



## Legacy Finding Aid for Manuscript and Photograph Collections

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### What are Finding Aids?

Finding aids are narrative guides to archival collections created by the repository to describe the contents of the material. They often provide much more detailed information than can be found in individual catalog records. Contents of finding aids often include short biographies or histories, processing notes, information about the size, scope, and material types included in the collection, guidance on how to navigate the collection, and an index to box and folder contents.

### What are Legacy Finding Aids?

The following document is a legacy finding aid – a guide which has not been updated recently. Information may be outdated, such as the Historical Society’s contact information or exact box numbers for contents’ location within the collection. Legacy finding aids are a product of their times; language and terms may not reflect the Historical Society’s commitment to culturally sensitive and anti-racist language. This guide is provided in “as is” condition for immediate use by the public. This file will be replaced with an updated version when available.

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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.**  
**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS REGISTER**

**Title:** MS 575 Lillian Rogers Parks Papers, 1939-1997

**Processor:** Karen Stahl

**Date:** October 4, 2000

**Lillian Rogers Parks** was born in Washington, D.C. in 1897. Lillian was 12 years old when her mother Maggie began working as a personal maid at the White House under President Taft. Maggie continued to work under Presidents Wilson, Hoover and Roosevelt. In October 1929, Lillian began working as a seamstress full time under President Hoover. She continued under the administrations of Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower. Lillian had been stricken with polio at the age of six, which created a special bond with FDR. Her duties included making draperies and curtains for the second and third floor windows and keeping all the linens mended. She also fixed and remade dresses and hats for the First Ladies.

She decided to write her memoirs after she retired from the White House on February 1, 1960. In 1961, Lillian's first book entitled *My 30 Years Backstairs at the White House* was published, which described her experiences with the Presidents, First Ladies and the White House staff. Her book was on the best seller list for 26 weeks. In 1979, the book was made into a nine hour TV miniseries on NBC called "Backstairs at the White House." Her later books, *It Was Fun Working at the White House* and *The Roosevelts: A Family in Turmoil*, were not as successful as her first book.

Lillian Parks was a life-long resident of Washington, D.C. She attended Phelps Business High School, but dropped out due to ill health. She was a member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Washington and was an officer of its Candle Guild. During her retirement she appeared on many TV and radio talk shows, including the Larry King Show and the "Today" Show. In 1994 she participated in a Smithsonian Institution history project on the White House, presented at the Sumner School Museum in Washington, where she discussed her experiences working with the Presidents. Her marriage to Carlton Parks ended in divorce. She died in Washington, D.C. on November 6, 1997.

**Scope and Content:** The Lillian Rogers Parks Papers, 1939-1997, are arranged in three series:

Series I: . Correspondence, 1939-1992 consists of personal and business letters, greeting cards, invitations, and postcards. Most of the letters relate to the publication of her book. The series is arranged by type of correspondence and then chronologically.

Series II: Material related to *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House* and “Backstairs at the White House” consist of research notes, manuscripts, interviews and press releases. On December 1, 1990 Lillian Parks was interviewed on “Voices from the Backstairs: A Radio Documentary on the Lives of the White House Workers,” a presentation of National Public Radio. A transcript of this interview is in this series. The series is arranged by document type and then chronologically.

Series III: Memorabilia consists of material collected by Lillian Parks relating to the U.S. Presidents, including information relating to Raleigh Amyx (curator of Presidential Museum, Gainesville, VA), clippings from the Saturday Evening Post about the Presidents. Photographs of Lillian are also included. The series is arranged by document type.

**Donor:** Lillian Rogers Parks, 1994.093

**Size:** 1.45 cubic ft (2 containers)

**Restrictions:** None

**Related Materials:**

Oral history interview, 1985. HSW Oral History Collection OHT 1985.P37

Parks, Lillian. *Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*. New York: Fleet Publishing Corp., 1961.

“Backstairs at the White House” miniseries, Ed Friendly Productions, Hollywood, CA, 1979.

**Container List:****SERIES 1: CORRESPONDENCE, 1939-1992****Container 1**

**Folder 1:** Letters, July 20, 1939 - December 1977

**Folder 2:** Letters, January 4, 1978 - December 12, 1980

**Folder 3:** Letters, January 2, 1981 - December 1989

**Folder 4:** Letters, December 7, 1990 - December 1994, and undated.

**Folder 5:** Holiday and Birthday Cards, 1964 - January 6, 1995 Card envelopes identify sender. Most are from White House staff and members.

**Folder 6:** Postcards May 1965 - April 1997; including 2 photographs with messages.

**Folder 7:** Holiday and Birthday Cards, - undated

**Folder 8:** Holiday and Birthday Cards, - undated

**Folder 9:** Invitations, April 9 1972 - July 28, 1992

**SERIES II: MATERIAL RELATED TO  
*MY THIRTY YEARS BACKSTAIRS AT THE WHITE HOUSE*  
AND  
“BACKSTAIRS AT THE WHITE HOUSE”**

**Folder 10:** Autobiographical information by Lillian's mother, Maggie Rogers

**Folder 11:** Research Notes

**Folder 12:** Research Notes

**Folder 13:** Research Notes

**Folder 14:** Research Notes

**Folder 15:** Research Notes

**Folder 16:** Research Notes

**Folder 17:** Notes

**Folder 18:** Manuscript

**Folder 19:** Manuscript

**Folder 20:** Manuscript

**Folder 21:** Manuscript entitled “A New, condensed, updated version of *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*”

**Folder 22:** Paperback copy of *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House* (Avon Books, 1961)

**Folder 23:** Excerpts of *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*, 1961. Segments of the book were serialized in the *Washington Daily News*.

**Folder 24:** Press Releases relating to *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*

**Folder 25:** Transcript of National Public Radio interview, December 1, 1990

**Folder 26:** “Promoting a Best Seller” written by Lillian Parks

**Folder 27:** Interviews Related to *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*

**Folder 28:** Receipts for royalties and appraisal fees.

**Folder 29:** Newspaper clippings and information relating to the miniseries “Backstairs at the White House,” 1978-1979.

### **SERIES III: MEMORABILIA**

**Folder 30:** Inventory of relics from the White House owned by Lillian Parks, January 1961.

**Folder 31:** Mementos of the White House including place settings, brochures, programs, “Souvenir”, a magazine written by Marageret Truman

**Folder 32:** A Commemorative Guide Book to the White House Replica and “Towards The Preservation of a Heritage: Inaugural Exhibition of the Howard University Museum,” 1979.

**Folder 33:** Newspaper clippings relating to Raleigh Amyx, a close friend to Lillian, 1980-1987.

**Folder 34:** Photographs of Lillian and postcards of places she visited

**Folder 33:** Newspaper clippings from the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and the *Washington Post* relating to the presidents and Washington, D.C., 1934-1962.