

Saint Louis Genealogical Society
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The Presidential Library System

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Old Northwest Research LLC
P O Box 144
De Forest, Wisconsin 53532-0144

Background

- Prior to the authorization act of 1955, creating the Presidential archive/library system, the materials gathered and created during a President's term of office were considered to be his personal property.
- In 1974, the Presidential Records Act was enacted, to prevent destruction of records.
- Initially, it only applied to Richard Nixon. In 1978, it was extended to include all administrations after 1981.*

Compliance*

- It should be noted that both Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter complied with the Act's provisions, even though it did not apply to their administrations.
- Since electronic communications have largely supplanted paper memoranda, the Act was revised in 2014 to apply to electronic communications as well.

Precursors to these Acts

- Franklin Roosevelt donated his materials to the National Archives for future use, as of 1939. He designed and had constructed at Hyde Park the library he intended.
- FDR's materials were subject to his control, given the understandings of the times, so there's no way of knowing what would have been withheld or destroyed on his authority.

Presidential Papers Project

- As of 2020, the Library of Congress has digitized its holdings of papers of 23 U. S. Presidents, from George Washington thru Calvin Coolidge.
- Herbert Hoover and Harry Truman were the only living former Presidents at the time of the 1955 act; accordingly their administrations and papers were covered by the act's provisions.

Pre-System papers

- All the digitized images are available through the Library of Congress online.
- They may be exhaustive, and they may be rather limited in their holdings...
- The following are available on microfilm, but not digitally:
 - John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Rutherford B. Hayes, Grover Cleveland, William H. Taft & Warren G. Harding.

Eisenhower

- Dwight Eisenhower, acclaimed as the conquering Allied hero of the Second World War's European theatre, had a library and archive established in his hometown of Abilene, Kansas, before he was elected President.
- The site, including his boyhood home, was delayed because his mother refused to sell her home to the admirers who were putting the library together.

Arthur's example

- Chester Arthur, who died shortly after leaving office of Bright's Disease, ordered a substantial number of his papers to be destroyed shortly before his death.
- Chester Alan Arthur III reported that three large garbage cans, 4' high, were burned the day before the former President died, on Arthur's explicit instructions.
- Check the Library of Congress for relevant holdings for earlier administrations.

Thomas Jefferson

- You will recall, after the burning of Washington in 1814, Congress purchased the personal library of Thomas Jefferson, establishing the Library of Congress.
- This was to give Jefferson some financial lift in his dotage, and to restore the library.
- No provision for a pension or personal security was made—of course, in the 19th Century, for most Americans, such support was non-existent, anyway.

Why should I use one?

- Reasons for research in a NARA-affiliated Presidential library:
 - If you are kin of one of these presidents, the research collections likely include genealogical detail and published information
 - If you had people living during their administrations, they will add cultural context
 - If you had people working in the administrations, by chance, you may find plenty materials of interest.

Example: LBJ

- The collection is on the campus of the University of Texas, in Austin.
- A reader's card is required: register at the front fort.
- It's a "call" system, not open-shelved.
- Like all NARA facilities, pencils-only

Johnson's genealogy

- LBJ's mother, Rebekah Baines Johnson, was an ardent amateur genealogist.
- In the late 1950s, she gave then-Senator Johnson a copy of her compiled work
- In 1965, her book, *A Family Album*, was published.
- We share several family lines, so I sought out her original research.

Findings

- As with most manuscript files, there was a lot of searching and sorting.
- Always return the files to their folders, maintaining the order in which they were given to you.
- Adhere to whatever digital copying and policies, and sign any release forms.

Copyright matters

- Remember, government documents are public domain; private documents may remain under copyright by the content creator; act accordingly.
- If you have any doubt, ask the archivist or staff person to help determine what is “fair use” of any materials.

Result

- In consequence of finding Mrs. Johnson's research notes, I was able to determine what her root sources were. There were hand-drawn charts, hand-copied information from published genealogies, family correspondence dating to the mid-19th Century that existed only in that file.
- And I was able to determine that I was using "better" original source materials on most of our common family.

Correspondence

- Finally, I was able to locate the original correspondence she had with fellow family members from three generations before my time, still living in the 1950s.
- This enabled me to find more information about the lines that I had “lost” between Kentucky and Texas in the 1840s, and carry them forward.

Example: Gerald Ford

- In 1976, President Ford was running for election to a term as president in his own right, having succeeded Richard Nixon following the latter's resignation.
- On 12 March, just prior to the Illinois presidential preference primary, he made a stop at a high school in suburban Chicago.

Ford's library—Ann Arbor

- The collection's textual holdings (digitized) include the President's daily diary, noting every stop, group and event in the public calendar.
- The rally's platform party, including elected officials and students from the high school, are included in the record.
- The rally began at 8:00 p.m. and at 9:32 p.m. he departed for his hotel.

Rally

- After the political speechifying was through, the President took questions from folks in the audience.
- I was one of those who was able to ask a question.
- The collection includes an audio recording of that interlude.
- If ever my children want a recording of my pre-adolescent voice, they can find it in the collections of the Ford Library in Ann Arbor.

Scanned from the President's Daily Diary Collection (Box 80) at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library

THE WHITE HOUSE		PHONE		ACTIVITY
TIME		P=Placed	R=Rec'd	
In	Out			
PLACE DAY BEGAN				DATE (Mo., Day, Yr.)
CLOCK TOWER INN				MARCH 12, 1976
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS				TIME DAY
				7:20 a.m. FRIDAY
				<p>The President and the First Lady were overnight guests at the Clock Tower Inn, 7801 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois.</p> <p>Note: A Military Aide's log for the President's activities in Illinois was not available for the daily diary. Some of the times and activities for the visit are not confirmed. The President was accompanied by members of the press throughout his visit to Illinois.</p> <p>The President was greeted by Congressman John B. Anderson (R-Illinois), honorary Co-Chairman of the Illinois State</p>
7:20				

5:30			The President returned to his suite.
5:46	5:48	P	The President talked with Mayor Daley.
7:32			The President returned to his motorcade.
7:32	7:56		The President motored from the Chicago Marriott Hotel to Buffalo Grove High School, 1100 West Dundee Road, Buffalo Grove, Illinois.
7:56	9:32		The President attended a campaign rally sponsored by the Illinois State PFC.
7:56			The President was greeted by: Clarence Miller, Principal of Buffalo Grove High School Six student body leaders of Buffalo Grove High School
8:00			The President went to the offstage announcement area.
8:01			The President went to the platform in the gymnasium. For a list of platform guests, see <u>APPENDIX "J."</u> The President was introduced by Richard B. Ogilvie, former Governor (R-Illinois) and Co-Chairman of the Illinois State PFC.

BUFFALO GROVE HIGH SCHOOL CAMPAIGN RALLY

Buffalo Grove, Illinois
March 12, 1976

Platform Guests

Front Row

Lynn M. Leber, President of the Senior Class of Buffalo Grove
High School, Buffalo Grove, Illinois

William C. Harris, State Senator (R-Illinois), Senate Minority Leader

Senator Charels H. Percy (R-Illinois), Honorary Chairman of the
Illinois State President Ford Committee

The First Lady

Harold B. Smith, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Illinois Tool Works, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois and Vice Chairman of the Illinois State
President Ford Committee (PFC)

believers can handle the problem of abortion in the right way. I have faith in people that they will, and I don't think they should be bound on the one hand by a certain decision of a Supreme Court or by a rigid Constitutional amendment on the other.

QUESTION: Since your nomination in August seems almost certain -- (Laughter) who would you consider for Vice President with you in November?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, David, I am delighted to hear your optimism. (Laughter) But I have been in enough political contests and enough athletic competitions to know that you don't win until the final whistle, and we are going to be working at that to make sure that your forecast is accurate.

But to answer the substantive question, I have said, and I am delighted to repeat, we have a wealth of fine Republican potential candidates for Vice President. We have some outstanding governors. We have some outstanding Members of the Congress. We have some other people who have held public office or who have been involved in public service. So we have a wide variety of outstanding talent from which we can pick.

I could go through the list, but a number of them would be outstanding running mates and would make outstanding Vice Presidents, and I don't have any worry that we can have a

Presidential Genealogy

- If you have New England forebears, especially, you are very likely related to a number of U. S. Presidents.
- For those with presidential libraries, Hoover, Roosevelt, Ford and the Bushes (both, obviously) had substantial New England ancestry.

Genealogy ties

- For those with Southern kinship, Truman, Johnson, Carter, Clinton & Obama* had substantial heritage there.
- Mid-Atlantic relatives pervade the family trees of Roosevelt (New Amsterdam), Eisenhower (Pennsylvania Dutch), Nixon (Quakers in New Jersey), Carter, and Biden*.
- * No working Presidential library, yet.

Additional persons of interest

- You may be genealogically-connected to other figures in an administration: the First Lady, the Vice President, or other officials whose own archival materials have been placed in the holdings of “their” President’s collections.
- Photographs, images, audio recordings of others may be available that prove to be of interest.

Non-NARA facilities

- Remember that there are other Presidential libraries that are not in the NARA system.
- The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum in Springfield, Illinois, is a state-sponsored facility.
- Rutherford Hayes's library in Fremont, Ohio, is a private facility as well.
- Nixon's library was self-excluded from the NARA system until after the former President's death in 1994.

Access

- With one NARA facility in the state (Truman), and three in bordering states (Hoover, IA; Eisenhower, KS; Clinton, AR), and a state facility for Lincoln in Illinois, researchers from Saint Louis will be well-situated for on sight visits.

Locations

- The rest are farther afield, including California (Nixon & Reagan), 3 in Texas (Johnson, both Bushes), Michigan (Ford), New York (FDR), Massachusetts (JFK) and Georgia (Carter).
- The Obama Center is scheduled for construction in Chicago, to open later this decade for public use; most of their archival holdings will be available digitally before the building is complete.

Online presence

- The libraries are all endeavoring to open additional channels digitally.
- The Hayes (private) library has an online obituary index that is particularly strong for Ohio death announcements.
- See rbhayes.org/ohio-obituary-index/extended-search-newspapers to access the database and request copies.

Questions?