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**THE PAPERS OF PETER JAMES MCGUINNESS**

Accession #90-004



Peter J. McGuinness with a constituent.

- Dates** Inclusive dates: 1919-1948
- Extent** 12 boxes including oversized and wrapped boxes
- Creator** Peter James McGuinness (1888-1948)
- Access / Use** Collection is open to researchers. Copyright retained by Brooklyn College.  
Files can be accessed at the Brooklyn College Library Archives & Special Collection, 2900 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, New York, Room 130
- Languages** English
- Finding aid** Guide is presently available in-house and online.
- Acquisition/Appraisal** Items were acquired from the Jamie Kelly Local History Institute at St. Francis College in 1989.
- Description Control** Finding aid adheres to one prescribed in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. Collection originally processed by Kevin Gomez in 1993.
- Preferred Citation** Item, folder title, box number, The Papers of Peter J. McGuinness,  
Brooklyn College Archives & Special Collections, Brooklyn College Library
- Subject Heading** McGuinness, Peter J. (Peter James). 1888-1948.

## Biographical Note

**Peter J. McGuinness (1888-1948)**, born in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn, New York, was the third of fourteen children. He attended P.S. 31 and Philip's Business School in Manhattan. Upon finishing grammar school, Peter worked as an office boy for the R. H. Hoe and Company, then as a runner at Thomas Plunkett's Celebrated Cigars, a bouncer on a steamboat, a middleweight fighter, and teamster for the S. Brinckerhoff Hay and Feed Company.

In 1907, Peter McGuinness married Margaret Lyons and began working on the docks at the John C. Orr Lumber Company. He became an official in the Lumber Handler's Local 955 of the International Longshoreman's Association. In 1917, McGuinness became a government lumber inspector. Around the same time, he and several other leaders in the community established the "Native Borns," a community group that opposed the foreign customs of Polish and Russian immigrants moving into Greenpoint.

A Democrat, McGuinness was instrumental in getting his friend, Republican John MacCrate, elected to Congress. McGuinness himself was elected to the Board of Aldermen representing the 15<sup>th</sup> A.D. (Greenpoint). In 1922, he proposed an ordinance prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to women, sparking a citywide controversy. During his term in office, McGuinness continued his battle to improve Greenpoint. He put much effort into having a new subway line built in the district; succeeded in persuading the city to construct a new bridge over Newtown Creek and one connecting Brooklyn and Queens (Meeker Avenue Bridge); three playgrounds were constructed and the McCarren Park pool was opened. McGuinness fought (unsuccessfully) to save the ferry to Greenpoint. In 1924, he defeated James McQuade and the county machine led by John McCooey as district leader.

In March 1927, McGuinness' Greenpoint People's Club was raided and, to the delight of Police Commissioner McLaughlin, McGuinness was arrested for gambling. Although the charges were dropped, McGuinness claimed McLaughlin with trying to frame him. McGuinness was vindicated after testifying before the Seabury Commission.

In 1931, McGuinness finally earned County Leader McCooey's support. McGuinness was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Public Works for the Borough of Brooklyn and, two years later, was promoted to Commissioner for a brief period. In 1935, he defeated Fusionist candidate Harold R. Reynolds for the office of the Sheriff of Kings County. From 1937 to 1941, McGuinness was elected Register of the county, and in recognition of his vote-getting ability, was again appointed Assistant Commissioner of Public Works in 1944.

McGuinness worked tirelessly for the people in his district. He trekked weekly around the neighborhood helping his constituents with their complaints and difficulties; his club handed out yearly Christmas baskets to those in need; he sponsored farm garden projects where local children grew their own vegetable gardens in McCarren Park. McGuinness was representative of the last of the old-time local politicians who were being replaced by a new breed of well educated professionals. McGuinness loved his district of Greenpoint; "... an enormous man with an enormous voice ... with the bearing of a beefy Roman emperor ... relished walking through Greenpoint -its lumber yards, varnish factories, dreary flats, and still dared to call the area 'the garden spot of the universe.' " (TIME magazine). If there was ever a quintessential Brooklyn, from McGuinness's point of view, "The Pernt" was it.

Peter James McGuinness died in 1948.

## **Chronology**

- 1888 Born in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York, on June 29, 1888.
- 1907 Married Margaret Lyons.
- 1908 Began employment at John C. Orr Lumber Co. Become active in International Longshoremen Union.
- 1917 Founded the Greenpoint Patriotic League.
- 1919 Elected as Democrat to the NYC Board of Alderman, from 15<sup>th</sup> A.D. (Greenpoint).
- 1922 Proposed municipal ordinance banning women from smoking.
- 1924 Elected Democratic District Leader for Greenpoint. Founded Greenpoint Peoples Regular Democratic Organization.
- 1928 Succeeded in getting city to build subway line through Greenpoint.
- 1931 Appointed Assistant Borough Commissioner for Public Works.
- 1935 Elected County Sheriff.
- 1936 Attended Democratic National Convention.
- 1937-1941 Served as County Register.
- 1948 Died on June 19, 1948 at St. Catherine's Hospital in Brooklyn, New York.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Peter J. McGuinness collection profiles the political career of Peter McGuinness, his power in the local Brooklyn Democratic party and in city government, as well as his civic dedication to the place he called “The Garden Spot of the World,” his neighborhood of Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

The bulk of this collection is in the form of large scrapbooks that denote the years of the newspaper clippings that are contained therein. The eleventh box bears some correspondence, speeches, photographs and personal memorabilia.

## **Series Descriptions**

**Series I. Scrapbooks, 1919-1945.** 10 boxes. Chronological arrangement.

Series I is comprised of Mr. McGuinness' scrapbooks, where he stored most of the press coverage that he received. The scrapbooks contain not only newspaper clippings, but also election material, cards, pictures, and letters as well. This series profiles McGuinness' colorful political career and gauges some of Brooklyn's political climate dating from the 1920s through the 1950s.

**Series II. Correspondence /Speeches / Photos / Personal Memorabilia 1919-1948.**

2 boxes. Alphabetical arrangement.

This series has a small selection of Mr. McGuinness' papers; business correspondences and speeches to/from political figures like Brooklyn Borough President John Cashmore and Congressman Hamilton Fish. There are also family photos and personal memorabilia such as political cartoons, invitations, cards, religious items, and condolence letters that Mrs. McGuinness received after her husband's death. There is also a wrapped box that was used to house newspaper clippings.

## Container List

### Series I. Scrapbooks, 1919-1945

#### Box 1 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 1 – 1919-1923

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 3 – 1922-1927

#### Box 1A Oversized (wrapped in tissue)

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 2 – 1923-1927

#### Box 2 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 4 – 1926-1927

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 5 – 1927-1928

#### Box 3 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 6a – 1926-1929

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 6b – March 1927 – Sept 1927

#### Box 4 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 7 – 1929-1930

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 8 – Apr 1929 – Nov 1929

#### Box 5 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 9 – Aug – Nov 1930

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 10 – Feb – Nov 1931

#### Box 6 Oversized

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 11a – Feb 1931 – Dec 1932

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 11b – Oct 1930 – Oct 1931

#### Box 7 Oversized (wrapped in tissue)

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 12 – 1932-1934

**Box 8 Oversized**

McGuinness / Former scrapbook – Vol. 13 – 1942-1946 - items mylared

**Box 9A Oversized**

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 14 – 1935, 1944-1945

**Box 9B Oversized**

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 16 – 1938-1941

**Box 10 Oversized**

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 15 – 1935-1944

**Box 10A Oversized (wrapped in tissue)**

McGuinness / Scrapbooks – Vol. 18 – 1934-1936, 1939-1940

**Series II. Correspondence / Speeches / Photos / Memorabilia**

**Box 11**

McGuinness / Business Correspondence, 1920-1942 – Business, Gov't, Private, Union

McGuinness / Correspondence, 1946-47; John Cashmore, Bklyn Borough President

McGuinness / Condolence Letters to Mrs. Peter McGuinness, 1948

McGuinness / Friendship-Appreciation Letters

McGuinness / Memorabilia: cartoons, citations, application, election material, legislative Resolution, business cards, dinner program, etc.

McGuinness / Photographs – family/portraits/weddings

McGuinness / Photographs public/political activities/friends

McGuinness / St. Patrick's Day Parade invitation, Mar 6, 1942

McGuinness / Speeches, 1940s - James Farley, Rep. Ham Fish, Quentin Reynolds

McGuinness / Veteran's Affairs, 1935, 1943, 1948

McGuinness / Ed Warring Correspondence, 1946

**Box 12 Oversized (wrapped in tissue)**

McGuinness / Wooden box covered in fabric and leather (housed newsclippings: see box 8)

October 2014