

Martin J. Sherwin Collection Relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer

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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

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Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011

Revised 2023 May

Collection Summary

Title: Martin J. Sherwin Collection Relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer

Inclusive Dates: 1910-2006

Bulk Dates: 1931-2006

ID No.: MSS85395

Creator: Sherwin, Martin J.

Extent: 26,000 items and 19 microfiche

Extent: 69 containers plus 1 classified and 2 microfiche containers

Extent: 27.6 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2008085395>

Summary: Author, biographer, and educator. Research material gathered for the writing of *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, including interviews and oral histories, government records, topical files, correspondence, photographs, printed matter, and miscellaneous material.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Bethe, Hans A. (Hans Albrecht), 1906-2005.

Bird, Kai.

Chevalier, Haakon, 1902-1985.

DuBridges, Lee A. (Lee Alvin), 1901-1994.

Fergusson, Francis.

Groves, Leslie R., 1896-1970.

Horgan, Paul, 1903-1995.

Kennan, George F. (George Frost), 1904-2005.

Lilienthal, David Eli, 1899-1981.

Oppenheimer, Frank, 1912-1985.

Oppenheimer, J. Robert, 1904-1967.

Oppenheimer, Katherine P. (Katherine Puening), 1910?-1972.

Sherwin, Martin J.

Smith, Alice Kimball.

Strauss, Lewis L.

Tatlock, Jean.

Teller, Edward, 1908-2003.

Organizations

Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory.

U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.

Subjects

Atomic bomb--Moral and ethical aspects.

Atomic bomb.

Communism--United States.

Hydrogen bomb--Moral and ethical aspects.

Hydrogen bomb.

Internal security--United States.

National security--United States

Nuclear arms control--International cooperation.

Nuclear energy--International cooperation.

Nuclear physics--United States.
Nuclear weapons.
Science--Moral and ethical aspects--United States.
Science--Political aspects--United States.

Places

United States--Politics and government--20th century.

Occupations

Authors.
Biographers.
Educators.

Acquisition Information

The collection of Martin J. Sherwin, author, biographer, and educator, relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer was given to the Library of Congress by Sherwin in 2007.

Processing History

The collection was processed by Joseph K. Brooks with the assistance of Kimberly L. Owens and Pamela K. Watkins in 2009.

Transfers

Audiocassettes and a reel-to-reel tape have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as part of the collection.

Related Material

Related material in the Manuscript Division includes the papers of [J. Robert Oppenheimer](#).

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Martin J. Sherwin in these papers and other collections in the custody of the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division for further information.

Access and Restrictions

The Martin J. Sherwin collection of material relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer is open to the public. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Division Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfiche

Nineteen microfiche were received as part of the Martin J. Sherwin collection relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer and are listed and described in the finding aid. These microfiche are not available for interlibrary loan.

Security Classified Documents

Government regulations control the use of security classified items in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to the use of classified material.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Martin J. Sherwin Collection Relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Biographical Note

Martin J. Sherwin

Date	Event
1937, July 2	Born, New York, N.Y.
1959	B. A., Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.
1971	Ph. D., University of California, Los Angeles, Calif.
1973-1980	Lecturer and research associate, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.
1975	Published <i>A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance</i> . New York: Vantage Press. Reissued in 1987 as <i>A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race</i> . New York: Vantage Press; and in 2003 as <i>A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and its Legacies</i> . Stanford: Stanford University Press
1980-1993	Adjunct professor, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Medford, Mass. Founding director, Nuclear Age History and Humanities Center, Tufts University, Medford, Mass.
1995-2007	Walter S. Dickson professor of English and American history, Tufts University, Medford, Mass.
2005-2006	Published with Kai Bird <i>American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer</i> . New York: Vantage Press
2007-2021	Awarded National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for <i>American Prometheus</i> Professor emeritus, Tufts University, Medford, Mass., and professor, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va.
2020	Published <i>Gambling with Armageddon: Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis</i> New York: Knopf
2021, October 6	Died, Washington, D.C.

J. Robert Oppenheimer

Date	Event
1904, Apr.22	Born, New York, N.Y.
1925	A.B., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
1925-1926	Attended University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England
1927	Ph.D., University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany
1928-1947	Assistant professor, associate professor, and professor of physics, University of California, Berkeley, Calif., and the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, Calif.
1940	Married Katherine Puening Harrison
1943-1945	Director, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, N.Mex.
1946-1952	Chairman, General Advisory Committee to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission
1946-1954	Member, Committee on Atomic Energy, Research and Development Board, U. S. Atomic Energy Commission
1947-1966	Director and professor of physics, Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton, N.J.
1954	Security clearance revoked by the Personnel Security Board of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission

1963
1967, Feb. 18

Received the Enrico Fermi Award
Died, Princeton, N.J.

Scope and Content Note

The collection of Martin Jay Sherwin (1937-) relating to theoretical physicist and “father of the atomic bomb” J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967) spans 1910-2006, with the bulk of the collection concentrated from 1931 to 2006. The collection consists entirely of Sherwin's files relating to the writing and publishing, with Kai Bird, of their Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Oppenheimer, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*. The papers include interviews and oral histories, government records, articles and newspaper clippings, topical files, correspondence, photographs, and printed matter. The collection is organized in four series: [Interviews and Oral Histories](#), [Government File](#), [Subject File](#), and [Classified](#).

The interviews with Oppenheimer and his colleagues, family members, childhood and university friends, associates, students, and antagonists were compiled by Sherwin, Bird, Alice Kimball Smith, and others. Smith edited *Robert Oppenheimer, Letters and Recollections*, published in 1980, and Sherwin and Bird relied heavily on the interviews and correspondence she collected for their book. Interviewees include Hans A. Bethe, Haakon Chevalier, Lee A. DuBridge, Francis Fergusson, Leslie R. Groves, Paul Horgan, George F. Kennan, David Eli Lilienthal, Frank Oppenheimer, Lewis L. Strauss, and Edward Teller.

The accomplishments and controversies of Oppenheimer's government service are documented in the [Government File](#) series. The Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory files relate to Oppenheimer's stint as director of the laboratory during World War II and the development there of the first atomic bombs. Also included are copies of Oppenheimer's Federal Bureau of Investigation file, spanning 1941-1975, that was released to Sherwin under the Freedom of Information Act and contains wiretap transcripts, agent reports, and statements of confidential informants. Oppenheimer's prewar political views and Communist associations during that period and controversial positions he took as an advisor on nuclear policy after the war, such as his opposition to the development of the hydrogen bomb and his push for the international control of atomic energy and weaponry, raised national security concerns at the FBI, the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission, and congressional committees. Other FBI files pertain to Oppenheimer's brother, experimental physicist Frank Oppenheimer, and his friend, fellow professor, and alleged communist, Haakon Chevalier. FBI files also comprise part of topical files in the [Subject File](#) series on Oppenheimer's wife, Katherine P. Oppenheimer, and on an earlier fiancée, Jean Tatlock.

Concerns relating to J. Robert Oppenheimer's alleged risk to national security came to a head in 1954, when the Personnel Security Board of the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission revoked his security clearance after a hearing, thus eliminating his direct influence on atomic energy and weapons policy. The security clearance hearing, Oppenheimer's service on the General Advisory Committee, and the controversy about building the hydrogen bomb are among the topics documented by the commission's material in the [Government File](#).

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in four series:

- [Interviews and Oral Histories, 1923-2004](#)
- [Government File, 1919-2003](#)
- [Subject File, 1910-2006](#)
- [Classified, 1943-1944](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-8	<p><u>Interviews and Oral Histories, 1923-2004</u></p> <p>Interview transcripts, oral histories, and background material. Arranged alphabetically by name of interviewee.</p>
BOX 9-41	<p><u>Government File, 1919-2003</u></p> <p>Copies of Federal Bureau of Investigation case files and other files relating to the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, U. S. Atomic Energy Commission, and congressional committees. Arranged alphabetically by agency or branch of government and thereunder by type of material, topic or control number. Includes two containers of microfiche. <i>Microfiche shelf no. 23,374</i></p>
BOX 41-69	<p><u>Subject File, 1910-2006</u></p> <p>Articles, newspaper clippings, theses and other academic papers, notes, photographs, topical files, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material</p>
BOX CL 1	<p><u>Classified, 1943-1944</u></p> <p>Documents containing national security information removed from the collection. Arranged and described according to the series and folders from which they were removed.</p>

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BOX 9-41

Government File, 1919-2003

Copies of Federal Bureau of Investigation case files and other files relating to the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, U. S. Atomic Energy Commission, and congressional committees.

Arranged alphabetically by agency or branch of government and thereunder by type of material, topic or control number.

Includes two containers of microfiche. *Microfiche shelf no. 23,374*

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BOX 66	Universities and institutes American Institute of Physics, Niels Bohr Library, College Park, Md., undated California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, Calif., 1938-1955, 1961, 1981-1983 Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Miscellany, 1919, 1925, 1945, 1956 Printed matter <i>Harvard Crimson</i> , 1922-1923 (2 folders) Miscellaneous, 1922-1928, 1975 Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton, N.J. Miscellany, 1946-1956, 2004, undated (2 folders) <i>Report of the Director</i> , 1953 (1 folder)
BOX 67	<i>Report of the Director</i> , 1953 (1 folder) Stern, Beatrice M., "A History of the Institute for Advanced Studies, 1930-1950" undated University of California, Berkeley, Calif. Birge, Raymond T., "History of the Physics Department," undated (4 folders)
BOX 68	Miscellany, 1935-1953, 1989 Physics students Peters, Bernard, class notes, 1939 (2 folders) Voge, Hervey Miscellany, 1939, 1982-1983 Physical chemistry class, lab notebook, 1930 Physics 221, "Notes on Quantum Mechanics," Bernard Peters, 1939 Physics 222, notes, 1939 (3 folders)
BOX 69	Radiation Laboratory, 1942-1943 University of Michigan, Physics Department, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1974-1989 University of Washington, Seattle, Wash., 1955-1979
BOX CL 1	Classified, 1943-1944 Documents containing national security information removed from the collection. Arranged and described according to the series and folders from which they were removed.
BOX CL 1	Subject File Documents containing national security information removed from the collection. Arranged and described according to the series and folders from which they were removed. Great Britain, Tube Alloys program, 1943-1944 (Container 52)