

Walter P. Reuther Library  
Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs  
Wayne State University Archives

**Helen Bowers Papers**  
2.5 linear feet  
1934-1995 (bulk 1947-1970)

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

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

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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.

### Series 1

#### Box 1

##### Box 1

1. Accountability, 1970
2. Accountability, 1970-1977
3. Accountability, 1973-1974
4. Bowers, Helen M., 1991-1995
5. Collective Bargaining, 1963
6. Collective Bargaining, 1964
7. Comfort, Frances, 1949-1970
8. Comfort, Frances- in memoriam, 1957-1982
9. Communism, February 1952 – March 1952
10. Communism, February 1952 – March 1952
11. Communism, February 1952 – March 1952
12. Communism, 1953
13. Contract Negotiation & Strike Vote, 1964-1966
14. Contract Negotiation & Strike Vote, 1966-1967

##### Box 2

1. Decentralization, 1967-1977
2. Decentralization, 1967-1969
3. Decentralization, 1970-1976
4. Decentralization, 1977
5. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 6, 1947-1948
6. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 7, 1948-1949
7. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 8, 1949-1950
8. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 9, 1950-1951
9. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 10, 1951-1952
10. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 11, 1952-1953
11. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 28, 1968-1969
12. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 31, 1971-1972
13. *Detroit Teacher* Vols. 32-34, 1973-1975
14. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 35, 1975-1976
15. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 36, 1976-1977
16. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 39, 1980
17. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 40, 1980-1981

##### Box 3

1. *Detroit Teacher* Vol. 41, 1981
2. DFT Campaign Materials, 1959-1971

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3. DFT Campaign Materials, 1959, 1963, 1972
4. DFT Campaign Materials; New Caucus, 1967-1973
5. DFT Campaign Materials; New Direction, 1970-1971
6. DFT Campaign Materials; Riordan Team, 1964-1974
7. DFT Campaign Materials; Various Slates, 1960-1977
8. DFT Campaign Materials- Independents, 1960-1970
9. DFT/AFT Campaign Materials, 1958 - 1972
10. DFT/MFT/AFL-CIO Campaign Materials, 1968-1973
11. DFT/MFT Address/Telephone Number Lists, 1941, 1959-1971
12. DFT General Executive Board Election Information on Candidates, 1948-1965
13. DFT History, 1934-1939
14. DFT History, 1940-1971
15. DFT History, 1947 - 1977
16. DFT History- "And battles long ago", 1950-1969
17. Education issues, 1961-1969

Box 4

1. Education, 1971-1974
2. Education; Minorities, 1971-1973
3. Financial issues of Detroit schools, 1963, 1969, 1971-1972
4. Grant, William; editorial materials, 1967-1974
5. MFT Detroit Teacher, DFT Newsletter, 1973-1974
6. Militancy Fund, 1964-1972
7. Morris, Gerald, 1973
8. Scrapbook Part 1, February 1947
9. Scrapbook Part 2, March 1947
10. Scrapbook Part 3, February & March 1947
11. Public Act 112, 1993-1994
12. Riordan, Mary Ellen, 1943, 1945, 1964
13. Schools- Disturbances, 1956, 1968-1971
14. Schools- Integration, 1967-1972
15. Selden, Dave vs Shanker, Albert, 1973-1974
16. Shurly, Dr. Burt R., 1937
17. Social Issues- Student, 1968-1975
18. Social Issues- Student Unrest, 1971

Box 5

1. Stiventon, V.; office manager materials, 1937-1943, 1949
2. Student Rights 1, 1960-1965
3. Student Rights 2, 1967
4. Student Rights 3, 1968
5. Student Rights 4, 1969
6. Student Rights 5, 1970-1973
7. Sweeney, Mrs. Florence, 1947-1951, 1963
8. *Teacher' Voice*, 1938-1939

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Series II

Box 5

9. "Auld Lang Syne-" biographies, 1968-1989
- 10-11. "Column Editorials/special features" 1958, 1961, 1966-1971
12. "Hot Stuff", 1963-1974
13. "Idea File", 1940s-1970s
14. "Materials for articles", 1955, 1971-1974
15. "More possibilities, good ideas, etc", 1971-1972
16. "Source of Commentary", 1965-1971
17. "Various Pilot Projects, Proposals, Experiments", 1968-1971
18. "Very groovy stuff" 1969-1972

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