

**Virgil C. Wikoff  
Papers, 1960 – 1982**

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**Biographical Note**

Virgil Wikoff was a City of Champaign Council Member from 1963-1967, and then served as Mayor from 1967-1975. He also served as Representative of the 52<sup>nd</sup> District in the Illinois State General Assembly from 1977-1982. Wikoff was born February 6, 1927 in Decatur, Illinois and spent most of his childhood on a farm outside of Maroa. Upon graduation from Maroa Township High School, he enlisted in the United State Navy and spent the final two years of the Second World War (1944-1945) in the Pacific Theater. Discharged from the Navy in 1946 he enrolled in the University of Illinois the following year and graduated with a B.S. in Architectural Engineering. After being recalled into the Naval Reserves during the Korean War, Wikoff returned in October 1952 and founded Lyman-Wikoff, Inc. General Contractors, a construction company he ran until his retirement.

Always civic minded and interested in public office, Wikoff ran for public office for the first time for Champaign City Council in 1963. Utilizing his contacts from the many civic minded organizations to which he belonged, Wikoff gained the third highest vote of all candidates and won a seat on the council. Unhappy with the leadership of long-time Mayor Emmerson Dexter, Wikoff tossed his hat in the ring for the 1967 Champaign Mayoral election. Again calling upon his impressive array of business community contacts and civic organization members, Wikoff won in decisive fashion, and then was easily re-elected in 1971.

Wikoff faced several trials during an age of intense upheaval in Champaign. During his administration, the city started its first attempts at Urban Renewal, which generated a great deal of controversy, especially in minority and poorer neighborhoods on the city's north and east side. Shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Wikoff presided over the passing of the Champaign Fair Housing Ordinance, one of the broadest and most encompassing in the entire country. The later years of Wikoff's administration was dominated by unrest. As the Vietnam War intensified, a growing anti-war movement sparked several protests on and around campus, culminating in a series of protests in March of 1970 that pushed Wikoff to authorize the deployment of Illinois Army National Guard troops to the campus town area for the first time in the history of the city.

Discouraged by this strife and by the leftward political tilt of the Champaign City Council during his second term as Mayor (Wikoff was a staunch conservative), he declined to run for another term and instead attempted to broaden his sights by running for the Illinois State General Assembly as Representative from the 52<sup>nd</sup> District. It was here that Wikoff suffered his first political defeat, however, coming in fourth in a race for three seats in the 1975 state elections.

Undeterred, he ran again in 1977 successfully, becoming the third of three representatives of the district. A reliable ally of Governor James R. Thompson, a fellow Republican, Wikoff served in the House as Chairman of the Cities and Villages Committee and the House Subcommittee on Education. In 1980 the size of the House was reduced from 177 to 118, forcing Wikoff to run directly against the popular Helen Satterthwaite for a seat in the newly created 103<sup>rd</sup> district in 1982 for a third term, and he was soundly defeated.

Wikoff continued to his construction firm for several years and served on many city, county, and state boards in an official and honorary capacity.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Virgil Wikoff materials span the entirety of Wikoff's political career, from his election to the Champaign City Council to his last term as State Representative. The vast majority of the material documents Wikoff's two terms as mayor of Champaign (1967-1975). Subjects of note include the Fair Housing Ordinance of 1968, race relations within the city (including the dealing with the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), and the student protests and unrest at the University of Illinois in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Financial, statistical, and demographic information about the City of Champaign during his tenure is well-represented. Wikoff's political campaign organization and strategies he employed are included. Finally, his attendance at local events and participation in civic organizations, as well as his day-to-day activities make up a good percentage of the materials.

### **Arrangement**

#### **Series**

**Series 1 – Correspondence**

**Series 2 – Unpublished Reports, Speeches, Statements**

**Series 3 – Event Invitations, Publications**

**Series 4 – Certificates**

**Series 5 – Appointment Books**

**Series 6 – Political Campaign Materials**

**Series 7 – Ephemera/Memorabilia**

### **Box Inventory/Folder List**

#### **Box 1**

Series 1 – Correspondence

Folder 1: Correspondence – Jaycees, 1960-1982

Folder 2: Correspondence – Vice-President Richard Nixon, 1961

Folder 3: Correspondence – Letters to the Editor, 1962-1982

Folder 4: Correspondence – Chanute Air Force Base, 1967-1968

Folder 5: Correspondence – City of Champaign, 1967-1972

Folder 6: Correspondence – Constituents, 1967-1975  
Folder 7: Correspondence – Constituents – Congratulations, 1963-1970  
Folder 8: Correspondence – Constituents – Campaign Contributions, 1967-1971  
Folder 9: Correspondence – Constituents – Fair Housing Ordinance, 1967-1968  
Folder 10: Correspondence – Constituents – Martin Luther King, Jr., 1968  
Folder 11: Correspondence – Illinois Municipal League, 1967-1982  
Folder 12: Correspondence – Jay Wertheimer Endorsement Incident, 1971  
Folder 13: Correspondence – State and Local Officials, 1971  
Folder 14: Correspondence – General Assembly, 1976, 1981

Series 2 – Unpublished Reports, Speeches, Statements

Folder 15: Reports – City of Champaign Election Results by Precinct, 1963-1971  
Folder 16: Reports – League of Women Voters Candidates Surveys, 1963-1971  
Folder 17: Reports – City of Champaign Construction Costs, 1967-1970  
Folder 18: Reports – City of Champaign Police Department, 1967-1975  
Folder 19: Reports – Report on the City of Champaign, 1970

Series 3 – Event Invitations/Publications

Folder 20: Invitations and Programs – Local Events, 1962-1973 [one of three]  
Folder 21: Invitations and Programs – Local Events, 1973-1976 [two of three]  
Folder 22: Invitations and Programs – Local Events, 1977-1980 [three of three]  
Folder 23: Invitations and Programs – Wikoff Family Events, 1962-1966  
Folder 24: Invitations and Programs – City of Champaign Buildings and Events, 1966-1978  
Folder 25: Invitations and Programs – University of Illinois Events, 1969-1982  
Folder 26: Invitations and Programs – Political Events, 1970-1977  
Folder 27: Invitations and Programs – National League of Cities, 1972-1973  
Folder 28: Invitations and Programs – State Government and Inaugurations, 1972-1978  
Folder 29: Invitations and Programs – Lyman-Wikoff Built Facilities, 1974-1978  
Folder 30: Invitations and Programs – Representative Virgil Wikoff Pig Roast, 1981  
Folder 31: Invitations and Programs – Illinois State General Assembly and Gubernatorial Inaugurations

**Box 2**

Series 3 – Event Invitations/Publications

Folder 1: Publications – Newsletters – Local and State Organizations, 1966-1982  
Folder 2: Publications – Newsletters, 1977-1982  
Folder 3: Publications – Newsletters – Regional and National Organizations  
Folder 4: Resolutions and Proclamations, 1971

#### Series 4 – Certificates

- Certificates – State of Illinois – Board Memberships, 1982 [Oversize – Box 4]
- Folder 5: Certificates – Honorary Certificates, 1967-1982
- Folder 6: Certificates – Nomination and Election Notices, Illinois General Assembly, 1976, 1982
- Folder 7: Certificates – Notice of Election, City of Champaign Mayor, 1971

#### Series 5 – Appointment Books

- Folder 8: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1960
- Folder 9: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1967
- Folder 10: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1968
- Folder 11: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1969
- Folder 12: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1970
- Folder 13: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1971
- Folder 14: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1972
- Folder 15: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1973
- Folder 16: Appointment Books – Virgil Wikoff, 1974

#### Series 6 – Political Campaign Materials

- Folder 17: Political Campaign Materials – Specimen Ballots, 1963, 1967
- Folder 18: Political Campaign Materials – Statement by Mayor Emmerson Dexter Regarding His Political Status, 1967
- Folder 19: Political Campaign Materials – City of Champaign Candidate Filing Documents, 1970-1971
- Folder 20: Political Campaign Materials – Press Releases, 1967-1982
- Folder 21: Political Campaign Materials – Pamphlets – Virgil Wikoff Campaigns for City of Champaign Offices, 1963-1971
- Folder 22: Political Campaign Materials – Pamphlets – Virgil Wikoff State Representatives, Illinois General Assembly, 1975-1982
- Folder 23: Political Campaign Materials – Pamphlets – Federal, State, and Local Officials, ca. 1966-1970
- Folder 24: Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Contribution Solicitation Letters, 1971, 1978
- Folder 25: Political Campaign Materials – Letters in Support of Wikoff, 1967, 1971
- Folder 26: Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Finance Reports, 1963-1970
- Folder 27: Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Strategy Documents, ca. 1962-1963
- Folder 28: Political Campaign Materials – United Slate Platform and Statements, 1971
- Folder 29: Political Campaign Materials – Speeches and Press Releases – Drafts – Virgil Wikoff
- Folder 30: Political Campaign Materials – Student Protest Documents, 1970

Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Posters – Virgil Wikoff for City Council, 1963 [Oversize – Box 4]

Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Posters – Virgil Wikoff for Mayor, 1967 [Oversize – Box 4]

### **Box 3**

#### Series 7 – Ephemera/Memorabilia

Folder 1: Buttons – Champaign County Women for Ogilvie

Folder 1: Buttons – 1975 National Indoor Speed Skating Championship

Folder 1: Buttons – Nixon-Agnew Campaign

Folder 1: Buttons – Virgil Wikoff Campaign

Folder 2: Calendar – Gift from Japanese Friends, 1977

Folder 3: Ceremonial Ribbons, 1970-1973

Folder 4: Nametags – Illinois Municipal League 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, 1972

Folder 5: Nametags – National League of Cities – Congress of Cities

Folder 6: Bracelets – POW/MIA memorials – Donald Casey and Joseph Rose III, ca. 1970

Folder 7: Business Cards – Virgil Wikoff – City of Champaign Mayor and State Representative

Folder 8: Matchbooks – Virgil Wikoff for Mayor [Champaign, Ill.] and State Representative

Folder 9: Golf Ball Markers – Virgil Wikoff for State Representative

Folder 10: Key to the City – Champaign, Ill. [three copies]

Folder 11: Tie Tack with City Seal

### **Box 4**

#### Series 4 – Certificates

Folder 1: Certificates – State of Illinois – Board Memberships, 1982

#### Series 6 – Political Campaign Materials

Folder 2: Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Posters – Virgil Wikoff for City Council, 1963 [Oversize]

Folder 3: Political Campaign Materials – Campaign Posters – Virgil Wikoff for Mayor, 1967 [Oversize]