

Grand Rapids History and Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding aid for the
William M. Glenn Papers
Collection # 049

September 2009 version

Abstract

The William Glenn Papers consist of the documents and images from the Grand Rapids, Michigan political activist William Melbourne Glenn, 1903-1986. In 1971, the Western Michigan Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union chose Glenn as its "Man of the Year" for his dedication and efforts in the causes of Civil Liberties. Glenn began his activism in 1941, having obtained the position as the first African American hired at Hayes Manufacturing Company in Grand Rapids, a position unique for Negroes during that time. However, Glenn lost this job in the 1950's, after an "unauthorized" trip to the Soviet Union. He went to court in an attempt to be reinstated, but was defeated by the McCarthyism of the time. So, he began his own construction firm. He also began to work for the rights of senior citizens, which he continued to the end of his life. He was a member of the Progressive Party, with security files maintained on him by government agencies. The bulk of the material here is from 1941-1986, and includes the Michigan State Police's Security Investigation Squad Glenn Files, 1952-1962 and Grand Rapids Urban League files 1962-1979. More recently, copies of FBI Documents on Glenn, ca. 1944-1966, have been added to the collection, obtained by Calvin College Professor Randal Jelks, under the Freedom of Information Act. The collection also includes images of national figures, such as George McGovern, probably during a 1972 President campaign visit, and the African American politician Shirley Chisholm.

Collection #: 049

Accession #: 1986.118; 1987.042; 2000.016

Donor: Virginia Glenn, 1986, 1987, 1990

Span dates: 1903-1986

Original processing date: August 1987.

Size: 8.13 linear ft. (97.5 inches)

Related Collections

Moving Images associated with this collection are housed in Coll. 175, the GRPL Moving Images Collection.

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
Box Inventory 9/2009		
1	Subject Files	blue standard
2	Subject Files	blue standard
3	Series II, III, IV, V	blue standard
4	Series V, VI	blue standard
5	scrapbooks	gray lid/w3.5x16x20
6	photographs	blue standard
7	slides	blue standard
8	slides	blue standard
9	slides	clam 3x15.5x10.5
10	slides	gray lid 3.5x17x12
11	FBI documents	slim
2000.016		
19-D-3	Oversize black scrapbook titled "William Glenn"—cover title.	
Videotapes from old films in Coll. 175.		

Processing Note:

The four reels of films, three 16mm and one 8mm, that are part of this collection are physically housed with the GRPL Moving Image Collection, #175. The first is of the 1963 March on Washington, plus miscellaneous subjects, including the plane flight. The third reel is of Glenn's trip to Europe, 1951, while the fourth is a Glenn discussion about housing. The March on Washington & the Trip to Europe, appear to have been reformatted to videotape. The collection was reprocessed with the donation of additional material in January 1990. This reprocessing consisted of rearranging a number of smaller series into a single larger Subject File series, organization of the photographs by subject heading and extensive revision of the finding aid.

Biography

William Melbourne Glenn was born on June 22, 1903 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His father, William M. Glenn, was first a coachman, later a chauffeur for W.H. Anderson, President of Fourth National Bank. His mother was Emma Cole. William M. Glenn married Virginia Burnett in 1937.

Some of Glenn's ancestors were black (African American), some white. As a result, Glenn learned of racial prejudice at an early age. Upon graduation from Central High School, the best job he could get was that of bellhop at the Pantlind Hotel in 1920. He worked for the Pantlind until 1941, when he obtained a job at the Hayes Manufacturing Company. Glenn was the first African American to be hired by Hayes, after the NAACP had broken the color barrier at the firm. Within a year, he had been elected Shop Steward, and then joined the UAW-CIO, becoming Plant Committee Chairman. He was also elected to the Kent County Industrial Council and given the responsibility of seeing that the fair employment practices laws were working in Grand Rapids. He revealed to the State Representative of the Fair Employment Practices Commission that Blacks were not being generally employed in local industries. Not long afterwards, Blacks were working at General Motors, American Seating, and several other local plants.

In 1951 William Glenn received a leave from Hayes to visit Europe with a group of union people. In Paris, several members of the group, including Glenn, decided to accept an invitation to visit the Soviet Union. When Glenn returned to New York, his passport was taken by the Immigration Department. As a result of the attention given to his unauthorized visit to the Soviet Union, he was discharged from Hayes. Glenn filed a grievance with the State, and his case went to arbitration. He won, and was re-instated by Hayes. A group of fellow employees, however, staged a sit-down strike, and refused to work with him, and he was again fired. More arbitration ensued but he was refused unemployment compensation. His lawyers finally decided that the hysteria caused at the time by Senator Joseph McCarthy and others prevented Glenn's case from having much hope for success.

As a result Glenn began a garage building business with a friend. This firm later developed into house repair/remodeling, as well as purchasing property, fixing it up, and reselling it. Once successful in business, Glenn also turned his attention to civic causes.

Glenn began agitating for senior housing in 1950, when he published a newspaper called the Civic Reminder, which lasted less than a year. He served on the Committee on Racial Equality and was president of the Grand Rapids chapter of the NAACP. He was chairman of the Housing Committee of the Grand Rapids Urban League under Paul Phillips, and was the first labor representative on the governing board of the Family Service Agency. He also was treasurer of Planned Parenthood.

In 1971, the Western Michigan Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union chose him as its "Man of the Year" for his dedication and efforts in the causes of Civil Liberties the citation reads. Upon retirement from business, Glenn turned his attention to helping the senior citizens. He was instrumental in organizing the local Concerned Senior Citizens, the XYZ Senior Citizens Center, and Senior Neighbors, Inc. During his later years, he acted as an ombudsman for senior citizens, both black and white. His assistance included housing, food, medical care, or even burial expenses.

Scope and Content

The bulk of the collection dates to the period, 1941 to 1986. It consists of Glenn's writings, correspondence, papers and government files, and letters to various editors, the thrust of Glenn's reform efforts are highlighted. Also included are records Glenn kept on the various organizations with which he worked. Over 1,400 slides and ca. 200 photographs illustrate Glenn's life, from family picnics to protest marches and senior citizen housing. The series are: 1) Subject Files, 2) Michigan State Police: Security Investigation Squad. Glenn File, 3) Concerned Senior Citizens, 4) Community Relations Commission, 5) Urban League, 6) Young and Old United, 7) Publications, 8) Clippings, 9) Scrapbooks, 10) Photographs, 11) Slides, and Film Reels.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Subject Files, 1914-83.

Consists of articles, speeches, and letters to editors, 1949 to 1970s. Includes a brief autobiographical sketch and address books maintained by William Glenn during the 1970s and 1980s. Also contains correspondence, 1947-1983, primarily related to Glenn's activities as an activist for senior citizens and housing, with a limited amount of personal correspondences from friends; Virginia Glenn's correspondence and membership lists related to the Michigan State Association of Colored Women's Clubs; the fifth grade notebooks of Glenn, which contains poems, favorite quotes, and short essays. Also includes essays and papers from Glenn's English 102 class at Grand Rapids Junior College; awards, letterheads from various groups and organizations with which Glenn was associated, and election flyers of both William and Virginia Glenn. And has records of William and Virginia Glenn's rental properties on Prospect and Jefferson streets in Grand Rapids.

Arranged alphabetically.

Series II. Michigan State Police Security Investigation Squad, 1952-62.

Copies from the State Police's "Red Squad" files on Glenn and his wife. This squad collected data on real or suspected Communist Party members, subversives and individuals considered a threat against society. Includes membership lists and copies of House Un-American Activities Committee testimony. Arranged alphabetically.

Series III. Concerned Senior Citizens, 1970-82, N.D.

By-laws, correspondence, media releases and notes of this agency, of which Glenn was a member. The agency, as its name implies, was an advocacy group for senior citizens. Arranged alphabetically.

Series IV. Urban League, 1962-79.

Consists of various records of the Urban League, and its pursuit of low-cost housing during the 1970s. Included is information on the Community Development Block Grant, miscellaneous reports, petitions, correspondence, resolutions, the Grand Rapids Model Village, and Glenn's notebook. The series reveals Glenn's pursuit of housing for the economically needy classes, especially the old and/or Black.

Arranged alphabetically.

Series V. Young and Old United (YOU), 1957-78.

Consists of Glenn's records regarding YOU. The series includes by-laws, correspondence (1972-1975), newsletters, minutes 1973-74, housing project proposals, general correspondence, press releases, Senior citizens housing, and sidewalk repair. The series reflects Glenn's influence in and on the community through his pursuit of senior citizen rights and causes. Arranged chronologically.

Series VI. Publications, 1940-78.

Consists of various surveys and reports on Grand Rapids, especially in regard to housing and Blacks, and handbooks and other information for senior citizens. Arranged alphabetically.

Series VII. Scrapbooks, c.1920-1983.

Consists of three scrapbooks. Volume 1, "William Glenn, This Is Your Life" was prepared by the Sub-Urban Club in 1983, and follows Glenn from the 1920s to the 1980s, containing many letters to the editor and other letters that reflect Glenn's position regarding the important issues of the day as he saw them. Volumes 2 and 3 contain Glenn clippings. Volume 2 deals with Senior Citizens, while volume 3 contains clippings on the Progressive Party and political issues. Arranged chronologically.

Series VIII. Photographs, c.1970, n.d.

Pictorials depict members of the Glenn family, Glenn's Russian trip, political protests, senior citizens and Grand Rapids housing. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Series IX. SLIDES, 1961-83.

Consists of slides made by Glenn from 1961 to 1983. Three special subject groupings head the series: 1962 Cuban Trip, 1963 March on Washington, and the 1965 Martin Luther King Parade, Grand Rapids. These are followed by the chronological arrangement of the slides from 1961 to 1983. These slides portray Glenn's lifestyle, shots of family or friends interspersed among demonstrations, senior citizens, slides of housing conditions, and organization in which he was active.

Series X. FBI Documents, ca. 1944-1966

Consists of Documents requested by Calvin College Professor Randal Jelks, under the Freedom of Information Act, including his correspondence. The documents are copies, most with some date, most with many blacked-out parts tracking Glenn's movements to Russia, and within the U.S. Includes documents on a passport obtained with the assistance of Gerald Ford, for a supposed trip to Europe, but actually to Russia.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
		Series I. Subject Files, 1914-1983.
1	1	Address book, 1978.
1	2	Articles and Speeches, c.1977.
1	3	Bergman, Francis and Walter, 1972-1979.
1	4-5	Correspondence, 1947,1967-68,1970-1974. 1975-81,c.1983.
1	6	Election Flyers, c.1970.
		Glenn material
1	7	Housing Committee, 1969-1975.
1	8	Senior Citizens Sub-committee, 1966-1976.
1	9	Cuba: Communism General information, c.1959, c.1970.
1	10	Cuban Trip Government Photos, n.d.
1	11	Demolition/Repair of housing, 1969,1971,1974.
1	12	Election File, 1975.
1	13-14	Biographical, 1959-1960,1961,1974,1951,c.1980.
1	15	Appeals, 1952.
1	16	Awards, Letterheads, Misc. 1935-1983.
1	17	Notebook, Grade 5, and Papers from English 101 and 102 Grand Rapids Junior College, 1914-1965.
1	18	Grand Rapids Politics, 1976.
2	1	Housing - General, 1965-1975.
2	2	Housing Maps, Misc. 1975.
2	3	Housing - Clippings, 1963-1980.
2	4	"Ideals", 1964-1985.
2	5	Letters to the Editor, 1973-1978.
2	6	Mayor's Central Committee, 1974-1975.
2	7	Miscellaneous, 1960-1970.
2	8	Political Organization, 1947,1971-1983.
2	9	Progressive Party, 1952.
2	10	"Project Seek", 1972.
2	11	Ransom Avenue Development Corp. Financial Records,1979-1982.
2	12	Ransom Avenue Development Corp. Legal Papers, 1972-1979.
2	13	Rental Property-Records, 1950,1978-1979.
2	14	"Russian Trip", (1952-1951).

Series I. Subject Files, 1914-1983, continued ...

- 2 15 Senior Citizens, 1967-1984.
- 2 16 Senior Neighbors, Inc. 1974-1982.
- 2 17 Vietnam War, 1965.
- 2 18-19 XYZ Center, 1966-1977, 1972-1973.

Series II. Michigan State Police Security Investigation Squad, 1952-1962.

- 3 1 Glenn File, 1955-62.
- 3 2 House Un-American Activities Testimony from Congressional Record, 1952.
- 3 3 Virginia Glenn, 1955-62.
- 3 4 William and Virginia Glenn, 1952.
- 3 5 Clippings from Detroit Times, 1952.

Series III. Concerned Senior Citizens, 1970-82, n.d.

- 3 6 By-Laws, n.d.
- 3 7 Correspondence, 1975-79.
- 3 8 Legislation, 1970-75.
- 3 9 Miscellaneous, 1976-82.
- 3 10 National CSC Correspondence, 1976-79.
- 3 11 Media, 1975-79.
- 3 12 Notebook, 1976.

Series IV. Urban League, 1962-79.

- 3 13 Community Development Block Grant, 1976-79.
- 3 14 Reports, 1969-76.
- 3 15 Model Village City or Grand Rapids, 1970-75.
- 3 16 Model Village Proposal to the Grand Rapids Foundation 1969.
- 3 17 Notebook, (1977).
- 3 18 Petitions and Correspondence, 1972-77.
- 3 19 Reports on Meetings, Resolutions, 1962-76.

Series V. Young and Old United, 1957-1978.

- 3 20 By-Laws c.1974.
- 3 21 Correspondence, 1972-75.
- 3 22 Members Correspondence/Newsletters,1973-75.
- 3 23 Housing Project Proposal, 1977.
- 4 1 Information, 1957-74.
- 4 2 Jackson Correspondence Data, 1973.
- 4 3 Minutes of the Executive Board, 1973-74.
- 4 4 Newsletters, 1972-73.
- 4 5 Press Releases, 1973.
- 4 6 Senior Citizens Housing, 1975-78.
- 4 7 Sidewalks, 1967-78.

Series VI. Publications, 1940-1978.

- 4 8 Crime Report Grand Rapids, 1960-62.
- 4 9 Housing Issue, 1974.
- 4 10 "Comprehensive Senior Citizens Service Project Proposal," 1968.
"West Michigan Regional Planning Committee, Grand Rapids and
Environs Transportation Study Annual Report," 1975.
"Michigan State Housing Development Authority; Annual Report," 1974
- 4 11 "A Manual for Grand Rapids Senior Citizens," 1968.
"Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Grand Rapids Annual Report," 1978.
"The Tenant Union Handbook," n.d.
- 4 12 "Negroes in Grand Rapids," 1959.
- 4 13 "Negro Population of Grand Rapids: A Social Study," 1940.
- 4 14 "A Survey of Senior Adults Services in Churches in Kent County," c.
1965.
"Campau Area Survey, Annual Report," [1965].

Series VII. Scrapbooks, c.1920-1983.

- 19-D-3 OVE Unboxed.
- vol. 1 "William Glenn, This is Your Life." [12/4/2000]
- 5 vol. 2 "Senior Citizens."
- vol. 3 "Progressive Party/Politics."
- 1 Civic Reminder, Vol. 1 Nos. 2-4, 1950.
[Also fnd. Misc. manuscript items and 2 oversized photos in the box.
Needs smaller boxed. 8/31/2000.]

Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d.

6	1	Campau Commons, ca.1970. (4)
6	2	Commercial buildings, ca.1970. (1)
6	3	Creston Commons, ca.1970. (1)
6	4	Demonstrations, 1970s. (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interior. Political convention, with “Michigan” delegation sign in the foreground.• War protest at the Calder. People with signs, man in a wheelchair with an “end the war” sign. (2)
6	5	Glenn’s Dog, n.d. (4)
6	6	Farmsteads, including a barn & old house ca.1970. (6)
6	7	Floods, n.d. ((1)

6	8	Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d. Houses. Identified, c.1970 702 Bates, SE (1) 628 Cass, SE (1) 636 Cass, SE (1) 714 Cass, SE (1) 401 Coldbrook, NE (2) 516 College, SE (1) 715, 719, 723, 727 Dykema Ct., SE (1) 1220 Euclid, SE (1) 170 Grand, NE (1) 449-451 Jefferson, SE (1) 523 Jefferson, SE (1) 1057-1059 Jefferson, SE (1) 463-465 Lafayette, SE (3) 563 Lafayette, SE (1) (burned, 2/12/1973) 607 Lafayette, SE (1) 568 Morris, SE (1) 608 Paris SE (1) 300 Prospect, SE (1)(block) 328 Prospect, SE (1) 328/330 Prospect, SE (1) 330 Prospect, SE (1) 332 Prospect, SE (1) 336 Prospect, SE (1) 337 Prospect, SE (1) 611 Sheldon, SE (2) 716 Thomas, SE (printed reversed)(1) 742 Thomas, SE (1) 624 Union, SE (2) 734-735 VanderVeen Ct., SE (1)
6	9	Houses. Unidentified, c.1970. (20)

Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d.

- 6 10 People. Chisholm, Shirley, ca.1970. (1)
- 6 11 People. Glenn, Virginia, n.d. (2)
- Virginia Glenn seated with dog at her feet.
 - Virginia Glenn seated, with dog standing in front of her. Dog is heeding William Glenn, who is visible at the left, pointing a finger at the dog.
- 6 12 People. Glenn, William, n.d. (5 b/w, 2 color)
- Color snapshot of William Glenn seated left, on a blue sofa, with an unidentified African American man at his right.
 - Color view of elder Glenn, wearing a plaid jacket.
 - The child, Bill Glenn, with a collie dog.
 - Elder Glenn speaking to African American children at unidentified school classroom. “How a bill becomes a law” display on the bulletin board behind him.
 - Older Glenn seated at a desk with his back to the camera, speaking on the telephone. A map is on the wall above the desk.
 - Small original photo and 8x10 copy photo, both of William Glenn in uniform, standing on the street outside the Pantlind Hotel.
- 6 13 People. Glenn, Virginia, William, family, n.d. (7 12/2/2004)
- Unidentified African American woman in a straw hat, standing with a bicycle. Posed photo.
 - Oval photo of child with curls, and woman, said to be William Glenn and his mother.
 - Young African American Woman. Aledo, Ill. Photographer. “16 years old 1887, came to Grand Rapids”—note on verso.
 - African American Woman. Ferber, Aledo, Ill (photographer) “Born Nov. 1, 1883”—verso note.
 - Couple seated on sofa, looking at House & Garden magazine.
 - Interior, 2 African American couples standing in an unidentified interior, in front of a fireplace. (2 sizes)
- 6 14 People. Groups, n.d. (1 color photo, 2 b/w photos, 1 photocopy)
- Contact print of Glenn seen on the right of Gerald Ford, in front of the U.S. flag, group photo, with 7 women. “Best wishes Jerry Ford” inscribed on front of image. [Note. Original photo in SAFE.]
 - Glenn on second row third from left. Unidentified group. Earl E. Spielmacher photo.
 - Color photo of Glenn in a group, seated, behind two women.
- 6 15 People. Hayes Body Co. employees, ca. 1950. (2)
Exterior view with group standing in front of brick building.
- 6 16 People. Lasha, Myrtle Craig, n.d. (1)

Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d.

- 6 17 People. Melder, Frank, n.d. (2)
6 18 People. McGovern, George, ca. 1970-1972. (1) George McGovern at
microphones during an outside rally(?), with an unidentified African
American man standing at McGovern's left.

Note: McGovern was previous misidentified as Eugene McCarthy,

- 6 19 People. Senior Citizens. (19 b/w, 3 color)
Includes three or four views of groups meeting, includes a group in a boat
on the water, group in costume dancing,
6 20 People. Senior citizens, n.d. (30)
 - Staff member at desk with sign, Esther Mojica.
 - Exterior view of window with sign "The Xtra years of Zest Center
for Retired Citizens".
 - Another view of the window and sign, with man (Glenn?) standing
in front of the window. Cross Bros. Photos stamp on verso.
 - African American woman, standing on porch steps near front door
of house. Verso ID: Mrs. Clara Keeney.

6 21

Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d.

People. Unidentified, n.d. (19)

- Elder woman in lace collar
- Two African American males seated at a desk, one in a folding chair.
- Office, with 6 people. One woman seated in front of a filing cabinet. Two men seated at desks. One man standing. Two men seated at left in folding chairs.
- Woman in foreground 1960's type hair and dress.
- Woman wearing glasses standing with hands on shoulders of child in front of her, in front of a brick house.
- Older man, dress shirt, tie, glasses, pens in shirt pocket.
- Old Woman (Extra Years of Zest)
- Interior. Woman at desk, two women behind her standing.
- Interior. African American boy seated in a chair. White woman in flowered dress talking to him at eye level, small girl in flowered dress on the move behind woman.
- African American nurse, white doctor(?), medical tray & utensils
- Group of small children "Cuban Children"—verso note.
- Older woman doctor(?) examining a young African American child (girl), in medical office.
- 2 portrait photos of unidentified African American woman, ca. 1950s-1960s?
- Unidentified African American woman seated in an arm chair.
- African American woman seated at a desk, window and blinds at right, ca. 1940s-1950's.
- Dup. Of photo in Folder 14. Glenn in unidentified group.
- Glenn(?) center back row of group. Two men and two women seated at table in front. 7 men standing behind them.
- Man in suit seated in office, eggs, meat and Muller milk in bottle on table beside him.

Series VIII. Photographs, ca. 1970, n.d.

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 6 | 22 | Ransom Towers, n.d. (2 color, 1 b/w)
Residential building across Ransom Street from the Main Grand Rapids Public Library building. |
| 6 | 23 | Russia, 1951. (15)
Group photos mostly. A couple of purchased views, but most items are snapshots of the group with scenes of buildings behind them.
1. Tour group with large crenellated building behind them. Glenn is believed to be the lighter colored African American in the back row. |
| 6 | 24 | Scenes. Unidentified, n.d. (5) |
| 6 | 25 | Copy Negatives, n.d. (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glenn jazz band• Virginia Glenn's Native American grandfather and uncle (child). |

Series IX. Slides, 1961-1980.

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 7 | vol. 4 | Cuban Trip, n.d.
1963 March on Washington.
Martin Luther King Parade, Grand Rapids, 1965. |
| | vol. 5 | Protests, Grand Rapids, 1961-64. |
| 8 | vol. 6 | Protests, Grand Rapids, 1965-70. |
| | vol. 7 | Protests, Grand Rapids, 1970-72. |

Holder #

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|----|-------|---|
| 9 | 1-9 | 1972-78. |
| 10 | 7-8 | 1972-80. |
| 10 | 9 | Senior Citizens Party.
Lumber Yard.
Housing |
| 10 | 10-12 | Housing |

Series X. FBI Documents

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|
| 11 | x | FBI Documents, 1944-1964. |
|----|---|---------------------------|

Series XI. Moving Images.

16 mm. Film, videotapes

A usage videotape of these old films is housed in GRPL Moving Images Collection at 175-UT5-71 (10/26/2006). Items 1-3 have been reformatted to videotape. The Sony Betacam version is marked 175-MT9 (10/26/2006)

Old Collection markings	175 Video markings
33-1 Box 5, V85	1963 March on Washington, D.C
33-2 Box 5, V85	1963 March on Washington, D.C.
33-3 Box 5, V85	Glenn's Trip to Europe, 1951.
33-4	Glenn debate in housing, n.d.

Note: Latest designated location for the Glenn films is FM025, Film Master Box 25, unverified. 10/26/2006. Coll. 175 is in revision, and locations given here may no longer be current.