

# A Guide to the Common Ground Records, 1983-2003 SC 0126

Common Ground Records

1983-2003



## Title Statement

A Guide to the Common Ground Records, 1983-2003 SC 0126

**Author:** Tiffany Cole and Julia Merkel, Dillon Thomas

## Publication Statement

**Publisher:** James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

880 Madison Drive  
MSC 1704  
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807  
Telephone: (540) 568-3612  
library-special@jmu.edu  
URL: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/>



2010, December 2016, September 2018

## Profile Description

**Creation:** This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2023-08-07 13:34:19 -0400.

**Language Usage:** Description is written in: English, Latin script.

**Descriptive Rules:** Describing Archives: A Content Standard

## Descriptive Summary

### Unit ID

SC 0126

### Unit Date

1983-2003

### Language

English .

### Abstract

The Common Ground Records, 1983-2003, consists of the newsletters, administrative files, and other material related to or published by the now-defunct Harrisonburg peace and justice organization Common Ground and its predecessors, The Network for Peace and Justice and Common Weal.

**source**

Bersson, Robert

**source**

Czyszczon, Greg

**source**

Diaz, Dale

**Extent**

0.96 cubic feet 3 boxes

**Repository**

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions**

Collection is open for research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

**Use Restrictions**

Collection is open for research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

**Acquisition Information**

The collection was donated to Special Collections in May 2010 by Greg Czyszczon with additions made in July 2010 by Bob Bersson, September 2010, December 2016 by Dale Diaz, and September 2018 by Bob Bersson.

**Processing Information**

A portion of Network for Peace and Justice newsletters were migrated to photocopy format upon receipt due to environmental damage and inherent vice i.e. vinyl line tape, acidic adhesives, and chemical deterioration of master photographic copies. This collection was reprocessed in December 2016 and is comprised of materials from the Common Ground Collection, **previously cataloged as SC 3019**, and the Network for Peace and Justice Collection, **previously cataloged as SC 3020**.

**Preferred Citation**

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], Common Ground Records, 1983-2003, SC 0126, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

## Administrative History

With a modest beginning in the early 1980s of approximately twelve members whose interest ranged from nonviolence and social justice to ecological awareness, Common Ground stemmed from Harrisonburg's Choose Life Peace Center which was an ecumenical group concerned with nuclear proliferation and the U.S. intervention in Central America. Common Ground: Network for Peace, Justice, and the Environment was officially founded in June 1987 by a group of representatives from local peace, justice, and environmental organizations. As a not-for-profit networking organization to channel the efforts of local groups, associations, and churches through education, research and civic action, Common Ground's primary goals were education, study and research on peace, justice and environmental quality; networking; building strong personal bonds of mutual support; active participation for change; and celebrating spiritual and ethical commitments. By 1996, the network had grown to fifty-three affiliate organizations. Xaverian Brother, Pete Mahoney was the network's long term director serving from 1987-1997. Brother Pete was followed by Ms. Dale Diaz in 1997 and Greg Czyszczon in 2003.

Common Ground's newsletter was known by three different names while in publication - Network for Peace and Justice (December 1983 - May 1987), Common Weal (August 1987, November 1987), and Common Ground (March 1988 - December 1996). All three titles are present within this collection. Early newsletters were mimeographed or photocopied. By 1992 the newsletters were published on newsprint. In its heyday in the late 1990s, circulation reached 2,000 copies. A quarter of the subscriptions were paid and the rest of the newsletters were freely distributed at local restaurants, campuses, and churches.

The Harrisonburg area Network for Peace and Justice is the predecessor of the Common Ground. Originally conceived of as a vehicle for "communication, cooperation and consciousness-raising" among twelve socially progressive local groups or chapters of national groups, the participating organizations listed in the inaugural October 1983 newsletter are: Choose Life; Christians for Peace; Church Women United,

Harrisonburg/Rockingham County; Citizens Party, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County; Community Mediation Center; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; National Organization of Women, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County and James Madison University chapters; Peacemakers, Trinity Presbyterian Church; Peace Ministry Committee, Church of the Brethren; and Women's Caucus, Church of the Brethren. Robert Bersson, JMU professor emeritus of art, was the newsletter's first editor. Contributions of articles came from representatives of member organizations.

For a short time, as the newsletter began to gain popularity and local support, the newsletter changed its title to Common Weal from August 1987 to November 1987. After this change, the title was again altered to become its final iteration as Common Ground: The Network for Peace, Justice, and the Environment in March 1988, retaining the original newsletter's title as its subtitle.

Common Ground promoted its core values by recognizing community members and projects at an annual awards banquet. Recipients over the years have been: Blacks Run Restoration; Allies (an organization for advocacy on behalf of the local gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual community); Ron Copeland for organizing the Little Grill Soup Kitchen; Joe Giarriatano, an inmate who formed the Peace Center at Augusta Correctional Center in Craigsville; the Community Mediation Center; and John Eckman for the Valley Conservation Center among many others.

The spirit of Common Ground embodied both "nonpartisan radicalism" and liberation theology with its preferential option for the poor and the marginalized members of society. Common Ground's activities and publications celebrated and gave voice to affiliate members and interests outside Harrisonburg's mainstream media outlets. The result of its alternative voice was political in nature: early Common Ground members credit their activism to General Dynamics' withdrawal of a proposal to build a munitions plant in the Shenandoah Valley; Common Ground worked with the Piedmont Environmental Council to successfully oppose Walt Disney Inc.'s proposed "Historic America Theme Park" in Haymarket, Virginia; and former Harrisonburg Mayor Carolyn Frank credits Common Ground members with changing "politics as usual" in this community by rallying with the "Taxpayers Against Golf Spending" campaign which placed new faces on Harrisonburg's City Council.

## Scope and Content

The Common Ground Records, 1983-2003, is comprised of three boxes (.96 cubic feet) consisting primarily of material related to or published by the now-defunct Harrisonburg peace and justice organization Common Ground and its predecessors, The Network for Peace and Justice and Common Weal. The collection is arranged into four series: Newsletters, Administrative Files, Ephemera, and Images.

## Keywords

Peace movements -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg  
Human rights -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg  
Social justice -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg  
Church and social problems -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg  
Environmentalism -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg  
Newsletters  
Photographs  
Slides (photographs)  
Administrative records  
Printed Ephemera  
Newspaper clippings  
Brochures  
Fliers (printed matter)  
Bersson, Robert  
Czyszczon, Greg  
Diaz, Dale

## Bibliography

Gingerich, R.C. and B.C. Busching. "New Approaches to Power in Grassroots Coalition Building: A Case Study of Common Ground" *Conscious Acts and the Politics of Social Change* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000. Merkel, Julia. "Interview notes from Common Ground Reunion Gathering, Harrisonburg's Hillandale Park, September 2010."

# Arrangement

The collection is arranged in four series:

- Newsletters, 1983-2003
- Administrative Files, 1986-1997
- Ephemera, 1990-1998
- Images, 1990

## Description of Subordinate Components

### Newsletters

**Unit ID** 1

**Unit Date** 1983-2003

#### Scope and Content

Series 1: Newsletters, 1983-2003, consists of the organization's monthly publications on topics relevant to peace, justice, and the environment including recycling, government intervention in Central America, homeless in Harrisonburg, and immigration, as well as a calendar with upcoming events and announcements. There are minimal gaps in the dates depending on the regularity of published newsletters or missing newsletters.

#### Network for Peace and Justice

**Unit Date** 1983-1984

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 1 (folder)

#### Network for Peace and Justice

**Unit Date** 1985-1987

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 2 (folder)

#### Common Weal

**Unit Date** 1987

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 3 (folder)

#### Common Ground

**Unit Date** 1988

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 4 (folder)

#### Common Ground

**Unit Date** 1989

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 5 (folder)

#### Common Ground

**Unit Date** 1990

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 6 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1991

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 7 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** January-August 1992

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 8 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** September-December 1992

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 1 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1993

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 2 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1994

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 3 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1995

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 4 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1996

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 5 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1997

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 6 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1998

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 7 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 1999

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 8 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 2000

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 9 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 2001

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 10 (folder)

## **Common Ground**

**Unit Date** 2002-2003

**Mixed Materials [1000886576]** 3 (box)

**Container** 11 (folder)

## **Administrative Files**

**Unit ID** 2

**Unit Date** 1986-1997

### **Scope and Content**

Series 2: Administrative Files, 1986-1997, consists of documents originating from the management of Common Ground and its predecessors. The documents include legal files, mainly Articles of Incorporation and IRS tax forms. The series also consists of correspondence to Common Ground, resource material for the newsletter on such topics as: recycling, nuclear disarmament, tax resistance, draft counseling, conscientious objection, the Green Party, Harrisonburg International Festival, sustainability, transportation, Ted & Lee performing group, community organizing, death penalty, immigration, Harrisonburg Police Department, Civil Rights, Harrisonburg Free Clinic, equal rights, school reform, Disney Historic America theme park, and social justice. Mailing lists, meeting agendas, and minutes of the board are also included here.

## **Legal Documents**

**Unit Date** 1987-1989

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 9 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1986-1987

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 10 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1988

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 11 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1989-1990

**Mixed Materials [1000886574]** 1 (box)

**Container** 12 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1991

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 1 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1992

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 2 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1993

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 3 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1994

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 4 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1995

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 5 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1996

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 6 (folder)

## **Administration**

**Unit Date** 1997

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 7 (folder)

# **Ephemera**

**Unit ID** 3

**Unit Date** 1990-1998

### **Scope and Content**

Series 3: Ephemera, 1990-1998, is primarily comprised of publicity material and newsclippings. The publicity material contains fliers, brochures, and programs from the Common Ground speaker series, fundraising events, and community events in the spirit of Common Ground. The newsclippings include newspaper articles and letters to the editor primarily from the Daily News-Record and written by or about Common Ground members or affiliate organizations.

## **Publicity**

**Unit Date** 1990-1998, undated

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 8 (folder)

## **Newsclippings**

**Unit Date** 1990-1998

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 9 (folder)

# **Images**

**Unit ID** 4

**Unit Date** 1990

### **Scope and Content**

Series 4: Images, 1990, is comprised of color photographs and slides from a banquet and Earth Day circa 1990. This series also includes images from a board meeting and annual awards banquet circa 2000.

## **Slides and Photographs**

**Unit Date** 1990, undated

**Mixed Materials [1000886575]** 2 (box)

**Container** 10 (folder)