



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 1588

William Bauchop Wilson papers

**1880-1929 (bulk 1913-1921)
125 boxes, 13 volumes, 55 linear feet**

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William Bauchop Wilson papers

Creator: Wilson, William B., 1862-1934

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Abstract

These papers from the private files of William B. Wilson (1862-1934), who served as the first U.S. Secretary of Labor, 1913-1921, mention labor conditions, strikes, efforts to secure employment under the government, patronage, and other routine work of a cabinet officer. A section of political letters documents his activities in the national campaigns, 1914-1920.

Background note

William Bauchop Wilson was born in Blantyre, Scotland, in 1862. He and his parents, Adam and Helen Nelson Wilson, immigrated to Arnot, Pennsylvania, in 1870. Wilson received an honorary LL.D. from Maryland State Agricultural College in 1914 and an honorary LL.D. from Ursinus College in 1918.

Wilson worked in Pennsylvania's coal mines from 1870 until 1898 and served as president of the District Miners' Union from 1888 to 1890. He ran for Tioga County Legislature in 1880 and for Congress in 1892. From 1900 to 1908 Wilson was secretary and treasurer of the National Union of Miners. He served as a member of Congress from 1907 until 1913 and during his tenure there was the chairman of the Committee on Labor.

Woodrow Wilson appointed William Wilson the first Secretary of Labor of the United States in 1913. While a member of President Wilson's cabinet, he was involved with the Council of National Defense, the Federal Board for Vocational Education, and the President's Mediation Commission. He also served as head of the United States housing program for war workers, for which he organized the Bureau of Industrial Housing and Transportation and the United States Housing Corporation.

In the years following his service as Secretary of Labor, Wilson returned to Tioga County, Pennsylvania, where he continued his work in farming and mining. In 1926 he was a candidate for the United States Senate and was defeated by Republican William S. Vare. Wilson died near Savannah, Georgia, on May 25, 1934.

Scope & content

The papers of William Bauchop Wilson provide a unique window into early 20th century American history. As President Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of Labor, William Wilson, an ardent Democrat and a pro-Union politician, served on numerous committees and influenced countless decisions made by the Wilson administration. His papers are a nearly complete history of his service as a cabinet member and reflect the events of the time with remarkable detail.

Wilson's papers reflect the formation of the new Department of Labor, of which he was the first secretary. Under Wilson's guidance, the department developed the Bureau of Immigration, the Bureau of Naturalization, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Children's Bureau, and the Division of Conciliation. Wilson was an advocate of laborer's rights, as well as children's rights, and he worked relentlessly to study and improve conditions for industrial workers. His attention to regulating industry and monitoring conditions reflects the growing importance of industrial business and mass production in America.

Wilson's studies of European emigration to the United States and his attempts to improve immigration procedures and educate foreign governments about U.S. immigration laws were brought to an abrupt end by the advent of World War I. During the war Wilson oversaw all aspects of wartime production and mobilization that involved labor, including lumber, copper mining, oil fields, and telecommunications. At the end of the war he worked to find housing and employment for returning soldiers.

Wilson's files from his tenure with the Department of Labor also include information on immigration and naturalization that brings to light the rising fear of Communism in the United States. Internal Department of Labor memoranda indicate the prevalence of this trend, and many of Wilson's papers regarding immigration and naturalization address this issue directly. There are files pertaining to the case of Ludwig Martens, an alleged Communist and admitted friend of Trotsky and Lenin, who was tried for being an enemy of the state and deported in 1921. Wilson's papers also include correspondence and news clippings relating to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and his attempts to find and disclose the identities of alleged communists.

The papers of William Bauchop Wilson give the perspective of a government insider on important issues and events, such as labor unrest, working conditions, immigration and naturalization, World War I, and the rise of industry and mass production in the United States. Wilson's rise from immigrant and coal miner to union leader and national figure is as noteworthy as his many political and professional accomplishments.

Overview of arrangement

Series I	Papers, 1880-1929	35 boxes
	a. Wilson v. Vare Senate campaign	
Series II	Official Correspondence, Department of Labor, 1913-1921	83 boxes
	a. Invitations	

	b. Postmasterships	
	c. Articles re: Public Affairs	
	d. Requests for documents	
	e. Personal	
	f. Requests for favors and information	
	g. Political	
	h. Patronage and endorsements	
	i. Applications for positions	
	j. Objections	
	k. Promotions	
	l. Requests for statements	
	m. Labor conditions and strikes	
	n. Applications for transfer	
	o. Labor statistics	
	p. Immigration service	
	q. Naturalization	
	r. Intra-office documents	
	s. Minutes of the Council of National Defense, 1917-1920	
	t. Marten's Case, 1919-1920	
Series III	Miscellany	7 boxes
	a. Bills and receipts, 1909-1926	
	b. Miscellaneous	
	c. Speeches	
	d. Biographical sketches	
	e. Writings of William B. Wilson	
	f. Papers of Dr. Paul W. Pritchard	
	g. Volumes	

Series description

Series 1: Papers, 1880-1930 (Boxes 1-35)

Series 1 is arranged chronologically and includes papers relating to Wilson's career as Secretary of Labor as well as his early personal and professional ventures and his activities after he left government office. His papers contain incoming and copies of outgoing correspondence, including telegrams, memoranda, and miscellaneous attachments. Also included are carbons of official correspondence sent (1913-1921) by Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis F. Post, which are interfiled with Wilson's letters and other papers. There is one subseries comprised of documents pertaining to Wilson's unsuccessful 1926 bid for a United States Senate seat.

Series 2: Official Correspondence, Department of Labor, 1913-1921 (Boxes 36-117)

Series 2 consists of files maintained by clerks in Secretary Wilson's office. These files include letters received and copies of letters sent, telegrams, memoranda, reports, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous attachments. These papers are arranged in 20 subseries. Each subseries consists of numbered files from the Department of

Labor office. Each file contains incoming and outgoing correspondence, as well as any additional memoranda or notes that pertain to a specific subject, person, issue, or event.

Series 3: Miscellany (Boxes 118-124).

Series 3 consists of seven subseries, including William B. Wilson's writings and biographical information. The papers of Dr. Paul Pritchard, Wilson's biographer, are included in this series, as is his unpublished doctoral dissertation about Wilson's career. Financial records are represented by the *Bills and Receipts* subseries. There are 13 volumes, including notebooks, diaries, and scrapbooks that document his personal and professional affairs.

Subjects

Labor and laboring classes
Labor laws and legislation
United States—Politics and government—20th century
United States—Secretary of Labor

Martens, Ludwig
Palmer, A. Mitchell (1872-1936)
Wilson, Woodrow (1856-1924)

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of Dr. Paul W. Pritchard.

Alternative format

None.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], William Bauchop Wilson Papers (Collection 1588), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

In October 2000 this collection was surveyed as part of the Collections Preservation and Backlog Processing Planning Project. The collection had a finding aid with a series-level inventory but no overall description. The boxes were arranged poorly on the shelves and were subsequently rearranged according to the plan recommended in the finding aid. This collection was approached again in December 2000 in preparation for the encoding of the finding aid. New series were established and a box-level inventory was completed.

Box and folder listing

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Volume	Expenses	1901

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