Guide to the Papers of Robert P. Sharp, 1933-1996

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Guide to the Papers of Robert P. Sharp, 1933-1996

Collection number: Consult repository

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California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California

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Date Completed:
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Robert P. Sharp papers,
Date (inclusive): 1933-1996
Collection number: Consult repository
Creator: Sharp, Robert P. (Robert Phillip), 1911-
Extent: 19 linear ft
Repository: California Institute of Technology. Archives.
Pasadena, California 91125

Abstract: The working papers, correspondence, publications and biographical material of Robert Phillip Sharp form the collection known as the Papers of Robert P. Sharp in the Archives of the California Institute of Technology. Sharp was a long-time member, and for some years chairman, of the geology division at Caltech.

Language: English.

Access
Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item, box and file number], Papers of Robert P. Sharp. Archives, California Institute of Technology.

Acquisition Information
Sharp's papers came to the Archives in two donations. The materials contained in the first of these originated during his term as chair of the Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences (1952-1968) and were embedded in Division files transferred to the Archives in 1990. The second donation was made by Dr. Sharp himself in 1998 and consisted of papers and documents from his Caltech office. Subsequently it was decided to remove all of Dr. Sharp's scientific papers from the Division files and to combine them with the 1998 donation to form the Papers of Robert P. Sharp. Papers connected solely with Sharp's administrative duties remain in the Division files.

**Biography**

Robert Phillip Sharp was born in 1911 in Oxnard, California. He attended the California Institute of Technology, where he earned his BS degree in 1934 and his MS degree a year later. In 1938 he received his PhD in geology from Harvard University, with a study of the structure and geomorphology of the Ruby-East Humboldt Range in Nevada.

Subsequent to his graduation from Harvard, Sharp began teaching at the University of Illinois, but World War II interrupted his academic career. He served from 1943 to 1945 in the US Air Force at the Arctic, Desert, and Tropic Information Center, where he was assigned to research and write manuals for arctic survival.

After the war, Sharp joined the University of Minnesota faculty, and in 1947 he began teaching at his alma mater, the California Institute of Technology, where he spent the rest of his academic career. From 1952 through 1968, he served as chair of the Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences. During his tenure he initiated the programs in geochemistry and planetary geology at Caltech.

The primary focus of Sharp's work has been on forms and processes on planetary surfaces, particularly those of Earth and Mars. His research topics cover a wide range of subjects, from glaciers to sand dunes and from landslides and mud flow processes to landforms of Mars.

During his PhD studies, field research in northeastern Nevada established his interest in landform development, mainly erosion surfaces and glaciations. Sharp's participation in the Caltech Grand Canyon boat expedition of 1937, sponsored by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, provided him with an opportunity for extended study of the Precambrian erosion surfaces of that region. An expedition to the Ice Field Range of the St. Elias Range initiated a thorough research on glaciers in Alaska and Canada. When he moved back to Southern California in 1947, Sharp started to investigate landforms in desert areas, such as sand dunes and their mechanics, desert domes, desert varnish and ventifacts.

Sharp served as a team investigator on the Mariner 4 (1965), 6, 7 (1969), and 9 (1971) flights to Mars, applying his knowledge of terrestrial landforms and processes to the study of the surface of Mars.


An endowed professorship in geology at the California Institute of Technology was created in 1978 in his name, honoring him and his academic achievements. Sharp became emeritus professor at Caltech in 1979. He continued to teach until 1998.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The present collection is composed of eight series, organized in forty-four archival boxes. The correspondence, Series I, makes up about a third of the collection, and it contains both incoming and outgoing correspondence organized in alphabetically ordered folders. However, researchers should be aware that Sharp's correspondence from the 1970s and 1980s has not yet been deposited in the Archives. Series II contains Sharp's geology field notebooks covering the years between 1936 to 1996, as well as his research notes and his annotated maps. Series III contains teaching material such as course and lecture notes, class assignments, and exams. Teaching aids, such as reference lists, can also be found in this section. Series IV deals with both academic and non-academic field trips conducted by Sharp. Photos related to field trips are found under Series VIII. Sharp's manuscripts, preprints and talks can be found in Series V. They are arranged in chronological order and contain a wide variety of related documents, from outlines and notes to related correspondence. Sharp's reprints have been grouped in Series VI. Series VII contains a small amount of biographical material. Researchers should refer to Sharp's oral histories, conducted in 1979-1980 by Graham Berry and in 1999 by Shelley Erwin, which are deposited in the Caltech Archives. Series VIII contains research related photos, field trip photos, and some personal photos.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection.

Sharp, Robert P. (Robert Phillip)
California Institute of Technology
# Guide to the Papers of Robert P. Sharp, 1933-1996

**Glaciology**

**Volcanism**

**Records of the Division of Geological and Planetary Sciences**

Robert P. Sharp Oral History with Graham Berry (1979)


## Series I: Correspondence

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Box 44, Folder 32  Banquet and reception party photos Oct. 1986
Box 44, Folder 33  Geological Society of America meeting 1996
Box 44, Folder 34  Group photo [n.d.]
Box 44, Folder 35  Group photo, New Orleans [n.d.]
Box 44, Folder 36  Group meeting [n.d.]
Box 44, Folder 37  Miscellaneous [n.d.]