

James K. Polk Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2022

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm73036509>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009178>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

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Collection Summary

Title: James K. Polk Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1775-1891

Bulk Dates: 1830-1849

ID No.: MSS36509

Creator: Polk, James K. (James Knox), 1795-1849

Extent: 20,500 items

Extent: 155 containers plus 20 oversize

Extent: 39 linear feet

Extent: 67 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mmm73036509>

Summary: United States president, Speaker of the House and representative from Tennessee, and governor of Tennessee. General correspondence, presidential letterbooks, diaries, account and memorandum books, drafts and copies of speeches and messages, family papers, financial and legal papers, and printed matter relating primarily to Polk's political career in Tennessee and on the national level.

Online Content: The papers of James K. Polk are available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000058>. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the online edition as available.*

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

Anderson, Alexander, 1794-1869--Correspondence.

Armstrong, Robert, 1792-1854--Correspondence.

Bancroft, George, 1800-1891--Correspondence.

Brown, Aaron V. (Aaron Venable), 1795-1859--Correspondence.

Buchanan, James, 1791-1868--Correspondence.

Burke, Edmund, 1809-1882--Correspondence.

Cass, Lewis, 1782-1866--Correspondence.

Catron, John, approximately 1786-1865--Correspondence.

Claiborne, J. F. H. (John Francis Hamtramck), 1809-1884--Correspondence.

Dallas, George Mifflin, 1792-1864--Correspondence.

Donelson, Andrew Jackson, 1799-1871--Correspondence.

Fairfield, John, 1797-1847--Correspondence.

Gillet, Ransom H. (Ransom Hooker), 1800-1876--Correspondence.

Graham, Daniel, 1789-1869--Correspondence.

Grundy, Felix, 1777-1840--Correspondence.

Harris, Jeremiah George, 1809- --Correspondence.

Haywood, William H. (William Henry), 1801-1852--Correspondence.

Horn, Henry, 1786-1862--Correspondence.

Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845--Correspondence.

Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845.

Johnson, Cave, 1793-1866--Correspondence.

Kane, John K. (John Kintzing), 1795-1858--Correspondence.

Kendall, Amos, 1789-1869--Correspondence.

Laughlin, Samuel H. (Samuel Hervey), 1796-1850--Correspondence.

Marcy, William L. (William Learned), 1786-1857--Correspondence.

Mason, John Y. (John Young), 1799-1859--Correspondence.

McLane, Louis, 1786-1857--Correspondence.
McNeal, Ezekiel Polk, 1804-1886--Correspondence.
Nicholson, A. O. P. (Alfred Osborn Pope), 1808-1876--Correspondence.
Pillow, Gideon Johnson, 1806-1878--Correspondence.
Polk family.
Polk, James K. (James Knox), 1795-1849.
Polk, Sarah Childress, 1803-1891. Sarah Childress Polk papers.
Ramsey, J. G. M. (James Gettys McGready), 1797-1884--Correspondence.
Ritchie, Thomas, 1778-1854--Correspondence.
Sutherland, Joel B. (Joel Barlow), 1792-1861--Correspondence.
Turney, H. L. (Hopkins Lacey), 1797-1857--Correspondence.
Van Buren, Martin, 1782-1862--Correspondence.
Walker, Robert J. (Robert John), 1801-1869--Correspondence.
Watterson, Harvey Magee, 1811-1891--Correspondence.
Woodbury, Levi, 1789-1851--Correspondence.
Wright, Silas, 1795-1847--Correspondence.
Yell, Archibald, 1797 or 1799-1847--Correspondence.

Organizations

Bank of the United States (1816-1836)

Subjects

Banks and banking--United States.
Elections--United States--19th century.
Mexican War, 1846-1848.
Nullification (States' rights)
Oregon question.
Patronage, Political--United States.
Plantations--Tennessee.
Public works--United States--19th century.
Slavery--United States.
Tariff--United States.

Places

California--History--1846-1850.
New Mexico--History--1848-
Tennessee--Politics and government--To 1865.
Texas--Annexation to the United States.
United States--Politics and government--1783-1865.
United States--Territorial expansion.

Titles

James K. Polk Papers at the Library of Congress

Occupations

Governors--Tennessee.
Presidents--United States.
Representatives, U.S. Congress--Tennessee.
Speakers of the House, U.S. Congress.

Acquisition Information

The papers of James K. Polk, United States president, Speaker of the House and representative from Tennessee, and governor of Tennessee, were received through gift and purchase by the Library of Congress during the years 1903-2019.

Processing History

The papers of James K. Polk were arranged, indexed, and microfilmed in 1969. The additions of 1973 and 1977 were combined and are described as the 1977 Addition. The finding aid to the additions was revised and expanded in 1996. In 2009 the finding aid was expanded by including description of the main collection from the published index. A small addition was incorporated and the finding aid was revised in 2014. Another small addition was processed and the finding aid was revised in 2021.

Additional Guides

The microfilm edition of these papers (not including additions) is indexed in the *Index to the James K. Polk Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1969), prepared as part of the President's Papers Index Series. The index is available online at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/gdclccn.unk83053047>.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of James K. Polk 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 part of these papers is available on sixty-seven 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 James K. Polk are available on the Library of Congress website at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000058>. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the online edition as available.*

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, James K. Polk Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1795, Nov. 2	Born, Mecklenburg County, N.C.
1806	Family moved to what is now Maury County, Tenn.
1818	Graduated, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.
1819-1823	Chief clerk, Tennessee senate
1820	Began practicing law, Columbia, Tenn.

1824	Married Sarah Childress (died 1891)
1825-1839	Representative, sixth district of Tennessee, U.S. House of Representatives
1835-1839	Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
1839-1841	Governor of Tennessee
1845-1849	President of the United States
1849, June 15	Died, Nashville, Tenn.

History of the Collection

[From *Index to the James K. Polk Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1969), pp. v-xiv]

The papers of James K. Polk (1795-1849), 11th President of the United States (1845-49), have been described by his major biographer as a "magnificent collection." [1] The collection is, in fact, one of the most remarkably complete 19th-century Presidential collections in the Library of Congress. [2] The important steps in Polk's public career, from his early days in the House of Representatives through the close of his Presidency, are reflected in one way or another in his general correspondence, bound in 132 volumes. His diaries, 25 nearly uniform volumes, relate almost entirely to the Presidential period and have become readily accessible through their publication by the Chicago Historical Society and through the selections edited by Allan Nevins. [3] Five letterpress copybooks kept by Polk from October 1845 to May 1849, containing copies of approximately 600 of his outgoing holograph letters, are as significant in their own way as the diaries. Besides correspondence, diaries, and letterbooks, the papers in the Library include drafts of speeches and messages, financial records, memorandum books, legal documents, and other miscellaneous items.

In spite of the survival of these numerous and historically valuable materials, James K. Polk has not been one of our best known Presidents. [4] Born in North Carolina, he moved while still a boy to Tennessee. After graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1818 he returned to Tennessee to read law and establish a practice. From 1823 to 1825 he served as a State legislator, and in 1824 he married Sarah Childress of Murfreesboro. Entering the U.S. House of Representatives in 1825, Polk remained there for the next 14 years, serving as Speaker during his last two terms. In 1839 he was elected Governor of Tennessee but was unsuccessful in canvasses for that office in 1841 and 1843. He was nominated for the Presidency on the ninth ballot at the Democratic National Convention held in Baltimore in May 1844. While the cry of the Whigs in the ensuing Presidential campaign of 1844, "Who is James K. Polk?" was not entirely just then and certainly cannot be echoed today, until recently few biographers had turned their attention to Polk, and none had penetrated to the personality concealed behind his "disciplined public facade." [5] Now, however, the multivolume biography by Sellers is approaching completion, Polk's correspondence—letters sent and received—is being prepared for publication, [6] and the corpus of his papers, as accumulated by him during his lifetime and now preserved in the Library of Congress, has been microfilmed and indexed.

Polk apparently did not begin the systematic preservation of his papers until 1825 or thereabouts. The pre-1825 papers, before his election to Congress, occupy less than two bound volumes, and although some correspondence is included, the papers consist largely of accounts, legal documents, copies of 18th-century documents, papers of Samuel Polk and other members of the family, and papers relating to land transactions. For the remainder of the 1820s the Polk Papers are rather evenly divided between financial and legal manuscripts, notes and memoranda, and correspondence. In the 1830s, as Polk's political career advanced and his influence grew, his papers accumulated in increasing numbers. Correspondence, principally letters received, predominates in this period and makes up the bulk of the collection thereafter.

Polk showed great care and diligence in managing his correspondence. He generally endorsed the letters he received, sometimes merely with the name of the writer but frequently with a note about content. He was also cautious in dispatching his mail. While campaigning for reelection as Governor of Tennessee in 1841, for example, he wrote a political letter to a Nashville confidant, Gen. Robert Armstrong, but consigned the letter under cover to Sarah Polk, explaining, "my handwriting is known & I have reason to think my correspondence is closely watched." [7] On another occasion he enlisted the services of Supreme Court Justice and Tennessean John Catron in delivering "in person" a letter to Governor Aaron Venable Brown. [8] Polk even had advice for Andrew Jackson in these matters. Once, after seeing in the *Nashville Banner* a letter from Jackson to Gen. Jean B. Plauch, of New Orleans, "manifestly not written for publication," he suggested that Jackson mark such letters "Private." [9] Somewhat later he pointed out that there were times when a letter should be "addressed in a different hand" than Jackson's and sent off "without his frank," enclosed to a reliable friend with a request

that it be given "a speedy conveyance." [10] Polk's own letters were commonly marked "Private," "Private & unofficial," "Private & confidential," "Unofficial & Private," or "Confidential." [11]

Levi Woodbury, a contemporary and a fellow Jacksonian, recalled Polk's "power of concentrating all the faculties on the business in hand . . ." In exercising this power, the "patient inquiry, the wide research, the midnight lamp were all put in requisition." [12] This conscientiousness of Polk's, which amounted to an almost total absorption in his work, was evident even in the days before the Presidency, and when Sarah, who interested herself in every phase of her husband's career, would remonstrate against his constant toil, as likely as not she would be put to work. [13] The regime followed during the Presidential years was singularly arduous. In "The Long, Hot Summer" of 1845 the President has been pictured as rising at daybreak, working throughout the greater part of the day, and often continuing at his desk long into the night. Hundreds of letters received each week had to be read personally, and before anything was signed it received the closest scrutiny. [14] Polk frequently commented in his diary on these burdens of office, and toward the end of his administration reflected on the public's lack of understanding of "the constant accumulation of business requiring the President's attention." His own response to the challenge was certainly unusual:

No President who performs his duty faithfully and conscientiously can have any leisure. If he entrusts the details and smaller matters to subordinates constant errors will occur. I prefer to supervise the whole operations of the Government myself rather than entrust the public business to subordinates, and this makes my duties very great. [15]

A complaint that Polk made to Vice President George M. Dallas in August 1845, concerning the harassments of office, points to an interesting deficiency in the papers of the early Presidential period. During the first months of his term Polk was so immersed in work that he "had scarcely a moment to devote to correspondence" with his friends, and he had not, indeed, "written a dozen letters in that number of weeks and none except such as were indispensable." [16] The Polk Papers bear this out, for there are fewer than 30 letters in the collection written by him between March and mid-August 1845. Those that are preserved consist of fair copies and retained drafts in Polk's hand, fair copies in the hand of a secretary, and an occasional original of the letter sent. In mid-August, however, Polk began making letterpress copies of his increasingly numerous outgoing correspondence and thenceforward systematically maintained this form of record to within a few weeks of his death. [17]

About the same time that he began his letterbooks, Polk also started keeping a diary. It is somewhat surprising that he had never kept one at any previous time in his career, and he came to regret this oversight. [18] The reasons for starting the diary on August 26, 1845, are explained in the entry for the first anniversary.

Twelve months ago this day, a very important conversation took place in Cabinet between myself and Mr. Buchanan on the Oregon question. This conversation was of so important a character, that I deemed it proper on the same evening to reduce the substance of it to writing for the purpose of retaining it more distinctly in my memory. This I did on separate sheets. It was this circumstance which first suggested to me the idea, if not the necessity, of keeping a journal or diary of events and transactions which might occur during my Presidency. I resolved to do so & accordingly procured a blank book for that purpose on the next day, in which I have every day since noted whatever occurred that I deemed of interest. . . . The statement of the events which occur[r]ed on the 26th of Aug't, 1845, were never transcribed into the bound book, but will be found on the separate sheets on which they were written preceding Book No. 1. [19]

Polk's faithful adherence to this resolve to record the events of his administration, in spite of many besetting circumstances, has been called "little short of marvelous" by the editor of his diary. [20] The 25 duodecimo manuscript volumes, containing just under 4,000 pages, are impressive documents in themselves and, as Allan Nevins has indicated, rank with those of John Quincy Adams and Rutherford B. Hayes as the only full diaries ever kept by an occupant of the White House. [21]

A gap in the diaries occurs for the period from June 22 to July 7, 1847, the time of the Presidential tour "through the Northern and Eastern States." Polk made token entries during most of the trip but reserved 40 pages on which he intended to copy an extended journal of the tour kept by John Appleton of Maine, chief clerk of the Navy Department and a member of the Presidential party. Unfortunately this was never done, and the present whereabouts of the Appleton journal is not known. [22]

In addition to an occasional intriguing gap in Polk's diary and the lack of letterpress copies of early Presidential correspondence, many letters addressed to Polk as President are not now included in his papers. It is likely that most of these were referred elsewhere for appropriate action. Many hundreds, at least, are known to be in the Department of State file of "Applications and Recommendations for Office," now in the National Archives. [23]

Some indication of the dispersal of letters addressed to President Polk is provided by a two-volume manuscript "Index" kept by secretaries and White House clerks from 1844 to 1849. [24] A full collation of this index with the Polk Papers has not been made, but sufficient checking has been done to identify some interesting lacunae. Letters from Thomas Hart Benton may be used to illustrate this: In the index there are 17 items listed as communications addressed by Benton to Polk over the period May-August 1846. The remarks on content reveal something of their significance: "urges me to veto Spoliation Bill;" "gives his construction of the British proposal to settle the Oregon question, their acceptance of which was this day advised by the Senate;" "his plan of a campaign in Mexico." But in the Polk Papers for the entire period May-August 1846 there are only two Benton items, a docketed envelope and a 16-page memorandum concerning the Mexican War. [25] Nevertheless, the papers of the Presidential period are voluminous, and many of the items listed in the contemporary index are in the collection, filed under the date the letter was written and prominently bearing the appropriate file number. [26]

In the winter of 1848-49, as his administration drew to a close, Polk made preparations for his return to Tennessee. He had purchased in Nashville the old Felix Grundy house, now to be called Polk Place, and was having it radically altered to meet his and Sarah's specifications. [27] Boxes and packages began to be forwarded from Washington, Baltimore, and New York, and early in January an important shipment that included "Books, Pictures & [other articles] of value" was dispatched to Nashville via Wheeling. [28] Somewhere outside Wheeling, "in passing the mountains," the wagon carrying this shipment was upset and some of the boxes were broken. [29]

The news of this mishap proved very disquieting to Polk. He felt that the accident "was most unfortunate" and had been "the result of culpable negligence." His only regard was for his papers which had been put up "rather loosely" in Washington and were distributed in several of the boxes, "supposing that they would be perfectly safe" until he opened them himself at Nashville. The papers represented an accumulation of his four years in office, and some were of "a confidential character" and to him "most valuable." His greatest solicitude, therefore, was for their safety, and he was particularly anxious to know whether or not any of the manuscripts had been exposed to view, either along the route or in Wheeling, if they had fallen into "honourable hands," and if they had now been safely repacked. [30] Assurances were quickly forthcoming. Two boxes containing books and papers had arrived in Wheeling "split and injured," but showed no evidence of "having been opened or that any of the contents had been touched or that any of them could have well escaped from the boxes." [31] Everything was made secure by the shippers for the continuation of the journey, and Polk was more at ease, feeling that the accident may have been unavoidable. [32]

The press of public business remained so intense right up to the close of his administration that Polk was obliged to abandon his diary, not resuming it until he reached Tennessee. [33] Finally, on March 6, with Zachary Taylor duly inaugurated, the Polks set out for Tennessee. After a long, circuitous, and exhausting journey, during much of which the ex-President was weakened by illness, they took up residence at Polk Place on April 24. [34]

For days thereafter he was busily engaged in arranging and otherwise working with his papers and books. [35] But his efforts were cut short. His health, which had been undermined by years of overwork, and particularly by his labors as President, quickly gave way before an onslaught of virulent cholera, and he died on June 15, 1849, in his 54th year. [36]

Shortly before leaving the White House, Polk, while pondering on "the near approach of the termination of [his] Presidential term" and on "the uncertainty of life" as well, wrote out and signed his "last Will and Testament." A written will was already among his valuable papers in Tennessee, but since his situation had changed materially he had "deemed it proper to make another." [37] Although there is no mention of his papers in the will, one portion devised and bequeathed to Sarah all the balance of his estate not otherwise disposed of, including "personal property of any description" [38]

William L. Marcy, Polk's Secretary of War, registered in his diary his sense of shock at the suddenness of Polk's death: "Can it be possible. Indeed it is. What shadows we are—what shadows we pursue." [39] Polk had written to him as recently as May 9, noting that the acts of their administration were now "a part of the public history," and suggesting the "great importance,—of having presented to the country, a truthful and reliable history of the remarkable events—which were crowded into my Presidential term, and especially of the war" [40] George Bancroft, he felt, could prepare such

a history, but Polk wished Marcy to undertake it because his "knowledge of the facts . . . would be more extensive and minute" than Bancroft's could be. [41]

Marcy, while dwelling on this appeal immediately after Polk's death, felt that he "could draw an accurate character" of Polk, in fact "perhaps as much so as any man." But he was uncertain whether he should "seriously entertain" the thought of writing the history that had been urged upon him. Polk would find his place in his country's history, and it would be one that was "not inconspicuous." His impress was "stamped upon his times" and could not and should not "be defaced or obliterated." [42]

After further reflection, Marcy's intentions rapidly became even more irresolute. Praise from him for the Polk administration would be "less befitting" than praise from someone not of the Cabinet. He thought he might still "sketch such a character of him as may . . . properly go into a history to be written a hundred years hence, but it would not be for the public eye now or ever-" [43]

One history very much intended for the public eye appeared about a year after Polk's death. *The Life of James Knox Polk*, by the indefatigable editor, author, and compiler, John S. Jenkins, was "Respectfully Inscribed" to Marcy. [44] Although the book did not benefit from the use of Polk's papers, Marcy in a letter to Jenkins expressed himself "well pleased with the work." [45] He was not as generous in the privacy of his diary, declaring: "It does not amount to much—a mere *Outline*—no discrimination of characters brought into view—though the style is very well and he has talent in narrating—" [46]

During the long years that she survived her husband, Sarah Childress Polk lived a life of near seclusion at Polk Place. Undoubtedly the Polk Papers remained there with her. [47] The war years 1861-65 brought special difficulties, but she remained determinedly at home, treated with equal deference by Confederate and Federal commanders of the city. In fact, her home served at times as something of a sanctuary, and the Historical Society of Tennessee, as well as individuals, entrusted valuables to her safekeeping. [48]

Shortly after the close of the war, Henry Stephens Randall, author of *The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (1858), gave thought to the preparation of a life of Polk. Mrs. Polk was enthusiastic, but efforts that she and Randall made to gain assurance of President Andrew Johnson's "friendly countenance" with regard to the need for "liberal facilities for consulting official papers in the Departments at Washington," were wholly unavailing and the project was dropped. [49]

Mrs. Polk continued to be interested in having a responsible author write the biography of her late husband. For a time, she was hopeful that Ransom Hooker Gillet might be the one she sought. Gillet, who had been in Congress with Polk and had received appointments to Treasury posts from him during the Presidential years, had commenced a biography of Governor Silas Wright, a fellow New Yorker and longtime friend. Mrs. Polk provided some useful materials from the Polk Papers for this work, [50] and after further correspondence with the forthright Gillet she encouraged him to take up a life of Polk. [51] But Gillet had to decline, pleading unfamiliarity with the Tennessee background, a lack of style, and preoccupation with his study of Wright. [52]

Another negotiation involving the Polk Papers began in January 1875. John Cadwalader, the learned Philadelphia jurist who was then at work on a life of James Buchanan, had learned that Mrs. Polk retained diaries kept by her husband during his Presidency. Wishing to consult these as a source for the period of Buchanan's service as Secretary of State, he asked that they be sent to Philadelphia. [53] Mrs. Polk was at first reluctant to see the diaries leave Nashville, or even to have them used, but finally relented as long as Mrs. George W. Fall, her niece and adopted daughter, would accompany them to Philadelphia. [54] Arrangements were made and 23 diaries and "a bundle of papers and letters" were delivered to Cadwalader, and receipted for, on June 19. [55] He had the use of the papers for nearly a month, making "such extracts and copies of the letters and such notes and extracts from the diary" as he thought he might require. [56] The Polk Papers, at least an important segment of them, had been on their first journey since the President's death, had been used for the first time in the course of historical investigation, and had been safely returned to Polk Place. [57]

The most significant use made of the Polk Papers while they remained the property of his widow was by the distinguished historian, George Bancroft, who had served Polk successively as Secretary of the Navy and Minister to Great Britain. Writing to J. George Harris in April 1887, Bancroft announced his intention to "run down" from Washington to Nashville. He wanted "to do something for the memory of our friend" and asked that Harris speak to Mrs. Polk about the possibility of taking some of the Polk Papers to Washington for immediate copying and return. With these materials he would draw Polk's character and present the results of his administration, a "full and just statement" of which was "of great interest for

the whole nation." [58] At 86 years of age Bancroft was returning to a project that he had actually first considered when Polk had been nominated for the Presidency, 43 years before. [59]

Harris, who was eager to be associated with Bancroft in the work being planned, [60] called on Mrs. Polk at once. She was pleased that Bancroft was coming to Nashville and unhesitatingly agreed that the Polk Papers would be made available. Because of the intimacy that had existed between her husband and Bancroft, she felt that the papers would be as safe in his hands as in her own. [61]

Bancroft arrived in Nashville on April 16, 1871, and, in spite of considerable social attention paid to him, [62] found time to make a limited examination of the papers at Polk Place. [63] But much more time was needed for sorting and selecting, and an understanding was reached that the papers would be shipped to Washington. [64] Mrs. Polk and the steadfast Harris set to work, spending two days in packing a trunk for shipment. Not wishing to presume what Bancroft might want, they sent him everything he had seen while in Nashville, including "many strictly private and domestic letters." [65]

Bancroft received the papers "in perfect order" on May 9 [66] and worked on them during the summer of 1887, first at Washington and then at Newport, R.I. [67] It is not exactly clear when they were returned to Mrs. Polk, but on August 8 Bancroft sought the "exactest directions how to address them." [68] The papers were probably returned not long thereafter.

Although he continued to keep in touch with Harris and hoped that "life and mind should hold out," [69] enabling him to write his history, Bancroft had reached the point in time where "it was too late for plan and performance to maintain their ancient balance." [70] Regrettably, all that has come down to us from the zealous enterprise of Bancroft's last years are the compilations in the Bancroft Collection in the New York Public Library. Many of these, however, are important historical documents in themselves and reveal much about Bancroft's historical activities and his role in public affairs. [71] Included in the form of typescript copies are the Polk diaries, in 18 volumes, and four volumes of correspondence for the period 1821-49. Another item of much interest is an 86-page typewritten biographical sketch of James Knox Polk, left uncompleted by Bancroft and bearing his unmistakable marginalia. [72]

Bancroft died in January 1891, as did Mrs. Polk in August of the same year, having survived her husband by 42 years. Her intention with regard to the ultimate disposition of her husband's papers had once been to place them in the care of the Historical Society of Tennessee. Thus, in 1875, after having been approached by officers of the Society, she had agreed that "such valuable manuscripts, containing so much information in regard to the affairs of an important period of our country's history, should be securely kept," and expressed her willingness to present them eventually. She wished to retain "the papers mentioned" during her lifetime but would bequeath them to the Society where they would be "more sure to add their part to the History of our great and noble country." [73] However, by the time that she made out her will 10 years later, Sarah Polk had changed her mind, and she left the papers to her niece. The will stated:

The rest and residue of my estate including the manuscripts, letters, Correspondence etc. belonging To my late husband, I give for her Sole and Seperate [sic] use to my Niece Mrs. George W. Fall, whom I reared from infancy and who is to me as a daughter. [74]

Not much is known of the papers over the next decade. Polk Place was sold by the heirs—after the State of Tennessee declined an opportunity to purchase it—and the house was demolished in 1901. [75] In 1902 some news of the Polk Papers appeared in a brief announcement of the Chicago Historical Society that "two very important purchases" had been made. One of these was "The Papers of President James Knox Polk, consisting of the 'Diary' kept during his administration, 1845 to 1848, original drafts of messages and speeches, and correspondence, 1826-1848." [76] Some years later when the society was pressed for "circumstances attending the purchase," very little could be learned. [77]

In 1903 the Library of Congress received information that additional papers of President Polk were still in Nashville in private hands. Widespread efforts had been made in that year to add to the Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson Papers that had either already arrived at the Library or were soon to be transferred from the Department of State in accordance with an Executive Order of March 9, 1903. [78] Therefore, when Ainsworth R. Spofford learned that Mrs. Fall still retained some of Polk's papers, [79] Worthington C. Ford, Chief of the Manuscript Division, was dispatched to Nashville. Mr. Fall in the meantime had confirmed that "a large collection of Mr. Polk's papers" was in his wife's possession, "in fact. . . a large trunk full," and mentioned a willingness to dispose of the papers at "a reasonable figure." [80]

Ford, upon arriving in Nashville, was delighted to discover that Mrs. Fall "had the entire collection of Jas. K. Polk, except some 300 letters sold to the Chicago Historical Society." There were "between four and five thousand documents," he

thought, "and lots of good names." It was to be a clearance sale, all or nothing, and after some "higgling" over the price Ford urged the Librarian, Herbert Putnam, to "skimp" the sum that had been named, for it was "well worth it." [81]

After returning the next day for a closer inspection of the papers, Ford wrote even more enthusiastically to Putnam. "You can knock me over with a feather" he began. By a conservative estimate there were easily 10,000 pieces in the collection, and the price asked was "dirt cheap." The terms of the sale were drawn up and forwarded in his letter, and they were broad enough, Ford felt, to include everything, "past, present, and future." [82] Action was swift in Washington. Spofford arranged for the purchase on behalf of the Library, [83] and Ford, who had just returned from Nashville, was directed to proceed there again, this time to oversee the shipment of the papers. [84] Early on December 4, [85] four cases were shipped via Cincinnati, arriving at the Library the following day.

Ford, in a report on his activities, considered the Library's title to the collection to be "perfectly clear." Polk had left everything to his widow, and Sarah Polk had left her effects to Mrs. Fall. Except for a few items, principally memorabilia over which Ford thought it inexpedient to contend, he had been given the assurance that everything of Polk's of a public and private nature had been turned over. Apart from the papers in the Chicago Historical Society, there was no other collection of Polk's papers extant. Furthermore, Ford believed that the negotiation had been conducted in such a way "that the Library would have a clear title to anything that may come to light in [the] future." [86] Arrangement and indexing of the Polk Papers immediately got under way. They were found to contain about 10,000 items of correspondence and, among other things, the last volume of the diary. [87] The collection began to be used almost at once.

The first substantial augmentation of the Library's Polk Papers occurred in 1910, when Herbert Putnam, in a letter to Franklin H. Head, president of the Chicago Historical Society, raised the question of "concentrating two collections of the papers of Presidents of the United States," those of Madison and Polk. Study of the careers of the two Presidents was impossible without resort to the collections in the two distant repositories, and since the main collection, in both cases, was in the national library, Putnam asked that the Chicago Historical Society consider the feasibility of transfer, with reimbursement to be set at the amount the Society had paid for either or both of the collections. [88] A few impediments to the transfer had to be set aside in Chicago, and then Putnam's proposal was quickly accepted. [89] The manuscript diaries were sent on June 28, 1910, reaching the Library on the 30th, and the remaining papers arrived July 20. [90] The Librarian's *Report* for 1910 noted the action of the Chicago Historical Society in transferring custody of "24 volumes of Polk's Diary and a miscellaneous collection of about 450 letters to and from him." [91]

In 1927 Library officials, who had long been under the impression that the Polk collection had been virtually completed by the addition of the Chicago manuscripts, were startled to learn that a large body of Polk's papers was still outstanding. Dr. J. Franklin Jameson, of the Carnegie Institution's Department of Historical Research, was the first to receive this information. While assisting John Spencer Bassett in preparing the correspondence of Andrew Jackson for publication, Jameson had established a wide correspondence throughout the South. One of his correspondents, William E. Beard, news editor of the *Nashville Banner*, wrote to him in February 1927, calling attention to a "matter which may or may not be of interest, though I think it will be." He had in his custody, Beard said, "all the letters received by President James K. Polk during his term of office, and during the campaign preliminary thereto; also copy book files of the letters he wrote while President." The documents were the property of Mrs. Rollin P. Grant of New York City, formerly of Nashville, a friend of Beard's wife and "a daughter of the late Mrs. George W. Fall." Mrs. Grant, now the wife of a prominent New York banker, had recently dismantled her home in Nashville and had requested Beard's assistance in disposing of the letters. Should the Carnegie Institution not be interested in acquiring the letters, Beard invited appropriate suggestions. [92]

Quite naturally, Jameson's interest was immediately aroused, and he alerted Beard to the significance of the newly found papers. To Jameson there was "not the slightest question as to what ought to be their final place of deposit." The Library of Congress, which already had 83 volumes of Polk's correspondence, as well as his diaries and other papers, should be informed. [93] Beard agreed and provided the added information that there were enough letters to fill two ordinary-sized trunks. [94]

Jameson now notified the Library of the situation, [95] and Herbert Putnam arranged for a Library representative to meet with Mrs. Grant. In a letter to Mrs. Grant, Putnam explained the circumstances of the 1903 purchase of Polk's papers from Mrs. Fall and mentioned that the transaction had been for "all of the papers of President Polk," without reservation. It seemed evident to Putnam that, at the time the collection had been delivered, the present group of papers "must have escaped the attention of Mrs. Fall," or they certainly would have been forwarded with the rest, since the terms of purchase obviously embraced them. [96]

Mrs. Grant saw the matter as presented by Putnam and telegraphed Beard, authorizing him to send the papers to Washington. [97] She did stipulate, however, that some items be selected by Beard for personal reasons and for the Polk Memorial Room in the War Memorial Building in Nashville. Putnam, in sympathy with her wishes, explained that the Library's interest throughout had not been a narrow one, to assure the Government full performance of a purchase, but to assure that, "in association with the memorials of nearly all the other Presidents of the United States," there would be a memorial of Polk, "as nearly complete as possible." [98]

Six boxes of Polk Papers were received in the Library on March 4, 1927, [99] and a rough survey of their contents was made in order to determine what should be put aside in order to meet the requirements of Mrs. Grant. Beard's assistance was sought, but, since he was unable to come to Washington, some 500 pieces were finally selected and sent to him on May 4. [100] Work on the new increment of papers continued through 1927, and early in 1928 it was bound in 52 volumes, forming a "Second Series" of Polk Papers.

Small additions have been made to the collection since that time, notably a group of 22 letters written by Polk to his friend and political associate, Samuel H. Laughlin. The papers also traveled once more, this time to the University of Virginia's Alderman Library, for security purposes during World War II. [101] Several years after the war, the two series of "General Correspondence" were consolidated into one. With the advent of the Presidential Papers Program in the Library of Congress, as authorized by Public Law 85-147, August 16, 1957, the overall arrangement of the Polk Papers was perfected, the entire collection filmed, and every item of correspondence indexed. Thus the usefulness of the Polk Papers has been enhanced, their availability increased, and their preservation ensured.

Note: This essay was written by John McDonough, Specialist in the History of the National Period, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

1. Charles Grier Sellers, *James K. Polk, Jacksonian; 1795-1843* (Princeton, 1957), p. 495. Hereafter, *J.K.P., Jacksonian*.
2. There are approximately 20,500 discrete items in the Polk Papers. See the "Description of the Papers" that immediately follows this essay. The Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSL&A) has, in its Archives Division, an important group of papers of the gubernatorial period, including two letterbooks and a number of letters received. See "Executive Correspondence of Governor James K. Polk," in *American Historical Magazine*, vol. 8, July 1903, p. 271-284, 371-376. The editor is unidentified. The Manuscript Division of the TSL&A has a small Polk Collection that includes two index volumes to letters received during the Presidential period. The National Archives, in its varied holdings, has considerable material of Polk interest. According to Philip M. Hamer's *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven, 1961), and *The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, no other repository has reported having custody of a significant collection of James K. Polk Papers. Sellers has been indefatigable in his search for primary materials and, in discussing his "Sources" in the work cited above, especially p. 493-498, and in *James K. Polk, Continentalist; 1843-1846* (Princeton, 1966), p. 489-493, hereafter *J.K.P., Continentalist*, provides a guide to the availability of manuscripts for the study of Polk.
3. Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James K. Polk, During his Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, 4 vols. (Chicago, 1910); Allan Nevins, ed., *Polk, the Diary of a President* (New York, 1952). Nevins, in 1929 and 1952 editions of the *Diary*, incorrectly places the manuscript diaries in the Chicago Historical Society.
4. Norman A. Graebner, reviewing Sellers' *J.K.P., Jacksonian*, declared: "Men are remembered for their unique characteristics and Polk had none. In oratory he lacked the distinction of Daniel Webster or Thomas Hart Benton, in intellect that of John C. Calhoun, and in personality and leadership that of Henry Clay. His failure to seize the attention of his and later generations, however, has never denied the fact that he was a man of substantial qualities." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 44, Sept. 1957, p. 357-358.
5. The phrase is Sellers', in *J.K.P., Jacksonian*, p. vii. Eugene I. McCormac, in his *James K. Polk, a Political Biography* (Berkeley, 1922), made wide use of the then available Polk Papers. Even so, in his preface, McCormac disclaimed any intention of writing a personal biography, stating that his volume would "deal almost entirely with Polk's political career." A substantial addition was made to the Polk Papers after McCormac examined them.
6. Dr. Herbert Weaver is the director of this project, sponsored by the National Historical Publications Commission and the Tennessee Historical Commission. The work is being carried on at Vanderbilt University. The writer is indebted to Dr. Weaver and to Dr. Paul H. Bergeron, associate editor, for helpful suggestions and many courtesies.

7. Polk to Armstrong, Jonesborough, Aug. 2, 1841. Interestingly enough, this letter is in the Andrew Jackson Papers, LC. McCormac, *Polk*, p. 250, remarks on Polk's practice of sending Nashville correspondence under an extra cover.
8. Polk to Catron, Washington, Sept. 7, 1848, copy. Polk Papers, LC. Polk had heard that while Brown was away on a political canvass, letters addressed to him were opened by his family or by authorized friends. Judge Catron was told, "This I desire to prevent."
9. Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Columbia, July 11, 1844. A.J. Donelson Papers, LC.
10. Polk to Donelson, Columbia, July 22, 1844. Donelson Papers.
11. Examples abound in the Polk Presidential Letterbooks, Series 4, Polk Papers.
12. Levi Woodbury, *Eulogy on the Life, Character, and Public Services of the Late Ex-President Polk: Delivered at the Request of the Municipal Authorities of the City of Boston, July 25, 1849* (Boston, 1849), p. 10-14. Historians have generally remarked on Polk's attention to public business. See Eugene McCormac's article on Polk in the *Dictionary of American Biography*; Allan Nevins, *Polk, Diary*, p. xii; and John Spencer Bassett's "James K. Polk and his Constituents, 1831-1832," in *American Historical Review*, vol. 28, Oct. 1922, p. 68.
13. Sellers in *J.K.P., Jacksonian*, p. 459, and Anson and Fanny Nelson, *Memorials of Sarah Childress Polk* (New York, 1892), p. 67-68. Jeremiah George Harris, a Massachusetts editor and friend of George Bancroft, who later removed to Nashville to edit the *Nashville Union*, recalled that Polk had been greatly assisted by his wife who "knew where every authority was that he might want to refer to . . . and could lay her hand on what he wanted and forward it to him. . . ." Harris to George Bancroft, Nashville, Sept. 17, 1887. Bancroft Collection, New York Public Library (NYPL). Sarah Polk's own letters to her husband very strongly reflect her businesslike approach to his political affairs. Sarah Agnes Wallace, "Letters of Mrs. James K. Polk to Her Husband," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 11, June 1952, p. 180-191, and Sept. 1952, p. 282-288. The editor (p. 181) feels that Sarah's letters were "only a cover for her campaigning husband's mail."
14. Sellers' chapter on "The Long, Hot Summer" in *J.K.P., Continentalist*, particularly p. 301-309.
15. *Diary*, Dec. 28, 1848. For ease in reference, all *Diary* citations are from the Quaipe edition (see note 3) and include the editor's corrections. Some errors in spelling were allowed to stand.
16. Polk to Dallas, Washington, Aug. 23, 1845, copy. Polk Papers.
17. There are five separately bound letterpress copybooks, in strict chronological order, in the Polk Papers. The first commences on October 11, 1845, and the last terminates in late May 1849. The third of the five bound volumes in the letterbook series bears on the outside back cover the barely legible notation in Polk's hand: "Letter Book No. 4." As the only volume that was numbered by Polk, it gives rise to the interesting question of the whereabouts of volume 1, which would have been kept prior to October 11, 1845. As has been seen, fair copies, drafts, etc., seem to have occupied, although inadequately, the gap from March to mid-August 1845. Then, beginning around mid-August and extending to October 9, letterpress copies make their unmistakable appearance. These copies are now interfiled in their proper chronological place in the main series of Polk's general correspondence. At one time the Library of Congress held these letterpress copies, which apparently represent the survivals of what would have been volume 1, as a small, distinguishable group. Accession records and other forms of documentation are not sufficiently full to determine whether or not the copies were received loose or between the covers of an original letterbook.
18. *Diary*, Oct. 21, 1848. "I regret very much that I had not commenced keeping a Diary at the beginning of my political life. All public men should do so." Andrew C. McLaughlin, in his introduction to Quaipe's edition of the *Diary* (vol. 1, p. xiii), speculates that Polk probably intended his diary "to be a reminder of what actually happened, and he expected to use it himself as a basis for some formal narrative of his administration."
19. *Diary*, Aug. 26, 1846. The "seperate sheets" that relate to the events of August 26, 1845, are not maintained with the Polk diaries but are filed chronologically with his general correspondence. Polk duly entered the date, "Tuesday 26th Aug't 1845," at the beginning of his first volume, and then numbered the first eight pages but otherwise left them blank for later transcription of the separate sheets. The transcription was never made. Polk Papers.
20. Quaipe, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. vii.

21. See Nevins, *Polk, Diary*, p. xxii, who feels that the diary "brings before us a great deal that is quaint and picturesque and a great deal that is historically important." Sellers, in his bibliographical notes, calls the diary "immensely revealing though not altogether ingenuous." *J.K.P., Continentalist*, p. 490.
22. Token diary entries for June 22-July 7, 1847. Appleton went on to become a Congressman and Assistant Secretary of State under Buchanan. His journal, kept in Polk's behalf, has had a curious history of its own. Quaipe, after remarking that it was never copied into Polk's diary, simply states that "it remained in the possession of Polk's family until 1897, when it passed to Judge J.M. Dickinson." *Diary*, vol. 3, p. 73n. Polk commented on the receipt of the journal in a diary entry of October 27, 1847: "Mr. John Appleton . . . presented to me to-day a Journal of my tour in June & July last to the Northern States. Mr. Appleton accompanied me on that tour as one of my suite, and prepared the Journal from the notes which he had taken. It will be interesting for future reference and I will preserve it." Notice of the existence of the Appleton journal was later taken, in 1888 or thereabouts, by John Robert Irelan in *The Republic*, of which vol. 11 is *History of the Life, Administration and Times of James Knox Polk* (Chicago, 1888). According to Irelan (p. 575), Appleton presented the account, described as consisting of 150 "well written pages . . . bound in morocco," to Mrs. Polk, who had "some notions of having it printed." More than 30 years later, S.G. Heiskell, in his *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History* (Nashville, 1920), vol. 2, p. 280-283, added other details to the story of the Appleton journal. Heiskell declared the manuscript to be "faithful, dignified and thoughtful" and remarked further that it consisted of "two hundred or more pages of manuscript on old fashioned blue letter paper, artistically bound in Russia leather, and on the inside cover, which is lined with pink brocade, is an inscription in the writing of President Polk." The inscription as recorded by Heiskell is substantially the same as Polk's diary entry for October 27, 1847. Heiskell also printed a letter from Mrs. George W. Fall, Sarah Polk's niece and adopted daughter, as evidence that the Appleton journal had been presented to Judge Jacob McGavock Dickinson, who later became Secretary of War in Taft's cabinet. The letter, datelined "Polk Place, Nov. 24, 1897," says: "Thinking the enclosed diary of ex-President Polk, in which I find some correspondence of yours, might be of some historic interest and value to you and yours, it gives me much pleasure to ask your acceptance of the same." A large collection of Judge Dickinson's papers is in the Tennessee State Library and Archives, but the Appleton journal is not among them. See Tennessee State Library and Archives, Manuscript Division, *The Jacob McGavock Dickinson Papers* (Nashville, 1964), p. 1-35.
23. Record Group 59, National Archives. The applications and recommendations for office are arranged by Presidential administration, and alphabetically by name of applicant thereunder. During the period when the Department of State had responsibility for many aspects of domestic administration, it considered most applications and recommendations for positions in the Federal service, apart from those related to war or finance. U.S. National Archives, *Guide to the Records in the National Archives* (Washington, 1948), p. 234-235.
24. This index, which may be a partial one, bears the title "Index to Letters J.K. Polk" on the spines of the volumes, which also have the barely legible numbers "5" and "6" chalked on them. The original volumes are in the Manuscript Division of the TSL&A. The Library of Congress has a microfilm. The index is arranged in columns, by date, file number, writer, and remarks. Most of the assigned file numbers are used in combination with a letter, A through D, but not in strict sequence, jumping for example from A 122 to A 135 to A 164. The index was kept in three or four hands, probably including that of Polk's nephew and secretary, J. Knox Walker, and those of William V. Voorhies and H.C. Williams. In his diary for August 26, 1846, Polk, after returning from Fortress Monroe, recorded: "Mr. Wm. V. Voorhies, whom I had left in charge of my office, gave me a full account of all that had occurred during my absence. My letters, which he had opened by my direction, were all properly endorsed indicating their contents and every thing as far as I have learned has gone on well in my absence."
25. Polk's deliberate ways are revealed in the manner in which he handled the memorandum on the war. A note jotted on the envelope in which it was transmitted reads: "I corrected this draft, as shown within and added several pages of my own to it. In this form I read it to the Secretary of War who approved it. I had it copied, and the Secretary of War, took it, for the purpose of transmitting it to Genl. Taylor." Envelope docketed July 9, 1846, Polk Papers. There is a glancing reference to Benton-Polk correspondence in William E. Beard, "Letters to a President of the United States," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, vol. 9, October 1925 (issued May 1928), p. 146. Polk himself referred to the "earlier period of my administration" when Benton had "occasionally addressed notes to me." *Diary*, Dec. 10, 1848.
26. Oftentimes these items have been given a later date in the index, probably corresponding to the date on which the letter was received, the file number given, or some action taken. The discrepancy in dates leads to only minor confusion.
27. Donald Macdonald-Millar, "The Grundy-Polk Houses, Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 25, fall 1966, p. 280-286. The article discusses some of the changes made in the Grundy house and includes six measured drawings. V.K.

Stevenson, a Nashville architect and contractor, supervised the work on Polk Place. A number of letters passed between Stevenson and Polk in 1848-49.

28. Polk to V.K. Stevenson, Washington, Jan. 19, 1849, copy. Polk Papers. The shipment started from Washington on January 9. The letterpress copies of Polk's correspondence vary greatly in legibility.

29. George W. Thompson to Polk, Wheeling, Jan. 24, 1849. Polk Papers. Thompson was a Wheeling lawyer serving as U.S. district attorney.

30. Polk to Thompson, Washington, Jan. 27, 1849, copy. Polk Papers. Since Polk had heard nothing directly from the shippers, Black & Knox, he asked Thompson to see them in order that the questions in his mind might be resolved.

31. Thompson to Polk, Wheeling, Jan. 31, 1849. Polk Papers. Twenty packages were shipped on January 29. Black & Knox to J. Knox Walker, Wheeling, Feb. 2, 1849. Polk Papers. A statement of charges (Feb. 7, 1849, Polk Papers) made by the firm of Connor and Sanders, Nashville, against Polk, for freight, commissions, storage, drayage, etc., shows that two boxes and 41 packages were received in Nashville between November 17, 1848, and February 7, 1849.

32. Washington, Feb. 2, 1849, copy. Polk Papers. Damages to the shipment had been assessed at \$25, and the wagoner was held liable for a part. On learning of this Polk "was unwilling that the poor wagoner should lose his wages in consequence [of the accident]." A draft for \$25, was forwarded to Black & Knox, the whole amount to be handed to the wagoner. Black & Knox, in acknowledgment, wrote: "we believe a sight of the poor fellow's countenance on receiving the money would have been full compensation for this act of liberality [sic] on the part of his Excellency." Polk to Thompson, Washington, Feb. 2, 1849, copy, and Black & Knox to J. Knox Walker, Wheeling, Feb. 2, 1849. Polk Papers.

33. Entries in the diary for this period are explained by Polk in his entry for February 28: "At this point of my administration, and until its close, I found my time so constantly occupied by business and the numerous calls made upon me by the crowd of persons who had congregated at Washington to witness the Inauguration of my successor, that I found it impossible to record in this Diary the daily events as they occurred. After I reached Tennessee on this 13th of April, 1849, I resumed the record from my general recollection. The record of this day (the 28th of Feb'y) and the succeeding days of my term must necessarily, therefore, be very general & many incidents must be omitted."

34. It does not appear likely that Polk carried any significant group of his papers with him. Most of his belongings had already gone on ahead, and his secretary, J. Knox Walker, remained in Washington to attend to unfinished business. See Walker to Polk, Washington, March 18, 1849. Polk Papers.

35. Many entries in the diary for April and May 1849 allude to these activities.

36. Polk had undoubtedly contracted a milder case of cholera while passing through New Orleans on his homeward journey. Rudolph Marx, *The Health of the Presidents* (New York, 1960), p. 145-148.

37. *Diary*, Feb. 28, 1849.

38. The will is published in full in George H. Armistead, Jr., "The Void Provisions of a President's Will," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 15, June 1956, p. 136-140.

39. William L. Marcy diary, entry for June 19-20, 1849. Marcy Papers, LC.

40. Polk to Marcy, Nashville, May 9, 1849. Marcy Papers. A letterpress copy is in the Polk Papers.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Marcy diary, entry for June 19-20, 1849. Marcy Papers.

43. Marcy to Prosper Montgomery Wetmore, Albany, June 29, 1849. Marcy Papers.

44. John S. Jenkins, *The Life of James Knox Polk* (Auburn, 1850), and Jenkins to Marcy, Aug. 10, 1850, Sennett, Cayuga County, N.Y. Marcy Papers.

45. Marcy to Jenkins, Albany, Aug. 29, 1850. Marcy Papers.

46. Marcy diary, Aug. 31, 1850. Marcy Papers. In a letter to Marcy written at Sennett, Cayuga County, Sept. 2, 1850 (Marcy Papers), Jenkins claimed that the imminent publication of Lucien B. Chase's *History of the Polk Administration* (New York, 1850), affected the scope and design of his own work. Chase did not have access to the Polk Papers either.
47. Andrew Johnson, while Governor of Tennessee, may have asked to refer to some of the papers, but the meaning of a letter in which Sarah Polk speaks of sending volumes for his use is not clear. Sarah Polk to Andrew Johnson, Polk Place, Feb. 22, 1855. Andrew Johnson Papers, LC.
48. Anson and Fanny Nelson, *Memorials*, p. 170-175.
49. Henry S. Randall to Andrew Johnson, Cortland Village, N.Y., Nov. 21, 1865. Andrew Johnson Papers. In this, Randall quotes a letter of October 21 to him from Mrs. Polk, in which she wrote that Randall's plan to consult Johnson met with her "entire approbation." When Randall failed to get a reply, Mrs. Polk renewed the appeal in a letter to Johnson, March 16, 1866 (Johnson Papers). The relationship between James K. Polk and Andrew Johnson had not been a warm one. See the Polk *Diary*, July 21, 1846, and Jan. 1, 1849, for example. In the latter entry Polk wrote that Johnson was "very vindictive and perverse in his temper and conduct."
50. Ransom H. Gillet to Mrs. Polk, Lebanon Springs [New Lebanon], N.Y., July 10, 1871. Polk Papers. In a memorandum of July 27, 1871 (Polk Papers), Mrs. Polk listed the correspondence sent to Gillet and remarked: "Letters from Mr. Silas Wright sent to Mr. Gillet to be copied and returned to me." There are more than 30 Silas Wright items, preponderantly from Wright to Polk, in the Polk Papers. Gillet returned the borrowed letters in 1873. Gillet to Mrs. Polk, Lebanon Springs, N.Y., Jan. 24, 1873. Polk Papers.
51. Gillet to Mrs. Polk, Lebanon Springs, N.Y., Aug. 1, 1871. Polk Papers. There is no retained copy in the Polk Papers of Sarah Polk's letter to Gillet asking him to take up the project, although it is perfectly clear from Gillet's response of September 2, 1871 (Polk Papers) that she made the request.
52. Gillet to Mrs. Polk, Lebanon Springs, N.Y., Sept. 2, 1871. Polk Papers. Gillet recommended A.O.P. Nicholson. Nothing in the Polk Papers indicates that Mrs. Polk acted on this recommendation. Somewhat later, at the urging of J. George Harris, faithful friend of the Polks', Gillet briefly reconsidered, but nothing further developed. Gillet to J. George Harris, Lebanon Springs, N.Y., Jan. 16, 1873, and Mrs. Polk to Gillet, [Polk Place, Feb. 1873]. Polk Papers.
53. Because Cadwalader was not well acquainted with Mrs. Polk, he wrote to Gen. Robert Patterson asking him to forward to Mrs. Polk the letter requesting that the Polk diaries be made available to him. General Patterson, a Pennsylvania industrialist, had received an appointment as Major General of volunteers from President Polk in 1846. John Cadwalader to General Patterson, [Philadelphia], Jan. 6, 1875, and Patterson to Mrs. Polk, Philadelphia, Jan. 4 [6], 1874 [1875], Polk Papers. Patterson, in forwarding Calwalader's request, highly recommended him and gave assurance that the Polk diaries would be "well taken care of and faithfully returned."
54. Mrs. Polk to Patterson, Nashville, Jan. 23, 1875, copy; A. Welch to Mrs. Polk, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Feb. 8, 1875; Cadwalader to Mrs. Polk, Philadelphia, Feb. 26, Apr. 2, and Apr. 8, 1875; and Mrs. Polk to Cadwalader, [Nashville, Mar. 1875?], copy. Polk Papers.
55. The receipt, signed by Cadwalader, is in the Polk Papers.
56. Cadwalader to Mrs. Polk, Philadelphia, July 16, 1875. Polk Papers.
57. An undated, unsigned fragment of a draft of a letter is filed with the Polk Papers for the summer of 1875. It reads: "Mrs. Fall has returned with the diaries of the late President Polk and the letters to him which were transmitted for your examination." Regrettably, no work of Judge Cadwalader appeared incorporating the fruits of his research. The Cadwalader Papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania include a rather detailed prospectus of a life of Buchanan and other pertinent data. *Guide to the Manuscript Collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1949), item 1454, and conversation with Dr. Philip S. Klein, Buchanan's most recent biographer.
58. George Bancroft to J. George Harris, Washington, Apr. 8, 1887. Typescript copy, Bancroft Collection, NYPL; a draft is in the Bancroft Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS). Bancroft, although wishing to borrow the papers, thought that "Mrs. Polk should not permit the papers of Mr. Polk to go out of her control even for a moment. . . ."

59. Bancroft's explanation of that situation, as made to Martin Van Buren at the time, is of interest: "No sooner had the nominations at Baltimore become known, than a mass of details was committed to paper, and with a regular series of documents was transmitted to me *with a summons by a letter from Gen. Jackson himself* for me to prepare a biography of Mr. Polk." Bancroft to Van Buren, Boston, Sept. 6, 1844. Van Buren Papers, LC. Two of Polk's close associates, A.V. Brown and Sam Laughlin, urged Polk to assemble materials that Bancroft could utilize in the preparation of a campaign biography. A.V. Brown to Polk, At Table [Washington], May 30, 1844, and Sam Laughlin to Polk, Washington, May 31, 1844. Polk Papers. Bancroft, however, anxious to continue his *History of the United States* and occupied also as the Democratic candidate for the governorship of Massachusetts, did not take on the task. McCormac, in his biography of Polk, p. 272-273, cites J. George Harris to Polk, June 25, July 17, and July 19, 1844 (Polk Papers), in which Harris related his part in forwarding materials to Bancroft and told of Bancroft's declination, "for several substantial reasons," of the assignment of writing a biography. Harris had "mistaken the opinions of friends for his 'consent.'" Bancroft, however, who was "a good fellow—truly a great man—" had made suggestions and had amended some of the materials sent to him, and these materials could be "converted into articles for the [Nashville] Union. . . ." See also M.A. DeWolfe Howe, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft* (New York, 1908), vol. 1, p. 255, and Sellers, *J.K.P., Continentalist*, p. 182. Frank B. Williams, Jr., in "Samuel Hervey Laughlin, Polk's Political Handyman," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24, winter 1965, p. 356-392, states in a note (p. 386) that "Bancroft did produce a campaign document."
60. In his first letter to Harris, written at Washington, April 8, 1887, Bancroft had said: "You and I understand these things better than any other now alive." Bancroft Collection, NYPL.
61. Harris to Bancroft, Nashville, Apr. 10, 1887. Bancroft Collection, NYPL.
62. Harris informed his "friend of a half a century" that the Nashville visit was taking on the dimensions of a social occasion, and that he must "consent to be *lionized* a little by us." Mrs. Polk had first claim on Bancroft, and Harris, who had hoped to entertain him, bowed gracefully and agreed to "sail under her broad pennant." Harris to Bancroft, Nashville, Apr. 11, 1887. Bancroft Collection, NYPL.
63. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, vol. 2, p. 203. John R. Irelan had also viewed the papers and their surroundings. He observed that Mrs. Polk had very few of the letters written by her husband, but that "letters of his friends and political associates," labeled by the President, constituted a considerable portion "of his remaining papers." They were kept in a large, square, high-ceilinged room in the southeast corner of the unoccupied second floor of Polk Place. Polk had used the room as an office, but Irelan's questing eye found it a dreary place with dusty paper peeling and falling from the walls. Some of the President's manuscripts were on a long table in the center of the room, "covered with newspapers and sprinkled with tobacco, to keep off dust or moth." Boxes, demijohns, trunks, and two or three old bookcases with solid doors were along the walls, and the whole aspect was "uninviting and cold." Irelan, *The Republic*, vol. 11, p. 677-679. Irelan's volume on Polk was published in 1888, and it seems likely that he visited Nashville not long before Bancroft.
64. Harris to Bancroft, Nashville, Apr. 29, 1887, Bancroft Collection, NYPL. In this letter Harris spoke of the "ocean of papers" that would have been so difficult to "overhaul" in Nashville. Bancroft agreed to "devote every moment" to the papers until he returned them. Optimistically, he thought he could "return them in three or in two weeks, or in less." Bancroft to Mrs. Polk, Washington, Apr. 27, 1887. A retained typescript of the letter is in the Bancroft Papers, MHS; a photographic reproduction of the letter sent follows p. 262 of Anson and Fanny Nelson's *Memorials*.
65. Harris to Bancroft, Nashville, May 4 and May 7, 1887. Bancroft Collection, NYPL. Harris conveyed Mrs. Polk's instructions about the return of the papers in the letter of May 4: "she expressly desires me to say that while she knows there will be no unnecessary delays, she wishes you to have every opportunity to examine all the papers, and hopes you will not hasten their return to her until you have done so to your entire satisfaction. And then she would thank you to send them back to her address here in the same old trunk, by express, advising her thereof, by mail. I write these particulars because she desires me to do so."
66. Bancroft to Mrs. Polk [Washington], May 9, 1887, copy. Bancroft Papers, MHS.
67. In a letter of July 8, 1887, written at Newport to the Librarian of Congress, Ainsworth R. Spofford, Bancroft pronounced the Polk Papers "wonderfully good and useful." Spofford Papers, LC.
68. Bancroft to Mrs. Polk, Newport, Aug. 8, 1887, copy. Bancroft Papers, MHS.

69. Bancroft to Harris, Newport, Aug. 30, 1887, copy. Bancroft Collection, NYPL.
70. Howe, *Bancroft*, vol. 2, p. 313. Yet, in March 1889, a visitor to Bancroft found him "still bright with all his old fire," and after an hour's visit could hardly tear himself away from "the eloquent old man." Henry M. Field to Mrs. Polk, Washington, March 30, 1889. Polk Papers.
71. For example, an examination of vol. 174 of the Bancroft Transcripts, which includes vols. 1-2 of Polk's diary, disclosed that the diary is filled with Bancroft's notes, questions, underscorings, and clarifying remarks. On the title page it is carefully noted who made the copies and the comparisons with the original diary. Some of the comparisons were made by Bancroft. Bancroft Collection, NYPL. See also James Schouler, *Historical Briefs* (New York, 1896), p. 121-138, for an appreciation of this portion of the Bancroft Collection. A broader view of Bancroft's library is available in *The Library of the Late Hon. George Bancroft; a Sketch of the Historical Manuscripts; Memoranda Concerning the Books and Pamphlets*. Prepared by Joseph F. Sabin. n.p., undated
72. The sketch of Polk in *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* has sometimes been attributed to Bancroft, and, indeed, James Grant Wilson's *The Presidents of the United States* (New York, 1898 and 1914), which reprints the Cyclopaedia sketch as its chapter on Polk, specifically assigns authorship to George Bancroft. Yet the *Cyclopaedia* article notes that Bancroft "revised this article" (vol. 6, p. 55). Proof sheets of the Polk article are in the Bancroft-Bliss Papers, LC. Bancroft's holograph revisions take strong exception to some statements, thereby indicating other authorship. Worthington C. Ford, Chief of the Manuscript Division in 1902, in a memorandum discussing the purchase of the proof sheets, remarked: "It was one of the last things prepared by Bancroft and was indeed a paraphrase of Bancroft's manuscript made by the son, John Chandler Bancroft (as General [James Grant] Wilson informed me, in Philadelphia). Yet the manuscript corrections are Bancroft's own." Memorandum, W.C. Ford to the Librarian of Congress, Herbert Putnam, Dec. 23, 1902. Manuscript Division Letterbook, LC.
73. Mrs. Polk to J.G.M. Ramsey and other officers of the Historical Society of Tennessee (now the Tennessee Historical Society), Nashville, Jan. 19, 1875. Manuscript Division Files, LC. The acceptance of her "generous bequest" by the society is recorded in G.P. Thruston to Mrs. Polk, Nashville, March 15, 1875. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Thruston was corresponding secretary of the society.
74. The author is indebted to Dr. Paul Bergeron of Vanderbilt University for obtaining a photostat of a copy of Sarah Polk's will. The will, dated March 28, 1885, did specify that "The Books, pamphlets etc. Constituting the political library of my late husband I give to the State of Tennessee." Codicils added in January 1888 and January 1889 did not deal with the disposition of President Polk's papers.
75. Macdonald-Millar, "The Grundy-Polk Houses," p. 286.
76. Chicago Historical Society, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, 1888-1902, p. 377. The other important purchase was 17 vols. of the statutes of the Northwest Territory, Indiana Territory, and Illinois Territory, 1788-1818.
77. Gaillard Hunt to Miss Caroline M. McIlvaine, Washington, May 18, 1910. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Hunt, Chief of the Manuscript Division, wanted especially to learn how the papers had been brought to the attention of the Society. Miss McIlvaine, the society's librarian, replied on June 21, 1910, that the only entry on the society's books was on December 9, 1901, registering the check used in payment to the American Express Company. Manuscript Division Files, LC. This letter also indicated that Mrs. Fall had been unable to recall the circumstances of the transaction.
78. U.S. Library of Congress, *Report of the Librarian of Congress for . . . 1903* (Washington, 1903), p. 19-20, 24-25. The Andrew Jackson Papers were not included in the State Department transfer. Active negotiations that were also under way in 1903 resulted in the acquisition of the Andrew Johnson, Franklin Pierce, and Martin Van Buren Papers.
79. Judge John Allison to Spofford, near Nashville, Sept. 21, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Spofford was serving as Acting Librarian of Congress.
80. G.W. Fall to Spofford, Nashville, Oct. 21, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC.
81. Ford to Putnam, Nashville, Nov. 23, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Ford concluded his letter, saying: "These Presidential papers weigh much on my mind—There is only one place for them—so do your best."

82. Ford to Putnam, Nashville, Nov. 24, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC. The offer was to "sell without any reservation whatever. . . ."
83. Spofford to Mrs. Fall, Washington, Dec. 1, 1903. Copy of draft in Manuscript Division Files, LC.
84. Memorandum, Spofford to Ford, Dec. 1, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC.
85. Telegram, Ford to Librarian of Congress, Nashville, Dec. 4, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC.
86. Memorandum, Ford to the Librarian, Washington, Dec. 5, 1903. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Ford also wrote to Mrs. Fall to remind her that "an essential part of the transaction" was that legal evidence of ownership of the papers be provided. Apparently none was forthcoming, because Ford was still discussing the question of title in February 1904. Perhaps by this time he had seen Mrs. Polk's letter of 1875, mentioning a bequest to the Historical Society of Tennessee. He had also been visited by James D. Porter, acting president of the society. Porter had assured him that his society had no claim on the papers, but Ford asked that an informal note on the matter be forwarded nonetheless. Porter shortly complied, noting that he had full authority to state that the Historical Society made no claim for the Polk Papers and that the title acquired by the Library of Congress was "a good and perfect one." He suggested that Mr. Putnam file his letter as "a muniment of title." Ford to Mrs. Fall, Washington, Dec. 5, 1902, Manuscript Division Letterbook, LC; Ford to James D. Porter, Washington, Feb. 5, 1904, Manuscript Division Letterbook, LC; Porter to Ford, Nashville, Feb. 25, 1904. Manuscript Division Files, LC. Ford highly appreciated the view of the society and informed Porter: "When I heard that a former offer had been made, I regretted even to have the appearance of interfering with a local society, for I can assure you it is Mr. Putnam's last idea to make any such interference." Ford to Porter, Washington, Feb. 29, 1904. Manuscript Division Letterbook, LC.
87. Memorandum, Ford to Putnam, Washington, Feb. 3, 1904. Manuscript Division Letterbook, LC, and *Report of the Librarian of Congress for . . . 1904*, p. 49-50.
88. Putnam to Head, Washington, March 28, 1910. Manuscript Division Files, LC. The proposal may have originated with Gaillard Hunt, Chief of the Manuscript Division. Memorandum, Hunt [to Putnam], March 26, 1910. Manuscript Division Files, LC. The Chicago Historical Society acquired its Madison Papers by purchase in 1893. U.S. Library of Congress, *Index to the James Madison Papers* (Washington, 1965), p. vi.
89. Putnam to Head, Washington, May 7, 1910. Manuscript Division Files, LC. In this letter, Putnam summarized the contents of a letter of May 4 from Head. The society's decision was welcomed as one that would be greatly to the advantage of historical investigators, and as one "gratifying also upon the grounds of sentiment."
90. Telegrams, memoranda, and correspondence relating to the shipments are in the files of the Manuscript Division, June-July 1910. Milo Quaipe, who was bringing his edition of the Polk diary to completion, had briefly retained some of the papers in Chicago. Miss Caroline McIlvaine to Gaillard Hunt, Chicago, June 21, 1910. Concerning the Polk correspondence retained by Quaipe, Miss McIlvaine wrote to Hunt on July 1: "The letters are tied up in the packages just as we received them and we have not thought it best to break up their arrangement—"
91. *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for . . . 1910*, p. 26. The Polk Papers, exclusive of the diaries and some miscellaneous items, were bound in 83 volumes in 1911. Three volumes of Mrs. Polk's papers were separately bound at the same time.
92. William E. Beard to J. Franklin Jameson, Nashville, Feb. 5, 1927. Jameson Papers, LC. Beard discussed the letters and printed some of them in the article cited in note 25.
93. Jameson to Beard, Washington, Feb. 7, 1927. Jameson Papers. "It is a thousand pities," wrote Jameson, "in the case of any statesman, when some of his papers are in one place and some in another, subjecting historical inquirers to great inconvenience."
94. Beard to Jameson, Nashville, Feb. 10, 1927. Jameson Papers.
95. Jameson to Charles Moore, Acting Chief of the Manuscript Division, Washington, Feb. 15, 1927; and Jameson to Beard, Washington, Feb. 15, 1927. Jameson Papers.
96. Putnam to Mrs. Grant, Washington, Feb. 28, 1927. Librarian's Letterbooks, LC. Documents giving evidence of the terms of the 1903 purchase were also sent for Mrs. Grant's inspection.

97. Another Library representative had already been sent to Nashville, where he had met with Beard concerning the release of the papers.
98. Putnam to Mrs. Grant, Washington, March 2, 1927. Manuscript Division Files. LC. Putnam had reviewed the activities of Mrs. Grant in this letter. For Mrs. Grant's role in the establishment of a Polk Memorial Association, see Herbert Weaver and William G. Eidson, "The James K. Polk Home," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24, spring 1965, p. 3-19.
99. Memorandum to Chief, Manuscript Division, March 4, 1927. Manuscript Division Files, LC.
100. Several of Putnam's letters to Mrs. Grant and to Beard, during the period March 19-May 4, touch upon the matter of selecting the items for shipment. Librarian's Letterbooks, and Manuscript Division Files, LC.
101. The Polk Papers left the Library of Congress in late December 1941 and returned in September 1944.

Scope and Content Note for Additions to the Collection

The papers of James K. Polk were organized in eleven series prior to publication of the *Index to the James K. Polk Papers* by the Library of Congress in 1969. Series 1 through 9 and Series 11 were microfilmed and indexed. [Series 10: Printed Matter](#) was omitted from the microfilming and indexing and includes messages, pamphlets, speeches by Polk, and booklets and newspapers pertaining to Polk. [Series 12: Additions](#) includes correspondence, duplicates and fragments, engraved portraits, extracts copied from historic documents, philatelic covers, and a presidential order added to the collection after completion of the microfilm edition in 1969. An [Oversize](#) series was created in 2016.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in thirteen series:

- [Series 1: Diaries, 1845-1849](#)
- [Series 2: General Correspondence and Related Items, 1775-1849](#)
- [Series 3: Additional Correspondence and Related Material, 1826-1849](#)
- [Series 4: Letterpress Copy Books, 1845-1849](#)
- [Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833-1849](#)
- [Series 6: Notes, 1831-1847](#)
- [Series 7: Account and Memoranda Books, 1817-1850](#)
- [Series 8: Miscellaneous, 1827-1884](#)
- [Series 9: Sarah Childress Polk Papers, 1838-1891](#)
- [Series 10: Printed Matter, 1826-1886](#)
- [Series 11: Omitted Correspondence, 1811-1849](#)
- [Series 12: Additions, 1775-1885](#)
- [Oversize, 1832-1886](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
REEL 1-3	<p><u>Series 1: Diaries, 1845-1849</u></p> <p>Diary in Polk's hand. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 4-55	<p><u>Series 2: General Correspondence and Related Items, 1775-1849</u></p> <p>Mainly letters received, with receipts, legal documents, petitions, and other related items. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 56-57	<p><u>Series 3: Additional Correspondence and Related Material, 1826-1849</u></p> <p>Letters received and related material. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 57-58	<p><u>Series 4: Letterpress Copy Books, 1845-1849</u></p> <p>Copies of Polk's outgoing letters in five volumes. The first four volumes have self-contained indexes. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 59-61	<p><u>Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833-1849</u></p> <p>Drafts by Polk of messages to Congress and speeches, together with some printed copies. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 61-62	<p><u>Series 6: Notes, 1831-1847</u></p> <p>Notes by Polk on a variety of subjects. Arranged alphabetically on numbered mounting sheets and in an "executive record book."</p>
REEL 62	<p><u>Series 7: Account and Memoranda Books, 1817-1850</u></p> <p>Miscellaneous account and memoranda volumes. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 63	<p><u>Series 8: Miscellaneous, 1827-1884</u></p> <p>Broadsides and broadsheets, many of which were sent as letters to Polk, and other printed matter or documents pertaining to legal cases and politics, particularly to Democratic Party politics in Tennessee. Additional newspaper clippings are appended. Arranged chronologically.</p>
REEL 63-64	<p><u>Series 9: Sarah Childress Polk Papers, 1838-1891</u></p> <p>Letters received, invoices, receipts, checks, and related documents. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 10:1-4 not filmed	<p><u>Series 10: Printed Matter, 1826-1886</u></p> <p>Presidential messages to Congress, pamphlets, and speeches by Polk, and booklets and newspapers pertaining to him. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
REEL 64-67	<p><u>Series 11: Omitted Correspondence, 1811-1849</u></p> <p>Microfilm reproductions of manuscripts that appear in Series 2 but were incompletely filmed or omitted entirely when part of the microfilm was prepared in 1954.</p>

Arranged chronologically.

BOX 12:1 not filmed

Series 12: Additions, 1775-1885

Correspondence and miscellany including duplicates and fragments, engraved portraits, extracts copied from historic documents, philatelic covers, and a presidential order. Arranged by year of addition and alphabetically by type of material therein.

BOX OV 1-OV 20

Oversize, 1832-1886

Printed matter and newsletters.

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

Container List

Microfilm shelf no. 13,072 (Series 1-9 and 11)

Container	Contents
REEL 1-3	Series 1: Diaries, 1845-1849 Diary in Polk's hand. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 1	1845, Aug. 26-1846, Sept. 11 Digital content available
REEL 2	1846, Sept. 12-1848, Jan. 19 Digital content available
REEL 3	1848, Jan. 20-1849, June 2 Digital content available
REEL 4-55	Series 2: General Correspondence and Related Items, 1775-1849 Mainly letters received, with receipts, legal documents, petitions, and other related items. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 4	1775, May 31-1828, Apr. 25 Digital content available
REEL 5	1828, May 3-1831, Jan. 1 Digital content available
REEL 6	1831, Jan 2-1833, Jan. 16 Digital content available
REEL 7	1833, Jan. 17-1834, Jan. 20 Digital content available
REEL 8	1834, Jan. 21-1834, Sept. 14 Digital content available
REEL 9	1834, Sept. 15-1835, Mar. 5 Digital content available
REEL 10	1835, Mar. 6-1835, Dec. 20 Digital content available
REEL 11	1835, Dec. 21-1836, May 26 Digital content available
REEL 12	1836, May 28-1837, Jan. 17 Digital content available
REEL 13	1837, Jan. 18-1837, Sept. 10 Digital content available
REEL 14	1837, Sept. 11-1838, Feb. 16 Digital content available
REEL 15	1838, Feb. 17-1838, June, 27 Digital content available
REEL 16	1838, June 28-1838, Dec. 5 Digital content available

Series 2: General Correspondence and Related Items, 1775-1849

Container	Contents
REEL 17	1838, Dec. 6-1839, Mar. 25 Digital content available
REEL 18	1839, Mar. 27-1839, Sept. 12 Digital content available
REEL 19	1839, Sept. 13-1840, Feb. 27 Digital content available
REEL 20	1840, Mar. 2-1840, Aug. 15 Digital content available
REEL 21	1840, Aug. 16-1841, Mar. 30 Digital content available
REEL 22	1841, Mar. 31-1842, Jan. 9 Digital content available
REEL 23	1842, Jan. 10-1842, Dec. 12 Digital content available
REEL 24	1842, Dec. 13-1843, Oct. 20 Digital content available
REEL 25	1843, Oct. 21-1844, May 30 Digital content available
REEL 26	1844, May 31-1844, July 5 Digital content available
REEL 27	1844, July 6-1844, Aug. 23 Digital content available
REEL 28	1844, Aug. 24-1844, Oct. 1 Digital content available
REEL 29	1844, Oct. 2-1844, Nov. 1 Digital content available
REEL 30	1844, Nov. 2-1844, Nov. 17 Digital content available
REEL 31	1844, Nov. 18-1844, Dec. 11 Digital content available
REEL 32	1844, Dec. 12-1845, Jan. 20 Digital content available
REEL 33	1845, Jan. 21-1845, Mar. 1 Digital content available
REEL 34	1845, Mar. 2-1845, Mar. 19 Digital content available
REEL 35	1845, Mar. 20-1845, Apr. 11 Digital content available
REEL 36	1845, Apr. 12-1845, Apr. Digital content available
REEL 37	1845, May 1-1845, May 24 Digital content available
REEL 38	1845, May 25-1845, June 25 Digital content available
REEL 39	1845, June 26-1845, July 20 Digital content available
REEL 40	1845, July 21-1845, Aug. 20 Digital content available

Series 2: General Correspondence and Related Items, 1775-1849

Container	Contents
REEL 41	1845, Aug. 21-1845, Sept. 25 Digital content available
REEL 42	1845, Sept. 26-1845, Nov. 25 Digital content available
REEL 43	1845, Nov. 26-1846, Jan. 7 Digital content available
REEL 44	1846, Jan. 8-1846, Mar. 20 Digital content available
REEL 45	1846, Mar. 21-1846, June 10 Digital content available
REEL 46	1846, June 11-1846, Aug. 26 Digital content available
REEL 47	1846, Aug. 27-1846, Dec. 7 Digital content available
REEL 48	1846, Dec. 8-1847, Mar. 7 Digital content available
REEL 49	1847, Mar. 8-1847, June 8 Digital content available
REEL 50	1847, June 9-1847, Aug. 11 Digital content available
REEL 51	1847, Aug. 12-1847 Digital content available
REEL 52	1848, Jan. 1-1848, June 5 Digital content available
REEL 53	1848, June 6-1848, Oct. 24 Digital content available
REEL 54	1848, Oct. 25-1849, Mar. 1 Digital content available
REEL 55	1849, Mar. 2-1849, Dec. 8, undated Digital content available
REEL 56-57	Series 3: Additional Correspondence and Related Material, 1826-1849 Letters received and related material. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 56	1826, May 20-1848, May 19 Digital content available
REEL 57	1848, May 20-1849, June 3, undated Digital content available
REEL 57-58	Series 4: Letterpress Copy Books, 1845-1849 Copies of Polk's outgoing letters in five volumes. The first four volumes have self-contained indexes. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 57	1845, Oct. 11-1846, Aug. 9 Digital content available

Series 4: Letterpress Copy Books, 1845-1849

Container	Contents
REEL 58	1846, Aug. 13-1849, May 28 Digital content available
REEL 59-61	Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833-1849 Drafts by Polk of messages to Congress and speeches, together with some printed copies. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 59	1833, Dec. 30, speech pp. 1-32 Digital content available pp. 33-61 Digital content available 1833-1843, miscellaneous speeches Digital content available 1845 Mar. 4, inaugural address Digital content available Mar. 11, Senate nominations Digital content available Dec. 2, first annual message 1 of 3 Digital content available 2 of 3 Digital content available 3 of 3 Digital content available 1846 Mar. 14, public lands proclamation Digital content available Mar. 24, foreign relations Digital content available Apr. 13, Cherokee Indians Digital content available Apr. 20, Secret Service fund Digital content available May 11, hostilities by Mexico Digital content available June 8, volunteers, United States Army Digital content available June 10, Oregon question Digital content available Aug. 3, rivers and harbors Digital content available Aug. 8, French spoliations Digital content available Dec. 8, second annual message 1 of 4 Digital content available

Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833-1849

Container

Contents

	2 of 4	Digital content available
	3 of 4	Digital content available
	4 of 4	Digital content available
REEL 60	Dec. 22, territorial government in Mexico	Digital content available
	1847	
	Feb. 13, war with Mexico	Digital content available
	Mar. 3, Ireland and Scotland	Digital content available
	June, address at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.	Digital content available
	Dec. 7, third annual message	
	1 of 6 (pp. 1-90)	Digital content available
	2 of 6 (pp. 91-163)	Digital content available
	3 of 6	Digital content available
	4 of 6	Digital content available
	5 of 6	Digital content available
	6 of 6	Digital content available
	Dec. 15, river and harbor bill	Digital content available
	1848	
	Jan. 12, instructions for John Slidell	Digital content available
	Feb. 22, Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo	Digital content available
	Feb. 29, Mexican treaty	Digital content available
	Apr. 3, French revolution	Digital content available
	Apr. 29, Yucatan protection	Digital content available
	May 29, Oregon	Digital content available
	July 6, Mexican peace	Digital content available
	July 24, boundaries, New Mexico and California	Digital content available

Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833-1849

Container

Contents

	July 26, Prussian treaty Digital content available
REEL 61	July 26, rivers and harbors Digital content available
	Aug. 1, Indians Digital content available
	Aug. 14 Appropriations veto Digital content available
	California claims Digital content available
	Oregon Digital content available
	Dec. 5, fourth annual message 1 of 6 Digital content available
	2 of 6 Digital content available
	3 of 6 Digital content available
	4 of 6 Digital content available
	5 of 6 Digital content available
	6 of 6 Digital content available
	1849
	Jan. 2, military in Mexico Digital content available
	Feb. 8, Mexico Digital content available
	Mar. 3 Wilmot Proviso veto Digital content available
	Panama railroad veto Digital content available
REEL 61-62	Series 6: Notes, 1831-1847 Notes by Polk on a variety of subjects. Arranged alphabetically on numbered mounting sheets and in an "executive record book."
REEL 61-62	Subject file Bank Debates Digital content available
	Deposits bill Digital content available
	Banks in United States

	History
	Digital content available
	States
	Digital content available
	Addresses
	Digital content available
	Internal improvements
	Digital content available
	Congressional apportionment
	Digital content available
	Constituent affairs
	Digital content available
	Electoral College
	Digital content available
	Foreign affairs
	Digital content available
	Indian affairs
	Digital content available
	Land Office memoranda
	Digital content available
	Military pensions
	Digital content available
	National armory
	Digital content available
	Pinckney resolution
	Digital content available
	Rich and poor
	Digital content available
	Six militiamen
	Digital content available
	Soldiers pensions
	Digital content available
	State Department, expenditures
	Digital content available
	Surplus revenue
	Digital content available
	Tariff
	Digital content available
	Trial cases
	Digital content available
REEL 62	Journal, "An Authentic Transcript of the Executive Records of the Senate of the United States from the 4th of March, 1845, to the 3rd of March, 1847, Prepared for the President of the United States," undated
	Digital content available
REEL 62	Series 7: Account and Memoranda Books, 1817-1850
	Miscellaneous account and memoranda volumes.
	Arranged chronologically.

Series 7: Account and Memoranda Books, 1817-1850

Container

Contents

REEL 62

Family and personal accounts, 1845-1850

[Digital content available](#)

Samuel W. Polk accounts and estate, 1817-1845

[Digital content available](#)

Partnership of Aaron V. Brown and James K. Polk, 1822-1824

[Digital content available](#)

Partnership of Madison Caruthers and James K. Polk, 1820-1823

[Digital content available](#)

Miscellaneous congressional memoranda, 1829-1838, undated
(6 vols. in 1 folder)

[Digital content available](#)

Personal expenses, 1839-1841

[Digital content available](#)

Samuel W. Polk estate, 1839-1842

[Digital content available](#)

Corcoran & Riggs Bank account, 1845-1849

[Digital content available](#)

Treasury notes, 1847-1848

[Digital content available](#)

White House household expenses, 1848-1849

[Digital content available](#)

State of Tennessee, lists of individuals, undated

[Digital content available](#)

REEL 63

Series 8: Miscellaneous, 1827-1884

Broadsides and broadsheets, many of which were sent as letters to Polk, and other printed matter or documents pertaining to legal cases and politics, particularly to Democratic Party politics in Tennessee. Additional newspaper clippings are appended.

Arranged chronologically.

REEL 63

Chronological file, 1827-1849

1827, Dec. 10

[Digital content available](#)

1828

[Digital content available](#)

1831, Apr.-Dec.

[Digital content available](#)

1832, Dec. 27

[Digital content available](#)

1833, Nov.-Dec.

[Digital content available](#)

1834, Jan.-1834, Dec., undated

[Digital content available](#)

1835, Feb.-Dec. and undated

[Digital content available](#)

1836

[Digital content available](#)

1837

[Digital content available](#)

Series 8: Miscellaneous, 1827-1884

Container

Contents

1838, Jan.-Nov., undated
[Digital content available](#)

1839, Jan.-Sept., undated
[Digital content available](#)

1840
[Digital content available](#)

1841-1844
[Digital content available](#)

1845
[Digital content available](#)

1846, June-Aug.
[Digital content available](#)

1847, Feb. 16
[Digital content available](#)

1848
[Digital content available](#)

1849
[Digital content available](#)

1844-1849
[Digital content available](#)

Newspaper clippings, 1827-1884, undated
1829-1843

[Digital content available](#)

1846, undated
[Digital content available](#)

REEL 63-64

Series 9: Sarah Childress Polk Papers, 1838-1891

Letters received, invoices, receipts, checks, and related documents.
Arranged chronologically.

REEL 63

1838, Mar.-1851
[Digital content available](#)

REEL 64

1852-1891, Dec.
[Digital content available](#)

BOX 10:1-4 not filmed

Series 10: Printed Matter, 1826-1886

Presidential messages to Congress, pamphlets, and speeches by Polk, and booklets and newspapers pertaining to him.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

BOX 10:1

Booklets

New and Complete Edition of Ossian's Poems (1823), inscribed by Polk to his wife, 1826
Sketches, Civil and Military Services of William Henry Harrison, marked, 1840

Messages to Congress

1845, Dec.

1846, May-Dec.

1847, Dec.

Series 10: Printed Matter, 1826-1886

Container	Contents
BOX 10:2	1848, Dec. Digital content available Miscellaneous 1828-1832 Digital content available 1833-1834 Digital content available 1835-1836 Digital content available 1837-1838 Digital content available 1839-1841 Digital content available 1842 Digital content available
BOX 10:3	1843 Digital content available 1844 <i>See also Oversize</i> Digital content available 1845 Digital content available 1846 Digital content available 1847 Digital content available 1848 Digital content available circa 1848 Digital content available 1849-1860 Digital content available 1878-1885 Digital content available Undated, 1 of 2 <i>See also Oversize</i> Digital content available Undated, 2 of 2 Digital content available
BOX 10:4	Newspapers <i>See Oversize</i> Pamphlets, 1837-1841 Digital content available Speeches, 1826-1841 Digital content available
REEL 64-67	Series 11: Omitted Correspondence, 1811-1849 Microfilm reproductions of manuscripts that appear in Series 2 but were incompletely filmed or omitted entirely when part of the microfilm was prepared in 1954. Arranged chronologically.

Series 11: Omitted Correspondence, 1811-1849

Container	Contents
REEL 64	1811-1828 Digital content available
REEL 65	1829, Jan.-1845, Dec. 11 Digital content available
REEL 66	1845, Dec. 12-1848, Apr. 13 Digital content available
REEL 67	1848, Apr. 22-1849, Apr. 27, undated Digital content available
BOX 12:1 not filmed	Series 12: Additions, 1775-1885 Correspondence and miscellany including duplicates and fragments, engraved portraits, extracts copied from historic documents, philatelic covers, and a presidential order. Arranged by year of addition and alphabetically by type of material therein.
BOX 12:1	1977 Addition Correspondence, 1835-1849 Digital content available Miscellany Duplicates and fragments, 1849, undated Digital content available Engraved portrait, undated Digital content available <i>Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congress . . . [South Carolina] . . . 1775</i> Digital content available <i>Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence with Accompanying Documents . . . Raleigh [North Carolina] . . . 1831, and Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congress . . . [South Carolina] . . . 1885</i> Digital content available Philatelic covers, undated Digital content available 2014 Addition Engraved portraits of Polk, undated Digital content available Letter to Samuel H. Laughlin, 1844 Digital content available 2021 Addition Letter to Samuel H. Laughlin, 1844 Order by Polk authorizing Secretary of State James Buchanan to issue full power to Chargé d'Affaires for Venezuela Benjamin G. Shields in claims against the Republics of Colombia and Venezuela, 1845
BOX OV 1-OV 20	Oversize, 1832-1886 Printed matter and newsletters. Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Printed Matter Miscellaneous

Oversize, 1832-1886

Container

Contents

	1844 (Container 10:3) Digital content available
BOX OV 2	Undated, 1 of 2 (Container 10:3) Digital content available
BOX OV 3	Newspapers (Container 10:4) <i>Baltimore Patriot</i> , 1834, June 3 Digital content available
BOX OV 4	<i>Boston Post</i> , 1846, Dec. 1 Digital content available
BOX OV 5	<i>Boston Statesman</i> , 1834, May 24 Digital content available
BOX OV 6	<i>Christian Herald</i> , Detroit, Mich., 1877, Aug. 30 Digital content available
BOX OV 7	<i>The Globe</i> , Washington, D.C. 1833-1834 Digital content available
BOX OV 8	1835-1838 Digital content available
BOX OV 9	1841-1843 Digital content available
BOX OV 10	<i>National Intelligencer</i> , Washington, D.C. 1834-1838 Digital content available
BOX OV 11	1839-1841 Digital content available
BOX OV 12	1842-1843 Digital content available
BOX OV 13	<i>New Hampshire Statesman and State Journal</i> , Concord, N.H., 1835, Mar. 14 Digital content available
BOX OV 14	<i>New York Herald</i> , 1859, Sept. 29 Digital content available
BOX OV 15	<i>North Carolina Standard</i> , Raleigh, N.C., 1844, Sept. 18 Digital content available
BOX OV 16	<i>Paul Pry</i> , Washington, D.C., 1835, Jan. 24 Digital content available
BOX OV 17	<i>Richmond Enquirer</i> , 1832-1841 Digital content available
BOX OV 18	<i>St. Louis Republican</i> , 1884, Sept. 28 Digital content available
BOX OV 19	<i>The Times</i> , Chicago, Ill., 1886, Feb. 20 Digital content available
BOX OV 20	<i>United States Telegraph</i> , Washington, D.C., 1832-1834 Digital content available