
Guide to the Reverend Wendell L. Miller Collection

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Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives

Title: Reverend Wendell L. Miller Collection

Creator: Miller, Wendell L., 1902-1999

Identifier/Call Number: URB.WLM

Extent: 1.06 linear feet

Date (inclusive): 1928-1988

Abstract: Reverend Wendell L. Miller was pastor of the University Methodist Church, Los Angeles. He became involved in local politics when gambling and prostitution began edging toward the area surrounding the University of Southern California (USC) campus. Miller founded the Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C.), which also campaigned against crime and corruption in City Hall, ultimately resulting in the recall of Mayor Frank L. Shaw. The collection documents Miller's involvement with C.I.V.I.C., and includes announcements, bulletins, correspondence, newspaper clippings, news releases, pamphlets, radio addresses, speeches, statements, and related items. There is also a small amount of material documenting Rev. Miller's anti-war activities including letters from Japanese Americans sent to internment camps during World War II.

Language of Material: English

Biographical Information:

Reverend Wendell L. Miller, pastor of the University Methodist Church, Los Angeles, was born in Albion, Nebraska on April 16, 1902. After graduating from Albion High School, Miller attended Nebraska Wesleyan University, graduating in 1927, with an A.B. degree in Psychology. Miller and his wife, Thelma, moved to Los Angeles when Miller enrolled in an M.A. program at the University of Southern California. He graduated in 1932, and his first ministry was in Los Angeles Harbor where he worked to serve the needs of unemployed dock workers.

In 1937, Miller became involved in Los Angeles politics as gambling and prostitution began edging toward the USC campus community. At the behest of several parishioners, Miller began holding community-wide meetings, and founded the Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C.). Clifford Clinton, owner of Clifton's Cafeteria, became the financial backer and first chairman of the Committee.

Gaining major attention from the mayor's office, the police department, and organized crime, the organization stepped up its publicity campaign against crime and corruption in City Hall. When Mayor Frank L. Shaw denied publicly that houses of prostitution and gambling were a major problem in the city, the organization quickly began a recall campaign to oust the mayor and his friends. The recall was successful and several members of C.I.V.I.C., including Miller, convinced Judge Fletcher Bowron to run for mayor. Shortly after Bowron's successful mayoral campaign, C.I.V.I.C. ended its activities.

In 1954, Miller left University Church to begin a lecturing career in adult education, and a new ministry at Manhattan Beach Community Church which lasted twelve years. During his ministry at Community Church, Miller caught the attention of local members of the John Birch Society. In the early 1960s, the Birch Society published a pamphlet listing Miller as a communist along with such notable figures as Eleanor Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Margaret Mead.

Miller left Manhattan Beach in 1967, and settled in Palos Verdes. He became the Minister of Visitation of his local church until his retirement. Reverend Wendell L. Miller died at the age of 97 on November 9, 1999.

Scope and Contents

The *Reverend Wendell L. Miller Collection* documents Miller's career, including his early days as a minister in Harbor City, his time as minister of the University Methodist Church at the University of Southern California, and his work at the Manhattan Beach Community Church. The collection also documents Miller's involvement with the Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C.), founded in the late 1930s to prevent the spread of gambling and prostitution in Los Angeles. Miller's anti-war activities are also documented. The collection includes announcements, bulletins, correspondence, newspaper clippings, news releases, pamphlets, radio addresses, speeches, statements, and related items. It consists of four series: **Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee Files** (1936-1967), **Japanese Internment Files** (1942-1943), **Political and Religious Activity Files** (1937-1961), and **Non-Manuscript Material** (1928-1988).

Series I, **Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C.) Files**, documents C.I.V.I.C.'s campaign to end political corruption, gambling, and prostitution in Los Angeles in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and includes documentation of charges of communism leveled against Clifford Clinton, C.I.V.I.C. Chairman and an outspoken reformist with whom Miller worked closely. The series also documents the 1938 recall campaign against Mayor Frank L. Shaw, and the campaign of Mayor Fletcher Bowron. It consists of advertisements, correspondence, editorials, flyers, lists of prostitution houses, newspaper clippings, news releases, pamphlets, radio addresses, and statements, and is arranged alphabetically.

Series II, **Japanese Internment Files**, contains correspondence and newspaper clippings documenting Miller's involvement with relocated Japanese Americans during World War II. It includes letters condemning Miller and other members of his church for assisting Japanese Americans en route to various internment camps, as well as letters from Japanese Americans thanking Miller for his support and camp visits . The series is arranged chronologically.

Series III, **Political and Religious Activity Files**, documents Miller's political work, labor reform efforts, anti-war interests, and church activities. It includes a pamphlet from 1950 in which Miller and five other religious leaders wrote about the hydrogen bomb's implications, and a 1961 document titled "A Report on the Manhattan Beach Community Church" that accuses Miller and others of being radical communists. The series includes bulletins, correspondence, pamphlets, reports, and propositions, and is arranged alphabetically.

Series IV, **Non-Manuscript Material**, includes Miller's scrapbook of news articles, correspondence, pamphlets, portraits, advertisements, and religious work from throughout his life and career. The series also contains several photos from anti-war campaigns during World War II, and some oversized posters and news articles.

Arrangement of Materials:

Series I: Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C) Files, 1936-1967

Series II: Japanese Internment Files, 1942-1943

Series III: Political and Religious Activity Files, 1937-1961

Series IV: Non-Manuscript Material, 1928-1988

Electronic Format:

Digital reproductions of selected items in this collection are available electronically as a part of the [CSU Japanese American Digitization Project](#) .

Related Material

[Gilbert G. Benjamin, Jr. Subversive Activities Collection](#)

[Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 1](#)

[Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 2](#)

Conditions Governing Access:

The collection is open for research use.

Conditions Governing Use:

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For information about citing items in this collection consult the appropriate style manual, or see the [Citing Archival Materials](#) guide.

Processing Information:

Robert. G. Marshall and Thomas L. Davis, 1996

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Documents

Photographs

Scrapbooks

Audiovisual materials

Series I: Citizens Independent Vice Investigating Committee (C.I.V.I.C) Files, 1936-1967

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Box 1, Folder 3	Bowron for Mayor Committee (Carl C. Hoskin, Chairman): correspondence, September 1935, November-December 1939
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Box 1, Folder 6	The Church Layman's Committee for Good Government: correspondence, 1937 April 29, September 1938
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Box 1, Folder 8	C.I.V.I.C.: "Face the Facts," pamphlet
Box 1, Folder 9	C.I.V.I.C. - Clearing House Committee: Report #5 - Anti-vice Strategy!
Box 1, Folder 10	The CIVIC Committee: news release regarding Mayor Fletcher Bowron
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Box 1, Folder 13	Clinton, Clifford E., (CIVIC Chairman): correspondence, 1938 December 15
Box 1, Folder 14	Clinton, Clifford E.: "Bombing the Lid Off Los Angeles!" Parts 1 and 2, <i>Official Detective Stories</i>, 1938 May 25
Box 1, Folder 15	Clinton, Clifford E.: "Clifton' Food Poison Probe Believed Recall Motive," <i>Los Angeles Progressive Digest</i>, 1938 April 4
Box 1, Folder 16	Clinton, Clifford E.: "Reasons for Recall of Mayor Frank L. Shaw," flyer; pamphlet, February 1938
Box 1, Folder 17	Clinton, Clifford E.: "The Truth Will Set You Free," flyer
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Box 1, Folder 34	KFVD Radio: address, 1937 December 8
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Folder 1, Item 2	"Bowron's Backers Exposed," <i>The Los Angeles Club Reporter</i>, Vol. 1 No. 8, 1938 September 15
Folder 1, Item 3	"Recall or Recovery?" Advertisement, <i>The Highland Park Post Dispatch</i>, 1938 September 9
Folder 1, Item 4	"Big Shots of The C.I.V.I.C." <i>The Equalizer</i>, September 1937
