

Joseph Holt Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Prepared by Charles F. Cooney



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2011

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Latest revision: 2013 July

Collection Summary

Title: Joseph Holt Papers

Span Dates: 1817-1895

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1859-1889)

ID No.: MSS26385

Creator: Holt, Joseph, 1807-1894

Extent: 20,000 items ; 118 containers ; 26.2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: United States Postmaster general, secretary of war, judge advocate general of the United States Army, and lawyer. Correspondence, diaries, financial papers, legal papers, newspaper clippings, speeches, photographs, and printed matter relating to Holt's duties as judge advocate general, especially his work on the military commission that tried the Lincoln assassination conspirators, the trial of Mary Surratt, and various controversies surrounding the work of the commission. Other topics include Kentucky and Mississippi politics, Democratic Party politics, the elections of 1852 and 1856, the Civil War, and Holt's duties as secretary of war.

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

Black, Jeremiah S. (Jeremiah Sullivan), 1810-1883.

Buchanan, James, 1791-1868.

Cameron, Simon, 1799-1889.

Garfield, James A. (James Abram), 1831-1881.

Grant, Ulysses S. (Ulysses Simpson), 1822-1885.

Harlan, John Marshall, 1833-1911.

Hawes, Albert Gallatin, 1804-1849.

Hay, John, 1838-1905.

Hitchcock, Ethan Allen, 1798-1870.

Holt, Joseph, 1807-1894.

Holt, Margaret Wickliffe.

Holt, Mary Harrison.

Johnson, Reverdy, 1796-1876.

Johnston, Harriet Lane, 1830-1903.

King, Horatio, 1811-1897.

Lieber, Francis, 1800-1872.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Assassination.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Inauguration.

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865.

Nicolay, John G. (John George), 1832-1901.

Noircy, Amelie L. de.

Rush, Benjamin, 1811-1877.

Scott, Winfield, 1786-1866.

Sims, J. Marion (James Marion), 1813-1883.

Speed, James, 1812-1887.

Stanton, Edwin McMasters, 1814-1869.

Surratt, Mary E. (Mary Eugenia), 1820-1865.

Wallace, Lew, 1827-1905.

Weichmann, Louis J.

Organizations

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Knights of the Golden Circle.
United States. Army. Office of the Judge Advocate General.

Subjects

Elections--United States--1852.
Elections--United States--1856.

Places

Kentucky--Politics and government--1792-1865.
Mississippi--Politics and government--To 1865.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Occupations

Cabinet officers.
Lawyers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Joseph Holt, United States postmaster general, secretary of war, judge advocate general of the United States Army, and lawyer, were given to the Library of Congress by Mrs. Walter M. Rose in 1907. Additions were given by Joseph H. Rose in 1954-1957.

Processing History

The papers of Joseph Holt were arranged and described in 1978. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Joseph Holt 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, Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1807, Jan. 6	Born, Breckinridge County, Ky.
1828	Opened law office, Elizabethtown, Ky.
1832	Moved to Louisville, Ky. Assistant editor, <i>Louisville Advertiser</i>
1833-1835	Commonwealth's attorney, Louisville District, Ky.
1835-1842	Practiced law, Port Gibson and Vicksburg, Miss.

1842	Returned to Louisville, Ky.
1848-1851	Toured Europe and Egypt
1852	Supported Franklin Pierce for president
1856	Supported James Buchanan for president
1857	Moved to Washington, D.C.; appointed commissioner of patents
1859-1861	Postmaster general
1861	Secretary of war
1862-1875	Judge advocate general of the army
1865	Presided over military commission to try the Abraham Lincoln assassination conspirators
1866	Published "Vindication of Judge Advocate General Holt," <i>Washington Chronicle</i>
1875	Retired from the army
1888	Published article on trial of Mary Surratt, <i>North American Review</i>
1894, Aug. 1	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Joseph Holt (1807-1894) span the years 1817-1895, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1859-1889. The collection consists principally of correspondence supplemented by diaries, ledgers, account books, bills and receipts, briefs and other legal papers, newspaper clippings, speeches, photographs, and printed matter. The collection is organized into five series: [General Correspondence and Related Material](#); [Personal Correspondence](#), [Winfield Scott Correspondence](#); [Diaries, Notebooks, and Epistolary Records](#); [Financial Papers](#); and [Miscellany](#).

Holt's career as newspaper editor, lawyer, local politician, cabinet member, and first judge advocate general of the United States Army is illumined by this collection. Holt's correspondence from the 1830s and 1840s relates largely to legal matters and politics in Kentucky and Mississippi. In particular, the letters from Albert Gallatin Hawes, a United States Representative from Kentucky, afford generous glimpses into politics of that state.

The emerging sectional conflicts that ultimately led to the Civil War drew Holt into national politics. On the eve of the war he occupied a prominent place in the ranks of the Democratic Party. In 1859, he was appointed postmaster general by President James Buchanan. In January 1861, he was appointed secretary of war, an appointment he later described in an article entitled "How I Became Secretary of War." Among Holt's tasks as secretary of war was keeping the peace in the capital during Lincoln's inauguration. Correspondence between Holt and Winfield Scott reflects concern over numerous rumors of planned assassination attempts by the Knights of the Golden Circle and other pro-Southern organizations.

On Sept. 3, 1862, Holt was appointed judge advocate general of the army. Though a Southerner and a Democrat, he supported the Union. The newly-created post to which he was named carried the responsibility for the establishment of military commissions with jurisdiction over civilian offenders.

On May 4, 1865, a military commission was convened to try the Abraham Lincoln assassination conspirators. The event was to color the rest of Holt's life. The Holt Papers contain voluminous correspondence regarding the commission as well as affidavits, depositions, transcribed testimony, and various versions of the charges against the conspirators. Particularly

noteworthy is the correspondence between Holt and Louis J. Weichmann, a principal government witness in the conspiracy trial. Their correspondence began in May 1865 and continued for almost thirty years. Also in the collection are items relating to allegations that Holt suppressed a clemency petition addressed to President Andrew Johnson on behalf of Mary Surratt; a seven-page letter from Mrs. Samuel Mudd to Holt, pleading her husband's innocence; Holt's correspondence with other members of the commission after the trial; and a draft of the charges against the conspirators in the handwriting of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.

Correspondents include Jeremiah S. Black, James Buchanan, Simon Cameron, James A. Garfield, Ulysses S. Grant, John Marshall Harlan, John Hay, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Mary Harrison Holt, Margaret Wickliffe Holt, Richard S. Holt, Samuel P. Holt, Thomas H. Holt, Reverdy Johnson, Horatio King, Harriet Lane, Francis Lieber, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Rush, John G. Nicolay, Amelie L. de Noircy, Winfield Scott, J. Marion Sims, James Speed, and Lew Wallace.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in six series:

- [General Correspondence and Related Material, 1817-1894](#)
- [Personal Correspondence, 1832-1895](#)
- [Winfield Scott Correspondence, 1861](#)
- [Diaries, Notebooks, and Epistolary Record, 1836-1892](#)
- [Financial Papers, 1822-1894](#)
- [Miscellany](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-97	<u>General Correspondence and Related Material, 1817-1894</u> Bound volumes of letters received and sent. Includes transcripts of the trial of the Abraham Lincoln assassination conspirators, drafts of the charges, transcripts of correspondence, legal miscellany, speeches to the juries, and other miscellaneous items. Arranged and bound chronologically, with some items filed out of order.
BOX 98-101	<u>Personal Correspondence, 1832-1895</u> Mainly correspondence with family members and friends. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 101	<u>Winfield Scott Correspondence, 1861</u> Letters between Holt and Scott. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 102	<u>Diaries, Notebooks, and Epistolary Record, 1836-1892</u> Diaries, notebooks, and epistolary record. Organized into three groupings and arranged chronologically.
BOX 103-113	<u>Financial Papers, 1822-1894</u> Canceled checkbook, ledgers, account books, bills and receipts, and indenture. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 114-118	<u>Miscellany</u> Invitations, acceptances, calling cards, legal notes, a French copybook, roll book, passport, clippings, photographs, printed matter, an article by Holt, editorial remarks, an autobiography of Holt, and scrapbooks. Arranged by type of material.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-97	General Correspondence and Related Material, 1817-1894 Bound volumes of letters received and sent. Includes transcripts of the trial of the Abraham Lincoln assassination conspirators, drafts of the charges, transcripts of correspondence, legal miscellany, speeches to the juries, and other miscellaneous items. Arranged and bound chronologically, with some items filed out of order.
BOX 1	17 Mar. 1817-5 Aug. 1830
BOX 2	6 Aug. 1830-13 Nov. 1832
BOX 3	14 Nov. 1832-2 Apr. 1834
BOX 4	3 Apr. 1834-16 Feb. 1835
BOX 5	17 Feb. 1835-19 Oct. 1836
BOX 6	20 Oct. 1836-26 Mar. 1838
BOX 7	27 Mar. 1838-11 Apr. 1840
BOX 8	12 Apr. 1840-30 June 1841
BOX 9	1 July 1841-29 Mar. 1843
BOX 10	30 Mar. 1843-15 Jan. 1845
BOX 11	15 Jan. 1845-14 Feb. 1846
BOX 12	15 Feb. 1846-29 Feb. 1848
BOX 13	1 Mar. 1848-5 Mar. 1851
BOX 14	6 Mar. 1851-24 June 1852
BOX 15	25 June 1852-25 Oct. 1853
BOX 16	26 Oct. 1853-17 Apr. 1856
BOX 17	18 Apr. 1856-26 Nov. 1857
BOX 18	27 Nov. 1857-7 Oct. 1858
BOX 19	8 Oct. 1858-18 Mar. 1859
BOX 20	19 Mar.-13 June 1859
BOX 21	14 June-14 Nov. 1859
BOX 22	15 Nov. 1859-5 Jan. 1860
BOX 23	6 Jan.-23 Feb. 1860
BOX 25	24 Feb.-12 June 1860
BOX 25	13 June-13 Nov. 1860
BOX 26	14 Nov. 1860-25 Jan. 1861
BOX 27	26 Jan.-28 Feb. 1861
BOX 28	1 Mar.-9 June 1861
BOX 29	10 June-2 Sept. 1861
BOX 30	3 Sept.-22 Oct. 1861
BOX 31	23 Oct.-31 Dec. 1861
BOX 32	1 Jan.-4 Apr. 1862
BOX 33	5 Apr.-3 July 1862
BOX 34	4 July-11 Oct. 1862
BOX 35	12 Oct.-10 Dec. 1862
BOX 36	11 Dec. 1862-7 Feb. 1863

General Correspondence and Related Material, 1817-1894

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 37	8 Feb.-16 Mar. 1863
BOX 38	17 Mar.-31 May 1863
BOX 39	1 June-24 Aug. 1863
BOX 40	25 Aug.-13 Nov. 1863
BOX 41	14 Nov. 1863-6 Jan. 1864
BOX 42	7 Jan.-29 Feb. 1864
BOX 43	1 Mar.-18 June 1864
BOX 44	19 June-27 Sept. 1864
BOX 45	28 Sept.-9 Dec. 1864
BOX 46	10 Dec. 1864-11 Mar. 1865
BOX 47	12 Mar.-22 May 1865
BOX 48	23 May-8 July 1865
BOX 49	9 July-16 Sept. 1865
BOX 50	17 Sept.-20 Dec. 1865
BOX 51	21 Dec. 1865-5 Apr. 1866
BOX 52	6 Apr.-26 July 1866
BOX 53	27 July-28 Sept. 1866
BOX 54	29 Sept.-26 Dec. 1866
BOX 55	27 Dec. 1866-8 Apr. 1867
BOX 56	4 Apr.-17 July 1867
BOX 57	18 July-23 Dec. 1867
BOX 58	24 Dec. 1867-4 May 1868
BOX 59	5 May-31 Oct. 1868
BOX 60	1 Nov. 1868-11 Mar. 1869
BOX 61	12 Mar.-22 Aug. 1869
BOX 62	23 Aug. 1869-24 Feb. 1870
BOX 63	25 Feb. 1870-5 Jan. 1871
BOX 64	6 Jan. 1871-8 Jan. 1872
BOX 65	9 Jan. 1872-28 Oct. 1872
BOX 66	29 Oct. 1872-21 July 1873
BOX 67	22 July-23 Dec. 1873
BOX 68	24 Dec. 1873-30 Sept. 1874
BOX 69	1 Oct. 1874-15 July 1875
BOX 70	16 July 1875-15 June 1876
BOX 71	16 June 1876-4 July 1877
BOX 72	5 July 1877-6 July 1879
BOX 73	7 July 1879-11 May 1881
BOX 74	12 May 1881-20 July 1882
BOX 75	21 July 1882-24 Sept. 1883
BOX 76	25 Sept. 1883-15 May 1884
BOX 77	16 May 1884-28 May 1885
BOX 78	29 May 1885-26 Jan. 1886
BOX 79	27 Jan. 1886-19 Jan. 1887
BOX 80	20 Jan. 1887-9 Oct. 1887
BOX 81	10 Oct. 1887-7 Feb. 1888
BOX 82	8 Feb.-7 June 1888

General Correspondence and Related Material, 1817-1894

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 83	8 June-15 Nov. 1888
BOX 84	16 Nov. 1888-13 Mar. 1889
BOX 85	14 Mar. -6 Aug. 1889
BOX 86	7 Aug.-26 Dec. 1889
BOX 87	27 Dec. 1889-20 June 1890
BOX 88	21 June 1890-15 Jan. 1891
BOX 89	16 Jan.-22 Sept. 1891
BOX 90	23 Sept. 1891-22 Nov. 1892
BOX 91	23 Nov. 1892-2 Aug. 1894
BOX 92-93	Trial of Abraham Lincoln conspirators (transcripts of depositions, drafts of charges, transcripts of correspondence, and miscellany)
BOX 94	Legal miscellany
BOX 94	Communications to newspapers
BOX 95	Speeches to juries
BOX 96	School exercises, college speeches, and Lyman mandamus papers
BOX 97	Owen, Irish, and Gooch case, Jacob Thompson charges
BOX 98-101	Personal Correspondence, 1832-1895 Mainly correspondence with family members and friends. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 98	1832-1839
BOX 98	1840-1842
BOX 98	1843-1849
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BOX 99	1860
BOX 100	1861-1869
BOX 100	1870-1879
BOX 100	1880-1889
BOX 101	1890-1891
BOX 101	1892-1895
BOX 101	Undated (3 folders)
BOX 101	1861
BOX 101	Winfield Scott Correspondence, 1861 Letters between Holt and Scott. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 101	1861
BOX 102	Diaries, Notebooks, and Epistolary Record, 1836-1892 Diaries, notebooks, and epistolary record. Organized into three groupings and arranged chronologically.
BOX 102	Diaries

Diaries, Notebooks, and Epistolary Record, 1836-1892

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 102	1842
BOX 102	1849
BOX 102	1850
BOX 102	1855
BOX 102	Undated
BOX 102	Notebooks
BOX 102	1836-1837, 1852, 1887-1892 (3 vols.)
BOX 102	Undated (4 vols.)
BOX 102	Epistolary record, undated
BOX 103-113	Financial Papers, 1822-1894 Canceled checkbook, ledgers, account books, bills and receipts, and indenture. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 103	Canceled checkbook, 1871
BOX 103	Ledgers
BOX 103	1836-1837
BOX 103	1842
BOX 104	Account books
BOX 104	1836-1838, 1837 (2 vols.)
BOX 104	1837-1839 (4 vols.)
BOX 104	1839-1845, 1842-1844, 1843-1844 (3 vols.)
BOX 104	1844-1845 (2 vols.)
BOX 104	1845-1846, 1846 (4 vols.)
BOX 104	1846-1847, 1847-1848, 1848-1849 (3 vols.)
BOX 104	1849-1850, 1850-1851, 1851-1852 (3 vols.)
BOX 104	1852, 1853-1854, 1854 (3 vols.)
BOX 105	1855-1859, 1860, 1862 (3 vols.)
BOX 105	1861-1866, 1866-1875, 1867-1869 (3 vols.)
BOX 105	1869-1871, 1876-1877, 1872-1878 (3 vols.)
BOX 105	1878-1887, 1879-1884, 1881 (3 vols.)
BOX 105	1882, 1883, 1884-1889 (3 vols.)
BOX 106	Bills and receipts

Financial Papers, 1822-1894

Container

Contents

BOX 106	1822-1836
BOX 106	1837-1838
BOX 106	1839-1840
BOX 106	1841-1842
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BOX 107	1845-1847
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BOX 108	1861-1862
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BOX 108	1865-1866
BOX 108	1867-1868
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BOX 109	1871-1872
BOX 109	1873-1875
BOX 109	1876
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BOX 110	1880-1881
BOX 111	1882
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BOX 112	1886-1887
BOX 112	1888-1889
BOX 112	1890-1891
BOX 112	1892-1894
BOX 113	Undated (3 folders)
BOX 113	Indenture 1841
BOX 114-118	Miscellany Invitations, acceptances, calling cards, legal notes, a French copybook, roll book, passport, clippings, photographs, printed matter, an article by Holt, editorial remarks, an autobiography of Holt, and scrapbooks. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 114	Invitations, acceptances, and calling cards (6 folders)
BOX 115	(7 folders)
BOX 116	Legal notes
BOX 116	Unbound
BOX 116	Bound
BOX 116	School exercise books, 1823-1824, 1827, undated
BOX 116	Manuscript copybook in French

Miscellany

Container

Contents

BOX 116	Roll book
BOX 116	Passport, 1850
BOX 117	Clippings
BOX 117	Maps
BOX 117	Photographs
BOX 117	Printed matter
BOX 118	Printed matter (3 folders)
BOX 118	Article, "How I Became Secretary of War"
BOX 118	Editorial remarks from the <i>Louisville Journal</i> , Mar. 6, 1852
BOX 118	Autobiography, manuscript and typescript
BOX 118	Scrapbooks (2 folders)