

Herbert Putnam Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2013

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<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms014017>

LC Online Catalog record:

<http://lcn.loc.gov/mm77037093>

Prepared by Marilyn Weissman

Collection Summary

Title: Herbert Putnam Papers

Span Dates: 1783-1958

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1899-1939)

ID No.: MSS37093

Creator: Putnam, Herbert, 1861-1955

Extent: 8,000 items ; 35 containers plus 1 oversize ; 14 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

Summary: Librarian of Congress. Family and general correspondence, family diaries and journals, speeches, articles, scrapbooks, legal papers, genealogical material, autograph collection, and printed matter relating largely to Putnam's family and personal life, including diaries and letters of many members of the Putnam and allied O'Hara, Pinhey, and Mason families. Also includes papers relating to Putnam's interests and activities in the field of librarianship, especially to his work as director of the Boston Public Library and his position as Librarian of Congress.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Adams, James Truslow, 1878-1949--Correspondence.

Eliot, Charles William, 1834-1926--Correspondence.

Evans, Luther Harris, 1902-1981--Correspondence.

Ford, Worthington Chauncey, 1858-1941--Correspondence.

Jacobi, Mary Putnam, 1842-1906. Mary Putnam Jacobi correspondence.

Leland, Waldo Gifford, 1879-1966--Correspondence.

MacLeish, Archibald, 1892-1982--Correspondence.

Mason family.

Meyer, Agnes Elizabeth Ernst, 1887-1970--Correspondence.

Moore, Charles, 1855-1942--Correspondence.

O'Hara family.

O'Hara, Eliot, 1890-1969. Eliot O'Hara correspondence.

O'Hara, Shirley Putnam, 1886- Shirley Putnam O'Hara correspondence and diaries.

Olmsted, Frederick Law, 1870-1957--Correspondence.

Pinhey family.

Pinhey, Amy Putnam. Amy Putnam Pinhey correspondence and diaries.

Putnam family.

Putnam, Brenda, 1890-1975. Brenda Putnam correspondence.

Putnam, C. H. (Catherine Hunt), 1792- C.H. Putnam correspondence.

Putnam, Charlotte Elizabeth Munroe, -1928. Charlotte Elizabeth Munroe Putnam correspondence.

Putnam, George Palmer, 1814-1872. George Palmer Putnam correspondence.

Putnam, Herbert, 1861-1955.

Putnam, Israel, 1718-1790. Israel Putnam correspondence.

Putnam, Ruth, 1856-1931. Ruth Putnam correspondence and diaries.

Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919--Correspondence.

Spofford, Ainsworth Rand, 1825-1908--Correspondence.

Swartwout, Egerton, 1870-1943--Correspondence.

Vollbehr, Otto H. F. (Otto Heinrich Friederich), 1869-

Organizations

Boston Public Library.

Library of Congress--Officials and employees.

Library of Congress.

Library of Congress. Trust Fund Board.
Otto Vollbehr Collection (Library of Congress)

Subjects

Autographs--Collections.
Incunabula.
Libraries--Massachusetts--Boston.
Libraries--Washington (D.C.)
Library science.

Occupations

Librarians of Congress.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress, were given to the Library of Congress by his daughters, Brenda Putnam and Shirley Putnam O'Hara, 1956-1963.

Processing History

The papers of Herbert Putnam were described and arranged in 1977. The finding aid was revised in 2013.

Transfers

Photographs and engravings received with the Putnam papers have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Related Material

Additional Herbert Putnam papers from the period of his librarianship (1899-1939) are in the Library of Congress Archives. Material relating to the period when Putnam served as librarian emeritus (1939-1955) is contained in the Luther Evans Papers, also in the Manuscript Division.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Herbert Putnam 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.

Preferred Citation

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

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1861, Sept. 20	Born, New York, N.Y.
1883	A.B., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
1883-1884	Attended lectures, Columbia Law School, New York, N.Y.

1884-1886	Librarian, Minneapolis Athenaeum, Minneapolis, Minn.
1885	Admitted to Minnesota bar
1886	Married Charlotte Elizabeth Munroe
1887-1891	Librarian, Minneapolis Public Library, Minneapolis, Minn.
1892-1894	Practiced law, Boston, Mass.
1895-1898	Librarian, Boston Public Library, Boston, Mass.
1898	President, American Library Association
1899-1939	Librarian of Congress
1902	Elected overseer of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
1904	President, American Library Association
1917-1919	General director, American Library Association War Service
1925	Library of Congress established the Trust Fund Board
1931	Library acquired the Otto H. F. Vollbehr collection of incunabula, including the Gutenberg Bible
1939	Retired as librarian of Congress Appointed librarian of Congress emeritus Awarded Joseph W. Lippincott Award
1955, Aug. 14	Died, Woods Hole, Mass.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Herbert Putnam (full name George Herbert Putnam) (1861-1955) span the years 1783-1958, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1899-1939. The collection includes family diaries and journals, family correspondence, general correspondence, speeches and articles, scrapbooks, clippings, legal papers, genealogies, and miscellaneous printed matter. The papers are organized into eight series: [Family Diaries and Journals](#), [Family Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Speeches and Writings](#), [Clippings File](#), [Subject File](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

The [Family Correspondence](#) series and [Family Diaries and Journals](#) give the collection its essentially personal character and document the Putnam family's many and varied interests. Herbert Putnam's letters to his wife, Charlotte Elizabeth Munroe Putnam, to his grandmother, C. H. Putnam, and to his sister, Victorine Amy Putnam Pinhey, reveal his indecision regarding the choice of librarianship or the legal profession as his life's work. Later letters to his wife and to his daughters, Brenda Putnam and Shirley Putnam O'Hara, document not only his ever-widening interests in all aspects of library work and early years as Librarian of Congress, but reveal his many intellectual interests and love of poetry as well. Other family members represented in the Family Correspondence file include Putnam's sister, the historian Ruth Putnam; General Israel Putnam of Revolutionary War fame; Putnam's son-in-law, the artist Eliot O'Hara; his father, George Palmer Putnam, founder of the publishing company that bears his name; and his sister, Mary Putnam Jacobi, one of the first women to graduate from l' Ecole de Médecine, Paris, France.

The [General Correspondence](#) file and [Speeches and Writings](#) relate mainly to Herbert Putnam's professional interests. His thoughts on library work can be found here, including his comments regarding Harvard Library policy and the examination for a librarian at the Chicago Public Library. Information is provided on such landmarks in the history of the Library of Congress as the purchase of the Otto Vollbehre Collection of incunabula, including the Gutenberg Bible; the decision to sell catalog cards; the establishment of the Library of Congress classification system; the initiation of interlibrary loans; and the establishment of the Trust Fund Board, which Putnam considered his greatest achievement as Librarian of Congress.

The Library of Congress Round Table guest books in the [Subject File](#) contain the autographs of statesmen, writers, kings, presidents, Supreme Court justices, and others who shared the hospitality of the librarian's luncheon circle.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in eight series:

- [Family Diaries and Journals, 1843-1913](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1783-1955](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1886-1955](#)
- [Speeches and Writings, 1883-1950](#)
- [Clippings File, 1899-1954](#)
- [Subject File, 1904-1955](#)
- [Miscellany, 1858-1958](#)
- [Oversize](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1	<u>Family Diaries and Journals, 1843-1913</u> Diaries and journals of Putnam family members. Arranged alphabetically by name of person.
BOX 2-13	<u>Family Correspondence, 1783-1955</u> Letters sent and received. Includes a Ruth Putnam letterbook. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and therein chronologically.
BOX 14-17	<u>General Correspondence, 1886-1955</u> Letters sent and received. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 18-24	<u>Speeches and Writings, 1883-1950</u> Handwritten, typewritten, and printed copies or drafts of speeches and articles. Loose manuscripts arranged alphabetically by title and scrapbooks arranged chronologically.
BOX 25	<u>Clippings File, 1899-1954</u> Newspaper and magazine clippings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 26-28	<u>Subject File, 1904-1955</u> Correspondence, guest books, reports, newspaper clippings, and printed matter. Arranged by subject or type of material.
BOX 29-35	<u>Miscellany, 1858-1958</u> Legal papers, genealogies, general miscellany, and printed matter. Arranged by type of material.
BOX OV 1	<u>Oversize</u> Appointments, honors, and other material. Described according to the series and container from which the items were removed.

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Family Correspondence, 1783-1955

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