

John Osborne Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2003
Revised 2021 October

Collection Summary

Title: John Osborne Papers

Inclusive Dates: circa 1900-1983

Bulk Dates: 1941-1983

ID No.: MSS60400

Creator: Osborne, John, 1907-1981

Extent: 35,000 items

Extent: 100 containers plus 1 oversize and 1 classified

Extent: 40 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm82060400>

Summary: Author, editor, and journalist. Correspondence and memoranda; family papers; drafts of published and unpublished articles, reports, columns, and interviews; notes and notebooks; dispatches and news cables; research material; and other papers documenting Osborne's career as a reporter, editor, and columnist for *Time*, *Life*, and the *New Republic*.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Carter, Jimmy, 1924-

Ford, Gerald R., 1913-2006.

Forrestal, James, 1892-1949.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

Luce, Henry Robinson, 1898-1967--Correspondence.

Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994.

Osborne, John, 1907-1981.

Reagan, Ronald.

Subjects

Foreign correspondents--England--London.

Foreign correspondents--Italy--Rome.

Foreign correspondents--Japan--Tokyo.

Journalism--New York (State)--New York.

Journalism--Washington (D.C.)

Korean War, 1950-1953--Journalism.

Presidents--United States.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

World War, 1939-1945--Journalism--Europe.

Places

London (England)--History--Bombardment, 1940-1945.

United States--Politics and government--1969-1974.

United States--Politics and government--1974-1977.

United States--Politics and government--1977-1981.

United States--Politics and government--1981-1989.

Titles

Life (Chicago, Ill.)

New Republic (New York, N.Y.)

Time.

Occupations

Authors
Editors
Journalists

Acquisition Information

The papers of John Osborne were deposited in the Library of Congress by his wife, Gertrude McCullough Osborne, 1982-1993. In 1999, the deposits were converted to gifts by Osborne's son, John Osborne III.

Processing History

The papers of John Osborne were arranged and described by Michael McElderry with the assistance of Brian McGuire in 1999. Family correspondence remaining from an earlier accession was interfiled by Miles Lawlor in 2021. The finding aid was revised by Maria Farmer in 2021.

Additional Description

The papers of John Osborne are described in *Library of Congress Acquisitions: Manuscript Division, 1982*, pp. 26-28.

Transfers

Items have been transferred from the Manuscript Division to other custodial divisions of the Library. Audiotapes have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. Photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division. All transfers are identified in these divisions as part of the John Osborne Papers.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of John Osborne 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.

Classified Material

Government regulations control the use of classified material in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified material.

Preferred Citation

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

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1907, Mar. 15	Born, Corinth, Miss.
1925-1926	Attended Southwestern University, Memphis, Tenn.
1926-1927	Attended University of Colorado, Boulder, Colo.
1927-1931	Reporter, <i>Commercial Appeal</i> and the Associated Press, Memphis, Tenn.
1933-1935	Public information officer, Tennessee Valley Authority and National Recovery Administration
1936-1938	Labor affairs writer and national affairs editor, <i>Newsweek</i>
1938-1961	Writer, editor, and foreign correspondent, Time, inc.
1942	Married Gertrude McCullough
1946-1948	London bureau chief, Time, inc.
1948-1951	Foreign editor, <i>Life</i> magazine
1951-1953	Washington editor, Time, inc.
1953-1956	Senior Far East correspondent, Time, inc.
1956-1961	Staff writer, <i>Life</i> magazine
1961	Published <i>Britain: A Country of Character</i> (New York: Time, inc. 176 pp.)
1961-1968	Free-lance writer
1968	Published <i>The Old South</i> (New York: Time-Life Books. 192 pp.)
1968-1981	White House correspondent and associate senior editor, <i>New Republic</i> ; wrote regular columns "The Nixon Watch" and "White House Watch"
1970-1975	Published annual volumes of collections of "The Nixon Watch" columns
1974	George Polk Memorial Award for magazine reporting
1977	Published <i>White House Watch: The Ford Years</i> (Washington: New Republic Book Co. 482 pp.)
1981, May 2	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John Franklin Osborne (1907-1981) span the years circa 1900-1983, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period after 1941. Although he worked as a reporter and writer for several newspapers and *Newsweek* magazine from 1927 to 1938 and as a free-lance writer from 1961 to 1968, Osborne's most important work as a journalist and editor was largely confined to two phases of his long career, each identified with the news magazine with which he was associated at the time. The first phase covers the period from 1938 to 1961 when he worked as a writer, editor, and foreign correspondent for Time, inc. The second, from 1968 until his death in 1981, began when Osborne joined the staff of the *New Republic* to write an analysis of Richard M. Nixon's presidency in a column entitled "The Nixon Watch," which was continued under the title "White House Watch" during later administrations. Records originating from both news organizations are contained in subseries in the [Journalism File](#). The [Time files](#) contain correspondence and memoranda, drafts of published and unpublished articles and reports, notes and notebooks, dispatches, news cables, and research material. Osborne's field reports reflect the political and international repercussions of American foreign policy during and immediately following World War II, while his office files provide insight into the operations of Henry Luce's publishing empire. The [New Republic files](#) contain material similar to those of *Time*, including an important set of notes transcribed from Osborne's tape-recorded interviews and telephone conversations, and serve as source material for the study of twentieth century American politics as viewed through the office of the United States presidency. In addition to the files associated with *Time* and the *New Republic*, the collection also includes [family papers](#), general correspondence, research and production material for Osborne's [books and free-lance writings](#), and [miscellaneous](#) items.

As an editor and foreign correspondent for *Time*, Osborne reported many of the major events of the mid-twentieth century. A selection of the stories Osborne covered while stationed in London, Rome, Tokyo, New York, and Washington includes World War II reports from Europe and the London "blitz," the Communist takeover of China, and the Korean War. Osborne's files include dispatches, news cables, and memoranda. The geopolitical file, representing Osborne's collected notes and research material on specific countries and foreign policy issues, documents postwar international realignment, especially in the Far East.

In his role as adviser and editor, Osborne exchanged correspondence and memoranda with other top editors and decision makers throughout the corporate hierarchy of Time, inc., including Henry Luce. These exchanges outline various administrative and editorial policies and suggest the extent to which the company shaped its product through tight editorial control and a centralized world view. For some years, Osborne was a colleague of Whittaker Chambers on the staff of *Time* magazine. Reflecting on his relationship with Chambers, Osborne responded to John Chabot Smith's book, *Alger Hiss: The True Story*, in a controversial review published in the *New Republic* in April 1976. Material relating to the review and the relationship is located in the *New Republic* files.

In an effort to advance his career and broaden his opportunities for independent writing, Osborne left *Time* in 1961 to become a free-lance writer. The [Books and Writings File](#) contains correspondence, drafts, notes, and other material detailing the contract negotiations, research, and writing he pursued during this period. The series contains a large collection of notes and research material gathered in support of an intended, but unpublished, biography of James Forrestal. Similar files accumulated for prospective volumes on John F. Kennedy and Vietnam illustrate Osborne's research methods.

In 1968 Osborne became the White House correspondent for the *New Republic*. The collection contains drafts, notes and notebooks, and reference files produced and collected by Osborne while writing his regular columns, "The Nixon Watch," and "White House Watch." Although Osborne's columns chronicled the record of incumbent presidents from Richard M. Nixon to Ronald Reagan, his attention was drawn more closely to the study of the American presidency as an institution. It was the office of the presidency, more so than its occupant, that Osborne admired and sought to document. The *New Republic* files include full sets of drafts, proofs, and tearsheets for these columns, which were later collected and published as *The Nixon Watch* in annual volumes, 1970-1975, and *White House Watch: The Ford Years*, 1977. Material relating to these published volumes can be found in the [Books and Writings File](#).

Despite his access to inside sources, Osborne preferred official documents and transcripts for his information. His work habits are further reflected in the set of notes, notebooks, and reference material he used in preparation for his columns. These materials are in the White House file, among the [files of the New Republic](#). Although Osborne kept notebooks throughout his career to record both facts and impressions, his holograph entries are fragmentary and difficult to read. Of greater importance are his typewritten notes, which he categorized and filed both chronologically as a set and selectively within subject headings. In addition to research material, the notes include transcripts of personal and telephone interviews conducted by Osborne with a variety of administration officials and recorded by him on cassette tapes.

Correspondence and memoranda exchanged between staff members of the *New Republic* detail administrative decisions that influenced editorial policy at the magazine. Readers' reactions to his columns were always important to Osborne, and their letters, along with his replies to the more thoughtful responses, are contained in the [New Republic files](#).

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in six series:

- [Family Papers, 1915-1983](#)
- [Journalism File, 1941-1981](#)
- [Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980](#)
- [Miscellany, 1940-1981](#)
- [Oversize, circa 1900-1974](#)
- [Classified, 1978](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-2, 99-100	<p><u>Family Papers, 1915-1983</u></p> <p>Letters received and copies of letters sent by Osborne, as well as correspondence exchanged between family members other than Osborne, telegrams, genealogical records, printed matter, writings, and miscellaneous items and enclosures.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by name of family member and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 2-71	<p><u>Journalism File, 1941-1981</u></p>
BOX 2-17	<p><u>Time, inc., 1941-1966</u></p> <p>Correspondence and memoranda, telegrams, dispatches and news cables, research material, reports, notes and notebooks, typescripts, drafts, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures documenting Osborne's career as a writer, correspondent, and editor with Time, inc.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 17-71	<p><u>New Republic, 1949-1981</u></p> <p>Correspondence and memoranda, notes and notebooks, transcripts, drafts, typescripts, tearsheets, proofs, reference files, research material, financial records, reports, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures accumulated by Osborne as White House correspondent for the <i>New Republic</i>.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 71-94	<p><u>Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980</u></p> <p>Correspondence, drafts, typescripts, notes and notebooks, research material, tearsheets, contracts, royalty statements, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures relating to Osborne's published and unpublished writings, with the exception of the articles written for Time, inc., and the <i>New Republic</i> noted above in the Journalism File.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by type of material and books alphabetically by title and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 94-98	<p><u>Miscellany, 1940-1981</u></p> <p>Correspondence, financial records, address and telephone books, appointment calendars, awards, cards and invitations, diary, medical records, memorabilia, notes, printed matter, and miscellaneous items.</p> <p>Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><u>Oversize, circa 1900-1974</u></p> <p>Oversize material consisting mostly of printed matter.</p> <p>Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.</p>
BOX CL 1	<p><u>Classified, 1978</u></p> <p>Telegrams, cables, memoranda, correspondence, and policy papers.</p> <p>Arranged according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-2, 99-100	Family Papers, 1915-1983 Letters received and copies of letters sent by Osborne, as well as correspondence exchanged between family members other than Osborne, telegrams, genealogical records, printed matter, writings, and miscellaneous items and enclosures. Organized alphabetically by name of family member and arranged chronologically therein.
BOX 1	McCullough family Genealogy, 1915, 1966, 1975, undated Other family members, 1981, undated Nee, Owen D., and Elizabeth Nee (sister), 1956, 1969, 1973-1979, undated Nee, Owen D., Jr., (nephew) and Amber Nee, 1974, 1981 Osborne, Gertrude M. (wife) Cards, 1980, undated Correspondence, 1931, 1939-1983, undated (2 folders) "Family" letters, 1946-1947, undated Letters exchanged with John Osborne 1941, Jan.-Oct. 1941, Nov.-1942, Feb. 1942, Mar.-1948, Apr. 1948, May-1949, Sept. 1949, Oct.-1953, Apr. 1953, May-1954, Apr. 1953, May-1956, June 1956, June-1961, Apr. 1972, Feb.-1980, Sept. Undated Miscellany, 1945-1956, undated Writings, 1977, undated Osborne, John F., III, (son) and Peggy Osborne Correspondence 1950-1956 1969-1973 1974-1976 1977-1982 Undated Miscellany, 1954, 1961-1963, 1974-1980, undated
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Family Papers, 1915-1983

Container

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Osborne family genealogy, 1925, 1952, 1974, undated

BOX 2-71

Journalism File, 1941-1981

BOX 2-17

Time, inc., 1941-1966

Correspondence and memoranda, telegrams, dispatches and news cables, research material, reports, notes and notebooks, typescripts, drafts, printed matter, and miscellaneous items and enclosures documenting Osborne's career as a writer, correspondent, and editor with Time, inc.

Organized alphabetically by subject or type of material and arranged chronologically therein.

BOX 2

Bureaus

Hong Kong, 1956, undated

London, England, 1946-1948, undated

Correspondence

Administrative and editorial, 1941-1960

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Letters of introduction, 1950

Luce, Clare Boothe, undated

BOX 3

Luce, Henry R., 1942-1956, undated

(3 folders)

Editorial and research projects

Chiang Kai-shek, written by

"Our Struggle Against the Russian Imperialists and Their Chinese Communist Agents,"
1954

Soviet Russia in China, 1957, undated

Suggestions for stories, 1950-1951

Taft, Robert A. (1889-1953), 1951

Vandenberg, Hoyt S., 1951-1952

Expense accounts, 1941-1956

Geopolitical file

Burma, 1950-1955

(2 folders)

BOX 4

China

Congresses

Eighth National Chinese Communist Party Congress

Miscellany, 1956

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Speeches, 1956

First National People's Congress, 1954-1956

Dispatches and news cables, 1954-1955

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	Map, 1944 <i>See Oversize</i>
	Miscellany, 1947-1955, undated
	News cables and research memoranda, 1950, undated
	Nixon, Richard M., visit of, July 1956
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	Taiwan (Formosa)
	Correspondence, 1952-1955, undated
	Dispatches and news cables, 1948-1955, undated
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	Miscellany, 1943-1964, undated
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Journalism File, 1941-1981

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BOX 11	"Round Table," <i>Le Monde Libre</i> , 1944-1945 Waugh, Evelyn, 1946, 1966 Writings Articles "American Aid in Asia," 1956 "Americans in Asia," 1953-1956 "America's Cyprus: A Report on Okinawa," 1956 "Andres Soriano," 1955-1956 "Arthur Koestler," 1944-1947, undated "Bevin Closeup," 1946 "Chennault and the Big Buck," 1953-1954 "China: The New Context," 1956 "Economics of the Candidates," 1960 "Fulbright's Last Chance," 1959 "George Marden," 1954
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	"The Way of Death," 1956
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	Statements of assets and liabilities, 1969-1973
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Newspaper clippings

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Press book

Press conferences

Press pool reports

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BOX 73	Books "James Forrestal," unpublished Atlantic Monthly Press, 1962-1965, 1975, undated Classified material review, 1962-1963 Correspondence General, 1964, 1970-1973, 1980, undated

Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

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Books and Writings File, circa 1900-1980

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Oversize, circa 1900-1974

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Miscellany ([Container 41](#))

Books and Writings File

Books

"James Forrestal," unpublished

Notes and research material, circa 1900-circa 1968

Early years

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BOX CL 1

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Arranged according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.

BOX CL 1

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