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609-397-7188 * www.trentonlib.org

Collection 335
West End Neighborhood Association
1985-2009

By John Bednar
December 2020

History

The West End Neighborhood Association, abbreviated as W.E.N.A., is a community organization composed of Trenton residents who lived in a specific section of the city: West End Avenue, Montgomery Place, West State Street, between Prospect Street and North Fisher Place, Luther Towers, and Colonial Gardens. Brought together about 1985, the group worked toward bridging the gap of communication between citizens and government agencies and facilities.

The range of W.E.N.A.'s efforts reach into multiple different issues and areas of study. While community organization and engagement are perhaps at the forefront, there are many other topics that are directly or indirectly related to their objectives. These include: urban planning, urban renewal, housing, race relations, public health, and youth programs. The ultimate goal of many of these decisions was to deter and prevent further criminal activity in the neighborhood. This would in turn help transform and redefine the identity of the community.

Connections between the organization and other notable groups and figures in the city of Trenton is well documented in the collection. They include former mayors, religious leaders, government officials (state and local level), the police department, non-profits, and investment groups. W.E.N.A. had multiple purposes for these interactions. Some were less positive, ranging from requesting aid or assistance from an agency or the city, to actively calling out their actions (or lack thereof). Many sought to bring others into their fold, at both an individual and

organizational level. Gaining support and membership helped advance their goal of bringing together different parts of the shared neighborhood.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection consists of flyers, minutes, letters, correspondence, posters, newspaper clippings, official documents, handwritten notes, agendas, and other items pertaining to the West End Neighborhood Association, its members and events, and the location outlined as their community.

The collection is divided into 5 series: I. Organizational Papers; II. Correspondence; III. Community Partnerships; IV. Clippings; and V. Photographs.

This collection is important in documenting the actions of a group of neighbors and activists who wanted to improve and call attention to the needs of their community. Of interest to researchers are various topics, including urban renewal, development projects, community events, crime, urban planning, the West End of Trenton (especially the noted locations), activism in Trenton, grassroots organizing, civic pride, and the importance of organized citizens in city programs and decisions.

Series Description

Series I. Organizational Papers

Much of this series consists of hand-written notes, in addition to official documents such as by-laws, financial records, and meeting agendas and minutes. These items provide insight into the structure and purpose of the group's meetings, and their level of involvement in the city. As part of their efforts, W.E.N.A. published handouts, flyers, posters, and forms to bring attention to their existence, meetings, and organized events. This series contains both copies and originals.

One item of interest is a flyer for a block party hosted by the group, just one of many events they helped coordinate. There are announcements for clean-up days and redevelopment projects. This, and the series as a whole, helps demonstrate the breadth of the group's activities, going beyond lodging complaints and formal actions. Events attempted to provide the grounds for serious community building.

Also included in this series are financial documents about the organization, much of which centers around their application for tax exemption status, and general information about W.E.N.A. such as application forms, lists of addresses in the neighborhood, and newsletters. Of interest is a large, blue notebook in which there are handwritten notes about planning for a Christmas party in 1987. While not the most formal example, as one of the earlier documents in

the collection it shows the planning and cooperation behind the association from the beginning, including dividing up tasks and using the party as a moment to bring together community leaders and those who wished to take a more active role in bettering their neighborhood.

Series II. Correspondence

This series contains letters, or drafts of letters, by members of the organization sent to city representatives in the mayor's office, New Jersey State Parks, development companies, and other community leaders such as religious figures. The letters often served as ways for the leaders of W.E.N.A. to request intervention or action by officials in their neighborhood, as a response to something like criminal activity or a public health concern. Some are of a more personal nature, and others are looking to connect with those who may align with their goals as a group.

Of particular note are some letters written to local reverends, requesting their presence at a Christmas party hosted by the organization. The hope for friendship and collaboration underscores the importance of networking to the association's goals.

Series III. Community Partnerships

While the focus is on records about W.E.N.A. and its events, there is also documentation of city council meetings in which attention was paid to projects or happenings relevant to the West End. There are flyers about community alerts, National Night Out, and resource directories of important phone numbers. Also included in this series are awards that W.E.N.A. received, and flyers for events that W.E.N.A. may not have hosted, but likely participated in or collaborated with the organizers. Of note are lists of city government officials with contact information (housing is singled out in a handwritten note on one of the pages).

Series IV. Clippings

The articles in this series refer to, cite, or mention W.E.N.A., its inhabitants, and/or its location as seen through local media. Context and important background information are especially notable in this series, allowing a researcher to get a better understanding of the neighborhood and relevant happenings.

A particularly notable clipping is one describing a fire in the West End that dislodged many residents. This event is referenced in many of the group's materials that can be seen in other series, as they hoped to aid those who lost their homes through food and clothing drives. These efforts are described in another article as well.

Series V. Photographs

This series contains one folder of color photographs of buildings believed to be in the West End. While there are no annotations on these apart from a few dates, it is likely they were taken to document the need for repairs, renovation, and development.

Provenance: Gift of Susan Hartt-Perez; other various sources

Restrictions: none

Container List

Box / Folder / Folder Title

Series I.

1 / 1 / Organizational Papers

1 / 2 / Meetings, Agendas, Minutes

1 / 3 / Projects

1 / 4 / General Information

1 / 5 / Newsletters

Series II.

1 / 6 / Correspondence

Series III.

1 / 7 / Community Partnerships

1 / 8 / Community Events, Programs

1 / 9 / Awards

Series IV.

1 / 10 / Clippings

Series V.

1 / 11 / Photographs