

**S0198 Oberbeck, Rita (1908-1983)**  
**Papers, 1939-1979**  
**26 Folders**

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The Rita Oberbeck papers were donated to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-St. Louis by Doris and Maurice Wheeler in June 1984.

Rita Oberbeck was born in St. Louis March 28, 1908. She attended Washington University, taking journalism courses. Unable to continue college during the depression, Oberbeck took a job in 1937 as a secretary to Meyer Perlstein, director of the Southwest region of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Soon Perlstein recognized Oberbeck's talents as a writer and producer, and he appointed her Dramatics Director of the Southwest region of the ILGWU. In this position, Oberbeck produced plays, skits, and pageants for the union in St. Louis and the rest of the Southwest region. To promote the ILGWU, she wrote scripts for radio and television programs. Eventually, Oberbeck became the Director of the Educational Department of the union in St. Louis, a position she held until retirement in 1970.

During her years with the ILGWU, Oberbeck also did union organizing in cities such as Fairfield, Illinois; Dallas and San Antonio, Texas; and St. James and Haiti, Missouri.

Oberbeck compiled the reminiscences of her years with the union in an unfinished biography of Meyer Perlstein entitled *Shortsnooping with Meyer*. The work offers glimpses of her life and of the activities of the ILGWU as well as biographical sketches of Perlstein. Oberbeck spent her retirement years working on the biography. She died in 1983.

A more personal biography of Rita Oberbeck written by Doris Wheeler is attached.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Oberbeck papers are arranged into four series: Writings 1939-1976; Correspondence 1939-1970; ILGWU information; and Photographs. The bulk of the writing consists of an unfinished biography of Meyer Perlstein (director of the ILGWU, Southwest region). The material provides autobiographical details about Oberbeck and information about activities in the ILGWU. Also included are Oberbeck's fiction writings with one folder of poetry. Duplicates and a short article from the TV Guide were discarded.

**SERIES DESCRIPTION**

**SERIES 1- WRITINGS 1939-1976, FOLDERS 1-22**

Arranged in three sub series. Folders 1-13 contain material Oberbeck used for her unpublished biography of Meyer Perlstein entitled *Shortsnooping with Meyer*. Included are designated chapters, handwritten drafts, and notes. Folders 14-17 include pieces written about Oberbeck's union activities; scripts, skits, and songs for the ILGWU; and articles referring to Perlstein. Folders 18-22 contain fiction writing, including a folder (22) of poetry.

**SERIES 2- CORRESPONDENCE 1939-1970, FOLDER 23**

Arranged chronologically. Correspondents are Meyer Perlstein, director of the Southwest region of the ILGWU; Thomas Eagleton, U.S. Senator from Missouri; Frederick Siems, Vice-President ILGWU; Lee Kelliher; reporter for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat; and Eva Chambers, Educational Director of ILGWU in St. Louis.

**SERIES 3 - ILGWU INFORMATION, FOLDERS 24 AND 25**

Programs, handouts, songs, and clippings of the ILGWU are in chronological order. Oberbeck wrote and produced several of the programs. Two copies of the union's paper, Justice, are included, as are Oberbeck's notes about union benefits.

**SERIES 4 - PHOTOGRAPHS, FOLDER 26**

There are two photographs. One shows Rita Oberbeck with Meyer Perlstein (c.1945). The other pictures Meyer Perlstein with Nathan Gross, Secretary of Garment Manufacturers (c.1950).

**FOLDER LIST**

**BOX 1**

Folder 1-13, Shortsnopping with Meyer

1. Chapters I and I, untitled
- Chapter III, "The Southwest"
2. Chapter IV, "Fabric of the Past"
3. "Sometimes a Very Old Woman"
4. (Chapter V], "To Cheat despair"
5. (Chapter VI], untitled
6. Insert for (Chapter VI], "Tomorrow Must Be Ours (a history of mankind)"
7. Chapters VII and VIII, "Meet Me in St. Louis"
8. Chapter IX, "The Meeting"
- Chapter X, "20,000 Gibson Girls Protest"
9. Stories About Meyer Perlstein
10. Essays
11. Early Life of Meyer Perlstein
12. "Portrait of Tanasko and Related Sketches"
13. Notes
14. Short pieces
15. References about Meyer Perlstein
16. Scripts, skits, and songs for ILGWU
17. Article on HUD
18. Notes, drafts of "Pru Story"
19. Rewrites of "Pru Story," Jan. 1964 - Sept. 1964
20. "Pru Story," Sept. 1965
21. Untitled story, Oct. 1965
22. Poetry, 1960-1965

**SERIES 2 CORRESPONDENCE**

23. Correspondence, 1939-1970

**SERIES 3 ILGWU INFORMATION, 1952-1976**

- 24. Programs, clippings, songs
- 25. Newspapers
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