The Filson Historical Society

Abramson family
Papers, 1938-2016

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Size of Collection:
5 cu. ft., 1 wrapped vol., 1 ovsz. fld.

Location Number:
Mss. A A158
Abramson family
Papers, 1938-2016

Scope and Content Note

The collection documents the political campaigns and career of former Mayor of Louisville Jerry Abramson, as well as the civic involvement of his wife Madeline Malley Miller Abramson. Included are campaign and mayoral records, political correspondence, polling data, transcripts of speeches, newspaper clippings, and some personal papers, primarily from the 1980s-early 2000s. Jerry Abramson served as Louisville 3rd Ward Alderman (1975-1978), General Counsel and Secretary of Justice to Governor John Y. Brown (1980-1981), Mayor of Louisville (1985-1998), Mayor of Louisville Metro (2003-2011), Lieutenant Governor in the administration of Governor Steve Beshear (2011-2014), and Deputy Assistant to President Barack Obama and Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (2014-2016).

Box 1 contains records documenting Jerry Abramson’s campaigns and terms in office, along with a small number of personal documents relating to Jerry, Madeline, and their son Sidney Abramson. Campaign materials pertain to Jerry Abramson’s Third Ward Alderman, Mayor, and Lieutenant Governor races. They include announcement speeches, financial reports, lists of contributors, memorabilia, event information, and polling data. With the memorabilia is a published copy of the 1992 National Democratic Convention speeches, signed on the front by Bill Clinton. Newspaper clippings relate to Abramson’s involvement with Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign, Abramson’s terms as Mayor, his marriage to Madeline Miller in 1989, the merger of the Louisville and Jefferson County governments in 2003, and Abramson’s positions in Governor Brown’s and President Obama’s administrations. Political correspondence relates to Abramson’s mayoral campaigns and terms. District Dialogues consist of a disassembled scrapbook of documents and information about Jerry Abramson’s meetings with residents in every city district in 2002.

Box 2 consists of documents from Abramson’s high school and college years, additional records about Abramson’s campaigns and terms in office, and Madeline Abramson’s papers. Jerry Abramson’s political papers include Friends of Jerry Abramson Political Action Committee (PAC) records, campaign reports and information, Mayor, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor’s office documents, biographies and tributes, and White House dinner invitations. Madeleine Abramson’s papers consist of speeches, some correspondence, materials related to her civic involvement, and a few personal items. Folder 35 holds a few items relating to the Falls of the Ohio crossroads campaign in 2010, as well as a Zachary Taylor commemorative coin and a CD-R with a proposal for an illustrated activity guidebook to the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery.

Boxes 3-5 contain scrapbooks documenting Jerry Abramson’s political career from 1977 to 2002. Some were put together by Roy Abramson and by Blanche Norman. The scrapbooks consist primarily of newspaper clippings but also include memorabilia, fundraising materials, invitations, and photographs. They document Abramson’s service in Governor Brown’s
administration, his three terms as Louisville Mayor, his and Madeline Malley Miller’s wedding, his attendance as President of the United States Conference of Mayors at the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel with President Bill Clinton, the Louisville-Jefferson County merger campaign, and Abramson’s election as Louisville’s first Metro Mayor.

Folders 76-79 hold miscellaneous legal sized papers: campaign data from 1985; certificates for Jerry Abramson from the Department of the Army in 1971, from Jefferson County in 1985, and from the Kentucky Senate in 2003; Lester Abramson’s real estate records from the 1930s-1950s; and records relating to Steve Beshear’s Lieutenant Governor campaign in 1982-1983.

Volume 80 and folder 81 hold oversize items: polling data from 1985; a Kentucky State Board of Elections document certifying Steven L. Beshear and Jerry E. Abramson as Governor and Lieutenant Governor in 201; a Bachelor of Arts degree for Madeline Abramson from Bellarmine University in 2013; and an Air Force One flight certificate.

The Filson deeply appreciates the volunteer work of Rabbi Stanley Miles in arranging, describing, and writing the biographical note for the Abramson family papers.

Related collections:

Jerry and Madeline Abramson Photograph Collection, ca. 1965-2010 [020PC15].

Museum objects: New York City marathon cap [2021.30.1], “Mayors Care for You” United States Conference of Mayors pin [2021.30.2], “I Helped Build Waterfront Park” pin [2021.30.3], Jerry Abramson mayoral campaign button [2021.30.4], City of Louisville pins [2021.30.5-6], “Salute to Mayor Jerry E. Abramson” pin [2021.30.7].
Biographical Note

Jerry Edwin Abramson (1946–) had a career which took him from a small grocery at the corner of Preston and Jacob Street to City Hall in Louisville, the Kentucky State Capitol in Frankfort, and finally to an office in the West Wing of the White House in Washington, DC.

Abramson was born in Louisville, Kentucky on September 12, 1946, at Jewish Hospital. His parents were Roy Abramson (1917-1998) and Shirley Botwick Abramson (1920-2002), and he has one sibling Sheilah Abramson-Miles (1950- ).

Abramson attended the Louisville public schools of Greathouse and Hawthorne Elementary, Seneca Middle School, and Seneca High School, graduating in 1964. During high school he was active in the teen programs at the Jewish Community Center, particularly the national high school fraternity AZA (Aleph Zedek Aleph) sponsored by B’nai B’rith, an international Jewish social and service organization. Abramson assumed a leadership role locally in the Resnick AZA chapter and regionally in the KIO (Kentucky-Indiana-Ohio) district. At Seneca High School he played in the marching band, was active in debate, and sang in the rock band Apollo and the Sunsetters.

In 1964 Abramson began his undergraduate career at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. He was a member of the ZBT (Zeta Beta Tau) Jewish social fraternity. In 1966, Abramson ran for and was elected to the IU Union Board. The Union Board was responsible for programming at the Indiana Memorial Union, then the largest student union complex in the world. He was also selected for the Indiana University Foundation, which oversaw Little 500 Weekend, a 50-mile bicycle race described as the “World’s Greatest College Weekend.”

In the spring of 1968 Abramson became involved in the presidential campaign of Robert F. Kennedy. He was selected to lead Youth for Kennedy during the Indiana primary. Meeting, working, and traveling with Senator Kennedy had a profound effect on Abramson and inspired him to pursue a career in public service. Sadly, at the time of Abramson’s graduation from Indiana University, Senator Kennedy was assassinated at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Abramson was invited to be on the funeral train from New York to Washington but declined because it would prevent him from attending his graduation ceremony.

In the fall of 1968 Abramson began his legal studies at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC. During the summer of 1969 he was drafted into the United States Army during the Vietnam War. He took basic training at Fort Knox in Kentucky and spent the remainder of his military career serving in the Judge Advocates Office at Fort Knox and the Presidio in San Francisco, CA. He left the service in the spring of 1971 and resumed law school at Georgetown where he had been elected to the Georgetown Law Review.
After graduating from Georgetown in the spring of 1973, Abramson returned to Louisville and took an Associate position at the Greenebaum, Doll, Matthews and Boone law firm. He also became active in both the secular and Jewish communities. In 1975 he ran for and was elected 3rd Ward Alderman in the Louisville Board of Aldermen. Abramson served two terms on the Board of Aldermen from 1975 to 1979. In 1980 Governor John Y. Brown chose him to be his general counsel and secretary of justice. He served in this position through 1981. Eventually Abramson became a partner in the Greenebaum, Doll and McDonald law firm.

In the early 1980s Abramson decided to run for mayor of Louisville. He was elected as mayor in 1985 and served until 1998. Jerry Abramson earned the nickname “Mayor for Life” as eventually he became the longest serving mayor in Louisville’s history.

During Abramson’s first term as mayor on June 24, 1989, he married Madeline Malley Miller (1955- ). Madeline grew up in a Catholic family in Louisville’s South End. They were active in the Democratic party and with the Kentucky Irish American newspaper. Madeline graduated from Holy Rosary Academy in 1973. She earned an Associate Degree in Real Estate from Jefferson Community College and an Associate Degree in Paralegal Studies from the University of Louisville. She worked at a variety of firms, ultimately becoming Executive Assistant to the General Counsel of US Bank and a Member of the Advisory Board. In 1991 the Abramsons adopted their son, Sidney (1991- ). In 2016 Sidney Abramson married Kandice Oppell; they have two children, Grayson Robert Abramson (2018- ) and Ruby Jane Abramson (2021- ).

Highlights of Jerry Abramson’s first terms (1985-1998) include the $700 million expansion of Louisville International Airport; the creation of Waterfront Park as part of the revitalization of Downtown Louisville; and the expansion of the local economy by recruiting Yum Brands and the Presbyterian (Church) USA to relocate to Louisville. In 1994 he was elected president of the United States Conference of Mayors.

After completing three terms as mayor in 1998, Abramson returned to the practice of law at Frost, Brown, Todd. During this time frame there was a successful campaign to merge the governments of Louisville and Jefferson County into the Louisville Metro government. Abramson was instrumental in this campaign. He was selected to run for the position of the first mayor of Louisville Metro, a position he occupied from 2002-2010. Abramson integrated the two pre-existing governments into one system.

At the end of Abramson’s second term as metro mayor, he decided not to run for a final third term. For many years he had been friendly with Steve Beshear, who was serving his first term as governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Beshear was seeking a candidate to run with him as his lieutenant governor for his second term, and Abramson joined the Beshear ticket. Abramson took office as lieutenant governor in December 2011.

In November of 2014 Abramson received an appointment from President Barack Obama to become Deputy Assistant to the president and White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs. Abramson’s focus was to serve as liaison between the White House and state and local governments and indigenous tribes.
When Abramson left the White House at the end of the Obama administration, he resumed his faculty position at Bellarmine University. In late 2018 he left Bellarmine to accept a position at Spalding University as executive-in-residence.

References

Folder List

Box 1
Folder 2: Abramson family genealogy, 2001
Folder 3: Abramson family Jewish documents, 1989-2016
Folder 5: Campaign memorabilia, Louisville races and Democratic National Convention, 1975, 1980s, 1992
Folder 6: Campaign contributions and prospective contributors, mayor’s race, 1985-1986
Folder 7: Campaign documents, mayor’s race, 1984-1985, 1990-1995
Folder 8: Campaign financial reports, mayor’s race, 1985
Folder 9: Campaign packet, mayor’s race, 1985
Folder 10: Campaign questions and special request forms, mayor’s race, 1985
Folder 11: Campaign senior citizen dinners, mayor’s race, 1985
Folder 12: Campaign volunteer forms and information, mayor’s race, 1985
Folder 13: Campaign strategy and notes, lieutenant governor’s race, 2010-2011
Folder 14: Clippings Robert F. Kennedy presidential campaign, 1968
Folder 16: Clippings first term as mayor, 1985-1989
Folder 17: Clippings second term as mayor, 1990-1993
Folder 18: Clippings third term as mayor, 1995-1997
Folder 19: Clippings third term as mayor, 1998-1999
Folder 20: Clippings, 2000
Folder 21: Clippings merger campaign, 2002
Folder 22: Clippings Louisville metro mayor, 2003-2010
Folder 23: Clippings White House years, 2014-2015
Folder 24: Correspondence, 1964, ca. 1985, undated
Folder 25: Correspondence, 1984-1986
Folder 26: Correspondence, 1987-1989
Folder 27: Correspondence, 1990-1996
Folder 29: “A Development Banking Enterprise for Louisville,” 1993
Folder 30: District Dialogues with Jerry, Districts 1-6, 2002
Folder 31: District Dialogues with Jerry, Districts 7-12, 2002
Folder 32: District Dialogues with Jerry, Districts 13-18, 2002
Folder 33: District Dialogues with Jerry, Districts 19-26, 2002
Folder 34: Downtown development, Louisville Central Area (LCA), 1985

Box 2
Folder 35: Falls of the Ohio crossroads campaign, 2010
Folder 36: Friends of Jerry Abramson PAC financial reports, 1985-1994
Folder 37: Friends of Jerry Abramson PAC records, 1988-1989
Folder 38: Friends of Jerry Abramson PAC records, 1990
Folder 39: Friends of Jerry Abramson PAC records, 1991
Folder 40: Friends of Jerry Abramson PAC records, 1992
Folder 41: Governor and lieutenant governor inauguration, 2011
Folder 42: Governor’s office documents, 1995, 2011
Folder 43: High school clippings and papers, 1962-1964
Folder 44: Indiana University clippings and papers, 1964-1968
Folder 45: Jerry Abramson law firm announcement and awards, 1974, 1977, 1998-2003
Folder 46: Jerry Abramson biographies, 2010
Folder 47: Jerry Abramson tributes at end of mayoral terms, 1998, 2010-2011
Folder 49: Madeline Abramson civic engagement, 1990-2015
Folder 51: Madeline Abramson speeches, 2005-2006
Folder 52: Madeline Abramson speeches, 2007-2009
Folder 53: Madeline Abramson speeches, 2010-2015
Folder 55: Mayor’s cabinet retreat, 7 March 1994
Folder 56: Mayor’s contingency fund reports 2003-2011
Folder 57: Mayor’s campaign tabular reports, 2006
Folder 58: Mayor’s race opponents, 1985
Folder 59: Mayor’s race opponent, Kelly Downard, 2006
Folder 60: Metro mayor campaign reports and script, 2006
Folder 61: “Municipalities, Jefferson County, Kentucky” report, 1982
Folder 62: R. Harrison Hickman consultation correspondence and polling data, 1983-1989

Box 3

Box 4
Volume 70: Scrapbook, July 1990-October 1991
Volume 71: Scrapbook, October 1991-May 1993

Box 5
Volume 74: Scrapbook, 1995-1996
Volume 75: Scrapbook, January 1999-November 2002
Folder 76: Campaign data, 1985
Folder 77: Certificates, 1971, 1985, 2003
Folder 78: Lester Abramson Real Estate, Victoria Hotel, 630 W. Main Street, 1938-1952
Folder 79: Steve Beshear lieutenant governor campaign, 1982-1983

Oversize
Volume 80 (wrapped): Polling data, 1985
Folder 81: Certificates, ca. 2011-2014
Subject Headings

Abramson, Jerry E., 1946-
Abramson, Madeline Malley Miller, 1955-
Air Force One (Presidential aircraft).
Airports – Kentucky – Louisville.
Aleph Zadik Aleph.
Belle of Louisville (Steamboat).
Beshear, Steven L., 1944-
B’nai B’rith.
B’nai B’rith Youth Organization.
Campaign funds – Kentucky.
City planning – Kentucky – Louisville.
Clinton, Bill, 1946-
Democratic Party (Ky.)
Elections – Kentucky.
Elections – Kentucky – Louisville.
Falls of the Ohio State Park (Ind.)
Gay rights – Kentucky – Louisville.
Housing – Kentucky – Louisville.
Inauguration.
Indiana Memorial Union. Union Board.
Jewish college students.
Jewish Community Center (Louisville, Ky.)
Jewish Community Federation of Louisville.
Jewish families – Kentucky – Louisville.
Jewish Hospital (Louisville, Ky.)
Jewish lawyers – Kentucky – Louisville.
Jewish mayors – Kentucky – Louisville.
Keneseth Israel (Louisville, Ky.)
Kentucky Derby.
Lawyers – Kentucky.
Lieutenant governors – Kentucky.
Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government (Ky.)
Louisville (Ky.) – History.
Louisville (Ky.) – Politics and government.
Louisville Standiford Field.
Mayors – Kentucky – Louisville.
Miles, Stanley R., 1948-
Political action committees – Kentucky.
Political campaigns – Kentucky.
Political campaigns – Kentucky – Louisville.
Presidents – United States – Inauguration.
Public opinion polls – Kentucky – Louisville.
United Jewish Campaign.
Urban development.
Victoria Hotel (Louisville, Ky.)
Waterfronts – Kentucky – Louisville.
White House (Washington, D.C.)