Olga Madar Collection

Papers, 1929-1996
(Predominantly, 1950s-1990s)

12 linear feet

Accession # 203
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Olga Marie Madar was born in the coal mining town of Sykesville, Pennsylvania May 17, 1915 and moved to Detroit with her family during the Depression. Because of her prowess on the softball field, Chrysler hired her to work on the assembly line after her graduation from Northeastern High School in 1933 and she used summer jobs at the corporation’s Kercheval plant and the Bower Roller Bearing plant to put herself through Michigan Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University), graduating in 1938 with a degree in physical education.

In 1941 she traded her teaching position for a better paying job at the Ford Willow Run bomber plant, joined nascent UAW Local 50 and organized its first community recreation programs, programs so successful that the local hired her as director of recreation, social services and women’s activities. In 1947 she was appointed director of the International Union’s Recreation Department where she fought and won the battle to integrate organized bowling leagues. From 1958 until 1966 Ms. Madar also served as a Detroit Parks and Recreation Commissioner and was responsible for instituting competitive promotional exams within the city’s recreation department and for setting up innovative programs for senior citizens.

In 1966 Ms. Madar was elected to the UAW International Executive Board as a member-at-large, the first woman to hold such office. Four years later she was elected to the first of two terms as International Vice-President—again, the first woman to achieve such a leadership position within the UAW—with responsibility for directing the Departments of Conservation and Resource Development, Recreation and Leisure-Time Activities and Consumer Affairs and servicing technical, office and professional workers’ locals. Ms. Madar retired from the UAW in 1974, but remained active in retiree affairs.

Throughout her life, Olga Madar worked tirelessly to eliminate discrimination against women and minorities in the workplace and in the community and proved especially adept at coalition-building. She was instrumental in launching in 1971 the Michigan Women’s Political Caucus and the Network for Economic Rights, which pushed for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and for gender equity in the workplace, and spearheaded the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women by women who felt powerless within their unions, winning election as national president at its founding.
convention in March of 1974. Through service with countless civic organizations, she sought to increase citizen participation in decision-making in recreation, education, health care and other areas.

The papers of Olga Madar include correspondence, reports, minutes, news clippings, publications and other material reflecting her career with the UAW and her work on behalf of issues of concern to women, senior citizens and other community groups.

Additional material relating to Olga Madar may be found in the CLUW and UAW Conservation and Recreation Departments Collections and in her UAW IEB oral history and two others available in the Reuther Library Reading Room in which she discusses her involvement in the women’s movement.

**Important subjects in the collection:**

- Civil Rights Act of 1964--Title VII  
- Coalition of Labor Union Women  
- Democratic Party (Mich.)  
- Detroit Public Schools  
- Equal pay for equal work--United States  
- Equal Rights Amendment--United States  
- Michigan Democratic Party  
- National Women’s Political Caucus  
- Network for Economic Rights  
- Retirees--Services for--Michigan  
- Sex discrimination against women  
- Trade-unions--Environmental policy  
- UAW Conservation and Resource Development Department  
- UAW Recreation and Leisure-Time Activities Department  
- UAW Retired Workers Centers  
- UAW Technical, Office, Professional Department  
- United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964  
- Women automobile industry workers  
- Women labor leaders--United States  
- Women’s rights--Societies, etc.

**Important correspondents in the collection:**

- Birch Bayh  
- Liz Carpenter  
- Caroline Davis  
- Carolyn Forrest
Douglas Fraser
Erma Henderson
Hubert Humphrey
Mildred Jeffrey
Coretta Scott King
Margaret Laurence
Emil Mazey
George McGovern
Barbara Mikulski
Walter Reuther
Edith Van Horn
Myra Wolfgang
Leonard Woodcock

Non-manuscript material:

A few photographs and items of memorabilia received with the collection have been placed in the Archives Audiovisual Department.
Contents

12 storage boxes

Series I, Personal Files, 1929-1996, Box 1

Series II, United Automobile Workers Union, 1942-1995, Boxes 2-6

Series III, Organizations and Issues, 1950-1996, Boxes 6-12

Files related to her activities with organizations other than the UAW and to her interest in issues not necessarily related to her union duties.
Series I
Personal Files, 1929-1996
Box 1

1. Appointment books, day books, 1944-77
2. Biographical sketches, 1960s-1990s
9. Honorary degree; Eastern Michigan University, 1970
10. Honorary degree; Shaw College at Detroit, 1975
11. Honors and awards (certificates), 1960s-1980s
12. Indian Village Association, 1964-65
13. Madar family genealogy
14. Memorial celebration, 23 May 1996
17-20. News clippings (re Madar), 1950s-1990s
21. Northeastern High School and Burroughs Intermediate School scrapbook, c. 1929-33
22. Obituaries, 1996
23. Olga Madar Senior Center dedication, 1995
25. Speaking engagements, misc., 1960s-1908s
28-42. Speech notes/drafts, 1960-84
43. (Madar) sports team activities, 1930s-1940s
44. Teaching certificate (Michigan State Normal College), 1938
45. “Women Are Great” script (WJR Radio tribute), 1970
Series II
UAW, 1942-1995
Boxes 2-6

Box 2

2-5. CAP, Michigan; misc., 1966-74
6-8. CAP, National, 1971-74
9-11. CAP, Southeastern Michigan; corres., 1970-74
12. CAP, Southeastern Michigan; financial reports, 1970-74
13. CAP, Southeastern Michigan; meetings, 1970-74
14. CAP, Southeastern Michigan; misc., 1970-74
15-16. CAP, Wayne County; corres., 1971-74
17-18. CAP, Wayne County; meetings, 1971-74
19-20. CAP, Wayne County; misc., 1971-74

21-22. Conservation Department; corres., 1966-74
23. Conservation Department; Downriver Anti Pollution League, 1969-71
24. Conservation Department; Environmental, Occupational Health and Safety Questionnaire, 1970
25. Conservation Department; memoranda, 1969-74
26. Conservation Department; Pollution Action Line (PAL), 1967
27. Conservation Department; project proposal—Increasing Environmental Awareness and Action on the Part of Industrial Workers and Their Families, 1972
28. Conservation Department; project proposal—Training Industrial Worker Activists and Their Families to Be Effective Environmental Leaders, 1973
29. Conservation Department; project proposal—United Community Action for Environmental Education of Workers and Citizens, 1974
30. Conservation Department; publications, 1960s-1970s
31. Conservation Department; staff meeting minutes, Apr-May 1969
32. Conservation Department; United Action for Clear Water Conference, 1965
33. Conservation Department; UAW National Energy Program, 1974
34. Conservation Department; UAW resolutions/IEB action, 1970s
35. Conservation Department; UAW/Madar public statements on the environment, 1967-73
36. Conservation Department; UN symposium on environment, Jun 1970

Box 3

1. Consumer Affairs Department; corres. and reports, 1969-74
2. Consumer Affairs Department; public statements/speeches on consumer affairs, 1969-73
3. Consumer Affairs Department; publications, 1969-74
4. Education Department, 1969-73
5. Fair Practices Department, 1969, 1973-74
6. Family Education Center, 1970-73
7. General Motors Department, 1971-76
8. International Affairs Department; Czechoslovakian trade unions, Madar visit to, 1968

Box 3 (cont’d)

10-25. IEB; correspondence, 1967-75
26-32. IEB; corres.—Emil Mazey, 1968-74
33. IEB; corres./condolences—Walter and May Reuther, 1970
34-39. IEB; corres.—Leonard Woodcock, 1970-74
40. IEB election; clippings, 1966
41-47. IEB election; Committee for the Election of a Woman to the UAW Executive Board, 1964-66

Box 4

1. IEB election; corres., May-Aug 1966
3-4. IEB; meeting notes, n.d.
5-12. IEB; meeting notes, 1968-74
13. IEB; officers’ meeting notes, n.d.
14-17. IEB; officers’ meeting notes, 1970-73

18. Legal Department, 1967-74
19. Local 50, c. 1942-43
20. Local 205 (Woodall Industries), 1943-45
21. Local unions; corres., 1970-73
22. Public Relations Department, 1971-73

24. Recreation Department; “A Brief History of Leisure with a Case Study of Union (UAW) Leisure-Time Involvement” by Floyd Newby, 1966
26. Recreation Department; corres. and reports, 1950-73
27-30. Recreation Department; Deprived Areas Recreation Team (DART), 1966-70
31. Recreation Department; Detroit sports stadium project, 1969
32. Recreation Department; DSR reduced fare plan for senior citizens, 1955-58
33. Recreation Department; Madar articles on recreation, 1956-67
34. Recreation Department; Madar public statements/speeches on recreation, 1957-73
35. Recreation Department; Madar public statements/speeches on recreation—National Recreation and Park Assn. 2nd National Forum address, 1968
36-37. Recreation Department; Michigan & Southwestern Ontario CIO & UAW Recreation Conference, 1950-51
38. Recreation Department; Music Scholarships, 1964-69
39. Recreation Department; publications, 1948-73
40-41. Recreation Department; publications—"Recreation Round Up,” 1948-57
42. Recreation Department; Vest Pocket Parks project, 1968

Box 5

1. Retired Workers Department; AFL-CIO Committee on Union Retirees, 1982-83
2-3. Retired Workers Department; Advisory Council, 1982-93
4-5. Retired Workers Department; corres. and reports, 1963-94

Box 5 (cont’d)

6-7. Retired Workers Department; Local 769 (Norris Industries) Retired Workers Chapter, 1978-91
8. Retired Workers Department; Region 1A (1E) Retired Workers Council, 1969, 1982, 1985-92
9-12. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—AFSCME Local 1640 negotiations, 1967-69
13-15. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—board minutes, 1965-73
16. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—budget material, 1967-74
17. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—by-laws, 1961-71
18-21. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—corres. and reports, n.d., 1956, 1961-76
22. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—drop-in and activities centers proposal, 1968
23. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—Eastside Center (Parkside), 1967-71
24. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—Project Restore, 1967
25. Retired Workers Department; Retired Workers Centers—public housing rent increase, 1968-69
26. Staff Pension Plan Board of Trustees, 1970-74
27. Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department; corres. and reports, 1967-74
28-31. TOP; EEOC (Title VII), 1967-74
32. TOP; federal contract compliance guidelines, 1973-74
33. (UAW) Women; affirmative action program, 1972-73
34. (UAW) Women in leadership, United Active Women; lists, 1970s

Box 6

1. (UAW) Women; member survey, 1972-74
2. (UAW) Women; MESC maternity leave case, 1973-74
3. (UAW) Women; political action, 1972-73
4. (UAW) Women from Administration Caucus, Committee of, 1974
5. Women in the Japanese auto industry, 1980
6. Women’s Department; Canadian Region Women Workers Conference, 1968-73
7-10. Women’s Department; corres. and reports, 1965-83
11. Women’s Department; International UAW Women’s Conference, 1972, 1995
12. Women’s Department; International UAW Women’s Resolutions, 1966-86
13. Women’s Department; publications, 1970s-1980s
15-16. Women’s Department; Regions 1-1A-1B-1E Women’s Committee, 1970-73, 1977
17. (UAW) Women’s Trip to Fort Knox, 1944
Olga Madar Collection

- 10 -

Series III
Organizations and Issues, 1950-1996
Boxes 6-12

Box 6

19. Americans for the Coast, 1980-82
20. Belle Isle vehicle admission tax controversy, 1994
21. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan Senior Advisory Council, 1984-90
22. Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW); AFSCME Local 3309 negotiations, 1989
23-24. CLUW; American Family Celebration, 1987-88
25-26. CLUW; Anchorage Chapter, 1984-86
27. CLUW; Archives Committee, 1983-87
28. CLUW; “Bargaining for Child Care” (draft), 1985
29. CLUW; Bargaining for Our Families Conference, 1988
30-31. CLUW; Center for Education and Research, 1979-95
32. CLUW; Center for Education and Research Health & Safety Project, 1981
33. CLUW; chapter status reports, 1979-90
34. CLUW; Child Care Seminar, 1977
35. CLUW; Committee on Older and Retired Persons, 1983-86
36. CLUW; committees, misc., 1979-90
37. CLUW; convention, founding, Mar 1974
38-39. CLUW; convention, 1977, 1979

Box 7

1. CLUW; convention, 1988
2. CLUW; convention—Madar remarks at installation of officers, 1994
3-4. CLUW; convention, 1995
5-16. CLUW; corres. and reports, 1973-96
17. CLUW; financial reports, 1977-90
18. CLUW founding; Madar interview, “OCAW Reporter” article, 1977, 1986
19. CLUW; history (draft), 1984
20. CLUW; history—“Women Organizing in Unions: Formation of CLUW” (draft), 1984
21. CLUW; Kent County Chapter, 1977-89
22. CLUW; Macomb-Oakland Chapter, 1981-86
23. CLUW; Meany, George, notes on CLUW officers’ meeting with, Jan 1975
24. CLUW; member questionnaire, 1978
25-26. CLUW; Metro-Detroit Chapter, 1977-96
27. CLUW; Metro-Detroit Chapter—Olga Madar Awards Dinner, 1992
28-29. CLUW; Michigan Chapter, 1977-91
30. CLUW; Michigan Chapter—People’s Campaign for Choice
31. CLUW; Midwest Conference of Union Women Leaders, 1973
32. CLUW; National Executive Board meeting minutes, Feb 1987
33. CLUW; National Executive Board meeting minutes, May 1987
34. CLUW; National Executive Board meeting minutes, Jun 1989
35. CLUW; National Executive Board/Officers Council meeting agendas, 1980-90

Box 7 (cont’d)

36. CLUW; National Executive Board and Chapter Presidents list, 1987
37. CLUW; national office reports, 1987-90
38. CLUW; National Officers Council meeting minutes, Feb-Aug 1987
39. CLUW; National Officers Council meeting minutes, Jun 1988
40. CLUW; National Officers Council meeting minutes, Aug 1989
41. CLUW; National Officers Council meeting minutes, Oct 1989
42. CLUW; news clippings, 1975-90
43. CLUW; October League, 1974
44. CLUW; press releases, 1976-86
45. CLUW; printed material, 1977-95
46. CLUW; public testimony, 1977-94
47. CLUW; Testimonial Dinner honoring Olga Madar, 1977
48. CLUW; Tribute to Addie Wyatt, Madar remarks at, 1988
49. CLUW; 20th Anniversary Gala, 1994
50. CLUW; Washtenaw County Area Chapter, 1987-88
51. CLUW; Wayne County Chapter, 1975-79
52. CLUW; White House Conference on Aging, 1980-81

53. Delegation for Friendship Among Women China trip, 1971-73
54. Detroit Charter revision, 1971

Box 8

1-2. (Detroit) Citizens’ Coalition on the Status and Rights of Women, 1972-74
3. Detroit mayoral campaign and Coleman Young autobiography controversy, 1993
4. (Detroit) Mayor’s Committee on Family Center, 1963-65
5. (Detroit) Mayor’s Senior Citizen Commission, 1972-78
6. Detroit Parks and Recreation Commission; Madar resignation, 1966
7-9. Detroit Parks and Recreation Department Committee on Mental Health Programs, 1966-70
10-11. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on Health, Physical Education and Physical Fitness; corres. and reports, 1959-61
12. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on Health, Physical Education and Physical Fitness; findings and recommendations, 1960
13. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on Health, Physical Education and Physical Fitness; minutes, 1959-60
14. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on Health, Physical Education and Physical Fitness; state tournament competition, 1959-61
15. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on Health, Physical Education and Physical Fitness; survey questionnaire on school program, n.d.
16. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; “Factual Reports—Regional Committees,” Apr 1958
17. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; “Findings and Recommendations of the City-Wide Committee,” Nov 1958
18. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; “One Year After,” Dec 1959

Box 8 (cont’d)

21. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; Northeast Region corres., 1957-58
22. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; Northeast Region recommendations, 1958
23. Detroit Public Schools Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs; Northeast Region report reference material, 1958
24. Detroit Public Schools Region 8 School Community Relations Committee, 1971-72

25. Detroit Recreation Department’s Advisory Commission, 1983

Box 9


5-11. Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); corres. and reports, 1967-77
12. ERA; Citizens’ Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1970-75
13. ERA; Common Cause, 1973-74
| 14. | ERA; Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Council, 1972-74 |
| 15. | ERA; Labor Committee for ERA, 1977 |
| 16. | ERA; National Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1971-73 |
| 20-21. | ERA; public statements and testimony, 1970-79 |
| 22. | ERA; resource material, 1970-81 |
| 23. | ERA; Senator Birch Bayh, 1970 |
| 24-26. | ERA; states, 1971-74 |
| 27. | ERA; Women United, 1971-72 |

**Box 10**

| 1. | Ethnic Millions Political Action Committee, 1974 |
| 2. | Ford Auditorium demolition controversy, 1990 |
| 4. | Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, 1957-91 |
| 5. | Kelly for Senate Committee, 1972 |
| 6. | Labor for Peace Steering Committee, 1972-73 |
| 7. | Labor Law Reform Rally; Madar speech, etc., May 1978 |
| 8. | “Labor’s Political Action Strategies and Women”; speech, article, 1992 |
| 9. | Metropolitan Retiree Service Center, 1994-95 |
| 17. | Michigan League for Human Services, 1972-75 |

**Box 10 (cont’d)**

| 19. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; conferences, 1985-91 |
| 20-26. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; corres. and reports, 1985-95 |
| 27. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; legislation, 1985-94 |
| 28. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; minutes, 1985-86 |
| 31. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; resource material, 1980s-1990s |
| 32. | Michigan Pay Equity Network; statements on comparable worth, 1984-89 |

33-34. Michigan Recreation Advisory Committee; corres. and reports, 1972-74

**Box 11**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michigan Recreation Advisory Committee; corres. and reports, 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Michigan Recreation Advisory Committee; minutes, 1972-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Michigan Recreation and Parks Assn. Women’s Recreation Group, 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Michigan State University Alumni Association Democratic Trustee Selection Committee, 1970-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Michigan Task Force on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, 1978-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>National Association of Social Workers, 1971-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>National Committee for Fair Play in Bowling Awards Dinner, Oct 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>National Council of Senior Citizens; corres., 1987-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>National Council of Senior Citizens; health care, 1984-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>National Council of Senior Citizens; Midwestern Regional Conference, 1993, 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>National health insurance, 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>National Recreation and Park Association Task Force on Manpower and Education, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC); Administrative Council, 1973-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>NWPC; Advisory Board, 1975-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>NWPC; corres. and reports, 1971-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>NWPC; Finance Committee, 1973-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>NWPC; Illinois Women’s Political Caucus, 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-25</td>
<td>NWPC; Michigan Women’s Political Caucus, 1971-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>NWPC; Missouri Women’s Political Caucus, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>NWPC; national convention, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-30</td>
<td>NWPC; National Policy Council, 1971-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>NWPC; news clippings, 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>NWPC; newsletters, 1971-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>NWPC; Ohio Women’s Political Caucus, 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>NWPC; Operating Committee, 1971-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>NWPC; organizing conference, Jul 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>NWPC; Pennsylvania Women’s Political Caucus, 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>NWPC; Political Action Committee, 1973-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>NWPC; press releases, 1971-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>NWPC; state contacts, 1972-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>NWPC; Steering Committee, 1973-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>NWPC; Women’s Political Times, 1978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 11 (cont’d)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>National Women’s Suffrage Day; Madar speech, Aug 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Network for Economic Rights (NER); Illinois, 1971-73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 12**
1. NER; Michigan—affiliates, 1972
2. NER; Michigan—conference, 1971
3-6. NER; Michigan—corres. and reports, 1971-74
7. NER; Michigan—Flint Area chapter, 1972
8. NER; Michigan—handbook, 1971-72
9. NER; Michigan—Legislative Action Group, 1971-72
10. NER; Michigan—minutes, Feb-Apr 1971
11. NER; Michigan—news clippings, 1970-72
12. NER; Michigan—task forces, 1971-72
13. NER; Ohio, 1971
14. NER; Wisconsin, 1971
15. Nursing homes, 1972
16. Resource Center for Consumers of Legal Services, 1973
17-19. Riverfront Recreation Opportunities Panel, 1976-77
23. United Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit and United Foundation, 1960-72
24-25. U.S. Department of Labor Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Women, 1973
26. Vietnam War, 1966-70
27. Wayne County Commission on Aging, 1975-80
28. Wayne County Planning Commission, 1977
29. White House Conference on Aging, 1970-71
30. Winifred Fraser Campaign Committee, 1974
31. Women for Justice Boyle Committee, 1984
32-33. Women’s Equity Action League, 1970-77
34. Women’s Equity Action League—Michigan, 1970-72
35. Women’s Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, 1976