

Collection #
M 0509

**DAVID RUSSELL BONTRAGER
PAPERS, 1939–1976 (BULK 1955–1965)**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	5 manuscript boxes, 1 photograph folder
COLLECTION DATES:	1939-1976 inclusive; 1955-1965 bulk
PROVENANCE:	James P. Fadely, Indianapolis, IN, 16 September 1993
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	None
RELATED HOLDINGS:	None
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1988.0576
NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL 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 being nominated 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), photographs, and legal correspondence of the Bontrager law firm (1975-1976). Even though the Senator died in 1971, his son, William continued in the firm.

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BOX 1: Senate Matters

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Jun.-Aug. 1957	Box 1, Folder 7
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BOX 2: Senate Matters; Personal Correspondence

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Senate matters, Oct.-Dec. 1962	Box 2, Folder 6
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Photograph, John Burt 1960	Visual Collection: Photograph, Folder 1
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BOX 3: Personal Correspondence; Tax Records; Miscellaneous

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BOX 5: Declined Invitations; Correspondence; Miscellaneous

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Contributions, Apr.-May 1964	Box 5, Folder 9
Contributions, Jun.-Dec. 1964	Box 5, Folder 10
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