



The Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986

1984-1987

Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections
1 Cunningham Square
Providence, RI 02918-0001

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Collection Overview

Creator:	General Assembly of Rhode Island
Title:	Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986
Dates:	1984-1987
Quantity:	31 box(es) (20 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986 was convened to revise the State's Constitution. The collection is primarily composed of background and historical texts, committee proceedings, delegate correspondence, hearing transcripts, and files related to the ratification drive. The collection also includes broadcast video film of many of the sessions.
Identification:	rppc_riconcov1986
Language:	The records are in English.
Repository:	Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections 1 Cunningham Square Providence, RI 02918-0001

Historical Information

On November 4, 1986, the people of Rhode Island altered their most important State document, the written compact with each other and with their government, the State Constitution. This basic contract was the product of one year's work by one hundred elected delegates from a cross-section of the population, most with relatively little previous political involvement. This "people's convention," through a statewide series of lively public hearings, encouraged the interest of and commentary and participation by the general citizenry.

The 1986 Constitutional Convention was an unlimited Convention that began in January, 1986. The Convention met at the State House and at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence. Kevin A. McKenna was President of the Convention, Albert Rainville, Vice-President, and James R. Langevin was Secretary. One hundred delegates, representing each R.I. district, took part. Governor Bruce Sundlun (1991-present) caused a controversy when he announced his bid to run for the 1986 race against incumbent Edward DiPrite. After some debating, he was eventually allowed to remain as a delegate.

Of the three hundred and twenty-two resolutions considered by the delegates, twenty-four, condensed into fourteen ballot questions, were put before the voters. The records documenting the evolution of the Constitution reflect the public will on the eight successful questions and the six failed. In addition, the collection has allowed scholars to analyze the legal and social interpretations of the convention as well as observe the inner workings of this law-making body and the process as a reflection of its time.

Scope and Content Note

The Papers were divided into twenty record groups in a rough chronological order, beginning with background information through General Laws publication of the new Constitution approved by the voters. Background information, such as the Constitution as it read prior to the Convention, a Preparatory Commission Report and General Assembly enabling legislation, set the stage. Plenary Sessions Journals contain the official digest of the fourteen meetings of the entire assembly.

Because, as in most legislative bodies, the members assigned proposals to committees for in-depth discussion, the resolutions are arranged by committee in numerical order. The committee files also include meeting and public hearing records, research staff reports and information responses, legal staff opinions, committee reports and correspondence.

Through twelve public hearings, delegates invited comment from individuals and groups on virtually all subjects before the Convention. In turn, a Public Information Office kept both the delegates and the general population abreast of upcoming events and the status of individual proposals. Internal workings of the Convention are reflected in the general delegate correspondence, individual delegate requests, personnel files and budget records.

The ratification drive record group includes the product of the Convention's deliberations, from drafts of the proposed new Constitution to the ballot put before the voters. The public relations efforts, including edited video tapes of plenary sessions, undertaken to explain to, and recommend passage by, the citizens of the State are also included. The last section contains the voting results and published versions of the Rhode Island Constitution of 1986.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into twenty series.

Series List

- Background of the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention
- Plenary Sessions
- Committee on Citizens Rights
- Committee on Delegate Services
- Committee on Ethics
- Committee on Executive Branch and Independent Agencies
- Committee on General Assembly and Elections
- Committee on Judicial Branch
- Committee on Local Government
- Committee on Public Information
- Committee on Rules
- Committee on Style and Drafting
- Public Hearings
- Public Information Office
- Delegates General Files
- Delegates Service Requests
- Personnel
- Budget
- Ratification Drive
- Rhode Island Constitution of 1986

Index Terms

Researchers wishing to find materials related to this collection should search the HELIN catalog with these index terms -- View the catalog record for this collection.

Subjects

- Constitutional amendments
- Constitutional conventions -- Rhode Island

Constitutions -- Rhode Island

Rhode Island

Rhode Island. Constitutional Convention (1986)

Rhode Island. General Assembly

Rhode Island -- Politics and government -- 1951-

Technical Requirements

Researchers are advised that the Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections department does not maintain the appropriate broadcast video equipment to play the videotaped plenary sessions contained in this collection.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Except for Keven A. McKenna's personal files, Providence College has held this copy of the Convention files since its delivery from the State.

Preferred Citation

The Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986, Providence College, Phillips Memorial Library, Special and Archival Collections

Acquisitions Information

The Rhode Island General Assembly, through Chapter 287 of the 1986 Public Laws, mandated that the records of the Convention be deposited in the Rhode Island State Archives and that copies be maintained in the Rhode Island Supreme Court Library and the Providence College Special and Archival Collections.

Already possessing substantial documentation of the Limited Conventions of 1958 and 1973, as well as the Convention of 1964-69, Providence College was pleased to accept this collection to its Special Collections. Convention President Keven A. McKenna donated his personal files, thereby providing an added dimension to the official record. Mr. McKenna and Convention Assistant Research Director Paul Redkovich II, who saved and organized pertinent documents, cooperated fully in the effort to make these materials available for research.

Processing Information

This collection was originally processed in 1989. In 2013-2014 the collection was re-processed and encoded.

Restrictions

Open for research.

Photocopying and scanning of materials is a fee based service available in the repository and is permitted at the discretion of the Librarian of Special and Archival Collections when in compliance to the College's policy on copyright and publication.

Researchers are advised that express written permission to reproduce, quote, or otherwise publish any portion or extract from this collection must be obtained from the Providence College Phillips Memorial Library. Although Providence College has physical ownership of the collection and the materials contained therein, it does not claim literary rights. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the owners of the literary rights and to obtain any necessary permissions from them.

Certain restrictions may be imposed to protect the confidentiality of living individuals. For further information contact Special and Archival Collections, Phillips Memorial Library, Providence College.

Related Material

Additional materials relating to the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986 may be found in the Rhode Island State Archives.

No materials were separated from this collection.

Inventory

Series: Background of the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention

Dates: 1984-1986

Extent: (8 folders)

Material types:

- constitutions
- legislation (governmental function)
- legislative records
- miscellaneous
- reports
- state government records
- subject catalogue

Scope and Content Note

The Background of the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of 1986 contains historical files from previous conventions. In addition, other relevant materials such as the Enabling Legislation that set in motion the process of changing the Constitution can be found in this series.

Arrangement

This series is arranged by historical files first and miscellaneous files second. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Plenary Sessions

Dates: 1986

Extent: (77 folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- legislative records
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- publications
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Plenary Sessions contains the entirety of the Journal of the Constitutional Convention, a publication released by the Convention regularly to keep the public notified of the Convention proceedings. This series also contains numerous resolutions dealing with administrative matters, issues not voted on by committee, and commendations at the end of the convention.

Arrangement

The series is arranged by Journal files first, followed by resolutions and reports. The Journal is arranged chronologically, while the resolutions and reports are by number. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Citizen's Rights

Dates: 1986

Extent: 6 box(es)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains resolutions put to the committee, research and legal reports as per committee requests, minutes, proceedings of committee hearings, both private and public, and committee correspondence. Much of the material surrounds the Right to Life/Abortion debate.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Delegate Services

Dates: 1986

Extent: (2 folders)

Material types:

- correspondence
- membership lists
- memorandums

Scope and Content Note

The Delegate Services Committee served the purpose of "keeping the delegates happy." This limited series lists the members of the committee, as well as several memorandums and correspondence regarding the planning of several functions for the delegates' benefit.

Arrangement

This series is arranged by membership lists first, followed by correspondence, which is arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Ethics

Dates: 1986

Extent: (87 folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Ethics has extensive material regarding the duties, powers, and limits of elected officials. It features several research staff reports conducted in this topic, as well as numerous resolutions regarding impeachment and recall of public figures. A sizable portion of these resolutions have several versions, edits, and substitutions, showing the Convention's effort and the amount of time spent debating these topics. In addition, the scope of the series demonstrates the strong public desire to see a more accountable government.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Executive Branch and Independent Agencies

Dates: 1986

Extent: (86 folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Executive Branch and Independent Agencies contains a wide variety of materials on numerous issues, including election cycles, property rights, nature preservation, affirmative action, and nuclear energy.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on General Assembly and Elections

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on General Assembly and Elections spent a great deal of time discussing what kind of representative body would best serve Rhode Island. Numerous bills calling for reapportionment, duration of terms, and even proposals for a unicameral house were discussed. In addition, the Committee files contain proposals regarding legislative pay and the power of the representative body to borrow money.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Judicial Branch

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Judicial Branch had several issues brought to it, but the majority of resolution fell into two categories. The first concerned the selection, powers, and limits of judges. The second concerned the rights of criminals and former felons. Other topics debated include: victims of crimes, the death penalty, and search and seizures.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for a detailed listing of the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Local Government

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Local Government addressed a wide variety of topics from property rights to environmentalism. The fundamental debate behind the committee, however, was the question of Home Rule. Essentially, the Committee sought to define exactly how much power was delegated to the cities and counties of the state.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Public Information

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Local Government addressed a wide variety of topics from property rights to environmentalism. The fundamental debate behind the committee, however, was the question of Home Rule. Essentially, the Committee sought to define exactly how much power was delegated to the cities and counties of the state.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Rules

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Committee on Rules was formed to help facilitate the actions of the rest of the Convention, and establish a set of procedures that had to be observed. The first set of rules, proposed in January 1986, was later amended in March. The rest of the series contains the various committee meetings discussing the rules at the Convention.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Committee on Style and Drafting

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The majority of the resolutions within the Committee on Style and Drafting are proposed and passed re-writes of resolutions found elsewhere. The Committee would be assigned resolutions offered by the representatives and tasked with re-writing them with language better fitting the Constitution of the State, to help avoid legal misinterpretation.

Arrangement

The resolutions and reports in the files are arranged by the number assigned to them by the Convention. The committee meetings, hearings, and correspondence are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Public Hearings

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains detailed minutes and transcriptions of many of the public hearings that took place across Rhode Island during the convention. Some of the files also contain either lists of guest speakers or correspondence to/from the guest speakers.

Arrangement

The public hearings are arranged chronologically. A research staff report and correspondence files follow. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Public Information Office

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

Working closely with the Committee on Public Information, the Public Information Office served as the liaison between the general public and the Convention. While the Committee was comprised of elected delegates, the Public Information Office had its own staff, hired by the Convention. The files contain monthly new releases and calendars, as well as clippings and correspondence related to the Convention.

Arrangement

The news releases and calendars are listed chronologically. The correspondence and clippings that follow are also chronological. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Delegates, General Files

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The majority of this series surrounds the personal files and correspondence of Convention President, Keven A. McKenna. A large group of photographs of the Convention are also here, as well as internal correspondence between delegates regarding procedures.

Arrangement

McKenna's files are listed chronologically. The photographs and correspondence follow. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Delegates' Service Requests

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains requests made from each delegate to the research department of the Convention. These requests often asked for precedence on a legal issue, or inquiries on how other states conducted a certain system.

Arrangement

The service requests are listed alphabetically by delegate's last name. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Personnel

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains all of the files pertaining to the Convention staff who were not elected delegates. This includes organization and structure, job descriptions and applications, and a series of staff meetings.

Arrangement

The series consists of files pertaining to the staff of the Convention. Following this are the staff meeting minutes, which are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Budget

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains all the files relating to the Convention budget, including appropriations, expenditures, and salaries. Copies of the laws passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly that grant authority and finances to begin and continue the convention are contained here. In addition, the series contains requests to the General Assembly for more funds, as the Convention went over budget.

Arrangement

The series is organized chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Ratification Drive

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The Ratification Drive is a series which contains the files regarding the effort made by the Convention to the people of Rhode Island to vote on the fourteen proposed changes on the ballot. It contains numerous re-writes of the ballot questions, as well as the debate that went into choosing how to structure the questions. The series concludes with a copy of the final ballot. This series also contains the broadcast video tapes of the Convention.

Arrangement

The series consists of a long series of revisions to the proposed ballot, arranged chronologically. It concludes with a copy of the ballot. The video tapes are arranged chronologically. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.

Series: Rhode Island Constitutional of 1986

Dates: 1986

Extent: (folders)

Material types:

- agendas (administrative records)
- correspondence
- hearings (event)
- legislative records
- membership lists
- memorandums
- minutes
- proceedings
- reports
- resolutions (administrative records)

Scope and Content Note

The series is divided into two sections. The first contain the results of the November 4, 1986 ballot, along with associated files and correspondence. The second contain several copies of the final Rhode Island Constitution of 1986.

Arrangement

The series is arranged chronologically, with the files and correspondence surrounding the November 4, 1986 election first followed by the publications of the final Constitution. Contact Special and Archival Collections for additional information on the content of this Series.