

Guide to the Betty Rocker papers

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Title: Betty Rocker papers

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Date (inclusive): 1940-1988

Abstract: Betty Rocker served as an attorney for the Sacramento County public defender's office from 1974 to 1988. Her influential life and career is expressed through this collection of images, ephemera, awards, scrapbooks and newspaper clippings.

Biographical Note

Betty Potok was born on August 13, 1931, in Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, to Mac Potok, a clothing salesman and native of Germany, and Alice Potok (nee Kraisler), a native New Yorker. She went on to attend James Madison High School, learned French, became an amateur roller-skater, and took advantage of New York's world famous opera and theater offerings. In 1950, she married Herbert Dankman who soon took a job as a civilian engineer at Sacramento's McClellan Air Force Base. The couple had three children - Linda, Carolyn and Alan - but divorced in 1962. Settled in Sacramento, Betty married Edwin Rocker in August 1963. For much of the 1960s, she both worked in real estate and owned and operated an employment agency called the Keller Agency. In 1968/68, Rocker then pivoted to the study of law. Even without an undergraduate degree - she attend Sacramento State College from 1967 to 1969 as a business major - she scored so well on her Law School Admission Test that the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law admitted her in 1969. To fund her coursework, Rocker won a number of scholarships while also working full-time as a nightshift telephone company supervisor. Rocker went on to graduate fifth in her class in June 1973. Within a year, she was working for the Sacramento County public defender's office where she specialized in spousal abuse law and developed a reputation as a dauntless adversary for prosecutors and committed defender of the underdog. Rocker died in May 1988.

Preferred Citation

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Scope and Contents

With coverage from circa 1940 to 1988, the collection is composed primarily of items relating to Rocker's early years in Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, and her academic and professional career in Sacramento. Series I. scrapbooks - a total of two - cover the Brooklyn years of Rocker's youth while newspaper clippings from the Sacramento Bee and Union's provide coverage of Rocker's many cases as a public defender. Series II includes photographs, many that cover the Dankman family living in Arden Park in the 1950s and 60s, Series III correspondence, Series IV academic, personal and professional records, and Series V a wide range of certificates, diplomas and awards. Do note that various items from Series V have been altered by decoupage and will sit in flat Box 3. Series VI is made up of four books on American jurisprudence, awarded to Rocker for her legal accomplishments. Each is identified by a bookplate. Series VII contains a rock that was awarded to those within the Sacramento district attorney's section who won convictions in jury trials against Rocker. The legendary item was referred to as "A Piece of the Rock." Also note that a large portion of the collection's original order was left intact.

Scrapbooks Series I

Photographs Series II

Correspondence Series III

Academic, Personal and Professional Records Series IV

Certificates, Diplomas and Papers of Commendation Series V

Books Series VI

Artifacts Series VII