

Franklin Pierce Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

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Collection Summary

Title: Franklin Pierce Papers

Span Dates: 1820-1869

ID No.: MSS36194

Creator: Pierce, Franklin, 1804-1869

Extent: 2,350 items; 27 containers; 6.8 linear feet; 7 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: President of the United States, U.S. representative and senator from New Hampshire, and lawyer. Correspondence, diary kept by Pierce while serving in the Mexican war, writings including drafts of Pierce's messages to Congress, and an engraved portrait.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Atherton, Charles Gordon, 1804-1853--Correspondence.
Bell, Samuel D. (Samuel Dana), 1798-1868--Correspondence.
Burke, Edmund, 1809-1882--Correspondence.
Campbell, James, 1812-1893--Correspondence.
Cass, Lewis, 1782-1866--Correspondence.
Curtis, James L. (James Langdon)--Correspondence.
Cushing, Caleb, 1800-1879--Correspondence.
Davis, Jefferson, 1808-1889--Correspondence.
Fowler, Asa, 1811-1885--Correspondence.
George, John H. (John Hatch), 1824-1888--Correspondence.
Hatch, Albert Ruyter, 1817-1882--Correspondence.
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 1804-1864--Correspondence.
Marcy, William L. (William Learned), 1786-1857--Correspondence.
McNeil, Elizabeth, 1788-1855--Correspondence.
McNeil, John, 1784-1850--Correspondence.
Peaslee, Charles Hazen, 1804-1866--Correspondence.
Pierce, Benjamin, 1757-1839--Correspondence.
Pierce, Franklin, 1804-1869.
Pierce, Jane M. (Jane Means), 1806-1863--Correspondence.
Polk, James K. (James Knox), 1795-1849--Correspondence.
Seymour, Thomas H. (Thomas Hart), 1807-1868--Correspondence.
Webster, Sidney, 1828-1910--Correspondence.

Subjects

Mexican War, 1846-1848.

Places

United States--Politics and government--1853-1857.

Occupations

Lawyers.
Presidents--United States.
Representatives, U.S. Congress--New Hampshire.
Senators, U.S. Congress--New Hampshire.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Franklin Pierce, President of the United States, United States representative and senator from New Hampshire, and lawyer, were acquired by gift and purchase during the years 1902-1984.

Processing History

The Franklin Pierce Papers were arranged, indexed, and microfilmed in 1959-1960. Subsequent additions were arranged and described in 1979, 1984, and 1996. In 2009 the finding aid was expanded by including description of the main collection from the published index.

Additional Guides

The microfilm edition of these papers (not including additions) is indexed in the *Index to the Franklin Pierce Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1962), prepared as part of the President's Papers Index Series. The index is available online in [PDF](#) and [page view](#) versions.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Franklin Pierce 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 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.

Preferred Citation

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

History of the Collection

[From *Index to the Franklin Pierce Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1962), pp. v-vi]

New Hampshire was silent for half a century on the subject of Franklin Pierce. Not until 1915 when the feelings and emotions of the Civil War and Reconstruction had subsided did the state extend recognition by erecting a statue to its only President. The record is equally silent on the fate of his personal papers from 1869, the year he died, to 1903, when Worthington C. Ford for the Library of Congress found surviving documents in the possession of a nephew of Pierce. In the President's will, dated January 22, 1868, there were numerous specific bequests but no reference to his personal papers. He bequeathed "All of the rest and residue of my Estate of every kind & description whether real personal or mixed . . . to my nephew Frank H. Pierce." [1] Frank Pierce served as U.S. Consul at Mantanzas, Cuba, and at Vancouver, British Columbia, and later practiced law in New York. Probably because of his absences from New Hampshire, his brother, Kirk D. Pierce, had possession of President Pierce's personal papers in 1903 and later sold them to the Library of Congress. The Library organized the manuscripts and published a calendar of them in 1917. [2]

In 1922 and 1926 other manuscripts from the Pierce family were acquired by the New Hampshire Historical Society. This organization generously permitted the Library of Congress to obtain photostats of these items, and by a repetition of that courtesy the photostats are included in the microfilm reproduction and in this index of the Pierce Papers. Similarly, the Henry E. Huntington Library, which possesses a diary kept by Pierce during the Mexican War, generously permitted the Library of Congress in 1924 to photostat this valuable item and now to include it in the microfilm and in the index.

The assembled papers and photostats were microfilmed in 1959, and the film was released in 1960; the papers were subsequently rebound in 26 volumes. [3] These surviving Pierce Papers represent but a small part of what must have existed when Pierce left the White House. Mr. Ford, while Chief of the Manuscript Division, characterized the collection in 1904 as "a small one in size . . . merely a remnant of what was probably a large collection of Pierce Papers. I saw little of special historical value. There are some good letters from members of his cabinet, from his political advisers, and such journalists as Edmund Burke. There are drafts of Pierce's State papers; but I saw few of his own letters." [4]

In the dozen years of his life after retiring from the Presidency, Pierce may have disposed of or destroyed many of his own papers. [5] Dr. Roy F. Nichols, his biographer, writes that he "seemingly destroyed his papers for those four years (1853-1857), carefully saving a few odd pieces . . ." Since few letters from Mrs. Pierce to her husband survive, Dr. Nichols suspects "that Pierce before his death destroyed what must have been a voluminous correspondence between himself and his wife." [6] The "Prefatory Note" to the *Calendar* (p. 3) refers to a fire which is said to have destroyed many of the Pierce Papers. No other reference to this fire has been found, and members of the Pierce family do not recall hearing of such a fire. [7]

Since it is evident that many Pierce manuscripts have not survived, researchers may wish to examine the following papers and collections in the Library of Congress which contain one or more letters written by, to, or about Pierce:

- American Academy of Arts and Letters
- Benham-McNeil
- Blair, Francis P.
- Burke, Edmund
- Callaghan, Charles
- [Cushing, Caleb](#)
- [Davis, Jefferson](#)
- Fish, Hamilton
- Hart, C. C., Autograph Collection
- [Jackson, Andrew](#)
- [Johnson, Andrew](#)
- King, Horatio
- [Lincoln, Abraham](#)
- Manypenny, George W.
- Marble, Manton
- Marcy, William L.
- [Meigs, Montgomery C.](#)
- Mordecai, Alfred
- Murphy, John B., Collection of Presidential Wills
- [Polk, James K.](#)
- Presidential Papers-General
- [Van Buren, Martin](#)

In addition to the Pierce manuscripts in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., and in the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord N.H., which are included in this index, the latter library has added in recent years more than 25 manuscripts to its Pierce collection. Other libraries known to possess one or more Pierce manuscripts are the Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick,

Maine; the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.; the Concord Public Library, Concord, N.H.; the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J.; the New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*, edited by Philip M. Hamer (New Haven, 1961), which includes references indexed under "Presidents, U.S.," may lead a searcher to other Pierce manuscripts. The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections now being assembled at the Library of Congress may in due course reveal the whereabouts of other Pierce manuscripts.

Note: Grateful acknowledgement is made to Dr. Roy F. Nichols who read and commented on a draft of this essay.

1. Photostat in John B. Murphy Collection of Presidential Wills, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress..
2. *Calendar of the Papers of Franklin Pierce* (Washington, 1917).
3. The Pierce Papers were evacuated from the Library of Congress late in 1941 to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Three years later, when the war danger was past, the papers were returned to Washington. A statement concerning the evacuation appears in *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress*, 1945, p. 59.
4. Memorandum to Herbert Putnam, December 3, 1904, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
5. Roy F. Nichols to David C. Mearns, March 31, 1959, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
6. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce, Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia, 1958), pp. 553-554, 576. Quoted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press.
7. Miss Mary K. Pierce to David C. Mearns, December 8, 1961, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Scope and Content Note for Additions to the Collection

The addition to the papers of Franklin Pierce includes correspondence, writings, and an engraved portrait organized as [Series 6: Addenda](#). Correspondence and writings received before 1984 are arranged and described in Part A and include nine letters written by Pierce to John and Mary Aiken, Edmund Burke, Asbury Dickins, John W. Forney, Asa Fowler, Milo Mason, and Nathaniel G. Upham. In his letter to Burke, 19 Feb. 1847, Pierce reflects upon the acceptance of his military commission and the cause of the Mexican War.

Also included in Part A is a paper entitled "The Influence of Circumstances on the Intellectual Character," written by Pierce in 1824 while still a student at Bowdoin College, and a manuscript of an address he wrote for his father, Benjamin Pierce (1757-1839), delivered as the governor's message to the legislature of New Hampshire, 6 June 1829.

Part B comprises material processed in 1996 and includes four items of correspondence and an engraved portrait. The correspondence concerns politics, especially the Democratic party in New Hampshire, and family matters. Pierce's signature has been cut out from his letter to John Fairfield, 12 August 1844, and his letter to John Aiken, 21 March 1857.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in six series:

- [Series 1, Diary, 1847](#)
- [Series 2, General Correspondence, 1838-1868](#)
- [Series 3, Additional Correspondence, 1820-1869](#)
- [Series 4, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1838-1869](#)

- Series 5, Messages to Congress, 1853-1856
- Series 6, Addenda, 1824-1864

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
REEL 1	<u>Series 1, Diary, 1847</u> Photostat of original volume in Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.
REEL 1-3	<u>Series 2, General Correspondence, 1838-1868</u> Letters and related documents written to or by Pierce. Arranged chronologically and, where there are five or more documents for a day, arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
REEL 3-6	<u>Series 3, Additional Correspondence, 1820-1869</u> Photostats of original letters and related documents in New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H. Arranged chronologically and, where there are five or more documents for a day, arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
REEL 6	<u>Series 4, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1838-1869</u> Letters and copies of letters written to or by Pierce. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 7	<u>Series 5, Messages to Congress, 1853-1856</u> Drafts of Pierce's messages to Congress. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 6:27 not filmed	<u>Series 6, Addenda, 1824-1864</u> Correspondence, writings, and an engraved portrait. Arranged in parts according to date of receipt.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
REEL 1	Series 1, Diary, 1847 Photostat of original volume in Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.
REEL 1	1847, May 27-July 30
REEL 1-3	Series 2, General Correspondence, 1838-1868 Letters and related documents written to or by Pierce. Arranged chronologically and, where there are five or more documents for a day, arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
REEL 1	1838-1853
REEL 2	1854-1863
REEL 3	1864-1868
REEL 3-6	Series 3, Additional Correspondence, 1820-1869 Photostats of original letters and related documents in New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H. Arranged chronologically and, where there are five or more documents for a day, arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
REEL 3	1820-1842
REEL 4	1843-1852 July 10
REEL 5	1852 July 11-1858 Apr.
REEL 6	1858 July-1869
REEL 6	Series 4, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1838-1869 Letters and copies of letters written to or by Pierce. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 6	1838-1869
REEL 7	Series 5, Messages to Congress, 1853-1856 Drafts of Pierce's messages to Congress. Arranged chronologically.
REEL 7	1853-1856
BOX 6:27 not filmed	Series 6, Addenda, 1824-1864 Correspondence, writings, and an engraved portrait. Arranged in parts according to date of receipt.
BOX 6:27 not filmed	Part A

Series 6, Addenda, 1824-1864

Container

Contents

Correspondence and manuscripts, 1824-1857, undated
Part B
Correspondence and engraved portrait, 1843-1844, 1857, 1864

Selected Bibliography

- [From *Index to the Franklin Pierce Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1962), p. vi]
Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1905, pp. 41-42, 53; 1918, p. 44; 1925, p. 62; 1926, p. 66; 1931, p. 58; 1932, p. 37.
- Garrison, Curtis W., *List of Manuscript Collections in the Library of Congress to July 1931* (Washington, 1932), p. 191.
- Hamer, Philip M., *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven, 1961), pp. 86, 214, 344.
- Leech, Wilmer R., *Calendar of the Papers of Franklin Pierce* (Washington, 1917).
- "Manuscripts," *Library of Congress Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions*, 3 (May 1946), p. 38.
- Nichols, Roy F., *Franklin Pierce, Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia, 1958), pp. vii-x, 547-578.
- Powell, C. Percy, *List of Manuscript Collections Received in the Library of Congress, July 1931 to July 1938* (Washington, 1939), pp. 10, 16.
- "The Present Status of Presidential Papers," *Manuscripts*, VIII (Fall 1955), p. 12.
- Rowland, Buford, "The Papers of the Presidents," *American Archivist*, XIII (July 1950), p. 202; reprinted in *Autograph Collectors' Journal* III (Summer 1951), p. 47.
- U.S. Library of Congress, *Handbook of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress* (Washington, 1918), pp. 329-330.