



THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI RESEARCH CENTER-KANSAS CITY

K0140

Frank Harold Backstrom (1902-1990) Papers
1923-1984
3 folders (MICROFILMED)

Scrapbook of clippings, campaign literature, and other memorabilia related to Backstrom's career on the Kansas City City Council during the reform movement of the 1930s-1940s.

BIOGRAPHY:

Frank Harold Backstrom was born April 24, 1902, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Backstrom. In 1904, the family moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where young Frank attended public school, graduating from Benton Grade School in 1916, and Central High School in 1920. He then attended the University of Michigan where he participated in intercollegiate debates. Backstrom graduated with a literary degree in 1924 and earned a law degree in 1926. He was admitted to the Bar in Missouri that year and became a member of the law firm of Swearingen, Olsen and Backstrom in Kansas City.

Backstrom was interested and active in civic affairs. He served as a member of the Committee of 100 overseeing the Kansas City 10 Year Plan, and participated in various organizations intending to improve the community.

Frank Backstrom first entered politics by running as the Republican candidate for the 9th District Missouri General Assembly seat in 1932. Not gaining that position, he became active in reform politics in Kansas City and in 1934 was selected to run for the Kansas City 4th District Councilman on the Citizen's Movement or 'Fusion' ticket. The election of 1934 was particularly violent and resulted in 4 persons being killed at the polls and a number injured. The 'Fusion' ticket lost all but Backstrom's and one other seat. The next few years found Backstrom and his few allies on the Council confronting the City Manager, H.F. McElroy, in an attempt to expose and reform the Pendergast machine's control of city government. The 1938 election gave the Machine a sweep of the Council, however, Backstrom was reelected in 1940 with other reform candidates including

Mayor John Gage. Backstrom continued to serve on the Kansas City Council until 1951 when he chose not to run again.

At this point, Backstrom determined to change careers. In 1952 L. Perry Cookingham appointed him assistant City Manager of Kansas City. The following year he was hired by the City Council of Tacoma, Washington, as that city's first city manager. In 1956, Backstrom moved to Wichita, Kansas, where he served as City Manager until 1962, when he became the Manager for Toledo, Ohio. Frank Backstrom retired from that office in 1970, and for several years was the executive director of the Masonic Auditorium in Toledo.

PROVENANCE:

The papers were a loan to be microfilmed from Mr. Frank H. Backstrom and were received on August 31, 1984 as accession 0255kc.

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PREFERRED CITATION:

Specific item; folder number; *Frank Harold Backstrom (1902-1990) Papers (K0140)*; The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-KC].

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DESCRIPTION:

These papers are composed of three parts: a folder of miscellaneous materials including campaign literature and other memorabilia; a scrapbook of clippings pertaining to Backstrom's life and political career in Kansas City; and a series of loose clippings, which have now been mounted, also dealing with Backstrom's life, career and interest in Kansas City political activity.

INVENTORY:

- Folder 1. Miscellaneous materials
This folder contains such items as campaign literature relating to the 1934, 1938 and 1940 elections to the Kansas City, Missouri, city offices; pamphlets concerning the operation of Machine Politics in Kansas City; a cartoon of the City Council under Mayor John Gage; and other miscellaneous notes and items.
- Folder 2. Scrapbook, 1923-1951
This scrapbook was compiled by Backstrom and contains newsclippings concerning his activities in high school and at the University of Michigan. However, the majority of the clippings pertain to Backstrom's political career in the City Council of Kansas City, Missouri, from 1934-1938, and 1940-1951.
- Folder 3. Clippings, 1931-1984
These loose clippings have been arranged for microfilming in chronological order with undated items at the beginning of the series. The subject of the clippings is similar to the scrapbook in Folder 2, however, this series does include a few items about Backstrom's career as a city manager in Tacoma, Washington. Some of the items presented in this folder are duplicates of items in other folders of the papers.