

Materials of Special Files Administrative Files Among Nixon Presidential Materials, 1969-73

The Presidential historical materials of Special Files Administrative Files White House Special Files are in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration under the provisions of Title I of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 (P. L. 93-526 , 88 Stat 1695) and implementing regulations. In accordance with the act and regulations, archivists reviewed the file group to identify personal and private materials as well as non-historical items. Materials were returned to those staff members who originated them.

Materials covered by the act have been archivally processed and are described in this register. Items which are security classified or otherwise restricted under the act and regulations have been removed and placed in a closed file. A Document Withdrawal Record (NA Form 1421) with a description of each restricted document has been inserted at the beginning of each folder from which materials have been removed. A Document Control Record marks the original position of the withdrawn item. Employees of the National Archives will review periodically the unclassified portions of closed materials for the purpose of opening those which no longer require restriction. Certain classified documents may be declassified under authority of Executive Order 12356 in response to a Mandatory Review Request (NA Form 1420) submitted by the researcher.

Linear feet of materials: 1 linear foot, 9 linear inches

Approximate number of pages: 1,040

Organizational Note

The Special Files Unit was created in September 1972 to provide a central storage location for sensitive material. Early in 1970, John R. Brown III, Special Assistant to the President and Staff Secretary, had conducted a review of the handling procedures for all Presidential papers. His report was contained in a memorandum to H.R. Haldeman, dated March 25, 1970. In it, Brown recommended the immediate establishment of a special files unit to handle the storage of all sensitive material, material of a personal nature, and material containing the President's handwriting. The consolidation of these files into a central location would, according to his recommendation, tighten up the procedures for handling Presidential papers. Two years later the Nixon administration acted on the recommendations by establishing a special files unit within the White House complex that was completely independent of the White House Central Files unit.

To ensure the utmost security, the number of individuals, who worked in the Special Files Unit was kept at a minimum. Gertrude Brown Fry, who was Staff Assistant for Security, was appointed to supervise the new White House unit. Her assistant was Hazel F. Fulton, who had been a confidential assistant to Peter M. Flanigan, Assistant to the President.

Prior to the establishment of Special Files, much of the sensitive material generated by the White House staff was not forwarded to the White House Central Files for general storage, but was dispersed throughout the White House complex and held by individual staff members in their own offices. Following the decision to set up Special Files, John W. Dean III, Counsel to the President, instructed Fry and Fulton to receive, index, and file all sensitive White House staff materials. They were also provided criteria to use in making determinations about items to be included in the Special Files. Under the criteria there were twelve groups of files that warranted special care and handling: investigative reports on individuals; applications and recommendations for positions; document that contained derogatory remarks concerning the character, loyalty, integrity, or ability of individuals; documents relating to personal, family, or financial affairs of individuals; documents that contained information which could be used to harass living persons or relatives of recently deceased persons; information prejudicial to the national security; information prejudicial to foreign relations; communications addressed to the President in confidence, the immediate publication of which would result in discouraging confidential communications to a President in the future; documents that pertained to the President's personal, family, business, and financial affairs; security classified information; documents specifically restricted by the President; and politically sensitive information or documents. With these instructions Fry proceeded to set up, organize, and manage the Special Files.

The first materials received by the new White House unit were the President's handwriting files and the files of the Staff Secretary. Fry and Fulton also began to review the Confidential Files in the White House Central Files, including the subject files and retired files of White House staff members, to determine which documents should be removed and placed in the Special Files. Furthermore, it was decided to continue the same arrangement scheme used by the White House Central Files Unit rather than to devise a new filing system for Special Files materials. A cross-reference card was prepared for use by the White House Central Files unit to indicate the now location of withdrawn items in Special Files. This practice, however, was not always done as time passed.

It was the intention of the Special Files Unit that each senior White House staff member would send sensitive materials to Special Files for storage and exclusive retrieval by the staff member. In practice, however, Special Files did not receive sensitive material from many top staff members. When staff members did resign their appointment or left the White House staff, the Special Files Unit received all their files and reviewed them for items that met the specified criteria for sensitivity and inclusion in Special Files., All non-sensitive materials were subsequently forwarded to the White House Central Files for general storage. If the Special Files Unit did not receive a large quantity of sensitive materials from particular staff Member, but only a few folders, these folders were placed in the file group known as Special Staff Files.

On February 13, 1975, William Casselman, President Ford's White House Counsel's Office, asked Gertrude Fry to become custodian of the historic tapes which were stored in Safe Zone 128, Old Executive Office Building. Jerry Jones, Staff Secretary, had been the custodian of the tapes and this activity was consuming all of his time. The Watergate Special Prosecutor and the law firm, representing Richard Nixon were notified that this transfer of authority was going to take place and approved it. Hazel Fulton was not included in this authorization. With assistance of the Secret Service which was charged with the physical security of the tapes Mrs. Fry provided access and pulled tapes on request from April 3, 1975 until August 8, 1977 when the tapes were turned over to the National Archives.

In May 1973 the Special Files received the files of H.R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman, and John W. Dean III. These files had been seized by the FBI after the resignation of Haldeman and Ehrlichman and the firing of Dean. Mrs. Fry did not integrate these files into the Special Files, she was only the custodian of them. They were placed in the Special Files because it was perceived as the most secure filing unit.

After the resignation of the President other file groups were placed in the custody of the Special Files for security such as the files of Rose Mary Woods, J. Fred Buzhardt, James St. Clair, Office of Presidential Papers and Archives-Daily Diary and the Gift Unit.

Although Special Files was a development of the Nixon administration, it did not immediately end with the resignation of President Nixon on August 9, 1974. The Special Files Unit continued to operate for an additional eleven months by serving the needs of the Ford White House staff. On June 23, 1975, the Ford administration abolished Special Files and all sensitive materials in its custody were transferred to the Confidential Files of the White House Central Files.

Description of series

Container No.

Contents

1-2

ADMINISTRATIVE FILES, 1972-1974

General office functions and activities are represented in these files including interoffice memos requesting space and equipment; travel arrangements to three Presidential Libraries; forms used by Special Files and acquired from other units; manuals and information on setting up the Special Files Unit and processing manuals; notebooks maintained by Hazel Fulton and Trudy Fry on political items and declassification procedures.

2-4

FINDING AIDS AND INVENTORIES, 1972-1974

These files contain an overall guide to the Special Files Unit and lists of boxes of materials stored in Special Files; lists of Oversize Attachments reviewed and removed from House Central Files; lists of the Special Files under the protection of the Secret Service; inventories of President Nixon's Outbox materials and lists of materials from the Staff Secretary.

4

ACCESSES AND SEARCHES

There is a desk calendar concerning accesses to impounded files in Special Files and an appointments record maintained by the EPS, but the largest portion of this series are the folders on the searches of the Special Files conducted by Mrs. Fry and Mrs. Fulton.

4

TAPE RECORDINGS

Included are lists of the Presidential tapes and the location of taping devices; a binder of authorization letters and memos after access to the tapes storage area and transmittal sheets on tapes once located and placed in Special Files and now in the Nixon Project A-V unit.

Container No.

Contents

4

MISCELLANEOUS

Three folders of materials on Dean's calls and meetings with the President; handwritten documents on legal matters and some information on the Nixon Foundation.