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Deans, Marie; Papers

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M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives
Title:	Marie Deans Papers
ID:	apap377
Date [inclusive]:	1957-2015
Physical Description:	4.36 cubic ft.
Physical Location:	The materials are located onsite in the department.
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	This collection documents the death penalty abolitionist work of Marie McFadden Deans. A smaller amount of personal materials, such as Deans' poetry and writing, also is included.

Preferred Citation

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

Identification of specific item, series, box, folder, Marie Deans Papers, 1957-2015. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York (hereafter referred to as the Deans Papers).

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Biographical Note

Marie McFadden Deans (1940-2011) was a death penalty abolitionist and mitigation specialist who advocated for individuals on Death Row. Following the murder of her mother-in-law Penny Deans in 1972, Marie Deans began to voice her opposition to capital punishment. In 1976, Marie Deans formed Murder Victims' Families Against the Death Penalty (later called Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation), an organization for those whose loved ones had been killed by someone and oppose the death penalty. From 1978 to 1981, Deans served on the National Death Penalty Committee for the Charleston chapter of Amnesty International (of which Deans founded) to investigate Death Row and clemency procedures. After moving to Virginia from South Carolina in 1983, she established the Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons (VCJP), serving as Executive Director to this organization dedicated to recruiting and assisting lawyers for death penalty appeals, abolishing the death penalty, and promoting

clemency in Virginia and beyond. Additionally, Deans worked with other organizations such as the South Carolina Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons, and Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

Deans worked on legal cases – those of individuals already on Death Row and individuals on trial for capital crimes, hoping to mitigate their sentences and ensure post-conviction counsel. The cases of Earl Washington, Jr. (exonerated in 2000) and Joe Giarratano (death sentence commuted in 1991) are two of Deans' more high-profile success stories on Death Row. Deans was present for the executions of almost three dozen individuals and regularly visited inmates on Death Row in Virginia and South Carolina. Deans wrote articles, short stories, and books about her work hoping to raise public awareness of Death Row procedures and cases.

Although the Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons closed in 1993 due to a lack of funding, Deans continued to investigate cases, find inmates attorneys, petition for clemency, call for the abolishment of the death penalty, and advocate for prisoners until her death from lung cancer.

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Content Description

This collection includes writings, papers, newsclips, publications, business and personal correspondence, reports, subject files, court documents, legal case work, organizational documents, poetry, short stories, and photographs saved by, created by, and/or related to Marie Deans and her anti-death penalty work from 1957 to 2015. Not all folder dates are inclusive.

Materials from the Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons (VCJP), spanning from 1983 when it was founded by Deans up until its closure in 1993, are featured. This includes reports, projects, correspondence, flyers, press releases, letters, and memos to attorneys from Deans' time with VCJP. Materials from Deans' work with Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation (MVFR) can also be found in this collection. MVFR newsletters, board correspondence, conference information, fundraising, minutes, and articles about and by members of MVFR stretching into the early 2000s illustrate Deans' undying passion for anti-death penalty activism. Photographs of incarcerated individuals, correctional facilities, Death Row, activism, and Marie Deans are a highlight of the collection. Additionally, personal correspondence between Deans and individuals facing the death penalty or their family members provides unique insight into the lives of those on Death Row. An abundance of news clippings that Deans kept documenting the death penalty, Death Row, cases Deans worked on, VCJP, Mecklenburg Correctional Center, and executions from the 1980s to early 2000s are present.

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Arrangement of the Collection

The collection is arranged in alphabetical order. There are no series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Dulcie Beauregard in 2023.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Robert Deans, son of Marie Deans, donated all materials in this collection to the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives in 2018.

Access

Access to this collection is unrestricted except for one folder noted on the finding aid.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Deans, Marie McFadden, 1940-2011
- Death Penalty
- Capital punishment--United States.
- Capital punishment--Virginia
- Death row inmates.
- Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons
- Murder victims' families
- Criminal Justice and Prisons
- Clippings, newspaper
- Files by subject
- Photographs.
- Correspondence.
- Minutes (administrative records)

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