



Guide to Buck Dinner Committee Records LR001830

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Walter P. Reuther Library

5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

URL: <https://reuther.wayne.edu>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Walter P. Reuther Library
Creator:	Buck Dinner Committee
Source:	Grossman, Leonard
Title:	Buck Dinner Committee Records
ID:	LR001830
Date [inclusive]:	1966-2002
Physical Description:	3 Linear Feet (3 SB)
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	Material entirely in English.
Abstract:	Labor lawyer Maurice Sugar established the Buck Dinner in 1929. Meeting annually in locations throughout metropolitan Detroit, the Buck Dinner Committee provides financial support to advocacy groups involved in civil rights, equality, and social justice. Each year the committee picks "Head Hunters" to invite guests to these dinners to donate money. After they collect funds, the committee meets to decide which organizations need money to continue their activities. A sample of recipient organizations includes the American Civil Liberties Union, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the National Lawyers Guild. The committee remains active as of 2018 and continues to provide financial support to social advocacy groups.

Citation Style

"Buck Dinner Committee Records, Box [#], Folder [#], Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University."

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History

Originating as a spontaneous evening meal in the winter of 1929, labor lawyer Maurice Sugar and wife Jane Sugar gathered their friends. Guests were served venison, sang songs, and paid fifty cents each to a fund for the unemployed. The event developed into an annual meal with the purpose of supporting organizations dedicated to equality and social justice. Maurice Sugar described the purpose of the Buck Dinner is to financially support such organizations who are unlikely to receive help from conventional sources. Remaining active as of 2018, the procedure for these dinners involves "Head Hunters" to invite guests and encourage them to donate. During the Great Depression, unemployment and hunger were the two main causes for donations. The Buck Dinner's number of participants grew as unionization struggles and the rise of fascism in the 1930s influenced workers, teachers, and labor organizers join. Some prominent labor organizers who were also Buck Dinner guests included George Addes, Dick Frankenstein, Percy Lewellyn, and Leo LaMotte.

In the post-World War II years, entertainment at the dinner included political skits featuring George Shapiro and folk dancing led by Blanche Shafarman. In 1949, the cast of the Broadway musical *Finian's Rainbow* joined the Buck Dinner following a show at the Cass Theater. Entertainment during the 1950s often included political humor in the form of songs such as 'I want a job in the Cabinet, I've got a Million Dollars.'

The 1950s was a time of crisis for the Buck Dinner as attendance and contributions from its members declined due to the House of Un-American Activities Committee hearings, job firings, and deportation proceedings. Recipients of Buck Dinner contributions included the Michigan Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born. As McCarthyism waned, support from the Buck Dinner shifted more towards organizations involved in the Civil Rights Movement at the end of the 1950s. Among the supported organizations were the Southern Conference Education Fund, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Students' Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. As the United States became increasingly involved in Vietnam, organizations opposed to the war such as Women Strike for Peace received contributions. By 1966, some organizations such as the ACLU and the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) were ongoing recipients. These two organizations continue to receive annual funding as of 2018.

Following Maurice Sugar's death in 1974, Ernest Goldman and Michael Miller were made dinner chairman and co-chairman respectively. By the fiftieth anniversary of the Buck Dinner, participants included Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Ed Sadlowski of the United Steelworkers of America, and Chilean freedom fighters Luis Meneses and George Frias. By 1991, the Buck Dinner grew to twenty headhunters bringing in three hundred guests. The headhunters would sit with ten to twenty guests at a table and compete with other tables to donate the largest amount. Typical recipients of donations would include organizations advocating civil rights, women's issues, and peace and justice in Central America.

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Scope and Content

This collection consists of the records of the Buck Dinner Committee which organizes the annual Buck Dinner and reviews grant applications for the distribution of raised funds to organizations who advocate peace, justice, and civil rights. The bulk of the records pertain to the planning of dinners, donation requests, distribution of funds, and committee finances from 1966 to 2002. A few records originate from the committee's partner organizations such as the National Lawyers' Guild and the American Civil Liberties Union. Documents include meeting agendas and minutes, dinner guest lists, correspondence, expense and budget reports, donation requests, fund distributions to organizations, and invitation forms. Donation requests are often attached to reports that detail the recent activities of the requesting organization. Folder 1-18 contains a photograph of Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi meeting with representatives from Empty Bowls and Oxfam America. The collection is organized into one series, General Files, 1966-2002.

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Arrangement

The collection is arranged in 1 series (Boxes 1-3). Folders in the series are arranged chronologically, except for the folders related to partner organizations, which are grouped together and are arranged alphabetically.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Walter P. Reuther Library

5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

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Acquisition

Collection was donated by Leonard Grossman to the Walter P. Reuther Library in January and April of 2004.

Processing History

Processed and finding aid written by Walter P. Reuther Library on March 14, 2018.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Use

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Maurice Sugar Papers

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Controlled Access Headings

- Fund raising
- Grossman, Leonard
- Sugar, Maurice, 1891-1974

Collection Inventory

Series 1: General Files, 1967-2002

Title/Description	Instances
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Buck Dinner, 1967-1972	box 1	folder 1
Buck Dinner, 1974-1988	box 1	folder 2
Buck Dinner, 1981	box 1	folder 3
Buck Dinner, 1982	box 1	folder 4
Buck Dinner, 1983	box 1	folder 5
Buck Dinner, 1984	box 1	folder 6
Buck Dinner, 1985	box 1	folder 7
Buck Dinner, 1987	box 1	folder 8
Buck Dinner donation requests, 1987	box 1	folder 9-10
Buck Dinner, 1991	box 1	folder 11
Buck Dinner distribution meeting, 1991	box 1	folder 12
Buck Dinner donation requests, 1991	box 1	folder 13
Buck Dinner financial, 1991	box 1	folder 14
Buck Dinner, 1992	box 1	folder 15-18
Buck Dinner distribution meeting, 1992	box 2	folder 1
Buck Dinner financial, 1992	box 2	folder 2
Buck Dinner, 1993	box 2	folder 3-6
Buck Dinner distribution meeting, 1993	box 2	folder 7
Buck Dinner financial, 1993	box 2	folder 8
Buck Dinner, 1994	box 2	folder 9
Buck Dinner distribution meeting, 1994	box 2	folder 10-12
Buck Dinner financial, 1994	box 2	folder 13
Buck Dinner, 1995	box 2	folder 14
Buck Dinner donation requests, 1995	box 2	folder 15-16
Buck Dinner financial, 1995	box 2	folder 17
Buck Dinner, 1996	box 2	folder 18
Buck Dinner donation requests, 1996	box 2	folder 19
Buck Dinner financial, 1996	box 2	folder 20
Buck Dinner, 1997	box 3	folder 1
Buck Dinner distribution meeting, 1997	box 3	folder 2
Buck Dinner donation requests, 1997	box 3	folder 3
Buck Dinner financial, 1997	box 3	folder 4

Buck Dinner, 1998	box 3	folder 5
Buck Dinner financial, 1998	box 3	folder 6
Buck Dinner insurance, 1998	box 3	folder 7
Buck Dinner donation request to Fund for Equal Justice, 1998	box 3	folder 8
Buck Dinner, 1999	box 3	folder 9
Buck Dinner financial, 1999	box 3	folder 10
Buck Dinner, 2000	box 3	folder 11
Buck Dinner, 2001	box 3	folder 12
Buck Dinner applications, 2002	box 3	folder 13
Buck Dinner invitations and funeral programs, 1966-1986	box 3	folder 14
Partner organization: ACLU-Metropolitan Detroit Branch ACLU Executive Board Handbook, 1991	box 3	folder 15
Partner organization: ACLU Eastland Mall, 2002	box 3	folder 16
Partner Organization: Sugar Law Center- Mayer request, 2002	box 3	folder 17

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