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Introduction
Approximately 22 cubic feet

The papers of Paul William Preisler, a St. Louis area biochemist, union organizer, lawyer, and photographer, contain correspondence, petitions, suits, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Subjects of interest include civil liberties, legislative redistricting, and the Socialist Party of St. Louis.

Paul William Preisler was born on May 31, 1902. His father, Ernest Preisler, was an architect and realtor in St. Louis. Many homes designed by him are still standing in South St. Louis. Martha Witter Preisler, the mother of Paul, was a descendant of an old St. Louis family who owned and operated Witter's Book Store, a locally famous store and a literary salon. Preisler had three brothers and two sisters.

As a young boy, he attended Sherman Grammar School, followed by McKinley High School. During the summers, the Preisler family would vacation at Elkhart Lakes in Wisconsin. It was here that Preisler developed a life-long interest in turtles. Later as an adult, Preisler would entertain the vacationers with turtle races. In the fall of 1919, he entered Washington University. He graduated four years later with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering. He continued his education, receiving his Ph.D. in Biochemistry in 1927. The same year he married Doris Bausch, a botanist, and physiologist. Preisler then worked as a postdoctoral fellow in Washington, D.C., Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. After finishing his work on the west coast, he returned to St. Louis and was hired by the Washington University School of Medicine as an instructor. He remained with the University until 1941 when he joined the army. After the war, he returned to the University, staying until 1950 when he began to study law.

During the thirties, Preisler campaigned vigorously against the proposed Food and Drug Act in Congress. he gave lectures with slides (some of which are in the collection). He spoke to the academic and scientific community, as well as to the general public. Preisler demanded more stringent rules for the sale of drugs, listing of the contents on cans and bottles, and the removal of quacks in the business.

In 1935, Preisler helped found the St. Louis Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, Local 420. He was elected its first president. His first and most important task was to force the Board of Education to allow teachers to unionize, something fiercely opposed by the Board. Two years later, as the result of a court suit to force a non-partisan board election, the teachers were allowed to unionize. On the national level, Preisler became influential in the union and was elected International Vice-President for two terms (1938-1940; 1940-1942). An avid anti-Communist, Preisler helped oust three locals from the national federation for alleged Communist infiltration. However, there were
repercussions from his duties with the federation. Washington University did not endorse Preisler's union activities, but they did not wish to fire him, so they kept him at the level of instructor.

Also, in the Depression decade, Preisler joined the Socialist Party. He was elected Chairman of the City Central Committee, a position held until 1952 when he resigned from the Party. One of his major concerns in the Party was that the Board of Election Commissioners refused minority parties and non-partisan candidates the right to have challengers and watchers at the election polls. As chairman, Preisler filed suit against the Board. In the early fifties, the case finally reached the Supreme Court of Missouri, which ruled in Preisler's favor. Minorities could now have challengers and watchers at the polls. (For more information see the Preisler Collection, Series 4, Socialist Party, UMSL Archives and Manuscripts Division). In 1934 after the death of his father, Preisler assumed the presidency of the Preisler Realty Company, in addition to his duties as a chemistry instructor, his labor activities, and his socialist causes. Preisler stayed with the company until 1943 when the company was sold.

Besides all of the above activities, Preisler also ran for public office in the thirties. In 1937, two years after the St. Louis chapter of the American Federation of Teachers had been founded, Preisler ran for the Board of Education as a non-partisan. The Board refused his candidacy since, by its constitution, it was bi-partisan. In a landmark decision by the Missouri Supreme Court, the Board was forced to accept Preisler's candidacy. The court order was handed down three days before the election, which meant all the ballots had to be remade. Preisler was not running to win (which he didn't) but on principle.

When World War II broke out, Preisler entered the United States Army as a captain. He was stationed at Fort Sam Houston in Texas at the Brooks General Hospital. His assignment was to the Sanitary Corps. In January 1946, he was discharged as a lieutenant colonel. After the war, he returned to St. Louis. Again, he was in court. This time in 1947, he organized a suit against the Board of Education, because they did not permit married female teachers to work. Again the court ruled in favor of Preisler, and women were allowed to retain their positions.

In 1950, at the age of forty-eight, Preisler entered St. Louis University School of Law. He was retained as Research Associate at Washington University with no salary. In 1969, he was awarded Professor Emeritus. He was also still active with the teachers union, but the issue consuming most of his time at this point was the one of redistricting. In 1952 while still a law student, Preisler filed his first redistricting suit. It was against the Board of Election Commissioners for the improper drawing of the election districts. He lost in the lower court but on second appeal to the Missouri Supreme Court, he won. St. Louis was forced to redraw her election maps.
Next, he turned his attention to the United States Congressional Districts of the state. He filed in 1962, on the grounds that the districts were not as compact and "nearly equal in population as may be." In 1965, the issue was brought before the Missouri General Assembly, which was responsible for legislating the districts. The General Assembly proposed a plan, and the electorate voted for it in 1965. Early in 1966, Preisler refiled the suit, for he did not think that the 1965 plan was fair enough. Late in the summer of 1966, the Missouri Supreme Court declared the 1965 plan unconstitutional. By 1969, the difference in Congressional representation was less than 2000 in population per district. At the time of his death in 1971, he was involved in another redistricting suit. In 1975, the court voted against Preisler's suit. (For more information on the Redistricting Cases, please consult the Supplement to the Papers-Taped oral history interviews with Mr. David Hemenway, Mr. Charles Blackmar, Mr. David Grant. Also Series 6, Paul William Preisler Papers). As a lawyer, Preisler served gratuitously as a Counselor for the ACLU. He defended the right of students to wear long hair, hold anti-war demonstrations, and the publish uncensored newspapers. He also defended prisoners and women against discrimination.

He was also involved in municipal affairs. He filed suit against the City of St. Louis when it proposed the roadway through Shaw's Garden. Due to the vehement protest from Preisler and the other citizens, the plan was dropped. Another case was that of the License collector's job. Preisler contested it, claiming it was patronage. However, he lost this case.

Often, Preisler's fight against discrimination took the form of running for office. He ran as a Socialist for the Missouri legislature in 1934 and 1936. He campaigned for the Board of Education in 1937, 1939, 1959, 1965, 1967, and 1971 as a non-partisan. In 1940 and 1957, he ran for the Board of Alderman also as a non-partisan. In 1954, Preisler ran for the United States Congress. This campaign was another contested in the courts. The dispute revolved around the filing fee. The Secretary of State of Missouri, Walter Toberman, refused to accept the Preisler candidacy as a non-partisan; his argument was that a statute was designed to stop Communist and splinter parties from filing unless they had a substantial number of votes in the proceeding election. Preisler argued that he could run as an individual and not as a representative of a party. The case went before the Missouri Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of Preisler. Preisler did not win any of these elections. However, he successfully defended the rights of other non-partisan candidates, many of whom were subsequently elected.

Donor Information
The papers were donated to University of Missouri by Doris Wheeler on April 27, 1972 (SA0112). An addition was made on November 13, 1978 by Doris Wheeler (Accession No. SA2086). An addition was made on June 16, 1982 by Doris Wheeler (Accession No. SA2472). An addition was made on March 28, 1983 by Doris Wheeler (Accession No.
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Supreme Court of Missouri Motion for Rehearing, Sept., 1955. Preisler vs. Members of Election Commissioners, Secretary of State, and Attorney General
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U.S. Supreme Court Reports Subject of Annotation, March-April, 1964. Lucas vs. Colorado General Assembly
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U.S. Supreme Court footnotes, Oct., 1967. Secretary of State and Attorney General, et.al. vs. Preisler, et.al
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