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A Monument Completed:
The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower

Sharon Ritenour Stevens


"There is no better way to gain a true understanding of America’s traditions and objectives than through a direct study of the writings of our national leaders and the records of our free institutions," President Eisenhower wrote to Franklin G. Fioete, head of the General Services Administration, on 12 June 1958. Eisenhower praised the National Historical Publications Commission for having made “splendid progress toward enlarging the basic stock of source materials of American history” through its program that supported publication of historical documents. “The free world must have histories written by men and women in search of the truth—not by those seeking to rewrite the records of the past to their own advantage. This underlies the essential need of a broad and incorruptible supply of our Nation’s documentary resources,” wrote the president. (Papers of DDE, 19: 937).

Eisenhower would be pleased to see the results of the experienced and talented editorial team that completed The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower documentary series in twenty-one volumes (initial projections called for ten). While this review deals with the final four volumes of the Eisenhower Papers Project (The Presidency: Keeping the Peace, Volumes 18 to 21, edited by Louis Galambos, Daun van Ee, Elizabeth S. Hughes, Janet R. Brugger, Robin D. Coblentz, Jill A. Friedman, and Nancy Kay Berlage) housed at the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at the Johns Hopkins University, a brief retrospective of the entire project is in order.

In the early 1960s the History Department of Johns Hopkins University (led by David Herbert Donald) proposed to the university’s president, Milton S. Eisenhower (brother of DDE), that Eisenhower’s papers be published. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., served as the first editor/director of the project, and his associate
Dwight D. Eisenhower at desk

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas
editor was Stephen E. Ambrose. In the 1970s Louis Galambos succeeded Chandler; eventually Daun van Ee was named coeditor with Galambos, and Elizabeth S. Hughes was named executive editor.¹

While the primary source of selected Eisenhower papers was the collection of presidential and pre-presidential documents now housed in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, other sources included the National Archives, Library of Congress, and Columbia University Archives. Johns Hopkins University Press published all twenty-one volumes of the Eisenhower Papers in several sets of volumes, with each set containing its own index, introduction, chronology, glossary, and bibliographical essay. Sets include The War Years (Volumes 1–5);² Occupation, 1945 (Volume 6) and The Chief of Staff (Volumes 7–9); Columbia University (Volumes 10–11); NATO and the Campaign of 1952 (Volumes 12–13); The Presidency: The Middle Way (first term, Volumes 14–17); and The Presidency: Keeping the Peace (second term, Volumes 18–21).³

This final set containing nearly 1,800 documents skillfully selected from President Eisenhower’s second administration spanning 20 January 1957 to 20 January 1961 sheds significant light upon major domestic, foreign, and national-security issues during this tense Cold-War period of the 1950s and early 1960s. The editors include documents, some items only recently declassified, previously unavailable to scholars and many in print for the first time. Most of the documents selected, for publication in full or as sources for the annotation, were culled from the extensive manuscript collections in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene. A substantial number of items were selected from the Eisenhower Manuscripts and subset Ann Whitman File, as well as collateral collections such as the papers of Secretaries of State John Foster Dulles and Christian A. Herter. The editors were fortunate to have access to Eisenhower’s correspondence with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (whom DDE addressed as “Harold”) housed at the Public Record Office in Kew, England.

²Editor Alfred Chandler decided to skip over Eisenhower’s pre-World War II career and formative years because “few students would be interested in the personality and training of a junior Army officer.” The initial editors, therefore, decided not to publish the papers in chronological order but to start with December 1941 and to publish Eisenhower’s “earlier papers at a later date” (1: xiii–xiv). The bypassed volume of prewar Eisenhower documents was later published by the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (Daniel D. Holt and James W. Leyerzapf, Eisenhower: The Prewar Diaries and Selected Papers, 1905–1941 [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998]).
³“Our original plan had been to publish a single volume of the letters Eisenhower wrote after he left the White House in 1961,” wrote Daun van Ee. “As funds dwindled and the
Dwight D. Eisenhower with John F. Kennedy

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas
The source/location of each item has been carefully identified and provided by the editors within the document headings and footnotes.

The editors clearly state their selection policies: to focus on “Eisenhower the man and not on the presidential office.” Accordingly, they have “selected for publication only documents that he wrote, dictated to a secretary, redrafted, or was closely involved with in some other way.” The editors used “memorandums of conversation, lists of items signed by the President, diary entries, congressional mail summaries, records of telephone conversations, calendars, routing sheets, emended drafts, handwritten postscripts, and Presidential Secretary Ann C. Whitman’s own detailed notes” to determine the authenticity of Eisenhower documents (18: xxx–xxxi). They have not duplicated those documents already published in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower (Washington, D.C., 1958–61), but reference them in the annotation. Because the editors do not publish incoming letters and reports, they summarize them to provide a context for Eisenhower’s documents. The annotation is objective, thorough, and relevant. Documents are meticulously cross-referenced by document number to background information and further developments. The glossary and Eisenhower chronology are helpful, and the index is superb.

The editors organized the Eisenhower documents in chronological order, and the pages as well as the documents are numbered consecutively within Volumes 18 through 21; beginning with a letter (no. 1) on 21 January 1957, addressed to his brother Edgar and ending with a letter (no. 1782) on 19 January 1961, addressed to Vice President Richard M. Nixon. In the first, the president reports on the ill health of brother Arthur and his dread of viewing the inaugural parade. “The other part that gives me a little pause is that again today I swear to do my best for another four years in working at a job that at times is nothing deadline approached, it became obvious that the research and editorial work could not be completed in time.” Also sacrificed was the cumulative index. “The most serious item we cast to the waves and to the sharks was the long-promised cumulative index. This would have greatly reduced the labors of scholars interested in issues that spanned one or more phases of Eisenhower’s career,” wrote van Ee. The most important lesson to be learned from their experience, van Ee advised other documentary projects, is that “the creation of deadlines for fund-raising purposes should be avoided. A completion goal is one thing; an imposed termination date is another. No project should have to choose between finishing on schedule and fulfilling its mission, or between meeting an artificial deadline and maintaining high quality.” He sympathized with grantors and funding agencies who “would like to see long-standing endeavors finish, so that they can move on toward new challenges, more exciting and less familiar. It should be realized, however, that these undertakings are historiographical monuments, and like all monumental works, they take time—and money—to complete. To hurry a project that is thorough, productive, and important is short-sighted. These are works for the ages” (Van Ee, “‘Our Revels Now Are Ended’”).
but frustration. We have never successfully got across to America as a whole the cold war requirements in fighting Communism," Eisenhower lamented. "The only reason that I rather resent signing on to do my best for the next four years is that there are so many things Mamie and I have wanted to do for so long, and this time it is more difficult for me than it was in 1953 to believe that I personally had the duty of standing again for this office. Possibly I am like a woman convinced against her will" (18: 5–7). How different was Eisenhower's diary entry on 21 January 1953? "My first day at President's Desk. Plenty of worries and difficult problems. But such has been my portion for a long time—the result is that this just seems (today) like a continuation of all I've been doing since July '41—even before that! (14: 5).

"As you know," Eisenhower wrote to Nixon on 19 January 1961, "I am not an individual that accepts defeat easily. When I have to recognize a major setback, my sole reaction is to redouble effort in order to recover lost ground. In the November eighth election we, the Republican Party, endured such a setback. It was, however, not so much a blow to the convictions, policies and principles that we espouse as it was to our effort to awaken the American people to the importance of the issues raised and the advantage to the country of following Republican counsel" (21: 2258).

President Eisenhower maintained insightful correspondence with prominent individuals and world leaders as well as with family, World War II associates, and personal friends. His candid letters to longtime, boyhood friend Edward Everett "Swede" Hazlett are especially revealing because they provided an avenue whereby he would vent his feelings and opinions regarding matters domestic and foreign. In a 22 July 1957 letter to Hazlett, Eisenhower commented on self-serving members of Congress and their ignorance of foreign affairs; explained that "mutual security operations represent America's best investment" and the importance of foreign aid and trade in achieving "the strengthening of freedom and the gradual exhaustion of Communism in the world"; defended African-American civil rights and school desegregation and the importance of respecting the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution; and listed some of the contributory causes of inflation. The president then apologized for sending a too long letter that "represents only the meandering reflections of an individual who has daily to use up more than a normal ration of his sense of humor in order to keep right side up." Eisenhower likened himself to "a ship which, buffeted and pounded by wind and wave, is still afloat and manages in spite of frequent tacks and turnings to stay generally along its plotted course and continues to make some, even if slow and painful, headway" (18: 319–24).
The Presidency: Keeping the Peace—as does the entire series of The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower—serves as a masterful model documentary edition and fulfills Eisenhower's call to provide documentary resources available to the public.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's farewell address

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas