

COLORADO GOVERNORS

John Charles Vivian



Scope and Content Note

The John Charles Vivian collection comprises approximately 60 cubic feet of material spanning 1886-1960. Besides records documenting his terms as governor from 1943-1947, there is a significant amount of personal material about him, his family and his activities outside of the governor's office. His administration is documented well through the Executive Record, correspondence and subject files, speeches, and newspaper clippings. His personal life and political activities are primarily documented through correspondence, newspaper clippings, legal files, photographs, and scrapbooks. The major series that exist in the collection include: the Executive Record; correspondence/subject file; newspaper clippings; speeches; legal files; Hoover Commission records; photographs; scrapbooks; publications; and miscellaneous personal files.

Biography

Colorado's governor during the tumultuous period of the Second World War (1943-1947) was John Charles Vivian. At a time when the whole of America was being tested as a nation, the Colorado home front remained relatively peaceful. Both of Vivian's two-year terms brought about no single great event, which could stand testimony to the solid approach he took towards public service. Quiet as things were, Vivian accomplished transforming Colorado from a strongly rural, mining dependent collection of counties into a progressive industrial-scientific state.

John C. Vivian's grandparents settled near Arvada, Colorado, in 1860. Vivian's father, John F. Vivian, was very politically active throughout his entire life. When John Charles was born on June 30, 1889, in Golden, Colorado, his father had already become a powerful member of the local Republican Party. John F. Vivian had started out as a Precinct Committeeman and Chairman for Jefferson County. He would serve as a Republican National Committeeman, and three time State Chairman of the party. The eldest of his two sons, John Charles, would follow the road his father prepared for him and would become Colorado's thirty-eighth governor.

Our "spend nothing governor," as he was referred to by his opponents, graduated from Golden High School in 1905. At the University of Colorado at Boulder, he played bass drum in the marching band, and was band leader his senior year. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1909. Vivian would complete his formal education at the Denver University Law School where he attained a Bachelor of Laws degree the summer of 1913.

Governor Vivian enjoyed two hobbies, the first of which was writing. While at Boulder he worked as state editor of the Boulder branch of the old Denver Times. He also wrote for the Rocky Mountain News as a city editor in metro Denver. He quit writing for newspapers in 1911 to follow a career as a lawyer, but

would keep on writing prose and verse. In 1937, his poems and epigrams started to see publication in many nationally circulated newspapers and magazines, including the Chicago Tribune and New York Times. He was criticized in some social circles as being snobbish for not publishing his work in the local papers, while his reputation for simple verse seemed too "yocal local" for the publishing elite. He transcended this problem by the use of a pen name: Vivian Varian. John Charles Vivian always referred to himself as a newspaperman at heart. Teller Ammons and Ralph Carr were the only other governors to share the occupation as newspapermen.

Vivian's second hobby was music. As mentioned previously he was a drummer in college. He also played the piano. Vivian was known to sit down and entertain guests with his piano playing whether at home or in front of an audience. His interest in music was shared by his wife, Maude Charlotte Kleyn, a professor from the University of Michigan's School of Music. Born in Holland, Michigan, she migrated to Colorado after their marriage and was very active with her husband promoting the performing arts in Denver.

The political influence of the Vivian family grew with John's appointment as City Attorney for Golden, Colorado, from 1914-1917. After serving in the Marines during World War I, he became the Jefferson County Attorney in 1922 and held that position for 10 years. It was during this time that John Charles Vivian, his father, and their families, held so much political power, that people would refer to the City of Golden and Jefferson County as, "the county of Vivian."

Under Ralph Carr's administration (1939-1943) John Vivian became Lieutenant Governor. Unknown circumstances surrounded the closed door nomination of Vivian as the Republican Gubernatorial Candidate in 1942. It has been speculated that the two other candidates could not compete with the elder Vivian's political influence. Whatever the reasons, John Charles Vivian won the Republican nomination and then the general election, becoming Governor of Colorado in 1943.

All Colorado governors up until 1943 were salaried at five thousand dollars per year. Vivian became the first ten thousand dollar per year governor. Vivian was known to be very penurious, hence the designation as the "spend nothing governor." In the interest of the war-time economy, he turned down a post election celebration after his gubernatorial victory and did not use the service of a police squad car to chauffeur him around. He lived at his own home, and drove himself around in an older high mileage state-owned vehicle.

Vivian was also fiscally conservative in the way he governed. He reduced the number of state employees; abolished the service tax; created no new taxes; accepted no monies from the federal government; and left office having amassed a thirteen million dollar surplus in the state's general fund. Vivian's administration concerned itself with highway safety, conservation, uniform state laws, veteran's benefits, and the creation and passage of the Colorado Labor Peace Act. He believed that citizens should have the opportunity to voice their opinions directly to the governor, so he instituted an open door policy for his office. Monday through Friday, from three to three-fifteen in the afternoon, preceding his daily press conference, Vivian's office was open to anyone who wanted to see him for any reason.

Very little conflict occurred during Vivian's administration except in 1944, when, in one fell swoop the federal government drafted thirty young men from Delta county into the Armed Forces. Many county citizens were convinced that the Selective Service Program was inadvertently sabotaging the war effort at home by drafting so many young men that were needed on the farms. Outraged citizens descended upon Vivian's open door demanding that something be done. Vivian countermanded the draft order, and made

it stick. This was the first time that a governor had ever challenged the power of the Selective Service Program and won.

Despite his political experience and his family influence, Vivian ran for the U.S. Senate on the Republican ticket in 1948, but lost. After retiring from public office, Vivian became associated with the law firm of Vivian, Sherman and Kinney in Denver. He also became the Colorado Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Citizens Committee for the Hoover Report. The Hoover Commission, established by Congress in 1947, strove to reorganize the federal government for greater economy and efficiency. Vivian was also a member of Masonic Lodge #1 in Golden, Colorado, and attended the Episcopal Church. He died of cancer at the age of seventy-six, on February 10, 1964, in Golden, Colorado.

Bibliography - John Charles Vivian

- Colorado Legislative Council. Presidents and Speakers of the Colorado General Assembly: A Biographical Portrait From 1876. Denver: Eastwood Printing Co., 1980.
- The Denver Post, February 14, 1943.
- The Denver Post, May 8, 1945, page 2.
- The Denver Post, September 20, 1945, page 7.
- The Denver Post, January 27, 1947, page 4.
- The Denver Post, August 7, 1947, page 17.
- The Denver Times, June 14, 1908.
- Empire Magazine, September 22, 1963, page 23.
- Las Animas - Bent County Democrat, January 15, 1943.
- Rocky Mountain News, October 16, 1942.
- Rocky Mountain News, January 13, 1943.
- Rocky Mountain News, November 6, 1943.
- Rocky Mountain News, June 30, 1945, page 30.
- Rocky Mountain News, July 10, 1946.
- Rocky Mountain News, April 18, 1948, page 29.

Series Descriptions

Executive Record

The Executive Record contains: executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; letters of extraditions and requisitions; honorary citations; and proclamations that were issued by Governor Vivian.

Correspondence/Subject File

This series makes up the bulk of the collection and combines correspondence and subject files. It includes subseries such as reports, speeches, personal files, and newspaper clippings. Within the series there is gubernatorial as well as personal material. The majority of the records concern state agencies and public officials although there are items such as letters to his wife, Maude, her diaries, and letters concerning his outside interests such as the Republican Party, the Masons, and the American Legion. There is also documentation concerning the Hoover Commission and correspondence with Herbert Hoover. The series spans approximately 1909-1950's.

Speeches and Messages

Vivian's inaugural speeches and numerous speeches before and after he was governor are included in this series.

Newspaper Clippings

Newspaper clippings comprise 16 cubic feet in the collection and as such are a major series. Subject areas include: political campaigns; state finance; state highways; prohibition; agriculture; railroads; the Kennedy family; the National War Labor Board; editorials while governor; humor and entertainment; the American Legion; and miscellaneous subjects. The clippings span from the 1920's through the 1950's.

Legal Files

Vivian's legal files consist of approximately 3 cubic feet of material that spans 1916-1953 and document his legal career. Included are numerous probate as well as civil case files. Vivian's military record and request for discharge as well as his will (1925) also exist within these records.

Hoover Commission Records

The Hoover Commission was established by Congress in 1947 to reorganize the federal government in the interests of economy and efficiency. The Vivian Collection includes 7 cubic feet of records that document this commission and Vivian's involvement with it.

Photographs

There is 1 cubic foot of photographs of the Vivian family from 1886-1961.

Scrapbooks

There is 1 cubic foot of scrapbook material concerning personal topics such as arts and music, Vivian's college and early law career, postcards from Europe, medals and pins, and other ephemera.

Publications

Included in this series are miscellaneous publications that Vivian collected as well as publications for which Vivian wrote articles. The series spans 1929-1957.

Miscellaneous Personal Files

Included in this series are personal ephemera including appointment calendars (called Yearbooks).