



BHC-MSS 0002
Guide to the Jasper McLevy Collection
By Meghan Rinn
June 2017

Descriptive Summary

Creator: McLevy, Jasper

Title: Jasper McLevy Collection

Dates: 1900-1962

Quantity: 12 manuscript boxes, 8 record cartons, 13 oversized boxes totaling 20 cubic feet

Abstract: The Jasper McLevy Collection represents the professional and public life of Jasper McLevy, Bridgeport's socialist mayor from 1933-1957. It holds records from his administration, documentation from the Socialist Party of Bridgeport including minute books and account books, and personal scrapbooks compiled by McLevy, as well as speeches and additional material.

Collection No.: BHC-MS 0002

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical Sketch of Jasper McLevy

Jasper McLevy (March 27, 1878-November 20, 1962) served as the mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut from 1933 to 1957. The city's first socialist mayor, he is best remembered for helping to resolve the city's insolvency, on the site inspections, and keeping a tight purse string, as well as weeding out the corruption of the earlier mayors of the city. To many in the city, he was simply known by his first name, Jasper.

McLevy was the son of Scottish immigrants, and the oldest of nine children. He began to work with his father in the roofing trade after a stint of factory jobs prior to his leaving the eighth grade. His interest in Socialism came from reading the book Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy, and would soon see him make a large number of attempts at public office. He ran for the Connecticut General Assembly as a socialist in 1902, and that was followed by twenty more unsuccessful campaigns for various public offices. It took nine campaigns for him to be elected mayor of Bridgeport, and these campaigns frequently featured him on a soapbox.

Small successes prior to his election in 1933 did exist though. In 1903 he helped to get a petition passed that funded free textbooks for elementary school children in the city. He also did organization work for the Central Labor Union, and became the International President of the Slate and Tile Roofer's Union.

These activities helped elect him to the office of mayor in 1933, following the resignation of Mayor Buckingham and the ensuing contest between James L. Dunn, President of the Common Council, and McLevy. The tally was in McLevy's favor with 22,445 votes, a lead of about 6,000 over Dunn.

McLevy inherited a city wide debt upon coming into office, a combination of the 1929 stock market crash and poor management by the city afterwards. That the federal government assumed the city's debt about eight days after McLevy was elected helped significantly. His administration was noted for penny pinching during McLevy's time in office. Frequently McLevy's work day involved his going into his office for an hour in the morning and in the afternoon, and spending the rest of the day elsewhere in Bridgeport with those he represented.

Under his tenure, McLevy became known for being out in the field, for his fiscal restraint, and generally focusing on the details of managing the city. He helped to bring the civil service to Bridgeport, build miles of esplanades for the Park City, spent federal relief money carefully, maintained low taxes, and helped to overhaul Bridgeport's sewer system channeling waste to dedicated plants rather than out into the Long Island Sound. Bridgeport saw four federal housing projects built under McLevy's administration, including the later infamous Father Panik Village which was built as part of a "slum clearance" project.

His approach to running the city was not without criticism. The inaccurate, but often told story of McLevy declaring "God put the show there, let Him take it away" reflects the fact that his hold on the city purse strings was sometimes too tight. Beyond snow removal, he objected to an extra \$4,500 for a dedicated full-time school physician, and later in his career, was caught up in a fight with city firefighters who wanted better conditions and more pay - a surprise for a man who was international president of a trade union. Critiques increased as McLevy's tenure grew longer. One notable one came as the city expanded - new residents in newly developed areas were not receiving the same fire, police, and sewer service as older parts of the city. Downtown began to show its age, and there was no spending dedicated to improve it.

Come 1955 the Bridgeport Democrats ran Samuel Tedesco against McLevy. While McLevy remained mayor for two more years, Tedesco unseated him in 1957. McLevy campaigned for reelection afterwards, and he only stopped his engagement when he suffered a stroke in 1960.

Beyond his role as mayor of Bridgeport, McLevy was also a part of the Socialist Party both in Connecticut and nationally. He helped get three socialists into the state senate, and two representatives in Hartford come 1934. Some critics viewed McLevy and others as being so-called Old Guard Socialists who only appeared to adhere to party principles but failed to act on them. This tension came to a head at the Detroit Convention of the Socialist Party in 1934. The *Declaration of Principles*, which had a more radical bent, was adopted at this time. Members that voted against the declaration formed the Social Democratic Federation, which McLevy then joined, creating friction with party loyalists. In 1938 briefly, and then permanently in 1950, McLevy and the Connecticut Socialists left the National Party. McLevy's socialism was decidedly low key, and his work primarily focused on reform.

Much of McLevy's life outside of politics remained private to the point of being mostly hidden from the public. There is little known about his first wife, Mary Flynn. He married his second wife, Vida Stearns, in 1929, but this information remained unknown for five years until *The Herald* found the records in the Office of Vital Statistics. Stearns herself was an artist, and the two had a farm in Washington, Connecticut, which served as their shared home. According to rumor, the real reason the two lived apart was because Stearn's father objected to a perceived abandonment of socialist principles by McLevy, but this information was never remarked upon by either. In their later years, they had two collies, both named Lassie, who were photographed frequently with McLevy, along with a cat named Peter.

Jasper McLevy died on November 19, 1962. His honesty in office was constantly remarked upon, as was the frugality of his tenure.

Scope and Content Note:

The Jasper McLevy collection primarily provides an overview of Jasper McLevy's professional and political life, with an emphasis on his time as the mayor of Bridgeport and his association with socialism.

Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material cover the personal papers of McLevy, starting in 1919 and ending in 1962. The vast majority of the contents relate to his political and public life, but additional material towards the end of the series addresses his personal life and includes correspondence with his second wife Vida Stearns and information about their farm.

The Socialist Party of Bridgeport series primarily contains the minute books of the Socialist Party of Bridgeport, as well as several account books, offering insight into the functions and day to day events of the party at the time. Other material focuses on their activity and campaigns they have been involved in, including platforms, a scrapbook of newspaper advertisements, and campaign literature.

The material in the speeches series features drafts and finalized press releases of various speeches given by McLevy over the years.

Printed material documents the various functions that McLevy attended or else was invited to, showing the scope of his involvement with the city, as well as organizations at the state and national level.

Scrapbooks are curated by McLevy himself, and demonstrate how he viewed himself. Their date range provides a broad overview of his career in the public eye.

Clippings are arranged by rough chronological order when possible. However many folders are undated, due to the delicate nature of the clippings. They may yet undergo preservation work.

3d items are primarily awards given to McLevy.

The two boxes at the end of unprocessed material contain items that need treatment, but are likely unable to be attended to in the near future.

Arrangement Note:

In 2010, an inventory and initial processing of the Jasper McLevy papers were begun by Robert G. Marshall, who mainly organized the correspondence, mayoral files, and related material files. Processing was begun again in 2017 by Meghan Rinn who completed the project.

The Jasper McLevy Papers are arranged into six series, based primary on format. They are correspondence, mayoral files, and related material; Socialist Party of Bridgeport; Speeches; Printed Material; Scrapbooks; Clippings; 3D items; and unprocessed material.

Note that the contents of boxes 19 through 21 were found near the end of processing. A decision was made not to integrate them into the existing scrapbook boxes primarily because these scrapbooks are in poorer condition than the others, and it was safer to keep them apart.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Transferred to the Bridgeport History Center from the University of Bridgeport in 1975.

Preferred Citation: Jasper McLevy Collection (BHC-MSS 0002), Bridgeport History Center.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

McLevy, Jasper, 1878-1962

Corporate names

Socialist Party of the United States of America

Subject tracings

Connecticut--Bridgeport.

Politicians--Connecticut--Bridgeport--Biography.

Socialism--United States--History--20th century.

Series I: Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material

Arrangement: Chronological by document type.

Summary: Series I provides an overview of McLevy's political life, with some examples and insights into his personal one as well. It also contains photographs.

Box 1

1. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1919
2. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1921
3. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1927
4. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1928
5. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1929
6. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1930
7. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1931
8. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1932
9. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1933

Box 2

1. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, January-March, 1934
2. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, April-June, 1934
3. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, July-September, 1934
4. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, October-December, 1934
5. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, January-March, 1935
6. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, April-June, 1935
7. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, July-September, 1935
8. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, October-December, 1935
9. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, Congratulation messages and responses, 1935

Box 3

1. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, January-March, 1936
2. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, April-June, 1936
3. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, July-September, 1936
4. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, October-December, 1936
5. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1937, 1 of 2
6. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1937, 2 of 2
7. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1938
8. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1939

Box 4

1. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1940
2. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1941
3. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1942
4. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1943
5. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1944, 1 of 2
6. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1944, 2 of 2
7. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1945
8. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1946
9. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1947
10. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1948
11. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1949
12. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1950
13. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1951
14. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1952
15. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1953

Box 5

1. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1954
2. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1955
3. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1956
4. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1 of 2, 1957
5. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 2 of 2, 1957
6. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1958
7. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1959
8. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1960
9. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1961
10. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, 1962
11. Correspondence, mayoral files, and related material, n.d.

Box 6

1. Charter amendments to the City of Bridgeport, c. 1937
2. Survey and Recommendations of the Hartford Police Department, 1941
3. Narrative, Wheeler property for prop. Civic Center, 1954-1955
4. Wheeler Mansion, 1957
5. Honorary degree from Wesleyan, 1941
6. Undated correspondence
7. Vida Stearns, early correspondence

8. Mrs. McLevy's lectures

Box 7

1. Income tax, 1958, 1959
2. Correspondence re: secret marriage, 1934
3. McLevy farm documents, n.d.
4. Obituaries, 1962
5. Greeting cards, 1 of 4
6. Greeting cards, 2 of 4
7. Greeting cards, 3 of 4
8. Greeting cards, 4 of 4
9. Original art of McLevy, n.d.
10. Political cartoons of McLevy, 1947-1957, n.d.
11. National cyclopedia of American Biography portrait of McLevy, signed, n.d.
12. Photographs, McLevy and other officials, 1941, n.d.
13. Portraits of McLevy, n.d.
14. Photographs of McLevy from Unknown Scrapbook
15. Photographs, Construction of Bridgeport Firehouse #16, 1956
16. Photographs, Dorthoy Secor and Audubon J. Secor, n.d.
17. Other photographs, n.d.
18. Negatives, McLevy, n.d.

Series II: Speeches

Arrangement: Chronological.

Summary: These speeches represent a sampling of the many McLevy gave during his career. Some are transcripts while others are drafts.

Box 8

1. WICC speech, November 5, 1934
2. Speeches, 1936
3. Campaign speech, 1939
4. Radio address, October 23, 1947
5. Radio address, October 2, 30, 31, November 1, 3, 1950
6. Untitled speech, 1951
7. Radio address, October 9, 1952
8. Radio address, October 15, 27, 29, 1954
9. Radio address, November 1, 1955
10. McLevy for US Senator radio address, November 2, 1956
11. Speeches, 1957
12. Public address, October 21, 24, 29, 1958
13. Speech for governor, November 3, 1958
14. Platform of Socialist Party, August 1959
15. Radio addresses for October 16, 20, 23, 27, November 2, 1959
16. Radio speech, October 27, no year
17. Notes for speeches parks, n.d.
18. Campaign speeches originally in binder together, n.d.
19. Radio campaign speeches, n.d.
20. Undated speeches, 1 of 2, n.d.
21. Undated speeches, 2 of 2, n.d.
22. Various short topic essays, n.d.

Series III: Socialist Party of Bridgeport

Arrangement: Minutes and financial information has been given precedence in this series to offer an accurate picture of daily party life. Additional material that focuses on speeches and other activities comes next, followed by political ephemera. Material written about the party's past comes at the conclusion of the series.

Summary:

Box 9

1. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1900
2. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1907-1908
3. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1911-1915
4. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1913-1914
5. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1914-1919
6. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1917-1920

Box 10

1. Socialist Party of Bridgeport minutes, 1932
2. Socialist Party of America Financial Secretary's Ledger, c. 1908
3. Socialist Party of Bridgeport combination account book, 1911-1912
4. Socialist party of Bridgeport combination account book, 1927-1930

Box 11

Additional socialist party materials including ballots, 1912-1936; n.d.

Declaration of Principles, 1934

"In Answer to Devere Allen's Alleged Truth about New York: by James O'Neal, March, 1936

Rules, minutes of National Convention of Democratic Socialists, May 29-31, 1937

List of bills sponsored by the Socialist Party of Connecticut, 1939

"Hartford's Tammany Hall and Invisible Government" by Bellani Trombley, n.d.

Socialist Party newspaper advertising scrapbook, October 12-November 6, 1944

Socialist party publications and advertising, 1930s-1950s

Socialist Party platforms, 1938-1946

Socialist Party banquet programs, 1939-1942

McLevy Mayoral Campaign literature, 1939

McLevy Mayoral Campaign, 1930s

McLevel Mayoral Campaign literature, 1944-1945

"History of the Socialist Party in Connecticut Integrated with the National Socialist Party" by Victory E. Muniec, 1953

Socialism and women: the Bridgeport Experience, by Henry H. Barnard, May 1976

Photographs, socialists, c. 1920s-1960s

Series IV: Printed material

Arrangement: Chronological

Summary: This printed material primarily comes from events McLevy attended, and has been kept to reflect his many responsibilities as mayor of Bridgeport.

Box 12

1. Programs, 1934-1939
2. Programs, 1940-1943

3. Programs, 1943-1949
4. Programs, 1953-1960
5. Programs, n.d.

Series V: Scrapbooks

Arrangement: Chronological

Summary: Jasper McLevy clipped many articles about himself and his political party over his lifetime, and curated a number of scrapbooks as a result. These scrapbooks are delicate due to acidic newspaper print, but reflect his own habits of examining his time in office.

Box 13

1. Scrapbook, October 18-December 30, 1933
2. Scrapbook, December 31, 1933-April 18, 1934
3. Scrapbook, April 19-July 31, 1934

Box 14

1. Scrapbook, August 1-October 20, 1934
2. Scrapbook, October 21-December 16, 1934
3. Scrapbook, December 17, 1934-March 10, 1935

Box 15

1. Scrapbook, March 15-June 24, 1935
2. Scrapbook, March 17-October 20, 1935
3. Scrapbook, October 18, 1935-August 24, 1937

Box 16

1. Scrapbook, 1937
2. Scrapbook, Election 1953
3. Scrapbook, 1943-1960

Box 17

1. Scrapbook, 1959
2. Scrapbook, 1960-1961
3. Scrapbook, n.d.

Box 18

1. Socialist party scrapbook, 1934
2. Socialist party scrapbook, 1938
3. Socialist party scrapbook, 1940-1941

Box 19

Note: Scrapbooks are housed together because of same style and same fragile nature.

1. Scrapbook, Socialist party, 1905-1910
2. Scrapbook, 1929-1932

Box 20

1. Scrapbook, 1937
2. Scrapbook, 1938
3. Scrapbook, 1955

Box 21

1. Scrapbook, 1956
2. Scrapbook, Awards to Mc Levy, c. 1950s
3. Scrapbook, group photos and testimonials, c. 1950s
4. Scrapbook, personal and untitled, n.d.

Series VII: Clippings

Arrangement: Chronological

Summary: Jasper McLevy clipped many articles about himself and his political party over his lifetime, and in addition to scrapbooks, simply stored the clippings. By and large these have been grouped by year, but there are many folders that, due to acidic newsprint, did not have time to be examined. Preservation photocopying may see these boxes re-processed in the future.

Box 22

1. Clippings, May, 1934, 1 of 2
2. Clippings, May, 1934, 2 of 2
3. Clippings, June, 1934
4. Clippings, July, 1934
5. Clippings, August, 1934
6. Clippings, September, 1934
7. Clippings, October, 1934
8. Clippings, 1934, 1 of 4
9. Clippings, 1934, 2 of 4
10. Clippings, 1934, 3 of 4
11. Clippings, 1934, 4 of 4

Box 23

1. Clippings, April, 1935
2. Clippings, June, 1935
3. Clippings, July, 1935
4. Clippings, August, 1935
5. Clippings, September, 1935
6. Clippings, November 1935, 1 of 2
7. Clippings, November 1935, 2 of 2
8. Clippings, December, 1935
9. Clippings, February, 1936
10. Clippings, March, 1936
11. Clippings, April, 1936
12. Clippings, May-September, 1936
13. Clippings, December, 1936
14. Clippings, January-April, 1938

Box 24

1. Clippings, May-October, 1938

2. Clippings, Hurricane from September, 1938
3. Clippings, 1938, 1 of 3
4. Clippings, 1938, 2 of 3
5. Clippings, 1938, 3 of 3
6. Clippings, January, 1939
7. Clippings, February-April, 1939
8. Clippings, May-June, 1939
9. Clippings, July-October, 1939, 1 of 2
10. Clippings, July-October, 1939, 2 of 2

Box 25

1. Clippings. 1940
2. Clippings, June-December, 1941
3. Clippings, 1942-1944, 1 of 2
4. Clippings, 1942-1944, 2 of 2
5. Clippings, March-July, 1943
6. Clippings, 1945
7. Clippings, 1945-1947
8. Clippings, 1949

Box 26

- Clippings, 1950, 1 of 2
- Clippings, 1950, 2 of 2
- Clippings, 1951, 1 of 4
- Clippings, 1951, 2 of 4
- Clippings, 1951, 3 of 4
- Clippings, 1951, 4 of 4
- Clippings, 1952
- Clippings, 1952-1954 1 of 3
- Clippings, 1952-1954 2 of 3
- Clippings, 1952-1954 3 of 3
- Clippings, Barnum Festival, 1953-1954

Box 27

1. Clippings, Barnum Festival, 1955-1956
2. Clippings, Barnum Festival, 1957
3. Clippings, Barnum Festival, n.d.
4. Clippings, 1 of 11, n.d.
5. Clippings, 2 of 11, n.d.
6. Clippings, 3 of 11, n.d.
7. Clippings, 4 of 11, n.d.
8. Clippings, 5 of 11, n.d.
9. Clippings, 6 of 11, n.d.
10. Clippings, 7 of 11, n.d.
11. Clippings, 8 of 11, n.d.
12. Clippings, 9 of 11, n.d.
13. Clippings, 10 of 11, n.d.
14. Clippings, 11 of 11, n.d.

Box 28

1. Clippings, 1 of 12, n.d.
2. Clippings, 2 of 12, n.d.
3. Clippings, 3 of 12, n.d.
4. Clippings, 4 of 12, n.d.
5. Clippings, 5 of 12, n.d.
6. Clippings, 6 of 12, n.d.
7. Clippings, 7 of 12, n.d.
8. Clippings, 8 of 12, n.d.
9. Clippings, 9 of 12, n.d.
10. Clippings, 10 of 12, n.d.
11. Clippings, 11 of 12, n.d.
12. Clippings, 12 of 12, n.d.

Box 29, Full newspapers featuring articles on McLevy and other full papers McLevy retained

1. Bridgeport Life, June 26, 1937 (editorial)
2. Bridgeport Life, June 27, 1937 (front page)
3. Bridgeport Sunday Post, December 28, 1958 (photograph)
4. Bridgeport Life, October 20, 1934
5. Bridgeport Life, June 27, 1936
6. Bridgeport Life, July 13, 1940
7. Bridgeport Life, October 13, 1940
8. Cape Cod Standard Times, 1955
9. Daily Christian Advocate, May 3-7, 1960

Series VI: 3d items, flat file storage

Arrangement: By size

Summary: The 3-d items and material in flat file storage offer insight into some of the honors received by McLevy for his public service. They have been stored according to size and needs of individual items.

Box 30

1. Cap, gown, and honorary degree from Wesleyan University, 1941

Box 31

1. Bridgeport Municipal Airport sign
2. Recognition award from YMCA Industrial Recreation council, 1960
3. Legion of Valor recognition award, August 7, 1935

Flat file storage - OS-HCD

Map, redevelopment area no. 1. Bridgeport, Conn., existing conditions, 1951. Flat file storage.

Series VII Unprocessed material

Arrangement: None

Summary: Several items in the collection require further treatment to preserve them. It is unknown when this treatment will occur, so they remain unprocessed for the time being.

Box 32

1. Two wooden boxes for documents bearing McLevy's name on the spine. Due to acidic nature, these spines will be sawed off and put in safe housing, and the boxes themselves discarded

Box 33

1. A scroll and additional photographs that are curled up and in need of treatment

Accrual: In March 2018, items were found in collection storage. They contain proofs that are reports on McLevy's life, but is unclear if they were intended for tv broadcast, radio, or newspapers.

Box 34

1. Page 1 biography, revised to April 7, 1962, 7 takes, 5 copies
2. Campaigns, 3 takes, 4 copies, c. 1962
3. Administration, 8 takes, 4 copies, c. 1962
4. Socialist splits, 1 take, 4 copies, c. 1962
5. Soapbox, 8 takes, 4 copies, c. 1962
6. Inspected city jobs, c. 1962
7. Housing plan, 4 takes, 4 copies, c. 1962

Accrual: In August 2018, items were found in collection storage.

Box 35

1. Award from Bridgeport Brass Company Quarter Central Club to McLevy, November 16, 1954
2. Emancipation award to McLevy, October 22, 1954

Accrual, August 2022

Box 36

Scrapbook, 1937

Scrapbook, 1958-1959

7^{5th} birthday scrapbook, March 7, 1953

Box 37, Scrapbooks

Scrapbook, January-March, 1935

Scrapbook, 1955-1957

Scrapbook, 1957

Scrapbook, 1939

Box 38, Pins and medals, 1930s-1950s

Accrual, January 2024

Boxes 37, pt. 1 and 38, pt. 2

Scrapbook, 1931-1938