

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

Grand Rapids Citizens League Papers

Collection # 051

September 2009 version

Abstract

The Citizens Action League Papers and records document the activities of this citizens group in Grand Rapids and Kent County, Michigan, 1916-1926. With the goal of better government, the League led the drive for the city commission / manager form of government. With adoption of said governmental form, the League turned its attention to preserving it against attack, and supporting prohibition and other "moral issues." The League was dissolved in 1926, having lost most of its membership. Included are minutes, bylaws, correspondence, committee files, subject files, and various government related publications and documents.

Note: There have been a couple citizens leagues in Grand Rapids history. The one in existence in 2008, uses the name of "Citizens League of Greater Grand Rapids". The unprocessed materials listed with the Box Summary in this finding aid, are believed to represent one of those later Citizen's organization. The later citizens leagues may have a similar, but not necessarily identical mission, as the earlier league.

Collection #: 051

Accession #: 1985.026, 1986.074 ; 1997.003 Unprocessed.

Donor: Grand Rapids Citizens League, 1926

Span dates: 1916-1926

Processor: William C. Black, November 1987; finding aid reformatted by Richard H. Harms, December 1996; Note on additional unprocessed materials added, Oct. 1999.  
Box Summary, Marcella Beck, August 31,2000.

Size: 25.8 linear ft. (310 inches)

Related Collections

Coll. 104 Dorothy Judd Collection.

Box Summary

| Box No.                         | Description of Contents     | Box Description |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Box Inventory 9/2009            |                             |                 |
| 1                               | organization                | standard legal  |
| 2                               | organization                | standard legal  |
| 3                               | organization                | standard legal  |
| 4                               | organization                | standard legal  |
| 5                               | organization                | standard legal  |
| 6                               | organization/administration | standard legal  |
| 7                               | admin                       | standard legal  |
| 8                               | admin                       | standard legal  |
| 9                               | admin                       | standard legal  |
| 10                              | admin                       | standard legal  |
| 11                              | admin                       | standard legal  |
| 12                              | admin/governmental agencies | standard legal  |
| 13                              | gov. agencies               | standard legal  |
| 14                              | gov. agencies               | standard legal  |
| 15                              | gov. agencies               | standard legal  |
| 16                              | gov. agencies/policies      | standard legal  |
| 17                              | gov. policies               | standard legal  |
| 18                              | gov. policies               | standard legal  |
| 19                              | gov. policies               | standard legal  |
| 20                              | various subjects            | standard legal  |
| 21                              | various subjects            | standard legal  |
| 22                              | xx                          | slim flip legal |
| Unprocessed from Old Collection |                             |                 |
| 23                              | G16                         | Folio clam      |
| 24                              | G16                         | 3" print        |
| Added 2/5/2003                  |                             |                 |

Box Summary

| Box No.   | Description of Contents | Box Description       |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Unprocessed Accession 1997.033 also shelved at Coll. 051. 1997.003. See Archivist<br>Currently has separate box numbering and no inventory. |                         |                       |
| 1   | 1997.003                | standard legal        |
| 2   |                         | standard legal        |
| 3   |                         | standard legal        |
| 4   |                         | standard legal        |
| 5   |                         | standard legal        |
| 6   |                         | standard legal        |
| 7   | 1997.003                | standard legal        |
| 8   |                         | standard legal        |
| 9   |                         | standard legal        |
| 10  |                         | standard legal        |
| 11  |                         | standard legal        |
| 12  | 1997.003                | standard legal        |
| 13  |                         | standard legal        |
| 14  |                         | standard legal        |
| 15  |                         | standard legal        |
| 16  |                         | standard legal        |
| 17  |                         | standard legal        |
| 18  | 1997.003                | standard legal        |
| 19  |                         | standard legal        |
| 20  |                         | standard legal        |
| 21  |                         | standard legal        |
| 22/175AV  |                         | Odd white w handles   |
| 23  |                         | cubic                 |
| 24  |                         | standard legal        |
| 25  |                         | blue standard handles |
| 26  |                         | slim legal            |
| 27  |                         | cubic                 |
| 28  |                         | cubic                 |
| 29  |                         | folio clam            |

## History

The Grand Rapids Citizens League was formed in 1918 with the purpose of insuring the success of the Commission-Manager form of city government. The Leagues' belief was that the operation of this form of government required the election of qualified public candidates to run this modern, business-like government. Roy C. Hattan, formerly assistant city attorney, was elected secretary and effectively functioned as the chief executive officer of the League. Hattan and his successor, Russel F. Griffin, attempted to have elected those candidates who best exemplified the ideals of the Citizens League. The League, through the early 1920s, became embroiled in local politics on all levels, joining in name-calling, deal making, and other facets of local politics as then existed.

The League adopted the cause of Prohibition, and fought for its passage and continued to support the efforts to eradicate illegal boot-legging and production. The League was generally supportive of efforts to apply "moral" standards to governmental issues, but these standards often were not supported by the greater part of the electorate. By 1926, support for the League had waned, and in the fall of 1926, the League was dissolved, and its records donated to the Grand Rapids Public Library.

Note: An earlier group, called the Citizens Alliance of Grand Rapids, appears to be a union labor organization, rather than a political oversight organization, such as the Citizens League. For items from the Citizens Alliance, see Coll. 263.

## Scope and Content

The collection documents the efforts of the Grand Rapids Citizens League, 1917-1926. Through the five series, the daily workings and long range plans and goals of the League are presented. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, in-coming and out-going. Also represented within the collection is a considerable amount of charts, surveys, and other such data.

Series Descriptions

**Series I. Organization.**

Arranged chronologically.

Consists of the files on the organization of the Citizens League, and the major committees and boards that were responsible for its operation. Included are the minutes and correspondence of the Executive Board, the primary policy setting body. The minutes and correspondence of the Finance Committee are also included in the series. The personal correspondence of Robert Griffin, executive secretary of the League, 1922-6, is included as is correspondence of the Municipal Measures Committee, Publicity Committee, Membership Committee, Social Betterment Committee, and the Advisory Council. This series is especially revealing in the formation and internal conflicts and compromises that was the Citizens League.

**Series II. Administration.**

Arranged chronologically.

Consists of the records of the daily administration of the League. Included in the series is the correspondence relating to the election campaigns of 1917-25, including campaign methods, endorsement of candidates, and expenses. A complete run of the Sentinel is included, data on public meetings, mailing and other lists, and office management and audit and budget information.

**Series III. Governmental Agencies.**

Arranged chronologically.

The series consists of the League's records and data on the operations of various city and county governmental departments. Included under Kent County are: Work farm, Purchasing Agent, Domestic Relations Court and Juvenile Detention Home. City departments include Service, Safety, Welfare, Purchasing, Legal, Art Museum and Library, and others. Especially important in the series are the records and correspondence in re Primary election, 1918-1926, and correspondence concerning the Commission Manager Form of Government. This series gives a view of the city's workings, and the League's opinions of them. The election materials are especially revealing of League involvement in the local politics, the League's foes as well as allies.

**Series IV. Governmental Policies**

Arranged chronologically.

Consists primarily of League correspondence on matters Of government policies, including charters and amendments, city plans, county commission form of government, budgets and surveys, county home rule, and annexation. The material on the charter amendment campaigns provides especially useful information on the politics and political factions contesting control of the city, and the extents to which they waged their campaigns.

**Series V. Various Subjects**

Arranged chronologically.

The series consists of the subject files of the League, containing most notably files on: the Public Utility Franchises, Roads, Elections, National Affairs (post-war), Coal Supply, Equal Suffrage, and Prohibition. The files on the utilities include gas, telephone, inter-urban & street railway, including comparisons with costs in other cities. The files on national affairs, including war programs, reconstruction, and high cost of living are of importance in portraying ideas of Grand Rapidsians, as exemplified through the League, in re these post-war issues.

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**Series I. Organization.**

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