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James M. Beck Papers, 1787-1936 (bulk 1880-1936): Finding Aid

These papers were processed with the generous support of Ms. Virginia Beck.

Summary Information

Call number:	MC007
Location:	Princeton University Library. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library. Public Policy Papers. 65 Olden Street Princeton, New Jersey 08540 USA
Size:	14.68 linear feet (17 archival record storage boxes and 24 custom made phase boxes).
Language(s) of material:	English.
Abstract:	The James Beck papers consist primarily of correspondence, articles, addresses and scrapbooks which document Beck's career as lawyer, Assistant United States Attorney, United States Attorney, Assistant Attorney General, Solicitor General of the United States, a Republican member of Congress, author, and public speaker.

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Biography of James Montgomery Beck

James Montgomery Beck was born in Philadelphia on July 9, 1861. Raised in a Moravian home, he graduated from the Moravian College and Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1880. Despite his father's wish that he become a minister, he pursued a legal career. After an apprenticeship in law he was admitted to the bar in 1884 and entered the law office of William F. Harrity, a prominent Pennsylvania Democrat, with whom he formed a law partnership in 1891. Admitted to the bar of New York City in 1903, and in 1922 to the bar of England, he rose to be one of America's leading corporate lawyers.

Like many others, Beck combined his legal career with a career in public service. He served as Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania 1888-1892, and as United States Attorney 1896-1900. Although he started out as a "Cleveland Democrat," he joined the Republican Party in 1900 and was subsequently appointed Assistant Attorney General by President William McKinley. In this capacity, he became involved with litigation concerning the government's regulatory powers, which reflected the wish of the late McKinley and early Theodore Roosevelt administrations to assist the American business community. Beck resigned in 1903, when he joined the New York law firm of Shearman and Sterling. He continued his law practices in New York, Philadelphia and Washington until 1921. In that year President Warren G. Harding, whose election Beck had actively promoted, appointed him Solicitor General of the United States. He resigned in 1925, briefly returned to his law practice and then was elected as a Republican to Congress in 1927, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of James M. Hazlett. Reelected three consecutive times, he resigned in 1934, disillusioned with the "Rubber Stamp Congress" and his inability to fight the measures of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, which conflicted with his individualism and constitutionalism, and his principles of limited government and *laissez-faire*.

Beck shared his ideals and political beliefs in numerous speeches and publications. Having many personal contacts in England, he felt very strongly about the Allied cause and was one of the first Americans to make a case for the Entente, the alliance between Great Britain, France, and Russia prior to World War I. His most famous book, *The Constitution of the United States* (1924), sold over fifty thousand copies, including translations in German and French. As a Congressman he was the leading spokesman in the campaign against Prohibition, but he tried to fight the principles and legislation of the New Deal. He continued this fight after his resignation, and his book *Neither Purse Nor Sword*, about the destruction wrought by the New Deal upon the Constitution, appeared five months after his death. His biographer, Morton Keller, portrayed him as a passionate man, who felt deeply about anything he engaged in, but who, disillusioned with post-war society, venerated the past. One of the most eloquent orators of his time, James Beck helped shape the political views of the Republican Party. In a changing society, he died in political isolation in April 1936 and was later remembered as the often lonely defender of conservatism's great beliefs.

Beck was a devoted member, and later President, of the Philadelphia Shakespeare Society from 1913 until his death. He married Lilla Lawrence Mitchell in 1890, and had a son and a daughter, James Montgomery Beck, Jr. and Beatrice.

See: Morton Keller, *In Defense Of Yesterday. James M. Beck and the Politics of Conservatism, 1861-1936*, (New York, Coward-McCann, 1958).

Description

Consists primarily of correspondence, articles, addresses and scrapbooks which document Beck's long public service career. A significant portion of the correspondence concerns limited government and the constitutionality of certain measures. An important portion of this series is Beck's correspondence with Harry M. Daugherty, Attorney General under Warren G. Harding, concerning Daugherty's trial. Subject files contain correspondence on specific issues surrounding Beck's books, legal cases, speeches, and publications and include the New Deal and Republican party politics. Significant parts of this series include files on Prohibition and correspondence about World War I. Beck's addresses and legal arguments address major political issues of his time as well as local celebrations and commemorations. The bulk of material in the General files consists of letters of sympathy upon Beck's death. Twenty-four scrapbooks consisting primarily of newspaper clippings document Beck's public life.

Series 1, Correspondence, 1890-1936

Series 1, Correspondence 1890-1936, contains general correspondence (arranged alphabetically by correspondents' name) about political issues, with limited government and the constitutionality of certain measures as broad underlying themes. Additional themes are party politics and legal issues, or specific subjects, some of which are also found among the subject files (series 2). Among the correspondents are Henry Cabot Lodge, H.L. Mencken, Jules Jusserand, Philander Knox, William E. Borah, William Howard Taft, H.L. Doherty, Harry M. Daugherty, George Wickersham and Marshall French, for whose published memoirs Beck acted as an agent. The correspondence with Harry M. Daugherty, Attorney General in Harding's administration, includes correspondence concerning Daugherty's trial. As a public figure Beck received many letters from members of the public in response to his addresses, sometimes broadcast, or his actions in Congress. Some of these Beck filed himself under the subject "fan mail." Simple requests for copies of his speeches have been discarded.

Although many well known names can be found in this series, the correspondence is often perfunctory. Members of the British peerage may be found under their title rather than their surname. Correspondence concerning World War I has been placed in Series 2.

Series 2, Subject Files, 1893-1936

Series 2, Subject Files 1893-1936, contains correspondence arranged by subject matter, then chronologically. Most concerns some of Beck's books and legal cases, Republican party politics, and matters discussed in Beck's many speeches and publications, such as states' rights, tariff matters, the American Constitution, bureaucracy, and the New Deal. Of particular interest are the files on the campaign against Prohibition, for which Beck became the leading Congressional spokesman, and correspondence concerning World War I.

Some subject files are not complete or extensive, such as the one for the American Liberty League in the formation of which Beck played a prominent role. However, correspondence in Series 1 often complements subjects in this series.

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments, 1881-1936

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments 1881-1936, contains Beck's addresses and legal arguments, which were originally bound into twenty-two volumes, in rough chronological order. Access to the subject matter of the addresses is provided by indexes, kept at the beginning of this series (see Box 11, Folder 8).

The subjects of the addresses are varied, including local celebrations and commemorations as well as major political issues of the day, such as Prohibition, tariff matters, and the New Deal. One recurrent theme is Shakespeare, a particular interest of Beck's, who quoted from Shakespeare in most of his speeches. Volume 20

contains lectures for the University of London (*The American Theory of Government*, 1932) and Georgetown University (*The Preamble of the Constitution*, 1926).

The series of addresses and legal arguments is incomplete; the addresses previously found in volumes 2-4 (circa 1899-1906) are missing. Additional addresses and articles not found in the volumes have been added at the end of the series.

Series 4, General, 1787-1936 [bulk circa 1923-1936]

Series 4, General 1787-1936 [bulk circa 1923-1936], contains letters of sympathy concerning James Beck's death in 1936, loose newspaper clippings and some miscellaneous items. (Letters of sympathy from correspondents also listed in Series 1 may be found here as well.) The newspaper clippings may supplement the scrapbooks, especially for the time around Beck's death in 1936.

Series 5, Scrapbooks, 1880-1936

Series 5, Scrapbooks 1880-1936, consists of 24 scrapbooks, meticulously maintained. These provide a full record of Beck's public life as found in newspaper clippings concerning his public appearances, speeches, publications and activities. While the first few volumes may contain dinner cards and other memorabilia, and very rarely, a letter or a photograph, the great majority of the scrapbooks consists of clippings only. Researchers should be careful in handling the volumes: the pages are very brittle and many bindings have red rot. Additional loose clippings which may complement the scrapbooks, especially for the year 1936, can be found in Series 4.

Arrangement

Organized into the following series:

Series 1, Correspondence, 1890-1936

Series 2, Subject Files, 1893-1936

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments, 1881-1936

Series 4, General, 1787-1936 [bulk circa 1923-1936]

Series 5, Scrapbooks, 1880-1936

Access and Use

Access

Collection is open for research use.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish materials from the collection must be requested from the Curator of the Public Policy Papers. Researchers are responsible for determining any copyright questions.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition

The collection was donated by James M. Beck, Jr. in 1951 (Accession No. AM 15061).

Processing and Other Information

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); James Beck Papers, Box and Folder Number; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Helene van Rossum in 1999 with the generous support of Ms. Virginia Beck. Finding aid written by Helene van Rossum in 1999.

Encoding

Machine-readable finding aid encoded in EAD 2002 by Techbooks and Cristela García-Spitz on October 13, 2006.

Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Subject Headings

These materials have been indexed in the [Princeton University Library online catalog](#) using the following terms. Those seeking related materials should search under these terms.

- Daugherty, H. M. (Harry Micajah), 1860-1941 -- Trials, litigation, etc.
- Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 -- Appreciation -- United States.
- Republican Party (U.S. : 1854-) -- History -- 20th century.
- Bureaucracy -- United States -- 20th century.
- Conservatism -- United States -- History -- 20th century.
- Lawyers -- United States -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
- Legislators -- Pennsylvania -- 20th century -- Speeches, addresses, etc.
- New Deal, 1933-1939.
- Prohibition -- United States.
- Correspondence.
- Scrapbooks.

- Speeches.
- American history/20th century
- American politics and government
- World War I

Contents List

Series 1, Correspondence, 1890-1936

Series Description

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Series 2, Subject Files, 1893-1936**Series Description**

Series 2, Subject Files 1893-1936, contains correspondence arranged by subject matter, then chronologically. Most concerns some of Beck's books and legal cases, Republican party politics, and matters discussed in Beck's many speeches and publications, such as states' rights, tariff matters, the American Constitution, bureaucracy, and the New Deal. Of particular interest are the files on the campaign against Prohibition, for which Beck became the leading Congressional spokesman, and correspondence concerning World War I.

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Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, 1935	10	4
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Retirement from Congress: reactions from colleagues (alphabetical order), 1934	10	9
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Writings: <i>The Constitution of the United States</i> , German translation, 1922-1929	11	3
Writings: <i>The Constitution of the United States</i> , foreign comments and praise, 1926-1927	11	4
Writings: <i>May it please the Court</i> , 1927-1931	11	5
Writings: <i>May it please the Court</i> , advertising, 1930	11	6
Writings: <i>Our Wonderland of Bureaucracy</i> , 1932-1933	11	7

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments, 1881-1936

Series Description

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments 1881-1936, contains Beck's addresses and legal arguments, which were originally bound into twenty-two volumes, in rough chronological order. Access to the subject matter of the addresses is provided by indexes, kept at the beginning of this series (see Box 11, Folder 8).

The subjects of the addresses are varied, including local celebrations and commemorations as well as

Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments, ... (Continued)

major political issues of the day, such as Prohibition, tariff matters, and the New Deal. One recurrent theme is Shakespeare, a particular interest of Beck's, who quoted from Shakespeare in most of his speeches. Volume 20 contains lectures for the University of London (The American Theory of Government, 1932) and Georgetown University (The Preamble of the Constitution, 1926).

The series of addresses and legal arguments is incomplete; the addresses previously found in volumes 2-4 (circa 1899-1906) are missing. Additional addresses and articles not found in the volumes have been added at the end of the series.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>
Indexes to the bound volumes, with illustrations depicting James Beck, 1899- circa 1936	11	8
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Vol. 5, 9-17, 1881, 1907-1908 and undated	12	2
Vol. 6, 1-6, 1909, 1911	12	3
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Series 3, Addresses and Legal Arguments, ... (Continued)

Vol. 14, 8-15, 1924	14	4
Vol. 15, 1-7, 1924-1925	14	5
Vol. 15, 8-14, 1924-1925	14	6
Vol 16, 1-8, 1924-1926	15	1
Vol. 16, 9-15, 1926-1927	15	2
Vol. 17, 1-10, 1927-1929	15	3
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Vol. 19, 16-27, 1931-1934	16	1
Vol. 20, Lecture series University of London "The American Theory of Government", 1932	16	2
Vol. 20, Lecture series Georgetown University "The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States", 1926	16	3
Vol. 21, 1-7, 1932-1934	16	4
Vol. 21, 8-19, 1924, 1931, 1934-1935	16	5
Vol. 22, 1-13, 1934-1936	16	6
Vol. 22, 14-22, 1935-1936	16	7
Loose addresses and publications, not listed in the bound volumes, 1917-1936 and undated	17	1

Series 4, General, 1787-1936 [bulk circa 1923-1936]

Series Description

Series 4, General 1787-1936 [bulk circa 1923-1936], contains letters of sympathy concerning James Beck's death in 1936, loose newspaper clippings and some miscellaneous items. (Letters of sympathy from correspondents also listed in Series 1 may be found here as well.) The newspaper clippings may supplement the scrapbooks, especially for the time around Beck's death in 1936.

Series 4, General, 1787-1936 [bulk ... (Continued)]

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>
Letters of sympathy and other correspondence relating to James Beck's death, 1936	17	2
Correspondence to Mrs. James Beck, 1916, 1934	17	3
<i>James M. Beck's election case, first district of Pennsylvania. Hearings before the Committee on Elections no. 2, House of Representatives, Seventieth Congress, first session, by authority of House resolution no. 9. Testimony., 1928</i>	17	4
Miscellaneous items, 1787, 1898, circa 1923-1935	17	5
Newspaper clippings, circa 1900-1936	17	6-8

Series 5, Scrapbooks, 1880-1936**Series Description**

Series 5, Scrapbooks 1880-1936, consists of 24 scrapbooks, meticulously maintained. These provide a full record of Beck's public life as found in newspaper clippings concerning his public appearances, speeches, publications and activities. While the first few volumes may contain dinner cards and other memorabilia, and very rarely, a letter or a photograph, the great majority of the scrapbooks consists of clippings only. Researchers should be careful in handling the volumes: the pages are very brittle and many bindings have red rot. Additional loose clippings which may complement the scrapbooks, especially for the year 1936, can be found in Series 4.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>
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Vol. 2, 1890-1897	17	19
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