Business Women's Legislative Council of California records: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by David P. Levitus.
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Overview of the Collection

Title: Business Women's Legislative Council of California records.
Dates (inclusive): 1927-1943
Collection Number: mssBusiness Women's Legislative Council
Creator: Business Women's Legislative Council of California.
Extent: 339 items in 1 box
Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department
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Abstract: This collection consists of letters and documents that form a portion of the Business Women's Legislative Council of California's records and chiefly document the organization, maintenance and activities of the Council from 1929-1936 and 1938-1943. Notable correspondence includes letters from elected officials as well as candidates in California and the governors of nearly all states in response to questions about their positions on "equal rights for women wage-earners."

Language: English.

Access
Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

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Preferred Citation

Provenance

Historical Note
Founded in 1927 under the leadership of Sue Brobst, the Business Women's Legislative Council of California worked to bring about and maintain equal rights for women in the workplace until the group folded in the mid 1940s. In its own words, the BWLCC's purpose was to bring about and maintain equal opportunity under the law for men and women in the business world; and to oppose discriminatory legislation against women engaged in gainful occupations." At its start, the organization principally advocated against "protective laws" limiting women’s work hours to the daytime and a maximum of eight hours per day. Passed to help wage workers, the BWLCC took offense on principal to the law’s apparently unequal treatment of women and men. They also argued that the law prevented women engaged in business and the professions from putting in the long hours required for success. Like their counterparts nationally, they received support from business interests like the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and Merchants and Manufacturers Association and eventually the Republican Party. Opposition came from those in the "labor-liberal" and "social feminist" camp such as Franklin Roosevelt, his wife Eleanor Roosevelt, and his Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who saw protective legislation for women as a key stepping stone to legislation protecting all laborers.

At cursory glance it also seems that between the early 1930s and the late 1930s, the membership began to include more teachers and workers. At the same time, business and professional women’s clubs tended to drop their membership. At all times, however, the group drew members mostly from the Los Angeles area despite its statewide aspirations. Initially, some members came from San Diego for instance but membership was generally concentrated in the white, Anglo, Protestant enclaves in West Adams, Glendale and the San Gabriel Valley. In the late 1930s, the first Jewish names appear as board members and shortly thereafter, the group expressed its desire to cooperate regardless of "race or creed" and its interest in the political activities of African-American and Japanese-American women’s groups. In addition to individual memberships, the BWLCC included representative of various women’s clubs such as, the Zonta Club of Pasadena, the Business Woman’s City Club, the Republican Women’s Federation, the Sierra Madre's Woman’s Club, the Women’s Lawyers Club, the Women’s Traffic Club, the Women’s Aeronautic Association, and many chapters of the California Federation of
Business and Professional Woman's Clubs. The organization loosely cooperated with similar groups in other states such as New York and Washington, as well as the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.

Scope and Content
The collection consists of letters and documents which formed a portion of the Business Women's Legislative Council of California's records. The items in the collection pertain to the organization, maintenance and activities of the Council. The records span the years from 1927 to 1943, although there is a general gap in the files before 1929 and from 1936 through 1938. Notable correspondence includes letters from elected officials as well as candidates in California and the governors of nearly all states in response to questions about their positions on "equal rights for women wage-earners." Prominent gubernatorial signatories include Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Bilbo, and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Among the many letters from California legislators, the one from Culbert Olson is the most notable. Ephemera includes pamphlets on women's rights from other organizations, newspaper clippings/transcripts, convention programs, and a typewritten tribute to Sue Brobst, BWLCC’s founder and long-time president.

Manuscripts comprise the bulk of the folders in the collection. The best records for understanding the organization’s operations and culture are the meeting minutes. In addition to supplying a running record of the organization’s history, they collate information found in board member reports, correspondence, membership records, resolutions and constitution. They become more detailed after 1939. The folder from the 1935 convention is a particularly rich source of information, including a list of the 500 members during the previous year. Membership records and applications contain valuable information about the occupation and address of individual members as well as a complete list of affiliated clubs. One major weakness of the collection is that provides very little evidence in regard to the organization’s daily workings and relevant inter-personal dynamics. The formality of the minutes, reports, corresponds obscures these aspects of organizational life. However, the formality itself indicates the organization’s approach within its particular social context. Lastly, one folder contains material such as pamphlets and reports from the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, with which the BWLCC affiliated.

Major topics include women’s economic, social and legal conditions in the United States, women’s and feminist societies, feminism’s political aspects, women’s rights, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, The International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and the National Women’s Party, as well as economic, social, and political conditions in Los Angeles County and California.

Major participants in the collection fall into two categories. Nationally prominent officials include Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Bilbo, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and Culbert Olson. Notable BWLCC board members include Sue Brobst, Albert Gude Lynch, Mamie L. Chase, Gertrude I. George, Frances Siener, Anne Leidendeker, Una Winter, May G. Schaefer, Iva Kellog, Lila B. Clark, Majorie Longwell. All held the role of president or secretary at some point and several such as Brobst, George, Winter, and Longwell were active in many other public organizations, before, during, and after the BWLCC’s tenure.

Arrangement
Grouped into folders, by document type, the folders are in alphabetical order by and files within every folder are arranged chronologically.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

Corporate Names
National Woman's Party
Business Women's Legislative Council of California

Subjects
Businesswomen -- California -- Societies, etc.
Equal rights amendments -- United States.
Feminism.
Women -- California -- History -- 20th century -- Sources.
Women -- Legal status, laws, etc.
Women -- Societies and clubs.
Women's rights -- United States.

Genre
Business records -- California -- 20th century.
Letters -- (correspondence) California -- 20th century.
Box 1

Records.

**Bulletins, Speeches and Public Relations Material. 1930-1943**
Physical Description: 27 items

**Constitution, By-Laws and Amendments. 1927**
Physical Description: 4 items

**Correspondence: L.A. and California institutions and officials. 1927-1943**
Physical Description: 40 items

**Correspondence: Solicitations for Business. 1930-1935**
Physical Description: 3 items

**Correspondence: State Governors. 1931**
Physical Description: 32 items

**Correspondence: Women’s Legislative Council of Washington State. 1931**
Physical Description: 1 item

**Ephemera: Newspaper Clippings. 1927-1943**
Physical Description: 20 items

**Ephemera: Pamphlets, Invitations, Programs. 1924-1943**
Physical Description: 14 items

**International Federation of Business and Professional Women Material. 1935-1939**
Physical Description: 5 items

**Meeting Minutes, 1929-1939. 1929-1939**
Physical Description: 25 items

**Meeting Minutes, 1940. 1940**
Physical Description: 12 items

**Meeting Minutes, 1941. 1941**
Physical Description: 12 items

**Meeting Minutes, 1942-1943. 1942-1943**
Physical Description: 12 items

**Membership Applications. 1929-1930**
Physical Description: 20 items

**Membership Records. 1930-1941**
Physical Description: 35 items

**Records of 1935 Convention. 1935**
Physical Description: 12 items

**Reports of Board Members. 1935-1943**
Physical Description: 18 items.
Reports of the Treasurer. 1935-1943
   Physical Description: 36 items

Resolutions. 1929-1942
   Physical Description: 9 items

Templates for Communication with Members. 1941-1943
   Physical Description: 5 items