

DOROTHY DOWNTON FILES, (1972) 1974-77

Collection Type

Federal Records

Extent

2.0 linear feet (ca. 4,000 pages)

Record Type

Textual

Access

Open. Some items are temporarily restricted under terms of the donor's deed of gift, a copy of which is available on request, or under National Archives and Records Administration general restrictions (36 CFR 1256).

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Processed by

Kellee Green, December 1990; revised by William McNitt, October 2011

Biography

Dorothy Elizabeth Downton

Nov. 11, 1946 - Born Dorothy Elizabeth Hessler in Manistee, Michigan

June 1964 - Dec. 1965 - Attended Davenport College of Business, Grand Rapids

Jan. 1966 - Stenographer, FBI Washington Field Office, Washington, D.C.

Jan. 1967 - Joins Ford congressional staff

Aug. 1972 - Joins Ford personal staff

Dec. 1972 - Becomes Ford's personal secretary

Dec. 1973 - Personal secretary to the Vice President

Dec. 1973 - Married David Downton

Aug. 1974 - Jan. 1977 - Personal secretary to the President

Jan. - June 1977 - Ford Transition Office

June 1977 - Nov. 1980 - Personal secretary, Office of Gerald R. Ford, Rancho Mirage, CA

May 1990 - July 1994 - Executive secretary to CEO, Lionel Trains, Chesterfield, MI

May 1995 - Jan. 2008 - Administrative Assistant to the Chief of the Detroit Bureau, The Associated Press

Jan. 2008 - Retired from The Associated Press

Scope and Content Note

Dorothy Downton joined the Ford congressional staff as a secretary in January 1967, becoming Mr. Ford's personal secretary in 1972, and remaining his personal

secretary throughout the Ford Vice Presidency, the Presidency, and for three years after the Presidency in the Ford Office in California. During her tenure as secretary to the President, Downton worked in the Office of the President, reporting directly to the President. The Office of the President was responsible for handling the President's personal affairs.

Dorothy Downton managed many of the First Family's personal financial matters, including payments for First Family food consumption at the White House, Camp David, and the White House Mess, and personal expenses related to travel. Downton also paid First Family bills such as tuition and insurance premiums, but little evidence of this is found in the collection. During the 1976 Presidential campaign, Downton handled arrangements and payments for the First Family's campaign - related travel, and, like other members of the personal staff, made numerous "get out the vote" telephone contacts on Ford's behalf.

Downton's files include correspondence addressed to the President (often via Downton), incoming and outgoing correspondence she handled for the President, and referral memos to and from other White House staff members, most often Roland Elliott and members of the correspondence unit. The correspondence relates to many different topics and much of it is from personal friends and relatives of the President. There are also requests for autographs and photographs (usually referred to Anne Kamstra), letters of advice to the President, and requests for his assistance. A number of letters have notations or memos in Mr. Ford's handwriting as to how they should be handled, often providing useful insights on Ford's personal relationships. It is not always clear, however, why certain correspondence items were administered by Downton.

This collection also includes official materials filed by Downton for the President's use, including copies of memos and reports from Vice President Rockefeller, Ford's copy of the 1976 campaign strategy program and preliminary media plan, and long - time friend Jack Stiles's report on the operations, personnel, and effectiveness of the President Ford Committee. Consequently, the Downton collection is particularly valuable for studies of the 1976 Presidential campaign. Also of note are a series of office logs maintained in Ford's Grand Rapids office by Trix Turkenburg Carlson, July - October, 1974. The logs furnish a unique perspective on the Presidential transition.

Although evidence of Dorothy Downton's work is found in the Ford congressional and Vice Presidential papers, the Downton collection contains only a few scattered documents from that period. The notable exception is a series of reports from the 1972 Ford - Boggs congressional trip to the People's Republic of China (currently security classified and closed to research).

Related Materials (December 1990)

The White House Central File Subject File category, "President - Personal" (PP) relates to personal and quasi - personal First Family topics, especially the public's interest in such matters. The Files of Philip Buchen, counsel to the President, also include significant materials on the First Family. Additional information regarding the First Family is available in the Library's collection of printed materials, and material on Mrs. Ford is in many files.

Chronological files of correspondence generated by Dorothy Downton, Mildred Leonard, and Debra Shuffleton, 1966 - 1982, are among the unprocessed Ford Personal Papers. The files of personal staff members Mildred Leonard and Anne Kamstra are also unprocessed.

Collections containing material on the 1976 Presidential campaign are described in "The 1976 Presidential Election: A Guide to Manuscript Collections Available for Research" which is available upon request.

Last Modified Date

2024-04-09

Campaign File, 1976.

(Boxes 1 - 2, 0.5 linear feet)

Memoranda, correspondence, reports, polls, and printed matter almost entirely related to the 1976 Presidential campaign. Materials include a campaign strategy program annotated by Ford, a preliminary media plan by Bailey, Deardourff, and Eyre, a report on the operation, personnel and effectiveness of the PFC (written by Jack Stiles), and reports of telephone contacts made by Downton, Mildred Leonard, and other members of the personal staff to encourage the Republican vote in the Michigan and California primaries.

Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 1 - Campaign File

Status	Title
OPEN	Congressional Campaigns - Candidate Campaign Deficits
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Campaign Report
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Campaign Strategy Program (1)-(3)
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - New Hampshire
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Phone Calls
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Polls (1)-(2)
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Preliminary Media Plan
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - PFC Reimbursements and Payments (1) - (2)

Box 2 - Campaign File

Status	Title
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Ronald Reagan
OPEN	Presidential Campaign - Objects (Memorabilia)
OPEN	Status: Chartbook of Social and Economic Trends (1)-(2)

Correspondence File, 1974-76.

(Box 3, 0.4 linear feet)

Correspondence, memoranda, instructions, and messages documenting various topics. Much of the correspondence is from personal friends and relatives of the President. A number of letters have annotations in Ford's handwriting as to how they should be handled. Also included are four letters dated August 9 and 10, 1974, consisting of resignations from Laurence Silberman and Frederick Dent, and congratulations from Clarence Kelley.

Arranged chronologically by date of last noted action (receipt, referral, response, etc.).

Box 3 - Correspondence File

Status	Title
OPEN	Correspondence (1)-(9)
OPEN	Correspondence - "Not Answered or Acknowledged"

Status	Title
OPEN	Correspondence - Senior Officials
OPEN	Correspondence - Vail Friends

White House File, 1974-77.

(Boxes 4 - 6, 1.1 linear feet)

Agendas, speeches, memoranda, logs, news clippings, and printed materials, including detailed financial records concerning the purchase of food and personal items for the First Family and White House entertainment. Memos from Vice President Rockefeller to the President document health issues, science and technology, the Bicentennial, and the 1976 Presidential campaign. Also included is a joint report to President Nixon by Ford and Hale Boggs on their 1972 congressional trip to the People's Republic of China (closed/classified) and a copy of Ford's handwritten outline for the State of the Union Address in January, 1976.

Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 4 - White House File

Status	Title
OPEN	First Family Food (1)-(4)
OPEN	Ford, Gerald R. - Participation in GOP Events
OPEN	Ford, Gerald R. - Speeches - Remarks to the American Legion
OPEN	Ford, Gerald R. - Speeches - State of the Union
OPEN	Ford, Gerald R. - Speeches - Vice Presidential (1)-(5)

Box 5 - White House File

Status	Title
OPEN	Gift Items
OPEN	Grand Rapids - High School
OPEN	Grand Rapids Office Logs
OPEN	News Clippings
OPEN	Presidential Activities - Vail
OPEN	President's Press Conferences (1)-(3)
OPEN	Social Office Guest Lists

Box 6 - White House File

Status	Title
OPEN	Trip - China - 1972
OPEN	Vice President's Memos for the President (1)-(4)
OPEN	White House Entertainment
OPEN	White House Staff Memos
OPEN	White House Staff Mess (1)-(4)