Special Collections

Researchers may visit Special Collections (appointments are advised) or contact us by letter, fax, e-mail, or phone. Special Collections is normally open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. until noon and 1 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. and by appointment. Hours may vary.

Location

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Legacy for Future Generations

Congressman William Lehman was instrumental in transforming both South Florida and the country. A proponent of mass transit, he secured funds to build Miami-Dade County’s Metrorail and Metromover systems and the Trauma Center at Jackson Memorial Hospital. He revised regulations to facilitate the adoption of children from foreign countries and to enable federal employees to donate their unused sick leave to other employees. These are but a few of the accomplishments documented in the papers that the Congressman donated to Barry University.

The William Lehman Papers

Barry University has preserved Congressman Lehman’s papers and made them accessible to researchers. The papers document the various activities in which the Congressman was involved, give insight into how he accomplished his goals, and reflect his vision for the future. The diverse range of materials—from speeches to correspondence, from video tapes to photographs—leaves a remarkably rich legacy.
Early Years and Family Life

William “Bill” Marx Lehman was born in Selma, Alabama on October 5, 1913, to Corinne Leva and Maurice M. Lehman. He received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. He married Joan Feibelman of Miami, who became a well-known sculptress. Together they raised two sons, William, Jr. and Thomas, and a daughter, Kathryn (Kathy).

Business Career

Early in his career the future congressman opened an automobile business in Miami and gained a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Seeking greater challenges, Lehman obtained a teaching certificate and, while still involved in his automobile business, taught English—first in a public high school and then part-time at a community college. In 1966, he obtained a seat on the Dade County School Board. Within a few years he became its chairman. In that capacity he became a calm voice during the turbulent period of public school desegregation.

Political Life, 1973-1993

During his early years in office Lehman served on the Committee on Education and Labor where he worked to improve life for the elderly, the economically disadvantaged, the handicapped, and those with learning disabilities. He also championed support for the arts, defended environmental initiatives including protection for the Everglades and South Florida’s water supply, and fought to mitigate the condo recreational lease problem.

In 1975, Lehman gained a seat on the Select Committee on Intelligence, which was charged with investigating Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) abuses. He later gained a seat on the Budget Committee and was appointed to serve on the President’s Commission on the Holocaust.

Congressman Lehman became a member of the Appropriations Committee in 1979, serving on the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and the Subcommittee on Transportation. As chairman of the Subcommittee on Transportation he controlled billions of dollars in highway, seaport, and airport funds and secured substantial funding for numerous South Florida projects.

When the 1980 Mariel crisis and boatlift brought over 100,000 Cubans to South Florida, Congressman Lehman helped secure authorizing funds to reimburse state and local governments for the costs. The Lehman amendment to the supplemental appropriations bill appropriated $100 million for Cuban and Haitian resettlement. In 1988, he traveled to Cuba with Mickey Leland (D-TX) to meet with Fidel Castro and negotiated the release of three longtime political prisoners.

Transportation Subcommittee