



Ralph Rosen Papers

Collection Number: S0143

Collection Title: Ralph Rosen Papers

Dates: 1924-1982

Creator: Rosen, Ralph, 1904-1982

Abstract: The Ralph Rosen papers document the fluoridation controversy in St. Louis and Missouri from the late 1940s through the early 1980s, and in particular, the actions of Rosen to convince others of its merits. Also included in the collection are pro and anti-fluoridation literature from throughout the United States.

Collection Size: 3 cubic feet
(132 folders, 2 photographs)

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](https://www.shsmo.org/research-center). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org.

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Processed by: Processed by Anne R. Kenney, March 1982; revised by AJ Medlock, June 2022

Biographical Note:

Ralph Rosen was born on September 15, 1882, to Sam and Millie Rosen, in Linton, Indiana. After Sam Rosen's death in 1919, the family migrated to St. Louis City, where Ralph Rosen graduated from Washington University in 1927, with a degree in Chemistry. He subsequently attended Washington University's School of Dental Medicine and graduated with a D.D.S. in 1930. Rosen married Sadie Packman in 1929 (they had three children, Jack, Marian, and Brenda Rogers) and maintained a private dental practice in downtown St. Louis City from 1930 to 1956, and in University City from 1956 until 1981. Throughout his career, Rosen was active in professional organizations, including the St. Louis Dental Society and the American Association of Dental Editors.

In the late 1940s, Rosen became interested in the effects of fluoride on teeth. Although he initially opposed the addition of sodium fluoride to public drinking water, by 1950, several controlled experiments conducted in New York, Michigan, and Ontario, indicated that fluoridation could substantially reduce tooth decay. Following the release of a five-year study on the Kingston-Newburgh, New York project and the endorsement by the U.S. Public Health Service, Rosen became an enthusiastic advocate of fluoridation. His editorial, "Progress of Decay" in the July 1950 issue of the *St. Louis Dental Society Bulletin* stimulated both debate and public support for fluoridation among local dentists and predated the American Dental Association's endorsement by three months. The American Medical Association published its support in *Hygeia* nine months later, in part because Rosen requested a formal statement from Dr. Lull, the executive secretary of AMA.

Through his *Bulletin* editorials, favorable articles, and letters to the editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Rosen kept the fluoridation issue before the St. Louis dental profession and the community. He and other dentists, most notably David Brock (President, Missouri State Dental Association), Paul O'Brien (Chair, Council on Dental Health, St. Louis Dental Society), and Paul Guidry (Chair, Kirkwood Council on Dental Health), lobbied extensively for fluoridation measures in both the city and county. Members of the St. Louis Dental Society and Medical Society presented public conferences, distributed literature, appeared on radio programs, and traveled extensively throughout the region to convince civic groups, chambers of commerce, labor organizations, businesses, politicians, industries, educators, and parents.

Rosen and his allies received strong political support from St. Louis City mayors Joseph Darst and Raymond Tucker; scientific support from Gerald F. Cox, professor of Dental Research at the University of Pittsburgh; and early editorial support from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Opponents to fluoridation ranged from religious groups (such as the Mott Foundation and the Catholic Church); from realtors (Such as Bruno Realty Company), who feared damage to water pipes; from businesses (including Anheuser-Busch), which were concerned over the effects of sodium fluoride on their products; and from local dentists (in particular Martin T. Rippe) and chiropractors, who, like Christian Scientists, viewed fluoridation as involuntary medication. Some politicians (such as St. Louis City Alderman Walter Ziegenbalg and Water Commissioner Thomas Skinker) believed fluoridation was either too expensive or that long-term effects should be more thoroughly studied.

Water fluoridation was first proposed to the St. Louis City Board of Alderman in December 1951 and finally approved in October 1954. An attempt to repeal the ordinance failed and St. Louis City began fluoridating the public water the following September. In St. Louis County, a non-

binding postcard survey of Kirkwood voters showed the community favored fluoridation 1,066 to 955 in 1953. The St. Louis County Council later passed a fluoridation ordinance in 1959. A suit by residents who challenged the Council's right to enact such an ordinance was supported by Circuit Court Judge Douglas L.C. Jones in July 1960. The Missouri State Supreme Court overturned the case in 1961; the case reached the United States Supreme Court, who refused to hear the case in October 1962. In January 1963, St. Louis County began fluoridating its water.

The St. Louis Dental Society (later the Greater St. Louis Dental Society) awarded Rosen its achievement award for his work promoting fluoride in St. Louis City and County. In 1972, Washington University awarded Rosen its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1973. Dr. Rosen died on April 15, 1982, due to complications from cancer.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 8 series:

Correspondence
Rosen's Writings
St. Louis Dental Society Bulletins and Council on Dental Health Newsletters
Newspaper clippings
Pro-Fluoridation Literature
Anti-Fluoridation Literature
Photographs
Oral Histories

Scope and Content Note:**Correspondence**

This series contains carbons and first drafts of Rosen's letters and copies of proposed city ordinances on fluoridation. Subjects of interest include opposition to and support for fluoridation in St. Louis City and County, Kirkwood, and Festus; the St. Louis Dental Society; and the dental profession. Correspondents include Dr. J. Earl Smith, David W. Brock, Paul O'Brien, Sam Krupnick, Thomas J. Skinker, Alfred Fleishman, Raymond R. Tucker, and Betty Satterfield. The materials in this series are arranged chronologically.

Rosen's Writings

This series consists of reports, speeches, statements, and radio broadcasts, written by Rosen about fluoridation, dental education, professionalism, and dental research. The materials in this series are arranged chronologically, with reports, speeches, statements, radio broadcasts, and articles appearing first, followed by letters to the editor and editorials.

St. Louis Dental Society Bulletins and Council on Dental Health Newsletters

This series contains issues of the *St. Louis Dental Society Bulletin* and the *Council on Dental Health* newsletters. As an editor of the Bulletin (1946-1953), Rosen frequently wrote editorials and published articles favoring fluoridation. The materials in this series are arranged chronologically.

Newspaper Clippings

This series contains newspaper clippings about the fluoridation debate in St. Louis and nationwide. Arranged chronologically, the first five folders contain local newspaper coverage; the last folder contains out-of-state newspaper clippings.

Pro-Fluoridation Literature

This series consists of endorsements, reports, newsletters, articles, reprints, books, and research data supporting fluoridation from the American Dental Association, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), and World Health Organization. This series is arranged by issuing group or individual.

Anti-Fluoridation Literature

This series contains statements, reports, newsletters, articles, reprints, research data, and books from local, state, and national groups, including the Pure Water Association of America Inc. and the Lee Foundation for Nutritional Research, and individuals, such as dentists, scientists, and doctors. The materials in this series are arranged by issuing group or individual.

Photographs

This series consists of two images: the first is of dentists witnessing the addition of Sodium Fluoride to drinking water at Richland, Missouri; the second depicts the installation of new members of Omicron Kappa Epsilon. The materials in this series are arranged chronologically.

Oral Histories

This series contains oral history interviews with Ralph Rosen and William A. Stolar.

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f. 31	Editor's report, St. Louis Dental Society, 1946
f. 32	<i>Care of the Dentally Indigent</i> , 1951
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