

COLORADO GOVERNORS

Ralph L. Carr



Scope and Content Note

The Colorado Governors collections include 54 cubic feet of material related to Ralph Lawrence Carr, Governor of Colorado from 1939-1943. The major series included in the collection are speeches and messages, correspondence, the Executive Record, reports, and miscellaneous. The records date primarily from 1939-1943, although some correspondence pre- and post-date this range. The condition of the materials is good, and should remain so with current storage and conservation methods.

There is also a separate collection entitled "The Governor's Council of Defense," which has material spanning Carr's term during the first few years of World War II. The "Council of Defense" collection has extensive documentation concerning both World War I and World War II. It comprises 80 cubic feet of records and includes publications; press releases; pamphlets and posters; correspondence; reports; subject files; newspaper clippings; memorandums; as well as numerous other record types.

The strengths of the Carr Collection include documents pertaining to World War II and the treatment of Japanese-Americans. Carr spoke out in defense of the civil rights of Japanese-American citizens, arguing that it was inhumane and unconstitutional to place them in internment camps. One such camp, Amache, was located near Granada, Colorado. Besides the larger "Council of Defense" collection, Carr kept another separate group of records entitled "Council of Defense 1941-1943." Included in this material is Carr's correspondence with camp inmates, their family members, and a concerned citizenry. This correspondence sub-series is labelled "Def-Aliens."

In Governor Carr's collection, there is also a wealth of material relating to the State Reorganization Act which proposed to increase the economy and efficiency of our State government. Finally, there is material related to the State's institutions such as the Penitentiary, Reformatory, and State Home for Dependent and Neglected Children. Institutional movement of population reports exist from 1939-1940 and can be a useful tool for genealogists and those interested in the day-to-day operations of these facilities.

The primary weakness of the collection is its organization which makes research somewhat difficult. The collection was originally arranged alphabetically within the series. Most of the documentation, whether or not it is correspondence, is filed under "Correspondence" or "Miscellaneous" files. Some items may be "hidden" under an obscure file folder label title. Recent descriptive processing of the collection, however, has made searching easier.

Biography

Between 1939-1943 Colorado had one of the most courageous and independent governors ever to be elected. Ralph Lawrence Carr was born in Rosita, Colorado and educated in the Cripple Creek school system. After receiving his LLB from the University of Colorado, Carr moved to Victor, Trinidad, and then Antonito where he practiced law and became a publisher. Carr served as a county attorney of Conejos County, and then as Colorado Assistant Attorney General. The apex of his legal career occurred when he became a United States District Attorney. As a Republican, Carr lost this influential post when the Democratic "New Dealers" began to dominate national politics. Despite this loss he was able to stay in the public eye by becoming a powerful and prominent water/irrigation lawyer.

In 1939 a struggling Republican Party supported Carr as their gubernatorial candidate, and won. Within the first half-hour of his term, Carr proposed a plan for a balanced budget by transferring state income taxes from public schools to the state's general fund. These immediate fiscal measures helped to save our state from imminent bankruptcy. Also due to Carr's leadership, the Legislature passed the State Reorganization Act which greatly increased the efficiency of state government. As a result, Carr is one of the few governors known for making the Colorado bureaucracy more operative.

While Carr's policies were aimed at dismantling the expensive bureaucracy of the New Deal, Carr still supported Roosevelt's foreign policy and favored American entrance into World War II after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The war with Japan initiated a chain of events that bred discrimination and intolerance toward Japanese-Americans. In 1942 an estimated 120,000 Japanese-Americans were stripped of their property and possessions. These displaced citizens were resettled in land-locked states by the War Relocation Authority so that the supposed "yellow peril" could be contained. The question on many Coloradans' minds was not whether American citizens of Japanese descent should be stripped of their rights and put in internment camps, but where the camps should be. The overwhelming opinion of the populace was typified by a series of highway billboards proclaiming "Japs keep going."

One of the few voices of reason during wartime was Governor Carr, who continued to treat the Japanese-Americans with respect and sought to help them keep their American citizenship. He sacrificed his political career to bravely confront the often dark side of human nature. "If you harm them, you must harm me. I was brought up in a small town where I knew the shame and dishonor of race hatred. I grew to despise it because it threatened the happiness of you and you and you." Carr's selfless devotion to all Americans, while destroying his hopes for a senate seat, did in the end become extolled as, "a small voice but a strong voice."

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Series Descriptions

Speeches and Messages

This series includes inaugural addresses; biennial messages to the General Assembly; veto messages; and other public speeches.

Correspondence

The correspondence series is a combination of correspondence and subject files. It is organized alphabetically by correspondent, subject, or agency. There are some personal papers included under this series as well as a newsclipping scrapbook and institutional movement of population reports which may specifically list the persons moved at various State institutions. These facilities are also documented elsewhere in the correspondence. Other major subject areas include the Japanese internment camps; the Colorado Council of Defense; the penitentiary; pardons and extraditions; legislative matters; proclamations; appointments; a Rocky Mountain Arsenal hunting and fishing privileges map; correspondence concerning the Dolores Refining Company (an early uranium company); and water resources and conservation documentation including correspondence regarding the Republican River Basin Compact.

Executive Record

The Executive Record contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requests; honorary citations; and proclamations which were issued by Governor Carr during his term from 1939 - 1943.

Reports

Governor Carr kept a number of bound and unbound reports concerning Colorado agriculture; public buildings; government reorganization; the judicial consequences of the Kansas vs. Colorado water rights case; and other subjects. Within the correspondence series there are also institutional movement of population reports as described above.

Miscellaneous

This series was evidently organized as a subject file when documentation was not filed with correspondence or elsewhere. It comprises less than 4 cubic feet of the collection and includes minutes to various meetings; petitions; Department of Welfare newsletters and bulletins; speech material; and penitentiary lists.