

Researching American Foreign Relations at the Library of Congress

by John Earl Haynes

The Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress has amassed extraordinary collections for documenting American foreign policy, surpassed only by the National Archives' holdings of the official records of the State Department. In addition to the foreign policy-related documents available in twenty-three presidential papers collections (Washington through Coolidge), the division houses the papers of more than half the individuals who have served as secretary of state, from the first secretary, Thomas Jefferson, who assumed office in 1789, to Alexander Haig, who resigned in 1982. More than three hundred other collections comprise the papers of American diplomats or contain significant material relating to American diplomacy. These, too, span American history, from Benjamin Franklin's letters as the American colonies' diplomatic representative to France in 1776 to the papers of William Howard Taft IV, who became the United States ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1989. The Library of Congress also hosts the on-line resource "Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training," which includes searchable transcripts of more than 1,500 oral history interviews with U.S. diplomatic personnel. This resource is located at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/index.html>.

The papers of key presidential confidants such as Sol M. Linowitz, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan also contain valuable foreign policy-related material, as do the papers of secretaries of defense Caspar Weinberger and Elliott Richardson and other military officials. The papers of General Hugh L. Scott, for example, contain his diary and other documents relating to his role in the American diplomatic mission to Russia, 1917-19, while those of General Tasker Bliss, a member of the American Peace Commission, describe the complications of the American role in the negotiations ending World War I. General Frank McCoy's papers detail not only his long military career but also his role as member and first chairman of the Far Eastern Advisory

Commission after World War II. Admiral William Leahy's papers document his service as ambassador to Vichy France as well as military chief of staff to presidents Roosevelt and Truman during World War II.

Many of the division's earliest documents relating to American diplomatic history are transcripts, photoreproductions, and other copies of rare materials held in repositories outside the United States. In 1898, within a year of its creation, the Manuscript Division acquired Benjamin Franklin Stevens's collection of facsimiles and transcripts of British manuscripts. Soon thereafter it obtained photoreproductions of additional papers relating to America held in European archives. Donations from two private sources—James B. Wilbur in 1925 and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1927—provided financial resources for the expansion of the division's Foreign Copying Program, which today includes thousands of volumes of transcripts, photostats, microfiche, and microfilm. Supplementing the foreign reproductions were donations from two private collectors of original materials on early Spanish and Portuguese involvement in North America. The gifts of Edward S. Harkness in 1927 and Hans P. Kraus in 1969 have made available to the public invaluable documents from the first two centuries of European exploration, conquest, and settlement of the New World.

American diplomatic affairs during the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the first third of the nineteenth century are reflected in the papers of presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, and John Tyler, as well as in the papers of various members of Congress and the cabinet, including Timothy Pickering, Roger Sherman, Oliver Ellsworth, James McHenry, Caleb Cushing, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster. The mid- to late eighteenth century also witnessed important events in American foreign affairs and diplomacy, including the Mexican-American War, the American Civil War, and the Spanish-American War. Some of the more notable collections documenting these events and others include the papers of James K. Polk, John C. Calhoun, Abraham Lincoln, William McKinley, John Sherman, Theodore Roosevelt, and Elihu Root.

Diplomacy during World War I is extensively documented in the division's holdings, notably in the papers of President Woodrow Wilson, which are particularly rich with material on the Paris Peace Conference, and his cabinet members Robert Lansing, Philander C. Knox, William Jennings Bryan,

Newton D. Baker, and Josephus Daniels, among others. Of particular interest are nine volumes of private memoranda in which Secretary of State Lansing recorded accounts of cabinet meetings, vivid impressions of dignitaries whom he met, and detailed descriptions of the Paris Peace Conference and the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Versailles and the covenant of the League of Nations.

In the twentieth century no foreign policy relationship has been so fraught with danger as that of the United States and the Soviet Union. The library's manuscript resources are particularly rich for studying the relations between these two superpowers, as the division's holdings include the papers of several of this country's diplomats to tsarist Russia, including George Washington Campbell, Simon Cameron, and George von Lengerke Meyer, and ambassadors to the Soviet Union W. Averell Harriman, Charles E. Bohlen, Laurence A. Steinhardt, William H. Standley, Malcolm Toon, and Joseph E. Davies. The Harriman Papers comprise one of the richest collections of primary source material on modern American foreign policy. Harriman served as President Roosevelt's special representative to Great Britain (1941-43), ambassador to the Soviet Union (1943-46), coordinator of the Marshall Plan (1948-50), United States negotiator for the Test Ban Treaty (1963), and American representative at the Paris peace talks with North Vietnam (1968-69). A significant addition to the Davies papers is currently being organized. A large addition to the Paul Nitze papers, already among the most heavily consulted collections dealing with American Cold War policies, has also just arrived at the library, and it is hoped that archival organization of this addition will begin in 2009.

The library's diplomatic collections are not limited to the papers of presidents, State Department officials, and appointed ambassadors. Included as well are the papers of those who promoted the nation's foreign policy through covert means. The collections of Central Intelligence Agency officials David Atlee Phillips, Archibald Roosevelt, Jr., and Cord Meyer and National Security Agency director William Odom document the institutionalization of American intelligence operations in the post-World War II period. These and other recently acquired collections focusing on the government's covert policies and activities complement the papers of ambassadors and State Department officials who pursued more open and traditional diplomatic approaches to American foreign policy.

While the library advises members of Congress to place their papers in a depository in their home states to ensure maximum research use, the Manuscript Division has acquired some congressional papers that contain diplomatic material. The papers of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for example, document not only his close attention to foreign policy during his long tenure as U.S. senator from New York, but also his service as ambassador to India and the United Nations. The Manuscript Division's collections of the papers of journalists such as Joseph Alsop, Hedrick Smith, Neil Sheehan, Whitman Bassow, and Henry Shapiro also contain material relevant to the history of American foreign relations. When consulted together, the division's varied holdings provide a remarkably complete and nearly unparalleled record of this country's most significant foreign policy initiatives.

The Manuscript Reading Room is open six days a week, Monday through Saturday, from 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., and is located in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress on Capitol Hill. Researchers need a Library of Congress reader's card, easily obtained with a photo ID at the readers' registration station, also located in the Madison Building. Most collections are stored on site, and it rarely takes more than ten minutes for an archival box to be delivered to a researcher's table.

For collections stored off-site, researchers are encouraged to review a finding aid and contact the Manuscript Reading Room (phone 202-707-5387, fax 707-7791, e-mail mss@loc.gov) forty-eight hours prior to their arrival so that all the boxes they wish to consult can be brought to the Manuscript Reading Room for their use without delay. Currently, only a portion of the registers (finding aids) for the more than 11,000 manuscript collections are available on line at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/f-aids/mssf.html>. Researchers can consult reference librarians in the Manuscript Reading Room about access to paper copies or electronic copies of other registers. With regard to the papers of persons active in the latter half of the twentieth century, researchers should also consult reference librarians about any donor-imposed restrictions that may be in effect and about procedures for requesting access from the donor. Some of the collections with diplomatic material also contain security classified material. Researchers can consult the reference librarians or the Manuscript Division classified documents officer about access to classified material.

Researchers are welcome to bring laptop computers and digital cameras (no flash) into the Manuscript Reading Room. Scanners are not permitted. Wireless access is available, and the Manuscript Reading Room has computer work stations for access to Library of Congress electronic resources and the Internet. Self-service photocopiers are also available. Other Reading Room rules and procedures are discussed at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/>.

In addition to the personal papers and documents held by the Manuscript Division (more than 11,000 collections and sixty million items), researchers should keep in mind that the Library of Congress also has more than thirty-two million cataloged books and extensive holding of photographs, microfilm, motion pictures, videos and sound recordings. Information for researchers about resources available in specific library areas or special-format reading rooms can be found at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/research-centers.html>.

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