



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Reuben Snake papers, 1971-1996

Janice Gould (Konkow)

2007

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	Reuben Snake papers
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.012
Date:	1970-1996
Extent:	1.25 Linear feet (3 archival boxes)
Creator:	Snake, Reuben, 1937-1993
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Reuben A. Snake, Jr. Papers, located in the Cultural Resource Center of the National Museum of the American Indian, contain writings, correspondence, biographical materials, and written materials relating to the Native American Church which document the literary and political activities of this Winnebago tribal leader.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Kathy Snake in 2006.

Processing Information

Processed by Janice Gould (Konkow), 2007.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Reuben A. Snake, Jr. Papers, Box and Folder Number; National Museum of the American Indian Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Access to NMAI Archive Center collections is by appointment only, Monday - Friday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment (phone: 301-238-1400, email: nmaiarchives@si.edu).

Conditions Governing Use

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish or broadcast materials from the collection must be requested from the Archivist of the National Museum of the American Indian. Please submit a written request to NMAIArchives@si.edu. Copyright vested in Reuben A. Snake, Jr. has not passed to the National Museum of the American Indian; researchers are responsible for determining any other copyright questions.

Biographical / Historical

Reuben A. Snake, Jr. was born January 12, 1937 at Winnebago, Nebraska, the youngest child of Reuben Harold and Virginia Greyhair Snake. Reuben's mother divorced her husband and later remarried, but Reuben's early life was fraught with hardships, including a period of separation from his parents and siblings. When the family's financial situation improved, parents and children were able to reunite and eventually settled in Hastings, Minnesota.

Reuben entered Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1950 but later dropped out due to problems with alcohol. He joined the Army in 1956, from which he was honorably discharged, and two years later he married Kathy McKee, with whom he raised four daughters and two sons. In 1965 he quit drinking.

Reuben was active in the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s and organized many demonstrations during his tenure as national chairman of that organization. After being elected chairman of the Winnebago tribe, Reuben reorganized the tribe, centralizing its administration and improving funding and accountability. Reuben was involved with educational issues as well, serving on education committees for the National Congress of American Indians and the National Tribal Chairman's Association. He worked both nationally and internationally to help make more widely known issues of Indian health, education, and religious freedom.

Reuben began to renew his spiritual and cultural ties with the Native American Church in the 1970s and eventually became a Roadman for the church. With the help of Senator Daniel Inouye from Hawaii he fought judicial battles to legalize the importation of peyote from Mexico for use in sacramental ceremonies. In 1990, when the United States Supreme Court ruled that the sacred use of peyote was not protected by the Constitution, Reuben became the official spokesperson for the Native American Church to educate the public about church philosophy and history. He organized the Native American Religious Freedom Project to lobby for national legislation what would amend and strengthen the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

Reuben had suffered a major heart attack in 1986, and by the early 1990s, his health was deteriorating. He died on June 28, 1993. Reuben did not live to see the results of his hard work on behalf of Native American religious freedom, Amendments to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which President Clinton signed into law in October, 1994. These amendments protected the religious use of peyote by Indians.

Scope and Contents

The Reuben Snake Papers encompass original writings by Snake, correspondence, biographical materials, and written materials relating to Reuben's activism on behalf of the Native American Church.

Also included in this collection are video and audio tapes that contain interviews, talks, radio broadcasts, and other orally and visually transmitted items. These materials have been transferred to the NMAI Media Archives. All photographs have been transferred to the NMAI Photo Archives.

Arrangement

The Reuben Snake papers are divided into four series:

Series 1, Writings, (undated, 1972-1993),

Series 2, Correspondence (undated, 1982-1996),

Series 3, Biographical (undated, 1985-1996),

Series 4, Native American Church (1971-1993)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Ho-Chunk (Winnebago)
Peyote

Cultures:

Ho-Chunk (Winnebago)

Types of Materials:

Biographies
Biography files
Clippings
Correspondence
Interviews
Obituaries
Reports
Writings

Names:

National Congress of American Indians
National Tribal Chairmen's Association
Native American Church of North America

Functions:

American Indian Movement

Container Listing

Series 1: Writings, 1972-1993, undated

10 Folders

English.

This series contains original writings by Reuben Snake, tribal Chairman's reports and observations as well as position papers and interviews.

Box 1, Folder 1	Writings, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Writings: "Being Indian Is...", 1972
Box 1, Folder 3	Writings: "The Iron Horse Incident", 1974
Box 1, Folder 4	Writings, 1973-1979
Box 1, Folder 5	Writings, 1980-1982
Box 1, Folder 6	Writings, 1983-1989
Box 1, Folder 7	Writings, 1990-1991
Box 1, Folder 8	Writings, 1992
Box 1, Folder 9	Writings, 1993
Box 1, Folder 10	Writings by Others, undated

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1982-1996, undated

15 Folders

English.

This series contains various forms of correspondence including miscellaneous correspondence, correspondence with interviewers, and correspondence with James Botsford, Reuben Snake's attorney.

Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence, 1982-1983, undated
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence: "Deposition Testimony", 1992
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence: Ginger Miles, 1991-1993
Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence: Huston Smith, 1992-1993
Box 2, Folder 1	Correspondence: Contracts and Agreements, 1989-1994 English.
Box 2, Folder 2	James Botsford: Correspondence, 1989-1996
Box 2, Folder 3	James Botsford: Correspondence with Jay Fikes, 1992-1994 English.
Box 2, Folder 4	James Botsford: Correspondence with Huston Smith, 1993-1994
Box 2, Folder 5	James Botsford: Correspondence with Bremer Foundation, 1993-1994
Box 2, Folder 6	James Botsford: Correspondence with Clear Light, 1993-1996, undated
Box 2, Folder 7	James Botsford: Correspondence, Notes, undated
Box 2, Folder 8	James Botsford: "The Peyote Road," Film Scripts, undated
Box 2, Folder 9	James Botsford: "The Peyote Road," Post-Production Issues, undated
Box 2, Folder 10	James Botsford: "The Peyote Road," Film Reviews, undated
Box 2, Folder 11	James Botsford: Native American Film Makers, undated

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Series 3: Biographical, 1985-1996, undated

8 Folders

English.

This series contains a variety of biographical information on Snake. This includes news clippings relating to Snake's work as Winnebago tribal chairman, Snake's vitae as well as tributes to him, and eulogies and obituaries following his death. Also included is the draft of Jay Courtney Fikes' autobiography of Snake.

Box 2, Folder 12	Biographical: Jay C. Fikes, Autobiography of a Humble Serpent, pgs. 1-100, 1996
Box 2, Folder 13	Biographical: Jay C. Fikes, Autobiography of a Humble Serpent, pgs. 101-199, 1996
Box 2, Folder 14	Biographical: Jay C. Fikes, Autobiography of a Humble Serpent, pgs. 200-291, 1996
Box 2, Folder 15	Biographical: Jay C. Fikes, Reuben Snake Interviews, pgs. 1-75, 1996
Box 3, Folder 1	Biographical: Jay C. Fikes, Reuben Snake Interviews, pgs. 76-150, 1996
Box 3, Folder 2	Biographical: News Clippings on Reuben Snake, 1985-1996
Box 3, Folder 3	Biographical: Miscellaneolus Papers, 1991-1993
Box 3, Folder 4	Biographical: Vitae, Tributes, Eulogies, Obituaries, 1991-1993

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Series 4: Native American Church, 1971-1993

7 Folders

This series includes resolutions made by various tribal governments and addressed to the U.S. Congress in support of the Native American Church, as well as the agendas of NAC officers' and delegates' meetings. The Native American Religious Freedom Project files contain materials relating to the lobbying efforts of the Native American Church and drafts of the proposed amendments to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The remaining files contain news clips documenting court cases on Native American use of peyote and articles on the effects of peyote and its sacramental value to the Native American Church.

Box 3, Folder 5	Native American Church, 1983-1991, undated
Box 3, Folder 6	Native American Church, 1991
Box 3, Folder 7	Native American Church: American Indian Religious Freedom Project, 1990-1991, undated
Box 3, Folder 8	Native American Church: American Indian Religious Freedom Project, 1992
Box 3, Folder 9	Native American Church: American Indian Religious Freedom Project, 1993
Box 3, Folder 10	Native American Church: News Clips on Native American Activism, 1971-1993, undated
Box 3, Folder 11	Native American Church: Peyote, 1991-1993, undated

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