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Coll. 464
Edwin S. Fisher (1903-1994)
Personal Papers

By Ned Kolpan, September 2021
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Biography

In 1927, the Trenton Fire Department installed its first alarm system. Three dispatchers were hired to helm this novel technology. Among the new recruits was Edwin Fisher. His 38-year dedication to the Trenton Fire Department culminated with his appointment as Chief Dispatcher for the Trenton Communications Bureau for both the police and fire departments in the late 1940s. He would remain in this position until 1966, but his involvement with the TFD's alarm system would continue until his death in 1994.

This lifelong relationship with the fire department, plus his involvement with many fire prevention-based organizations, left behind a legacy of endless notes, lists, and folders filled with records, protocols, and policies. An enthusiastic collector of letters, Edwin Fisher's collection includes the professional correspondence of former Chief Oliver Schafer, and his own business pursuits during the 1950s and 1960s, and decades of publications for all things fire safety.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection consists of notes, papers, magazines, catalogs, newspaper clippings, and letters related to business transactions and everyday activities of both Edwin Fisher and his predecessors.

The collection is significant in capturing what being a fireman was like behind the scenes. For every person running into a burning building, there is someone else who has to catalog the use of call boxes, order supplies, train others, and go to public events. Because the range of documents in this collection extends from the early 1900s to the 1970s, it expertly showcases how fire

department protocols have changed over the course of a century (or, more accurately, how they have stayed the same).

Update February 2024: This collection found itself in a bit of an awkward spot--most of the materials pertained to the Trenton Fire Department, but at least a few folders contained items from the FDNY and Fisher's personal life. To reconcile this issue, the papers relating to the Trenton Fire Department have been relocated as a subseries within the Trenton Police, Fire, and Public Safety Collection (CITY-PFPS), maintaining the order first laid out in this collection. The personal items remain here, as the "Edwin S. Fisher Personal Papers." The majority of these items relate to Fisher's work with the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), including correspondence, notes, and summaries of incidents. These papers also include clippings from the magazine of the International Municipal Signal Association, of which Fisher was a member and committee chair. Finally, this collection contains a few clippings about Trenton (the oldest of which likely date to his predecessor, Otto Schafer), including Fisher's obituary.

Arrangement

Series I: International Municipal Signal Association (IMSA) materials

Folder 1: IMSA member lists, meeting ephemera, correspondence, rosters, magazine clippings

Unfolded: IMSA "Official Wire and Cable Specifications" binder (circa 1975)

Series II: New York City Fire Department (FDNY) materials

Folder 2: "Radio Fire Record" (notes, correspondence, etc. on fires in NYC)

Folder 3: FDNY alarm codes, reports, and miscellaneous info; newspaper clippings

Series III: Trenton materials

Folder 4: Maps (photocopied)

Folder 5: Clippings about Trenton

Folder 6: Edwin S. Fisher obituary

This series contains newspaper clippings, both photocopied and original, of various fires throughout Trenton's history. It also includes stories about infrastructure proposals; fire prevention; moments in history; and natural disasters. In addition to the clippings are photocopied maps in different sizes of the Trenton area. Of particular note is Edwin Fisher's 1994 Times obituary; a photocopy of the True American's 1900 coverage of the Livingston School fire; an original printing of a 1916 Gazette notice to building contractors about an infrastructure proposal; and an enlarged map of the Trenton and Morrisville area.