

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY  
ABILENE, KANSAS

COCHRAN, JACQUELINE:  
Papers, 1932-75

Accessions A76-4, A76-4/1, A76-4/2, A78-5 and A83-5

Processed by: TB  
Date Completed: December 1989

The papers of Jacqueline Cochran, businesswoman and aviatrix, were deposited in the Eisenhower Library by Miss Cochran in 1975 and 1977. Additional papers were deposited in 1982 by the executors of Miss Cochran's estate.

Linear feet of shelf space occupied:	228
Approximate number of pages:	379,100
Approximate number of items:	250,000

An instrument of gift for these papers was signed in August 1981 by the executors of Miss Cochran's estate. Literary property rights in the unpublished writings of Jacqueline Cochran in these papers and in other collections of papers in the Eisenhower Library have passed to the people of the United States.

Under terms of the instrument of gift the following classes of documents will be withheld from research use:

1. Papers the disclosure of which would constitute an invasion of privacy or a libel of a living person.
2. Papers that are authorized by statute or Executive Order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and are in fact properly classified pursuant to such statute or Executive Order.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

### I. Biography

Jacqueline Cochran, cosmetics executive and world-famous aviatrix, was the product of obscure origins. Born Bessie Pittman about 1906 in northwest Florida, she was the youngest of five children of Ira and Mary (Grant) Pittman. The Pittmans were an impoverished family that moved from one town to another in search of work. Even as a child, Bessie possessed an unusual amount of drive and ambition. She resented the limited opportunities available to her in such an environment, especially after she was told the Pittmans were not her real parents, but had merely raised her from infancy. At an early age Bessie left home and changed her name to “Jacqueline Cochran,” apparently to symbolize her break with the past. Although she renounced the Pittman name, and never publicly revealed the identity of her foster family, she remained in contact with her foster parents and later contributed to the support of their children and grandchildren.

After briefly studying to be a nurse, Cochran obtained a job in a beauty parlor in Pensacola, Florida. Over the next few years, she climbed the social ladder until, by 1932, she was working as a beautician in an exclusive store in New York City. Shortly thereafter, she began developing her own line of cosmetics. About 1935, she founded her own company, Jacqueline Cochran Incorporated. The company grew slowly but by the late 1940s, Cochran’s products were being sold in department stores across the United States. She also became the American distributor for several famous French products, notably Nina Ricci perfumes.

Although her cosmetics business brought her widespread recognition, Cochran is chiefly remembered for her aeronautical activities. In 1932, while living in New York City, a friend offered her a ride in an airplane. Entranced by the flight, Cochran took flying lessons and made her first solo flight after only a few hours instruction. She later bought her own plane and flew it around the country while developing her cosmetics business.

From her earliest days as a pilot, Cochran was interested in air racing. During the 1930s, she entered as many races as she could. The first was the 1934 MacRobertson Air Race from London to Melbourne, Australia. She also entered the annual National Air Races and in 1938 became the first woman to win the prestigious Bendix Trophy.

Financial support for her early racing activities was provided by several wealthy friends, the most important of whom was Floyd Odlum. Odlum was a financier who had made a fortune in the 1920s and 1930s by buying and reorganizing bankrupt companies. He had a controlling interest in, or was an executive of, innumerable companies, notably Atlas Corporation, Radio Corporation of America (RCA), Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation (Convair), and General Dynamics Corporation. Plagued by arthritis during most of his adult life, he was a founder and generous patron of the Arthritis and Rheumatism Foundation.

Floyd Odlum took an interest in Jacqueline Cochran’s flying and provided financial and logistical support for her entry in the MacRobertson Air Race. With his help she began to develop a large ranch in the southern California desert near Indio. In 1936 they were married. Although in private life she was Mrs. Floyd Odlum, she continued to use her maiden name

professionally and was popularly known as Jacqueline Cochran for the rest of her life.

Cochran's racing activities in the 1930s brought her a wide acquaintance among the famous pilots of the day. An especially close friend was Amelia Earhart who spent several days relaxing at Cochran's ranch prior to departing on her ill-fated flight around the world in 1937. Other friends who were famous pilots included Ben Howard, Paul Mantz, Tex Rankin and Roscoe Turner. Cochran was also active in various aeronautical organizations, particularly the National Aeronautical Association (NAA), and the Ninety-Nines, a group of professional women pilots.

By 1941 Cochran was one of the most famous women pilots in the United States. As such she approached the U.S. Air Force to suggest the possibility of using women as ferry pilots in wartime. When her initial proposals were turned down she went to England (becoming in the process the only woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic in World War II) and volunteered her services to the Royal Air Force. For several months she worked for the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), a branch of the Royal Air Force. Her work involved recruiting qualified women pilots in the United States and taking them to England where they joined the ATA.

In 1942, following U.S. entry into World War II, the Air Force recognized the need for additional pilots. Cochran's earlier proposals were resurrected and she was invited back to the U.S. to head a program for training women pilots. As head of the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) she supervised the training of over one thousand women, many of whom performed distinguished services in flying experimental Air Force planes.

After the WASP program was eliminated in December 1944, Cochran went on a trip around the world, ostensibly as a war correspondent for Liberty magazine, and spent the rest of the war observing conditions in the Far East and Europe. Following her return to the U.S. she spent several years developing her cosmetics company, entering air races, and lobbying with the Air Force on behalf of former WASPs.

In 1948 the Air Force agreed to let WASP veterans join the Air Force Reserve. Cochran joined the Reserve where she eventually gained the rank of Colonel and remained until her retirement in 1970. Her active duty station was in the Office of Legislative Liaison. This brought her into close contact with many influential members of Congress. She was on friendly terms with many high-ranking Air Force officers and civilians, notably James Doolittle, Ira Eaker, Curtis LeMay, Carl Spaatz, Stuart Symington and Lyndon B. Johnson. Cochran was also actively involved in several civilian groups which support the work of the Air Force, particularly the Air Force Association and the Air Force Academy Foundation.

Although Air Force regulations did not permit Cochran to fly while on duty, she continued to be an active pilot in private life. Through her husband's contacts in the aerospace industry she had access to many advanced aircraft, and she continued to set flying records until the 1960s. In May 1953, while flying a Canadian jet, she became the first woman pilot to exceed the speed of sound. Her flying exploits brought her into close contact with many other professional pilots, notably Charles Yeager (the first man to exceed the speed of sound) and Frank Everest.

Cochran remained active in many private aviation groups and frequently used her influence to

advance the cause of women in aviation. She was an officer in the NAA and its parent organization, the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI). She was on the board of directors of Northeast Airlines. In 1962 she participated in a study by the Lovelace Clinic of Albuquerque, New Mexico, on the adaptability of women to space flight. She later served as a consultant to NASA on the role of women in the space program.

In addition to her aeronautical activities, Cochran was deeply involved with charitable work. She and her husband organized a private foundation, the Cochran-Odlum Foundation, through which they donated substantial sums to worthy causes. Much of her work was concerned with children. Although Cochran had no children of her own she retained vivid memories of her underprivileged childhood and this encouraged her to become involved with children's groups. She was on the board of directors of Camp Fire Girls. She also provided financial aid to several Spanish children.

Cochran was also active in Republican politics. As early as 1946 she considered running for Congress for her home district, the 29th District of California, which embraced Imperial and Riverside Counties. Her chance came in 1956 with the retirement of the incumbent Republican Congressman John Phillips. Cochran entered the Congressional race and, in the primary election, defeated a field of five male opponents to gain the Republican nomination. In the general election, however, she was defeated by the Democratic candidate Dalip S. Saund, a native of India.

Following her defeat Cochran never again ran for public office. She retained an active interest in state and national politics, however, and frequently supported Republican candidates. In 1968 she attempted to raise support for a proposed Presidential bid by General Curtis LeMay.

Cochran's interest in politics led to a close friendship with Dwight D. Eisenhower. In February 1952 she helped sponsor a massive rally on Eisenhower's behalf at Madison Square Garden in New York City. The rally was recorded and Cochran flew the film to France for a special showing at Eisenhower's headquarters. The show of support was a major factor in convincing Eisenhower to run for president in 1952.

During the 1952 campaign Cochran persuaded employees at Walt Disney Studios to produce an animated cartoon in support of Eisenhower's candidacy. She attended the Republican National Convention in Chicago in July and assisted with arrangements for Eisenhower's visit to Los Angeles in October. Eisenhower appreciated Cochran's efforts and remained a close friend for the rest of his life. He frequently vacationed at Cochran's ranch in California and wrote portions of his memoirs there after leaving office.

Despite her many activities and accomplishments, Jacqueline Cochran suffered from indifferent health during much of her life. Seldom did a year pass in which she did not enter the hospital for treatment of various ailments. In 1971 a progressive heart disease forced Cochran to retire from flying. In 1973, she and her husband sold their ranch in Southern California and lived quietly at Indio until their deaths.

## II. The Papers

The papers of Jacqueline Cochran, as befitting her long and active career, form a large and complex body of material. The complicated arrangement is largely a product of the filing scheme developed by her secretarial staff. Prior to 1963 there were four locations at which Miss Cochran stored her files. Most of the active files were kept at the office of her cosmetics company at 630 Fifth Avenue in New York City. Miss Cochran also kept small quantities of correspondence at her New York apartment and at her ranch near Indio, California. Inactive files were stored at her cosmetics plant in Newark, New Jersey.

The files at 630 Fifth Avenue were usually kept on an annual basis. Each year the staff would set up a General File which held most of Miss Cochran's social and aeronautical correspondence. Separate files were made for material of a more personal nature, such as information on her speeches, trips, business and financial activities, and her Air Force career. At the end of the year the files would be moved to storage and a new file established for the coming year.

Prior to early 1951 it was customary for Miss Cochran's staff to dispose of most of the General Files two or three years after they had been retired. As a result the files prior to 1949 are very fragmentary and appear to have been preserved only because they contained material of particular interest to Miss Cochran. The existing materials for the period include her scrapbooks, correspondence relating to her aviation activities in the 1930s, her ATA and WASP files which document her work in World War II, and the material she received upon being elected president of the Ninety-Nines in 1941.

The records disposal policy changed in early 1951 when Miss Cochran was contacted by the Women's Archives at Radcliffe College in an effort to solicit her papers. Although Miss Cochran dithered for many years before deciding on the Eisenhower Library as a repository, the Radcliffe approach alerted her to the historical significance of her activities and she began to preserve her files. She approached this project with the same enthusiasm that characterized her activities: by saving every scrap of paper that crossed her desk. Because of this, the files after 1948 are voluminous in extent and contain a high percentage of routine material of little research value. The General Files for 1949 had not yet been destroyed and these are the earliest files that were systematically preserved.

In 1963 Miss Cochran sold her cosmetics company and had all of her stored files shipped to her ranch in California. An inventory of the files was made at that time and is located in Box 143 of the General Files Series. The inventory indicates that several files existed in 1963 which were not among the papers when they were sent to the Eisenhower Library. The missing files included material on Miss Cochran's cosmetics company, her bank accounts and personal finances. It is believed that Miss Cochran had the missing files destroyed.

The General Files themselves are incomplete. Notations in the files reveal that in 1975, while preparing the files for shipment to the Eisenhower Library, Miss Cochran removed (and presumably destroyed) a number of folders relating to her personal business affairs. The missing files included material on her New York apartment, her secretarial staff, her expense accounts, and her work for Northeast Airlines. Approximately half of the 1956 files, covering the letters N to Z, are also missing and may have been destroyed by mistake.

The loss of so many files means that certain aspects of Miss Cochran's personal life are impossible to document. For example, she saved no material from her childhood or early adulthood so the only information available on her early life is what she wrote down in later years. It is also unclear the extent to which her activities were financed by her husband Floyd Odlum. Floyd and Jacqueline kept their business affairs separate so scholars will find very little material on Mr. Odlum's activities among his wife's papers. Despite the gaps in the collection, however, it is an invaluable source of information on the history of aviation from the 1930s to the 1970s.

The existing material is divided into seventeen series, one of which, the General Files, comprises over half of the collection. The General Files forms the backbone of the collection and contains the bulk of Miss Cochran's subject and correspondence files, including most of her existing pre-World War II correspondence. Another series, the Scrapbook Series, also covers her entire active career and contains many newspaper clippings which reflect the public awareness of her activities.

The remaining fifteen series pertain to more specific aspects of Miss Cochran's career. The ATA Series and the WASP Series document her activities during World War II. The Primary Political Files and the General Election Files pertain to her 1956 Congressional campaign. There are series which pertain to her work with the FAI, the NAA, Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1952 Presidential campaign, her career in the Air Force, her book Stars at Noon, and the speed records she set in various types of aircraft. There are also series containing information on her speeches, her trips, and published articles in which she had a particular interest. The Ninety-Nines Series consists primarily of material on the early history of the Ninety-Nines which was given to Miss Cochran in 1941 when she was elected president of the organization. The Business Series contains the few surviving files on Miss Cochran's personal financial and business activities.

More details on the content and arrangement of these series are given below in the Description of Series section.

## CHRONOLOGY

ca. 1906	Born, probably in northwest Florida
1932	Learned to fly in New York City
1934	Entered MacRobertson Air Race
1935	Established cosmetics company
May 11, 1936	Married Floyd Bostwick Odlum
1938	Won the Bendix Trophy at the National Air Races
June 1941	Flew a bomber across the Atlantic Ocean to England
March - September 1942	Recruited women pilots for the British ATA
September 1942 - December 1944	Director of Women Pilots for the US Air Force
1948	Joined Air Force Reserve
1952	Active in Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidential campaign
May 1953	Became first woman to fly faster than sound
1956	Candidate for Congress from California
1963	Sold her cosmetics company
1971	Retired from flying due to heart condition
1973	Sold her ranch in southern California
June 17, 1976	Death of Floyd B. Odlum
August 19, 1980	Died in Indio, California

## DESCRIPTION OF SERIES

### I. GENERAL FILE SERIES. 1932-75. 263 boxes

This series contains the bulk of Miss Cochran's subject and correspondence files. There is very little material prior to 1949 when Miss Cochran began to systematically preserve her papers. The material is arranged into five subseries.

#### A. ANNUAL FILES SUBSERIES. 1933-67. Boxes 1-185

Subject and correspondence files, arranged by year and thereunder by name or subject. The 1933-36 files pertain largely to Miss Cochran's 1934 entry in the MacRobertson Air Race. Most of the correspondence for 1942-45 is filed in the WASP series. About half of the 1956 files, covering the letters N to Z, were not received at the Eisenhower Library. In 1968 the Annual Files were succeeded by the Social and Subject Files.

#### B. SOCIAL FILE SUBSERIES. 1968-75. Boxes 186-201

Correspondence between Jacqueline Cochran and her personal friends, arranged alphabetically.

#### C. SUBJECT FILE SUBSERIES. 1968-75. Boxes 202-238

Correspondence, memoranda and reports on various subjects in which Miss Cochran was interested, filed alphabetically. This includes material on the organizations to which she belonged.

#### D. FOREIGN FILE SUBSERIES. 1949-63. Boxes 239-255

Correspondence of Jacqueline Cochran with individuals and organizations in foreign countries, arranged geographically by country and thereunder by name. After mid-1963 such correspondence was filed in the Annual Files.

#### E. SPECIAL FILE SUBSERIES. 1932-73. Boxes 256-263

Material of particular interest to Jacqueline Cochran that was not filed in the Annual Files by her staff. Included is information on her foster family, a few of her flight logs and passports, her address books, and correspondence with Dwight D. Eisenhower, Cardinal Spellman and Radcliffe College.

### II. AIR FORCE SERIES. 1948-71. 7 boxes.

Correspondence, reports, personnel forms and printed material pertaining to Miss



Cochran's service in the Air Force Reserve. The material is arranged into two subseries. The first subseries (Boxes 1-4) contains general information on her military service. The second subseries (Boxes 5-7) concerns a survey she made on the status of women in the Air Force while serving as a special consultant to the Air Force Chief of Staff during 1950-51.

III. AIR TRANSPORT AUXILIARY (ATA) SERIES. 1941-44. 5 boxes.

Correspondence, reports, personnel forms and memoranda pertaining to Miss Cochran's work with the ATA. Most of the material consists of application forms and letters of inquiry from women seeking admission to the program. There is also a small quantity of official correspondence on the administration of the program and social correspondence between Cochran and the women pilots who served in England.

IV. ARTICLES SERIES. 1938-63. 8 boxes.

Correspondence, drafts and printed material pertaining to newspaper and magazine articles of particular interest to Jacqueline Cochran. Arranged chronologically by year of publication. The series contains articles which were written by Miss Cochran and articles which were written about her by others.

V. BUSINESS SERIES. 1935-72. 10 boxes.

Before shipping her papers to the Eisenhower Library, Jacqueline Cochran removed, and presumably destroyed, most of the files relating to her personal financial and business activities. In the course of processing the collection a few scattered files of business material were found. These have been brought together in this series in order to facilitate their use. The material includes bills and receipts from Cochran's foreign trips between 1949 and 1956, and her domestic expenses in 1957; correspondence, reports and printed material from her cosmetics business, most of which concern advertising; and miscellaneous items on Cochran's ranch in southern California.

VI. EISENHOWER CAMPAIGN SERIES. 1952. 3 boxes.

Correspondence, memoranda, clippings and printed material pertaining to Jacqueline Cochran's interest in Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1952 presidential campaign.

VII. FEDERATION AERONAUTIQUE INTERNATIONALE (FAI) SERIES. 1958-64. 15 boxes.

Correspondence, memoranda, reports and printed material pertaining to the work of the FAI and its affiliated aero clubs. The bulk of the files cover the period from 1958 to early 1963, the years of Miss Cochran's greatest involvement in the FAI. Material prior to 1958 and after 1963 is in the General Files Series.

VIII. GENERAL ELECTION FILE SERIES. 1956-61. 14 boxes.

Correspondence, memoranda, reports and printed material pertaining to Cochran's unsuccessful campaign for Congress from the 29th district of California. The series covers her campaign after the primary election in June 1956. Earlier material is in the Primary Political File Series. After Cochran's defeat in November 1956 the file was stored at her ranch in California. It remained active and was used by her staff as late as 1961. Most of the post-1956 material pertains to Cochran's public appearances in California and to the operation of her private golf course.

IX. NATIONAL AERONAUTIC ASSOCIATION (NAA) SERIES. 1958-63. 20 boxes.

Correspondence, memoranda, reports and printed material pertaining to the work of the NAA and its affiliated organizations. The files cover the period from early 1958 to early 1963, the years of Miss Cochran's greatest involvement in NAA. Material prior to 1958 and after 1963 is in the General Files Series.

X. NINETY-NINES SERIES. 1930-44. 13 boxes.

Correspondence, reports and printed material pertaining to the early activities of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots founded by Amelia Earhart in 1929. The series contains the official records of the first five presidents of the organization. The material was given to Jacqueline Cochran when she was elected president in 1941 and she retained the files instead of passing them on to her successor in 1943. Because they were the records of the Ninety-Nines rather than the personal papers of Miss Cochran, the original files were returned to the organization after being found among Miss Cochran's papers. This series consists of electrostatic copies of the original files made by the Eisenhower Library to preserve the integrity of the collection. The original records are among the Ninety-Nines archives at Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

XI. PRIMARY POLITICAL FILE SERIES. 1955-56. 19 boxes.

Correspondence, memoranda, reports and printed material pertaining to Miss Cochran's unsuccessful campaign for Congress from the 29th district of California. The series covers her campaign down to the primary election in June 1956. Material for the period after the primary election is in the General Election File Series.

XII. SCRAPBOOK SERIES. 1932-71. 21 boxes and 33 bound scrapbooks.

Publications, newspaper and magazine clippings and memorabilia collected by Jacqueline Cochran during her aviation career. The publications are arranged by type of publication (government publications, periodicals and miscellaneous items) and thereunder by title, author or subject. Memorabilia and loose clippings which were not pasted into scrapbooks are arranged chronologically. The bound scrap-books are in chronological order. Some of the loose scrapbook material includes World War II correspondence and invitations of particular importance to Miss Cochran which she did not file in the General Files Series or the WASP Series.

XIII. SPEECH SERIES. 1938-69. 13 boxes.

Correspondence, drafts and notes pertaining to speeches given by Jacqueline Cochran, arranged chronologically by date of speech. Very few of the files contain actual texts of the speeches, as Miss Cochran usually spoke extemporaneously. The series also contains reference material used by Miss Cochran in preparing her speeches, such as aeronautical statistics, famous quotes, and copies of speeches given by others.

XIV. SPEED RECORDS SERIES. 1939-71. 11 boxes.

Correspondence, reports and printed material concerning airplane speed records established by Jacqueline Cochran. The material is divided into six subseries. The first five subseries contain information on records set by particular types of aircraft (P-51, F-86, Jetstar and F-104 planes). The sixth subseries contains information on miscellaneous records set by Miss Cochran, lists of her major record-breaking accomplishments, and lists of various world and U.S. aircraft records.

XV. STARS AT NOON SERIES. 1951-72. 12 boxes.

Drafts and galley proofs of Jacqueline Cochran's memoirs, Stars at Noon, and correspondence relating to its publication, distribution, serialization and translation into foreign languages. The series also includes material prepared by Miss Cochran during 1971-72 for a proposed sequel to the book which she never completed.

XVI. TRIPS SERIES. 1945-71. 14 boxes.

Correspondence, itineraries and travel documents pertaining to trips made by Jacqueline Cochran, arranged chronologically by the date of the trip. The series also contains tourist literature and printed material acquired by Miss Cochran during her trips.

XVII. WOMEN'S AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS (WASP) SERIES. 1941-72. 28 boxes.

Correspondence, reports and printed material concerning a program to utilize women as ferry pilots for the Air Force during World War II. The material is divided into five subseries. The first subseries (Boxes 1-2) pertains to Jacqueline Cochran's early proposals for women ferry pilots and her 1941 bomber flight to England. The next three subseries (Boxes 3-19) concern the administration of the WASP program and Miss Cochran's role in the program. The subseries include Miss Cochran's personal files as Director of Women Pilots; a collection of general correspondence, reports and newspaper clippings regarding the administration of the WASP program; and a set of historical reports and Congressional publications concerning the Air Force and the WASP program in World War II. Miss Cochran's personal files contain portions of her social correspondence for 1942-45 which was filed among her WASP papers rather than in the General Files Series. The last subseries (Boxes 20-28) contains material on the post-war activities of the WASP pilots, including their reunions and their efforts to join the Air Force Reserve. Additional material

on WASPs in the post-war period is in the General Files Series.