



## **Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter Records (S0045)**

**Collection Number:** S0045

**Collection Title:** Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter Records

**Dates:** 1948-1988

**Creator:** Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter

**Abstract:** The collection contains meeting minutes, letters, memos, periodicals, and membership information pertaining to Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter, a political advocacy group that promotes the principles of liberals as formulated in the New Deal. The bulk of the material dates from 1959 to 1970 and 1977 to 1982, all during the administration of Jack L. Pierson. Subjects of interest include the group's endeavors to promote progressive political candidates, as well as their involvement in anti-war protests.

**Collection Size:** 2 cubic feet  
(55 folders)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

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

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**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter Records* (S0045); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

**Donor Information:** The records were donated to the University of Missouri by Jack Pierson on September 9, 1982 (Accession No. SA2489). An addition was made on September 11, 1985 by Jack Pierson (Accession No. SA2713). An addition was made October 4, 1995 (Accession No. SA3202).

**Separated Materials:** Western Historical Manuscript Collection, St. Louis staff placed two oral histories with Jack Pierson (SA4119) and Harold Hanke (SA4120) in the Oral History Collection (S0829) at an unknown date.

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the Americans for Democratic Action, St. Louis Chapter Records can be found in the following collections:

*New Democratic Coalition (1968-) Records* (S0068)

**Processing Information:** Collection S0227 was merged into S0045 in May 2019.

**Processed by:** Processed by Kenn Thomas (S0045, May 1983) and Linda Belford (S0227, August 1987). Revised by AJ Medlock and Emery Cox October 1, 2019

### **Historical Note:**

The St. Louis Chapter of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) was an activist group that formed in 1947 to promote American liberalism. Founders and early leaders included Violet Gunther (later national director of ADA), Episcopal Bishop William Scarlett, and lawyers R. Walston Chubb (the first chapter president) and Harold C. Hanke. The ADA chapter was partly an outgrowth of Liberal Voters League, which Chubb had also led.

The predecessor of the national ADA, the Union for Democratic Action (UDA), had been formed in 1941 by Missouri-born theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, International Ladies Garment Workers Union official Murray Gross, politician James I. Loeb, and others, with the goal of promoting liberalism and left-wing ideals while opposing the more strict pacifism of the Socialist Party of America (see collection S0090). Both conservatives and communists were banned from UDA membership.

In 1947, liberals including Niebuhr, Loeb, politician Hubert Humphrey, political theorist Arthur Schlesinger Jr., economist John Kenneth Galbraith, labor leader Walter Reuther, civil rights lawyer Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., and activist Eleanor Roosevelt met to create Americans for Democratic Action. ADA replaced UDA but kept the latter's restriction on communists; members agreed to a loyalty oath that they were not communists. The new organization was created in response to another left-of-center group, Progressive Citizens of America ("PCA"), which was more sympathetic to the Communist Party. National ADA's principal issue in the 1940s and 1950s was civil rights, and the organization later also worked for education reform, the environment, fair trade, and workers' rights and against poverty and war.

In the 1950s, St. Louis ADA worked on public transit and endorsing progressive candidates. The following decade saw greater local involvement with issues such as civil rights, police brutality, anti-war activism, and continued candidate endorsements and campaigning. The chapter's flagship event was the annual Roosevelt Day Dinner, a heavily planned and advertised fundraiser that attracted prominent guest speakers, including United States Representative James Roosevelt, economist Leon Keyserling, and politician G. Mennen Williams.

ADA worked chiefly with the Democratic Party but was never officially part of it. On the other hand, the New Democratic Coalition (NDC), a similar progressive group that also had an active St. Louis chapter (see collection S0068), explicitly saw itself as a reform movement in the

Democratic Party. Although ADA and NDC held some joint events and published a joint newsletter in the late 1970s, ADA's nonpartisanship was the reason that NDC rejected a merger, according to Jack Pierson, President of St. Louis ADA.

Activity in St. Louis ADA decreased through the 1970s and 1980s, and the chapter became defunct sometime shortly thereafter. The national organization continues to advocate for progressive causes and is today best known for its ratings (on a "Liberal Quotient" scale) of Congresspersons' voting records. Chapters remain in 9 states and Washington, DC.

### **Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into the following 6 series:

Meeting Minutes  
Correspondence  
Roosevelt Day Dinners  
Platforms and Memoranda  
Newsletters and Newspaper Clippings  
Membership

### **Scope and Content Note:**

#### **Meeting Minutes**

This series consists of materials related to the official proceedings and actions of both the St. Louis chapter and national ADA. The minute books in folders 2 and 3 contain entries that discuss the Melvin Cravens case and subsequent attempts at police reform: a St. Louis police officer killed a handcuffed African American teenage boy in June 1965; St. Louis ADA reviewed the case and advocated for a civilian review board. The materials in this series date from 1959 to 1970 and are arranged first with the local minutes preceding the national, and then chronologically.

#### **Correspondence**

This series contains correspondence and memoranda pertaining to communication among members, national ADA officials, political candidates, and other contacts. The correspondence demonstrates the chapter's work to expand membership, retain existing members, pass legislation, and maintain positive media coverage. Folder 31 contains documents that mention the joint events and publications with NDC. The materials in this series date from 1948 to 1988 and are arranged chronologically.

#### **Roosevelt Day Dinners**

This series contains letters, financial records, and advertising materials pertaining to the ADA tradition of holding fundraising dinners in honor of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Since the Roosevelt Day Dinner was St. Louis ADA's most prominent fundraiser, chapter leaders put in much effort to book guest speakers and sell tickets. Correspondents include James Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. The materials in this series date from 1960 to 1963 and are arranged chronologically.

## Platforms and Memoranda

This series contains correspondence and memoranda that demonstrate some of the specific activities in which St. Louis ADA was engaged, including political campaigns, influencing the Democratic Party, and anti-war activism. Folder 47 shows the coordination that went into ADA's campaigning, especially for John F. Kennedy for President of the United States in 1960. The St. Louis chapter also endorsed ten state and local candidates that year, including John M. Dalton for Governor of Missouri and Richard L. "Larry" Carp for United States Representative, District 2. The materials in this series date from 1960 to 1969 and are arranged alphabetically.

## Newsletters and Newspaper Clippings

This series contains complete issues from ADA periodicals and clippings from St. Louis-area newspapers about the arrest of David S. Gray. Folder 50 comprises a special issue of *ADA World Magazine* called "Congress Looks at Vietnam". Folders 52 and 53 contain a large number of issues of *Legislative Newsletter*, an ADA publication that reported on the United States Congress.

Reverend David S. Gray was an Episcopal minister who had hosted an ADA event in 1960 at his residence. He was charged with selling alcohol without a license when beer was consumed in exchange for donations. Folder 51 contains photocopies of local news articles about the case, including a letter to the editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* saying that the arrest was racially motivated because NAACP members had attended the meeting. The materials in this series date from 1959 to 1969 and are arranged alphabetically.

## Membership

This series contains index cards that list members' names, addresses, and telephone numbers; some cards also give other information, such as the date of when dues were paid or what roles were held in ADA. The materials in this series date from 1961 to 1971 and are arranged alphabetically within each folder.

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