

## Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago

For 51 years the Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago promoted the continuing education of adults in the metropolitan Chicago area. Through its many activities and publications it coordinated existing educational programs and stimulated the creation of new ones. It served as a major force in defining and proclaiming the cultural image of Chicago. The Adult Education Council was established in 1924, and incorporated August 18, 1925 as the Chicago Forum Council. The purpose was "...to promote understanding and good will by bringing people of different groups into friendly association with each other for discussion of problems related to the public welfare." [footnote Auditor's report 1926, folder 17 box 2] the forums it sponsored at downtown hotels were very successful, bringing prominent speakers to lecture on debate key issues. The organization was endorsed by an advisory committee which included most of the prominent reformers in Chicago, including Jane Addams, Preston Bradley and Harriet Vittum.

In 1927 the Forum Council began publication of Educational Events in Chicago, a monthly listing of educational activities for adults. That same year a group of educators founded the Chicago Adult Education Conference. It was to be an organization for professionals which would focus on adult education from the practitioner's point of view. By 1929 the functions and techniques of the two organizations were similar enough that the board of directors decided to merge, and in August announced the creation of the Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago (AEC). In October of 1931 it was reorganized as a federation of agencies which offered or supported adult education programs.

The AEC continued to sponsor forums and to publicize educational events with a new emphasis on professionalism it offered specialized conferences on the practices of adult education. In 1936 the organization expanded into cultural activities, creating the Musical Arts Piano and Songs cycles at Orchestra Hall. The low cost concerts featuring prominent performers were offered until 1948, when Allied Arts Corporation took them over.

In 1948 the AEC began to have problems. Declining attendance at the piano series had left it in debt and the resignation in February of Ralph McCallister, the executive director, left it without supervision. The Board of Directors decided to economize by limiting the size of the paid staff and the scope of activities. By 1953 the Community Fund had withdrawn support because the lack of an executive director had resulted in a disintegrating program.

Finally, in 1956, the Board of Directors hired a new executive director, Robert Ahrens. One of the first activities planned under his direction was George Bernard Shaw Day, July 26, 1956 to honor the centennial of Shaw's birth. It received national publicity for the AEC and resulted in increased donations and membership, which convinced the Board of Directors to sponsor an annual special event. As part of Ahrens' efforts to revitalize the organization he began publication of a newsletter in 1957, and in 1958 the AEC took over publication of the Chicago Exhibitions Calendar (Chicago Arts Calendar after 1962) from the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1960, reflecting the growing diversity of its membership and programs, the Adult Education Council began to create a series of assemblies which related to specific interest areas. The first was the Arts Assembly which originally was to become an independent organization but remained a part of the AEC.

In 1962 Ahrens resigned and was replaced as executive director by Esther (Mrs. Benjamin) Fain. Her years with the organization were marked by increasing financial difficulties. Although the AEC was able to continue to sponsor its successful program, rising costs often exceeded income. With no outside funding, special events could not compensate for the deficit. Income from the College Booklet and Speakers Bureau dropped as colleges faced declining enrollments and low budgets. Mrs. Fain served for two years as a volunteer but finally the Board of Directors agreed to dissolve and the organization closed on November 21, 1975.

Originally the AEC was funded by contributions, but within the first year had built up a list of lecturers from the forums and used it to establish a speakers bureau. Miss Charlotte Sanders was hired to be the secretary of the bureau. By 1929 it accounted for half of the year's income of the AEC. It became both a major service activity and source of funding for the organization. Miss Sanders ran the speakers bureau until her retirement in 1962. In 1936 the Adult Education Council began to publish the College Booklet, a listing of small colleges in the Midwest which was distributed free to high school students in the Chicago area. Colleges paid to be included and since printing costs were low the booklet became a major source of income.

The folders are arranged in alphabetical order, within each folder the papers are in chronological order with undated material at the end. Wherever possible original folder titles have been retained, although some new titles, indicated by an asterisk, have been created by the cataloger from loosely filed or unorganized papers. The 'minutes' files have been kept as received: they include minutes from executive committee, board of directors, general membership meetings and reports from various committees. The name of the committee and activities for professional educators has changed several times. Therefore the Practitioners, assembly of professionals in adult education, and education assembly all refer to the same group.

The Manuscript Collection houses the papers and records of people and organizations which were associated with the Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago. Papers of individuals who dealt with the AEC include Victor Olander, Preston Bradley, Harriet Vittum, Henry P. Chandler and Frank McCallister. Organizational records of groups affiliated with the AEC are: Armour Institute, Chicago Urban League, Chicago Woman's Aid Society, Hull House, Young Women's Christian Association of Metropolitan Chicago, Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund, Marcy Center, Onward Neighborhood House, Institute of Design, League of Women Voters, Metropolitan Housing Council, and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, researchers should also consult the records of the Community Fund for additional information.

The collection contains annual reports, lists of Board of Directors, brochures and pamphlets, constitution and by-laws, correspondence, auditors' examination of records, tax records, minutes, programs from musical events, newspaper clippings, photographs, program announcements, organization publications, newsletters, records of the speakers bureau, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous material relating to the operations of the Adult Education Council of Greater Chicago

The records, comprising 5 feet plus oversize items were donated to the Manuscript Collection by Mrs. Esther Fain, executive director of the organization, on November 21, 1975. The records are filed under the following titles:

Folders

1. Adult Education Association of the U.S.A.  
November 24, 1970, N.D.
2. Adult Education Week 1953, notebook  
November 21, 1952 - September 17, 1953
3. Annual Reports  
May 21, 1932 - May 1 1955
4. Arts Assembly  
October 21, 1959 - March 15, 1972
5. Assembly of Professionals in Adult Education  
February 1963 - March 24, 1965
6. Blacks  
December 28, 1959 - 1974
- \*7. Board of Directors, lists  
1941 - 1973
8. Brochures and pamphlets about the Adult Education Council  
1928 - 1967
9. China trip  
August 26, 1975 - September 13, 1975
10. Conference on Community Cooperation  
April 22, 1944
- \*11. Conferences sponsored by the Adult Education Council  
October 19, 1929 - April 1, 1974
12. Constitution and By-Laws  
August 18, 1925 - August 30, 1970

13. Correspondence  
July 12, 1956 - June 2, 1975
14. Education Assembly  
June 6, 1967 - May 10, 1971
- \*15. Emergency Adult Education and Recreation Program  
1931
16. Fain, Mrs. Benjamin  
September 17, 1962 - February 1967
17. Financial records: Auditors' examination of records  
April 30, 1926 - April 30, 1935
18. Financial records: Auditors' examination of records  
December 31, 1936 - December 31, 1946
19. Financial records: Auditors' examination of records  
December 31, 1947 - August 31, 1958
20. Financial records: Auditors' examination of records  
August 31, 1959 - August 31, 1971
21. Financial records: Community Fund  
June 18, 1931 - April 6, 1953
- \*22. Financial records: Federal forms  
December 29, 1937 - October 10, 1974
- \*23. Financial records: miscellany  
March 8, 1928 - March 7, 1973
- \*24. Financial records: State forms  
March 12, 1938 - March 23, 1971
25. Forums  
November 2, 1930 - March 24, 1965
26. History  
ca. 1930's - August 16, 1972

- \*27. History: Adventures in Brotherhood by James E. Pitt  
1955
- 28. Letterheads  
N.D.
- 29. Letters and Drama Assembly  
April 17, 1963 - November 9, 1969
- \*30. "Lind Show Appearances through AEC"  
N.D.
- 31. List of Chicago wall murals  
N.D.
- 32. Manual compiled by Robert J. Ahrens  
September 1, 1956
- 33. Minutes: Chicago Adult Education Conference  
November 5, 1926 - June 17, 1929
- 34. Minutes  
February 3, 1928 - December 10, 1930
- 35. Minutes  
January 14, 1931 - December 21, 1933
- 36. Minutes  
January 8, 1934 - December 29, 1937
- 37. Minutes  
January 25, 1938 - December 20, 1944
- 38. Minutes  
February 7, 1945 - December 17, 1947
- 39. Minutes  
January 21, 1948 - December 3, 1952
- 40. Minutes  
January 7, 1953 - February 6, 1958

41. Minutes: Notebook "November 1955 through June 1962"  
November 2, 1955 - January 7, 1960
42. Minutes: Notebook "November 1955 through June 1962"  
February 5, 1960 - June 20, 1962
43. Minutes: Notebook "1962-"  
September 13, 1961 - November 14, 1972
44. Museum Directors Round Table  
October 1961 - June 5, 1963
45. Musical Arts Piano Series Announcements  
November 14, 1937 - 1948
46. Musical Arts Piano Series Programs  
November 17, 1936 - 1948
47. Musical Arts Song Cycle Programs  
February 26, 1945 - April 15, 1947
48. Newspaper clippings  
February 9, 1963 - November 29, 1975
49. Photographs: Activities  
April 1956 - August 1975
50. Photographs: Speakers Bureau A-J  
N.D.
51. Photographs: Speakers Bureau K-Y  
N.D.
52. Practitioners meetings  
March 8, 1942 - March 17, 1954
- \*53. Program announcements  
May 8, 1942 - June 15, 1972
54. Proposal for survey of attitudes toward adult education

1952

55. Publications: abstract of Frontiers of American Culture by James Truslow Adams  
1944
56. Publications: An Investigation of Materials and Methods for the Introductory Stage of Adult Literacy Education  
June 30, 1964
57. Publications: Chicago Arts Calendar  
October 1962 - September 1968
58. Publications: Chicago Arts Calendar  
October 1968 - July 1973
59. Publications: Chicago Exhibitions Calendar  
April 1958 - September 1962
60. Publications: The Chicago Forum Lectures  
October 25, 1936 - February 28, 1937
61. Publications: The College booklet  
1936 - 1959
62. Publications: The College booklet  
1960-1964
63. Publications: The College booklet  
1965 - 1968
64. Publications: The College booklet  
1969 - 1971
65. Publications: The College booklet  
1972 - 1974
66. Publications: Directory of Adult Education Opportunities  
March, 1950 - 1971
67. Publications: Educational Events in Chicago  
October 1, 1927 - December, 1947

68. Publications: Handbook for Leaders of Senior Citizens Clubs  
April, 1970
69. Publications: Mid-West Institute and Conference on Adult Education  
July 5, 1937 - July 12, 1937
70. Publications: Newsletter, "Issues and Events"  
June 1957 - June 1962
71. Publications: Newsletter  
August 20, 1962 - March 15, 1972
72. Publications: Today and Tomorrow in Illinois Adult Education  
February 1974
73. Speakers Bureau, biographical press releases  
N.D.
74. Speakers Bureau, brochures and lists of speakers  
1929 - 1971
75. Speakers Bureau, correspondence  
July 23, 1956 - November 28, 1972
76. Special events: "Creative Chicago" festival  
March 31, 1965 - August 7, 1965
77. Special events: Darrow centennial  
October 1956 - October 1957
- \*78. Special events: Fund raisers and miscellany  
November 18, 1949 - February 14, 1973
79. Special events: Hemingway event  
October 22, 1962 - February 26, 1963
80. Special events: Holmes banquet  
May 7, 1937 - May 23, 1937
- \*81. Special events: National Folk Festival

May 7, 1937 - May 23, 1937

82. Special events: Sandburg memorial  
September 18, 1967 - January 6, 1968
83. Special events: Script by Coughlin and Friedkin, "Death of Caesar."  
N.D.
84. Special events: Script by Coughlin and Friedkin, "Triumphant Banner."  
N.D.
85. Special events: Shaw Day and Shaw Society minutes  
May 26, 1956 - May 26, 1959
86. Special report on structure and programs  
May 1, 1961
87. Training program for workers with senior citizens  
October 26, 1968 - April 7, 1970
- \*88. Women's Division  
1960

Oversize material: 1 folder with proclamations for special events

- 4 scrapbooks
1. February 4, 1949 - June 26, 1959
  2. Spring 1959 - December 4, 1966
  3. July 21, 1956 - March 14, 1958
  4. December 4, 1961 - June 16, 1962

Subject Entries

Adult education

Adult education - Research

Aged

Ahrens, Robert

An Investigation of Materials and Methods for the Introductory Stage of Adult Literacy Education

Art calendars

Art societies

Chicago Adult Education Conference

Chicago Arts Calendar

Chicago Exhibitions Calendar

Chicago Forum Council

The Chicago Forum Lectures

The College Booklet

College publicity

Concert agents

Conference on community cooperation, 1944

Continuing education centers

"Creative Chicago" festival

Darrow centennial

Directory of Adult Education Opportunities

Education of the aged

Educational association