

John G. Nicolay Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2010

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm78034736>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms011009>

Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011
Revised 2021 October

Collection Summary

Title: John G. Nicolay Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1811-1943

Bulk Dates: 1860-1901

ID No.: MSS34736

Creator: Nicolay, John G. (John George), 1832-1901

Extent: 5,500 items

Extent: 18 containers plus 2 oversize

Extent: 7.2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm78034736>

Summary: Presidential secretary and biographer. Correspondence, research notes, notebooks, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous material documenting Nicolay's public career, particularly his tenure as secretary to President Abraham Lincoln and his numerous literary activities, including his works on Lincoln.

Online Content: The John G. Nicolay Papers are available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000085>.

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

Bigelow, John, 1817-1911--Correspondence.
Burlingame, Anson, 1820-1870--Correspondence.
Cameron, Simon, 1799-1889--Correspondence.
Colfax, Schuyler, 1823-1885--Correspondence.
Conkling, Roscoe, 1829-1888--Correspondence.
Dennison, William, 1815-1882--Correspondence.
Dix, John A. (John Adams), 1798-1879--Correspondence.
Dixon, James, 1814-1873--Correspondence.
Fogg, George Gilman, 1813-1881--Correspondence.
Greeley, Horace, 1811-1872--Correspondence.
Hale, James Tracy, 1810-1865--Correspondence.
Harlan, James, 1820-1899--Correspondence.
Hatch, O. M. (Ozias Mather), 1814-1893--Correspondence.
Hay, John, 1838-1905--Correspondence.
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865.
Lincoln, Robert Todd, 1843-1926--Correspondence.
McClure, Alexander K. (Alexander Kelly), 1828-1909--Correspondence.
Medill, Joseph, 1823-1899--Correspondence.
Morgan, Edwin D. (Edwin Denison), 1811-1883--Correspondence.
Nicolay, Helen, 1866-1954. Helen Nicolay papers.
Nicolay, John G. (John George), 1832-1901.
Nicolay, Therenia Bates, 1836-1885--Correspondence.
Philbrick, Charles H--Correspondence.
Reid, Whitelaw, 1837-1912--Correspondence.
Schurz, Carl, 1829-1906--Correspondence.
Sumner, Charles, 1811-1874--Correspondence.
Swett, Leonard, 1825-1889--Correspondence.
Tilton, Theodore, 1835-1907--Correspondence.
White, Horace, 1834-1916--Correspondence.

Woolfolk, A. C. (Austin Coleman), -1880--Correspondence.

Organizations

United States. Supreme Court--Officials and employees.

Subjects

Diplomatic and consular service, American--France.

Places

France--Foreign relations--United States.

United States--Foreign relations--France.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

United States--Politics and government--1861-1865.

Titles

John G. Nicolay Papers at the Library of Congress

Occupations

Biographers.

Secretaries, Presidential.

Acquisition Information

The papers of John G. Nicolay, presidential secretary and biographer, were given to the Library of Congress by his daughter, Helen Nicolay, between 1910 and 1947. Letters written by Abraham Lincoln that were formerly in this collection have been removed and placed in the Abraham Lincoln Papers.

Processing History

The papers of John G. Nicolay were arranged and described by Frank Tusa in 1977. The collection was expanded and revised by Thomas Bigley in 2010.

Additional Guides

Most of the collection has been cataloged alphabetically by correspondent and subject in a card index file available in the Manuscript Reading Room. Contact the reference staff for information.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of John G. Nicolay 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.

Online Content

The John G. Nicolay Papers are available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000085>.

Preferred Citation

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

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1832, Feb. 26	Born, Essingen, near Landau, Bavaria
1838	Immigrated to the United States
1854-1856	Editor, <i>Free Press</i> , Pittsfield, Ill.
1856-1860	Clerk for secretary of state of Illinois
1860-1865	Private secretary to Abraham Lincoln
1865	Married Therenia Bates (died 1885)
1865-1869	United States consul, Paris, France
1872-1888	Marshall, Supreme Court of the United States
1890	Published with John Hay <i>Abraham Lincoln; A History</i> . New York: Century Co. 10 vols.
1901, Sept. 26	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John George Nicolay (1831-1901) span the years 1811 to 1943, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1860 to 1901. The collection reflects Nicolay's long political career, particularly his tenure as private secretary to Abraham Lincoln, and documents his numerous literary activities. There is also a limited amount of material relating to the literary activities of his daughter, Helen Nicolay. The collection is composed mainly of correspondence and research material, supplemented by notebooks, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous material and is organized in seven series: [Notebooks and Bound Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Helen Nicolay General Correspondence](#), [Transcripts](#), [Research File](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

The [Notebooks and Bound Correspondence](#) series is relatively brief and incomplete, but the [General Correspondence](#) series contains a wealth of material pertaining to Nicolay's public and private activities. The correspondence is especially valuable, though not voluminous, during the years he served as Lincoln's private secretary. Numerous letters from the young secretary to his future wife, Therenia Bates, offer an intimate glimpse into the character and activities of the war president and the men who shaped national policy, as well as Nicolay's evaluation of the important political and military decisions made during these crucial years. Scattered memoranda made by Nicolay both before and during Lincoln's administration provide a valuable supplement to this correspondence.

Nicolay's career as a public officeholder and writer is amply documented in the correspondence for the years after the war, particularly his collaboration with John Hay as coauthor of a multivolume biography of Lincoln. Nine revealing letters, 1861-1870, from Nicolay to O. M. Hatch in the Hatch papers at the Illinois State Historical Library have been photocopied and interfiled in the correspondence series.

Nicolay's political career brought him into contact with many distinguished public men, and the general correspondence is enriched by numerous letters from American political figures. Prominent correspondents include John Bigelow, Simon Cameron, Schuyler Colfax, William Dennison, John A. Dix, James Harlan, O. M. Hatch, John Hay, Robert Todd Lincoln, Alexander K. McClure, Charles H. Philbrick, and A. C. Woolfolk. There are also scattered letters from Anson Burlingame, Roscoe Conkling, James Dixon, George Gilman Fogg, Horace Greeley, James Tracy Hale, Joseph Medill, Edwin D. Morgan, Whitelaw Reid, Carl Schurz, Charles Sumner, Leonard Swett, Theodore Tilton, and Horace White. Nicolay's literary career, particularly his years of work on the Lincoln biography, is the subject of the [Research File](#) series. The notes, memoranda, and other material collected by Nicolay and his daughter have been organized into material relating to Lincoln and material unrelated to Lincoln. The first half of the series, particularly the copies and extracts from the diaries of prominent Civil War political and military figures, includes much pertinent material relating to Lincoln and his

administration. Nicolay's literary endeavors, other than his works on Lincoln, are represented by notes, memoranda, and other material in the second half of the series.

The collection concludes with a [Miscellany](#) series that includes an autograph collection of invitations for the Civil War period.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in seven series:

- [Notebooks and Bound Correspondence, 1856-circa 1910](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1811-1943](#)
- [Helen Nicolay General Correspondence, 1901-1914](#)
- [Transcripts, 1860-1865](#)
- [Research File, circa 1860-1942](#)
- [Miscellany, 1852-1942](#)
- [Oversize, 1861-1871](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<p><u>Notebooks and Bound Correspondence, 1856-circa 1910</u></p> <p>Correspondence, notes, clippings, and memorabilia bound in one scrapbook, one volume of official correspondence, and three small notebooks.</p>
BOX 2-6	<p><u>General Correspondence, 1811-1943</u></p> <p>Letters sent and received by John G. Nicolay and his daughter, Helen Nicolay, supplemented by numerous memoranda and occasional copies of letters written by Abraham Lincoln. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 6	<p><u>Helen Nicolay General Correspondence, 1901-1914</u></p> <p>Letter received and copies of letters sent by Helen Nicolay, supplemented by occasional memoranda. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 7	<p><u>Transcripts, 1860-1865</u></p> <p>Typed copies of letters in this collection from Nicolay to Therenia Bates and others, as well as copies of his memoranda. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 8-16	<p><u>Research File, circa 1860-1942</u></p> <p>Notes, memoranda, occasional correspondence, drafts of chapters and articles, newspaper and article clippings, printed matter, extracts from diaries, and memorabilia collected by John G. Nicolay and Helen Nicolay.</p> <p>Organized in three parts: a Lincoln file of material gathered by the Nicolays for their published works relating to Abraham Lincoln; transcripts of diaries and notes of Lincoln's associates; and a miscellaneous file containing material collected by John G. Nicolay for literary projects unrelated to Abraham Lincoln. The Lincoln file and transcripts are arranged largely as received according to the title or file name provided. The miscellaneous file is arranged alphabetically by title or topic.</p>
BOX 17-19	<p><u>Miscellany, 1852-1942</u></p> <p>Scrapbooks, sketchbooks, book of poems, autograph collection, pencil sketches, cards and invitations, patent material, article clippings, and material collected by Helen Nicolay for a biography of John G. Nicolay. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 2	<p><u>Oversize, 1861-1871</u></p> <p>Broadside from <i>Charleston Mercury</i> announcing dissolution of the Union and magazine article by John Hay. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Notebooks and Bound Correspondence, 1856-circa 1910 Correspondence, notes, clippings, and memorabilia bound in one scrapbook, one volume of official correspondence, and three small notebooks.
BOX 1	Diplomatic correspondence, 1861, Feb.-Apr. Digital content available
BOX 1	Notebook
BOX 1	1856-1858 Digital content available
BOX 1	1862, Feb.-Mar. Digital content available
BOX 1	1863, summer Digital content available
BOX 1	Scrapbook of a correspondences and memorabilia, 1856-1870, 1887, circa 1910 Digital content available
BOX 2-6	General Correspondence, 1811-1943 Letters sent and received by John G. Nicolay and his daughter, Helen Nicolay, supplemented by numerous memoranda and occasional copies of letters written by Abraham Lincoln. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2	1811-1829 Digital content available
BOX 2	1831-1839 Digital content available
BOX 2	1841-1859 Digital content available
BOX 2	1860, Jan.-Nov. 10 Digital content available
BOX 2	1860, Nov.11-Dec. 30, [1860] Digital content available
BOX 2	1861, Jan.-Feb. Digital content available
BOX 2	1861, Mar.-Apr. Digital content available
BOX 2	1861, May-June Digital content available
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BOX 2	1861, Sept.-Oct. Digital content available
BOX 2	1861, Nov.-Dec., [1861] Digital content available

General Correspondence, 1811-1943

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General Correspondence, 1811-1943

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BOX 4	1887, June-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 5	1888 Digital content available
BOX 5	1889 Digital content available
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BOX 5	1890, Dec. Digital content available
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General Correspondence, 1811-1943

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BOX 6	1900, Jan.-Dec., [1900] Digital content available
BOX 6	1901, Jan.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 6	1902-1907 Digital content available
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BOX 6	Undated (catalogued) Digital content available
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BOX 6	Helen Nicolay General Correspondence, 1901-1914 Letter received and copies of letters sent by Helen Nicolay, supplemented by occasional memoranda. Arranged chronologically.
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Helen Nicolay General Correspondence, 1901-1914

Container	Contents
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BOX 7	Transcripts, 1860-1865 Typed copies of letters in this collection from Nicolay to Therenia Bates and others, as well as copies of his memoranda. Arranged chronologically.
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BOX 7	1861, Apr.-June Digital content available
BOX 7	1861, July-Sept. Digital content available
BOX 7	1861, Oct.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 7	1862, Jan.-Mar. Digital content available
BOX 7	1862, Apr.-June Digital content available
BOX 7	1862, July-Sept. Digital content available
BOX 7	1862, Oct.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 7	1863, Jan.-Apr. Digital content available
BOX 7	1863, May-July Digital content available
BOX 7	1863, Aug.-Dec. Digital content available
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Research File, circa 1860-1942

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largely as received according to the title or file name provided. The miscellaneous file is arranged alphabetically by title or topic.

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BOX 8	During the administration, Military (not used in <i>Personal Traits</i>) Digital content available
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BOX 14	"Among the Mormons" Digital content available
BOX 14	"Benjamin Franklin" Digital content available
BOX 14	Bibliography project for children's history of U.S. Digital content available
BOX 14	"Champagne" Digital content available
BOX 14	"Confederate States of America" Digital content available
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BOX 14	"Green Bay" Digital content available
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BOX 14	3 of 5 Digital content available
BOX 14	4 of 5 Digital content available
BOX 14	5 of 5 Digital content available
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BOX 16	“Tour de Babel” Digital content available
BOX 16	“Up the Mississippi” Digital content available
BOX 16	“Vesuvius” Digital content available
BOX 16	“The White House from John Adams to James Madison”
BOX 16	1 of 2 Digital content available
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Research File, circa 1860-1942

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BOX 17	Catalog of books Digital content available
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BOX OV 1	Lincoln in the campaign of 1860

Oversize, 1861-1871

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BOX OV 1	Broadside, "The Union Is Dissolved," 1860, Dec. 20 (Container 11) Digital content available
BOX OV 2	Miscellany
BOX OV 2	Magazine article, "Little Breeches," by John Hay, <i>Harper's Weekly</i> , 1871, May (Container 17) Digital content available