

AFSCME Archives

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Wayne State University

The labor history archives at Wayne State University was established in 1960 and later became known as the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs. It is the largest archive specializing in labor records in North America. The Reuther Library has been the official repository for AFSCME records since 1974.

What are archives?

Archives are records that have historical value, including but not limited to: letters, reports, notes, photographs, and videos, which are created by individual people, organizations, and governments. These records are documentary evidence of the past that we can use to interpret and understand history (more information at archivists.org). AFSCME staff and members, labor and social history scholars, and many others use the records for research.

What the AFSCME Archivist does

The AFSCME Archivist's primary job is to preserve AFSCME's historical record and ensure the union's legacy. She works with the International Union in a variety of ways, including assisting with records management procedures, directing the transfer of records to the archives, organizing the records, preserving at-risk documents, and describing the collections to make them easy to find. Describing collections includes creating a finding aid, which is the main tool for discovering collections' contents. The archivist also digitizes photographs and other documents and makes them available on the web, conducts oral history interviews, creates exhibits, and gives presentations on the archives, among other tasks.

Where to find the AFSCME Archives

AFSCME Collections: <http://reuther.wayne.edu/taxonomy/term/10>

AFSCME Image Galleries: <http://reuther.wayne.edu/image/tid/25>

Digital Exhibit on the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike:
<https://digital.library.wayne.edu/iamaman/>

Contact the AFSCME Archivist

SCaloia@wayne.edu

313-577-9437

@AFSCMEArchivist

Caring for your records

Whether you are sending your local's records to the Reuther Library, another institution, or holding onto them for now, there are steps you can take to make them last as long as possible. Avoid storing records in environments with high heat, humidity, or frequently fluctuating temperature and humidity. Cool and dry is best, which means avoiding places like basements or areas with leaky roofs or pipes. Keep food away from the records to prevent pests from making a home in them. Avoid using tape, glue, or rubber bands directly on the records – these materials cause damage and leave stains as they deteriorate.

Have multiple back-ups of your electronic records, including an off-site or cloud backup if possible. Keep in mind that not many digital formats are considered “archival”. Generally the best file types for long-term preservation are:

Text files: .txt, .html, .xml, .php

Word documents: .doc, .docx

Excel spreadsheets: .xls, .xlsx

Rich text: .rtf

PowerPoint: .ppt, .pptx, .pps

Adobe: .pdf

Audio: .mp3, .avi, .mpg, .wav

Photo: .jpg, .tif

Video: .mov

What records does the Reuther Library collect from AFSCME?

Listed below are general types of records the Reuther Library collects from AFSCME International, Councils, and Locals. This list offers guidelines but is not definitive. Because records vary from one organization to another, you should still speak directly with the archivist to share more details about the records you would like to donate.

The Reuther Library seeks originals of most record types. If your organization wishes to keep the originals of some documents, such as constitutions and bylaws, copies can be substituted. If you have record types not on the list, please feel free to ask about them. This following applies to any format of record, whether paper or digital.

WANTED: Researchers often find the following types of materials most helpful.

Articles written by or about the union, organization, or its members

Audits and year end financial summaries

Charters

Committee files

Constitution/bylaws

Contracts and negotiation files

Correspondence/memoranda

Director's and officers' files

Event, program, and union action files

Field staff and organizing files

Films/videos/audio tapes (labeled and identified) produced by the union, organization, or its members

Meeting minutes and agendas
Membership records
Photographs, preferably with identifying information like names of people, date, location, and event
Press releases
Project files
Publications by the union
Reports/white papers
Transcripts, testimonies, speeches, and speech notes

NOTE: Legal files, grievance files, and collections of books, videos, or artwork not produced by the union, or its members must be discussed with the archivist before shipment.

NOT WANTED: The following materials have minimal historical value or cannot be opened for research due to privacy concerns. If you have record types listed below that you believe have value, please discuss them with the archivist.

Applications or resumes for jobs, scholarships
Audio recordings that are inaudible and/or unlabeled
Bank statements
Blank stationery
Cancelled checks and/or check stubs
Cash journals
Conference planning files and registration forms
Routine correspondence (thank-you notes, dues statements, hotel reservations, etc.)
Duplicates
Files of newspaper clippings and magazine articles not specifically about the union, organization, or its members
Invoices
Personnel or human resources files
Petty cash slips
Photographs with no identifying information
Plaques, trophies
Videotape recordings that are inaudible, un-viewable and/or unlabeled

Materials falling under the above guidelines that are in digital format are welcome and can be transferred on external hard drives, flash drives, optical disks or cloud services. Please speak with the archivist before transfer.

How to Prepare an Inventory

We would greatly appreciate a rudimentary inventory, which will help us make your collection available to researchers more quickly. With this inventory we (and researchers) will know how your files were arranged. The inventory can be as simple as this:

Box 1: Meeting Minutes, 1960-1980
Box 2: Meeting Minutes, 1980-1985
 Reports, 1970-1985
 Correspondence, 1980-1987

Speeches, 1978-1983
Box 3: Memoranda, 1960-1970

Download a Sample Inventory Sheet:

http://reuther.wayne.edu/files/Sample_Inventory_Sheet.doc (MSWord - 16KB).

Send the inventory to the AFSCME archivist. Additionally, within each box, place the inventory for that box in front of the files.

How to Pack the Records

Following are recommended methods of packing your records so that the papers are not damaged in transit. If you have any questions about packing your records, please ask the archivist.

Your records should be in folders within the box. We discourage hanging folders since they will damage the box en route. We also discourage packing loose materials because without folders, the papers are unprotected and unorganized.

The material in the boxes should be in sequential order. For example, if you have six file cabinets of materials, box one should start with records from cabinet one, drawer one followed by drawer two, and so on. The last drawer of cabinet six should be in the last box in the numerical sequence. If you have another filing system, please pack the boxes so as to maintain the order of the records as described above.

Be sure that boxes are full, to prevent sagging and bending of papers, but not overstuffed. All materials should be in strong packing boxes that are 12 in. x 15 in. x 10 in. only. Fill up empty space with newspaper or other packing material so that items do not slide, bend, or experience further damage in transit. Tape the boxes with strong tape.

DO NOT pack your box like this, with loose, disorganized papers, poorly stacked, and folded:



DO pack a box like this with papers in labeled folders and an inventory of the box in the front:



DO NOT use an oversized box without a labeled description of the contents. If possible, we prefer you pack your papers in a standard-sized box with dimensions of 12 in. x 15 in. x 10 in. that can handle both letter and legal size folders.

How to Label the Boxes

On the short side of the outside of the box, indicate which box of the total number it is, e.g., Box 1 of 6. Also indicate general information like dates for the material inside the box, e.g., 1967-1972; from which department within the union the materials originate, e.g., Organizing Department; and general topics covered, e.g., State files, Alabama-Louisiana.

On the top of the box, affix a shipping label addressed to:
Stefanie Caloia, AFSCME Archivist
c/o Wayne State University Libraries
attn.: Walter P. Reuther Library
5150 Anthony Wayne Dr.
Detroit, MI 48202

Is the Reuther Library right for your local?

The Reuther Library is the official repository for AFSCME International records but not necessarily for AFSCME locals. While we are very interested in collections from local unions, in some cases, your local's records may be better suited for donation to an archive near you. For example, there may be a significant research community in your area that is interested in your records and unlikely to travel to Michigan for access. A local institution would enable your records to stay in your community. If you need assistance finding a local institution, the AFSCME Archivist may be able to help, so do not hesitate to ask.