

JOHN H. OVERTON PAPERS

Mss. 4371

Inventory

Compiled by
Nick Skaggs

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2018

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SUMMARY

Size.	4 linear ft.
Geographic locations.	Louisiana; Washington, D.C.
Inclusive dates.	1896-1984
Bulk dates.	1916-1940
Languages.	English, French
Summary.	Political, financial, and personal papers of attorney and United States Senator John H. Overton. Contains materials related to his senatorial campaigns and the campaigns of his political allies.
Restrictions on access.	None.
Related collections.	Huey Long Impeachment Scrapbook, Mss. 2600 John B. Fournet Papers, Mss. 2558 John Holmes Overton Scrapbook, Mss. 3130 John H. Overton Silhouette, Mss. 4158 Winston Overton Photographs, Mss. 3084
Copyright.	For those materials not in the public domain, copyright is retained by the descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. Copyright law.
Citation.	John H. Overton Papers, Mss. 4371, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack locations.	106:, OS:O

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

John H. (Holmes) Overton was born in Marksville, Louisiana on September 17, 1875. He was the youngest son of Thomas Overton (1835-1913) and Laura Elizabeth (née Waddill) Overton (1845-1937). He graduated from Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge in 1895 and from the law department of Tulane University in New Orleans in 1897. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1898, practiced law in Alexandria, Louisiana, and was a member of the board of supervisors of LSU. He married Ada Ruth Dismukes in 1905. Their children were Katharine (Kay), Ruth Dismukes, John Holmes, Jr., and Mary Elizabeth. In 1918, Overton ran as a Democrat for the U.S. Senate for Louisiana to fill the unexpired elective term of Sen. Robert F. Broussard after the latter's death. Overton ran against former Louisiana governor Luther E. Hall and state Rep. Edward J. Gay in the Democratic primary, ultimately losing to Gay. Overton eventually became U.S. representative for the 8th Congressional district of Louisiana (1931-1933). In 1932, Overton defeated U.S. Sen. Edwin S. Broussard for the Democratic nomination in the senatorial primary, which resulted in Overton becoming U.S. senator for Louisiana (1933-1948). Broussard claimed that fraud, corruption, and voter irregularities occurred in the primary, and a U.S. Senate sub-committee was formed to investigate the allegations. Despite this, Overton was seated. In 1934, Overton assisted his brother Winston Overton (1870-1934), Louisiana Supreme Court justice, in his judicial reelection campaign. Thomas F. Porter, district judge of Calcasieu, ran against Winston. After Winston's death (September 9, 1934) during the campaign, Overton and U.S. Sen. Huey P. Long (the two had been longtime allies) endorsed Lieutenant Governor John B. Fournet, who ultimately won over Porter. In the 1930s, Overton also worked with U.S. Rep. Joachim O. Fernández to establish Chalmette National Historical Park (now called Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery and part of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve). In 1938, Overton ran unopposed and was reelected to the U.S. Senate. He was reelected again in 1944. Overton also supported Governor Earl K. Long's gubernatorial campaign from 1939 to 1940 (while Earl K. was serving the rest of former Louisiana governor Richard W. Leche's elective term after the latter's resignation). Overton died in Bethesda, Maryland in 1948 while still in office.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Papers include political, financial, and personal papers of attorney and U.S. Sen. John H. Overton. Political papers consist chiefly of files from Overton's political campaigns, specifically his runs for the U.S. Senate for Louisiana. Also included are files from Overton's support of the campaigns of Winston Overton, John B. Fournet, and Earl K. Long. Campaign files include generally correspondence, lists of voters, advertising materials, and other printed materials used for campaign planning and strategies. Also included in the political papers are files related to a U.S. Senate-led investigation into Overton's 1932 Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate (correspondence, hearing notes, reports, and subject files) and files related to Overton's involvement in the creation of Chalmette National Historical Park (mostly correspondence).

Financial papers consist mostly of receipts and correspondence related to Overton's personal bills, purchases, and financial interests. Personal papers include correspondence, printed materials, photographic items, and manuscript volumes generated and collected by Overton and his family.

LIST OF SERIES AND SUBSERIES

Series I. Political Papers, 1914-1940, undated

Subseries 1. 1918 U.S. Senatorial Campaign Files, 1914-1918, undated

Subseries 2. 1932-1933 U.S. Senatorial Primary Investigation and Hearing Files, 1927-1933, undated

Subseries 3. 1934 Winston Overton Reelection Campaign Files, 1934

Subseries 4. 1934 John B. Fournet Campaign Files, 1934, undated

Subseries 5. Chalmette National Historical Park Creation Files, 1934-1939

Subseries 6. 1937-1938 U.S. Senatorial Reelection Campaign Files, 1933-1938, undated

Subseries 7. 1939-1940 Earl K. Long Gubernatorial Campaign Files, 1939-1941, undated

Series II. Financial Papers, 1916-1918, 1938-1942, undated

Series III. Personal Papers, 1896-1984, undated

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I. Political Papers, 1914-1940, undated

Subseries 1. 1918 U.S. Senatorial Campaign Files, 1914-1918, undated

Series contains chiefly correspondence related to John H. Overton's 1918 U.S. senatorial campaign. Correspondence received is mostly written to Overton and William E. Krebs, Overton's campaign manager, and is from politicians, civil servants, attorneys, bankers, sheriffs, business owners, and other citizens from most Louisiana parishes. There are several letters from Winston Overton and William H. Sullivan, vice-president and general manager of the Great Southern Lumber Company. Most writers discuss their feelings and thoughts on Overton announcing his candidacy; their allegiances, alliances, and voting intentions for the Democratic primary; and their predictions on which candidates various parishes will vote for. Some writers mention or discuss Overton's positions of support for prohibition (May 21, 1918 letter from Winston Overton; July 27, 1918 letter from J. P. Jones; August 12, 1918 letter from B. H. Dement) and women's suffrage (July 24, 1918 letter from Jean M. Gordon of the Louisiana State Suffrage Association; August 3, 1918 letter from J. Hugo Dore). There are also two letters from former Louisiana governor Luther E. Hall, one of Overton's opponents in the primary, announcing Hall's candidacy (April 22 and 29, 1918). Photocopies of correspondence sent are written mostly by Overton and Krebs, but some are also written by Overton's supporters. Photocopies of correspondence sent are mainly announcements of Overton's candidacy, political networking queries, and acknowledgements of letters received by Overton and his campaign staff.

Additional series materials include lists of parish voters, lists of LSU graduates, lists of signatures and supporters, form letters, itineraries, speeches, broadsides, pamphlets, a newspaper clipping from *The New Orleans Item* about state Rep. Edward J. Gay's record on labor legislation (circa August 1918, oversize), and other printed campaign materials. One campaign pamphlet is in French and English.

Subseries 2. 1932-1933 U.S. Senatorial Primary Investigation and Hearing Files, 1927-1933, undated

Series contains chiefly correspondence, notes, reports, summaries, other printed materials, and subject files related to a U.S. Senate-lead investigation into John H. Overton's 1932 nomination after the Democratic primary. Correspondence consists mostly of letters documenting Overton's preparation for the investigation and hearing. Correspondence of interest includes a telegram from U.S. Sen. Tom Connally informing Overton that U.S. Sen. Robert B. Howell has formed a subcommittee for the investigation (September 27, 1932) and letters from Winston Overton (September 24, 1932) and Allen J. Ellender (November 7, 1933) expressing their views and providing advice on the investigation and hearing.

Hearing notes include John H. and Ellender's personal notepads from the November 1933 hearing and notes compiled on witnesses' testimonies. Investigation reports and summaries include a committee activity report (September 16, 1932) and a pleadings summary. Other printed materials related to the investigation and hearing include newspaper clippings and

voting results from the Democratic primary. Subject files include informational reports on past investigations that dealt with contested senatorial elections, including cases of bribery, corruption, fraud, and dummy candidates. Also included in the subject files are annotated segments and issues of the *Congressional Record*.

Subseries 3. 1934 Winston Overton Reelection Campaign Files, 1934

Series contains correspondence, advertising materials, and various voters lists related to Judge Winston Overton's Louisiana Supreme Court reelection campaign. Correspondence is arranged in two groups: general and parish. General correspondence contains mostly letters written by John H. Overton announcing Winston's reelection campaign (regular and oversize). Other letters discuss campaign strategies. Parish correspondence consists chiefly of letters between John H. and his political allies in various parishes. They discuss mostly the voting climate in specific parishes.

Advertising materials include form letters distributed by John H. and Winston, responses from newspapers regarding political advertising rates, advertisements for John H.'s radio appearance to promote Winston's campaign, broadsides by Winston responding to opponent Thomas F. Porter's political attacks (oversize), transcripts of John H.'s radio address (August 19, 1934), a speech given by Winston, and newspaper clippings. Additionally, there is a separate file of advertising materials related to Porter's campaign against Winston (regular and oversize).

Subseries 4. 1934 John B. Fournet Campaign Files, 1934, undated

Series contains mostly correspondence and printed materials related to John H. Overton and U.S. Sen. Huey P. Long's endorsements of John B. Fournet (after the death of Winston Overton) to the Louisiana Supreme Court. Of interest is a letter from Long to Overton endorsing Fournet (October 3, 1934) and a letter from Harvey G. Fields (October 2, 1934) discussing his views on Thomas F. Porter. Additional printed materials of interest include broadsides by Long (September 1934, oversize) and Fournet (September 18, 1934, oversize) attacking Porter, a broadside by Porter attacking Long (October 3, 1934, oversize), and form letters by Long (September 12, 1934) and Fournet (September 17, 1934) denouncing Porter's campaign.

Subseries 5. Chalmette National Historical Park Creation Files, 1934-1939

Series contains mostly correspondence related to the U.S. Senate's resolution to create the national park. Many letters are from organizations and individuals supporting the creation of the park. Attached to some letters are working papers on Overton's Senate bill. There is also a copy of a Senate concurrent resolution (April 19, 1935, oversize) creating a commission to revise information in school textbooks regarding the Battle of New Orleans. Resolution is signed by Lieutenant Governor James A. Noe and Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives Allen J. Ellender.

Subseries 6. 1937-1938 U.S. Senatorial Reelection Campaign Files, 1933-1938, undated

Series contains correspondence (including letters of congratulations), campaign memorabilia, a statement of contributions and disbursements, congressional voting records, a poll tax list, lists of voters, miscellaneous reports, and other printed materials related to John H. Overton's

U.S. senatorial reelection campaign. Correspondence includes mostly letters between Overton and his political friends and allies discussing campaign strategies and the voting climates in various parishes. Of interest is a response by Overton (December 20, 1937) to a letter (December 12, 1937) from T. C. Reagan mentioning Overton's opposition of the Federal Anti-lynching Bill. Filed separately from the aforementioned correspondence are letters of congratulations. Most letters of congratulations are from Overton's supporters, congratulating him on his reelection campaign and his eventual reelection. Some letters also inform Overton of rumors that Robert (Bob) H. Brothers has filed to run against him (July 27, 1938 response by Overton to July 26, 1938 letter from T. R. Hughes; July 30, 1938 response by Overton to July 26, 1938 letter from René F. Clerc). Later letters of congratulations reveal that Brothers was not able to qualify to run (August 8, 1938 response by Overton to August 5, 1938 letter from James F. Byrnes).

Campaign memorabilia includes a campaign button (March 10, 1938) and an election certificate signed by Governor Richard W. Leche (November 23-25, 1938). Congressional voting records include typed copies from the 73rd to 75th Congresses (1933-1938). Poll tax list (1937) is for Avoyelles Parish and was obtained by Allen J. Ellender and Overton to use as a mailing list (May 10, 1938). A report from the United States Department of Agriculture titled "Changes in the Agricultural Situation in Louisiana" (revised October 1937) and a memorandum from the Civilian Conservation Corps (January 17, 1938) are also present. Other printed materials include newspaper clippings, press releases, and speeches by Reverend Gerald K. Smith (circa 1938, oversize).

Subseries 7. 1939-1940 Earl K. Long Gubernatorial Campaign Files, 1939-1941, undated

Series contains chiefly correspondence and printed materials related to John H. Overton's endorsement and support of Louisiana governor Earl K. Long's campaign to win a full gubernatorial term in 1940. Correspondence of interest includes a letter from Harvey G. Fields (March 16, 1940) to Overton providing suggestions for Overton Brooks's (John H.'s nephew) 1940 United States congressional campaign. There are also several letters (May 1940) discussing an investigation of Robert Mogel.

Series II. Financial Papers, 1916-1918, 1938-1942, undated

Series contains chiefly receipts, payment transmittal letters, and correspondence related to John H. Overton's financial interests and activities. Financial materials from 1916-1918 are mostly receipts from various businesses and organizations, including furniture stores, petroleum and oil refineries, clothing manufacturers, publishing companies, construction and hardware companies, and automobile dealers. Many receipts are stamped and dated as paid. Receipts are arranged alphabetically by service provider.

Financial materials from 1938-1939 consist of receipts with corresponding payment transmittal letters from Overton (this combination of materials is labeled as bills paid) and correspondence with various businesses, organizations, and people regarding financial matters. Receipts/bills paid and financial correspondence are filed separately. Receipts/bills paid are arranged alphabetically by service provider. Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by a mixture of last names, business and organization names, and occasionally topic (topical correspondence for

1938 includes newspaper subscriptions, oil leases, salary, senatorial staff, and stocks; topical correspondence for 1939 includes accounts receivable, apartment expenses, contributions, deposits, dues, newspaper subscriptions, oil leases, salary, senatorial staff, and stocks). Additionally, there is one receipt from 1942.

Series III. Personal Papers, 1896-1984, undated

Series contains correspondence, booklets, newspaper clippings, photographic prints, manuscript volumes, and other printed materials. Correspondence is mostly from friends of the Overton family. Two letters from Fanny Morris Ward (March 14 and May 5, 1902) to Mrs. (Ada) Overton discuss a donation the former has made to the city of Marksville, Louisiana. Another letter discusses Overton's daughter Mary's French lessons (March 30, 1934). Another letter mentions Overton recovering from an illness (January 10, 1935). Correspondence regarding the Society of Cincinnati is filed separately and discusses mainly subscription payments and society meetings.

Booklets include *The Archers Handbook* (1928) and an annual report from the Alexandria Service League (1965-1966). Newspaper clippings include an article titled "Natchitoches 'Graveyard of History'" which discusses the American Cemetery at Natchitoches, Louisiana and mentions the grave of William Huston Jack, superintendent of public instruction in Louisiana. Another clipping of interest (from *The New Orleans Item*, undated) describes a fist fight between John H. Overton and Burt W. Henry. Other printed materials include a birth announcement card for Katharine Overton (December 1, 1902), a program for Ruth Dismukes Overton's recital at Alexandria School of Expression (December 8, 1922), and a speech John H. gave at the 27th annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Association (March 25-26, 1946). Photographic prints include a signed print from Ralph Hebert, a Louisiana state senator (December 19, 1938), several portraits of John H. Overton, and unidentified prints (most likely of Ada, John Holmes, Jr., and Ruth).

Manuscript volumes include a ledger belonging to Ada Overton's sister Mary Dismukes (1960-1961), a school notebook (possibly belonging to Ruth), a family clothing and list book belonging to M. C. Jack of Natchitoches (most likely Mary Catherine Jack, the wife of William Huston Jack; circa 1880), an address book belonging to John Holmes, Jr. (circa 1938), and an unidentified notebook. There is also an LSU diploma for Ruth (June 4, 1934).

Additional items include an LSU Alumni Federation membership certificate for John H. (April 25, 1939, oversize) and some Louisiana and Arkansas maps (oversize).

INDEX TERMS

Materials relating to these people, places, and things can be found in the series and subseries indicated, as represented by their numbers.

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Ellender, Allen J., 1890-1972.	I. 2, 5-6
Fournet, John B. (John Baptiste), 1895-1984.	I. 4
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Long, Earl Kemp, 1895-1960.	I. 7
Long, Huey Pierce, 1893-1935.	I. 4
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CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents with dates</u>
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106:		1	1-25	Correspondence A-Z (received), 1918
			26-46	Correspondence A-Z (sent), 1918
			47-48	Lists of voters and LSU graduates, 1914-1918, undated
			49	Lists of signatures and supporters, 1918
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Subseries 2. 1932-1933 U.S. Senatorial Primary Investigation and Hearing Files, 1927-1933, undated				
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			54-55	Overton and Ellender notepads, 1933
		2	1-2	Witness notes, 1933
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			4	Other printed materials, 1932-1933, undated
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106:		2	14-24	Parish correspondence, 1934
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OS:O		--	1	Advertising materials: broadsides, circa 1934
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106:		2	28	Expenses, 1934
			29-30	Lists of voters, 1934
			31	Lists of commissioners, 1934
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			33	Huey P. Long broadsides and circulars, 1934
			34	Other printed materials, 1934, undated
OS:O		--	1	Broadsides, 1934

Stack

Location **Box** **Folders** **Contents with dates**

Subseries 5. Chalmette National Historical Park Creation Files, 1934-1939

106:	2	35-37	Correspondence, 1934-1939
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Subseries 6. 1937-1938 U.S. Senatorial Reelection Campaign Files, 1933-1938, undated

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		52	Lists of voters, miscellaneous reports, and other printed materials, 1934-1938, undated
OS:O	--	1	Gerald K. Smith speeches, circa 1938

Subseries 7. 1939-1940 Earl K. Long Gubernatorial Campaign Files, 1939-1941, undated

106:	2	53-54	Correspondence and printed materials, 1939-1941, undated
OS:O	--	1	Newspaper clipping and typewritten message, 1939

Series II. Financial Papers, 1916-1918, 1938-1942, undated

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Series III. Personal Papers, 1896-1984, undated

62	Correspondence, 1902-1922, 1934-1935, 1946-1947 undated
63	Society of Cincinnati correspondence, 1940-1941
64	Booklets, 1928, 1965-1966
65	Newspaper clippings, 1934, undated
66	Other printed materials, 1896, 1910-1946, 1984, undated
67	Photographic prints and postal cards, 1938, undated
68	Ruth Dismukes Overton LSU diploma, 1934
69	Vol. 1: Mary Dismukes ledger, 1960-1961
	Vol. 2: Ruth Dismukes Overton notebook, circa 1930-1933

Stack

Location **Box** **Folders** **Contents with dates**

Series III. Personal Papers, 1896-1984, undated (continued)

106:	4	70	Vol. 3: M. C. Jack family clothing and list book, circa 1880 Vol. 4: Unidentified notebook, undated Vol. 5: John Holmes Overton, Jr. address book, circa 1938
OS:O	--	1	John H. Overton LSU Alumni Federation certificate, 1939
	--	2	Maps, 1936-1940, 1977, undated