The Modern Political Archives Enters Cyberspace

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What do a former Vice President of the United States, a former Ambassador to India, a former Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, a former Major League Baseball Commissioner, and a former Federal Housing Expediter all have in common? The answer is that all of their papers are housed in the Modern Political Archives, located in the U.K. Libraries’ Division of Special Collections and Archives. In fact the Modern Political Archives contains the public and sometimes personal papers of over thirty prominent twentieth century Kentucky public servants, on both the state and national levels. With one exception, papers of every Kentucky governor from 1935 to 1963 are found here, as well as the papers of several U.S. Senators and Congressmen.

These collections have drawn scholars and researchers to Lexington from all over the world and have proven to be invaluable in studying twentieth century Kentucky and national history. On July 1st, 1996 these collections became even more visible and accessible when the Modern Political Archives entered the challenging and exciting new world of cyberspace by creating a Home Page on the World Wide Web. Researchers can gain access to the Modern Political Archives Home Page either by initially accessing the Libraries’ Main Home Page, or through the Division of Special Collections and Archives Home Page, or by keying in the Modern Political Archives Home Page address directly, http://www.uky.edu/libraries/special/mpa.

The Modern Political Archives Home Page provides a description of the archives’ holdings, methods of access, and services provided to researchers. A list of the major collections follows along with a brief description of each individual collection. Each collection has been “linked” to a more detailed description of
that collection. A researcher simply "clicks" on the collection he or she is interested in, and a more detailed collection description, along with a digitized photograph of the collection's main character, will appear on the computer screen.

The Modern Political Archives Home Page is still very much "under construction" with much more material to be added. However, when accessed most collections in the archives provide the researcher with at least a description down to the series level. A few, such as the John B. Breckinridge, Mac Swinford, and Charles K. Wheeler Collections, provide the researcher with complete inventories to those collections. Still others provide even more detailed and interesting information.

Before serving as Vice President of the United States from 1949 to 1953, Alben W. Barkley served in the U.S. Senate from 1927 to 1949, and again from 1955 until his death in 1956. He served as the Senate Majority Leader from 1937 to 1947. Researchers accessing the Barkley Collection from the Modern Political Archives Home Page can peruse the series descriptions to the collection, as well as call up digitized images of political cartoons of Barkley drawn by Clifford K. Berryman and his son, Jim, for the Washington Evening Star. Those researchers possessing computers with audio capability can also hear Alben Barkley utter his last words before collapsing and dying of a heart attack at the podium while addressing a mock Democratic convention at Washington and Lee University on April 30, 1956.

Jouett Shouse represented Kansas in Congress from 1915 to 1919, and served as chair of the Democratic National Executive Committee from 1929 to 1932. An opponent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Shouse served as president of the American Liberty League from 1934 to 1938. Researchers accessing the Shouse Collection from the Modern Political Archives Home Page can view the entire inventory as well as find additional information regarding Al Smith's 1928 presidential campaign. Also "linked" with the Shouse Collection is a fuller description of the American Liberty League and its activities, as well a listing of the pamphlets published by the League which are part of the Shouse Collection. Researchers can actually choose several of these pamphlets to read in their entirety.

Stanley F. Reed served as Solicitor General of the United States from 1935 to 1938, defending much of President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation before the Supreme Court. Appointed to the
Supreme Court by Roosevelt in 1938, he served until his retirement in 1957. Researchers accessing the Reed Collection from the Modern Political Archives Home Page can view the series descriptions to the collection, as well as request individual oral history interview transcripts with former Reed law clerks that have been "linked" to the Reed Collection from the U.K. Libraries' Oral History Program Home Page. These interviews give insight into some of the landmark decisions handed down by the Supreme Court in the twentieth century, such as Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954.

These are just a few examples of what researchers all over the world now have access to through the new and exciting world of the Internet. By creating the Modern Political Archives Home Page, the U.K. Library has created a new avenue to disseminate information about the invaluable holdings housed in the Division of Special Collections and Archives. The Modern Political Archives Home Page will continue to grow as new material is regularly added. Researchers will now be able to have access to descriptions of that rich information, or to the actual documents themselves, at their fingertips. This will facilitate their research activities by allowing them to better focus their time and energy when they visit Lexington to use the material. The information superhighway is becoming a reality, and the University of Kentucky Libraries Division of Special Collections and Archives is helping to lead the way.