



A. B. L. E. Commission Records (R1546)

Collection Number: R1546

Collection Title: A. B. L. E. Commission Records

Dates: 1975-2005

Creator: A. B. L. E. Commission

Abstract: The A. B. L. E. Commission Records contain the business records, photographs, and newspaper clippings created by, or for the promotion of the A. B. L. E. Commission, an incorporated organization. It was organized by Melvin E. Carnahan in 1976 to address community concerns about the lack of support for the elderly in Rolla, Missouri. The A. B. L. E. in the A. B. L. E. Commission's name stood for Achievement of a Better Lifestyle for the Elderly. The commission's mission was to raise public awareness of the importance for seniors to connect and engage with the community, create new memories, and maintain social lifestyles as they age. The A. B. L. E. Commission dissolved in June of 2025.

Collection Size: 1 cubic foot
(21 folders)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research but may be stored offsite. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Rolla](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at rolla@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *A. B. L. E. Commission Records* (R1546); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Rolla [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Rolla].

Donor Information: The records were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Susan Birdsong on July 8, 2025 (Accession No. RA1757).

Processed by: Processed by Ashley Weaver on February 25, 2026.

Historical Note:

The ABLE Commission was incorporated in 1976 to address growing community concerns about senior citizens' quality of life in Phelps County, Missouri. Flagship members of the organization included Judge Eugene Northern and Governor Melvin E. Carnahan, both well-known and influential members of the Rolla community. Governor Carnahan was the first president of ABLE. Gwen Sieck was instrumental in getting the organization incorporated and electing its first officers.

The ABLE Commission headquarters was located at Holloway House in Rolla, Missouri. Holloway purchased a large farm consisting of 240 acres in the suburbs east of Rolla for \$7,200.00 in 1902. He renovated the house on the property into the home now recognized as the Holloway House. The property changed hands many times over the next hundred years. In the 1970s, the property and the house were sold to the city of Rolla. The land became known as Ber-Jaun Park, and the Holloway House was used intermittently until 1980, when it became vacant.

In the late 1970s, the city of Rolla was uncertain about the historic mansion's future. Around that time, the Central Missouri Area Agency on Aging and the ABLE Commission joined efforts to create a senior center where the elderly could share meals and gather for activities in the Rolla area. By the early 1980s, ABLE arranged to lease the Holloway House from the city for \$100 per year. The ABLE commission applied for and won a federal grant to upgrade and renovate the house as a senior center, providing better accessibility and rooms for activities on the second floor.

The work done for senior citizens by the ABLE Commission was subsidized by the City of Rolla and the United Way of Rolla. The rest of the ABLE Commission's operating budget came from activity fees and rental of office space to such groups as the Southeastern Missouri Transportation System (SMTS), Arts Rolla, CMAAA, and Mederi Caretenders. Services offered at the Holloway House included meeting spaces for church groups and non-profits, holiday gatherings and celebrations, monthly luncheons, craft classes, a foot care clinic, Yoga sessions, communal yard sales, Yoga classes, and other entertainments.

The ABLE Commission was asked to vacate the Holloway House in late 2022, due to city concerns about habitability and problems with the structure caused by deferred maintenance. The Commission functioned out of churches and community centers for a couple of years after it left the Holloway House, but ultimately dissolved in June 2025. Phelps Connections for Seniors took over many of the activities that ABLE provided for seniors in the Phelps County area.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 4 series:

Business Records
Photographs
Miscellaneous
Oversize

Scope and Content Note:

Business Records

This series contains materials related to the creation of the A.B.L.E. foundation, including its bylaws, early meeting minutes, and financial overviews. In addition to the foundation information, there are newspaper articles that chronicle all that the A. B. L. E. Commission did over its 30-plus years, which helped to ensure the elderly in Rolla, Missouri, had a better quality of life. There is also correspondence from Missouri politicians and national foundations that assist the elderly, like the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

Photographs

This series consists of photographs taken by members of the ABLE Commission during its active period and three slides featuring images of the Holloway House in Rolla, Missouri. The photographs depict the membership engaged in fundraisers, officer elections, and holiday celebrations.

Miscellaneous

This series contains items collected by the ABLE Commission membership that have a tangential relationship to the ABLE Commission. These items include how to become an AARP chapter, obituaries of community members, a piano songbook, and a city proclamation.

Oversize

This series contains oversized materials from Scrapbook Two. A large pencil drawing of the Holloway House, and the Rolla Senior Citizen scrapbook from 1978-1980.

Container List:

Business Records

Box 001	f. 1	By-laws, meeting minutes, and financial reports, 1977-1980
	f. 2	The Holloway House News, the ABLE Commission's newsletter, 2002-2004
	f. 3	Compiled Community Cookbooks, fundraisers for the ABLE Commission, 1995, 2005.
	f. 4	Newspaper clippings, 2000-2005
	f. 5	Awards and plaque faces, no date
	f. 6	Holloway House, Rolla, Missouri, no date
	f. 7	Scrapbook 1, correspondence and newspaper clippings, 1970s
	f. 8	Scrapbook 2, correspondence and newspaper clippings, Part One, 1970s

Photographs

Box 002	f. 9	ABLE Commission social and fundraising events, 1987-1997
	f. 10-11	ABLE Commission Unknown events, no date
	f. 12	ABLE Commission members and guest speakers, no date

- f. 13 Slides, the Holloway House, no date
- f. 14 Photocopies of photographs of members and activities at the
ABLE Commission, no date

Miscellaneous

- f. 15 American Association of Retired Persons, how to create an
AARP chapter guidebook and instructions, 1989
- f. 16 Obituaries, 1997, 2020-2022
- f. 17 The Golden Book of Favorite Songs, Schmitt, Hall & McCreary
Company, Minneapolis, 1951
- f. 18 IRS Volunteer Recognition Day, Proclamation, City of Rolla,
Missouri, 1990

Oversize

- Box 003 f. 19 Scrapbook Two, Part Two Correspondence and Newspaper
Clippings, Part Two, 1970s
- f. 20 Drawing of the Holloway House, Rolla, Mo., no date
- f. 21 Rolla Senior Citizens Scrapbook, 1975-1980

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A. B. L. E. Commission	1-21	Yes
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Baumgartner, Janet	7	Yes
Bennett, Lee	14	Yes
Birdsong, Susan	14	Yes
Brennan-Howk, Lynne	14, 16	Yes
Bruns, Mary Lou Kelley, 1942-2021	16	Yes
Bullock, Kristy	14	Yes
Carnahan, Melvin E., 1934-2000	1, 8, 16	
Cohen, Helen	14	Yes
Cole, John	14	Yes
Community cookbooks--Missouri--Rolla	3	
Danforth, John	8	Yes
Dean, Linda	12	Yes
Eagleton, Thomas F.	7-8	Yes
Failing, Oscar	8	Yes
Farnsworth, Jerry	21	Yes
Farrar, Janet	1, 12, 21	Yes
Farrar, Lester	8	Yes
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Index Term	Folder	Image
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Hendrick, Jeannine	4	Yes
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Karr, George W.	12, 16	Yes
Klein, Irwin	1	
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Leaver, Mildred B., 1906-2014	1, 8	
Lee, Thomas	12	Yes
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Mayfield, Barbara	7	Yes
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Mitchell, Agnes	4	Yes
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Oliver, Kathy	14	Yes
Ray, Corinne	21	Yes
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Smith, Clayton	1	

Index Term	Folder	Image
Smith, Millage	7	Yes
Sternberg, Bill	4	Yes
Symington, James	8	Yes
University of Missouri--Rolla	8	
Uthlaut, Ralph	8	Yes
Waits, Fran	7	Yes
Wedge, Bobbie	7	Yes
Weiss, Gordon E., 1925-1987	1	
Williams, Lester	8	Yes
Winch, William "Bill" H., 1926-2022	14	Yes
Woods, Ruby	8	Yes
Yelton, Nita	12	Yes