Collection Summary

Title: Gideon Welles Papers
Span Dates: 1777-1911
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1820-1876)
ID No.: MSS45054
Creator: Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878
Extent: 15,070 items
Extent: 45 containers plus 1 oversize
Extent: 18.2 linear feet
Extent: 36 microfilm reels
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm78045054

Summary: Secretary of the navy and newspaper editor. Correspondence, diaries, writings, naval records, scrapbooks, and other papers relating to Welles's work as editor of the Hartford Times; his activities as a member of the Democratic Party and, later, the Republican Party in state and national politics; the role of the navy in the Civil War; and the presidential administrations of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.


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
Allyn, Joseph Pratt, 1833-1869--Correspondence.
Babcock, James F. (James Fairchild), 1809-1874--Correspondence.
Blair, Montgomery, 1813-1883--Correspondence.
Burr, Alfred Edmund, 1815-1900--Correspondence.
Chase, Salmon P. (Salmon Portland), 1808-1873--Correspondence.
Cleveland, Edward Spicer--Correspondence.
Colfax, Schuyler, 1823-1885--Correspondence.
Cox, Samuel Sullivan, 1824-1889--Correspondence.
Dahlgren, John Adolphus Bernard, 1809-1870--Correspondence.
Dana, Charles A. (Charles Anderson), 1819-1897--Correspondence.
Day, Calvin--Correspondence.
Dix, John A. (John Adams), 1798-1879--Correspondence.
Dixon, James, 1814-1873--Correspondence.
Eads, James Buchanan, 1820-1887--Correspondence.
Elliott, Henry H.--Correspondence.
Faxon, William, 1822-1883--Correspondence.
Ferry, Orris S. (Orris Sanford), 1823-1875--Correspondence.
Field, David Dudley, 1805-1894--Correspondence.
Foote, Andrew H. (Andrew Hull), 1806-1863--Correspondence.
Forbes, John Murray, 1813-1898--Correspondence.
Fox, Gustavus Vasa, 1821-1883--Correspondence.
Hale, R. C. (Reuben Charles), 1812-1863--Correspondence.
Hawley, Joseph R. (Joseph Roswell), 1826-1905--Correspondence.
Howard, Mark, 1817-1887--Correspondence.
Jackson, Amasa--Correspondence.
Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845.
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826.
Jenkins, Thornton A. (Thornton Alexander), 1811-1893--Correspondence.
Johnson, Andrew, 1808-1875.
Johnson, Richard M. (Richard Mentor), 1780-1850--Correspondence.
Jouett, James E. (James Edward), 1828-1902--Correspondence.
Judson, Andrew T. (Andrew Thompson), 1784-1853--Correspondence.
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865.
Mitchell, Henry, 1830-1902--Correspondence.
Morgan, Edwin D. (Edwin Denison), 1811-1883--Correspondence.
Niles, John M. (John Milton), 1787-1856--Correspondence.
Niles, Nathaniel, Jr., 1791-1869--Correspondence.
Parker, Foxhall A. (Foxhall Alexander), 1821-1879--Correspondence.
Patton, William, 1798-1879--Correspondence.
Paulding, Hiram, 1797-1878--Correspondence.
Pease, J. J. R.--Correspondence.
Pettit, William V.--Correspondence.
Pratt, James J.--Correspondence.
Smith, Albert, 1805-1870--Correspondence.
Smith, Joseph, 1790-1877--Correspondence.
Southworth, Sylvester S.--Correspondence.
Tompkins, Daniel D., 1774-1825--Correspondence.
Warner, Charles Dudley, 1829-1900--Correspondence.
Weed, Thurlow, 1797-1882--Correspondence.
Welles, Edgar Thaddeus, 1843-1914, Diary of Gideon Welles, secretary of the navy under Lincoln and Johnson. 1911.
Welles, Edgar Thaddeus, 1843-1914--Correspondence.
Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878.
Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878. Lincoln and Seward; remarks upon the memorial address of Chas. Francis Adams, on the late Wm. H. Seward, with incidents and comments illustrative of the measures and policy of the administration of Abraham Lincoln, and views as to the relative positions of the late President and Secretary of State. 1874.
Welles, Mary Hale, 1817-1895--Correspondence.
Wilkes, Charles, 1798-1877--Correspondence.

Organizations
Democratic Party (U.S.)
Republican Party (U.S. : 1854- )
United States. Navy Department.
United States. Navy--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
United States. Navy.

Subjects
American newspapers--Connecticut.
Federal government--United States.
Natural history.
Political parties--United States.
Presidential candidates--United States.
Press and politics--United States.
Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)
States' rights (American politics)

Places
Hartford (Conn.)--History.
Slavery--United States.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
United States--Politics and government--1861-1865.
United States--Politics and government--1865-1869.
United States--Politics and government--19th century.

**Titles**

*Gideon Welles Papers at the Library of Congress*

*Hartford times.*

**Occupations**

Cabinet officers.
Newspaper editors.

**Provenance**

The papers of Gideon Welles, secretary of the navy and newspaper editor, were deposited in the Library of Congress in several installments from 1911 to 1914 by Welles's son, Edgar Thaddeus Welles. Formal conveyance of the papers to the Library was recorded in 1941. Another gift from the Welles family was made in 1915 by Alice Welles, Gideon Welles's granddaughter. Other items were acquired through various gifts and purchases, 1906-2009. The research papers of Henry B. Learned relating to Welles were given to the Library by Mrs. Learned in 1931.

**Processing History**

The papers were arranged and bound in volumes in 1918, and an addition was appended in 1979. In 1963, a partial index for approximately four thousand items of correspondence in the collection was completed by John de Porry of the Manuscript Division. In 1987 the volumes were disbound and the papers reorganized and arranged for microfilming. Additions to the papers were made in 1997 and 2010.

**Copyright Status**

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

**Access and Restrictions**

The papers of Gideon Welles 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.

**Microfilm**

A microfilm edition of the first eight series of these papers is available on thirty-six reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

**Online Content**

The papers of Gideon Welles are available on the Library of Congress Web site at [http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000078](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000078).
Preferred Citation
Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Gideon Welles Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date | Event
--- | ---
1802, July 1 | Born, Glastonbury, Conn.
1819-1821 | Attended Episcopal Academy, Cheshire, Conn.
1823-1825 | Attended the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy (Norwich University), Norwich, Vt.
1826-1836 | Editor and part owner, Hartford Times
1827-1835 | Member, Connecticut House of Representatives
1834 | Unsuccessful Democratic Party candidate for Congress
1835 | Married Mary Jane Hale
1835 | Elected Connecticut state comptroller of public accounts
1836-1841 | Appointed postmaster of Hartford, Conn.
1842-1843 | Elected Connecticut state comptroller of public accounts
1846-1849 | Chief, Bureau of Provisions and Clothing, U.S. Navy
1850 | Unsuccessful Democratic Party candidate for U.S. Senate
1854 | Resigned from the Democratic party
1856 | Unsuccessful Republican Party candidate for governor of Connecticut
1856-1864 | Founder, Republican Party newspaper, Hartford Evening Press
1860 | Member, Republican National Committee and National Executive Committee
1861-1869 | Secretary of the navy
1868 | Rejoined the Democratic Party
1869-1877 | Published historical articles in Galaxy
1872 | Resigned from the Democratic Party to become a Liberal Republican
1874 | Published Lincoln and Seward. New York: Sheldon & Co.
1878, Feb. 11 | Died, Hartford, Conn.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Gideon Welles (1802-1878) span the period 1777-1911, with the core of the material concentrated in the years 1820-1878. The papers include diaries, correspondence, writings, naval records, and scrapbooks reflecting all phases of Welles's career as a newspaper editor, politician, and naval administrator. Welles was a gifted diarist, correspondent, and essayist, and his papers are a rich source of primary materials for the study of the political and social history of the United States in the nineteenth century.

The Diaries series includes a fifteen-volume diary, 1862-1869, written when Welles was secretary of the navy, and a three-volume retrospective narrative, 1861-1869, plus notes and journal entries for earlier periods in his life. Welles's Civil War diaries were excerpted and edited by his son, Edgar Thaddeus Welles, for publication in a three-volume set in 1911, drafts of which are also included in the series.

Documentation for Welles's political, literary, and personal endeavors is distributed throughout the collection. Welles's administration of the navy is most substantially documented in his diaries and in the series of official letterbooks. His diaries contain observations about cabinet members during the administrations of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.
The Letterbooks record the day-to-day operational and administrative policies enacted by the Navy Department during the Civil War including those related to the establishment of blockades, ship construction and naval ordnance, the outfitting of ironclads, naval engagements and tactical maneuvers, and the pursuit and capture of Confederate cruisers and subsequent rewarding of prize money.

In addition to the Diaries and Letterbooks, the papers also include a series of Navy Department records collected by Edgar Thaddeus Welles while he was employed as chief clerk of the Navy Department, 1865-1869. The records are mostly concerned with routine administrative detail, especially solicitations for positions and appointments of clerks, midshipmen, surgeon's mates, and other minor officials.

The Diaries also document Welles's literary ambitions, evident even in his youth. He attended Cheshire Episcopal Academy and the newly founded Literary, Scientific and Military Academy in Norwich, Vermont. While enrolled at the latter school, Welles drafted one of his earliest writings entitled "Journal of an Excursion to the White Mountains," an account of a field trip undertaken by Welles and fifty other students in 1824 under the leadership of Alden Partridge, headmaster and founder of the academy. The draft of this journal is included in his diary and another copy is located in the Speeches and Writings file. Exclusive of his Civil War entries, the remainder of the diaries include occasional drafts of prose and poetry, meditations in essay form, drafts of letters, travel descriptions, and entries recording Welles's keen interest in observing the political and natural world around him. The correspondence series also contains material relating to Welles's school years and letters exchanged with family members, friends, and schoolmates from Cheshire and Norwich.

Welles was a lifelong adherent to Jeffersonian principles and, until his departure in 1854, an active participant in the Democratic party. As a writer and politician, he helped organize and promote Jacksonian democracy in his home state of Connecticut through the editorial policy of his newspaper, the Hartford Times, and through his involvement as a Democratic party spokesman and state legislator. The Correspondence series is composed primarily of political correspondence documenting Welles's commitment to the principles of Jefferson and Jackson on both statewide and national levels first as a member of the Democratic party and then in the newly-established Republican party. Welles's correspondence with Democratic party leaders and functionaries concerns the party from Jackson's administration to that of Franklin Pierce. Letters in the Miscellany series written to Welles by John M. Niles, senator from Connecticut, 1835-1839 and 1843-1849, and postmaster general, 1840-1841, provide detailed accounts of personalities and political issues.

The Correspondence series further chronicles Welles's withdrawal from the Democratic party in 1854 over the issue of slavery and the development of the Republican party. Other correspondence dates from his term of office as secretary of the navy throughout the Civil War and the early years of Reconstruction.

Observations of a more personal or family nature are interwoven throughout the correspondence. Welles's letters to his cousin, R. C. Hale, 1833-1835, were written while he was courting Hale's sister and Welles's future wife, Mary Hale.

As an editorial writer and journalist, Welles contributed many articles on local and national politics to the Hartford Times and, after his retirement in 1869, to the Galaxy. The Speeches and Writings series contains copies of many of these articles, and material in the Correspondence series reveals interaction between newspaper policy and politics in nineteenth century America.

A Miscellany series includes correspondence files for Welles's longtime political ally and personal friend, John M. Niles, as well as for Welles's wife Mary and son, Edgar Thaddeus. The Henry B. Learned series contains research material relating to Welles compiled in the course of Learned's research on the executive branch of government.


The Additions include correspondence to and from Welles, 1822-1877, letters relating to Welles, and undated drafts of his writings covering a wide range of personal, business, and political subjects, especially naval matters, the Civil War,
and Reconstruction policies. In Addition I, the letters and writings concern political parties and presidential candidates and questions on the limits and uses of federal and state powers. A few items date from Welles's youth in Connecticut or concern his early interest in local politics. Correspondents include Schuyler Colfax, Samuel Sullivan Cox, Charles A. Dana, John A. Dix, William Faxon, Orris S. Ferry, David Dudley Field (1805-1894), Gustavus Vasa Fox, Foxhall A. Parker, Joseph Smith, Charles Dudley Warner, and Thurlow Weed. Addition II includes a draft of his 1874 book Lincoln and Seward as well as notes and draft writings for a series of articles for Galaxy magazine that formed the basis of the 1874 book. Addition II also contains a letter by Welles to Orville H. Browning relating to William Henry Seward and to a history being written by Thurlow Weed. The Additions have not been microfilmed or indexed.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in ten series:

- **Diaries, 1824-1869**
- **Letterbooks, 1862-1869**
- **Correspondence, 1820-1878**
- **Records of the Navy Department, 1805-1878**
- **Speeches and Writings, 1822-1878**
- **Scrapbooks, 1834-1900**
- **Miscellany, 1777-1911**
- **Henry B. Learned Papers, 1899-1911**
- **Additions, 1822-1877**
- **Oversize, 1842-1860**
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<td>Diaries and transcripts, diary notes, and journal entries by Welles including a three-volume retrospective narrative, 1861-1867, and fifteen-volume diary, 1862-1869, written when he was secretary of the navy. A three-volume printed version, as well as diary entries by Welles's son, Edgar Thaddeus, are also included. Items are arranged chronologically.</td>
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<td>BOX 7-9</td>
<td><strong>Letterbooks, 1862-1869</strong></td>
<td>Letterbooks from the office of the secretary of the navy containing copies of mostly outgoing letters and memoranda of Gideon Welles and other naval officials. Arranged chronologically. Alphabetical name indexes with accompanying subject abstracts are located at the beginning of each volume.</td>
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<td>REEL 5-8</td>
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<td>BOX 10-27</td>
<td><strong>Correspondence, 1820-1878</strong></td>
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<td>BOX 27-29</td>
<td><strong>Records of the Navy Department, 1805-1878</strong></td>
<td>Letters of application and recommendation for appointed commissions, memoranda, documents, and reports from the office of the secretary of the navy. Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<td>BOX 30-35</td>
<td><strong>Speeches and Writings, 1822-1878</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Scrapbooks, 1834-1900</strong></td>
<td>Newspaper clippings and copies of published articles by Welles. Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<td>BOX 39-41</td>
<td><strong>Miscellany, 1777-1911</strong></td>
<td>Correspondence, financial and legal documents, printed matter, cards and invitations, collected speeches and writings by others, and notes. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</td>
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<td><strong>Henry B. Learned Papers, 1899-1911</strong></td>
<td>Research material compiled by Learned relating to Welles including transcripts of articles and correspondence written by Welles, research notes, other correspondence, printed matter, and writings. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</td>
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<td>BOX 44-45 not filmed</td>
<td><strong>Additions, 1822-1877</strong></td>
<td>Correspondence and drafts of writings. Arranged in two additions by date of processing and therein by type of material or topic.</td>
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**Oversize, 1842-1860**

Scrapbook, 1842-1860

Arranged and described according to the series and container from which it was removed.
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Diaries and transcripts, diary notes, and journal entries by Welles including a three-volume retrospective narrative, 1861-1867, and fifteen-volume diary, 1862-1869, written when he was secretary of the navy. A three-volume printed version, as well as diary entries by Welles's son, Edgar Thaddeus, are also included.
Items are arranged chronologically. |
| BOX 1 REEL 1 | Diaries and narratives
- 1824 , "Journal of an Excursion," original document and partial transcription
  [Digital content available](#)
- 1827, May-Aug. , original document and partial transcription
  [Digital content available](#)
- 1839-1858 , original document and partial transcription
  [Digital content available](#)
- 1843, Oct. 16-19 , original document and transcription
  [Digital content available](#)
- 1853 , original document and transcription
  [Digital content available](#)
- 1855-1856
  - Vol. 1, 1855, Apr.-1856, Jan. 3 , original document (pages blank throughout) and transcription
    [Digital content available](#) |
| BOX 2 REEL 1 | Vol. 2, 1856, Jan. 7-Mar. 1 , original document, no transcription
[Digital content available](#) |
| BOX 2 REEL 2 | 1861-1867 , retrospective narrative
- Vol. 1
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- 1862-1869 , diaries
  - 1862, July 13-Oct. 25
    [Digital content available](#) |
| BOX 3 REEL 2 | 1862, Nov. 1-1863, Apr. 21
[Digital content available](#) |
| BOX 3 REEL 2 | 1863, Apr. 22-July 27
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| BOX 3 REEL 3 | 1863, July 27-1864, Jan. 30
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| BOX 3 REEL 3 | 1864, Feb. 1-July 22
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### Diaries, 1824-1869

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| BOX 4 REEL 3 | 1864, Dec. 15-1865, May 2  
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| BOX 4 REEL 3 | 1865, May 8-Dec. 30  
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| BOX 4 REEL 3 | 1866, Jan. 1-June 15  
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| BOX 5 REEL 4 | 1866, June 18-Dec. 21  
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| BOX 5 REEL 4 | 1866, Dec. 24-1867, June 20  
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| BOX 5 REEL 4 | 1867, June 20-Dec. 20  
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| BOX 5 REEL 4 | 1867, Dec. 24-1868, May 29  
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| BOX 6 REEL 4 | 1868, June 1-1869, Jan. 18  
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| BOX 6 REEL 5 | 1869, Jan. 18-June 6  
Digital content available |
|            | circa 1910, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, handwritten and typescript drafts |
|            | "Diary of Edgar T. Welles," 1862, Sept. 3-9  
Digital content available |

### Letterbooks, 1862-1869

Letterbooks from the office of the secretary of the navy containing copies of mostly outgoing letters and memoranda of Gideon Welles and other naval officials. Arranged chronologically. Alphabetical name indexes with accompanying subject abstracts are located at the beginning of each volume.

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| BOX 7 REEL 6 | 1863, Feb. 2-May 22  
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| BOX 8 REEL 6 | 1863, May 23-Sept. 30  
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| BOX 8 REEL 6 | 1863, July 25-1864, Mar. 17  
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| BOX 8 REEL 7 | 1864, Mar. 17-June 27  
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| BOX 14 REEL 13 | 1838, Jan.-Apr.  
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| BOX 15 REEL 13 | 1839, Feb.-1840, Feb.  
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| BOX 15 REEL 14 | 1840, Mar.-May  
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<td>&quot;Acquisition of Territory&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Administration of Abraham Lincoln,&quot; 1877</td>
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<td>Article on the fugitive slave law</td>
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<td>&quot;Benjamin F. Butler and Negro Suffrage&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;The Capture and Release of Mason and Slidell,&quot; 1873</td>
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"Censure of the Fillmore Administration for Publishing Spanish Correspondence about Cuba"

"Col. Benton," 1858

"Comments on Mayor Wood's Proposition to Feed the Poor of New York Out of City Funds"

"Comments on the Convention System for Nominating Candidates for President"

"Comments on the Proposed Gift of a Carriage by Citizens of Boston to President-elect Pierce," 1853

"Communication in Answer to Article in Litchfield Republican Accusing Me of Founding a Sectional Party"

"Condemnation of National Conventions"

"Condition of the Democratic Element of the Republican Party in Connecticut"

"Connecticut," nos. 1-15, 1856

"Connecticut Democratic State Convention Resolutions Censured"

"Connecticut General Assembly Session Terminated"

"The Connecticut Liquor Law"

"Connecticut Politics: Controversy between Postmaster and Squire Warner"

"Constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law," 1855

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"Controversy between New York Democrats"

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"Criticism on a Chapter of Thurlow Weed's Autobiography," July 1870

"A Day's Ramble in Search of an Old Soldier (John Penlow)"

"Declining to Be Candidate for Governor in 1837"
"Democratic and Whig Presidential Candidates"

"Democratic Party"

"Democratic Party in Power"

"Democrats and Whigs Since 1850"

"Denunciation of the General Government for Interfering in State Elections"

"Election of 1848"

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"The Fillmore Administration a Total Failure," 1851

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"Fort Pickens," 1871

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"General Pierce, General Scott and the Roman Catholics"

"General Principles of Taxation"

"German Republicans"

"The Glittering Generalities of the Republicans," 1865

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"The History of Emancipation," 1872

"Hubbard's [Richard D.] Nomination for Congress"

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"Kansas: The Bogus Legislature"

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"Lincoln's Triumph in 1864," 1878

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"Memo, Fremont Campaign"

"The Missouri Compromise"

"Mr. Wheeler's Slaves and Their Right to Freedom in Pennsylvania"

"Mormonism"

"National Affairs"

"National Affairs: Position of Parties, etc."

"National Convention at Cincinnati"

"National Conventions and the Demand for the Reorganization of the Democratic Party"

"National Democracy--State Rights"

"National Politics: Old Parties and Their Issues Are Dead"

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"New York City Politics: State and Federal Struggle for Control"
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"Regret at Defeat for Re-election to Senate of Thomas H. Benton"
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"Remarks on Political Affairs," 1858
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"Reminiscence of a Quiet Place in Connecticut"
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"Review of Political History of U.S. and Presidential Contests"
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"Review of William H. Seward's Speech at Rochester"
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<td>BOX OV 1 REEL 36</td>
<td><strong>Oversize, 1842-1860</strong></td>
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<td>Scrapbook, 1842-1860</td>
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<td>Arranged and described according to the series and container from which it was removed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX OV 1 REEL 36</td>
<td><strong>Scrapbooks</strong></td>
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<td>Vol. 2, 1842, Feb.-1860, June (Container 35)</td>
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