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Descriptive Summary

Title  Wirth, Mary Bolton. Papers

Date    1916-1975 (bulk 1950-1969)

Size    2.5 linear ft. (5 boxes)

Repository  Special Collections Research Center
             University of Chicago Library
             1100 East 57th Street
             Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract  Social worker. Contains correspondence, manuscripts, reports, memoranda, interviews, articles, notes, notebooks, travel accounts, biographical material, and photographs. Papers document Wirth's active career as a social worker, especially in the area of Chicago public housing. Includes material relating to the Chicago Housing Authority for which Wirth served as Supervisor of Community and Tenant Relations (1952-1958), the Department of Urban Renewal, and an investigation of the Office of Economic Opportunity in Michigan. Also includes material relating to University of Chicago alumni activities and Wirth's reaction over the non-reappointment of Marlene Dixon to the faculty at the University.

Information on Use

Access

No restrictions

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Wirth, Mary Bolton. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Mary Bolton Wirth, wife of the University of Chicago sociologist, Louis Wirth, had a distinguished career as a social worker over a period of more than fifty years, principally in the city of Chicago. Her prominence within her profession--she served as Executive Secretary of the Chicago chapter of the American Association of Social Workers from 1939-49 and as Supervisor of Community and Tenant Relations with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) from 1952-58--gave her the opportunity to struggle with and reflect upon many of the problems of administering social welfare programs, especially those in the field of public housing. After 1958, Mrs. Wirth continued to advise and consult on public housing.

Scope Note
The papers are arranged in six series.

Series I: Professional Papers, contains correspondence, memoranda, and brief case reports and position papers. Most of this material deals with problems in public housing. Typical is an analysis of gang activities at the Jane Addams project (9/30/53), which should be supplemented by reference to a notebook in Box 4, folder 9. The bulk of the correspondence was directed to or from local Chicago agencies concerned with public housing.

Two letters in particular, however, are outside this ordinary range:

-A letter to Senator Percy (2/10/73) critical of federal administration policies on housing and social programs.

-A letter to the Sun Times (7/11/74) critical of an article published by that newspaper (the reply of Marshall Field and a clipping of the article are included).

In addition to the above two letters, the following are important because of the prominence of their correspondents.

-From John H. Ballard, Executive Director, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago (8/21/70).

-From David L. Daniel, Director, Cook County Department of Public Aid. (3/21/73).

-From Paul Douglas, Alderman, City of Chicago (9/18/40).

-To Philip Hauser, Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago (12/7/64).

-From Jack Meltzer, Director, Center for Urban Studies, University of Chicago (5/22/67).

-From Daniel Ryan, President, Board of Commissioners of Cook County, Illinois (7/7/59).

-From Wilma Walker, Professor Emeritus, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago (2/20/63).

Very little of this material touches on Mrs. Wirth's own life and career per se, but there are exceptions: 7/15/22, 11/29/24, 8/24/29, 12/23/31, 6/28/35, 12/23/35, 2/16/38, 9/18/40, 1/13/44, 6/22/49, 9/8/52, 10/11/56, 5/7/58, 6/24/58, 7/7/59, 5/22/67, 12/2/72. This last letter and the undated letter to the Paducah News (folder 7) should be consulted by anyone interested in the biography of Mary Bolton Wirth, as should a letter of 6/11/58 in the section on "Local Housing Materials."

Series II: Writings, includes material less occasional and less ephemeral than that in the preceding section and contains both Mary Bolton Wirth's published writings and other examples of her work in unpublished form. The articles are arranged alphabetically by title. The book reviews are arranged alphabetically by author of the work under review. Note should be taken of an untitled
and undated draft of a statement in defense of the Chicago Housing Authority, written after Mary Bolton Wirth had left the.

Series III: Local Housing, parallels Wirth’s own correspondence. They provide much the same kind of information as the "Professional Correspondence," but their material was not written by or sent directly to Mary Bolton Wirth, but rather would have been subsequently referred to her attention. There are, for example, memoranda that circulated within the Chicago Housing Authority during Mary Bolton Wirth’s time as supervisor (1952-58) and memoranda from the Department of Urban Renewal during the subsequent period when she continued to act as an adviser and consultant. A great amount of this material comes from the early 1960’s.

Series I and Series III together offer a picture of the issues in housing that developed in Chicago over a number of years.

Series IV: Notes and Notebooks, is subdivided according to topics. Some duplication of material exists both within and between subdivisions. Several of these subdivisions correspond to special projects or studies to which Mary Bolton Wirth contributed (e.g., the investigation of the Office of Economic Opportunity in Michigan, part of the general Great Lakes Project under the direction of Jack Meltzer of the Center for Urban Studies, University of Chicago—which was itself a part of the broader U. S. Senate investigation of the Office).

The material in Series V: University of Chicago revolves mainly around concerns of the past—alumni matters, reunions of the class of 1920, controversy over two versions (R. Pollak’s and Mary Bolton Wirth’s) of what life had been like on the University of Chicago campus circa 1920. Mary Bolton Wirth’s "Report to Alice and Elizabeth" is an important witness to the troubles arising out of the debate over the academic fate of Marlene Dixon, an assistant professor of Sociology, in 1969. Also important is a copy of Mary Bolton Wirth’s letter to the University of Chicago Alumni Association (6/15/62) taking blunt exception to the granting of an award to Dr. Morris Fishbein.

Among the correspondents in this section are: Herbert Blumer (9/11/68), Everett C. Hughes (5/31/68), Albert Pick, Jr. (10/18/70), and Hubert I. Will (5/31/66). Also included is a letter from Mary Bolton Wirth’s daughter, Elizabeth Wirth Marvick, to the President of the University of Chicago Alumni Association (5/13/74).

Folder 3 contains two issues of "Twenty's Tabloid" reporting on the twentieth and fortieth reunions of the Class of 1920; a questionnaire sent to class members prior to the fiftieth reunion, and Mary Wirth's handwritten, critical evaluation of the reunion. Folder 4 contains material concerning her 1966 Alumni Citation for Public Service award.

Series VI: Travel, Biography and Photographs includes accounts of four trips—to California, London, Vienna, and the U. S. South—showing Mary Bolton Wirth in a somewhat more personal light, but never with her more social concerns very far from her mind. The correspondence is largely generated by these travel pieces. The biographical materials include evaluations, certificates of membership, and other personal documents. The researcher might find particularly helpful Mary Bolton Wirth’s job description of her responsibilities as Supervisor of Community
and Tenant Relations. Series VI also contains photographs of the University campus, student friends, and some neighborhood scenes, ca. 1916-1917.

**Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html

Wirth, Louis. Papers

**Subject Headings**

- Wirth, Mary Bolton
- Dixon, Marlene
- University of Chicago-Alumni and alumnae
- Chicago (Ill.). Dept. of Urban Renewal
- Michigan. Economic Opportunity Office
- Chicago Housing Authority
- Women social workers
- Social workers
- Social service

**INVENTORY**

**Series I: Professional Correspondence**

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Series II: Writings

Box 1
  Folder 8
    Advisory--Recreation

Box 1
  Folder 9
    Relocation--Welfare

Box 1
  Folder 10
    Untitled

Box 1
  Folder 11
    Book Reviews

Series III: Local Housing Materials

Box 1
  Folder 12
    1948-51

Box 1
  Folder 13
    1952-53

Box 1
  Folder 14
    1954-56

Box 1
  Folder 15
    1957-59

Box 2
  Folder 1
    1960-61

Box 2
  Folder 2

Box 2
  Folder 3
    November, 1962-December, 1962

Box 2
  Folder 4
    January 1, 1963-January 15, 1963

Box 2
  Folder 5
    January 16, 1963-February, 1963

Box 2
  Folder 6
    March, 1963
Box 2
Folder 7
April-December, 1963
Box 2
Folder 8
1964-67
Box 2
Folder 9
1968-73
Box 2
Folder 10
Undated
Box 2
Folder 11
Undated
Box 2
Folder 12
Undated

Series IV: Notes and Notebooks
Subseries 1: Chicago Housing and the Chicago Housing Authority
Box 2
Folder 13
1950's
Box 2
Folder 14
Jane Addams House in the early 1950's
Box 2
Folder 15
CHA in the later period
Box 2
Folder 16
CHA in the later period
Box 2
Folder 17
CHA in the later period
Box 3
Folder 1
Hand-written working notes on CHA
Box 3
Folder 2
Box 3
Folder 3
Various speech and discussion notes
Box 3
Folder 4
Topically indexed notebook collection of items on housing, first part

Box 3
Folder 5
Topically indexed notebook collection of items on housing, second part

Subseries 2: Urban Renewal

Box 3
Folder 6
Materials for a study on relocation, put together by MBW (1964-65) for the Hauser Report

Box 3
Folder 7
Box 3
Folder 8
Box 3
Folder 9
Additional material on urban renewal

Box 3
Folder 10
General Documents

Box 3
Folder 11-14
Project descriptions and other material

Box 4
Folder 1-4
General Documents

Box 4
Folder 5
Notes

Box 4
Folder 6
Material from the Loop College seminar

Box 4
Folder 7
Additional material on housing and the elderly

Box 4
Folder 8
Typical Fund-raising Kit

Box 4
Folder 9
Box 4
Folder 10
Packet of housing statistics for Chicago neighborhoods

Box 4
Folder 11
Box 4
Folder 12
Newspaper clippings, 1959-75 and undated; mostly from Chicago papers and mainly dealing with housing

Series V: University of Chicago

Box 5
Folder 1
Correspondence relating to University of Chicago (1962-74)

Box 5
Folder 2
Articles

Box 5
Folder 3
Class of 1920: 20th, 40th, and 50th Reunions

Box 5
Folder 4
1966 Alumni Citation for Public Service

Series VI: Biography, Travel and Photographs

Box 5
Folder 5
Miscellaneous

Box 5
Folder 6
Correspondence and a magazine note relating to this travel

Box 5
Folder 7
Biographical Documents

Box 5
Folder 8
Photographs ca. 1916-1917