Guide to the Papers of

The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax\*

\*(Formally Known As: Guide to the Papers of Virginia Foster Durr)

Prepared by Dana Chandler, 2007



**Tuskegee University Archives and Museums**

# Tuskegee, AL 36088

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**Collection Summary**

**Creator:** The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax

**Title:** Papers of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax

**Dates:** 1940-48

**Quantity:** 12.1 linear feet

**Identification:**

**Abstract:** The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (1940-1948) was an organization that sought, through grass-roots efforts, to repeal the National, as well as state, poll tax.

**Contact Information:** Tuskegee University Archives and Museums

Tuskegee University

Tuskegee, AL 36088 USA

Phone: (334) 725-2383

Fax: (334)

Email**:** [**archives@tuskegee.edu**](mailto:archives@tuskegee.edu)

URL: [www.tuskegee.edu](http://www.tuskegee.edu)

### Administrative Information

#### Preferred Citation

Papers of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax

**Acquisition Information**

Papers were acquired by the Tuskegee Archives from the estate of Virginia Foster Durr.

**Processing Information**

The papers were received in twenty two, over-stuffed, 1/3 c.f. archival boxes. There is no evidence that original order had been preserved. During processing in 2007, metal fasteners were removed and the documents were placed in acid-free folders. Copies were made of newspaper clippings and poor quality paper documents onto acid free paper. When possible and if applicable, the file title was taken from the original file folder. Since no original order was apparent, an order was imposed and series were created according to the subject matter of the records. Original file names were preserved as they were found on the folders. Blank folders were assigned titles according to the contents of the original folder. These artificial titles are noted in the inventory with square brackets.

**Index Terms**

This collection is indexed under the following headings in the Tuskegee University Libraries online catalog. Researchers seeking materials about related subjects, persons, organizations or places should search the catalog using these headings.

### Corporation Names Congress of Industrial Organizations National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee

**Subjects:**

African American political activists—History

African Americans—Civil rights—Alabama

African Americans—Southern States—Economic conditions   
 African Americans—Southern States—Social conditions

Alabama—Politics and government

Tuskegee (Ala.)

Tuskegee (Ala.)—Race relations

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

NAACP National Conference on Black Power

Poll Tax

Segregation   
 Social work with African Americans  
 Southern States—Politics and government  
 United States—Economic policy--1933-1945   
 United States—Politics and government--1933-1945

United States—Race relations

Voter registration—Alabama

Voting

**Persons:**

Bethune, Mary Jane McLeod, 1875-1955  
 Charlton, Louise O.  
 Connor, Theophilus Eugene "Bull," 1897-1973  
 Dombrowski, James A., (James Anderson), 1897-1983

Durr, Virginia Foster  
 Farley, Jim, (James Aloysius), 1888-1976  
 Gelders, Joseph  
 Lamar, Rachel  
 Lewis, John L., (John Llewellyn), 1880-1969  
 Mason, Lucy Randolph, 1882-1959  
 Morgan, Roberta

Perry, Jennings, 1900-  
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 1882-1945

Schryver, Kathryn  
 Smith, Ed "Cotton"

**Agency History**

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Figure 1: Photo taken at an organizational meeting of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax. Location was possibly at Mid-Western field office in Chicago, Illinois in 1945.

Introduced shortly after the American Revolution, the poll or capitation (head) tax was levied by state and local governments on all male citizens as a required sum that had to be paid before one could vote. Originally adopted by all states, the poll tax became an effective means to disenfranchise both women and minorities from voting. Although several states repealed the original tax, reconstruction in the South saw the advent of the cumulative poll tax which required white and black men between the ages of 21 and 60 years of age to pay a certain sum of money for every year since their twenty-first birthday, or since the law took effect. Often, these laws were amended to require proof that the poll tax had been paid over the entire period prior to voting in current elections.

Efforts to repeal such laws were active throughout the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. Although the national House of Representatives passed bills repealing the poll tax five times during the 1940s, Senators from certain Southern states continued to filibuster, thereby preventing any ratification by the U.S. Senate. It was not until the Twenty-Fourth Amendment was ratified in 1964 that the poll tax was abolished from national elections. Furthermore, it was not until two years later, because of the landmark case *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections,* that state poll taxes were ruled in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and subsequently abolished.

At the forefront of the efforts to repeal the poll tax was the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (NCAPT), which was formed in 1940 by Lee Geyer, Democratic Congressman from California’s 17th district, in an attempt to secure backing for his Federal anti-poll tax bill, which he had recently introduced into Congress. The NCAPT utilized grass-roots campaigns, newsletters, pamphlets and personal letters, and leading social activists in an attempt to repeal the National poll tax. In 1945, they swayed a majority in the House of Representatives to repeal the poll tax, but it would flounder in the Senate until majorities from both houses sought its repeal in the early 1960s. The NCAPT closed and disbanded in the summer of 1948.

Key social activists included: Virginia Foster Durr (a founding member of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare. She served as the vice-chairman of the Civil Rights Committee, a subcommittee to abolish the poll tax); Katherine Shryver (Editor and Executive Secretary of *The Poll Tax Repealer*); Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune (first president and co-founder of Bethune-Cookman University); and Jennings Perry (editor of the Nashville Tennessean). It was through the efforts of individuals such as these and others, that successive generations were emboldened to press further for equal rights for all men and women.

### Scope and Contents

The collection consists of documents generated or received by The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, 1940-1964. The bulk of the records date between 1942 and 1946; with some dated as early as 1941. They include correspondence, newspaper clippings, articles, pamphlets and other miscellaneous documents. The records are potentially valuable to those interested in researching a history of sociological thought regarding the lives of rural Southern poor and African Americans, Democratic thought and the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

**Arrangement**

The documents are arranged into one series.

**Series I:** National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax correspondence, notes, agendas, pamphlets, articles, posters, newspaper clippings, etc. 1941-1948.

**Restrictions**

#### Restrictions on Access

There are no restrictions on these papers.

**Restrictions on Use**

Researchers are responsible for addressing copyright issues on materials not in the public domain.

### Inventory

### Series I. National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax correspondence, notes, agendas, pamphlets, articles, posters, newspaper clippings, etc. 1941-1948.

#### Box Folder

#### 

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1 4 Arkansas

1 5 Arkansas

1 6 California

1 7 California

1 8 California

1 9 Colorado

1 10 Colorado

1 11 Connecticut

1 12 Connecticut

#### Box Folder

2 1 Delaware

2 2 Delaware

2 3 District of Columbia

2 4 District of Columbia

2 5 District of Columbia

2 6 District of Columbia

2 7 District of Columbia

2 8 Florida

2 9 Florida

2 10 Georgia

2 11 Georgia

#### Box Folder

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#### 7 1 New York

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8 1 Pennsylvania

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8 3 Rhode Island

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8 5 South Carolina

8 6 South Carolina

8 7 South Dakota

8 8 Tennessee

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8 11 Texas

8 12 Texas

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9 1 Utah

9 2 Vermont

9 3 Virginia

9 4 Virginia

9 5 Washington

9 6 Washington

9 7 West Virginia

9 8 Wisconsin

9 9 Wisconsin

9 10 Wyoming

9 11 Foreign

9 12 Midwest Office (Chicago, Illinois)

#### Box Folder

10 1 Personal, Virginia Durr

10 2 Personal, Sara d’ Avila

10 3 Services

10 4 Herman Finch and Associates

10 5 Job Files

10 6 By Laws

10 7 Executive Board

#### Box Folder

11 1 Abolish Poll Tax Week

11 2 Miscellaneous, 1941-1943

11 3 Virginia Forster Durr, Personal

11 4 Bender Dinner, 2-24-48

11 5 Bender Letter, 2-3-48

11 6 Constitutional Amendment

11 7 Requests for New Handbook

11 8 Conference 10-45

11 9 Conference 10-45

11 10 Correspondence- Progressive Party Candidates

#### Box Folder

12 1 Press Releases, 1945-1948

12 2 Publicity Ideas

12 3 Clippings, 1947 and 1948

12 4 1940 Census Data

12 5 Economic Data

12 6 Soldier Voting

12 7 Primaries

#### Box Folder

13 1 Movies or Films, APT

13 2 Speeches Made, Editorials

13 3 Speeches, Radio Scripts

13 4 Speeches, Radio Scripts

13 5 Speeches, Radio Scripts

#### Box Folder

14 1 Elections, 1948

14 2 Misc. Articles on Poll Tax, George H. Bender

14 3 Misc. Articles on Poll Tax, George H. Bender

14 4 Miscellaneous Articles, Jennings Perry and Others

14 5 Proceedings, Conference on Anti-Poll Tax Education

14 6 Bibliographies

14 7 Proceedings, Conference on Anti-Poll Tax Education

14 8 History of The National Committee to Repeal The Poll Tax and Photo

#### Box Folder

15 1 A.F.I., 1943-1946

15 2 Independent Unions

15 3 Farm Organizations, 1943-1946

15 4 Miscellaneous Organizations, 1943-1946

15 5 C.I.O, 1943-1946

15 6 C.I.O, 1943-1946

15 7 C.I.O, 1943-1946

15 8 C.I.O, 1943-1946

#### Box Folder

16 1 Church Organizations, 1943-1946

16 2 Church Organizations, 1943-1946

16 3 Administration, National Political Parties

16 4 Women’s Organizations, 1943-1946

16 5 YMCA-YWCA, 1943-1946

16 6 Civil Rights Groups, 1943-1946

16 7 Negro Organizations

16 8 Railroad Brotherhoods, 1943-1946

16 9 Veteran’s Organizations

16 10 Negro Organizations

#### Box Folder

17 1 Index Cards, Boule-Columnists

#### Box Folder

18 1 Index Cards, A-Z

#### Box Folder

19 1 Index Cards, Newspaper for Press Releases- Members Fairfax, Vax

#### Box Folder

20 1 Index Cards, A-Z

#### Box Folder

21 1 Mailed Lists Special

21 2 Mailing Lists Special

21 3 Money Raising

21 4 Pre-Paid Mailing Accounts

21 5 Sponsors

21 6 Sponsors

21 7 State Sponsor, Suggestions

21 8 Sponsoring Organizations

#### Box Folder

22 1 January 1946, Receipts

22 2 Receipts, February 1946

22 3 Receipts, March 1946

22 4 Receipts, April 1946

22 5 Receipts, May 1946

22 6 Receipts, June 1946

22 7 Receipts, July 1946

22 8 Receipts, August, September and October 1946

22 9 Receipts, January 1947

22 10 Receipts, February 1947

22 11 Receipts, March 1947

22 12 Receipts, April 1947

22 13 Receipts, May 1947

22 14 Receipts, June 1947

22 15 Receipts, July 1947

22 16 Receipts, September 1947

22 17 Receipts, October 1947

22 18 Receipts, November 1947

22 19 Receipts, February 1948

22 20 Receipts, March 1948

22 21 Receipts, April 1948

22 22 Receipts, May 1948

22 23 Receipts, June 1948

#### Box Folder

23 1 Lobbying Act Forms

23 2 Field Trips, 1943

23 3 Receipts, January 1945

23 4 Receipts, February 1945

23 5 Receipts, March 1945

23 6 Receipts, April 1945

23 7 Receipts, May 1945

23 8 Receipts, June 1945

23 9 Receipts, July 1945

23 10 Receipts, August 1945

23 11 Receipts, September 1945

23 12 Receipts, October 1945

23 13 Receipts, November 1945

23 14 Receipts, December 1945

23 15 USCHW-NCRPT. Finances

#### Box Folder

24 1 [Voting Restrictions in the 13 Southern States: The Committee of Editors and Writers of the South]

24 2 Statistics, 1944-Current

24 3 Senate, 1945-1946

24 4 Senate, 1945-1946

24 5 Senate, 1945-1946

24 6 Senate, 1945-1946

24 7 Action Letters, 1947

24 8 Report of Proceedings- Hearing Held Before Subcommittee of the Committee on

the Judiciary, S.1280

#### Box Folder

25 1 House Action 1943, 78th Congress, H.R. 7

25 2 1944 Election Statistics

25 3 House Action 1945, 79th Congress, H.R. 7

25 4 House Action 1943, 79th Congress, H.R. 7

25 5 Senate Action 1947

25 6 House Action 1947

25 7 House Action 1947

25 8 House Hearings, H.R. 29, July 1947, Copies of Testimony and More

25 9 Senate Hearings, 1948

#### Box Folder

26 1 Constitutionality [H.R. 7, The Anti-Poll Tax Bill]

26 2 Legislative Bulletin

26 3 Constitutionality [Miscellaneous About H.R. 7, The Anti-Poll Tax Bill]

26 4 Townsend Plan, 1943-1946

26 5 Wallace Committee, State Material- Minutes, Etc.

26 6 Virginia Democratic Party Plan

26 7 Appointment of Reps. in Congress

26 8 Progressive Party- Arlington County Elections, 1949

26 9 Progressive Party- General Elections, 1949

26 10 Wires Sent During H.R. 7 Senate Fight, July 30-31, 1946

26 11 Political Information, Candidates

26 12 Misc. To Sort

26 13 1946 Election Statistics

26 14 Materials Used

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27 1 Resolutions on Poll Tax, Adopted, Suggested

27 2 State Election Laws

27 3 State Election Laws

27 4 State Election Laws

27 5 State Election Laws

27 6 Court Cases

27 7 Supreme Court Cases

#### Box Folder

28 1 Poll Tax Pamphlets (1)

28 2 Poll Tax Pamphlets (2)

28 3 Poll Tax (Copies of Bills, Hearings and Reports)

28 4 Poll Tax (Copies of Bills, Hearings and Reports)

28 5 Poll Tax (Copies of Bills, Hearings and Reports)

28 6 Poll Tax Hearings

28 7 Poll Tax Hearings

#### Box Folder

29 1 Press Releases

29 2 Senate Action, 1944, 78th Congress, H.R. 7

29 3 Senate Action, 1944, 78th Congress, H.R. 7

29 4 Miscellaneous Articles

29 5 Documents Relating to the North Atlantic Treaty

29 6 Conference, 2-3-45

29 7 Cloture Data

29 8 Conference on Anti-Poll Tax Education, February 3, 1945