

Guide to the Kenneth R. Giddens Papers

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Kenneth R. Giddens

Title: Kenneth R. Giddens Papers [1908-1993]

Dates: 1954-1999 [Bulk 1955-1970]

Quantity: 4.0 linear feet

Abstract: Newspaper clippings, correspondence, magazine articles, photographs, and other items related to Kenneth R. Giddens, founder of Mobile's WKRG television and radio stations, and to his stint as director of the Voice of America and interim director of Radio Marti.

Accession: 06-09-457

Biographical Note:

Kenneth Giddens was born September 10, 1908, in Pineapple, Alabama, to Lovick and Addie Giddens. He graduated from Butler County High in Greenville, Alabama, and earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Auburn University. From 1931 to 1937 he worked as an architect, later joining the J. F. Pate Construction Company, where he worked until 1943. In addition to his work with WKRG, Giddens was a member of the board of directors of the First National Bank of Mobile. He was also involved in the construction of Mobile's Colonial Bel Air Mall, served as director of Voice of America from 1969 to 1977, and was a partner in a movie theatre chain. Giddens died in 1993.

WKRG began as an AM radio station in 1946, founded by Giddens, and would spawn an FM station one year later. Giddens entered the television medium in 1955 by adding WKRG-TV, a CBS affiliate. The Giddens family would remain in control of the stations until after Giddens death. The radio stations were sold in 1994, and the television station in 1998.

Scope and Content

Contains brochures, correspondence, ephemera, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, reports, and photographs related to the history of WKRG, to union issues with the station, and to the station's relationship to the Mobile *Press Register*. The collection also includes material about Giddens' other business ventures, including a business agreement related to the Air Sho drive-in theater, a theater chain, his involvement with Bel Air Mall and the Crichton Shopping Center, and Mobile development plans. The collection also includes information pertaining to Jay Altmayer and photographs related to the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Researchers should note that the collection is deficient in information on Giddens' personal life, and includes little material on his time with Voice of America.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in six series: 1. WKRG, 1955-1999 [Bulk 1955-1970], .5 cu. ft., arranged chronologically; 2. Giddens Business, 1954-87 [Bulk 1960-1972], one folder, arranged chronologically; 3. Miscellaneous, 1956-1992 [Bulk 1980-1988], six folders and one book, arranged chronologically; 4. Photos / Slides / Ephemera, 1957-2001 [Bulk 1960-1965], three folders, arranged by subject; 5. Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway (1967-1995 [Bulk 1982-1985]), 0.5 linear feet, arranged by subject; and 6. Radio Marti (1960-2007 [Bulk 1982-1985]), 1.0 linear feet, arranged by subject.

Access Restrictions

This material is open for research.

Preferred Citation

Kenneth R. Giddens Papers, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series 1. WKRG, 1955-1999. .5 cubic feet.

This series covers much of the history of the WKRG radio and television stations from their founding in the 1940s and 1950s through the 1980s, with a limited number of documents on operations in the 1990s. Among the materials to be found are a two-volume report on WKRG personnel and operations, documents from the National Labor Relations Board, and material related to labor relations and union propaganda.

Series 2. Giddens Business, 1954-1987. One folder.

Covers Giddens' other business ventures, including his partnership in Giddens and Rester Theatres and material on development plans for Mobile.

Series 3. Miscellaneous, 1956-1992. Six folders and one book.

Consists of brochures such as "The Clock," a bi-monthly magazine of the First National Bank of Mobile; a radio survey; and a show transcript related to various events, organizations, and people such as the Junior Miss Pageant, and Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen. In addition, there are invitations to the opening of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway (attended by President Richard Nixon) and to an event featuring then Vice President George H. W. Bush.

Series 4. Photos/Slides/Ephemera, 1957-2001. Three folders.

Includes photographs and/or slides of Giddens with various people, Bel Air Mall, Azalea Trail, Crichton Shopping Center, a labor strike against WKRG, Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen, as well as still images of the WKRG television show *Women's World*. Also contains a framed invitation to the opening of a Giddens and Rester theatre and ephemera from First Alabama Bank, the Athelstan Club, the Mobile Hilton, and Regions Bank.

Series 5. Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, 1967-1995. Fourteen folders.

This collection encompasses the history of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, the fight for funding, the court battle to stop construction and the grand opening of the waterway. The information on Altmayer pertains to his dealings with the White House on the Energy Counsel, their requested biography and correspondence from Giddens. The bulk of the material is dated from 1982-1985.

Series 6. Radio Marti, 1960-2007. Twenty-Seven folders.

This series details the need for Radio Marti and Giddens' pursuit of the passage of a bill for

funding. Giddens time as the Interim director is documented in the correspondence and the news clippings. The news clippings cover from the creation of the idea for Radio Marti to the first year of operation. The Bulk of the material is dated from 1982-1985.

Box 1

- 1-2. WKRG History; two volume station report (unfoldered)
3. WKRG Union Issues
- 4-7. WKRG – Press Register
8. Giddens Business
9. Miscellaneous – Bias in the Media
10. Miscellaneous – ABA/News clippings
11. Miscellaneous – Presidential invitations
12. Miscellaneous – Junior Miss
13. Miscellaneous – Archbishop Toolen
14. Miscellaneous – Miscellaneous Materials
15. Photos
16. Photos
17. Slides
- “Mobile: A Sunbelt Center of Opportunity” (unfoldered)

Box 2

Photograph of WKRG (undated)
Framed invitation to opening of Giddens and Rester’s Downtown Theatre (1945)

Box 3

First Alabama Bank paperweight
Regions Bank commemorative coins (two frames, one unframed)
Athelstan Club groundbreaking paperweight
Mobile Hilton groundbreaking replica of gold shovel

Box 4

1. Altmayer, Jay contains information on his dealing with the oil industry, White House and his biography
- 2-3. Correspondence
4. History of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway
- 5-9. News clippings of the court battle and creation of the Waterway
10. Publications pertaining to the creation of the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway
11. Separation Sheets (Invitation to the opening of Bel Air Mall, Bellingrath Book were removed)
- 12-13. Tennessee-Tombigbee News clippings about the opening and first year

Box 5

- 1-3. Correspondence

4. Congressional Papers pertaining to the passage of the bill forming Radio Marti
5. Giddens Talking Points about why Radio Marti was Needed
6. Publications and Papers about the creation of Radio Marti from the USIA
7. Unclassified Documents from the USIA from reporters and committee members
8. United States Information Agency featuring newsclipping and reports about Radio Marti
9. Business Papers detailing information about the setup and funding for Radio Marti
- 10-26. Radio Marti News clippings
27. TV Marti