



Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis Records

Collection Number: S0157

Collection Title: Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis Records

Dates: 1933-1941

Creator: Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis

Abstract: The collection contains bylaws, correspondence, membership lists, newsletters, co-op catalogs, and descriptive literature documenting the Cooperate Consumers of St. Louis, a Depression-era consumer's cooperative that made volume purchases from wholesalers and offered the merchandise for sale to its members at a reduced cost.

Collection Size: 0.25 cubic feet
(11 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](https://www.shsmo.org/research-center). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org.

Restrictions on Use: The Donor has given and assigned to the University all rights of copyright, which the Donor has in the Materials and in such of the Donor's works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others.

Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis Records* (S0157); 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 Edgar Metzger on March 12, 1981 (Accession No. SA2381).

Processed by: Processed by AJ Medlock and Caroline Smith, April 2023.

Historical Note:

St. Louisan Edgar Metzger founded Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis in 1933 after learning about organizations like the Cooperative League of the U.S.A.'s efforts to create small markets for consumers that would offer more affordable goods and products during the Great Depression. These organizations would pool their members' financial resources to buy goods and commodities in bulk and disperse them to their members. The Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis's first meetings drew between 30 to 40 people, who pooled their money to buy goods like razor blades from preexisting cooperatives in the United States.

Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis was incorporated in 1936 and opened their headquarters at 3609 Market Street in St. Louis City. They held board and education meetings and housed their Commodity Department. Two programs of note within the organization included the Commodity Department and the Educational Division. The Commodity Department collected members' dues and placed bulk orders for consumer goods. After Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis moved to 939 Boyle Avenue in 1938, the Commodity Department opened a storefront for members to place and pick up their orders. It would change locations again in September-October 1940 to 5803 Delmar Boulevard. The Educational Division was primarily responsible for organizing presentations promoting the cooperative movement to gain new members. These presentations included "Consumers Cooperation in America," "Consumers Cooperation in France," and "Cooperation and Fascism." The organization also published a newsletter for its members, *The Cooperative Bulletin* (later the *Co-Optimist*)

In 1939, Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis encountered financial difficulties due to members not contributing enough money to operate at full capacity. The cooperative undertook several measures to alleviate its financial troubles. For example, they announced in July 1939 that they were partnering with the Berkeley City Cooperative. Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis also decided to move to 5803 Delmar Boulevard, hoping its proximity to the city would attract additional members. The cooperative also hosted fundraising events to pay for rent and complete renovations for the new storefront. These measures achieved limited success, resulting in the new storefront opening in the first week of October 1940, hiring Elmer Bierbaum, a professional meat cutter, and purchasing a truck to make deliveries in the surrounding area. However, Cooperative Consumers was unable to build upon these initial successes: lack of funds resulted in the termination of Bierbaum in January of 1941 and the sale of their delivery truck in April 1941. The Consumers Cooperative of St. Louis dissipated sometime in the early 1940s due to these financial difficulties and declining membership.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following two series:

- Chronological Files
- Cooperative Distributors, Inc.

Scope and Content Note:**Chronological Files**

This series consists of correspondence, flyers, newsletters, order logs, cooperative pricing sheets, inventory logs, and publications related to the Cooperative Movement and the administration of

Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis. The correspondence within these files demonstrates the networking capabilities of cooperatives in the 1930s and 1940s, as most of the discussions between Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis and other cooperatives, such as the Cooperative Consumers Association and Cooperative Distributor's Inc., discussed established cooperatives, names of interested parties, and literature on the Cooperative Movement. Other materials of interest include the organization's newsletter, *The Cooperative Bulletin*. The publication was one way Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis promoted itself, featuring meeting announcements and advertisements for goods sold at its market. The materials in this subseries are arranged chronologically from 1933-1941.

Cooperative Distributors, Inc.

This series contains issues of the *Consumer Defender*, the official commodity catalog for Cooperative Distributors Inc. This cooperative organization operated in New York City and was one of the first mail-order cooperatives in the United States. Cooperative Distributors Inc. was one of many distributors Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis used to purchase goods in bulk for its members. The catalogs consist of lists, illustrations, photographs, and prices for the commodities—food, clothing, and home products (razors, vacuums, tires)—sold by the cooperative. Other materials of interest include correspondence to and from Cooperative Distributors Inc. and Cooperative Consumers of St. Louis regarding advice on organizing cooperatives and literature on the cooperative movement in the United States. The materials in this subseries date from 1934 to 1939 and are arranged chronologically.

Container List:

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f. 11	Consumer's Defender, 1934-1939

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