

Warren G. Harding-Carrie Fulton Phillips Correspondence

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2014**

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82048595>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms014016>

Prepared by Karen Linn Femia

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2014

Collection Summary

Title: Warren G. Harding-Carrie Fulton Phillips Correspondence

Span Dates: 1910-1924

ID No.: MSS48595

Creator: Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923

Creator: Phillips, Carrie Fulton, 1873-1960

Extent: 240 items

Extent: 2 containers

Extent: .6 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm82048595>

Summary: Warren G. Harding, newspaper editor, politician and president of the United States. Carrie Fulton Phillips, wife of a Marion, Ohio, store owner and paramour of Harding. Primarily correspondence by Harding sent to Phillips, also drafts and notes for correspondence written by Phillips, created during the course of their approximately fifteen-year relationship during and before his service as U. S. senator.

Online Content: The correspondence of Warren G. Harding and Carrie Fulton Phillips is available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000023>.

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

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923--Correspondence.

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923--Relations with women.

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923. Warren G. Harding-Carrie Fulton Phillips correspondence, 1910-1924.

Phillips, Carrie Fulton, 1873-1960--Correspondence.

Phillips, Carrie Fulton, 1873-1960.

Organizations

United States. Congress. Senate.

Subjects

Freedom of speech--United States.

Legislators--United States--Paramours.

Legislators--United States--Relations with women.

Paramours--United States.

Presidents--United States--Paramours.

Presidents--United States--Relations with women.

Presidents--United States.

World War, 1914-1918--Germany.

World War, 1914-1918--United States.

Places

United States--History--1901-1953.

United States--Politics and government--1901-1953.

Titles

Carrie Fulton Phillips papers

Warren G. Harding-Carrie Fulton Phillips Correspondence at the Library of Congress

Occupations

Newspaper editors.

Paramours.
Presidents--United States.

Provenance

The correspondence of Warren G. Harding and Carrie Fulton Phillips was given to the Library of Congress by George T. Harding in 1972.

Processing History

A preliminary arrangement was made at the Ohio Historical Society in 1963-1964. When transferred to the Library of Congress in 1972, the papers were inventoried and given conservation treatment. The papers remained closed until 2014 when they were processed and digitized.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Warren G. Harding and Carrie Fulton Phillips is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The correspondence of Warren G. Harding and Carrie Fulton Phillips is 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 correspondence of Warren G. Harding and Carrie Fulton Phillips is available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/collmss.ms000023>.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Warren G. Harding-Carrie Fulton Phillips Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Notes

Warren G. Harding

Date	Event
1865, Nov. 2	Born, Blooming Grove, Ohio
1884-1923	Owner and publisher of the <i>Marion Star</i> , Marion, Ohio
1891	Married Florence Kling DeWolfe (died 1924)
1899-1903	Member, Ohio State senate
1904-1905	Lieutenant governor of Ohio
1910	Unsuccessful Republican candidate for governor of Ohio
1915-1921	U. S. senator from Ohio
1920	Elected president of the United States
1921, March 4	Inaugurated president of the United States

1923, August 2 Died, San Francisco, Calif.

Carrie Fulton Phillips

Date	Event
1873, Sept. 22	Born, Bucyrus, Ohio
1896	Married James E. Phillips (died 1939), owner of Ulher & Phillips dry goods store in Marion, Ohio
1897	Birth of daughter Isabelle
1902	Birth of son James (died 1904)
1905	Relationship with Warren G. Harding began
1909	Jan.-Apr., traveled with husband and with Warren G. and Florence Kling Harding to Europe, visiting Italy, Spain, Switzerland, France and Germany
1911	Mar., vacationed with husband and with the Hardings in Bermuda for two weeks Sept., moved to Berlin, Germany, with daughter Isabelle, who attended school there Dec., sailed to U.S. to meet Warren G. Harding in New York City; they traveled together to Boston, Mass., and Montreal, Canada, returned to Germany Jan. 1912
1912	May-June, traveled with a group visiting Venice, Italy and Paris, France Dec., sailed to U.S. to meet Warren G. Harding in New York City; they traveled to Richmond, Va.
1913	Husband James arrived from Ohio and they traveled that summer with their daughter visiting Italy, Switzerland, England, and Sweden
1914	With outbreak of the war, left Germany arriving in New York City on July 23 and returned to live in Marion, Ohio
1916	Made frequent trips to New York City while Isabelle attended school there
1917	Aug.-Sept., spent several weeks with Isabelle in Port Jefferson, Long Island, N. Y., then several weeks in New York City
1918	June, met with Harding in northern New York State while he was speaking on the Chautauqua circuit
1920	Sept. 23, Carrie and James E. Phillips sailed for China, Hong Kong, and Japan; they departed Yokohama, Japan, on Dec. 4 bound for Honolulu, Hawaii, arrived in San Francisco, Calif., on Jan. 18, 1921
1923	July 4, sailed to Europe with nephew Thomas Fulton to visit her daughter Isabelle, her grandson William (born 1920), and Isabelle's husband William H. Mathée, who was serving as vice counsel and clerk in Zurich, Switzerland
1925	Mar. 19, returned to the United States
1939	After the death of her husband, continued living in Marion, Ohio, raising German Shepherd dogs
1956	Moved into a nursing home; her lawyer and guardian, Don Williamson, took possession of the letters
1960, Feb. 3	Died, Marion, Ohio

Scope and Content Note

In 1956, under the direction of her lawyer and guardian, Carrie Fulton Phillips moved into a nursing home. It was left to her guardian, Don Williamson, to pick through Phillips's possessions in her Marion, Ohio, home. While clearing a closet, Williamson found a cardboard box full of letters dating from 1910 to about 1924. Most of the letters were from Warren G. Harding to Phillips, but also there were some drafts and notes by her as well a few other related items. Not knowing what to do with the box of papers, he brought them home for safekeeping. This collection is comprised solely of the material that was in that box.

The correspondence of Warren G. Harding (1865-1923) and Carrie Fulton Phillips (1873-1960) spans the years 1910-1924. The material is organized alphabetically by type of material, but the correspondence and drafts of correspondence comprise most of the collection. Other material includes envelopes without letters, printed matter, a receipt, congressional passes, and an inauguration ticket. The material primarily dates from before and during Harding's service as United States senator from Ohio.

A file of correspondence and drafts of correspondence is organized chronologically with various correspondents interfiled. By far, most of the letters were written by Harding for Phillips. Many of the letters are dated, but many are either partially dated or not dated at all. Dates or approximate dates have been assigned to almost all of the undated letters and drafts using the content of the letters either with reference to outside events or to other letters. Sometimes both a bracketed date and a parenthetical date appear on the item and the dates may be years apart. The bracketed dates were written in 1963-1964 at the Ohio Historical Society. The parenthetical dates were created in 2014 while the papers were processed at the Library of Congress and are the result of research by Manuscript Division staff and the research of James David Robenalt in *The Harding Affair* (2009). Some letters are fragments with incomplete page numbering. In addition to her name or common terms of endearment, Carrie Phillips is often addressed as "Sis." Harding uses a number of ways to sign his letters. WGH and "Gov" were used for public letters that might be read by others. "Constant," "Jerry," "JVH," and "FHK" indicate a letter that was intended for Carrie Phillips alone. In personal letters he sometimes uses the name "Pouterson" to refer to the two of them.

That Harding and Phillips had a romantic relationship dating from 1905 to at least 1920 is clear from these letters. Although the first letter in these papers dates from 1910, other letters refer to 1905 as the beginning of the relationship. The letters are at times deeply passionate, but there is more to the collection than love notes and sentimental poetry. The letters give travel and speaking engagement information on Harding. They wrote to each other when at least one of them was not in Marion, Ohio, and both of them traveled frequently. Intricate plans had to be made to meet or even to direct where the next letter should be sent. Harding often described his activities and colleagues. After living in Germany for several years, Carrie Phillips was strongly pro-German both before and during World War I. She writes that it would be a betrayal of America to commit it to the interests of Britain. There are substantive exchanges in the letters and drafts concerning the war and Harding's role as senator. Before U.S. entry in the war, Harding acknowledged in a letter to Phillips that he had constituents writing him in support of Germany. On March 25, 1917 he wrote: "How unthinking and unfair you are when you accuse me of playing politics! I represent a state with hundreds of thousands of German Republicans. Nobody knows better than I do that I seal my political fate by displeasing them." Even after the United States entered the war, Phillips, against the advice of Harding, publicly expressed her opinions about the war. In a letter of February 17, 1918, Harding, who as president would commute the sentences of scores of political prisoners who had opposed the war, including Eugene V. Debs, tried to impress upon her the limits of free speech during the war: "I beg you, be prudent in talking to others. . . Remember your country is in war, and things are not normal, and toleration is not universal, and justice is not always discriminating." Before the Senate vote on the war resolution, there were oblique references in the correspondence regarding Carrie Phillips's power to expose Harding's marital infidelities (he voted in favor regardless). What Carrie Phillips wrote in her letters often has to be inferred from how Harding responds, however, there are some extended drafts by Phillips. See in particular drafts and notes from May, June, July, and Autumn of 1917, and March and December 5 of 1918. Phillips's notes and drafts reflect those times when she is most agitated, either over the war or concerning the perceived broken promises of Harding.

The box of letters found in Carrie Fulton Phillips's closet in 1956 remained in the home of her guardian until 1963, when they were first shown to historian Frances Russell and then brought to the Ohio Historical Society. Once there, archivist Kenneth W. Duckett feared the letters would be transferred to the Harding Memorial Association where they faced possible destruction. Believing that the papers deserved preservation, he secretly microfilmed them; only a handful of items were omitted from the film. Eventually, word of the letters leaked out. In the end, after various legal proceedings, the Harding family, who controlled copyright for most of the collection, purchased possessory rights from the family of Carrie Phillips with the understanding that the letters would go to the Library of Congress where they would remain sealed until July 29, 2014. The microfilm copies were sent to the Ohio Historical Society with the same restriction: closed until 2014. One microfilm copy, however, had escaped the notice of the families and the judge. Duckett had retained a copy and when he donated his papers to the Western Reserve Historical Society, the microfilm that was not part of the lawsuit ended up at the historical society. This is the copy used by James Robenalt while writing his book *The Harding Affair*.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Correspondence and drafts of correspondence
BOX 1	1910-1911 Digital content available
BOX 1	1912 Digital content available
BOX 1	1913
BOX 1	Jan.-Aug. Digital content available
BOX 1	Sept.-Nov., no month given Digital content available
BOX 1	1914 Digital content available
BOX 1	1915 Digital content available
BOX 1	1916
BOX 1	Jan.-Feb. Digital content available
BOX 1	Mar.-May Digital content available
BOX 1	Aug. Digital content available
BOX 1	circa Sept.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 1	1917
BOX 1	Jan.-Feb. Digital content available
BOX 1	Mar.-June Digital content available
BOX 1	July-Aug. Digital content available
BOX 1	Sept.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 1	1918
BOX 1	Jan.-July Digital content available
BOX 1	Aug. Digital content available
BOX 1	Nov.-Dec. Digital content available
BOX 2	1919 Digital content available
BOX 2	1920 Digital content available

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 2	1922-circa 1924 Digital content available
BOX 2	Undated Digital content available
BOX 2	Envelopes, 1916-1919, 1924, undated Digital content available
BOX 2	Notes by Carrie Fulton Phillips, undated Digital content available
BOX 2	Presidential inauguration ticket, 1921 Digital content available
BOX 2	Printed matter, 1911, undated Digital content available
BOX 2	Receipt for automobile purchase, 1919 Digital content available
BOX 2	U.S. Senate and House passes for Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Phillips, 1916 Digital content available