

THE MERCEDES NELSON COLLECTION

Papers, 1935-1971
(Predominantly, 1937-1939)

1 linear foot

Accession Number 685
L. C. Number MS

The papers of Mercedes Nelson were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in October of 1974 by Dr. Nelson and were opened for research in October of 1984.

Mercedes Nelson was born in Henning, Minnesota and after completing high school attended the University of Minnesota where she earned a B.S. in physical education in 1922 and a M.A. in 1940. She received her Ed.D. in 1951 after attending New York University for several summers.

Dr. Nelson began teaching in the Minneapolis Public Schools in 1922 and joined the Minneapolis American Federation of Teachers Local 59 in 1924. In 1935 she was appointed by Governor Olson as the first teacher to serve on the Minnesota State Board of Education. In 1936 she was elected as a Vice-President of the AFT and represented the region of Wisconsin-Minnesota until 1939. In 1936 Dr. Nelson and Ralph Ahlstrom, both AFT Vice-Presidents, called a conference of all AFT locals in Minnesota and formed the Minnesota State Federation of Teachers. Dr. Nelson was appointed Chairman of the Council Committee on Arrangements for the 1937 AFT National Convention and in 1939 she served on the editorial board of The American Teacher. During the 1940's, Dr. Nelson served as chairman on various AFT state and local committees and in 1946 was appointed Assistant-Principal of Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, a position she held for 22 years. In 1947 and 1948, Dr. Nelson served as secretary of the "Independent Caucus" of the AFT which advocated more active organization of teachers and elimination of the AFT no-strike policy.

Dr. Nelson retired in June of 1968. In addition to her educational work she served as Director of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, was on the Board of Family and Children's Services, and a member of the Foreign Policy Association, the United Nations Association, the World Federalists, the NAACP, and the Urban League.

The papers of Dr. Nelson consist mainly of correspondence and reflect primarily her work as a national AFT Vice-President and organizer.

Important subjects covered in the collection are:

Academic Freedom	Organizing
William Card Case	1948 Strike
Independent Caucus	Tenure

Among the important correspondents are:

George E. Axtelle	Mary F. Grossman
William Card	Irvin Kuenzli
Jerome Davis	Joel Seidman

An Index to correspondents will be found on p.4

Non-manuscript material:

One photograph relating to the 1939 Convention at Niagara Falls has been placed in the Archives Audio-Visual Collections. Several AFT newspapers received with this collection are available in the Archives Library.

Series I
General Files, 1935-1971
Boxes 1-2

Correspondence, minutes, reports and clippings covering the union activities of Mercedes Nelson. There is also information on the Independent Caucus, AFT Local 59, the 1948 strike, and the WPA Local of the AFT. There are several folders devoted to a hearing of William Card, an AFT organizer, and the events which surrounded the case. Files are arranged alphabetically by subject or type of material.

Box 1

- 1-5. AFT Executive Council Meetings, 1937-39
6. Executive Council Meeting, 28-30 Dec 1959
7. William Card; Executive Council Investigation, Aug-Dec 1938
- 8-10. William Card; Hearing, 9Dec1938
11. William Card; Letters Opposing, May-Dec 1938
12. William Card; Letters of Support, 1938-39
- 13-15. William Card; Organizing Reports, Sept - Dec 1937
- 16-17. Correspondence, AFT Activities, 1942-52
- 18-19. Correspondence, AFT Vice-President, 1936

Box 2

1. Correspondence, AFT Vice-President, 1937-1939
- 2-3. Correspondence, 1937 AFT Convention, Feb-Aug, 1937
4. Correspondence, American Teacher, 1937-39
5. Correspondence, Jerome Davis, 1937-50
6. Correspondence, Honors, 1968-71
7. Letters from Notables, 1936-64
8. Independent Caucus of the AFT, 1947-48
9. Local 59, AFT, 1948 Strike, 1948-51
10. Local 59, AFT, Tenure Fight, 1942-43
11. Minnesota State AFT Meetings, 1959, 1965, 1966
12. Organizational Work, Iowa, 1938-39
13. Organizational Work, North Dakota,, 1937-39
14. Organizational Work, South Dakota, 1936-38
15. Organizational Work, Wisconsin, 1936-39
16. Programs Dr. Nelson Participated In, 1939-67
- 17-18. Reports to Irvin Kuenzli, 1937-39
- 19-20. Speeches and Articles by Dr. Nelson, 1935-63
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- 22-23. Works Project Administration, Teachers Union, 1936-40

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