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Robert E. Sherman Papers MS-953

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical
Collections

1400 Townsend Drive

Houghton 49931

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URL: <http://www.lib.mtu.edu/mtuarchives/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections
Title:	Robert E. Sherman Papers
ID:	MS-953
Date [inclusive]:	1942-circa 2010
Date [bulk]:	1942-1946
Physical Description:	0.01 Cubic Feet 1 folder
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	English
Mixed Materials [sc_box]:	6
[folder]:	3
Abstract:	Papers, 1942-circa 2010, documenting the early life and military career of Robert E. Sherman, including personal recollections of his time on the Manhattan Project, local newspaper coverage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, enlistment and discharge papers, and letters from superior officers and J. Robert Oppenheimer, among other materials.

Preferred Citation

MS-953, Robert E. Sherman Papers, Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

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Biography

Robert Elton Sherman was born March 13, 1922 in Menominee, Michigan to Samuel Merritt Sherman and Inez (Mortensen) Sherman; he was the oldest of four children. Sherman attended school in Menominee and graduated at the top of his class in 1940. In recognition of Sherman's academic success, Michigan College of Mining and Technology awarded him a scholarship, and he enrolled as an electrical engineering student

later that year. In his collegiate years, Sherman's remarkable record of achievement continued: he was the highest-ranked scholar for the 1940-1941 academic year and took up work in the engineering laboratory as a part-time employee. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Sherman chose to enlist in the United States Army Signal Corps Reserves rather than be drafted to a service role in which completing his baccalaureate studies would be impossible. The Signal Corps--which Sherman joined in July 1942--allowed Sherman to attend an accelerated program and graduate with his bachelor's degree in December 1943. Within weeks of Sherman's graduation, the United States Army ordered him to report for active duty. He spent the winter receiving basic training in Missouri before participating in Officer Candidate School in New Jersey. Sherman was not promoted to officer and remained in New Jersey through the summer, repairing Army radios. When a notice posted at a military film in 1944 ordered him to report to his commanding officer, he did, seeking a respite from his tedious assignment. His new work posting was a stark contrast: Sherman was ordered, with no further explanation, to report to the Manhattan Project. The project took him not to New York City, as he anticipated, but to Oak Ridge, Tennessee and then to Los Alamos, New Mexico, where he was detailed to the 9812th Technical Services Unit of the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Under strictest secrecy, Sherman spent the next year working in the company of other scientists and researchers to design, evaluate, test, and report on prototypes of the atomic bomb. In the summer of 1945, Sherman was tasked with developing equipment for testing a bomb design in the New Mexico desert, which his superior officers subsequently invited him to attend. Sherman thus witnessed the famous Trinity test, the first detonation of a nuclear weapon. Weeks later, the news of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reached Los Alamos, to Sherman's joy. After Japan announced its surrender on August 15, 1945, corporate recruiters descended on Los Alamos to entice the Manhattan Project workers to join their companies in research positions. Sherman accepted an offer from AT&T Bell Laboratories and moved to New York City following his discharge in 1946. He remained at Bell Laboratories for the entirety of his career, working at its New York, New Jersey, and North Andover, MA branches. Robert E. Sherman passed away on February 26, 2012, at the age of 89. He was preceded in death by his wife Ethel and survived by their three children.

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Collection Scope and Content Summary

Papers, 1942-circa 2010, documenting the early life and military career of Robert E. Sherman. MS-953 incorporates a variety of materials to tell the story of Robert Sherman's youth and military experiences. At the heart of the collection are a biographical sketch and memoir in Sherman's own words, as well as a draft of the story intended for publication in a magazine or newspaper. A host of military papers includes documents pertaining to Sherman's enlistment and honorable discharge, orders for active duty, and certificates from the Army Corps of Engineers and President Truman honoring Sherman's service, among others. Newspapers and clippings from Menominee and New Mexico comprise a significant portion of the collection; most date to August and September of 1945, documenting the use of the atomic bomb in Japan and the subsequent Japanese surrender. A photograph of Sherman and a letter of reference from J. Robert Oppenheimer round out the materials.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access

Available for use in the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections.

Processing History

Emily Riippa, 12/12/2016

Conditions Governing Use

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Controlled Access Headings

- Military records
- Electrical engineers
- Memoirs
- Michigan Technological University
- Newspapers
- Photographs
- Atomic bomb
- Letters (Correspondence)

- Manhattan Project (U.S.)
- Military history -- 20th century -- Michigan
- World War, 1939-1945
- Mann, Lois R.

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
Photograph of Robert E. Sherman, circa 1945	
Personal recollections of early years and military service, undated	
Draft of article on Sherman, undated	
Certificate of honorable discharge, 1946	
Army Corps of Engineers atomic bomb service certificate, 1945	
Army separation qualification record, 1946 (2 pages)	
Letter of recommendation from J. Robert Oppenheimer, 1945	
Request for discharge, 1946	
Army enlistment form, 1942	
Active duty orders, 1943	
Newspaper clipping on Los Alamos, 2005	
White House certificate of appreciation, circa 1945	
Letter from Army general urging reenlistment, 1946	
Approval of honorable discharge, 1946	
"Menominee Herald-Leader" front page, September 1, 1945	
"Menominee Herald-Leader" front page, August 6, 1945	
"Albuquerque News," August 8, 1945	
"Menominee Herald-Leader" section, June 12, 1940	
"Santa Fe New Mexican" section, August 9, 1945	
"Santa Fe New Mexican" clipping, undated	