Papers of Mary W. Dewson

1898 - 1961


The papers were donated to the Library by Miss Mary W. Dewson. Literary Property Rights in these papers have not been donated to the United States Government.

Quantity: 10 feet

Restrictions: None

Related Materials: Files in the President’s Papers including PPF 5689 (Mary W. Dewson), OF 300 (Democratic National Committee) OF 1710 (Social Security Board), and OF 1086 (Committee on Economic Security), Papers of Eleanor Roosevelt, Democratic National Committee Papers, Papers of the Democratic National Committee - Women's Division and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Foundation Papers.
Mary Williams Dewson, usually known as "Molly," was born in Quincy, Massachusetts on February 18, 1874. At 17, she startled her New England Republican family by supporting Grover Cleveland for President. She continued to display her independence by seeking a college education at a time when this was a rare goal for a woman.

After graduation from Wellesley College in 1897, she did research for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston. She compiled statistics on women's wages and hours and also wrote a "Family Budget Book." From 1900 to 1912 she served as superintendent of the Girls' Parole Department of Massachusetts. Her statistical studies were widely published but of greater importance to Molly Dewson was the welfare of the girls with whom she worked.

In 1911, she accepted an assignment as secretary of the Committee on Minimum Wage Legislation for the State of Massachusetts. This committee's report contained recommendations for what became the first minimum wage law and served as a model for other states.

After leaving the Girls' Parole Department, Molly Dewson and her friend, Mary Porter, ran a dairy farm in Berlin, Massachusetts for five years. In 1917, both women went to France to work with the American Red Cross.

When the war ended and the work became too routine for Molly's taste, she returned to the United States, sold the farm and took a job as a research secretary for the National Consumers League. There she continued her activities for minimum wage legislation. She wrote the factual parts of the briefs on minimum wage legislation for the Supreme Court and the State of California. She resigned from the position in 1924 but maintained her interest in the League for the rest of her life.

From 1924 to 1927, she worked with a number of organizations, including the National Consumers League as a volunteer. At some point during this period she met Eleanor Roosevelt and the two became friends. It was Mrs. Roosevelt who asked her to help with the Democratic Campaign in 1928 and started her on her political career. Miss Dewson worked for Franklin D. Roosevelt during his second gubernatorial campaign in 1930. She was chairman of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Campaign Committee in 1932, Director of the Women's Division, 1933-34; Director of the General Advisory Committee of the Women's Division, 1934-36 and Vice Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, 1936-37.
Because of her interest in social reform, Molly Dewson was asked by President Roosevelt to serve on the Advisory Council of the President's Committee on Economic Security. The recommendations of this committee were later incorporated in the Social Security Act.

Miss Dewson was always interested in the role of women in government and industry. She firmly believed that at least one woman should be appointed to the Social Security Board but the members of the first Board were all men. In 1937, Miss Dewson, herself, became the first woman to serve on the Social Security Board. She was concerned with improving the image of Social Security and in expanding coverage to include domestic workers and farm laborers and also widows and dependent children. Not all of these goals were accomplished during her tenure on the Board, however.

In 1938, Molly Dewson retired from government service and, with Mary Porter, went to live in what had previously been their summer home in Castine, Maine. Even in retirement, she kept in touch with former colleagues. She served as director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Fund and as Vice President of the National Consumers League. She died in October 1962, in Castine.

Miss Dewson's papers for the early part of her career are at Radcliffe College. Those held by the Roosevelt Library deal mainly with her work in the 1930's for the Democratic Party and the Social Security Board. Her papers reflect her deep interest in people and particularly in the advancement of women. They also reflect the zest for living of this woman who won a tennis championship at age 53 and ran for state office when in her 80's.

The Dewson Papers have been arranged in four series as follows:

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<tr>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>General Correspondence Files, 1924-1961: Incoming and outgoing personal, business, and political correspondence arranged alphabetically by subject or surname of correspondent. In many cases, the files have been annotated by Miss Dewson. The dates given in the shelf list are the inclusive dates for the materials in the file. Related material is found in the Subject Files (see below).</td>
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<td>Containers</td>
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<td>5 - 8</td>
<td>Subject Files: Contains files on topics of particular interest to Miss Dewson. There is a large amount of material on political campaigns, particularly the 1936 Campaign. Material relating to some of the subjects is also found in the General Correspondence Files (see above).</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 - 12</td>
<td>Speech, Article and Miscellaneous Files, 1912-1956: Contains speeches, articles and reports by Miss Dewson and her colleagues. When the person involved was someone other than Miss Dewson, this fact is indicated in the shelf list. This series also contains newspaper clippings roughly arranged by year. The bulk of the clippings are from 1936. In addition, there are campaign materials from 1932 and 1936; a chart on Social Security, apparently used for publicity; and a copy of Jim Farley's Story.</td>
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<td>13-33</td>
<td>Letter Books and Scrapbooks: Contains ten bound volumes of letters dated 1929 to 1951, mostly incoming correspondence from prominent political leaders, friends and associates, and twelve scrapbooks, 1932 to 1950, containing clippings and mementoes of Miss Dewson's political career.</td>
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*An Aid to the End* — a two-volume, unpublished manuscript written by Mary W. Dewson.
## Papers of Mary W. Dewson

1888 - 1961

General Correspondence Files

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| 1         | A (General)  
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Aiken, Paul 1937  
Akin, Stella 1936, 1949  
Allen, Florence 1932-1959  
Altmeyer, Arthur J. 1937-1957  
B (General)  
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Carr, Charlotte 1929  
Coffin, Jo 1936-1937  
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D (General)  
Dewson, Mary W. - Personal and Biographical Material  
Douglas, Paul H. 1954-1956  
Dubord, F. Harold 1937-1947  
E (General)  
Eben, Mary 1945-1947 and Undated  
Edwards, India 1937, 1946-1958  
Elliott, Harriet 1935-1945  
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| 2         | F (General)  
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J - K (General)  
Kerr, Harriet Allen 1933-1958  
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Roosevelt, Elliott, Franklin, Jr., James and John 1937-1949  
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Smith, Alfred E., Correspondence re 1928 Campaign  
T (General)  
Tate, Richard and Liz 1945-1957  
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Truman, Harry S. 1946-1953  
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 | Wallace, Henry A. 1947-1948
 | Welles, Sumner 1937, 1954
 | White, Sue S. 1931, 1936
 | Whitney, Florence 1935-1936
 | Wolfe, Carolyn 1933-1958
 | Woodward, Ellen 1936-1960

Subject Files

5 | Buenos Aires Conference 1936
 | Campaign of 1936: Articles, Drafts and Correspondence
 | Campaign of 1936: Correspondence with State Leaders: Arkansas-Kansas
 | Campaign of 1936: Correspondence with State Leaders: Maine-Missouri
 | Campaign of 1936: Correspondence with State Leaders: Nebraska-Oregon
 | Campaign of 1936: Correspondence with State Leaders: Pennsylvania-Washington
 | Campaign of 1936: Form Letters
 | Campaign of 1936: Meetings with State Leaders

6 | Campaign of 1936: News Digest
 | Campaign of 1936: Peace Plank
 | Campaign of 1936: Program Materials
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7 | Correspondence with State Leaders, 1937, Indiana-Massachusetts
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 | Democratic Digest
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<td>&quot;What Campaign Issues Mean to Women&quot;</td>
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<td>1933</td>
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<td>Speech to the Cuyahoga Women's Democratic Club</td>
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<td>Speech to the Young Democrats in Convention at Kansas City</td>
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<td>&quot;Women Voters of Pennsylvania it's Up to You&quot; Pennsylvania Survey</td>
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<td>Untitled Talk on the Election</td>
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<td>March 1, 1924</td>
<td>&quot;The Human Aspects of the New Deal&quot; The Christian Register</td>
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<td>Untitled Speech on Democratic Women</td>
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<td>Speech at First Regional Conference at Richmond, Virginia</td>
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<td>Introduction to series of Broadcasts sponsored by Women's Division - Mrs. James F. Wolfe</td>
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<td>Radio Address - Mrs. Ellen Woodward</td>
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<td>September 17, 1935</td>
<td>Introduction to Radio Broadcast - Mrs. James F. Wolfe</td>
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<td>Speech Before the Institute of Government, Charleston, West Virginia - Mrs. James F. Wolfe</td>
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<td>April 30, 1936</td>
<td>&quot;What Has Relief, Recovery and Setting Our House in Order Cost Us?&quot; Democratic Women's Regional Conference, Onandaga Hotel, Syracuse, New York. Portions also used for radio talk</td>
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<td>&quot;New Frontiers For Old&quot; Address at Wellesley College Commencement - Josephine Roche</td>
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<td>Speech at Lewiston, Maine</td>
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<td>&quot;Politics As A Career&quot; - Wellesley Club News</td>
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<td>&quot;What the Social Security Act Means to Women&quot; Speech before the National Radio Forum</td>
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<td>&quot;An Amateur's Views on Education&quot; Wellesley Club of New York, N.Y.</td>
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<td>&quot;Next Steps in Social Security Legislation&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Fifty Years of Progress Toward Social Security&quot; State Convention of Affiliated Young Democrats, New York City</td>
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<td>&quot;Industry and Agriculture at the Gates of a New Decade&quot; - Address by James A. Farley</td>
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<td>May 23, 1940</td>
<td>&quot;Do Political Parties Educate?&quot;</td>
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<td>- William Hard at &quot;America's Town Meeting of the Air&quot;</td>
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<td>April 9, 1947</td>
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<td>&quot;Mary Chamberlain&quot;</td>
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<td>1900</td>
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<td>Labor Bulletin of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts No. 13</td>
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<td>December 1924</td>
<td>The Women Republican, Vol. 2, No. 17</td>
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<td>Bulletin of Women's City Club of New York</td>
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<td>Acceptance Speech before the Democratic National Convention - Franklin D. Roosevelt</td>
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<td>&quot;Report to the Industrial Commissioner on the Effect of Directory Order No. 1 on the Wages of Women and Minors in Laundries in New York State and the Need for Mandatory Wage Order Governing Laundry Occupations&quot;</td>
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