

**The New York Public Library
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Guide to the

New York Times Company records. John B. Oakes papers

1952-1995 (bulk 1970-1990)

MssCol 17797

Forms part of the New York Times Company records

Compiled by Philip Heslip, June 2013

Summary

Creator: New York Times Company

Title: New York Times Company records. John B. Oakes papers, 1952-1995 (bulk 1970-1990)

Size: 2.1 linear feet (5 boxes)

Source: ☐ New York Times Company, donated 2007.

Abstract: Journalist John B. Oakes (1913-2001) was an editorial writer and editor who worked for *The New York Times* from 1946 to 1993, and who is credited with developing the modern op-ed page. This collection contains some of Oakes's *Times* office files primarily from the 1970s and 1980s, and consists of internal correspondence and memoranda concerning the Editorial Department, as well as copies of speeches and a file of op-ed page articles and notes by Oakes.

Access: ☐ Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>.

Copyright information: Copyright for documents created by New York Times Company principals and staff has been transferred to The New York Public Library.

Preferred citation: New York Times Company records. John B. Oakes papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Custodial history: This collection is comprised of office files from The New York Times Editorial Editor John B. Oakes. In ☐ preparation for his retirement from The Times, Oakes moved his office files to his home in 1989. Between 1990 and 1999, Oakes sent multiple samples of his papers to The Times' archives with the expectation that he would transfer the remainder there in the future. Instead he donated the collection to Columbia University. These sample files, however, were retained by The Times and assembled into the present John B. Oakes papers. They were never processed by The Times.

Processing note: The original order of the Alphabetical Correspondence Files, Op-Ed Page Notes, and Speeches has been maintained. The Chronological Correspondence Files contain various files of letters, labeled by year, and arranged by date. This collection was partially refoldered.

Related collections

John B. Oakes papers, 1912-2005. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

John B. Oakes papers, 1932-1969. Wisconsin Historical Society, Library-Archives Division.

Creator history

Journalist John Bertram Oakes (1913-2001) was an editorial writer and editor who worked for *The New York Times* from 1946 to 1993, and who is credited with creating the modern op-ed page.

Oakes was born in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, to George Washington Ochs-Oakes (brother of *New York Times* publisher Adolph S. Ochs) and Bertie Gans Ochs. He graduated from Princeton University in 1934 and, before being drafted into the United States Army in 1941, worked at several newspapers including *The Trenton Times* and *The Washington Post*. After the war, Oakes joined *The New York Times* as the editor for the Review of the Week section. He became a member of the editorial board as a contributor in 1949, and from 1961 to 1976 served as the editor of the editorial page. In this position, Oakes managed the editorial staff and edited and helped develop their contributions. He also continued to write columns, notably on environmentalism, civil rights, and opposition to the Vietnam War. He established *The Times'* Op-Ed Page in 1970, which featured opinion pieces from a range of voices from outside of *The Times* and presented opposite the paper's editorials. This format became a model for other newspaper op-ed pages. Oakes was forced out of his editorship by Arthur Ochs Sulzberger in 1976 after years of disagreement over the liberal tone of the editorial page. Oakes continued to contribute to the editorial page until his retirement in 1993.

Oakes married Margery Hartman in 1945 and together they had four children. Oakes died in Manhattan in 2001.

Sources:

McFadden, Robert D. "John B. Oakes, Impassioned Editorial Page Voice of The Times, Dies at 87," *The New York Times*. April 6, 2001

Talese, Gay. *The Kingdom and the Power*. New York: Ivy Books, 1966.

Scope and content note

This collection contains some of John B. Oakes's *New York Times* office files, primarily from the 1970s and 1980s. These files consist of internal correspondence and memoranda concerning the Editorial Department and the Op-Ed Page, as well as copies of Oakes's speeches and a file of op-ed page notes and writings by Oakes. Between 1990 and 1999, Oakes sent these files to *The Times'* archivists for review with the expectation that he would send them selections of the remainder of his collection based on their recommendations. However, Oakes instead donated his papers to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University.

The collection is organized into four sections: Alphabetical Correspondence Files, Chronological Correspondence Files, Op-Ed Page Notes, and Speeches.

The Correspondence files feature internal memoranda between Oakes and other *Times* editors, mostly regarding letters to the editor and the management of the editorial department. Also present are many letters to the editor from the general public addressed to Oakes, typically responding to columns that he wrote. Other items include communications with colleagues outside of *The Times* making requests for book reviews or editorials on specific topics and causes, and letters with various outside institutions with which Oakes was affiliated. The most substantial correspondence files are those with Managing Editor A. M. Rosenthal and Associate Editor Charlotte Curtis, both of which contain opinions on specific op-ed letters.

The Op-Ed Page Notes files contain drafts of many of Oakes's editorials submitted to *The New York Times* between 1985 and 1990. Many drafts have heavy annotations and corrections. The Speeches file consists of copies of Oakes's speeches given throughout his career at higher education institutions around the country. Included are Oakes's speeches on international peace, foreign affairs, journalism, civil liberties, and environmental conservation. Some speeches are heavily annotated.

Arrangement

The collection is organized into four sections: Alphabetical Correspondence Files, Chronological Correspondence Files, Op-Ed Page Notes, and Speeches.

Key terms

Subjects

Op-ed pages -- United States

Occupations

Newspaper editors

Names

Curtis, Charlotte, 1928-1987

New York Times Company

Oakes, John B. (John Bertram), 1913-2001

Rosenthal, A. M. (Abraham Michael), 1922-2006

Special formats

Photographs

Speeches

Container list

Alphabetical Correspondence Files

- b.1 f.1 American Friends Service Committee, 1980
- b.1 f.2 Coast Alliance, 1980
- b.1 f.3 Committee for the Single Six-Year Presidential Term, 1984
- b.1 f.4 Committee to Protect Journalists, 1986
- b.1 f.5 Consumer Action Now, 1982
- b.1 f.6 Curtis, Charlotte, 1975-1977
- b.1 f.7 Dacey, Norman, 1971-1975
- b.1 f.8 Helsinki Watch, 1982
- b.1 f.9 Hovey, Graham, 1981-1986
- b.1 f.10 International Center for Development Policy, 1987
- b.1 f.11 Managed By Objectives (M.B.O.), 1975-1976
- b.1 f.12 *New York Times* Foundation, 1987-1988
- b.1 f.13 Princeton University, 1973-1982
- b.1 f.14 Rockefeller University, 1980
- b.1 f.15 Rosenthal, A. M., 1971-1976
- b.1 f.16 Scripps-Howard Foundation, 1978-1980
- b.1 f.17 Syracuse University, 1977-1980
- b.1 f.18 United Nations Association, 1980-1982
- b.1 f.19 United Nations Environment Programme, 1982
- b.1 f.20 Washington Journalism Center, 1976-1984
- b.1 f.21 The Wilderness Society, 1980-1988
- b.2 f.1 White House Fellows, 1974-1976
- b.2 f.2 Worldwatch, 1984-1986

Chronological Correspondence Files

- b.2 f.3-8 1961-1972
- b.3 f.1-10 1970-1983
- b.4 f.1-5 1985-1994
- b.5 f.1-2 Op-Ed Page Notes, 1985-1990
- b.5 f.3 Speeches, 1952-1986