

Montclair Intelligence Division

Montclair Intelligence Division Records

1940-1942

Title Statement

Montclair Intelligence Division Guide to the Montclair Intelligence Division Records Mss. Acc. 2007.116

Author: SCRC Staff.

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Mss. Acc. 2007.116

Unit ID

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Unit Date

1940-1942

Unit Date

1940-1942

Language

English

Creator

Montclair Intelligence Division

Creator

Randle, Thomas

Extent

0.20 Linear Feet

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

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Historical Note:

Located west of New York City, Montclair, New Jersey had a population of approximately 40,000 in the late 1930s. At the time, a group of the citizens of the New York suburb, troubled over potential fifth column activity in their community, formed an intelligence gathering organization to expose perceived subversive activities. The organization eventually became part of the official civil defense apparatus of the town and was referred to as the Intelligence Division of the Montclair Security Council.

Colonel Dallas Townsend, a New York attorney and Montclair resident, served as the town's Commissioner of Public Safety and the members of the Intelligence Division reported to him. Official recognition was granted to the group by Townsend in the Fall of 1941, giving it work space in the Montclair Municipal Building, where it held regular monthly meetings.

For purposes of their activities, the Intelligence Division partitioned Montclair into fifteen sections, each headed by a "key man." Ten to fifteen "thoroughly trustworthy", "good substantial Americans" of unquestioned patriotism were assigned to, or recruited by, each of the key men. They were from "different levels of society and various social groups." In this pyramidal structure, key men did not know the identity of other key men and the lower level informants only knew their own key man. Members of the Intelligence Division were to report to the next most superior authority on activities they "construed as subversive or un-American in any way." Correspondence from operatives was addressed to their key man in care of the office at municipal building. Townsend, the top of the intelligence gathering pyramid, would then turn over information to the FBI if he thought it represented information sympathetic to the Nazi cause.

As of July, 1941, according to the Montclair Times, the intelligence division had been operating for over a year. The newspaper claimed it was remarkably successful in uncovering potential subversive activities and fascist sentiment. Although the FBI never reported back to the intelligence division as to the outcome of information passed to it, the newspaper credited the intelligence division with 43 reports to the FBI resulting "in several arrest and convictions."

Scope and Contents

The letters in the collection consist of correspondence between Thomas Randle, the head of the Intelligence Division of the Montclair Security Council, and various members of the organization dated from September 9, 1940 to August 9, 1942.

The letters in the collection of the Intelligence Division of the Montclair Security Council are dated September 9, 1940 to August 9, 1942. They contain information pertaining to the organization of the division, prospective recruits and reports on potential subversive activity.

The tone of the letters change somewhat with America's entrance into World War II. In a letter, dated December 8, 1941, Randle asks his recruits to take stronger steps to stop subversive activities, indicating Montclair to be in a part of the country "riddled with foreign agents." He asks them to report any un-American activity to the division and to do so without arousing suspicion.

Keywords

Correspondence
Subversive activities--United States--History--20th century
World War, 1939-1945--Collaborationists

Arrangement of Materials:

The collection is arranged chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Key men correspondence

Unit ID id209125

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126076

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 1 (folder)

Scope and Contents

One-page article titled "Private citizens chase would-be Fifth-column Nazis"

Key men correspondence A-1 to A-45

Unit ID id209126

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126077

Unit Date 1941-1942

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 2 (folder)

Key men correspondence A-1 to A-45

Unit ID id209127

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126078

Unit Date 1940-1942

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 3 (folder)

Key men correspondence A-46 to A-123

Unit ID id209128

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126079

Unit Date 1942

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 4 (folder)

Key men correspondence A-46 to A-123

Unit ID id209129

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/126080

Unit Date 1942

Mixed Materials 1 (Box)

Container 5 (folder)