MISSION RANCH RECORDS, 1956-1974

Descriptive Summary

Title: Mission Ranch records
Dates: 1956-1974
Accession Number(s): 2013-004
Extent: 1 foot, 6 inches
Language: Materials are written in English.

Administrative History:
Mission Ranch was established through the Women of the Church, a subsidiary group under the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). Funded by the 1953 Birthday Offering, an annual collection to support mission activity, the purpose of Mission Ranch was to provide comfortable housing in Austin, Texas for missionaries on furlough. The first occupants arrived in 1956 and the Mission Ranch Board of Trustees managed operations until 1974, at which time the property and assets were placed under the authority of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The property consists of two duplexes located at 507 and 607 Bellevue Place, Austin, Texas, near Austin Seminary. At the time of operations, the Mission Ranch Board of Trustees managed the buildings and occupancy. Women from each supporting synod (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma) served on the Board and reported to their respective Women’s Councils in each synod. Also included in the Board were the Seminary President and two laypersons residing in Austin.

The Board held an Annual Meeting every May at Austin Seminary to discuss the year’s business and new actions, and hold elections. Elected positions included Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Board also appointed one layperson as Chairman of Supervision and Maintenance. Terms were three years and subject to re-election. The Seminary President was a prominent member due to his proximity to the property, associations with church leadership, and personal connections with many of the missionaries who sought occupancy at Mission Ranch. David Stitt was the Seminary President at the time of the Board’s first meeting in 1954 and served on the Board until he left the Seminary in 1971. Prescott Williams was the Seminary President after Stitt and served on the Board until its dissolution in 1974. At the time of dissolution, Marguerite Huston, of Oklahoma, acted as Board Chairman to
supervise business affairs, and Edna Noll, of Texas, acted as Secretary to file correspondence and send reports to the Board of Women’s Work, later the Women’s Coordinating Council.

Occupants of the Mission Ranch homes included missionaries and international students. Missionaries were the intended residents, and priority was given to those who intended to study at Austin Seminary or The University of Texas at Austin. Applications for occupancy were processed by an Austin-based committee, including the Seminary President, who occasionally chose to offer vacancies to visiting students. A normal residence period was 11½ months, with two weeks reserved for cleaning and renovation. The Board partnered with the Board of World Missions, another organization of the PCUS, to financially support missionaries’ stay at Mission Ranch. Missionaries from other denominations also stayed at Mission Ranch, and many studied at the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas.

Following synod redistricting within the PCUS in 1972-1973, the Women’s Coordinating Council recommended that Mission Ranch be placed under Austin Seminary’s administration and ownership. The Synod of Red River accepted the recommendation at the 1973 Meeting in New Orleans and instructed the Board to transfer property and operations to Austin Seminary. The Board held their final meeting in January 1974, at which time the transfer was completed and the Board dissolved. The Seminary initially continued to offer the homes to missionaries, and later repurposed the property.

References:

Scope and Contents:
Meeting materials, administrative reports, correspondence, and financial records document the work of the Mission Ranch Board of Trustees and the missionaries who sought occupancy and lived in the apartments. Correspondence and meeting materials indicate relationships and operations between organizations of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). The records comprise the individually maintained files of the Seminary Presidents and Board Treasurers, however the work of the other members of the Board is evident from the production of meeting materials, reports, and correspondence. Description of missionary occupants is primarily limited to applications for occupancy and records of funding from the Board of World Missions, however some circumstances required additional correspondence or mention in reports. One such situation involved a missionary escaping political turmoil in the Congo in 1960 and in need of emergency housing. Other missionaries were previously acquainted with David Stitt and their correspondence includes social topics in addition to inquiries about occupancy.
The administrative series contains files of administrative materials, minutes, and by-laws. The largest of the files -- labeled "General - Minutes, by-laws, charters, pamphlets" -- acts as a general catch-all of Dr. Stitt’s copies of the aforementioned administrative subjects. Separated into two files by date, 1956-1968 and 1969-1974, respectively, many of the items found within these files are similar in nature to those found in the correspondence and financial series with the distinction that they include notes written either by or for Stitt. Although documentation does not start until after the arrival of the first occupants in 1956, these records are comprised of copies of the Mission Ranch Board of Trustees minutes and agendas (including copies of the fiscal year’s financial statements and budget), by-laws for both the Board and furlough homes, the charter for Mission Ranch as a private corporation, the contract for the property the homes were to be built upon, and pamphlets advertising Mission Ranch as a place of residence for missionaries on leave.

The remaining files in the series have no clear creator and are divided into by-laws and meeting minutes.

The correspondence series consists of two subseries. The Seminary Presidents’ correspondence files are divided between David Stitt and Prescott Williams. Stitt presided as Seminary President for the majority of Mission Ranch operations, 1954-1971, and maintained extensive correspondence with Board members, particularly Marguerite Huston and Edna Noll, church entities and organizations, and missionaries in the field. Stitt communicated frequently with the Board of World Missions and was appointed as Chairman in 1967. Copies of his letters to Board members document their work with Mission Ranch as well as concerns about changes in the PCUS. One such letter to Noll in 1970 indicates that changes in church structure could reduce the capacity of women’s work. Enclosures of incoming letters from the Board include copies of their correspondence, reports of associated church entities, and financial records. Stitt took a clergy position in Houston following his presidency at Austin Seminary and continued his correspondence with Board members. The latest dated document is a copy of meeting minutes from the January 1974 final meeting.

Prescott Williams assumed the responsibilities of Seminary President’s role on the Board of Trustees following Stitt’s departure. It was at a time of re-organization for the PCUS Synods, and among Williams’s first tasks was to write a report investigating the relationship between Austin Seminary and Mission Ranch. Correspondence includes documentation of general operations of Mission Ranch, but is predominantly focused on negotiations between the Board of Trustees, Austin Seminary, the Women’s Coordinating Council, and the Synod of Red River. In negotiations, Williams acted as both advocate for Mission Ranch and Seminary President due to a temporary absence of Board Chairman, Marguerite Huston. The file includes legal correspondence and
documents for the Mission Ranch property transfer and allocation of assets. Documents range in date from 1971 to 1974 and include the 1965 Bylaws.

The second correspondence subseries consists of Treasurers’ files, including the documents of Virginia Joslin, York Jackson, W.F. Lovett, and Daniel Junkin from 1956-1962 and 1965-1974. Joslin served as Treasurer 1956-1960, after which the Seminary Treasurer, John Smiley, served on the Board as Treasurer. Jackson served as Treasurer in 1965, but resigned from Board membership by the 1966 annual meeting, at which time Lovett assumed the duties of Treasurer. He served through the term to 1968, after which Daniel Junkin was appointed Board Treasurer and served up to the dissolution of the Board of Trustees in 1974. The Treasurers’ files include bank receipts, tax records, insurance statements, records of contributions, correspondence with Board members and the Board of World Missions, documents related to meetings and operations, as well as correspondence pertaining to the documents.

Junkin’s files are maintained according to the Board’s fiscal year, running from May to April, and documents are filed by date received. Documents of contributions reflect changes in synod administration for the regions of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. The files from 1972-1973 and 1973-1974 include extensive documents and correspondence pertaining to Mission Ranch negotiations and financial decisions involved in the transfer.

The financial series contains files of financial reports, paid invoices, bank statements and check stubs, filed by date received. The financial reports include operating statements, operating budgets, and expenditures for each fiscal year 1966-1973, and the final statement for May 1973-February 1974. Paid invoices and bank statements range in date from April 1965 to June 1974. Virginia Joslin, York Jackson, Rose Ballerstedt, W.F. Lovett, and Daniel Junkin managed all included expenses and financial records for Mission Ranch prior to February 1974, and the remaining documents after the Board’s dissolution were processed through the Seminary. Paid invoices represent expenses from repairs and renovations on the property as well as Board functions. The only financial records available before 1965 are check stubs, ranging in date from June 1961 to May 1973.

Related Collections:
Austin Seminary records, Austin Seminary Archives, Stitt Library, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Marvin Eickenroht papers, Austin Seminary Archives, Stitt Library, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Provenance Note:
The Mission Ranch Records were found in storage at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Prescott Williams served as Seminary President at the time of dissolution, and David Stitt’s papers may have been collected with his other files. Treasurers’ records and financial files indicate transfers from each Treasurer after 1956 and to the Seminary in 1974. The latest date in the records is from 1974, so records were likely placed in storage shortly after Mission Ranch came solely under Seminary ownership and administration.

Processing Information:
Processed by Anna Robinson with assistance from Jessica Klein, student project, November 2013.

Restrictions:
Materials are available by appointment only. Contact the archivist for details.

Index Terms:
Personal Names:
Stitt, David Leander.
Williams, Prescott H., 1924-
Organizations:
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.--Board of Women’s Work.
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.--Board of World Missions.
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.--Woman’s Auxiliary.
Subject Headings:
Missionaries--Correspondence.
Missionaries--Leaves and furloughs.

Preferred Citation: Mission Ranch records, 1956-1974, Austin Seminary Archives, Stitt Library, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

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