

Series Descriptions

The first seven series contain newspaper clippings, and their descriptions are arranged alphabetically by title of the series. The fourteen other series are correspondence series that are also arranged alphabetically by title. The researcher should understand that even though these materials are organized into discrete series descriptions, the records themselves are intermingled throughout the microfilm. In other words, this is a conceptualization of the series found in these volumes if one were to bring like matter together; the material itself has not been rearranged.

Clipping Series

The ACLU, through a clipping service and from its local committees and agents, received hundreds of clippings annually which it organized. The sheer variety of journals included in these series is staggering. Much material is taken from left-wing press and little-known local and regional papers. A small sample volume included over thirty-six different papers ranging from the Seattle *Industrial Worker* and the Riverside, California *Press* on the West Coast to the Providence *Journal* and the Baltimore *Post* on the East Coast, from the Albion, Michigan *Recorder* and Minnesota *Labor Review* in the midwest to the El Paso *Herald* and Denver *Rocky Mountain News* in the mountain west.

Series 1 - Academic Freedom—Clippings (1917–1950)

This series provides access to information on academic freedom cases from roughly 1925 when the Academic Freedom Committee came into existence until 1950. There is a small amount of general material prior to 1925. Clippings are generally arranged by state, but there are a few subject files as well. Of special note are the many volumes of clippings on the Scopes trial found under Tennessee. Subjects found under this series are Bible reading laws, anti-evolution laws, loyalty oaths, conscientious objectors, flag burning, bans on lectures, bans on unions, flag salute cases, discrimination, compulsory military training, textbook censorship, Communists in the schools, dismissals of teachers and students, and individual cases of various college and university professors.

Series 2 - Censorship—Clippings (1928–1929, 1933–1946, 1949–1950)

Most of this series is arranged by state, although there are a number of subjects as well, including censorship of books, comics, magazines, motion pictures, newsstands, the mails, the press, radio, theater, and war correspondents. See also States Clippings (Series 7) for clippings on censorship, especially prior to 1933.

Series 3 - Chronological—Clippings (1947–1948)

This small series includes clippings from 1947 and 1948 arranged chronologically by month. It contains materials normally found in the other clippings series.

Series 4 - Federal Departments—Clippings (1920–1923, 1925–1946, 1949–1950)

This clippings series mirrors the types of materials found in the Federal Departments Correspondence (Series 11). In general, it covers due process matters arising from agencies of the federal government. One should also look at General Clippings (Series 5) and Censorship Clippings (Series 2) for other clippings involving federal departments of government. The clippings are generally arranged alphabetically by the appropriate government department.

Series 5 - General—Clippings (1912, 1917–1946, 1949–1950)

This series covers a variety of subjects in which the ACLU had a general interest but which were not directly associated with individual cases in the states. The chief focus of this series is on the labor movement (including strikes, injunctions, industrial espionage, labor violence, and IWW cases, among them the San Diego free speech case from 1912), conscientious objection, civil rights (including Japanese-American internment, lynchings, Negroes, and racial discrimination), patriotic organizations, press coverage of civil liberties issues, religious freedom, and government intrusions on civil liberties (including aliens, raids, deportations, and wiretapping). A small number of clippings relating to the organization of the ACLU are also included.

Series 6 - Legislation—Clippings (1917–1923, 1926–1946, 1949–1950)

This series relates principally to federal legislation, although there are several volumes that include state and local legislation as well, especially relating to the espionage acts enacted in the period during and after World War I. The principal legislative issues are labor unions, censorship, immigration and naturalization, anti-lynching bills, espionage and sedition, and congressional investigative committees. In general, the terms used by the ACLU to describe the legislative matters have been retained. Thus, the entire list should be surveyed for matters relating to the same subject.

Series 7 - States—Clippings (1919–1946, 1949–1950)

The ACLU arranged most of its activities by state, and this series provides access to clippings relating to many of the issues with which it dealt over the years. One should also consult clippings for academic freedom, censorship, and general material which also contain clippings related to individual states. For 1947 and 1948 only, clippings were arranged in chronological order. The states clippings files related to such topics as lynchings, strikes, criminal syndicalism, unions, blacklisting, police brutality, free speech and assembly, miscegenation, sterilization, discrimination, the Ku Klux Klan, prosecutions, arrests, police raids, interferences with meetings, official violence, deportations, fingerprinting, mob violence, and handbill ordinances. There are many clippings relating to the celebrated Mooney-Billings bomb attack case in California, the 1926 Passaic Strike in New Jersey, Communist demonstrations in New York, and the Centralia murder case in Washington in 1920. Each volume's index outline provides much more detail about topics covered. The term "states" includes many United States territories or other nearby countries in which the United States had an interest (for instance, Cuba and Nicaragua).

Correspondence Series

The correspondence of the ACLU is wide ranging and reflects the growth in the various matters in which the ACLU took an interest over time. While most series focus on the work of the organization, there are several series dealing with events or organizations outside the scope of the ACLU. Of particular importance is the States Correspondence (Series 21), which contains much on the ACLU's involvement with cases throughout the nation.

Series 8 - Academic Freedom—Correspondence (1917–1919, 1921, 1924–1926, 1928–1934, 1936–1941, 1943–1950)

This series principally represents the work of the Academic Freedom Committee and the staff that worked under its direction. One should also see records relating to the Committee in Organizational Matters (Series 18). For the most part, records are arranged by state, although there are some other subjects. Frequent issues include evolution, yellow dog contracts for teachers, Bible reading in schools,

compulsory military training in schools, loyalty oaths, Communist Party membership, flag-saluting cases, textbook bans, and release time in schools.

Series 9 - Censorship—Correspondence (1917–1921, 1930–1950)

This series contains correspondence relating to free speech issues during World War I and matters handled by the Committee on Freedom from Censorship during the 1930s and 1940s. Two other committees functioned in these areas at a later time: the Committee on Freedom of Communications (which largely dealt with monopoly issues) and the Committee on Radio. Again, Organizational Matters (Series 18) should be consulted for more information about the work of these committees. The records are mostly organized around individual types of censorship (book, comics, customs, speech, magazine, motion picture, post office, press, radio, and theater). For a few years there are some cases arranged by state.

Series 10 - Conscientious Objectors—Correspondence (1917–1921, 1927, 1940–1942, 1944–1950)

Records found in this series are concentrated around the time of the two world wars when conscientious objection was a paramount issue. For the first war, records are generally organized around the camps and forts to which COs were assigned, although there are several sets of cases organized by states or alphabetically by name. For the second war, the bulk of the material is organized alphabetically by name of the conscientious objector. Much of the work of the ACLU during the Second World War was conducted by the National Committee on Conscientious Objectors, whose records were placed at Swarthmore College following the war. The records include telegrams, letters, and memoranda to federal officials. There is much personal information on COs, depositions they gave, and reports on camp conditions based upon site visits by the National Civil Liberties Bureau during World War I.

Series 11 - Federal Departments—Correspondence (1924–1950)

This series documents the ACLU's considerable correspondence with the three branches of the federal government over the years, especially in the area of due process. Matters addressed with some frequency include rights of aliens, loyalty investigations, civil service questions, congressional investigations, military investigations, labor disputes, fair employment practices, Japanese-American internment, Indian affairs, and civil rights. In general, the material is organized by department, although there are many subject files in this series. Since the ACLU did not consistently organize this material, the researcher is urged to review the entire list of subjects.

Series 12 - Federal Legislation—Correspondence (1919–1921, 1926–1950)

In its early years the ACLU shied away from lobbying for specific legislation, other than in the areas of amnesty for conscientious objectors and repeal of the wartime espionage and sedition acts. With the coming of the New Deal, the ACLU was much more involved on the legislative front, although the organization still did not have a Washington office at the end of Baldwin's tenure in 1950. The ACLU described legislation in a variety of ways: by author, by subject, by bill number, and by the general name of the bill. Researchers are advised to read the list carefully since there is no grouping of records; this is simply an alphabetical listing. Frequent topics include wiretapping, immigration and naturalization, labor, conscientious objection, civil rights, censorship, radio, and the espionage act.

Series 13 - General—Correspondence (1917–1924, 1926–1929, 1931–1950)

This series includes the correspondence of the ACLU on a variety of matters that are not found elsewhere in the collection. Major topics addressed include aliens, amnesty, attacks on the ACLU, deportations, Indians, IWW cases, international civil liberties, organized labor, minority political party rights, Negroes and civil rights, patriotic organizations and their attacks on the ACLU, propaganda for and against civil liberties, race relations and discrimination, radio, religious freedom, sedition, and the United Nations.

Series 14 - Injunctions—Correspondence (1931–1935, 1937–1939)

This small series focuses on attempts by the ACLU to obtain uniform state laws relating to the issuance of injunctions in the face of union-organizing efforts. Most of the records are organized by state, although there are a few special subjects.

Series 15 - Labor and Liberal Organizations—Correspondence (1921, 1931–1950)

Records in this series indicate the ACLU's vast correspondence with a variety of cooperating organizations around the nation and the world. Baldwin believed that there was strength in numbers and his wide-ranging correspondence reflected a desire to work with other organizations on the variety of issues addressed by the ACLU. The series is arranged alphabetically by name of the outside organization. These organizations focused on such subjects as anti-Fascism, protection of aliens, civil rights, conscientious objection, pacifism, Communism, socialism, and religion.

Series 16 - Nelles Papers, Walter—Correspondence (1920–1926)

This series covers the personal papers of Walter Nelles, an attorney who handled many of the ACLU's cases during its first decade. The four bound volumes include a few legal records (*U.S. v. Steene* [1920], *Connecticut v. Coleman* [1921], and a Roger Baldwin case [1925–1926]), but they principally consist of writings on the Constitution, the Knights of Labor, labor injunctions and the Sherman anti-trust act, and a publication called the *Law and Freedom Bulletin*, which Nelles edited from 1920 to 1924. The reason that these records are found among the ACLU archives is unclear, except for Nelles's relationship to the organization.

Series 17 - New York City Committee—Correspondence (1936–1950)

Beginning in 1936 the ACLU formed a quasi-independent New York City Committee to handle local matters. Eventually this organization became one of the most important local affiliates in the country, namely, the New York Civil Liberties Union, but not before Baldwin's retirement in 1950. These records document the internal activities of this Committee as well as its many special interests, including limits on free speech and assembly, labor strikes, Communist activities, civil rights, police brutality, wiretapping, and Works Progress Administration policies.

Series 18 - Organizational Matters—Correspondence (1917–1950)

This series documents the activities of the ACLU board of directors, the Executive Committee, the National Committee, and various subject committees created over the years. There is also material on local affiliates, although one should certainly look under States Correspondence (Series 21) as well. The use of the ACLU's bail fund during the 1920s and 1930s is of special importance in terms of its relationship to unions and Communists. The series also includes some runs of ACLU publications and minutes. The series is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Series 19 - Pennsylvania Civil Liberties Committee and Philadelphia Branch—Correspondence (1930–1933)

These are the records of the Pennsylvania State Committee, which had an office in Harrisburg during the legislative season, and the Philadelphia Branch. For most of the period covered, Allan G. Harper, who subsequently headed the Indian Rights Association in Philadelphia, was the Executive Secretary for both organizations. John V. Stranger, who followed Harper as Executive Secretary, reported that the organization was insolvent and that no one wanted to maintain the “six files” of material. In an August 1, 1934, letter Baldwin urged Stranger to send the material to the New York Public Library, which explains why the early Pennsylvania records wound up in New York. These records focus on several local issues including injunctions, censorship, deportations, police brutality, and strikes. Generally, one should assume volumes include material from all four years even when they are marked otherwise.

Series 20 - State Legislation—Correspondence (1928–1929, 1935–1941, 1943–1947, 1949–1950)

The State Legislation series includes correspondence dealing with state legislative activities. In general, it is arranged by state, although there is a large amount of general material and some subject files. In addition, one should review the correspondence found in the injunctions and States Correspondence (Series 21), which also deal with state legislative activities.

Series 21 - States—Correspondence (1917–1950)

This is probably the most important series in the microfilm set. The national office maintained an active correspondence with state and local officials, friendly correspondents, clients, and other individuals on a variety of matters, principally relating to legal cases. These records are arranged by state and often include records for the early activities of the growing number of state affiliates. The record of ACLU’s vigorous involvement in many of its most significant legal cases are found in this series. For instance, the Massachusetts records include materials relating to the ACLU’s role in the Sacco-Vanzetti defense. Colorado records cover the 1928 coal strike. Alabama records in the 1930s provide much information about the Scottsboro cases. ACLU’s campaign against Boss Hague in the 1930s is found in the records of New Jersey during that time period. Again, one should utilize the index and the internal volume descriptions to find appropriate materials for the research question.