

Passport



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The Gerald Ford Library

by Geir Gundersen

The Gerald R. Ford Library is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the north campus of the University of Michigan, Gerald Ford's alma mater.¹ As part of the presidential library system administered by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Ford Library is home to twenty-one million manuscript pages and audiovisual items documenting the life and career of the thirty-eighth president. These materials range from Gerald Ford's congressional, vice-presidential and presidential papers, to selected federal records and personal papers donated by individuals associated with Gerald Ford and his presidency.² Selected strengths of the holdings include domestic affairs and policies, economics, the 1976 presidential campaign, media relations, White House management and decision-making, congressional relations, and foreign policy.

At the core of the library's holdings on foreign relations and national security are the National Security Adviser Files of Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. These files total approximately eight hundred thousand pages and are divided into over forty smaller collections containing security classified and nonclassified material. These collections encompass such areas as geographical regions, high-level meetings, memoranda of conversations, economic affairs, decision and study memoranda, program analysis, back-channel messages, press and congressional relations, liaison with commissions and committees, and correspondence with foreign leaders. Two other important foreign relations collections are the White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File subject categories for countries, foreign affairs, international organizations, and

national security-defense, and the U.S. President's Commission on CIA Activities within the United States (Rockefeller Commission). Our holdings also encompass personal papers donated by former government officials involved with foreign affairs and national security issues, including those of Howard "Bo" Callaway, Secretary of the Army; Leo Cherne, chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board; Wolfgang Lehman, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Saigon; and James Wilson, State Department Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs.

The Ford Library opened to research in 1981. In the early years, the library focused its work plan and resources on processing collections possessing a minimum of security classified materials, with the intent of opening as much material as quickly as possible.³ This approach benefited researchers interested in domestic affairs more than diplomatic historians, but foreign affairs materials, most notably those in the WHCF Subject File, were not entirely overlooked. However, these materials provided primarily general overviews of U.S. foreign policy, summit meetings, and state visits rather than in-depth background, analysis and insights into the decision-making process and surrounding diplomatic activities.

There were, nonetheless, incremental gains in the declassification of national security classified materials. Some material became available through mandatory declassification review. This is a process requiring researchers to identify specific documents, typically using information from withdrawal sheets in our files. Requests for review are limited to thirty-five

documents per request.⁴ Additional declassification progress usually resulted from unexpected mandates issued by Congress, the president, or the courts, such as the Kennedy Assassination Records Act and projects on MIAs and POWs and human rights in Chile and Argentina.⁵

President Bill Clinton's issuance of Executive Order 12958 in April 1995 establishing deadlines for the review of all classified materials over twenty-five years old had a major impact on processing priorities and declassification at the Ford Library.⁶ Our focus shifted to the more sensitive files on the Ford presidency, such as the Kissinger-Scowcroft files from the White House West Wing, the presidential and other files of the National Security Council (NSC) staff, and the files of the Rockefeller Commission on CIA activities.

Executive Order 12958 also led to our participation in the Remote Archives Capture (RAC) program, an interagency review project developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to assist NARA and other executive branch agencies in reviewing their classified materials. Under RAC, over two hundred thousand pages have been digitally scanned for review by government agencies in Washington. Upon completion of their review, the agencies will notify the library of their decisions, and we will make these materials available to researchers as quickly as possible. Not all of our classified materials, however, have been scanned for RAC, because certain agencies, most notably the Department of State, chose not to participate in the Ford Library RAC program.

Equally important as RAC to
Passport December 2003

declassification has been the decision of some government agencies, in particular the Department of State and the National Security Council, to delegate declassification authorities to Ford Library archivists and provide special training on how to apply their declassification guidelines in systematic declassification review. Armed with these powers, library archivists have devoted many hours to systematic review of unprocessed, non-RAC material in the National Security Adviser Files and previously withdrawn materials in processed collections.

Our systematic review efforts have been helped by an unintended consequence of the State Department's decision to forgo RAC. Within the last year, the State Department has chosen instead to send on-site review teams comprised of retired foreign service officers to review systematically their documents and equities that are outside our declassification authority and purview of subject expertise. These ongoing review trips have had a noticeable impact on our declassification efforts. We are able to follow the department reviewers and open the vast majority of these documents in conjunction with our own systematic review efforts. We are also able to prioritize collections for future State Department review visits, thereby making our substantive foreign affairs materials more readily available to researchers.

We began our systematic review efforts several years ago in earnest. In preparation for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon in 2000, we undertook a special project to locate and make available materials regarding the Vietnam War.⁷ Taking a topical approach, we located and reviewed approximately thirty-nine thousand pages of readily identifiable materials related to Indochina and the war. Of this material, some twenty-five thousand pages from the numerous collections within the National Security Adviser Files have been opened.⁸ These materials include country files for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; back-channel cables passing

between the ambassador in Saigon and the White House; memoranda of high-level White House and other diplomatic conversations; NSC and other high-level meeting minutes; intelligence reports on Vietnam going back to 1967; and correspondence with foreign leaders. The project also included files related to the *SS Mayaguez* crisis that occurred on the heels of the U.S. evacuation from Saigon. These materials have been well received and used intensively by diplomatic historians in the past few years.

Following the Indochina project, we set our sights on the five geographical regions represented in the National Security Adviser's Presidential Country Files. In this project, we also incorporated researcher requests in prioritizing countries to be reviewed and have presently completed final review and opening of all country files for Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Canada, and Latin America, and we have reviewed and opened the majority of the Middle East and South Asia files. We have so far opened approximately sixty-five thousand pages of material from these collections consisting primarily of memoranda, reports, briefing papers, schedule proposals, correspondence, and telegrams. These materials concern U.S. relations with emerging and established nations on a bilateral and multilateral level and are arranged by region or country name with separate sequences for NSC documents and State Department telegrams. The NSC documents consist mostly of high-level finished products, especially memoranda, created by the senior staff member for a particular region and addressed to either the assistant or deputy assistant to the president for national security affairs or created and addressed to the president on their behalf. The State Department telegrams provide an interesting look at communications between officials in Washington and staff at embassies throughout the five regions, and are valuable for on-the-scene, current reporting and analyses of conversations and events. Sample topics addressed in the country files include the Turkish

invasion of Cyprus, Henry Kissinger's negotiating efforts in the Middle East, emerging relations with China, military base negotiations, the worldwide energy crisis, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Cuban incursions in Africa, the Panama Canal treaty negotiations, the transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe, and the first international economic summits.

Pending completion of our systematic review of the few remaining countries in the Presidential Country File for Middle East and South Asia, the Ford Library will for the first time in its history have substantive materials available on U.S. bilateral and multilateral relations with every country and geographical region, a true indicator that our foreign affairs materials are starting to come of age. These materials will be of interest to those researching country and regional studies, Cold War issues, U.S. foreign policy-making and its role in a post-Vietnam world, intelligence and military issues, conflict and cooperation among nations, and Henry Kissinger's enigmatic role as secretary of state.

Other National Security Adviser collections that have been opened in recent years include a copy set of National Security Decision Memoranda and National Security Study Memoranda, the National Security Council Meetings File, NSC Latin American Affairs Staff File, Presidential Name File, and a partial set of the Memoranda of Conversations File. Future projects will include such National Security Adviser collections as the Kissinger Reports on the USSR, China, and Middle East Discussions; NSC Outside-the-System Chronological File; Trip Briefing Books and Cables for President Ford; Presidential Transition File; and NSC Staff Affairs Files for economics and the geographical regions represented in the Presidential Country Files.

In the near future, the Ford Library will receive an important segment of Ford administration NSC Historical Files totaling nearly fifty thousand pages. These records, many of which will fill existing holes in our National

Security Adviser Files, have been maintained by the NSC as "institutional files" to help facilitate continuity of government, starting with the Eisenhower administration and continuing through subsequent administrations. Following a court ruling declaring these files to be governed by the Presidential Records Act (PRA), President Clinton decided to remove the materials from the NSC and divide them among the presidential libraries of the originating presidents, as well as NARA's Nixon Presidential Materials Staff. The Ford materials are likely to include complete sets of formally numbered NSC documents, formal studies initiated by National Security Study Memoranda, and meeting minutes and other files of NSC subgroups such as the Washington Special Action Group, Verification Panel, Defense Review Panel, and Committee on Foreign Intelligence. The materials are presently in Washington undergoing review by the NSC Access Management Office and other government agencies having equity interest in the records, including the CIA for intelligence sources and methods and the Department of Energy for information related to nuclear weapons. When they do arrive at the library, we will process them under the PRA rules and procedures. This includes making them available under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Two years ago, we received another sign that our foreign affairs collections are coming of age when historians from the Department of State began visiting the library to research and compile materials documenting the major policy decisions and significant diplomatic activity of the Ford administration for their Foreign Affairs of the United States (FRUS) series. Topical visits have so far compiled documents on Africa, China, foreign economic affairs, Latin America, Middle East, Soviet Union, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Mutually Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR), and Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. We expect these FRUS visits to continue for several more years.

Passport December 2003

Researchers contemplating a visit to the Ford Library are encouraged to contact the library in advance for information on our holdings. The library will provide a PRESNET database search report on requested topics listing open collections, folder titles, and estimated page counts. Our website (www.ford.utexas.edu) is also a good source of pre-trip information. Along with a guide to our historical materials and online collection finding aids, the website offers sample documents, a frequently asked questions section on conducting research at the library, travel directions, and information about the Gerald R. Ford Foundation grants program.⁹

If not driving, those traveling to the Ford Library can fly into Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, an international airport servicing all major domestic and international air carriers, located twenty-five miles east of Ann Arbor, or use Amtrak passenger rail service. Once in Ann Arbor, researchers without automobiles have several options, including Ann Arbor's top-rated mid-sized city bus system, the free bus system operated by the University of Michigan between its two campuses, or local taxi services.

Ann Arbor also offers visitors a wide range of lodging, restaurants, and cultural activities. Lodging encompasses European-style hotels, major motel and hotel chains, friendly bed and breakfasts, and on-campus housing through the University of Michigan. Accommodations nearest the library include the Red Roof Inn-North, Holiday Inn-North, Hampton Inn-North, Microtel Inn & Suites, and Hawthorn Suites. Information about availability of on-campus accommodations on the north and central campuses is available through the university's Conference Management Services (www.cms.housing.umich.edu).

Those visiting Ann Arbor's vibrant downtown and central campus areas, both within walking distance of each other, will find numerous restaurants featuring an interesting array of

international and American cuisine.¹⁰ There is also a wide range of cultural events and activities, including an acclaimed summer art fair, local and university libraries, museums and art galleries, theater productions, classical music concerts, folk and jazz clubs, and a multitude of bookstores. Additional information on lodging, restaurants, events, attractions, and transportation is available through the Ann Arbor Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (www.annarbor.org).

We welcome the opportunity to assist those planning a research trip to the Gerald R. Ford Library. Along with substantive foreign relations materials and an active declassification program, researchers will find a knowledgeable and experienced staff and an operation geared toward maximizing the efficiency of a researcher's time at the library. For additional information please contact us at the Gerald R. Ford Library, 1000 Beal Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; e-mail: ford.library@nara.gov; telephone 734-205-0555; fax 734-205-0571.

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Notes:

¹ Unlike other presidential libraries, the Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum is a split facility, with the Ford Museum located across the state in Grand Rapids, Ford's boyhood home and the heart of the congressional district he served for nearly twenty-five years.

² Examples of federal records include those of the U.S. Council on Economic Advisers and the U.S. President's Commission on Olympic Sports. Personal papers have been donated by such individuals as Melvin Laird, Ford congressional colleague and President Nixon's secretary of defense, and Arthur Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, 1971-1978.

³ To date, the library has opened seventy percent of its holdings.

⁴ While response time on requests is often slow, as most documents are submitted to

their originating agencies for review, mandatory review does provide requestors with certain appeal rights for information denied.

⁵ These mandated projects, however, always diverted staff and placed our mandatory review work on hold.

⁶ President George W. Bush recently issued amendments to Executive Order 12958, including an extension of the deadline for completing review of classified materials.

⁷ The project was in association with the conference "After the Fall: Vietnam Plus Twenty-Five," co-sponsored by the library, the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, and the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

⁸ The Vietnam project also included a mini-RAC component in which the CIA scanned nearly ten thousand pages of documents for which it wholly or partially controlled access, many of which have since been reviewed and opened.

⁹ Gerald R. Ford Foundation research grants are awarded semi-annually and help defray the travel, living, and photocopy expenses of a research trip to the Ford Library. Foreign applicants are responsible for the cost of travel between their home country and North America, since the grants only cover travel within North America.

¹⁰ Researchers should be forewarned that the library does not have lunch facilities, but cafeteria meals, fast food and coffee bar are available at the nearby North Campus Pierpont Commons. Those having an automobile will find a variety of fast food and restaurant options within a short driving distance of the library.