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ABILENE, KANSAS

ENDACOTT, J. EARL: Papers, 1944-74

Documentary Histories Series  
Accession: A91-15

## SERIES DESCRIPTION

J. Earl Endacott, a graduate of the University of Kansas at Lawrence, moved to Abilene in the early 1920s and taught history at Abilene High School for twenty years. In 1947, when the Eisenhower Foundation was preparing to open the Eisenhower family home to the public, Endacott was hired to serve as curator.

Endacott worked at the Eisenhower Center for 24 years. When the Museum was built in 1954 he became museum curator and helped catalog all the artifacts which were received from Dwight D. Eisenhower. When the Museum and Home were donated to the U.S. government in 1966 Endacott entered government service and continued to work at the museum until 1969 when William Jones, a professional curator, was hired to take over the position. Endacott had two more years to work until he could retire so he agreed to a request from the director of the Eisenhower Center to spend his last few months of government service compiling the history of the Center.

Endacott was probably the only person who could have written such a history. As the first employee at the Center he was in a position to observe its development from the very beginning. He had been acquainted with David J. Eisenhower and all the Eisenhower brothers and had acquired extensive information on the history of the family during his years of service. As an experienced historian he was skilled in research and analysis and could evaluate the significance of seemingly minor events.

Endacott organized his narrative history into three volumes covering the three main entities which had developed the Center. One volume describes the work of the Eisenhower Presidential Library Commission. This was a state agency created in 1955 by the Kansas Legislature to acquire land and raise money for the construction of the Eisenhower Library. The Commission also built the Place of Meditation which is the burial site of President and Mrs. Eisenhower.

A second volume covers the history of the Eisenhower Foundation. This organization was originally formed at the end of World War II to honor Dwight D. Eisenhower. When Ida Eisenhower died in 1946 her sons deeded the family home to the Foundation so that it could be opened to the public. The Foundation managed the Home and also built and managed the Museum. Endacott's history describes the work of the Foundation down to 1966 when it became quiescent after donating the Home and Museum property to the U.S. government.

The third volume covers the history of the Eisenhower Home and family. Through research in county and city records Endacott traced the history of the Home back to its original owner and was able to describe major improvements made by David and Ida Eisenhower after they moved into the Home in 1898. This volume is also the most important to biographers because it contains Endacott's personal observations of David and Ida Eisenhower and their sons. Endacott included comments on such controversial matters as David's vindictive nature and the exploitation of Ida by the Jehovah's Witnesses cult. He also described the early history of the Eisenhower family in Kansas, including accounts of David's residence in Hope and Dwight's childhood in Abilene. Much of the material for this early history was taken from Soldier of Democracy and other

popular biographies which are based largely on Eisenhower family tradition and which later historians have shown to be incorrect in part.

This series of the Endacott Papers contains rough drafts and duplicate copies of documents which Endacott collected while working on the histories. Endacott took the material with him when he retired and retained it until his death in 1982. His step-daughter inherited the collection and donated it to the Eisenhower Library several years later. The final typed copies of the histories, which Endacott turned over to the Library when the work was completed, are in the J. Earl Endacott Records.

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