During World War II, Commanding Officers were authorized to advance and promote deserving and qualified Sailors to the highest enlisted rank of Chief Petty Officer.

The determination of “deserving and qualified" could be difficult for the Commanding Officer. How best to prepare? How to plan and track preparation? How to best display your qualifications? From these dilemmas sprang the original charge books.
Chiefs began to direct First Class Petty Officers to prepare themselves to assume the additional responsibilities by recording all the details of those responsibilities.

In addition to the technical aspects of the various ratings, Chief Petty Officers also talked to the First Class aspirants about leadership, accountability, supporting the chain of command, and other professional subject.

The collection of notes and study material eventually came to be called by some a Charge Book perhaps because the Petty Officers who kept them were their charges; (entrusted to their care) for professional development or perhaps because the entries included charges (authoritative instructions or tasking of a directive nature).
History of the CPO Charge Books

By the late 1960s it was not uncommon to find junior officers and Chief's using small notepads to keep track of things to do and schedules of events. And by the mid 1970s Chief's initiations were alive and well throughout nearly every command in the Navy, and most Chiefs used a little green memo pad to keep track of what they felt was important.

In 1977 when the new Chiefs aboard USS Fulton AS-11 had to carry a green memo book sized about 8 1/2" x 11", and had to get every Chiefs signature at the command on a separate page.

By 1980 the Chiefs on large commands needed an easier means to ensure the selectees had gotten every signature. So was born the requirement to list Chiefs by seniority in a table of contents and give each Chief their own page. Before long this became the norm at every command.
History of the CPO Charge Books

Charge books were not treated with respect, most charge books of the day were so unruly.

By 1998 MCPON Jim Herdt was looking for more ways to clean up the initiation and make it worthy to continue the practice. As part of that worthiness he made the Charge Book a mandatory item of the initiation process. The next year the "The Charge Book, a Proud Keepsake" purpose was released to the Chiefs Mess.

By 1999 the Chief's wanting to keep whatever part of the traditional initiation alive accepted the new rules for the charge book and by 2000 many Chiefs kept their books as keepsakes.
Creative, proudly constructed charge books have been an especially impressive part of the past CPO Initiations. Proper use of charge books is an essential component of the welcome and acceptance into the CPO Mess.

Newly selected Chiefs are assigned their Charge Book project almost immediately. Selectees are encouraged to work together on this project but to be individually creative. This promotes team work amongst the selectees.

Every Chief in the mess then makes thoughtful, congratulatory, motivational, and tradition oriented entries to help guide the selectee as they prepare themselves to assume the additional responsibly of a Chief Petty Officer. Genuinely humorous entries are made as enhance the value of these grand mementos and keepsakes. They are, indeed, keepsakes.

In fact, many clearly qualify as genuine folk art.
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