



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Frank and Dolores Becker Papers

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2015

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | National Museum of the American Indian |
| Title: | Frank and Dolores Becker papers |
| Identifier: | NMAI.AC.075 |
| Date: | 1943-1968 |
| Extent: | 9 Sound discs 9 Photographic prints 3 Linear feet 1 Sound cassette |
| Creator: | Becker, Dolores Becker, Frank E. Indian Association of America |
| Language: | This collection is in English with one audiocassette that contains the Navajo language. |
| Summary: | The Frank and Dolores Becker papers contains materials from the Indian Association of America, Inc. as well as material regarding Frank Becker's work with Navajo Soldiers in the Army Air Corps during World War II. This includes a full run of the Indian Association of America's publication <i>Smoke Signals</i> , personal scrapbooks as well as a collection of phonographic records. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Thora Becker, 2013.

Processing Information

Processed by Rachel Menyuk, Archives Technician in 2015.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Frank and Dolores Becker papers, Box and Folder Number; National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

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Conditions Governing Use

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish or broadcast materials from the collection must be requested from National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center. Please submit a written request to nmaiarchives@si.edu.

Frank and Dolores Becker

Frank Becker was born in New York City on April 24, 1907 to Frank and Thora Bregartner Becker. A Graduate from Stuyvesant High School and the New York Training School for teachers, Becker received a B.S. from NYU in 1942 and was awarded his degree the same year he was inducted into the Army Air Corps. Becker taught at P.S. 17 before and after WWII and later received a Masters of Arts Degree.

Though he started as a mechanic in the Army Air Corps in 1942, Becker was soon transferred to the 704th training group in Atlantic City, New Jersey to help organize a school for illiterate soldiers. Becker was tasked to teach reading, writing and arithmetic to a mixed group of students that included Greeks, Chinese, Navajo, Pima and Papago soldiers. The largest group of Native American soldiers Becker taught were Navajo. Because many of the Navajo soldiers could not speak English, Roger Davis, an elected leader to the Navajo Tribal Council and Presbyterian missionary, was sent to Atlantic City to act as an interpreter. Together, Becker and Davis made phonographic recordings of the Army Handbook in both English and Navajo. Davis assisted Becker for five weeks staying as a guest of the Presbyterian Hospitality House. Becker later wrote a book on his experiences working with the group of Navajo soldiers titled *Navajo Way* (1956). The experience also sparked a lifelong interest in the Navajo culture as well as awareness of many of the problems facing the Navajo community in regards to education and health.

Following the war, Becker visited Arizona and New Mexico with his family in the fall on 1947. Frank had met Dolores in the early 1940's through mutual friends and the two were married December 27, 1944. Dolores, born August 6, 1913, had passed the New Jersey bar in 1936 and had been practicing law in the juvenile court system. After meeting Frank she also took an active interest in Native American culture. The family visited Gallup, Window Rock and Indian Wells, where they visited with Roger Davis, making particular note of the schools they visited. On the return from this trip, Becker wrote passionately on the failing of the U.S. government to fulfill its obligations to the Navajo people, particularly in the area of education. Frank and Dolores both joined several organizations, most notably the Indian Association of America, dedicated to helping Native Americans advocating especially for WWII Veterans returning home and education. Additionally, Frank wrote many columns, letters to the editor and speeches on both his experiences teaching Navajo soldiers during the war as well current issues facing Native American communities. Dolores appeared on several TV shows in the 1950's directed towards younger audiences explaining Native American cultures.

Frank Becker died November 11, 1979 in Shokan, NY and Dolores died on March 6, 2010 leaving behind a daughter and a son.

Additional Information on Frank and Dolores Becker provided by their daughter Thora Becker.

Indian Association of America

According to its constitution and by-laws, The Indian Association of America was originally founded in Denver, Colorado by Dr. Vincent "Red Fox" St. James and Dr. George C. Stagg in 1924. Red Fox, who claimed to be Blackfoot but whose origins are undetermined, had previously been a founder of the Tipi (Tepee) Order of America, an organization that blended ritual aspects closely related to Freemasonry

with the pan-Indian movement dedicated to advocacy work for the welfare of Native Americans. The Indian Association of America mimicked this model with some of its stated objectives being; to promote better understanding between the races, to study the Indian cultures of America, to foster education for American Indians, to provide direct help in emergencies faced by American Indian communities, to protest laws detrimental to American Indians and to promote the observance of American Indian Day.

Though previously active, the Indian Association of America was officially incorporated in the state of New York in 1950 as a non-profit organization. Frank Becker took over as "Great Sachem," or President, in October of 1950 and led the organization until its dissolution in 1968. Its magazine, *Smoke Signals*, began publishing bi-monthly in June of 1949 with Dolores Becker serving as editor for the entirety of its run between 1949 and 1961. Frank Becker acted as a contributing editor and later as an advisory editor. The Indian Association of America formally dissolved in March of 1968.

Scope and Contents

The bulk of the Frank and Dolores Becker papers come from their years working for the Indian Association of America between 1949 and 1968 as president (Frank) and secretary (Dolores). This includes administrative materials such as articles of incorporation and dissolution, the constitution and by-laws, member lists, as well as meeting reports and notes. There is also a full run of *Smoke Signals* (1949-1961), the association's bi-monthly magazine edited by Dolores Becker.

In addition to materials regarding the Indian Association of America there are two copies of Frank Becker's book, *Navajo Way* and background information on his work at the Presbyterian Hospitality house during WWII teaching English and reading to Navajo soldiers. There are several photos of Becker and the Navajo soldiers he taught as well as an audio cassette of the recording in the Navajo language used in the classroom. The recording features Frank Becker in English and Roger Davis in Navajo and includes several prayers as well as general army instructions and general orders for interior guard duty.

There are also two scrapbooks in the collection. One was created by Dolores which includes drawings, poems and research she conducted on Native American culture. The second is a scrapbook of newspaper articles and clippings, many of them written by Frank Becker, on the Becker's activities with the Indian Association of America and other related Native American issues. Many notices of Frank Becker's speaking engagements are included in this scrapbook. Also included is the Becker's collection of phonographic records. These nine records, 10 inch (78rpm) were produced by Tom Tom records, Canyon records and one by Victor and include a variety of Native American songs.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in one series alphabetically. The phonographic records are listed at the end of the collection, also in alphabetical order.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Diné (Navajo)

Indians of North America
Indians of North America -- Education
Indians of North America -- Periodicals
Navajo language

Cultures:

Diné (Navajo)
Indians of North America

Types of Materials:

Membership lists
Phonograph records

Names:

United States. Army. Air Corps

Container Listing

Series 1: Frank and Dolores Becker papers, 1943-1968

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| Box 1, Folder 1 | Indian Association of America: Certificate of Incorporation, Dec. 1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Indian Association of America: Constitution and By-laws, 1954 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Indian Association of America: Dissolution, 1968 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Indian Association of America: List of Active Members, 1958-1968 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1949 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1950-1953 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1954-1955 |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1956-1958 |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1960-1964 |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Indian Association of America: Meetings and Reports, 1967 |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Indian Association of America: Seals, 1949-1961 |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jun 1949-Dec 1949 |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1950-Jun 1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1950-Dec 1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1951-Jun 1951 |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1951-Dec 1951 |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1952-Jun 1952 |
| Box 1, Folder 18 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1952-Dec 1952 |
| Box 1, Folder 19 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1953-Jun 1953 |

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| Box 1, Folder 20 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1953-Dec 1953 |
| Box 1, Folder 21 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1954-Jun 1954 |
| Box 2, Folder 1 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1954-Dec 1954 |
| Box 2, Folder 2 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1955-Jun 1955 |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1955-Dec 1955 |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1956-Jun 1956 |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1956-Dec 1956 |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1957-Jun 1957 |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1957-Dec 1957 |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1958-Jun 1958 |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1958- Dec 1958 |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1959-Jun 1959 |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1959-Dec 1959 |
| Box 3, Folder 1 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1960-Jul 1960 |
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1960-Dec 1960 |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jan 1961-Jun 1961 |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Indian Association of America: Smoke Signals, Jul 1961-Dec 1961 |
| Drawer 13, Folder 3 | Map: Indian Tribes, Reservations and Settlements in the United States, 1943 |
| Drawer 13, Folder 3 | Map: Navajo Country, 1945 |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | Navajo Notes and Copies, 1943 |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | <i>Navajo Way</i> (2 copies), 1956 <i>1 electronic_discs_cd</i> |

- Box 3, Folder 7 Photographs: Navajo Soldiers at the Presbyterian Hospitality House, Atlantic City, New Jersey, c. 1943
9 Photographic prints
- Box 3, Folder 8 Sound Recording: Navajo Training in WWII, in Navajo and English, 1943
1 Sound cassette
Navajo; Navaho.
Featuring: Frank Becker and Roger Davis.

The original phonograph records (4 discs, 78 rpm) are located at the Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard St., Philadelphia, PA.
- Box 4, Item 1 Scrapbook: Articles and Newspaper Clippings, 1943-1957, 1933
- Box 4, Item 2 Scrapbook: Poetry, Drawings and Notes by Dolores Becker, 1952
- Box 5, Item 1 Phonographic Recordings: Navajo Squaw Dance/Song of the Sky City by Natay (Canyon Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 2 Phonographic Recordings: Navajo Squaw Dance Songs/Navajo Yei-Be-Chai by Jonah Yazza (Tom Tom Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 3 Phonographic Recordings: Peyote Ceremony Songs; Opening Prayer Song/Midnight Water Song by David Apekaun (Canyon Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 4 Phonographic Recordings: Peyote Ceremony Songs; Morning Water Song/Sunrise Song by David Apekaun (Canyon Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 5 Phonographic Recordings: Song of the Basket Dance/Butterfly Dance Song by White Leaf (Tom Tom Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 6 Phonographic Recordings: Sundown Round Dance Songs/Hoop Dance Songs by Taos Pueblo Indian Chorus (Tom Tom Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 7 Phonographic Recordings: Tewa Love Song/Taos Round Dance and Taos Clown Song by Pop Chalee (Canyon Records), undated
1 Sound disc
- Box 5, Item 8 Phonographic Recordings: War Dance (Cheyenne)/Shawnee Indian Hunting Dance by the Victor Concert Orchestra (Victor Records), undated
1 Sound disc

Box 5, Item 9

Phonographic Recordings: Yeibechai Chant by Fort Defiance Yeibechai Team
(Canyon Records), undated
1 Sound disc

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