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The Union Settlement Association Records, 1896-1994 MS# 1149

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SUMMARY INFORMATION

Creator

Union Settlement Association

Title and dates

Union Settlement Association Records, 1896-1994

Abstract

The Union Settlement Association Records document a century of the settlement's activities, and provide a unique view of the first wave of the settlement movement in America. They document social conditions, demographic change, political activity, philanthropy and social work in East Harlem with a strong emphasis on the urban renewal period of the 1950s and '60s. The records include: annual reports, board minutes and committee files, headworker and executive director files, program reports, community organization files, and visual materials such as photographs, maps and architectural drawings.

Size

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History of the Union Settlement Association

During the late 1800s Manhattan's East Harlem experienced a dramatic increase in population and economic activity as transportation lines were extended into the area and new housing was constructed. Successive waves of Irish, German, Jewish and Italian immigrants moved into tenement buildings and formed a vital community, establishing small businesses, benevolent societies and fraternal organizations. But the dense concentration of population also gave rise to a host of urban problems: poor housing, inadequate health care, lack of educational opportunities, and crime.

A similar increase in the social problems attending urban growth led reformers and philanthropists in England to establish Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house, in 1884. Originally distinguished by the commitment of educated upper and middle-class volunteers to "settle" in working class communities in order to understand their problems first-hand, the settlement model was imported to the United States in 1886 when Neighborhood Guild was established on New York's lower east side. American settlement houses were in the vanguard of efforts to provide social services in their neighborhoods through such programs as kindergartens, day care, hot lunches, health clinics, visiting nurses, camps, playgrounds and arts education. In addition, the settlements joined Progressive-era reform movements for improved housing, public health, and sanitation.

In 1893 members of the Alumni Club of Union Theological Seminary decided to establish a settlement house, and chose the growing neighborhood of East Harlem as the site for their work. In May of 1895, Seminary alumni William McCord and William T. Holmes moved into a second floor tenement at 202 East 96th Street. Within a year the settlement moved to larger quarters at 237 East 104th Street, where it remains to this day. With McCord as its first headworker, Union Settlement established a kindergarten and penny provident bank, maintained a public playground, and hosted clubs for adults and children. McCord was succeeded in 1901 by Gaylord S. White, who oversaw an expansion of activities to include summer camps, housing and health investigations, a music school, and the hosting of a nursing center operated by Henry Street Settlement. With its growing programs the settlement was soon cramped for space; a new building was erected and opened in 1913.

During the 1920s and '30s East Harlem's demography began to change as African-Americans and Puerto Ricans moved into the neighborhood. A significant number of Italian families remained in the area as well. This predominantly working class community was hit hard by the depression, and Union Settlement responded by establishing such programs as aid for the unemployed, a

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cooperative grocery, and a nursery school. The settlement was led during this period by Helen Harris, who later served as Director of United Neighborhood Houses. Harris was succeeded in 1940 by Clyde Murray, who worked during his tenure for the integration of an increasingly diverse East Harlem community through leadership in such organizations as East Harlem Council for Community Planning (originally founded at Union Settlement in 1912 as South Harlem Neighborhood Association); by expanding settlement programs to include consumer education, senior citizen activities; and through the incorporation of the formerly independent Sunnyside Day Nursery into Union Settlement.

During the 1950s and '60s East Harlem was the site of extensive construction of low-income public housing projects. Under the leadership of William Kirk, Union Settlement developed new programs to serve the changing community, such as a credit union, College Readiness (later federally funded as Upward Bound), Head Start, and services based in public housing facilities such as the Union-Washington Community Center at George Washington Houses. Established programs were expanded as well, including senior services and music education, the latter run during this period by the dynamic Blake Hobbs. Once again the growth of settlement activities demanded additional space. As part of a complex including the Leggett Memorial Children's Center and Gaylord White House, a new Union Settlement building was completed in 1964. In addition to expanding programs and services, Union Settlement led efforts to involve East Harlem residents in planning of urban development in the area. The East Harlem Project, run jointly with James Weldon Johnson Community Centers Inc., fostered citizen participation in urban planning around such issues as housing and schools. The settlement also worked with community organizations like the Metro-North Association and Massive Economic Neighborhood Development to plan additional social services and housing development in East Harlem.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, Union Settlement has continued to develop innovative programs for East Harlem residents, such as Settlement Home Care, providing home attendants for over 400 homebound elderly; adult education focusing on English as a Second Language; and co-sponsorship of Project Linkage, a senior housing with social programs; mental health counseling; and services for the HIV+ population through the East Harlem HIV+ Care Network. Executive Director Eugene Sklar, who first joined the settlement staff during the 1950s, now oversees the work of a thriving settlement beginning its second century in East Harlem.

Description

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The origins and early history of Union Settlement Association are documented by publicity brochures, annual reports, board minutes, and headworker correspondence, included in the "Administration" and "Board of Directors" series. These items are supplemented by photographs and scrapbooks in the "Audio-Visual Materials" series, and by several printed histories filed in "Administration."

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The impact of public housing development on East Harlem is well documented by records in the "William Kirk Files" and "Administration" series. In addition to records of Union Settlement sponsored programs and activities such as the East Harlem Project and the Franklin Plaza housing co-op, there are extensive files on such community organizations as the East Harlem Schools Committee, Massive Economic Neighborhood Development, Metro-North Association and Metro North East Harlem Housing Society. The "Board of Directors" series contains committee files, reports and correspondence that provide additional insight on the period and the development of settlement programs in response to community change.

Arrangement

The records are arranged in eight series:

Series I: Administration, 1896-1995	Pages 8-10
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Series V: William Kirk Files, 1953-1971	Pages 13-17
Series VI: Albert Mayer Files, 1960-1976	Page 17
Series VII: Programs and Services, 1901-1995	Pages 17-21
Series VIII: Audio-Visual Material, ca. 1900-1994	Pages 21-22

Series I: Administration, 1896-1995

Includes brochures and promotional material, budgets and financial statements, correspondence and biographical information on headworkers Gaylord S. White and Clyde Murray, publications, reports, records of East Harlem community organizations, and staff meeting minutes. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series II: Board of Directors, 1898-1980

Includes correspondence, committee records, minutes and memos, member rosters and biographical information. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series III: Nora Bowens Files, 1957-1971

Records of Director of the East Harlem Project include community organization minutes, correspondence, program planning files, reports. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series IV: Fundraising, 1914-1970

Includes appeals, benefit records, foundation correspondence. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series V: William Kirk Files, 1953-1971

Records of Executive Director include correspondence, memos, program reports and planning files, community organization minutes and correspondence, United Neighborhood Houses files. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series VI: Albert Mayer Files, 1960-1976

Records of architect and urban planner who worked on Franklin Plaza and other East Harlem developments. Includes correspondence with Union Settlement, and project files. Files arranged

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alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically. Architectural drawings by Mayer are included in "Series VIII - Audio-Visual Materials," described below.

Series VII: Programs and Services, 1901-1995

Includes correspondence, memos, reports, statistical and narrative reports, proposals, flyers and announcements. Also includes program case files that are restricted; see page 1 for additional information. Files arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series VIII: Audio-Visual Material, ca. 1900-1994

Includes black and white photographs, posters, maps, architectural drawings and scrapbooks. Materials arranged alphabetically by subject, and chronologically when possible.

ACCESS AND USE

Access

The following boxes are located off-site: 1-59. You will need to request this material from the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

Boxes 53-59 contain program records of a confidential nature and are closed to researchers, with the exception of Union Settlement Association staff, board members, or their approved agents, until 2050. All other records are open to research

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Curator for Manuscripts, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML). The RBML approves permission to publish that which it physically owns; the responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

Other Finding Aids

Additional Union Settlement Association materials are held by the following institutions: The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of The New York Public Library; Social Welfare History Archives of The University of Minnesota; and Union Theological Seminary.

ACQUISITION AND APPRAISAL

Provenance and Acquisition

Gift of the Directors of the Union Settlement Association Board of Directors, 1994.

Accrual of Records

No additions are expected.

PROCESSING AND OTHER INFORMATION

Processing Information

The records were processed and this finding aid prepared by James Moske and Holly MacCammon of LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, with funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

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Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid adheres to that prescribed by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*

Encoding

Finding aid written in English.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Union Settlement Association Records; Box and F.; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

Subject Headings

These papers have been indexed in the Columbia University Library online catalog using the following terms. Those seeking related materials should search under these terms.

Administrative records.
Agendas.
Announcements.
Annual reports.
Architectural drawings.
Blueprints.
Brochures.
Budgets.
Case files.
Child welfare workers.
Community centers--New York (N.Y.).
Contracts.
East Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--History.
Financial records.
Fliers (printed matter).
Human services--New York (N.Y.).
Immigrants--New York (N.Y.).
Interviews.
Lists.
Manuals.
Maps.
Memorandums.
Minutes.
Newsletters.
New York (N.Y.)--History.
New York (N.Y.)--Social Conditions.
Organizational charts.
Photographs.
Plans (drawings).
Posters.
Public housing--New York (N.Y.).
Reports.
Rosters.

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Scrapbooks.

Social service--New York (N.Y.).

Social settlements--New York (N.Y.).

Social workers.

Social work--New York (N.Y.).

Union Theological Seminary (New York, N.Y.).

United Neighborhood Houses of New York, Inc. (New York, N.Y.).

Welfare--New York (N.Y.).

Women social workers.

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