

John Foster Dulles' "Letter of Gift"

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Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

THE collection and preservation of private and official papers from different levels of government is an accepted and regular activity of archivists, manuscript librarians, and similar professional workers. In their endless hunt for new collections, these people employ all the arts of wit, guile, and appeals to "our sacred trust to generations yet unborn." In spite of all their rhetoric, their sophisticated approaches, and considerable publicity about their successes, plus the benefits of these conquests to the historical resources of the Nation, there is as yet a persistent, unsolved problem. That problem is to find and take into custody more of the personal papers of senior officials in government, at all levels, whose careers were wholly in the 20th century.

It would be gratuitous to subject this audience to a long explanation of the reasons for the problem. Any one of you who has done any collecting at this level has heard the refrain. You have gone to the offices and homes of potential donors and have been greeted with something like the following: "I have nothing of any value among my personal papers, which have been stored in the cellar of my country place on Long Island since I left office in 1904." With the passage and ravages of time, that may indeed be an accurate description of the papers! If that quotation is not evocative enough, there is always this one: "Yes, I have a few things, and I shall consider depositing them after I have had a chance to sort them out and get rid of the junk. Just as soon as I get time I will get to it."

So it goes. Men and women of brilliance, common sense, and not infrequently considerable respect for the study of history, faced with the pressure of daily business and their personal involvement as participants in the events of their times, procrastinate until they are no longer in control of their papers.

Each day the archivist whose job it is to collect such papers grows a little older, a little wiser, and a little more nervous when he hears of a fire within a hundred miles of one of these unprotected, unsorted caches. The raw stuff of future histories is locked away in thousands of private files, and the one profession whose obligation is to protect and preserve it for the future is frequently, sometimes permanently, frustrated in acquiring and caring for that material.

The reasons for this frustration are many and some are very individualized. At all points when dealing with these potential donors,

This paper was read at a session of the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Santa Fe, New Mex., on Oct. 19, 1967. The author is Director of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

the human element is paramount. From personal experience, however, I have come to the generalization that in the case of the senior Federal official, whether he be a career officer or an appointee whose term does not survive the sponsoring administration, several very important mental attitudes contribute to forestalling deposit.

First, there is the situation of the individual whose files are so voluminous that he quite literally does not know what he has from the period of his government service. Second, the files include sets of papers that are very sensitive, either in terms of politics, personal considerations, or shared confidences that may raise security problems. There is finally the pressure of time, especially if the person being solicited is still active in his career.

It is a foregone conclusion to most professional archivists that papers of historical value, or of possible historical value, should be preserved. Most of the senior government officials I have met would agree with that idea, at least in the abstract. It has been my experience, however, that many of these same officials are really quite innocent of the safeguards that may be imposed on their personal papers with regard to access, or even of the value of allowing a trained person to do the sorting or arranging. Some bog down hopelessly on the question of where to deposit their personal papers. This uncertainty results in a state of mind in which some men delay further, and some destroy, so that they will not have to make the decision.

It is also my belief that these personal files of contemporary government officials are unusually important to historians of the future, for the 20th century has seen the growth and application of rapid communications systems that discourage recordkeeping. Throughout business and government telephone conversations, radio and television transmissions, especially of day-to-day matters, are not usually recorded. Frequently the highly personalized memoranda used in the decision-making process are either the first to be destroyed or are unobtainable because they were conveyed orally. To any researcher who has worked in the records of the 19th century and those of the 20th it soon becomes apparent that there is great divergence in the quality of personal and official files from the two centuries, even when those files were generated by the same government office.

Ideally, all professional archivists and historians should be working toward the day when our senior public officials, who have the right to remove certain of their files when they leave office, will almost automatically arrange by an instrument of gift for the eventual deposit of those papers. As an example of how one such official provided for his papers, I offer the action of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State during the Eisenhower Administration.

Secretary Dulles had a unique public career, spanning a period from several years before World War I up through almost all of President

Eisenhower's second term in office. His files have in them much of the material historians will need to interpret American foreign affairs in that era. There was no question in Dulles' mind that the material should be preserved, but there were some very grave questions as to how, where, and under what conditions access should be granted—the same questions that still trouble many of his contemporaries and their heirs. For a man whose files were heavy with materials relating to his official duties, his personal life, and his political connections, it was not easy to decide on a course of action.¹

Dulles was dedicated to the idea that at some time his files should be open to researchers, yet he wished to prevent access to those materials that needed protection for particular and varying periods of time.²

In order to define the conditions for the deposit of his papers and to provide for access, Dulles constructed a most interesting and unique instrument of gift. He was not the first government official to do this, nor are all the elements of his instrument singular. But the combination of forethought and legal safeguards that he provided both during as well as after his lifetime constitutes an example for those who collect papers as well as to potential donors. It also seems to pose some questions about other instruments of gift.

The problem facing Secretary of State Dulles with regard to the placement of his papers is a variation on the theme familiar to most government officials and to those who seek to preserve their papers. Whether the official is at the executive level or below, is in State government or Federal, the problem is the same. Briefly stated it is this: In the course of his active career, each government official acquires a large number of papers. These may be official correspondence and official documents of various kinds. In that case, most of the material goes into his "official" file, which he deposits when he leaves his position. There are situations, however, in which the "official" file is only a very partial collection of the papers generated or received by a particular government official. Dulles knew of this problem. He knew also, that one of the great and frequent difficulties for the historian is to find the deposits of materials, personal, private, and official, so that he may have full material to work with.

¹ John W. Hanes, Jr., "The Dulles Papers," in *Foreign Service Journal*, 36:21-23 (Oct. 1959). As one of the principals who assisted Secretary Dulles in the matter of both the Princeton Project and his letter of gift, Hanes has used the experience to provide a good overview of the problems involved. Mr. Hanes was Deputy Assistant Secretary to Dulles.

² Appendix to letter, John Foster Dulles to Franklin Floete, Administrator of General Services, Apr. 5, 1959. Dulles' copy is in the John Foster Dulles Collection, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans. This collection is hereafter cited as "Dulles Collection." At the present time the Dulles Collection at the Eisenhower Library is not open for research. This citation, and the others in this paper, is to material that is related to the formation of the Princeton Project and the deposit of papers in the Eisenhower Library; these papers are available for research upon approval of the required application to the Director of the Library.

After much thought and consideration Dulles divided his papers. The first obvious grouping was the official files; these, of course, would remain with the State Department. The rest of the papers were then divided into three groups. In the first batch were Dulles' strictly personal papers, all dated before 1953, when he became Secretary of State. These papers were given to Princeton University with the stipulation that for 25 years research in and publication from them should be subject to the approval of a small committee composed of members of his family and his immediate and most intimate associates. Because this committee is so important to an understanding of the Dulles instrument, especially as that instrument relates to the holdings of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, we might look at the committee for just a moment.

The men who made up the committee were: John W. F. Dulles, his son; John W. Hanes, Jr., of Gunnels Run Farm, Great Falls, Va.; William B. McComber, Jr., of Rochester, N.Y. (now of Washington, D.C.); Roderick L. O'Connor, of Greenwich, Conn.; and John R. Stevenson of New York City. All these men had worked with Secretary Dulles, all were closely associated with him in both the State Department and other of his activities. All had his complete trust and confidence.

The second group of papers were those that would comprise the so-called Princeton Project, a collection of microfilm copies of official documents of the Department of State, most of them classified, deposited at Princeton University. This group of roughly 40,000 documents was carefully selected, at Princeton's expense, over a period of 3 years by a trained and security-cleared historian selected by and operating under Secretary Dulles' direct guidance. This man was Philip Crowl, now chairman of the department of history at the University of Nebraska. These documents were chosen from among the millions of State Department documents produced between 1953 and 1959 to reflect only those matters and those aspects of foreign policy with which Dulles personally dealt and which he personally influenced or which influenced him in other policy decisions. The collection is safeguarded under conditions approved by the State Department's office of security. Full control over the papers, including restrictions on who may see them and under what conditions, remains with the Department of State and not with Princeton University. In practice the conditions for research in these copies at Princeton will always be identical with conditions for research in the Department's own files in Washington, which contain the originals. The value of this collection, however, and one of the things that sets it apart from other attempts in this particular area, is that the files were brought together by the Secretary while a great many of the incidents to which they pertain were fresh in his mind and while he had access to his official files so

that he could, if necessary, refresh his memory by reference to the official file.

What we have in the Princeton Project, then, is a truly significant and selective collection reflecting the influence of John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, created at a time when events were still fresh in his mind and the minds of his associates, and representing at least his opinion of what was important at that time. That in itself is a very important aspect of this collection. The first two groups of papers—the early personal papers and microcopies of official papers—are housed at Princeton University in the new John Foster Dulles Library of Diplomatic History.

The third group of papers was a group on which the Secretary did not originally report to the Cabinet. During his service in the Eisenhower Administration, Dulles, like every Secretary of State before him, accumulated extensive files of documents that in the full sense are personal and private. These files consist mostly of personal letters, memoranda of personal conversations between Dulles and other persons both in and out of the Government, memoranda concerning telephone calls, daily personal records of appointments and activities, and personal draft working documents. None of these materials are suitable, or were deemed suitable by Dulles, for inclusion in the files of the Department of State. Indeed, many of them relate to Dulles' activity as a member of the Eisenhower Administration and not necessarily as Secretary of State.³ That distinction need not be explained to this audience, I am sure. As a matter of fact, one could say in all truth that most such papers are the private papers that an administrator collects. They are papers that he uses to make decisions, and right here we have one of the most significant aspects of the Dulles collection.

Archivists at every level should encourage all high government officials, administrators, and middle management people—everyone who is in the decision-making process and who has personal files of this nature—to explore the ways in which those files may be preserved. Their preservation does pose many problems, many of which are in the attitude of the donor. He may have very ambivalent feelings about the papers; he may even consider them useless for research. When they are brought together, however, with the official papers that resulted from them or with an account of the official actions resulting from them, they can be highly significant to the historian. Certainly this third group of Dulles papers is of great historical importance.

Although the papers in the third group were strictly personal many of them obviously dealt with highly sensitive public matters. Dulles believed they should be preserved. He also believed they should be

³ Memorandum to John W. Hanes, Jr., from John Foster Dulles, Mar. 6, 1959, attachment to letter from J. N. Greene, Jr., Special Assistant to the Secretary, Mar. 13, 1959, in the Dulles Collection.

handled in some way that would safeguard both their personal and any official sensitivity they might have. Here again I might point out that in the history of the Dulles collection, speaking of all three groups, there was always much concern with the question of where the personal left off and the official began. Many cabinet memoranda and background papers were prepared on this subject between 1956 and 1959.⁴

As historians and archivists we can understand some of this concern. In many cases the lines between personal files and official files are not clear. As at least one of the other speakers on this program will elaborate, it is sometimes possible to lose both the official and the personal correspondence when there is no statutory distinction. I have even been involved in otherwise learned discussions with people who should know better who insist that there just should not be any personal files!

From a practical point of view, however, we are all aware that every day quasi-official documents are generated by persons in administrative positions. The government, be it Federal, State, or local, has no control over these papers; no system ever perfected has given it absolute control over every document generated by an administrator. Dulles' concern for this matter was genuine, and the imaginative way in which he dealt with the problem was unique. He solved the problem by taking advantage of the Federal Records Act, which makes possible the deposit of such papers in Presidential libraries under conditions agreed upon by the donor and the Administrator of General Services. Mr. Dulles specifically gave these papers to the Eisenhower Library at Abilene, under the provisions of Section 507 of the Federal Records Act, as amended; and he agreed with the Administrator on a number of conditions, the most important of which are as follows:

1. That these papers will be safeguarded as though they were highly classified once they have been turned over to the Library.
2. Any access to, or research in them, will be granted only after approval by the same committee (enumerated previously), which committee was also established to supervise his personal papers at Princeton.
3. Even after committee approval, approval must also be granted by the Administrator of General Services, who will be responsible for safeguarding any interests the Government may have in the disclosure of sensitive information contained in the papers.⁵

These three provisions made it possible for these very sensitive papers to be preserved and provided a vehicle, the committee, by which they

⁴ See especially the final product in Cabinet Paper 59-58/4, "Removal of Papers by Retiring Department and Agency Heads," included as an attachment to a memorandum for John W. Hanes, Jr., from Robert C. Brewster, July 28, 1959; also, memorandum, John W. Hanes, Jr., to the "Acting Secretary of the Cabinet," July 16, 1959, in the Dulles Collection. In this last memo Hanes summarizes many of the points that had been developed earlier in discussion with Dulles.

⁵ *Ibid.*

could eventually be opened for research. Admittedly, a committee is not the best way to provide for such eventuality. But I believe very strongly that a committee is preferable to the loss of the papers. Imperfect though the device may be, it did allow for the preservation of the Dulles papers; and (with the change in Executive Order 10501, one of the results of Dulles' discussions with the President and the Cabinet) it did put new emphasis on the importance of all records of retiring officials, personal as well as official.

One particular Cabinet Paper from this period points up clearly both the problem and a possible remedy. In a paper issued on July 27, 1959, it was recognized that Cabinet officers and agency heads appointed by the President frequently have wide contacts in business and politics, and that their correspondence may be so "mixed" in character that determinations as to "official" or "personal" are hard to make. The paper urged that the advice of officials of the National Archives be sought in cases where there were many questions.

In the same paper (subsection (j), under 5, "Recommendations"), it was also urged that the Presidential archival depositories be used by persons having personal papers to deposit.

In addition to affording physical security to materials deposited therein, they also provide for their proper administration and servicing for research use by a trained professional staff as a part of the archival system of the United States. Serious thought should be given by retiring or retired officials possessing such collections to the advantages of arranging for their deposit, under appropriate restrictions, in a presidential archival depository.

A recent regulation of the Department of State similarly points up the problems and urges that the advice of trained personnel in the National Archives be used to resolve questions in that area.⁶ One very important point in all of these distinctions and devices was that papers would be preserved regardless of their basic character and that eventually they would be open for research.

The arrangements made by Secretary Dulles with the Administrator of General Services are not unusual in that they grant to the Secretary right of access to his personal files after deposit and give him the usual prerogatives with regard to persons having access to those files. The thing that is unusual about the arrangements that Dulles made in his instrument of gift is the formation of and instructions to the committee that after his death would decide what would be done with regard to access and other details pertaining to the handling of the collection. In a letter of March 9, 1959 (previously cited), sent to the members of the committee, Dulles made the following points in establishing the functions of the committee and left these guides for the committee as to his objectives:

⁶ Department of State Regulation, 5FAM 1814. 1-1, paragraph A. TL:CR-1022, 8-1-67.

First, he wanted to make sure that there would be access to his personal papers for bona fide research in the fields of history, political science, international relations, or related subjects and that this access would be granted as widely as possible. He stated: "The presumption shall be that access should be granted in any particular instance unless compelling reasons exist in your opinion to withhold such access." This is an important statement for the donor to leave for those who come after him. He went on, however:

that it shall be sufficient reason for withholding or limiting such access if in your opinion it would result in a violation of confidence placed in me by the President, or by other persons, or if it would result in embarrassment or injury to any living person or existing institution or if it is likely to be misused for partisan or other purposes. I rely on your judgment to judge the circumstances surrounding each request and to determine when sufficient time has passed with regard to any paper in this collection so that none of these disqualifying factors still apply.

In addition to this Dulles gave the committee the power to exercise certain controls with regard to publication resulting from such access, photoduplication of documents in the collection, and any exhibit of documents in the collection, again to insure that access would be given but that there be no distortions, there would be no violated confidences, there would be no embarrassment or injury to other persons.

One of the points made by Dulles is well worth noting here. Because of the varying restrictions that were placed on his papers in the Princeton Collection, the Princeton Project, and the Eisenhower Library, he was going to rely on the knowledge of the committee of the various materials on deposit so that, if a researcher could not obtain access to certain materials but had obtained access to other materials and yet had come to conclusions not warranted by the other materials, the committee could at least raise a roadblock or a warning flag to call this to the attention of the author. This is rather important.

The fourth point that Dulles made is as follows:

It is not my intention that the functions and control which I have given your committee shall be exercised other than as specified herein. It is my hope that your exercise of your functions and control will encourage and facilitate productive research work in and publication from my papers by any person with a legitimate interest in so doing at as early a date as is consistent with the considerations I have set forth herein and that you will not hinder or discourage such work.

With the formation of the committee and with the acceptance of the arrangements by the Administrator of General Services and the National Archives, it became possible for the papers to be deposited. A means had been found both for security and for ultimate access.

Now all of this, it seems to me, relates very directly to the work that each of us does in collecting materials from governmental officials. We need to be more cognizant of the different instruments of this type

and of the successful institution of arrangements of the Dulles type, so that we can creatively deal with some of the problems that arise every day with regard to the personal files of administrative officials. One of the great services that might be rendered by the Society of American Archivists would be to gather together examples of instruments that have been used to facilitate the collecting of personal files from persons in governmental administrations. Publicity on these instruments could make government administrators aware of the necessity for insuring that their personal files are preserved and could be of assistance to the archivists working with them.

The Dulles instrument is not perfect, from any point of view, but it has been successful in preserving his personal files. It also served as a model for Dulles' successor, Christian A. Herter, when he was faced with the same problem. This instrument serves too, as a reminder that much yet needs to be done in perfecting the method and timing of acquiring such collections, and the ways in which they can eventually be made available for research. If the Dulles experience does nothing else, it brings out the range of possibilities for dealing positively and creatively with problems whose solutions seem remote and for dealing with them while those most concerned with their solution are capable of arriving at those solutions.

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