

DAVID RUSSELL BONTRAGER PAPERS, 1939-1976

Collection #
M 509

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Processed by
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USER INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 5 manuscript boxes

COLLECTION DATES: 1939-1976 inclusive; 1955-1965 bulk

PROVENANCE: unknown

RESTRICTIONS: none

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS: none

OTHER FINDING AIDS: none

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 88.0576

NOTES:

HISTORICAL NOTE

David Russell Bontrager (1908-1971) was a highly regarded state senator from Elkhart County. Bontrager, a

Republican, was respected by both parties and remained a dominant figure in the Indiana State Legislature for 16 years.

Before taking his seat in the Statehouse, Bontrager gained political experience in his hometown of Elkhart. After moving to Elkhart in 1932, he was admitted to the Bar in 1933 and began practicing law. He held the position of city judge from 1939-1942 and then served as Elkhart County prosecuting attorney for two terms, 1944-1947.

Bontrager was elected to the state senate in 1948 on the Republican ticket. He was re-elected three consecutive terms: 1952, 1956, and 1960. During these 16 years as a senator, Bontrager served as the president pro tempore (1962) and as the Republican majority floor leader during the session of the 1963 Legislature. In 1958, Senator Bontrager went up against Governor Handley for the U.S. Senate nomination. Even though he was defeated that year, Bontrager succeeded in receiving the nomination in 1964. In the November election, however, he lost the U.S. Senate race to Democrat Senator Hartke.

After his defeat, Bontrager returned to his law firm in which he was the senior partner. The Indiana Senator died on June 30, 1971.

In addition to his involved political career, Bontrager was very active in civil causes. He was the charter member of the Exchange Club, the president of the National Exchange Club and board member of the YMCA. He was a member of local, state and national Bar Associations, the American College of Trial Lawyers, the Freemasons and the Elk Club. Bontrager, his wife Willene and his three sons were members of the Presbyterian Church.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection, which includes the papers of Senator Russell Bontrager, primarily spans the years of 1955-1965. A large portion of the papers are labeled "senate matters" (1955-1964) and are mainly correspondence between Bontrager and his constituents. The collection also harbors papers that specifically concern the 1961 and 1963 Legislatures.

In addition, there is a variety of personal correspondence (1958-1965) that deals with Senator Bontrager's speaking engagements and social functions. Some of this correspondence involves invitations from various groups and individuals that Bontrager either accepted or declined (1958-1963). Also included are responses of the Senator to individuals who financially contributed to his 1964 campaign. A small portion of correspondence is between Bontrager and the American College of Trial Lawyers (1959-1966) of which he was a member.

A small but notable part of the collection is a number of news articles about the Senator (1961-1965) and an assortment of politically concerned articles that had been sent to Bontrager for his specific attention (1956-1965).

The remainder of the collection includes an assortment of Bontrager's tax records (1939-1953) and legal correspondence of the Bontrager law firm (1975-1976). Even though the Senator died in 1971, his son, William continued in the firm.

BOX AND FOLDER INVENTORY

Box 1: Senate matters **Folder**

1 Jan.-Mar. 1955

2 Apr.-Dec. 1955

3 1956

4 Jan.-Feb. 1957

5 Mar. 1957

6 Apr. 1957

7 Apr.-May 1957

8 Jun.-Aug. 1957

9 Sep.-Dec. 1957

10 Feb.-Sep. 1958

11 Oct.-Dec. 1958

12 Jan.-Oct. 1959

13 Nov.-Dec. 1959

14 Jan.-May 1960

**Box 2: Senate matters; Personal correspondence
Folder**

1 Senate matters, Jun.-Oct. 1960

2 Senate matters, Nov.-Dec. 1960

3 Senate matters, 1961

4 Senate matters, Jan.-Apr. 1962

5 Senate matters, May-Sep. 1962

6 Senate matters, Oct.-Dec. 1962

7 Senate matters, 1963

8 Senate matters, 1964

9 Personal correspondence, 1958-1960

10 Personal correspondence, Jan.-Mar. 1961

11 Personal correspondence, Apr.-Aug. 1961

12 Personal correspondence, Sep.-Dec. 1961

13 Personal correspondence, 1962

**Box 3 Personal correspondence; Tax records, Miscellaneous
Folder**

1 Personal correspondence, 1963

2 Personal correspondence, Jan.-Nov. 6, 1964

- 3 Personal correspondence, Nov. 9-Nov. 10, 1964
- 4 Personal correspondence, Nov. 12-Nov. 13, 1964
- 5 Personal correspondence, Nov. 16-Nov. 18, 1964
- 6 Personal correspondence, Nov. 19-Dec. 1964
- 7 Personal correspondence, Jan.-Feb. 1965
- 8 Personal correspondence, Mar.-Apr. 1965
- 9 Personal correspondence, May-Sept. 1965
- 10 Personal correspondence, Oct.-Dec. 1965
- 11 Clippings regarding Bontrager, 1959-1965
- 12 Politically oriented clippings, 1956-1965
- 13 Tax records, 1939-1945
- 14 Tax records, 1946-1953

**Box 4 Legislature; Accepted invitations
Folder**

- 1 1961 Legislature, Dec. 1960-Jan. 1961
- 2 1961 Legislature, Feb. 7-Feb. 23, 1961
- 3 1961 Legislature, Feb. 24-Mar. 1961
- 4 1963 Legislature, Nov. 1962
- 5 1963 Legislature, Dec. 1962
- 6 1963 Legislature, Jan.-Feb. 1963
- 7 1963 Legislature, Apr.-May 10, 1963
- 8 1963 Legislature, May 13-Jun. 1963
- 9 1963 legislature, Jul.-Dec. 1963
- 10 Accepted invitations, 1958-1959
- 11 Accepted invitations, 1960-1961
- 12 Accepted invitations, Jan.-Sep. 1962
- 13 Accepted invitations, Oct.-Dec. 1962
- 14 Accepted invitations, 1963

**Box 5 Declined invitations; Correspondence; Miscellaneous
Folder**

- 1 Declined invitations, 1957
 - 2 Declined invitations, 1958-1959
 - 3 Declined invitations, 1960-1961
 - 4 Declined invitations, 1962-1963
 - 5 Correspondence with the American College of Trial Lawyers (1959-1966)
 - 6 Correspondence with the Office of Defense Mobilization (1959-1963)
 - 7 School Reorganization matters (1960)
 - 8 Contributions, Feb.-Mar. 1964
 - 9 Contributions, Apr.-May 1964
 - 10 Contributions, Jun.-Dec. 1964
 - 11 Legal matters (1975-1976)
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CATALOGUING INFORMATION

MAIN ENTRY: Bontrager, David Russell, 1908-1971

SUBJECT ENTRIES: Bontrager, David Russell, 1908-1971

Indiana. General Assembly. House

Indiana. General Assembly--Constituent communication

American College of Trial Lawyers

Politicians--Indiana--Elkhart

Lawyers--Indiana--Elkhart

Legislators--Taxation--Indiana--Elkhart

Campaign funds--Indiana

Indiana--Politics and government

Elkhart (Ind.)

END