



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Creative Commons Licenses in Archives West:  
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/cc-attr.shtml>