

PRELIMINARY INVENTORY
S0772 (SA2697, SA2856, SA3810, SA4404)
METRO HOUSING RESOURCES RECORDS

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Introduction

Approximately 29 cubic feet

The records of Metro Housing Resources contain correspondence, meeting minutes, applications, and newsletters documenting the organization's mission to advocate for fair housing and housing options for lower-income families and researching questions related to fair housing and the provisions of housing for low-income and minority families. The services consisted of developing and maintaining a listing service for clients and providing a referral and counseling service for people alleging discrimination in housing. Harry Edward Berndt, the director, closed the organization in 1982, citing declining support for housing issues under the Reagan administration.

Members of the Concordia Seminary Social Concerns Committee and other interested citizens of St. Louis County founded Metro Housing Resources in 1970 under the name New Neighbors. They later changed the name to County Open Housing and finally to MHR, which better identified it as a metropolitan-wide fair housing organization. They established MHR in response to the United States Civil Rights Commission hearings held in St. Louis early in 1970 which concluded that the St. Louis area "housed essentially two societies as the Kerner Commission warned" and that the "racial division of St. Louis is supported by a broad network of institutional systems whose leaders disclaim responsibility for them". The committee stated that the existence of two different housing markets supported this reality. MHR intended to help make housing options available to all people in every area of metropolitan St. Louis.

MHR's specific activities included the provision of client services, advocacy for fair housing and housing options for lower-income families, and research questions related to fair housing and the provisions of housing for low-income and minority families. The services consisted of developing and maintaining a listing service for minority and low-income renters and providing a referral and counseling service for people alleging discrimination in housing. Also, MHR attempted to convince property owners to participate in the HUD-subsidized Section 8 program and sought low-cost housing for those clients not certified for Section 8. MHR counseled all clients regarding their rights and obligations as tenants and their rights under fair housing legislation.

In 1978, Metro Housing Resources director Harry "Pete" Berndt completed a study of displacement in several midwestern cities, including St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and Toledo. The study resulted from a concern over the large numbers of low-income people, the majority comprised of African Americans displaced from redevelopment areas in St. Louis. MHR also proposed a major research effort to determine the number of instances of emergency housing requests by type in St. Louis, as well as the viability of providing permanent housing for families.

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MHR submitted administrative complaints against St. Louis County for several years, alleging that the County failed to meet its obligation to provide housing for lower-income people. Each complaint stressed specifically the failure of municipalities to participate in the provision for housing low-and moderate-income persons; the failure of the County to have an affirmative fair housing program; and the failure of municipalities to affirmatively comply with civil rights laws. As a result, the County's fifth-year application became conditioned by HUD, and its funds denied for failure to provide adequately for housing for low-and moderate-income families.

MHR also filed an administrative complaint has against St. Louis city's sixth year VI application, emphasizing the city's deficiencies in fair housing, displacement, and in aspects of its housing programs. As a result of its monitoring activities, MHR became selected to participate in the National Citizens Monitoring Project, administered by the Working Group For Community Development Block Grant Reform and funded by the Community Services Administration. MHR monitored the activities of both St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

Director Berndt closed the MHR office in 1982, in response to declining support for housing issues under the Reagan administration.

Donor Information

The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Harry Edward Berndt on May 30, 1985 (Accession No. SA2697). An addition was made on April 25, 1988 by Harry Edward Berndt (Accession No. SA2856). An addition was made on April 27, 1988 by Harry Edward Berndt (Accession No. SA4404). An addition was made on September 8, 2008 by Harry Edward Berndt (Accession No. SA3810).

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