CASE, RALPH H.
PAPERS, 1921-1957
(bulk dates, 1930-1956)
Quantity 10 linear ft.

ACQUISITION: Richard W. Case donated his father’s papers to the University of South Dakota in 1974. Dr. Herbert T. Hoover, Professor of history at USD, assisted in acquiring the donation

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Box 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 16 updated by Doris Peterson, February 2007

Accession Number: RC79-0001
Ralph H. Case, Esq., was born at Fort Bennet on the Cheyenne River Reservation on November 27, 1879. After graduating from Yankton College in Yankton, South Dakota, he joined the army and gained the rank of major. After serving several years in public office, Case studied law in Washington, D.C. In 1922, he was admitted to both Maryland and South Dakota Bar Associations.

In 1911, Case returned to South Dakota and met with the Black Hills Council. The tribal elders asked him to assist in prosecuting for reimbursement for the illegal taking of the Black Hills, which are sacred to the tribes of the Sioux Nation. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation that encompassed the Black Hills. In 1874, General George Armstrong Custer led an expedition that discovered gold in the Black Hills. The public encouraged opening the area for settlement in violation of the 1868 treaty. Congress expropriated the Black Hills and surrounding plains by an agreement approved on February 18, 1877. This provides the basis for the Black Hills Claim.

Case eagerly accepted the assignment. However, Congress assigned attorneys to represent Indian tribes and named Charles Evans Hughes as Sioux tribal attorney. Hughes resigned after President Harding named him Secretary of State. Case remained in contact with the Sioux tribes and traveled to the Rosebud Reservation in September 1921. After the Commissioner of Indian Affairs allowed Indian tribes to elect attorneys, all eight Sioux reservations elected Case, along with attorney C.C. Calhoun. These two attorneys signed a contract with the Sioux Nation on December 22, 1922.

In 1923, Case began litigation by filing the first Sioux petition under the U.S. Court of Claims, which had been established in 1855. In 1943, the Supreme Court denied certiorari in the Black Hills Claim thus upholding the decision of the Court of Claims that it did not have jurisdiction. The claim was at a standstill. In 1946, Congress established the Indian Claims Commission under which the Black Hills Claim could be re-filed. Case remained under the employment of the eight Sioux tribes and he re-filed the claim in August 1950.

Case expressed an intense personal interest in his work with the Sioux and garnered sharp criticism for allowing personal correspondence to monopolize his time. The Black Hills Claim, a lifelong obsession, drained the family finances. Because of this Case attempted to ensure that his son succeed him in his work. Despite his efforts, Case's work for the Sioux seemed to be a series of failures. Tribal members on the Standing Rock reservation voted to remove him as attorney in 1955. Despite the decision, Case continued to litigate the Black Hills Claim for the other tribes involved.

Throughout his 35 years of work on the Black Hills Claim, Case did not secure a victory. During this time, he dealt with the prosecution of numerous other claims including the Sioux pony claims, Wounded Knee claims, Cheyenne River coal claim, Lower Brule land claim, and the Fort Randall Dam claim. Case succeeded in securing victories for Sioux tribes on other, smaller claims such as the Oahe Dam Claim. His efforts to assist the tribes continued until his death in 1957. Following Case's death, attorneys Marvin Sonosky and Edward Lazarus succeeded in winning the Black Hills Claim for a total of $108,000,000, an amount which the tribes chose not to accept.
Scope and Content Note

The papers of Ralph Hoyt Case span the years 1922-1957, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period of 1944-1956. The materials relate to the prosecution of the Black Hills Claim, involving the Rosebud, Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Fort Peck and Santee Reservations. Additional items relate to smaller claims, including the Lower Brule land claim, Sioux pony claims and the Oahe Dam claim. The collection consists of correspondence, legal papers, legislative bills, newspaper clippings and other printed material.

The Case Papers have been arranged into series based on a specific claim, which adheres to the original order of the material. Correspondence, court documents and items relating to a specific claim or tribe remain together. The correspondence is filed chronologically and includes letters written to Case from various tribal members as well as federal and state officials. Much of the correspondence dealing with specific claims comes from individual tribal members interested in the progress of a specific case. Court documents are filed by number and include briefings, defendant briefs, plaintiff finding of fact, both in manuscript and print versions. The subject files contain additional print material relating to tribes or reservations.

This Sioux Claims series contains materials relating to claims specifically made by Sioux Tribes, including the Black Hills Claim; Sioux Personal Claims; Wounded Knee Claims; Pony Claims; Oahe Claim; Lower Brule Land Claim; Cheyenne River Coal Claim; Fort Randall Claim.

General Tribal Claims series includes claims associated with other American Indian tribes, not specifically the Sioux.

General correspondence series is arranged chronologically.

Subject Files contains articles, newsletters, minutes and additional material relating to tribes or reservations.

Newspaper Clippings are newspaper articles from national and regional newspapers pertaining to the Sioux tribe, the National Indian Defense Association and various claims.

Card Files contain an index of tribe members.

Additional Resources

Ralph H. Case Database, Richardson Collection, Special Collections, University of South Dakota  http://192.236.50.85/casesearch.htm

Subjects

Assiniboin Indians
Blackfeet Indians
Caddo Indians
Cherokee Indians
Cheyenne River Indian Reservation (S.D.)
Chickasaw Indians
Chippewa Indians
Choctaw Indians
Comanche Indians
Crow Creek Sioux Indians
Crow Creek Sioux Indian Reservation (S.D.)
Crow Indians
Dakota Indians--Claims
Dakota Indians--Government relations Dakota Indians--Land tenure
Dakota Indians --Land transfer Delaware Indians
Fort Randall Dam (S.D.)
Fort Peck Indian Reservation (Mont.)
Gros Ventre Indians
Indians of North America
Indians of North America--Claims
Kiowa Indians
Land tenure--Black Hills (S.D. and Wyo.)
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
Lower Brule Sioux Indian Reservation (S.D.)
Lummi Indians
Miami Indians
Mohegan Indians
Nez Perce Indians
Oahe Dam (S.D.)
Omaha Indians
Ottawa Indians
Pawnee Indians
Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (S.D.)
Ponca Indians
Potawatomi Indians
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Rosebud Indian Reservation (S.D.)
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Winnebago Indians
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Wounded Knee Massacre, S.D., 1890 Winnebago Indians
Yakima Indians
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Case, Ralph H. Papers

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