

A Guide to the James C. Turk Papers, 1972-2014

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A Collection in Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Archives 019
Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Archives, Washington and Lee University
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History

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Descriptive Summary

Accession number

017

Language

English

Creator

James C. Turk.

Extent

33 cubic feet.

Storage Location

Powell Archives stacks

Repository

Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Archives, School of Law, Washington and Lee University

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Gift of James C. Turk, Jr.

Preferred Citation

James C. Turk, Ms 019, Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Archives, Washington and Lee University School of Law, Lexington, VA

Biographical Information

James Clinton Turk was born on his parents' farm in Roanoke County on May 3, 1923. He was educated at William Byrd High School, Vinton, Virginia; Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia; and Washington and Lee University School of Law, Lexington, Virginia where he was a member of the class of 1952. Between college and law school, Turk served in the U.S. Army in World War II. Wed to the former Barbara Louise Duncan in 1954, they went on to have five children. He was active in many community and educational organizations as a board member or trustee.

He practiced law at the Radford firm of Dalton, Poff & Turk. In 1959, Turk was elected to the Virginia Senate where he served as minority leader from 1965-1972. President Richard M. Nixon appointed Turk to a federal judgeship in the Western District of Virginia in 1972. From 1973-1993, he acted as Chief Judge of the Western District. During these years, he presided over several high profile cases including the 1981 libel case that the Rev. Jerry Falwell brought against Hustler magazine publisher Larry Flynt. Though he took senior status in 2002, he served the court until his death on July 6, 2014 at his home in Claytor Lake, Virginia.

Scope and Content

The James C. Turk papers deal almost exclusively with his service as judge on the Western District of Virginia Federal Court from 1972-2014. Nothing from his childhood, education, war service or legislative career are documented here. Of the many civic and educational boards on which he served, only his relationship with Washington and Lee University is treated in these papers.

The correspondence series comprises letters from several sources: folders marked "personal correspondence," "general correspondence," and a group of letter boxes. Examining the contents of these files showed great overlap in their contents and, thus, they are to make up a single series. Likewise the subject files series seemed to have been kept in a variety of places, but creating a single series seemed to make most sense. Though speeches, photos, and clippings are each assigned separate series, there is just one folder in each category.

The 15 cubic feet of opinions and orders makes up almost half of the collection. It is unclear at this point as to their research value. Many are unreported, not found in the commercial electronic legal databases, and not shown to be available yet from the National Archives.

Surely the most distinctive series is Judge Turk's correspondence with convicts. Turk was known for his empathy with defendants and his aversion to excessively harsh sentences. That he once sentenced a man to prison and presided at his wedding on the same day - Valentine's Day, at that - suggests the complex connections he made with those appearing before him. These connections are evident throughout this correspondence.

These papers are open to the general public but, as has been suggested above, much more refined processing will be needed to make the information contained here easily accessible. The position in the processing cue assigned this collection may depend upon the number of researchers seeking to use it.

These papers have been processed to the level of series only.

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Box 7

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Carton 9

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7: Subject Files re Court Administration 1984-2014

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Scope and Content

Subjects include: Arbitration Barker v. U.S.; Blakely v. Washington; Big Stone Gap Courthouse; Bureau of Prisons; Cameras in Courtroom; Chief Judges; Civil Cases; Counties - Louisa, Culpeper and Orange; Court Reporters; Crack Cocaine; Death Row Cases; Depositories - Bank; Design Guide - U.S. Courts; Designation of Judges; Ethics - Lawyers; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Evidence; Falwell v. Penthouse International; Federal Judiciary Reports; Female Intensive Confinement Facility; Fourth Circuit Materials; General Services Administration; Government Property (non-consumable); Gramm, Rudman, Hollings (furloughs;) Habeas Corpus; Long Range Planning; Magistrates; Naturalization and Immigration; New Judges; Personnel Requirements; Pre-sentencing Reports; Pre-trial Reports; Pro Se Law Clerks; Pro Se Prisoners; Probation Officers; Public Defenders System; Rules of Civil Procedure; Rules of Court; Rules of Criminal Procedure; Rules - Local; Senior Judges; Sentencing Guidelines; Sequestration; Six Month Pending Motions Statistics; Space - Bankruptcy Court; Space - Poff Federal Building; Suits Against Judges; Supreme Court Materials; Time Study Cases; United States Attorneys; United States Marshals; Workshops & Programs - Judges.

8: Opinions (reported and unreported) and Orders 1968-2011

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Scope and Content

The cases are arranged by the Virginia city in which they were adjudicated. The cities are: Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Charlottesville, Danville, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg and Roanoke.