

# A Guide to the Louis Arthur Johnson Papers, ca. 1930-1964

Louis Arthur Johnson Papers ca. 1930-1964  
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A Collection in Special Collections The University of Virginia Library 8476  
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## History

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## Title Statement

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## Descriptive Summary

**Accession number**

8476

**Language**

English

## Physical Characteristics

This collection consists of ca. 56 linear feet of correspondence, memoranda, appointment schedules, speeches, press releases, photographs, phonographs records, films, scrapbooks, and printed material.

## Repository

Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

# Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

## Acquisition Information

The Louis Arthur Johnson Papers were a gift from the estate of Louis Johnson through Mr. I. Martin Leavitt of Steptoe and Johnson, Washington, D. C., and Mr. Oscar J. Andre, Steptoe and Johnson, Clarksburg, West Virginia, on 9 January 1966. Some of the files were picked up by staff members in sealed and labeled transfer cases from Johnson's office at 1250 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C., and some were picked up in similar cases from a storeroom in Clarksburg. Mrs. Ruth B. Nutter, Colonel Johnson's secretary for many years, undertook the assembling and organization of the papers before they were boxed and sealed.

## Preferred Citation

Louis Arthur Johnson Papers, Accession #8476, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

# Biographical/Historical Information

Louis Arthur Johnson was born on January 10, 1891, in Roanoke, Virginia, the son of Marcellus A. and Katherine Leftwich Johnson. After graduating from Jefferson High School, Roanoke, in 1908, he entered the University of Virginia and graduated in 1912 with the degree of Bachelor of Law. Johnson was president of the law class of 1912, a winner of public speaking awards, heavy-weight boxing and wrestling champion of the University, and a member of Delta Chi, Delta Sigma Rho, and the Raven Society.

Moving to Clarksburg, West Virginia, in September, 1912, Johnson associated with John S. Rixey and Philip P. Steptos under the name of Steptoe, Rixey, and Johnson. After one year, the firm became Steptoe and Johnson and grew to be one of the most important in the state, with offices in Clarksburg and Charleston, West Virginia, and in Washington, D. C.

In 1916, Johnson represented Harrison County in the House of Delegates and served as Chairman of the judiciary committee. Soon after the legislature adjourned, Johnson became an officer candidate in the Second Officers Training School at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. He was commissioned Captain, Infantry Section, Officers' Reserve Corps on November 27, 1917, and served with the 42nd Company, 11th Training Battalion and the 18th Company, 5th Training Battalion, 155th Depot Brigade until March 13, 1918 when he was transferred to the 305th Ammunition Train.

Johnson travelled overseas in May and was appointed Adjutant of the Train. He participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive and was honorably discharged on June 5, 1919, at Camp Dix, New Jersey. He was decorated with the rank of Commandeur Ordre National de la Legion D'Honneur by the Republic of France. Johnson continued his interest in military affairs by accepting a commission in the Officers' Reserve Corps.

Colonel Johnson participated in the national organization of the American Legion in 1919 and served in various capacities until he was elected National Commander in 1932. He was later elected a life member of the National Executive Committees and headed the Legion's Commission on Post-War American in 1943.

From 1933 to 1937, Johnson served as Civilian Aids to the Secretary of War for the state of West Virginia. He was also a member of the Federal Advisory Council of the United States Employment Services for several years. Johnson was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1924 and served as chairman of the Veterans Advisory Committee of the Democratic National Committee from 1936 to 1937. In 1948, he served as chairman of the Finance Committee of the Democratic National Committee and was chief fund raiser for President Truman's campaign.

From June 1937 through July 1940, Johnson served as Assistant Secretary of War where he voiced enthusiastic and effective support for the cause of national defense at a time when isolationism was a major topic of legislative discussion. In this post, he fought for an expanded air force and for an active program of industrial mobilization. Johnson disagreed with Secretary of War Harry Woodring over the transfer of arms to countries then fighting Germany. As a result, both men were replaced by President Roosevelt in 1940.

From 1942 to 1947, Johnson served under the Alien Property Custodian, and on the Boards of General Aniline & Film Corporation and of General Dyestuff Corporation in New York.

From March through December, 1942, Johnson was the President's personal representative to India. As chairman of the American Advisory Mission, it was Johnson's objective to determine by means of a technical survey how the United States could most effectively aid in the expansion of India's war production.

Appointed Secretary of Defense in March, 1949, Johnson conducted a vigorous program to cut defense expenditures and to unify the armed forces while maintaining a maximum of military strength. As the result of a long disagreement with Secretary of State Dean Acheson regarding the relative significance of Europe and Asia in American political thinking, Johnson resigned on September 19, 1950, and resumed his law practice. He spent his remaining years mainly in Washington, D. C.

Johnson was a Mason, an Elk, a Rotarian, a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, and a member of the American, West Virginia, and New York City bar associations. His clubs included Clarksburg Country; Bohemian of San Francisco; University, Drug and Chemical, and City Midday of New York; and Metropolitan, National Press, Army and Navy, Burning Tree, and Chevy Chase of Washington.

He married Ruth Frances Maxwell of Clarksburg in 1920. They had two daughters, Lillian Maxwell and Mrs. A. C. C. Hill, Jr. He died on April 24, 1966 at the age of seventy-five.

## Scope and Content Information

The Louis Arthur Johnson Papers, ca. 1930-1964, consist of ca. 56 linear feet of correspondence, memoranda, appointment schedules, speeches, press releases, photographs, phonograph records, films, scrapbooks, and printed material, resulting from Johnson's career as Assistant Secretary of War, 1937 to 1940, as President Roosevelt's personal representative to India, 1942, and as Secretary of Defense, 1949 to 1950. His lifelong interest in the American Legion is also represented in the correspondence. Only a small amount of material from the years preceding his tenure in the War Department, from the years following his resignation as Assistant Secretary of War, and from the years following his term as Secretary of Defense is contained in this collection.

The major portion of the collection consists of correspondence between Johnson and his friends, supporters, American Legion acquaintances, and various business leaders and political figures associated with the concerns of national defense. Johnson's letters are usually very short and "to the point." His overriding concern for adequate national defense, his support for an expanded air force, and for an active program of industrial mobilization are well-documented in the Assistant Secretary of War material.

The India papers document Johnson's activities while visiting India and contain a number of letters from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Secretary of Defense papers contain a great deal of general correspondence between Johnson and his friends and supporters. Commentary on Johnson's efforts to reduce defense expenditures and on the unification of the armed forces abounds throughout this material. Many of the letters are from people who voice approval of various aspects of his policies. There is little documentation of Johnson's dispute with Secretary of State Acheson concerning Far Eastern policy.

An excellent photograph collection and a comprehensive newspaper clippings file provide thorough documentation for Johnson's long and active public career. Eleven scrapbooks, from 1949 to 1950, provide excellent coverage of Johnson's tenure as Secretary of Defense.

The papers only concern Johnson's political career, and only for the years of public service. Personal papers, papers from his legal practice, from his business connections, and from state political activities are, with few exceptions, not included in this collection.

## Organization

The collection arrived at the University having been reviewed and organized previously by Mrs. Nutter, Colonel Johnson's secretary. It was decided to retain Mrs. Nutter's basic arrangement of the material into three groups: Papers of the Assistant Secretary of War, India Papers, and Papers of the Secretary of Defense. Loose papers and material not included in the three major groups were sorted into three minor groups: papers preceding Johnson's tenure as Assistant Secretary of War, papers between his service as Assistant Secretary of War and Secretary of Defense, and papers following his term as Secretary of Defense. A group of photographs and a group of newspaper and magazine clippings were arranged at the end of the collection. A list of scrapbooks, film, phonograph records and oversize items following the container listing.

Series I: Papers of Louis A. Johnson, ca. 1930-1935

This material consists of speeches and notes for speeches, chronologically arranged, together with a few miscellaneous items, also arranged chronologically.

Series II: Papers of the Assistant Secretary of War, 1936(1937-1940) 1941

This material was originally grouped into seven categories and was condensed into six groups as follows:

Subseries A: General Correspondence, 1937-1940; and Correspondence with Specific Individuals, ca. 1936-ca. 1941.

General political correspondence including material of the following nature: speaking engagements and speeches; industrial mobilization and preparedness; American Legion Conventions and meetings; dinner and banquet invitations; Veterans' appeals; job requests; official memoranda; and reserve commission requests. The container listing which follows this section provides a list of the folders filed by individual names. The general letter file includes either personal or general correspondence with the following people: Colonel J. H. Burns, Ordnance Department Executive; Homer Cummings; John W. Davis; Hardy C. Dillard; Ben Dorris of the American Legion; William O. Douglas; John Ewing, the Shreveport Times; James Farley, Postmaster General; W. Averell Harriman; J. Edgar Hoover; Cordell Hull; J. Monroe Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce; A. D. Lewis, Assistant to President, United Mine Workers; Drew Pearson' memoranda to President Roosevelt; C. R. Smith, President of American Airlines; Henry L. Stimson; and Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State.

The individually labeled folders were placed before each general correspondence folder of the same letter of the alphabet. Correspondence was pulled from the general file if the individual concerned already had a separate folder. This was done because the material in both files is similar.

Subseries B: Case Files, 1937-1940

Correspondence, memoranda, and papers on various topics including the following: Aeronautics, Air power, Aircraft expansion, American Legion, Appointments, Army, Army and Navy Munitions Board, Democratic National Convention, Industrial Mobilization, National Defense Policy Committee, National Defense Power Committee, Resignation, State Department, Strategic Materials, and War Resources Board.

The files are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Subseries D: Appointments schedule, 1937-1940

Daily Journal, 1938 Jan. 1-1940 July 25; Daily Schedule, 1937 June 21-1938 May 15; Appointments Calendar, 1940 Jan. 2-Dec. 28; Correspondence Indexes (Incomplete), 1937-1939.

Subseries E: Speeches. 1937-1940

Chronological.

Subseries F. Miscellaneous Papers of the Assistant Secretary of War, ca. 1937-1940

This group is comprised of material which did not fit into any of the other groups.

1. Johnson's letter of resignation, 25 July 1940. 2. Desk papers, 1937-1940. 3. Miscellaneous items, ca. 1937-ca. 1940, arranged alphabetically.

Series III: Papers of Louis A. Johnson, 1940-1948

This material was grouped into four categories.

Subseries A. Correspondence: Cordell Hull, President Roosevelt, and a general alphabetical file.

Subseries B. Reports, Proceedings, and Minutes, 1944 Feb.-1946 May

Subseries C. Speeches and Addresses, 1941 Aug.-1948 May, chronologically arranged. Subseries D. Miscellaneous items, 1940 July-1947, alphabetically arranged.

Series IV: Papers re: India, 1942-1964

Subseries A. Correspondence with Jawaharlal Nehru, 1942-1964

Subseries B. Correspondence re: India, 1942-1958, arranged chronologically.

Subseries C. Correspondence re: Nehru Dinner, 1949-1950, arranged chronologically. Subseries D. Miscellaneous Items, 1942-1956, chronologically arranged.

Subseries E. Photographs [1942], n.d.

Series V: Papers of the Secretary of Defense, ca. 1949-1950

This material was originally grouped into five categories as follows:

Subseries A. General Correspondence, 1949-1950

This material arrived at the library sorted into coded groups, possibly arranged by Johnson's secretary, Mrs. Nutter. These groups were maintained in the event that a key to the code was discovered, and because the groups had a certain integrity. One exception to the preservation of the original order was the interfiling of coded groups J40, J119, J120, J191, and J122. This was done for two reasons: the amount of material in each group was small and the material in the groups was very similar. A description of the coded groups follows:

(1) General Personal and Official Correspondence and Papers (Code J105).

Content: Mainly letters of friendship, expressions of opinion, congratulations, condolences, and general greetings as well as a small number of directives and statements concerning unification and the reduction of personnel.

Arrangement: 1. Correspondence, arranged alphabetically. 2. Miscellaneous Items, arranged alphabetically.

3. Commendatory Correspondence following Johnson's resignation, arranged alphabetically.

(2) Correspondence re: Appointments (Code J106), arranged alphabetically.

(3) Correspondence re: Requests for photographs and autographed photos (Code J107), arranged alphabetically.

(4) Correspondence re: Newspaper clippings, editorials, magazine articles, and television programs (Code J108), mainly concerning unification. Alphabetically arranged.

(5) Correspondence: Congratulatory, concerning Johnson's appointment as Secretary of Defense and concerning his celebration dinner and coffee caucus (Code J109). Alphabetically arranged.

(6) Correspondence and Papers re: Luncheon and dinner invitations (Code J110).

Arrangement: 1. Correspondence, arranged alphabetically. 2. Correspondence re: Nehru dinner, removed to India file. 3. Guest lists, arranged chronologically.

(7) Correspondence re: memberships in various clubs and requests to serve on special committees (Code J112). Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

(8) Letters of Introduction for various people traveling abroad (Code J113). Alphabetically arranged.

(9) Thank-you letters from Johnson (Code J114), for copies of articles, books, and gifts. Alphabetically arranged.

(10) Correspondence re: Visits by Johnson to various colleges and universities (Code J115). Arranged alphabetically by college.

(11) Correspondence re: Speeches given by Johnson and others, articles by Johnson, dinner talks, parades, and other official and ceremonial functions of the Secretary of Defense (Code J40, J119, J120, J121, J122). This material is arranged chronologically, with the identifying code retained on each item.

Subseries B. Safe-File, 1949-1950

This file consists of official and political material. An index is included in the first folder. Arranged alphabetically.

Subseries C. Engagements Calendars, 1949-1950

Chronologically arranged.

Subseries D. Speeches, Press Releases, and Press Conferences, 1949-1950

Chronologically arranged.

Subseries E. Miscellaneous Papers, 1949-1950

This material consists of three groups:

1. Typescripts of Staff Meetings of the Secretary of Defense, 1950 Jan. 13-July 3
2. Address lists and directories, 1949-1950. Arranged alphabetically.
3. Miscellaneous Items, 1949 March-1950 Sept., arranged alphabetically.

Series VI: Miscellaneous Papers of Louis A. Johnson, 1950-1964.

This material was sorted into the following groups:

Subseries A. Correspondence, 1950-1964. Arranged Alphabetically. B. Miscellaneous items and speeches, 1950-1957, arranged chronologically.

Subseries C. Printed Material, 1951, Proceedings of Hearings, U. S. Senate Committee on Armed Services and Committee on Foreign Relations.

Series VII: Photographs, 1938-1957, n.d.

Most of the photos are of Louis Johnson either alone or with other people. Included are photographs of President Truman, General Omar Bradley, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, Jawaharlal Nehru, and General MacArthur.

Chronological with an album placed at the rear of the foldered items.

Series VIII: Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, ca. 1930-1963, n.d.

The newspaper clippings are chronologically arranged by year and are followed by the magazine clippings, also chronologically arranged by year.

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**Box 1**

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**"Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson" 1949 April-June, 1951**

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**"Thirty-first National Legion Convention" 1949 Aug. 29-Sept. 1**

**Folder #7**

**"Armistice Day" 1949 Nov. 11**

**Folder #7**

**"Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, North Atlantic Treaty" 1949, 1950**

**Folder #7**

**"Cartoons" 1949**

**Folder #7**

**"Final Report, Armed Forces Day 1950 Area One" 1950**

**Folder #7**

**"Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, Visit to Japan" 1950 June**

**Folder #7**

**"Resignation of Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson" 1950 Sept.**

**Folder #7**

**Phonograph Records**

**Program of National Broadcasting Company "Magic Key of R. C. A., Army Day," in 10 parts, 78 RPM 1939 April 2**

**Folder #7**

**Scope and Content**

P-463 Parts 1 and 3

P-464 Parts 2 and 4

P-465 Parts 5 and 7

P-466 Parts 6 and 9

P-467 Parts 8 and 10

**Speech of Louis Johnson before the National Board of Fire Underwriters, New York, in 7 parts, 78 RPM 1940 May 23**

**Folder #7**

**Scope and Content**

P-468 Parts I-A and III-A

P-469 Parts II-A and IV-A

P-470 Parts V-A and VII-A

P-471 Parts VI-A

**Speech of Herbert Hoover, in 5 parts, 78 RPM 1940 May 27**

**Folder #7**

**Scope and Content**

P-472 Parts 1 and 3

P-473 Parts 2 and 4

P-474 Parts 5

**Speech of Louis Johnson before the Charleston chamber of Commerce, in 12 parts, 78 RPM 1950 Nov. 16**

**Folder #7**

**Scope and Content**

P-475 Parts 1 and 7

P-476 Parts 2 and 8

P-477 Parts 3 and 9

P-478 Parts 4 and 10

P-479 Parts 5 and 11

P-480 Parts 6 and 12

**Television Talk, General Julius Klein, "The Voice of Robert E. Taft," in 3 parts, 78 RPM 1954 March 25**

**Folder #7**

**Scope and Content**

P-481 Parts I and III

P-482 Part II

## **Films**

**Col. Louis Johnson takes Oath of Office as Secretary of Defense, 16 MM 1949 March 28**

**Folder #7**

**"Coffee Caucus," with Louis Johnson at the Army and Navy Club 1949 March**

**Folder #7**

**Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, Armed Forces Day Speech, 2 reels, 16 MM 1950 May 20**

**Folder #7**

**Secretary Johnson delivering a speech at the Industrial College of Armed Forces and also at Norfolk, Virginia, on the Korean situation [1950 June 27]**

**Folder #7**