



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Joanna Cohan Scherer Papers, 1960-2014

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Joanna Cohan Scherer Papers
Identifier:	Accession 19-190
Date:	1960-2014
Extent:	13.5 cu. ft. (13 record storage boxes) (1 document box)
Creator::	Scherer, Joanna Cohan
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 19-190, Joanna Cohan Scherer Papers

Descriptive Entry

Joanna Cohan Scherer was employed by the Smithsonian Institution from 1966-2006. She worked at the Smithsonian Office of Anthropology Archives (later known as the National Anthropological Archives) as a museum technician until 1970 when she was asked to become illustrations researcher of the *Handbook of North American Indians*, a 20-volume encyclopedia. She served as the *Handbook's* illustrations researcher for 36 years until May 2006 when she retired, becoming an emeritus anthropologist. During her tenure at the *Handbook* she was responsible for illustrations relating to people and activities (non-artifact illustrations) and did the original research and writing of captions for the pictures she selected. The *Handbook* was officially closed December 8, 2007, having published 15 of 20 volumes.

Scherer initiated three legal actions during her employment. The first, February 6, 1974, was a class action and employment discrimination suit on the basis of gender against the Department of Anthropology. After a U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission hearing, the discrimination complaint was found in her favor on March 12, 1975; it was shown that there had been a climate of discrimination against women in the Department of Anthropology in both hiring and promotion. No woman had ever been hired as a Curator in the Department of Anthropology despite the large number of professional women in anthropology. As a result of her settlement her employment title was changed from Museum Specialist to Anthropologist. Also, as a result of her case the first woman curator in anthropology was hired within the year (Adrienne Kaeppler).

In 1976, she filed a reprisal complaint that was heard in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (Scherer vs. Ripley, CA 77-1856). The U.S. District Court determined that *Handbook* management had engaged in numerous incidents of reprisal against her and found in her favor on February 11, 1982.

Scherer sued the Smithsonian for reprisal for the third and final time in 2000. This suit was dropped by Scherer as a result of the serious illness and death (in 2002) of Carolyn Rose who in 2000 had been the supervisor who initiated reprisals against her.

Scherer's papers show that various supervisors harassed her, unfairly critiqued her work, and passed her up for deserved promotions. The contents of her files consist of performance evaluations, depositions, correspondence with the *Handbook* staff, witness statements, Scherer's diary notes and daily calendars, general information on the federal employment of women, and supporting documents such as brochures, booklets, newspapers, clippings, newsletters, and serial publications. These papers also create a detailed production history of the *Handbook of North American Indians*. An abbreviated production history written by Scherer is due to be published in *Handbook* volume 1, Introduction (edited by Igor Krupnik) scheduled for publication in 2020. The two chapters written or co-authored by Scherer are titled "The Production:1970-2008" and "The Handbook: A Retrospective."

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Anthropologists
- Anthropology
- Indians of North America
- Labor disputes
- Law
- Litigation
- Museums -- Employees
- Natural history museums
- Personnel management
- Sexism in science
- Supervision of employees

Types of Materials:

- Brochures
- Clippings
- Manuscripts
- Newsletters
- Newspapers
- Serials (publications)

Names:

- Kaeppler, Adrienne Lois
- Krupnik, Igor
- National Anthropological Archives
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Anthropology
- Rose, Carolyn L.
- Scherer, Joanna Cohan

Preferred Titles:

- Handbook of North American Indians (Monograph)*
- Joanna Cohan Scherer v. S. Dillon Ripley*

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