Helen Bowers Papers
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Finding aid edited by Daniel Golodner, 2010

Accession Number: 1879

Creator: Helen Bowers, Detroit Federation of Teachers

Acquisition: The papers were deposited with the Walter P. Reuther Library via Mary Ellen Riordan when she deposited her papers on December 1, 2005.

Language: Material entirely in English.

Access: Papers are open for research.

Use: Refer to the Walter P. Reuther Library Rules for Use of Archival Materials.

Notes: Citation style: “Helen Bowers Papers, Box [#], Folder [#], Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University”

Copies:

Other Access Aids:

Related Material: Detroit Federation of Teachers collection, Michigan Federation of Teachers collection, Detroit Commission on Community Relations
History
Helen Marie Newman Bowers was born in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin on May 16, 1908. After graduating from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, she began teaching art in Detroit, Michigan in 1933 and quickly got involved with the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), Local 231. Helen Bowers earned her Masters degree at Wayne State University. She left the teaching profession in 1958 to become the executive secretary of the DFT. Ms. Bowers initiated and supervised the purchase of the first office building owned by the DFT. Together with DFT President Mary Ellen Riordan, Detroit teachers won collective bargaining in 1964. That contract served as the model for other early union contracts throughout the United States. Helen Bowers won duty-free lunch hours for elementary teachers, and conceived of “demonstration picketing” before schools opened in the morning to raise awareness to the community about why teachers were demanding collective bargaining. Ms. Bowers served on the Executive Board and became editor of the DFT newspaper, The Detroit Teacher. She attended numerous state and local conventions as a delegate, and from 1964 to 1968 served two terms as AFT Vice-President. Helen Bowers retired in 1974.

During her retirement Bowers focused her efforts with the DFT and union politics. She died on May 9, 1994.

Scope and Content:
The papers of Helen Bowers reflect her work with the DFT and education reform initiatives. This involves pre-collective bargaining rights in dealing with academic freedom, civil liberties as well as a living wage for teachers. Communism files contain a thorough documentation of the Maki Case trial from clippings from the three Detroit newspapers. The collection also contains very useful information about how the union gained power after collective bargaining was won. Their influence in education issues is seen in issues about accountability, decentralization and student rights.

Papers consist of newspaper clippings, correspondence, reports, organizational campaign materials and publications documenting early union activity of the DFT and educational issues as well as items from various press reports to help her develop the Detroit Teacher newspaper.

Important Subjects:
- Accountability
- Collective Bargaining
- Communism
- Schools – Detroit - Michigan
- Strike
- Decentralization
- Education
- Maki Case
- Student Rights
- Student Unrest – Detroit - Michigan
Series I  General Subjects, 1934-1994

Articles, letters, organizational campaign materials and publications, and papers documenting early union activity of the DFT and educational issues.

Series II  Helen Bowers’ Personal Materials, 1940s-1989
Art, articles, biographies, drawings, handwritten documents, and papers, from which Helen Bowers
**Arrangement**

Series I files are arranged alphabetically by subject and correspondent, and chronologically within the files. Series II files are arranged alphabetically by given name of file, per Helen Bowers, and chronologically within the files.

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