

John Osborne Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2021

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2003
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Collection Summary

Title: John Osborne Papers

Inclusive Dates: circa 1900-1983

Bulk Dates: 1941-1983

ID No.: MSS60400

Creator: Osborne, John, 1907-1981

Extent: 35,000 items

Extent: 100 containers plus 1 oversize and 1 classified

Extent: 40 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82060400>

Summary: Author, editor, and journalist. Correspondence and memoranda; family papers; drafts of published and unpublished articles, reports, columns, and interviews; notes and notebooks; dispatches and news cables; research material; and other papers documenting Osborne's career as a reporter, editor, and columnist for *Time*, *Life*, and the *New Republic*.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Carter, Jimmy, 1924-

Ford, Gerald R., 1913-2006.

Forrestal, James, 1892-1949.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

Luce, Henry Robinson, 1898-1967--Correspondence.

Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994.

Osborne, John, 1907-1981.

Reagan, Ronald.

Subjects

Foreign correspondents--England--London.

Foreign correspondents--Italy--Rome.

Foreign correspondents--Japan--Tokyo.

Journalism--New York (State)--New York.

Journalism--Washington (D.C.)

Korean War, 1950-1953--Journalism.

Presidents--United States.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

World War, 1939-1945--Journalism--Europe.

Places

London (England)--History--Bombardment, 1940-1945.

United States--Politics and government--1969-1974.

United States--Politics and government--1974-1977.

United States--Politics and government--1977-1981.

United States--Politics and government--1981-1989.

Titles

Life (Chicago, Ill.)

New Republic (New York, N.Y.)

Time.

Occupations

Authors
Editors
Journalists

Acquisition Information

The papers of John Osborne were deposited in the Library of Congress by his wife, Gertrude McCullough Osborne, 1982-1993. In 1999, the deposits were converted to gifts by Osborne's son, John Osborne III.

Processing History

The papers of John Osborne were arranged and described by Michael McElderry with the assistance of Brian McGuire in 1999. Family correspondence remaining from an earlier accession was interfiled by Miles Lawlor in 2021. The finding aid was revised by Maria Farmer in 2021.

Additional Description

The papers of John Osborne are described in *Library of Congress Acquisitions: Manuscript Division, 1982*, pp. 26-28.

Transfers

Items have been transferred from the Manuscript Division to other custodial divisions of the Library. Audiotapes have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. Photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division. All transfers are identified in these divisions as part of the John Osborne Papers.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Osborne is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of John Osborne are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Classified Material

Government regulations control the use of classified material in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified material.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, John Osborne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1907, Mar. 15	Born, Corinth, Miss.
1925-1926	Attended Southwestern University, Memphis, Tenn.
1926-1927	Attended University of Colorado, Boulder, Colo.
1927-1931	Reporter, <i>Commercial Appeal</i> and the Associated Press, Memphis, Tenn.
1933-1935	Public information officer, Tennessee Valley Authority and National Recovery Administration
1936-1938	Labor affairs writer and national affairs editor, <i>Newsweek</i>
1938-1961	Writer, editor, and foreign correspondent, Time, inc.
1942	Married Gertrude McCullough
1946-1948	London bureau chief, Time, inc.
1948-1951	Foreign editor, <i>Life</i> magazine
1951-1953	Washington editor, Time, inc.
1953-1956	Senior Far East correspondent, Time, inc.
1956-1961	Staff writer, <i>Life</i> magazine
1961	Published <i>Britain: A Country of Character</i> (New York: Time, inc. 176 pp.)
1961-1968	Free-lance writer
1968	Published <i>The Old South</i> (New York: Time-Life Books. 192 pp.)
1968-1981	White House correspondent and associate senior editor, <i>New Republic</i> ; wrote regular columns "The Nixon Watch" and "White House Watch"
1970-1975	Published annual volumes of collections of "The Nixon Watch" columns
1974	George Polk Memorial Award for magazine reporting
1977	Published <i>White House Watch: The Ford Years</i> (Washington: New Republic Book Co. 482 pp.)
1981, May 2	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John Franklin Osborne (1907-1981) span the years circa 1900-1983, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period after 1941. Although he worked as a reporter and writer for several newspapers and *Newsweek* magazine from 1927 to 1938 and as a free-lance writer from 1961 to 1968, Osborne's most important work as a journalist and editor was largely confined to two phases of his long career, each identified with the news magazine with which he was associated at the time. The first phase covers the period from 1938 to 1961 when he worked as a writer, editor, and foreign correspondent for Time, inc. The second, from 1968 until his death in 1981, began when Osborne joined the staff of the *New Republic* to write an analysis of Richard M. Nixon's presidency in a column entitled "The Nixon Watch," which was continued under the title "White House Watch" during later administrations. Records originating from both news organizations are contained in subseries in the [Journalism File](#). The [Time files](#) contain correspondence and memoranda, drafts of published and unpublished articles and reports, notes and notebooks, dispatches, news cables, and research material. Osborne's field reports reflect the political and international repercussions of American foreign policy during and immediately following World War II, while his office files provide insight into the operations of Henry Luce's publishing empire. The [New Republic files](#) contain material similar to those of *Time*, including an important set of notes transcribed from Osborne's tape-recorded interviews and telephone conversations, and serve as source material for the study of twentieth century American politics as viewed through the office of the United States presidency. In addition to the files associated with *Time* and the *New Republic*, the collection also includes [family papers](#), general correspondence, research and production material for Osborne's [books and free-lance writings](#), and [miscellaneous](#) items.

As an editor and foreign correspondent for *Time*, Osborne reported many of the major events of the mid-twentieth century. A selection of the stories Osborne covered while stationed in London, Rome, Tokyo, New York, and Washington includes World War II reports from Europe and the London "blitz," the Communist takeover of China, and the Korean War. Osborne's files include dispatches, news cables, and memoranda. The geopolitical file, representing Osborne's collected notes and research material on specific countries and foreign policy issues, documents postwar international realignment, especially in the Far East.

In his role as adviser and editor, Osborne exchanged correspondence and memoranda with other top editors and decision makers throughout the corporate hierarchy of Time, inc., including Henry Luce. These exchanges outline various administrative and editorial policies and suggest the extent to which the company shaped its product through tight editorial control and a centralized world view. For some years, Osborne was a colleague of Whittaker Chambers on the staff of *Time* magazine. Reflecting on his relationship with Chambers, Osborne responded to John Chabot Smith's book, *Alger Hiss: The True Story*, in a controversial review published in the *New Republic* in April 1976. Material relating to the review and the relationship is located in the *New Republic* files.

In an effort to advance his career and broaden his opportunities for independent writing, Osborne left *Time* in 1961 to become a free-lance writer. The [Books and Writings File](#) contains correspondence, drafts, notes, and other material detailing the contract negotiations, research, and writing he pursued during this period. The series contains a large collection of notes and research material gathered in support of an intended, but unpublished, biography of James Forrestal. Similar files accumulated for prospective volumes on John F. Kennedy and Vietnam illustrate Osborne's research methods.

In 1968 Osborne became the White House correspondent for the *New Republic*. The collection contains drafts, notes and notebooks, and reference files produced and collected by Osborne while writing his regular columns, "The Nixon Watch," and "White House Watch." Although Osborne's columns chronicled the record of incumbent presidents from Richard M. Nixon to Ronald Reagan, his attention was drawn more closely to the study of the American presidency as an institution. It was the office of the presidency, more so than its occupant, that Osborne admired and sought to document. The *New Republic* files include full sets of drafts, proofs, and tearsheets for these columns, which were later collected and published as *The Nixon Watch* in annual volumes, 1970-1975, and *White House Watch: The Ford Years*, 1977. Material relating to these published volumes can be found in the [Books and Writings File](#).

Despite his access to inside sources, Osborne preferred official documents and transcripts for his information. His work habits are further reflected in the set of notes, notebooks, and reference material he used in preparation for his columns. These materials are in the White House file, among the [files of the New Republic](#). Although Osborne kept notebooks throughout his career to record both facts and impressions, his holograph entries are fragmentary and difficult to read. Of greater importance are his typewritten notes, which he categorized and filed both chronologically as a set and selectively within subject headings. In addition to research material, the notes include transcripts of personal and telephone interviews conducted by Osborne with a variety of administration officials and recorded by him on cassette tapes.

Correspondence and memoranda exchanged between staff members of the *New Republic* detail administrative decisions that influenced editorial policy at the magazine. Readers' reactions to his columns were always important to Osborne, and their letters, along with his replies to the more thoughtful responses, are contained in the [New Republic files](#).

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in six series:

- [Family Papers, 1915-1983](#)
- [Journalism File, 1941-1981](#)
- [Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980](#)
- [Miscellany, 1940-1981](#)
- [Oversize, circa 1900-1974](#)
- [Classified, 1978](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-2, 99-100	<p><u>Family Papers, 1915-1983</u></p> <p>Letters received and copies of letters sent by Osborne, as well as correspondence exchanged between family members other than Osborne, telegrams, genealogical records, printed matter, writings, and miscellaneous items and enclosures.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by name of family member and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 2-71	<p><u>Journalism File, 1941-1981</u></p>
BOX 2-17	<p><u>Time, inc., 1941-1966</u></p> <p>Correspondence and memoranda, telegrams, dispatches and news cables, research material, reports, notes and notebooks, typescripts, drafts, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures documenting Osborne's career as a writer, correspondent, and editor with Time, inc.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 17-71	<p><u>New Republic, 1949-1981</u></p> <p>Correspondence and memoranda, notes and notebooks, transcripts, drafts, typescripts, tearsheets, proofs, reference files, research material, financial records, reports, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures accumulated by Osborne as White House correspondent for the <i>New Republic</i>.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 71-94	<p><u>Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980</u></p> <p>Correspondence, drafts, typescripts, notes and notebooks, research material, tearsheets, contracts, royalty statements, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures relating to Osborne's published and unpublished writings, with the exception of the articles written for Time, inc., and the <i>New Republic</i> noted above in the Journalism File.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by type of material and books alphabetically by title and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 94-98	<p><u>Miscellany, 1940-1981</u></p> <p>Correspondence, financial records, address and telephone books, appointment calendars, awards, cards and invitations, diary, medical records, memorabilia, notes, printed matter, and miscellaneous items.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><u>Oversize, circa 1900-1974</u></p> <p>Oversize material consisting mostly of printed matter.</p> <p>Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.</p>
BOX CL 1	<p><u>Classified, 1978</u></p> <p>Telegrams, cables, memoranda, correspondence, and policy papers.</p> <p>Arranged according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-2, 99-100	Family Papers, 1915-1983 Letters received and copies of letters sent by Osborne, as well as correspondence exchanged between family members other than Osborne, telegrams, genealogical records, printed matter, writings, and miscellaneous items and enclosures. Organized alphabetically by name of family member and arranged chronologically therein.
BOX 1	McCullough family Genealogy, 1915, 1966, 1975, undated Other family members, 1981, undated Nee, Owen D., and Elizabeth Nee (sister), 1956, 1969, 1973-1979, undated Nee, Owen D., Jr., (nephew) and Amber Nee, 1974, 1981 Osborne, Gertrude M. (wife) Cards, 1980, undated Correspondence, 1931, 1939-1983, undated (2 folders) "Family" letters, 1946-1947, undated Letters exchanged with John Osborne 1941, Jan.-Oct. 1941, Nov.-1942, Feb. 1942, Mar.-1948, Apr. 1948, May-1949, Sept. 1949, Oct.-1953, Apr. 1953, May-1954, Apr. 1953, May-1956, June 1956, June-1961, Apr. 1972, Feb.-1980, Sept.
BOX 99	Undated Miscellany, 1945-1956, undated Writings, 1977, undated Osborne, John F., III, (son) and Peggy Osborne Correspondence 1950-1956 1969-1973 1974-1976 1977-1982 Undated Miscellany, 1954, 1961-1963, 1974-1980, undated
BOX 100	Osborne, Norma Curry (mother), 1948-1953, undated Osborne, William E. (brother), 1946-1956, 1968-1978
BOX 2	

Family Papers, 1915-1983

Container

Contents

Osborne family genealogy, 1925, 1952, 1974, undated

BOX 2-71

Journalism File, 1941-1981

BOX 2-17

Time, inc., 1941-1966

Correspondence and memoranda, telegrams, dispatches and news cables, research material, reports, notes and notebooks, typescripts, drafts, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures documenting Osborne's career as a writer, correspondent, and editor with Time, inc.

Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.

BOX 2

Bureaus

Hong Kong, 1956, undated

London, England, 1946-1948, undated

Correspondence

Administrative and editorial, 1941-1960

(3 folders)

Letters of introduction, 1950

Luce, Clare Boothe, undated

BOX 3

Luce, Henry R., 1942-1956, undated

(3 folders)

Editorial and research projects

Chiang Kai-shek, written by

"Our Struggle Against the Russian Imperialists and Their Chinese Communist Agents,"
1954

Soviet Russia in China, 1957, undated

Suggestions for stories, 1950-1951

Taft, Robert A. (1889-1953), 1951

Vandenberg, Hoyt S., 1951-1952

Expense accounts, 1941-1956

Geopolitical file

Burma, 1950-1955

(2 folders)

BOX 4

China

Congresses

Eighth National Chinese Communist Party Congress

Miscellany, 1956

(2 folders)

Speeches, 1956

First National People's Congress, 1954-1956

Dispatches and news cables, 1954-1955

Miscellany, 1950-1958, undated

News releases and summaries, 1954-1956

BOX 5

Research memoranda and reports, 1950-1956

Suppression of anti-communists, 1955

United States policy, 1954-1956

Visas for Peking, China, trip, 1955-1956

Far East, 1950, undated

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container

Contents

	Hong Kong
	Miscellany, 1950-1956, undated
	Newspaper clippings, 1954-1956
	Notebooks, circa 1952-1954, undated
BOX 6	Notes, 1954-1956
	Research memoranda and reports, 1950-1956
	India, 1950
	Iran, 1952
	Korea
	Armistice agreement, 1952-1953
	Dispatches and news cables, 1950-1953
	Miscellany, 1950-1952
	Notebooks, 1952-1953, undated
	Notes, 1953
	Research memoranda and reports, 1951-1952, undated
	Okinawa, 1956
BOX 7	Philippines
	Correspondence, 1950
	Economic story for <i>Fortune</i> , 1955, undated
	Map, 1944 <i>See Oversize</i>
	Miscellany, 1947-1955, undated
	News cables and research memoranda, 1950, undated
	Nixon, Richard M., visit of, July 1956
	Notes, 1955
	Taiwan (Formosa)
	Correspondence, 1952-1955, undated
	Dispatches and news cables, 1948-1955, undated
	Interviews, 1952
	Maps, 1947, undated
	Miscellany, 1947-1954, undated
	News releases and summaries, 1950-1956
BOX 8	Newspaper clippings, 1950-1955
	(3 folders)
	Notes, 1953-1955
	Research memoranda and reports, 1950-1956
	Thailand, 1950-1953
	Vietnam, 1950, 1956, undated
	Humphrey, Hubert H., 1958
	Miscellany, 1943-1964, undated
	Notebooks
	1949-1953
	(2 folders)
BOX 9	Undated
	(4 folders)
	Notes, 1950, circa 1957, undated
	Photographs
	1955

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	Undated
	(3 folders)
BOX 10	(3 folders)
	Reports
	Miscellany, undated
	Press and wire service, 1950
	"Washington Report," 1951-1956
	(3 folders)
BOX 11	"Round Table," <i>Le Monde Libre</i> , 1944-1945
	Waugh, Evelyn, 1946, 1966
	Writings
	Articles
	"American Aid in Asia," 1956
	"Americans in Asia," 1953-1956
	"America's Cyprus: A Report on Okinawa," 1956
	"Andres Soriano," 1955-1956
	"Arthur Koestler," 1944-1947, undated
	"Bevin Closeup," 1946
	"Chennault and the Big Buck," 1953-1954
	"China: The New Context," 1956
	"Economics of the Candidates," 1960
	"Fulbright's Last Chance," 1959
	"George Marden," 1954
BOX 12	"Green Island"
	Captions, 1954
	Correspondence, 1954
	Drafts, 1954
	Notebooks, 1954
	Research material, undated
	"Hong Kong," 1954, undated
	"Lawyers and Lobbyists"
	Drafts, undated
	(2 folders)
	Memoranda, 1951
	Notes, 1951-1952
	Research materials, 1945-1952, undated
BOX 13	"MacArthur's Position on Formosa"
	Correspondence, 1949-1950
	Dispatches and news cables, 1950
	Drafts, 1950
	Research material, 1950, undated
	"Magsaysay in Perspective," 1953
	"My Dear General," 1945-1950, undated
	"Ordway and the New De Soto," circa 1947
	"Report from the Orient," 1950
	"This Way to Suicide," undated
	"Vietnam," 1956

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	"The Way of Death," 1956
	"Why McCarthy?" 1951-1952, undated
	"The Woman of Xuyen Moc," 1955
	Dispatches and news cables
	Chronological file
	1941-1947
	(3 folders)
BOX 14	1950-1957, undated
	(5 folders)
	Hong Kong bureau
	1953-1954
	(2 folders)
	1955
	(2 folders)
BOX 15	(1 folder)
	1956
	(2 folders)
	London, England, bureau, 1947-1948, undated
	(3 folders)
BOX 16	Other than Osborne, 1942-1956, undated
	(8 folders)
BOX 17	Tokyo, Japan, bureau, 1953
	(2 folders)
	Printed copies, 1944-1960, undated
	(2 folders)
BOX 17-71	<i>New Republic, 1949-1981</i>
	Correspondence and memoranda, notes and notebooks, transcripts, drafts, typescripts, tearsheets, proofs, reference files, research material, financial records, reports, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures accumulated by Osborne as White House correspondent for the <i>New Republic</i> .
	Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.
BOX 17	Correspondence
	Administrative and editorial, 1972-1981, undated
	(2 folders)
	Readers' comments and responses
	1966-1977
BOX 18	1978-1981, undated
	Expense accounts, 1972-1981
	(2 folders)
	General reference files
	Chambers, Whittaker, and Alger Hiss, 1949, 1972-1976, undated
	Evangelical Christians, 1980
	Kissinger, Henry, 1976-1980
	Newspaper clippings, 1976-1978
	Political campaigns
	Presidential campaigns

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	1976
	Newspaper clippings
	1980, John B. Anderson
	Bank loans
	Interviews
	Notes
BOX 19	Voting record, 1980-1981
	Primary campaign, 1976
	Miscellany
	Newspaper clippings
	Race, 1980
	Woodward, Bob, and Scott Armstrong, <i>The Brethren</i> , 1980
	Kinsolving, Lester, 1974-1978, undated
	Miscellany, 1970-1981, undated
	Notebooks, 1968, undated
	White House file
	Nixon administration
	Charter flights, 1973-1974
	Correspondence, 1969, 1975-1977
	Ford, Gerald R., cabinet proposal story, 1974
	Miscellany, 1970-1974, undated
	Notebooks
	Sept.-Dec. 1968
BOX 20	Jan. 1969-Jan. 1970
	(6 folders)
BOX 21	Jan. 1970-Mar. 1974
	(6 folders)
BOX 22	Mar.-July 1974, undated
	(5 folders)
	Notes, 1968-1978, undated
	Reference files
	Agnew, Spiro T., 1972, 1980
	Buchanan, Patrick J., 1972-1974
BOX 23	Carswell, G. Harrold, 1970, 1976
	Clawson, Ken W., 1972-1974
	Financial affairs
	Miscellany, 1970-1974
	Notes, 1974-1975
	Press briefings and releases, 1973
	(2 folders)
	Real estate, 1967-1973, undated
	Statements of assets and liabilities, 1969-1973
	Taxes, 1973-1974
	Ford, Gerald R.
	Addresses and remarks, 1974
	Miscellany, 1970-1975, undated
	Newspaper clippings, 1974

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

BOX 24	Schedules, 1974 General Accounting Office report on Nixon's housing, 1973-1975 Haldeman, H. R., 1972-1975 Interviews, 1971-1974 (2 folders) Kissinger, Henry Newspaper clippings, 1974-1977 Press conferences and releases, 1974, undated Klein, Herbert G., 1972-1973 Legislation, 1973 Miscellany, 1969-1975
BOX 25	Newspaper clippings, 1956, 1968-1980 Press briefings and conferences 1969-1973 (3 folders) 1974 (1 folder)
BOX 26	(1 folder) Press pool reports, 1973-1974, undated Press releases, 1973-1974 <i>RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon</i> , 1978-1979 Rebozo, Charles G. ("Bebe"), 1972-1974 Slapping incident, 1973 Staffing, 1968-1974 Strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT), 1969-1972 Trips 1972 Feb., China Miscellany, 1971-1972, undated Press book May-June, Austria, USSR, Iran, and Poland Miscellany Press book Press briefings and releases Press pool reports Printed matter <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 27	1974 Apr., France June, Middle East Miscellany, 1973-1974, undated <i>See also Oversize</i> Newspaper clippings Notes
BOX 28	Press book Press pool reports Press releases Schedules June-July, Belgium and USSR

	Miscellany <i>See also Oversize</i>
	Newspaper clippings
	Notes
	Press book
	Press conferences
	Press pool reports
	Press releases
	Schedules
BOX 29	Watergate
	Aftermath and support, 1973-1979, undated (2 folders)
	Deep throat, 1977, undated
	Ford, Gerald R., 1972-1976
	Hearing transcripts, 1974, undated
	Interviews, 1974-1977
	Last days, 1974
	Miscellany
	Newspaper clippings
	Press briefings and conferences (2 folders)
BOX 30	Press releases
	Legal documents, 1973-1974 (3 folders)
	Miscellany, 1973-1974, undated
	Newspaper clippings, 1973-1979 (3 folders)
BOX 31	Notes, 1973-1974, undated
	Presidential statements, 1973-1974
	Press conferences, 1973-1974 (4 folders)
	Printed matter, 1974-1976
	Resignation, 1973-1974
	St. Clair, James D., 1974
	Special prosecution reports, 1973-1975
BOX 32	Tapes
	Miscellany, 1973-1974
	Newspaper clippings, 1973-1980
	Notes, 1973-1977
	Transcripts, 1974, undated
	Trials, 1974-1975
	Woodward, Bob, and Carl Bernstein, <i>The Final Days</i> , 1976
	Correspondence
	Newspaper clippings, 1975-1976
	Notes
	Printed matter
	Research material
	<i>Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents</i>

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container

Contents

	1969-1972
BOX 33	1973-1974 (5 folders) Ford administration Correspondence, 1974-1978 Miscellany, 1974-1976, undated
BOX 34	Notebooks, 1975-1977 (6 folders)
BOX 35	Notes, 1975-1977 (6 folders)
BOX 36	Reference files Deregulation, 1974-1975 Foreign policy Africa, 1975-1976 <i>Mayaguez</i> (Ship), 1976 Miscellany, 1975-1976 Panama Canal, 1974-1976 Intelligence Miscellany, 1971-1976, undated (2 folders) Newspaper clippings, 1975-1976 Notes, 1976 Interviews 1975 1976 (2 folders)
BOX 37	Kissinger, Henry Foreign policy issues, 1975-1976 (3 folders) <i>Halperin v. Kissinger</i> , 1976 Newspaper clippings, 1975-1976 Notes, 1975-1976
BOX 38	Printed matter, 1975-1980, undated Strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II), 1975-1976 Wiretaps, 1974-1976 Miscellany, 1968-1979, undated (2 folders) Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 1975-1976 News summaries, 1975 Newspaper clippings, 1974-1976 (2 folders)
BOX 39	Nixon, Richard M., trip to China, 1976 Political campaigns Presidential campaign, 1976-1977 Primary campaign, 1976 Florida primary Illinois primary

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	Miscellany New Hampshire Newspaper clippings, 1975-1976 Wisconsin primary
BOX 40	Press briefings and conferences, 1974-1976 (5 folders) Press releases, 1974-1976, undated (3 folders) Press pool reports, 1974-1976, undated
BOX 41	Rockefeller, Nelson A. Miscellany, 1975-1976 Notes, 1975 Staffing Correspondence, 1974-1977 Miscellany, 1974-1976 Newspaper clippings, 1974-1975 Notes, 1974 Press conferences, 1974 Press releases, 1974-1975 Swearing-in, 1974 Transition, 1976 Trips 1974 Nov., Japan, Korea, and USSR Miscellany <i>See also Oversize</i> Press book
BOX 42	1975 July-Aug., Europe Miscellany Press book Nov., France Nov.-Dec., Pacific basin Miscellany Press book Watergate Affair Ford, Gerald R., obstruction inquiry, 1975-1976 Miscellany, 1973-1975 Nixon pardon, 1974 Tapes, 1974 "Win" campaign, 1974 Social invitations, 1974
BOX 43	Carter administration Correspondence, 1976-1981, undated Miscellany, 1978-1979 Notebooks Aug. 1976-Nov. 1977 (5 folders)

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container

Contents

BOX 44	Nov. 1977-Feb. 1981 (6 folders)
BOX 45	Notes Aug. 1976-Apr. 1978 (6 folders)
BOX 46	May 1978-Dec. 1980, undated (8 folders)
BOX 47	Reference files Administration Personnel Biographical sketches, 1977-1978, undated Miscellany, 1977-1980 Newspaper clippings, 1977-1980 Notes, 1977-1978 Press releases, 1977-1980 Reorganization Miscellany, 1976-1980, undated National security, 1977 Newspaper clippings, 1977-1978 Notes, 1977 Press conferences, 1977 Press releases, 1977 Blumenthal, Michael, 1978 Bourne, Peter, 1976-1977 Budget, economics, and trade Miscellany, 1977-1980 Newspaper clippings, 1977-1978 Notes, 1978, undated Presidential speeches and statements, 1977-1980 Press briefings, 1978 Camp David peace accords, 1978 Cargo preference legislation, 1977 Carter, Rosalynn Miscellany, 1976-1979 Notes, 1978 Carter, William A. ("Billy") Legal papers, 1980 Libyan representation, 1978-1980 <i>See also Classified</i> (2 folders)
BOX 48	Miscellany, 1977-1980, undated Notes, 1980 Press conferences, 1980 Statements, 1980 Defense and nuclear strategy, 1977-1980 (2 folders) Democratic party, 1980 Election reform, 1977
BOX 49	

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
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	Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none">Miscellany, 1977-1978Newspaper clippings, 1977-1978Press briefing, 1977Speeches and statements, 1977
	Equal rights amendment, 1977-1978
	Ethics in Government Act, 1977-1979
	Financial disclosure, 1975-1980
BOX 50	First week <ul style="list-style-type: none">Miscellany, 1977Newspaper clippings, 1977
	First year, 1977
	Foreign policy <ul style="list-style-type: none">Africa<ul style="list-style-type: none">Miscellany, 1978Newspaper clippings, 1977-1978Review memoranda, 1978-1979 <i>See also Classified</i>
	Brzezinski, Zbigniew <ul style="list-style-type: none">Interviews, 1977-1981Miscellany, 1976-1981Speeches and remarks, 1979-1980
	China <ul style="list-style-type: none">Correspondence and memoranda, 1977, undatedMiscellany, 1972-1978, undatedNewspaper clippings, 1977-1979Notes, 1978-1979
BOX 51	Press briefings and conferences, 1978
	Great Britain <ul style="list-style-type: none">Jay, Peter, 1977Miscellany, 1977Newspaper clippings, 1977Notes, 1977Taxation, 1975-1977
	Iran hostage crisis, 1979-1981
	Israel, 1977-1978
	Kissinger, Henry, 1977
	Middle East <ul style="list-style-type: none">Miscellany, 1977-1980Newspaper clippings, 1977-1980
BOX 52	Miscellany, 1976-1980
	Newspaper clippings, 1976-1980 <ul style="list-style-type: none">(7 folders)
	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summits, 1977-1978 <ul style="list-style-type: none">(2 folders)
BOX 53	Panama, 1977-1978
	Press releases, 1977

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	Speeches and remarks, 1977-1980, undated
	Strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT)
	Miscellany, 1977
	Newspaper clippings, 1977
	Notes, 1977
	Helms, Richard, 1977-1978
	Humphrey-Hawkins bill, 1976-1977
	Human rights, 1976-1977, undated
	Interviews
	Carter, Jimmy, 1976-1980
BOX 54	Miscellany, 1977-1981 (2 folders)
	Jordan, Hamilton, 1977-1981
	Kraft, Tim, 1980
	Lance, Bert
	Miscellany, 1976-1977
	Newspaper clippings, 1977
	Notes, 1977
	Miscellany, 1977-1978, undated
	Mondale, Walter F.
	Interviews, 1977-1980
	Miscellany, 1976-1977, undated
	Newspaper clippings, 1977
	Notes, 1977
	Press conferences, 1977
BOX 55	Press pool reports, 1977
	Press releases, 1977
	Speeches and remarks, 1977
	Newspaper clippings
	Nov. 1976-Oct. 1977 (6 folders)
BOX 56	Nov. 1977-Dec. 1980, undated (8 folders)
	Plains, Ga., 1976-1977, undated
	Policy angles, 1978
	Presidential campaigns
	1976
	Miscellany, 1975-1976, undated
BOX 57	Newspaper clippings (2 folders)
	Remarks and policy statements, 1974-1976, undated
	Schedules
	Speeches, 1974-1976
	Staff
	1980
	Funding
	Interviews

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	Miscellany
	Newspaper clippings
	Presidential Committee, 1979, undated
BOX 58	Press briefings and conferences
	Press pool reports
	Press releases
	Republican convention notes
	Speeches and remarks
	Presidential papers, 1980
	Press briefings and conferences
	1977-1978
	(4 folders)
BOX 59	1980-1981
	(6 folders)
	Press pool reports, 1977-1980, undated
	Press releases, 1977-1981
BOX 60	Race, 1976-1978
	Radio deregulation, 1979
	Religious faith, 1976-1980
	Schedules, 1977
	Speeches and statements, 1977-1980
	(2 folders)
	Steel industry, 1977
	Strauss, Robert S.
	Miscellany, 1977-1980
	Notes, 1977-1978, undated
	Transition
	1976
	Miscellany
	Notes
	1980
	Miscellany
BOX 61	Notes
	Trips
	1977
	July, Southern states tour
	Dec.-Jan. 1978, Europe, Middle East, and India
	Addresses and remarks
	Miscellany
	Newspaper clippings
	Press briefings and conferences
	Press pool reports
	Press releases
	Schedules
	1979
	June, Austria
	1980

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

	June, Europe
	July, Japan
	<i>Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents</i>
	1977
BOX 62	1978
	(4 folders)
	1979
	(2 folders)
BOX 63	(3 folders)
	1980
	(3 folders)
BOX 64	(4 folders)
	<i>The White House News Summary, 1977-1980</i>
	Young, Andrew
	Miscellany, 1976-1978
	Newspaper clippings, 1977
	Notes, 1977
BOX 65	Reagan administration
	Correspondence, 1980-1981
	Miscellany, 1981, undated
	Notebooks, 1981
	Notes, 1981
	(2 folders)
	Reference files
	Assassination attempt, 1981
	Deregulation, 1981
	Economics and finance, 1980-1981
	Foreign policy, 1980-1981
	Haig, Alexander M., 1980-1981
	Lefever, Ernest, 1980-1981
	Miscellany, 1978-1981
	Newspaper clippings, 1980-1981
	(2 folders)
BOX 66	Oil controls, 1981
	Political conservatives, 1980-1981
	Presidential campaign, 1980
	Ford, Gerald R.
	Newspaper clippings
	Press briefings and conferences, 1980-1981
	(5 folders)
BOX 67	Reagan, Nancy, 1981
	Transition
	Miscellany, 1981
	Personnel appointments and staffing, 1980-1981
	(4 folders)
	<i>Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 1981</i>
	Writings

Journalism File, 1941-1981

Container

Contents

	Articles, drafts, proofs, and tearsheets, 1965-1969
	Book reviews, 1968-1976
	Editorial comments, 1970-1971
BOX 68	"The Nixon Watch," drafts, proofs, and tearsheets Sept. 1969-Oct. 1973 (7 folders)
BOX 69	Nov. 1973-July 1974 Sept. 1974-Feb. 1977 (6 folders)
BOX 70	Mar. 1977-Sept. 1979 (6 folders)
BOX 71	"White House Watch," drafts, proofs, and tearsheets Oct. 1979-Apr. 1981 (4 folders)
BOX 71-94	Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980 Correspondence, drafts, typescripts, notes and notebooks, research material, tearsheets, contracts, royalty statements, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures relating to Osborne's published and unpublished writings, with the exception of the articles written for Time, inc., and the <i>New Republic</i> noted above in the Journalism File. Organized alphabetically by type of material and books alphabetically by title and arranged chronologically therein.
BOX 71	Articles and other writings Drafts, 1947-1950, 1963-1966, undated (2 folders) Printed copies, 1948, 1966, 1972-1980 Reports for the <i>Washington Post</i> on the murder of Willie Tucker, 1965-1966
BOX 72	Research material on nuclear policy, 1968 Title file "All Voyages End," undated "Chit for Mr. Willett," 1963 "The Foreign Service and the President," 1962 "Insanity and the Law," 1959 "A Letter to Noah," undated "Quiet Warriors," 1966 "Was Nixon 'Sick of Mind'?" 1975 Book reviews Commager, Henry Steele, editor, <i>Our Day and Generation</i> , 1979 Hartmann, Robert T., <i>Palace Politics</i> , 1980 Klein, Herbert G., <i>Making It Perfectly Clear</i> , 1980
BOX 73	Books "James Forrestal," unpublished Atlantic Monthly Press, 1962-1965, 1975, undated Classified material review, 1962-1963 Correspondence General, 1964, 1970-1973, 1980, undated

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

Container

Contents

	Research, 1962-1965, undated (2 folders)
	Drafts
	Chapter one, undated
	Miscellany, undated
	Duffield, Eugene S., 1960-1964
	Forrestal, Michael, 1962-1964
	Narrative outline and summary
	First draft, undated
	Variant draft, undated
BOX 74	Notes and research material, circa 1900-circa 1968
	B-36 hearings
	Background material
	Congress
	Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.
	Day files
	Diaries
	Dillon, Read & Co. (3 folders)
	Domestic and foreign policy
BOX 75	Duffield, Eugene S.
	Dunnington, Walter
	Early years
	Beacon, N.Y. (4 folders)
	Hoyt, Morgan H. "The Duchess County Roosevelt"
	Forrestal, James, correspondence
	Miscellany
BOX 76	Printed matter <i>See also Oversize</i> (3 folders)
	"Recollections of Old Duchess" New York, N.Y.
	Eberstadt report
	Eisenhower, Dwight D.
	Estate of James Forrestal
	Family members
	Forrestal, Josephine
	Forrestal, Michael
	Forrestal, Peter
	Miscellany
BOX 77	Finances
	General file (7 folders)
BOX 78	(7 folders)
BOX 79	Government organization
	Household accounts

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

Container

Contents

	Integration
	Interviews
	Official
	(2 folders)
	Personal
	(2 folders)
BOX 80	Johnson, Lyndon B.
	Kennan, George F.
	Kennedy, John F.
	Last months
	Leslie, Frank P.
	Medical file
	Collapse and death
	Hospital
	Military associates
	Names file
	National Security Council
	Navy staff
	Newspaper clippings
	Nimitz, Chester W.
BOX 81	Obituaries
	O'Hara, John
	Oil industry
	Personal file
	Politics
	Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. <i>See also Container 84, same heading</i>
	(2 folders)
	Religion
	Reputation
	Roosevelt, Franklin D.
	Secretary of defense
	General file
BOX 82	Personal file
	Public statements
	Testimony
	Unification issue
	Secretary of the navy
	General file
	(2 folders)
	Personal file
BOX 83	Truman, Harry S.
	Shields, Paul
	Sources
	Books
	Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.
	Indexes
	Symington, Stuart

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

Container

Contents

	Undersecretary of the navy
	General file
	Morganthau, Henry, Jr.
	Personal file
	Wall Street
	Wallace, Henry A.
BOX 84	World War I
	World War II
	Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., 1962-1963 <i>See also Container 81, same heading</i>
	Rogow, Arnold A., 1962-1966
	Sheehy, Maurice S., 1962-1964
	Typists, 1972
	"Nixon Watch" book collections
	Book reviews, 1970-1975
	(2 folders)
	Contracts, 1970-1974
	Correspondence, 1969-1980, undated
	(2 folders)
	Miscellany, 1970-1975
BOX 85	Royalty statements, 1971-1980
	Tearsheets, 1974
	<i>The Old South</i>
	Book reviews, 1968
	Correspondence, 1966
	Miscellany, 1966, undated
	Newspaper clippings, 1966
	Research material
	Dorn, William J. B., 1965-1966
	Miscellany, 1965-1966, undated
	(2 folders)
	South Carolina, 1965-1966, undated
	"Vietnam," unpublished
	Bibliography, undated
	Chapter submitted to <i>Life</i> magazine, 1968
	Correspondence, 1966-1970
BOX 86	Drafts, undated
	Miscellany, 1966
	Notes, 1966
	First set
	(4 folders)
	Second set
BOX 87	Third set
	Proposal, undated
	Research material
	Cables, 1955, 1966
	Cards, 1966
	(4 folders)

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

Container

Contents

BOX 88	(6 folders)
BOX 89	(1 folder)
	Miscellany, 1965-1966
	Photocopies, 1950-1964
	(2 folders)
	Printed matter, 1964-1968
	(4 folders)
	Summary, undated
BOX 90	"White House Watch: The Carter Years," unpublished
	Correspondence, 1978-1979
	Footnotes, 1977
	Tearsheet copy, 1979
	(2 folders)
	<i>White House Watch: The Ford Years</i>
	Book reviews, 1977
	Contract, 1975-1976
	Correspondence, 1977, undated
	Drafts and production material, 1977, undated
	Ford, Gerald R.
	Interview, 1976-1977
	Message to the publishers, 1977
	Miscellany, 1977-1979, undated
	Royalty statements, 1976-1979
BOX 91	Tearsheet copy, undated
	(3 folders)
	"Young Man Alone: The Presidential Education of John F. Kennedy," unpublished
	Contract, 1961
	Correspondence, 1961-1962
	Drafts, 1961
	(2 folders)
BOX 92	Notebooks, 1961
	(3 folders)
	Notes
	Advisers and friends, 1961
	Cabinet appointments, 1961
	Chronological file
	May-Aug. 1961
	(2 folders)
BOX 93	Sept. 1961-Nov. 1963, undated
	(2 folders)
	Congress, 1961
	Defense Department, 1959-1962, undated
	National security, 1961-1962
	Staff, 1961
	State Department, 1961, undated
	Proposal, 1961
	Research material

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

Container

Contents

	Blauvelt family genealogy, 1961
	Foreign service, 1961-1962, undated
	Kater, Leonard and Florence, 1959-1961, undated
	Miscellany, 1961-1964, undated
BOX 94	Correspondence, 1950, 1965-1979
	Harold Matson Co., 1964-1975
	(2 folders)
	Letters to the editor, 1965
	Miscellany, 1967
	Proposals and story notes, 1961, 1968, undated
BOX 94-98	Miscellany, 1940-1981
	Correspondence, financial records, address and telephone books, appointment calendars, awards, cards and invitations, diary, medical records, memorabilia, notes, printed matter, and miscellaneous items.
	Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.
BOX 94	Address and telephone books, 1949, undated
	(2 folders)
	Aisenman, M. Leone, 1974-1976
	Appointment calendars
	1976
BOX 95	1977-1981
	(5 folders)
	Awards, 1974-1980
	Cards and invitations, 1957, 1973-1981, undated
	Clubs
	Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C., 1976-1981, undated
	Federal City Club, Washington, D.C., 1976-1980
	Metropolitan Club, Washington, D.C., 1951-1952, undated
BOX 96	Miscellany, 1947, 1958, 1970, 1977-1979, undated
	Death of John Osborne
	Condolences, 1981
	(3 folders)
	Eulogies, 1981
	Obituaries and tributes, 1981
	Diary, 1966
	Financial papers
	Bienstock, Nathan S.
	Correspondence, 1946-1965
	Management account statements, 1947-1958
	Miscellany, 1961, undated
	Correspondence, 1947-1958, 1969, 1975-1980
	Miscellany, 1947, 1961-1962, 1972-1979, undated
	Real estate
	Miscellany, 1950, undated
	Sag Harbor, N.Y., 1950-1960, 1970-1981, undated

Miscellany, 1940-1981

Container

Contents

BOX 97	Washington, D.C., 1951-1965, 1975-1979 Social security, 1978-1981 Statement of accounts, 1947-1948 Stocks, 1951-1953 Taxes Audit, 1974-1976 Income, 1941-1964, 1972-1974 (2 folders) General correspondence 1941-1981 (4 folders)
BOX 98	Undated Identification documents Miscellany, 1940-1941, 1950, 1972-1981 Passports, 1948-1960, 1966-1971, 1977 (2 folders) Interview, 1977 Magazine subscriptions Miscellany, 1975-1978 <i>New Yorker</i> , 1972-1981 Medical records, 1952-1956, 1971-1981 Memorabilia, notes, and other items, 1942, 1951, 1969, 1976-1981, undated Printed matter, 1971-1981, undated St. Alban's School, Washington, D.C., 1952-1953 Sanford, David, 1971-1978, undated Speaking engagements, 1947, 1969, 1975-1980, undated <i>Washington Star</i> syndicate, 1975, undated Wills, 1966, 1975
BOX OV 1	Oversize, circa 1900-1974 Oversize material consisting mostly of printed matter. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Journalism File Time, inc. Geopolitical file Philippines Map, 1944 (Container 7) <i>New Republic</i> White House file Nixon administration Reference files Trips 1972 May-June, Austria, USSR, Iran, and Poland Printed matter (Container 27)

Oversize, circa 1900-1974

Container	Contents
-----------	----------

1974

June, Middle East

Miscellany ([Container 27](#))

June-July, Belgium and USSR

Miscellany ([Container 28](#))

Ford administration

Reference files

Trips

Nov. 1974, Japan, Korea, and USSR

Miscellany ([Container 41](#))

Books and Writings File

Books

"James Forrestal," unpublished

Notes and research material, circa 1900-circa 1968

Early years

Hoyt, Morgan H.

Printed matter ([Container 76](#))

BOX CL 1

Classified, 1978

Telegrams, cables, memoranda, correspondence, and policy papers.

Arranged according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.

BOX CL 1

Journalism file

New Republic

White House file

Carter administration

Reference files

Carter, William A. ("Billy")

Libyan representation, 1978 ([Container 48](#))

Foreign policy

Africa

Review memoranda, 1978 ([Container 50](#))