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American Civil Liberties Union, Pinellas County Chapter, Records : A Finding Aid of the Raymond and Margaret Yazell Collection

Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. Special Collections and University Archives.

James Anthony Schnur

Raymond Yazell

Margaret Yazell

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**American Civil Liberties Union,
Pinellas County Chapter, Records**

**A Finding Aid of the
Raymond and Margaret Yazell Files**

By
James A. Schnur
Special Collections Student Assistant
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
USF St. Petersburg

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Introduction and Provenance

The Pinellas County American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Collection presently consists of the personal archives and research files of Raymond and Margaret Yazell. These materials were donated to the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library in 1995 by Dr. Raymond O. Arsenault, professor of History at USF St. Petersburg and president at the time of the Pinellas County ACLU chapter. Items in this collection fall under the **Local and Regional History** provenance of the USF St. Petersburg library's Special Collections and Archives department.

Restrictions/Preservation Note

The acidic paper often used on printing presses has promoted the rapid physical deterioration of some materials in this collection, most notably newspaper clippings and fliers. To prevent further damage to items in the Pinellas County ACLU Collection, refrain from placing any additional stress on the paper fibers by folding or creasing newspapers, or by exposing items to light for an extended period of time. Please report any tears or other damage so library staff may take appropriate preservation or conservation measures. Employees will evaluate photocopying requests on an individual basis to ensure the long-term preservation of this unique collection.

Due to the confidential nature of client/attorney communications, certain materials in the legal panel case review files require consent of or membership in the Pinellas County ACLU Chapter prior to inspection. Please ask for further information from personnel in the special collections reading room. Materials in this collection do not circulate.

Scope and Contents

The Pinellas County ACLU Collection includes two distinct series. Materials in the three archival document boxes constitute the Ray Yazell ACLU research files. This series contains board meeting minutes, administrative materials, newspaper clippings, legal research reports, and subject files on civil liberties issues. Copies of Come Unity, an underground/community action newspaper, reside in a newspaper storage box and form the second series.

Biographical Note

A native of Kentucky, Raymond "Ray" Milton Yazell retired from the military as a lieutenant colonel and moved to St. Petersburg in 1968. He immediately became involved in civil liberties issues, serving as chairman of the Greater St. Petersburg ACLU chapter in 1971, as acting executive director of the state chapter in 1973, and as a long-time delegate on the Pinellas County and state

executive boards.

Yazell encouraged members of the community to understand and appreciate their cherished freedoms and the Bill of Rights. Through the court observer program and regular correspondence to municipal authorities, he worked with local officials to guarantee that courts extended constitutional protections to defendants. In addition to his ACLU responsibilities, Yazell also advocated criminal justice reform through regular discussions with law enforcement administrators and his Coalition for Alternatives to Jail Expansion (CAJE) organization. After the reinstatement of the death penalty, Yazell served as a co-founder of Tampa Bay Citizens to Abolish the Death Penalty. Along with his wife, Margaret "Margo" Yazell, he edited Come Unity, a St. Petersburg-based social action newspaper. While attending classes on the USF St. Petersburg campus, Ray and Margo played an important role in the development of a student ACLU chapter. Ray and Margo continued to enroll in seminars and classes at USF into the early 1990s.

In 1993, the Florida ACLU chapter awarded Ray and Margo Yazell the Nelson Poynter Civil Liberties Award for their tireless efforts on behalf of the community. On 4 November 1995, Ray Yazell passed away at the age of 81 due to complications caused by cancer.

Additional Sources of Information

The American Civil Liberties Union of Florida Papers offer another important primary source. Covering the period from 1955 to 1981, this collection includes eleven boxes (4.58 linear feet) of correspondence and miscellaneous materials on subjects such as crime, school integration, and the legal status of women. This collection resides at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Special Collections Department, University of Florida (call number: PKY ms 2).

As part of a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant, the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University has compiled information about repositories that possess ACLU affiliate holdings. For more information, contact the library at 65 Olden Street, Princeton, NJ 08544-2009, by telephone at (609) 258-6345, by FAX at (609) 258-3385, or by electronic mail to Mudd@pucc.princeton.edu.

Container Listing

Series: Ray Yazell ACLU Research Files

Document Box 1

Administrative Materials/Bylaws/Resolutions

Extent: 1 folder

Includes: background materials on the Greater St. Petersburg (later Pinellas County) ACLU chapter, resolutions, membership information, by-laws. The bulk of the material covers the 1970s.

American Civil Liberties Union (videorecording)

Extent: 1 videocassette

Thirteen-minute segment from October 1984 broadcast of 20/20. VHS format. (Included in box, but not placed in a file folder)

Annual Reports

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983.

Beckett, Jr., Gardner W. -- Legal Research Files

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: undated, 1983, 1984

A prominent St. Petersburg attorney, Gardner W. Beckett served

as a member of the Pinellas County ACLU's Legal Panel and an advocate for civil liberties. Beckett passed away in March 1993 while questioning a witness in a Tampa courtroom. The state chapter had awarded Beckett the 1991 Nelson Poynter Award for his many contributions to civil liberties.

Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes

Extent: 7 folders

Inclusive dates: 1968; 1970-1986

See the following folders:

Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1968; 1970-1972
Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1973-1975

Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1976-1977
Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1978-1979
Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1980-1981

Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1982-1983
Board of Directors -- Meeting Minutes, 1984-1986

Censorship -- Adult Videos/Movies

Extent: 1 folder

Contains clippings and related materials on adult-use zoning, adult book stores, and anti-pornography ordinances.

Chapter Activities

Extent: 11 folders

Inclusive dates: 1966-1989

Contains newspaper clippings, correspondence, research notes, publicity materials, and other assorted information that documents the activities of the Pinellas County ACLU chapter and its membership.

See the following folders:

Chapter Activities -- 1966-1970
Chapter Activities -- 1971
Chapter Activities -- 1972
Chapter Activities -- 1973: January-June

Document Box 2

Chapter Activities -- 1973: July-December
Chapter Activities -- 1974-1976
Chapter Activities -- 1977-1979
Chapter Activities -- 1980-1982
Chapter Activities -- 1983-1984
Chapter Activities -- 1985-1987
Chapter Activities -- 1988-1989

Church and State -- "3-Church Deal" for the Stadium Site

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: 1982-1986

Clippings document the relocation of predominantly African-American churches in the Gas Plant area, site of the present Thunderdome stadium. Federal officials launched an probe after churches received extra compensation from city officials that was denied to other residents in the Gas Plant area.

Coalition for Alternatives to Jail Expansion (CAJE)

Extent: 1 folder

Clippings and materials recount the construction of the jail and criminal court complex in the High Point area of mid-Pinellas County during the 1970s.

Court Observer Program

Extent: 1 folder

Bulk dates: 1972-1975

The Greater St. Petersburg ACLU chapter initiated a court observer program after the United States Supreme Court issued its June 1972 Argersinger v. Hamlin decision. This verdict affirmed that defendants who were accused of misdemeanors and faced jail sentences had the right to counsel (and appointed counsel, if indigent). In addition to the county courts, twenty municipalities maintained courts and conducted hearings for local offenses. Volunteers in the court observer program monitored these local courts and compiled information for ACLU attorneys.

Court Observer Program -- Data Forms (1973)

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: 1973

Includes individual data forms for various municipal courts.

Curfews

Extent: 1 folder

Assorted newspaper clippings from the 1970s and late 1980s on juvenile curfews.

Education, Elementary and Secondary

Extent: 1 folder

Assorted newspaper clippings from the 1980s that cover the topics of **Corporal Punishment** and **Student Dress Codes**.

Fair, Jim

Extent: 1 folder

A former Hillsborough County elections supervisor, Fair had faced impeachment charges and had spent time in the Florida State Hospital. He often faced criticism from other state authorities for questioning and challenging accepted bureaucratic practices.

Financial Reports and Treasurer's Records

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: 1970, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1984

Document Box 3

Free Speech -- Bob Canney Incident

Extent: 1 folder

A political activist and former college professor, Robert "Bob" Canney faced a long prison sentence after telling a crowd in Straub Park that they should bring the "goddamn war home." His protests against the conflict in Vietnam led to subsequent imprisonment and termination from his position at the University of Florida. Gardner Beckett, a Suncoast ACLU attorney, defended Canney, whose 1970 arrest was later deemed unconstitutional. Newspaper clippings, correspondence, and publicity materials from the Bob Canney Support Committee appear in this folder.

Free Speech and Assembly -- African People's Socialist Party

Extent: 1 folder

Contains clippings about the African People's Socialist Party.

Led by Joseph Waller--who later adopted the name Omali Yeshitela--this organization participated in a number of protests and public demonstrations against groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Free Speech and Assembly -- Parades

Extent: 1 folder

Includes correspondence and newspaper clippings from the 1970s

through 1989 that document parade registration and permit requirements for organizations and events such as the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference and Circus McGurkis.

Homelessness

Extent: 1 folder

Yazell's clipping file on homeless and indigent persons.

Legal Panel -- Case Review Files

Extent: 2 folders

Inclusive dates: 1973-1974

RESTRICTION NOTE: Use restricted to members of the Pinellas County ACLU Chapter. Ask staff for further information.

Includes correspondence between state chapter, local chapter, and ACLU attorneys with defendants in criminal cases. Many letters were sent to or from prisons, and describe matters related to court cases. Arranged alphabetically within two chronological folders:

Legal Panel -- Case Review Files, 1973

Legal Panel -- Case Review Files, 1974

Newsletters and Come Unity Announcements

Extent: 2 folders

Contains newsletters printed by the Greater St. Petersburg ACLU chapter, as well as a variety of announcements of ACLU events that appeared in Come Unity. The bulk of the material covers the period from 1973 to 1975.

Police Department Policies and Procedures

Extent: 1 folder

Includes correspondence and clippings, most from 1986 through 1988, that document police policies and ACLU responses.

Search and Seizure -- Howlett v. Rose

Extent: 1 folder

On 9 October 1986, the Pinellas County School Board suspended St. Petersburg High School student Mark Howlett after an administrator searched his vehicle. With the assistance of the ACLU chapter, Howlett filed suit against the school board and its then-superintendent, Scott N. Rose. This folder contains newspaper clippings and press releases.

Student Chapter -- USF St. Petersburg

Extent: 1 folder

Bulk dates: 1973-1974

While attending the University of South Florida, the Yazells worked with other students and Steven Lawson, professor of history, to form a student ACLU chapter at USF St. Petersburg.

This folder includes meeting minutes, publicity materials, correspondence, and copies of the Crow's Nest campus newsletter.

For a related collection, see: **Tschiderer Student Publications Collection**, Special Collections and Archives, USF St. Petersburg.

Treatment Facilities -- The "Seed" Drug Rehabilitation Program

Extent: 1 folder

Inclusive dates: 1973-1975, 1989

Describes the controversial "Seed" drug treatment facility, a program that received the support of many municipal judges. The file contains correspondence, clippings, and a special edition of the St. Petersburg Junior College Wooden Horse newspaper devoted to the facility. The Pinellas County Seed program closed in 1975. A subsequent program--known as "Straight"--was formed the following year.

Series: Come Unity Publication

Newspaper Box 1

Come Unity Newspapers

Extent: 1 newspaper storage box

Inclusive dates: February 1972-September 1988

Originally appearing as an underground newspaper, Come Unity remained a strong voice for community action and social justice issues into the late-1980s.
