

William K. Hefner Papers

1945-1987 (*Bulk:* 1959-1964) 6 boxes (9 linear ft.) **Call no.**: MS 129

Collection overview

In 1960, William K. Hefner (1915-1993) became one of the first of new breed of radical pacifists to run for elective office, when he ran as a peace candidate for Congress in the 1st district of Massachusetts. An accountant from Greenfield, Hefner was involved at a national level with movements for peace and civil rights. An early member of SANE, a founder of Political Action for Peace in 1959 (now CPPAX) and the Greenfield Peace Center (1963), and an active member of the American Friends Service Committee, War Resisters League, Turn Toward Peace, and the World Without War Conference, Hefner was an energetic force in the movements for peace and disarmament, civil rights, and a more just economic system. He ran unsuccessfully for office in three elections between 1960 and 1964, and supported peace candidate H. Stuart Hughes in his bid for election to the U.S. Senate in 1962.

The Hefner papers offer a remarkable record of politically-engaged activism for peace and social justice in the early 1960s. With an intensely local focus, Hefner was tied in to the larger movements at the state and national level, corresponding with major figures such as A.J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, Benjamin Spock, and Arthur Springer. The collection includes particularly rich documentation of the early years of Political Action for Peace, which Hefner helped found, with correspondence, minutes of meetings, and publications, as well as equally rich materials on Hefner's bids for congress in 1960 and 1962.

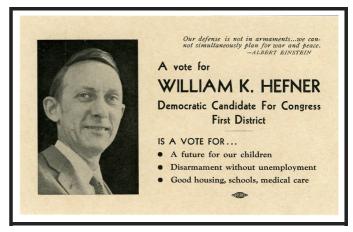
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Background on William K. Hefner

An accountant by trade, and a peace and civil rights activist by nature, Hefner was already a veteran of twenty years in the struggle for social justice when he became the sole peace candidate for national public office in 1960. Although he failed to secure the Democratic nomination for the seat in the First Congressional District of Massachusetts, and lost again two years later, Hefner never relented, remaining a passionate public voice for social justice for many years.

A native of Logan, West Virginia, William K. Hefner (1915-1993), had his first taste of practical politics shortly after high school when he worked for the County Board of Education. By his student days at Antioch College, he had already become a deeply committed pacifist, so much so that after graduation in May 1940, he helped found Ahimsa Farm in Aurora, Ohio, a center for study and discussion of simple living and nonviolent direct action modeled on Gandhian principles. During the Second World War, Hefner



William K. Hefner

refused military service on religious grounds and served two and a half years in prison as a conscientious objector in Ashland, Kentucky. After his release, he married Elizabeth Mutsch of Brooklyn, New York, in 1947, and in the following year, the couple moved to western Massachusetts, where Hefner began work as a certified public accountant in Greenfield and later as an Assistant Professor of Accounting at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (1951-1954). The Hefners had two children, Linda and Robert.

In many regards, Hefner followed a classic, old-line Liberal line on politics, though always distinguished by his ardent pacifism. His commitments hardly wavered, even at the height of the McCarthy era. As early as the end of the Second World War, he stood up publicly for widely unpopular causes on a number of fronts: arguing for the equality of the races, speaking out in favor of nuclear disarmament (urging his fellow citizens to match their "American patriotism" with "American ideals"), and calling for diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China. Informed by Quaker theology, his vision of patriotism fed into a steady stream of articles written for regional newspapers and into his annual Christmas messages, in which he called on his fellow Americans to act peacefully in accord with their Judeo-Christian professions.

Having already emerged as a local leader of SANE in western Massachusetts, Hefner helped organize Political Action for Peace (PAX) in 1959 to back peace candidates for public office and, as an early brochure stated, to "inject into the 1960 political campaign a set of ideas that does not lead to the inevitable failures stemming from the contradictory concept of 'maintaining peace through the arms race.'" Coordinating with national peace advocates such as A.J. Muste and Arthur Springer, PAX promoted their agenda with considerable energy and provided substantial support for Hefner's bid for the Democratic nomination for the congressional seat in the First District. Although he lost that race, Hefner polled well enough to be encouraged.

In 1962, PAX had a greater impact, with Massachusetts (along with California) fielding the largest number of peace candidates for public office. Hefner, who had been the only avowed peace candidate in 1960, secured the Democratic nomination for the First District, losing to two-time Republican incumbent Silvio O. Conte in the general election, while-PAX backed candidates Elizabeth Boardman ran for the congressional seat in the Third District and Harvard History Professor and independent, H. Stuart Hughes, for Senate. Although Boardman and

Hughes lost their elections, the organization that supported them endured, reforming as Massachusetts

Political Action for Peace (Mass PAX) in November 1962 and merging in 1972 with a broadly similar

organization, Citizens for Participation Politics(CPP) to form Citizens for Participation in Political Action (CPPAX).

Peace activism for Hefner went hand in hand with the struggle for social and racial justice, and from his college days, Hefner built working relationships with a number of nationally significant figures in the civil rights movement, including Bayard Rustin. Hefner lead contingents from western Massachusetts to at least three of the Marches on Washington, including the 1963 March led by Martin Luther King, and two marches against the war in Vietnam in 1964 and 1965.

Hefner was affiliated with a remarkably large number of peace and social justice organizations including the Fellowship of Reconciliation; War Resisters League; the Peace Committee of the New England Region American Friends Service Committee; the Committee on Peace and Social Concerns of the Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting of Friends (Quakers); the American Civil Liberties Union; the Congress of Racial Equality; the World Without War Council; and the American Committee on Africa. Locally, his commitments were equally varied, ranging from service as a member of the Board of Directors of Woolman Hill Quaker Conference Center in Deerfield, Mass., as Chair of the New England Committee on Political Action for Peace (PAX), Chair of the Hampshire-Franklin Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, and, for two years, as a member of the Mohawk Trail Regional School Committee. A Presbyterian, he attended the Mt. Toby Friends Meeting. He died in Greenfield in 1993.

Scope of collection

Hefner's unflinching commitment to effecting social change through the political process resulted in a deep and remarkably varied body of records. Although the Hefner papers span only about five years of his career in detail (1959-1964), they offer remarkable insight into the mind and organizational activities of a tireless peace advocate, a would-be congressman, and progressive proponent of causes ranging from civil rights to disarmament, a just foreign policy, and social equity at home.

Organized in three series, the collection contains records relating to Hefner's two runs for a seat in U.S. Congress from the First District of Massachusetts (1960 and 1962); materials relating to his work with peace organizations (Turn To Peace, Platform For Peace, SANE) and Civil Rights groups (Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party); and the foundational records for Political Action for Peace. The content in each of these series is varied, but overlaps considerably, and each series includes both incoming and outgoing correspondence, memoranda, newsletters, campaign press releases, and ephemera.

Series descriptions

Beginning with early efforts to galvanize support for his run the U.S. Congress in 1960 through his defeat at the hands of Republican incumbent Silvio O. Conte two years later, this series includes dense documentation of Bill Hefner's skills as a political organizer and his stance as a peace candidate. In addition to relatively mundane materials on campaign finances and getting out the vote, the series includes a strong selection of Hefner's stump speeches, his platform, publicity materials, and a thick run of correspondence with well known activists and antiwar supporters, including the singer Richard Dyer-Bennet, A.J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, and Benjamin Spock, and outgoing letters from Hefner to these and others. The series provides a detailed framework for understanding Hefner's attempts to enter Democratic Party politics, to marshal support and wage a peace campaign, and analyze the results. The campaign diary represents a slender, but engrossing chronicle of the 1962 election, and the campaign evaluations for that election provide a keen retrospective.

The series also contains significant materials relating to Hefner's involvement in supporting peace candidate H. Stuart Hughes' campaign for the Senate in 1962, including correspondence with campaign organizers, candidate's statements, press releases, newsletters, fliers and ephemera, and a series of notes on the campaign.

Series 2. Causes

1945-1978 114 folders

Although Hefner's involvements in reform activity were many and varied, he was particularly embroiled in the antiwar and civil rights movements. This series contains a wealth of correspondence, memoranda, ephemera, and other materials relating to Hefner's political activities in the 1950s and 1960s, with particular emphasis on his work with Turn Toward Peace and other disarmament and antinuclear groups, and in the early anti-Vietnam War struggles. Among other organizations that appear are the Greenfield Peace Center (which Hefner helped to found in 1963), Platform For Peace, SANE, and the World Without War Council.

Hefner's support for the civil rights movement is less thoroughly represented, however there is valuable material relating to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and scattered materials on integration and race.

Series 3. Political Action for Peace

1958-1969 69 folders

A founder of Political Action for Peace in 1959, Hefner kept a strong record of its early years. In many ways, this series contains the incunabula of the organization: documents pertaining to the exploratory committee and the early efforts at propagating their ideas to the public, minutes of committee meetings, and correspondence with the organization's officers and supporters. Inevitably, the series contains material relating to the elections of 1960 through 1964 and should be read in tandem with the other series in this collection.

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Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Elizabeth Hefner, April 1994.

Processing Information

Processed by Gabrielle Fein, Abbott Thayer, and Jess Watzky, December 2010.

Related Material

Among other collections in SCUA relating to Hefner and to peace activism in Western Massachusetts, see:

- Silvio O. Conte Papers
- Greenfield Peace Center
- Traprock Peace Center
- Valley Peace Center

Language:

English

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Cite as: William K. Hefner Papers (MS 129). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Antinuclear movement--Massachusetts.
- Civil Rights movements--Massachusetts.
- Nonviolence.
- Pacifists--Massachusetts.
- Political activists--Massachusetts.
- United States. Congress--Elections, 1960.

- United States. Congress--Elections, 1962.
- Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Protest movements.

Contributors

- Hefner, William K. [main entry]
- Boardman, Elizabeth F.
- Hughes, H. Stuart (Henry Stuart), 1916-1999.
- Muste, Abraham John, 1885-1967.
- Rustin, Bayard, 1912-1987.
- Springer, Arthur.
- Massachusetts Political Action for Peace.
- Platform for Peace (Organization).
- Political Action for Peace.
- SANE, Inc.
- Turn Toward Peace (Organization).

Genres and formats

• Minutes.

Link to similar SCUA collections

