Finding Aid to the Loretta Starvus Stack Papers

Finding aid prepared by Labor Archives and Research Center staff.
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2001, revised 2014
Title: Loretta Starvus Stack papers
Date (inclusive): 1951-1952
Creator: Stack, Loretta Starvus
Collection number: larc.ms.0249
Accession number: 1999/021; 2001/007
Extent: 1.0 cubic feet (2 boxes)
Repository: Labor Archives and Research Center
J. Paul Leonard Library, Room 460
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Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English.

Abstract: The Loretta Starvus Stack collection consists of letters, cards and drawings sent by Smith Act defendant, Loretta Stack, to her husband, Walter Stack, and children, as well as those she received from family and friends while she was detained in the Los Angeles County Jail from August to December of 1951, and during her trial in Los Angeles in 1952 (Yates, et. al v. United States Government).

Location: Collection is available onsite.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Loretta Starvus Stack Papers, larc.ms.0249, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University.

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Availability
Collection is open for research.

Acquisition
The Loretta Starvus Stack Papers were given to the Labor Archives and Research Center in February of 2001 by her daughter, Mary Starvus of San Francisco.

Processing Information
Processed by Labor Archives and Research Center staff.

Biography
Loretta Starvus Stack was born in Williamantic, Conneticut on May 2, 1913 and began working at the age of 14 in a textile factory in an effort to help support her family. Shortly thereafter, she became politically active in Boston, through the American Youth Congress. By the time she was 17, she had organized a strike of 2000 people, and although it was unsuccessful, her efforts to create an awareness of unfair labor practices continued. Stack became a resident of California in 1942 after moving to Los Angeles and becoming involved in the United Electrical Union. After the death of her first husband in World War II, Stack and her son Joseph moved north to San Francisco. There she helped to organize waitresses and bookkeepers while employed at Ahrens Bakery. At the time of her first arrest, she was the California State Organizing Secretary for the Communist Party and also acted as a secretary for various units of the waterfront section in San Francisco. She was an active supporter of her husband Walter Stacks's endeavors as a Communist Party and Marine, Fireman, Oiler and Watertenders Union Member as well.

The prosecution of Stack and the other Smith Act violators, including those who were tried in New York during the first round of the Smith Act Trials, was based upon the assumption that membership in the Communist Party constituted a conspiracy to teach and advocate for the violent overthrow of the United States Government. This was despite the fact that the Communist Party was a legal organization at the time of Stack's arrest, and had been so for 31 years prior. Despite having no criminal record at the time of her arrest, Stack was kept in jail with other California Communist Party leaders because the bails set by the courts were extremely high. This action significantly disrupted Communist Party activities.
Throughout the state, Stack spent nearly five months in jail, from August 1951 to December 1952, unable to pay the bail set at $50,000 at the time of her arrest. Her case, known as Yates, et. al v. United States Government (Oleta O'Connor Yates), was tried in Los Angeles before Judge William C. Mathes. During the trial she lived with her two children in Los Angeles, while her husband Walter Stack remained in San Francisco. Stack was found guilty on August 6, 1952; she was sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay a fine of $10,000. However, she was released on her own recognizance pending the decision of her appeals. The original conviction was upheld by Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1955; however, the Supreme Court eventually handed down a decision effectively destroying the Smith Act as unconstitutional on June 17, 1957.

Upon her release, Stack went back to Ahrens Bakery as a waitress and bookkeeper. After she retired she became involved in a movement that set out to improve the living conditions in the Glenridge Housing Development, where she lived for thirty years. She also started a community garden, advocated for regular bus routes to Diamond Heights, and worked to improve the quality of life for others. Stack died from congestive heart failure at the age of 85 on Wednesday, February 7, 2001.

Scope and Contents

The Loretta Starvus Stack collection consists of letters, cards and drawings sent by Smith Act defendant, Loretta Stack, to her husband, Walter Stack, and children, as well as those she received from family and friends while she was detained in the Los Angeles County Jail from August to December of 1951, and during her trial in Los Angeles in 1952 (Yates, et. al v. United States Government). Stack was a labor activist and Communist Party member. She was one of fifteen California working class leaders indicted under the Smith Act for conspiring to teach and advocate for the violent overthrow of the United States Government and organizing the Communist Party as a vehicle for such teachings. Stack’s eventual conviction was overturned when the United States Supreme Court invalidated the Smith Act in 1957.

Indexing Terms

Communist Party of the United States of America.
Communism—California.
Communism—United States.
Communist trials—California.
Communist trials—United States.
Communists—United States.
United States. Alien Registration Act, 1940.

Letters to Loretta Stack 1951-1952
Extent: 1.0 box

Box-folder 1/1-9 Letters from Walter, Joey, and Mary Margaret to Loretta
Box-folder 1/10 Letters and cards from supporters
Box-folder 1/11 Letters from Helen to Loretta 1951
Box-folder 1/12 Letters and cards from friends 1951
Box-folder 1/13 Pictures, letters, and cards from Mary Margaret Stack, written by Walter
Box-folder 1/14 Miscellaneous notes, envelopes, receipts

Letters from Loretta Stack 1951-1952
Extent: 1.0 box

Box-folder 2/1 Letters from Loretta to Walter, life in jail, reports 1951
Box-folder 2/2-7 Letters from Loretta to Walter and children 1951
Box-folder 2/8-10 Letters from San Francisco to Los Angeles, Loretta’s trial 1952
Box-folder 2/11 Letters to Walter and children while living in Los Angeles
Box-folder 2/12 Miscellaneous papers and news clippings 1951-1952