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White House Photographic Office: Files, 1974-1977

Collection Type

White House Office Files

Extent

1.6 linear feet (ca. 3,200 pages)

Record Type

Textual

Access

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Processed by

Jenny Sternaman, January 1990

Scope and Content Note

During the Ford administration the primary mission of the White House Photographic Office was to supply all the photographic needs of the President, the Vice-President, and the White House staff, especially the Press Secretary. Oliver Atkins headed the Office until his December 1, 1974 resignation; immediately upon his departure David Kennerly, the President's personal photographer and Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist, took over as the overall director, at least nominally reporting to Press Secretary Ron Nessen. At the end of the Ford administration Kennerly reported to Richard Cheney of the White House Operations Office.

An official White House Photographic Office was not established until the Johnson administration. Up to that time, the presidency was photographed by non-White House photographers, and the White House Photo Lab, established during the Eisenhower administration, was a military operation. In 1965 the photo operation moved to the White House with the creation of the White House Communications Agency (WHCA), which was responsible for the White House Photo Lab, and the addition of a civilian White House photographer attached to the Press Secretary's

office. At the time of the Ford administration the White House Photographic Office was a cooperative civilian/military effort (see attached memoranda for more detail). The White House provided salaries for all civilian employees, who administered the office and gave it professional direction. The military, through the White House Communications Agency (WHCA), provided for all of the office's other needs (including photographic equipment) and was responsible for the operation of the White House Photo Lab.

During the Ford administration the Lab was staffed with approximately 25 military personnel, 3 civilians and was supervised by Robert Moore. The handling of all lab operations, accounts, and equipment acquisitions and maintenance fell under the jurisdiction of the White House Photographic Lab. It was considered a distinct unit, part of both the White House Photographic Office and WHCA.

WHCA was established in 1965, and was an outgrowth of an Army Signal Corps unit introduced to the White House by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. One of its primary responsibilities is to insure constant communications to the President so that he can carry out his duties as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. The size of WHCA is classified, as are many of its activities. The White House Photo Lab was traditionally part of this communication network, and as such had been staffed and budgeted through WHCA, although it was also an important part of the White House Photographic Office.

At the inception of the Ford administration, however, WHCA began to transfer some of its budgetary responsibilities for the Photographic Office to the White House Press Office, including the purchase of David Kennerly's equipment and photo albums. Staff of the Photo Office tended to resist this transfer, fearing that if the shift in budgetary responsibilities continued, the office would suffer because the White House had not budgeted for all its needs, and a White House budgeted Photo Office would be subject to intense congressional scrutiny in the future. The Photographic Office's response to the budget transfer is well documented through outgoing correspondence and memoranda from Oliver F. Atkins and David Kennerly. These materials are located in folders labeled "Administrative."

The Photographic Office was responsible not only for photographing the Ford family and Ford Presidency but also for filling all photographic requests for such items as

slides, photos, and matting services. The majority of the requests were from the public, government offices needing wall decorations, and individuals who wanted specific pictures. Quite often this more mundane responsibility overshadowed the Office's larger mission and overwhelmed its resources. Through the large number of routine requests the Office received, the busy schedules of the photographers, and outgoing correspondence and memoranda from Oliver Atkins and David Kennerly, the researcher will get a sense of this dilemma. In mid 1975 the requests no longer appear in the files of the White House Photographic Office, because at some point David Kennerly instituted a policy of automatically sending out souvenir prints to individuals or groups that met with the President. This action apparently reduced the number of requests.

The files of the White House Photographic Office are divided into two series: Administrative Files, and Requests for Photographs. They cover only the early part of the Ford administration, with the exception of the "Duty Photographer Rosters" (Administrative Files series) which run from January 1974 to December 1976. Most of the material in this collection is of a routine nature, such as requests for photographs, courtesy acknowledgements, and housekeeping memoranda. Some organizational and policy making material is located in the Administrative Files. Even though the office experienced a change of command December 1, 1974, the files do not provide an explanation of why it occurred.

Related Materials (January 1990):

Researchers will want to examine White House Central Files categories FG 6-11-1/Kennerly and FG 13-6-1 (White House Communications Agency), and box 137 of the Ron Nessen Papers for documents covering the later part of the Ford administration. Also important is the Library's audiovisual collection, and David Kennerly's Shooter written shortly after he served as White House photographer.

Last Modified Date

2025-03-14

Box 1: Administrative Files, 1974-76. (0.4 linear feet)

Memoranda, correspondence, calendars, schedules, and forms relating to the transfer of budgetary responsibilities from White House Communications Agency (WHCA) to the White House, Photographic Office workload, photographer David

Kennerly's search for a secretary, scheduling Photographic Office staff, and operation of the Photographic Office.
Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 1 - Administrative Files

Status	Title
OPEN	Administrative - Correspondence
OPEN	Administrative - Kennerly
OPEN	Administrative - Personnel, White House Photographic Office
OPEN	Administrative - Miscellaneous
OPEN	Duty Photographer Roster (1)-(3)
OPEN	Official Photograph - Ford, Gerald R.
OPEN	Official Photograph - Vice President
OPEN	Releases
OPEN	Weekly Schedule
OPEN	White House Staff Handbook

Boxes 2-4: Requests for Photographs, 1974-75. (1.2 linear feet)

Because the Photographic Office did not require that requests for photos be written on a specific form, photo orders came typed or handwritten as notes on little slips of paper, letters, or memoranda. A few orders came on an actual photograph order form which apparently was rarely used.

The requests are arranged chronologically by month.

Box 2 - Photographic Requests

Status	Title
OPEN	Requests for Photos (1)-(7)

Box 3 - Photographic Requests

Status	Title
OPEN	Requests for Photos (1)-(8)

Box 4 - Photographic Requests

Status	Title
OPEN	Requests for Photos (1)-(8)

Status**Title**

OPEN

Requests for Autographed Photos