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A. Eugene Cox collection

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Biographical information

Allen Eugene “Gene” Cox was born in Denison, Grayson County, Texas, on August 13, 1905. His father, James Edgar Cox, was a dairymen from Missouri and his mother, Laura May Lott Cox, came from Prairie Grove, Arkansas. Cox was the eldest of two boys and four girls. He attended four schools in Denison between 1912 and 1916 because the family often moved. By 1920 he was living in Dallas and attending school there but left in the 7th grade. Cox then worked for a merchant in Dallas until 1927. Early that year he moved to El Paso where he was employed in the accounting departments of the Armour Packing Company and the Magnolia Petroleum Company. In 1931 he entered Texas Christian University with the intention of entering the ministry. He was active in the International Relations Club and involved in promoting civil rights for African Americans.

After meeting the prominent missionary Sherwood Eddy at a revival, Cox became interested in the cooperative farm project Eddy had founded at Hillhouse (later called Rochdale), in Bolivar County, Mississippi. Also involved with Eddy on the Delta Cooperative Farm project, purchased in March 1936, were theologian Reinhold Niebuhr; John and Mack Rust, inventors of the cotton picking machine; William Amberson, a physiology professor at the University of Tennessee Medical School in Memphis, Tennessee, who was also the leader of the Memphis Chapter of the Socialist Party of America; Sam H. Franklin, Eddy’s student; and H.L. Mitchell (1906-1989), executive secretary of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. The 2,138-acre farm was a diverse operation under resident director Franklin and had a mix of black and white families, mostly evicted Arkansas sharecroppers. It promoted economic equality and gave both races access to various social services. Cox moved there in June 1936 to work as accountant and bookkeeper. There he met Miriam Lindsey “Lindy” Hail (1911-1996) who was born in Japan to missionaries John Eugene Hail (1873-1911) and Harriet J. Wyckoff Hail (1874-1942. She had trained as a registered nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital and was also recruited by the cooperative farm in 1936. Gene and Lindy married the following year. They had three daughters: Carol, Patricia Gail, and Ann.

After Franklin enlisted in the navy in 1942, Cox became resident director of Providence Cooperative Farm, bought in 1938, near Cruger, Holmes County. But the cooperative farms were struggling. The Delta Cooperative Farm was on land difficult for farming and was never viable without outside money. This problem was made worse by the exodus of rural workers entering the armed services and moving to war-related industries, which led to the sale of the Delta Cooperative Farm in 1942. Cox found Providence could not compete against the mechanized farms and leased much of its land to private farmers. David R. Minter became farm doctor in 1938 and returned in 1946 after serving in the war. In that same year, Delta Foundation, Inc. was organized as a non-profit organization primarily for educational work. In 1950, Sam Franklin, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Charles S. Johnson resigned from the Providence board of trustees and a new board of directors was formed comprising Gene and Lindy Cox, and David and Mary Sue Minter. By the 1950s, Providence included a cooperative grocery, credit union, purchasing cooperative, supplementary school for African American children, and medical clinic. Cox
became acting director of the Mount Beulah Christian Center, near Edwards, Mississippi, in 1954 to offer religious and social services to African Americans.

Despite some early efforts by local plantation owners to undermine the cooperative farm, Cox and the people on the cooperative farms had generally cordial relations with the surrounding communities in Bolivar and then Holmes County until the early 1950s. But that cordiality began to change as some whites were concerned about the work of the farm with African Americans because the interaction was not strictly segregated. The label of communist was also attached to the farm leaders. They seemed out of sympathy with locals after Minter testified in support of Hazel Brannon Smith, editor of the Lexington Advertiser, in a libel case in which she accused a local sheriff of an unprovoked shooting of an African American man. On September 27, 1955, a group of about 600 white people organized by the local Citizens’ Council met at Tchula High School to protest an incident where some African American boys had allegedly whistled at a white girl. Tensions were already high because of the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision and the acquittal a week earlier of two white men for the murder of African American youth Emmett Till in the Mississippi Delta. Summoned to the meeting, Cox and Minter heard a tape recording of the boys’ interrogation conducted the previous day, which included references to mixed activities among the races at the farm. Both Cox and Minter denied racial integration was practiced there but Cox admitted he thought segregation was unChristian. The Cox and Minter families were asked to leave the county but initially they refused. The incident received national attention and the farm families suffered harassment from the local sheriff’s department. Bowing to the inevitable, the Cox and Minter families left Mississippi, with the former moving to Whitehaven in Memphis, Tennessee, where Cox worked for the National Council of Churches as director of rural development programs. Providence Farm was sold to the Delta Foundation with Gene Cox acting as executive director. The intention was for the foundation to carry on the work of the farm as the founders had intended. Lindy Cox and the Minters, now living in Texas, continued as directors. The farm, run by Fannye Booker, continued to have a store and offered educational programs to local African Americans.

Cox was deeply affected by being forced to leave, yet he was also determined not to abandon Mississippi and he continued to visit the state as part of his work for the NCC. He was active with religious groups and civil rights organizations and as part of an effort to publicize and document the situation in Mississippi and further afield, he collected materials including voluminous clippings which he copied and distributed. It says much about the organized nature of the man, his attention to detail and determination, and his wide interests, that he compiled such extensive files. Cox was very involved with the labor activities of H.L. Mitchell and the two men were life-long friends. He was very interested in the history of telephones and established a small museum. Another interest was archeology and he also collected and polished stones which he would give to the wide circle of people he met.

By the 1980s a decision had to be made on the future of Providence farm. Nearly 289 acres containing an archeological site was donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, while the remaining land was sold to the Nature Conservancy in 1991. In their retirement, Gene and Lindy volunteered extensively for the Memphis Regional Medical Center
which was recognized by Congressional Community Service Awards in 1981. Gene Cox died after a stroke on December 19, 1992. Lindy Cox died on August 1, 1996.

The Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union (STFU) was founded in July 1934 near Tyronza, Arkansas by H. L. Mitchell and Clay East in response to the crop-reduction program of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (A. A. A.) and the resulting eviction of sharecroppers by Southern planters. Members of the union included both black and white sharecroppers. The Union's objectives were “the relief of displaced workers; the establishment of collective bargaining agreements between workers and landlords, and the revamping of the A.A .A." Though not politically partisan itself, the union’s leaders were Norman Thomas-inspired socialists, a fact which was often used in efforts by planters to discredit the union.

In 1937 the STFU and other unions united to form the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) affiliated with the CIO. Two years later, unable to pay its dues and unhappy with the administration of the CIO, the STFU withdrew from UCAPAWA. The STFU was active during the war years, at one time reaching a membership of 35,000 centered in Arkansas, Oklahoma and the Missouri bootheel. In 1946 it reorganized as the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU), which affiliated with the AF of L, with rights to organize anywhere in the U.S. In 1952 the NFLU became the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU), which in 1960 joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workers of North America, officially ending the union's unique history of farm labor unionism.

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Scope and contents

The collection is arranged in three series. Series 1. Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, contains miscellaneous reports, articles, books, speeches, correspondence, photographs, and newspaper clippings related to the history of the STFU. Much is centered on the union’s driving force, H.L. Mitchell, and there are copies of his correspondence and writings, as well as material on the STFU Association which was organized to care for the legacy of the union. An interesting item is a scrapbook compiled by the British writer Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) on her 1935 trip to the United States.

Series 2, Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms, contains printed material and articles pertaining to the establishment of the Delta Cooperative Farm and three folders of audits, 1936-1942, provide insight into the farms’ financial failure. In regard to the Providence Cooperative Farm, there are several folders of materials describing the sequence of events and emotional climate in which Holmes County residents tried to force Cox and Minter to leave the area in 1955.

The third series, A.E. Cox, is the largest. It contains some personal correspondence and correspondence related to his work with the Delta Foundation. But the bulk of the series is published materials and newspaper clippings collected by Cox on a variety of subjects of interest.
to him. While he had a life-long interest in economic and social injustice, there are also folders of material on politics, history and science, Elvis Presley, to name a few.

Note: Cox used abbreviations of the newspaper titles to mark many of his clippings. They include:
CA – *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, Tennessee
CL – *Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson, Mississippi
DCP – *Deer Creek Pilot*, Rolling Fork, Mississippi
DDT – *Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, Mississippi
DJ – *Daily Journal*, Tupelo, Mississippi
DN – *Daily News*, Jackson, Mississippi
HCH – *Holmes County Herald*, Lexington, Mississippi
LA – *Lexington Advertiser*, Lexington, Mississippi
PS – *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, Memphis, Tennessee

Related materials

Allen Eugene Cox papers, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Libraries.
A. Eugene Cox Papers, 1953-1968, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
Delta and Providence cooperative farms papers, 1925-1963, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Paul J. Vanderwood papers on the Delta Cooperative Farm, 1938-1964, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Subject terms

Agricultural laborers--Labor unions--United States.
Delta Cooperative Farm Project (Hillhouse, Miss.)
Memphis (Tenn). Police Dept.
Providence Plantation (Miss.)
Sharecroppers.
Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.
Inventory

Box 1

Folder

Series 1. Southern Tenant Farmers Union.
1 Test Case: Sharecroppers of Arkansas vs. Hiram Norcross, 1935, briefs (copy).
2 Miscellaneous reports, programs, newsletters, memoranda, 1933-1936.
3 S.T.F.U. Songbook, undated (copy).

Articles and Interviews:
7 Burgess, David S., "The Bible Speaks to Labor," Town and Country Department, Board of Home Missions, undated.
   Mitchell, H. L., Portion of book manuscript and letters concerning it, 1941.
   Mitchell, H. L., Manuscript of lecture given at Cleveland State University, 1972 October 27.
   Mitchell, H. L., Manuscript of lecture given to History Department, Wake Forest University, 1972 September 28.
10 Extract from Evelyn Smith’s “Rebel Voices,” an unpublished memoir,
undated.
Findall, George Brown, "The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945,"
Vandiver, Joseph S. "The Changing Realm of King Cotton," undated (copy).
"Migrant Farm Labor: The Problem and Ways of Meeting It," circa 1939.

11 Affidavit, strike bulletin, etc., 1934-1935 and undated.
12 Several short histories of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union.
13 Newspaper and periodical articles pertaining to the sharecropper system and the S.T.F.U.,
15 Copies of Clay East’s correspondence 1934-1939. Includes Cox and Mitchell correspondence re: East, 1978. East was a president of the S.T.F.U.
16 Correspondence and other material related to Ernesto Galazara, who served as a vice-president of the S.T.F.U., 1968-1984 and undated.
17 George A. McNeely file. Contains a copy of a letter to his grandson. Also contains anti-black, anti-Jewish, and anti-business materials. McNeely was a vice-president of the S.T.F.U.
19 Obituaries of former members of the S.T.F.U.
21 Correspondence related to S.T.F.U.’s relationship with the United Cannery, Agricultural Packing, and Allied Workers of America Union, 1934-1939.
24 Copy of letter written by the Chairman of Conference of Younger Churchmen of the South (undated) requesting people to write to Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, urging him to make a thorough investigation of charges of "organizing to overthrow the government" against Ward H. Rogers, (Marked Tree, Arkansas).
26 American Federation of Labor Resolution No. 197 endorsing the S.T.F.U., 1935 October 17.
27 Material on Delmo Homes, a housing project located in Southeast Missouri, 1939-1978.
28 News release by the executive board of the United Mine Workers of America endorsing the strike of the S.T.F.U., 1936 May 29.
29 Petition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, undated.
Correspondence pertaining to investigation of Delta and Providence Farms and memoranda:
30 1937-1940 February 28.
1940 March 13-November 5.
Fairview Farms' sharecropper's contract.
Front page of *Memphis Press-Scimitar* newspaper describing the floods along the Mississippi River, 1937 January 27.
H. L. Mitchell's recommendation of a working division on organization and education for the S.T.F.U., undated.
Staff correspondence, 1936-1938. Includes correspondence with Sam Franklin, Delta Cooperative Farm.
Executive council meetings minutes, 1937 January 30, March 21, 22, June 18-20; financial statements, 1937 February, March.
Calendar of events, 1936 June-October, 1942-1943, 1945 January.
Constitution and by-laws, rural economic survey cards, travelers card, notices of union meetings.
News release pertaining to union's opposition to farm labor supply bill, undated (during World War II).
Biographical materials on H. L. Mitchell.
Lists of H. L. Mitchell's speaking engagements.
Articles written by H. L. Mitchell, 1943-1984 and undated.
Newsletter s and other mailings from H.L. Mitchell’s office, 1974-1987 and undated.
Transcript of tape recordings made for the Oral History Project of Columbia University, New York, 1956-1957. The autobiographical recordings were made by H. L. Mitchell.
Copy of letter from President Harry Truman to H.L. Mitchell, 1945 November 26.
Program for the Twelfth Annual Convention, 1945 December; program for the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, 1977 August.
Proceedings of fortieth anniversary meeting, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1974 April 25.
Program for the Fourth Annual Convention, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1938 February 25-27;

57 Copy of mailing list.


59 National Agricultural Workers Union ballots on whether to join Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, undated.


61 Charter of the National Agricultural Workers Union, AF L, Local #43, 1952 September 4.


63 Cassette of songs by John L. Handcox and other songs; correspondence concerning Handcox's suit for royalties from *Mean Things Happening in This Land* and other matters, 1981 -1986.

64 Copy of a play “Southern Tenant Farmers Union Forever” by Flotine Hodge, undated.

Correspondence: S.T.F.U. film project:


68 undated.

**Box 2**

1 Reunion, 1981-1989. Correspondence, newsletters: re: reunion, film project, etc.

2 Claude Williams, 1936-1979 and undated.

S.T.F.U. Association:

3 Charter, 1980.

4 Tax exemption, 1983.

5 Bylaws, 1983.

**Box 3**

Unfolded Scrapbook/photograph album: Compiled by British writer Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) on her 1935 trip to the U.S.A. Contents include section on plight of sharecroppers. Also poems by William Amberson and Mitchison.

**Box 4**


5 Correspondence between A.E. Cox and members of George L. Wilder family, photographs, 1956-1972.

6 Photograph proofs used in 1959 anniversary brochure and correspondence.


Series 2. Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms.

Charter, correspondence and articles, 1936-1941 and undated.

Audits:

1936-1938.

1938-1941.

1941-1942.

Holmes County incident, 1955:

Materials on incident including articles and statements on Cox’s non-Socialist affiliations.

Clippings; article by Sam Franklin.

Clippings and correspondence; Dr. Minter’s prescription pad.


Account of what was said at the meeting in which Cox and Minter were asked to leave Holmes County; obituary of J.P. Love, one of the participants in meeting; list of rumors concerning what went on at Providence Plantation; copy of article written by H. L. Mitchell for the January 1955, issue of Socialist Call concerning incident.

Clippings from periodicals concerning incident, 1955.

Clippings from newspapers concerning incident.

**Series 3. A.E. Cox.**

Correspondence to Cox, Executive Director of the Delta Foundation, requesting loans for education expenses:

29  1965-1970.

31 Personal correspondence to Mr. & Mrs. Cox from Margaret Hampton, Cruger, Miss., 1970-1983 and undated.
32 Personal correspondence to Mr. & Mrs. Cox from John Gibson; Mr. Gibson's obituary, 1957-1971.
33 Personal correspondence to Mr. & Mrs. Cox from Mrs. John Gibson, 1972-1981.
34 Personal correspondence, 1979-1981.
36 Young couples’ discussion group on poverty, July 1968.

Publications:

39 *Southern Exposure*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2, 1980 Spring, Summer.

**Box 5**

Subject files (clippings and ephemera):

1 Racism, integration, and civil rights issues:
   *The Thunderbolt*, No. 277, 278, 1982 May, June; No. 286, 1983 March; No. 296, 1984 March.
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<td>8</td>
<td>December-1948 January.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><em>Racism in America and How to Combat It</em>, United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1970 January.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Statement of students of the Atlanta University Center in support of integration of the South, circa 1959.</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Operation PUSH and Rev. Jessie Jackson.</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>List of important dates in Memphis black medical history, compiled by Walter W. Diggs, 1980.</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Memo written by H. L. Mitchell outlining efforts of landowners in Fayette and Haywood Counties, Tenn., to limit the voting power of blacks by forcing the sharecroppers off the land through mechanization, circa 1961.</td>
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N.A.A.C.P. and N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense Fund ephemera.


N.A.A.C.P. (Mississippi)/Aaron Henry.


*Center Light*, Greenwood, Miss., Vol. 8, No. 21, 22, 24-32, 1968 June 28-September 20.


*Center Light*, Greenwood, Miss., Vol. 9, No. 1, 2, 4-6, 8-12, 1969 January 10-March 28.


Mississippi Governor William Winter and administration:

1979 November 7-December 31.

1980 January 3-April 15.

1980 May 1-December 19.

1981 January 7-December 22.

1982 January 3-December 27.


American labor and unions:


8 Labor unions and strikes in Mississippi, 1978-1983.
10 Memphis Police Department, 1980. Re: allegations of brutality.
12 Memphis Police Department, 1981. Re: allegations of brutality.
13 Memphis Police Department, 1982. Re: allegations of brutality.
36 City of Memphis Hospital- Labor problems, 1979.
37 City of Memphis Hospital- Labor problems, 1980.


Land use in Whitehaven: housing, parks, etc., 1960-1981.

Mao Zedong’s widow, Jiang Qing.

Nuclear arms, 1982.


Elvis Presley:


Box 7

Center for Southern Folklore, 1980.
Creationism, 1982.

Box 8

Communes and cooperatives, 1972-1983.
Danny Cupit, 1980.


Fayette-Haywood Workcamps, Tennessee:
5 Correspondence, 1961-1964.
8 Fayette-Haywood Workcamps publications, 1963 and undated.
11 Loan fund.
12 Miscellany. Mid-South Consumers Oil Cooperative; Somerville, Tennessee, South Central Bell telephone directory, 1971 February.


Memphis Committee on Community Relations, 1959-1963.
Memphis and Shelby County Chapter of the Tennessee Council on Human Relations, 1960 and undated.
A Proposed Code of Fair Practices and Human Rights Commission for the City of
Memphis and the County of Shelby, Tennessee, undated.

5  “Fellowship News”, The Peter Cooper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Memphis, Tenn., 1972 April 15. Announces talk by Mrs. Frank A. ‘Happy’ Jones, chairman of the Memphis Community Relations Commission.

Separated materials

The following materials have been separated from the collection and disposed of as follows:
