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### ***Collection Summary***

**Repository:** Manchester City Archives. Office of the City Clerk. City of Manchester, NH.

**Creator:** Superintendent of Schools; Board of School Committee. City of Manchester, NH.

**Title:** Manchester Public Forum Records

**Collection Number:** 0607.005

**Accession Number:** 2015.1

**Dates:** 1936-1937

**Volume:** 1 linear foot

**Languages:** Collection materials are in English.

**Access:** Access to collection is open to the public. Please contact the archives for an appointment to view materials. Cite the collection number when making an appointment. Materials may be accessible online; please reference the digital note below.

**Digital Note:** Materials are not accessible online at this time.

**Conservation Notes:** Not applicable.

**Finding Aid Prepared by:** Mike Intranuovo, 2017.

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## **Historical Note**

The United States Office of Education, which was a small division of the Department of Interior from the 19th Century up until the 1970s, oversaw various special projects and programs. In the 1930s, the Office of Education executed the Federal Forum Program, which was aimed at educating the adult population of the public and to encourage democratic discussions. The program was created during the Great Depression and was funded through emergency relief allocations. It was also a response to the rising tensions in Europe that led to the outbreak of World War II, especially the suppression of free speech and assembly that was being displayed in Nazi Germany at the time.

Manchester was chosen as one of the ten regional forum demonstration centers in the country, and the only one located in New England. Forums were hosted within the city and in neighboring communities, such as New Boston, Raymond, and Derry, from September 1, 1936 to April 30, 1937; they were free and open to the public. The program's administrator was the Superintendent of Schools, Louis P. Benezet. Other Manchester citizens were also involved in the planning and execution of the forums, including members of the Bar Association, the Professional Women's Club, the Teacher's Guild, and other organizations. Some individuals were hired to promote the forums and perform administrative duties. The City Library also promoted the event by offering bibliographies of books and magazines related to forum topics, and creating relevant displays.

Forums were focused on a specific issue or question which usually fell within general topics such as economics, social issues, politics, gender issues, education, etc. Over the course of the program, 14,046 people attended 280 forums. In general, the forums were reported to have "stimulated public interest in timely problems and served as an outlet for the free expression of public opinion."<sup>1</sup>

Although the program came to an end in Manchester in 1937, it was federally terminated in June 1941, shortly before the United States entered World War II. The federal government attempted to restart the program in November 1941 under a different name, the School and College Civilian Morale Service, but it was terminated less than two years later due to lack of funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Final Report, Manchester Public Forum Records. Collection 0607.005. Accession 2015.1. Manchester City Archives. Office of the City Clerk. City of Manchester, NH.

### **Collection Description**

The collection consists entirely of materials created by or for the administrators of the public forum. This includes promotional and informational materials created by the Office of Education; forum agendas which included specific topics, relevant questions, relevant talking points, and a bibliography of relevant materials available at the public library; and a copy of the final report created by Manchester's Public Forum administrator, Louis P. Benezet, for the Office of Education.

The collection does not include specific information as to the opinions, discussions, or questions asked by Manchester residents during these forums. Instead, it includes materials that were used to administer, plan, and execute the forums. The final report offers a general summary of the program and its results, while the forum agendas document the specific topics that were discussed during the forums. Since the individuals who administered the program were local citizens, and they were able to decide what topics were discussed during the forums, the topics largely reflected issues that were considered to be important and relevant to the people of Manchester at the time. This collection, therefore, offers some insight into what issues were most prevalent in the minds of Manchester's residents during the later years of the Great Depression leading up to World War II.