



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

A Finding Aid to the John Pye papers,  
circa 1911-1979, in the Anacostia  
Community Museum Archives

Sony Prosper, 2011. Revised by Katie Seitz, March 2016

2016



Anacostia Community Museum Archives  
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<http://www.anacostia.si.edu/Collections/ArchiveCollection>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Names and Subjects .....	3
Container Listing .....	4
Series 1: Biographical, 1925-1979, undated.....	4
Series 2: Correspondence, 1911 - 1966, undated.....	5
Series 3: Career, 1944 - 1952, undated.....	6
Series 4: Miscellaneous, 1938 - 1947, undated.....	7
Series 5: Photographs, circa 1920-circa 1965, undated.....	8

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Anacostia Community Museum Archives
<b>Title:</b>	John Pye papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	ACMA.06-024
<b>Date:</b>	1911-1979
<b>Extent:</b>	1.54 Linear feet (3 boxes)
<b>Creator:</b>	Pye, John
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The John Pye papers, dating from 1911 to 1979 and measuring .73 linear feet, document the career of White House chauffeur and butler John Pye. The collection is composed of correspondence, clippings, invitations, photographs, and a book.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The John Pye papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 2003 by Ethel L. Pye.

### Processing Information

The papers were processed by Sony Prosper in 2011. Additional processing and description were completed by Katie Seitz in March 2016.

### Preferred Citation

John Pye papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Ethel L. Pye.

### Restrictions

The John Pye papers are the physical property of the Anacostia Community Museum. Literary and copyright belong to the author/creator or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, and to obtain permission to publish or reproduce, contact the Museum Archives.

### Conditions Governing Use

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: [ACMarchives@si.edu](mailto:ACMarchives@si.edu).

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## Biographical / Historical

John Pye, 1888- , moved from Newburg, Maryland, to Washington, DC, in 1900. His first documented employment was with the Elks Club. In 1916 he became a chauffeur for Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, and in 1920, he worked for the Post Office. He occasionally acted as a chauffeur for Franklin D. Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In 1933, upon Roosevelt's ascent to the presidency, Pye was brought on as a White House employee. Pye worked as a valet, messenger, chauffeur, butler, and occasional cook in the White House from 1913 to 1952. After his retirement, he continued to supervise select events at the White House and other elite DC-area institutions.

Pye lived in Northeast DC during his career. In later life he moved to Gainesville, Virginia, with his wife Thelma.

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## Scope and Contents

The John Pye papers, which date from 1911 to 1979, document the personal and professional life of John Pye. The collection contains material related to his employment at the Elks Club in Washington, D.C., as the chauffeur for the Secretary of the Navy, at the United States Post Office, and as a valet, messenger, chauffeur, and butler in the the White House from 1913-1952. Very notable are correspondence and event invitations from the Truman and Roosevelt administrations. The papers include letters, certificates, newspaper clippings, invitations, photographic prints, photographs, and a book on President Harry S. Truman by his daughter Margaret Truman.

The collection is organized into four series: Series 1: Biographical, Series 2: Correspondence, Series 3: Career, Series 4: Miscellaneous, and Series 5: Photographs.

Series 1: Biographical, 1925-1979, undated, consists of newspaper clippings and writings detailing the personal and professional life of John Pye.

Series 2: Correspondence, 1911-1966, undated, consists of letters of recommendation for Pye, invitations, and other correspondence from his employment at the White House.

Series 3: Career, 1944-1952, undated, consists of lists of White House Luncheon attendees, a certificate recognizing Pye's WWII civilian service, and a signed broadsheet commemorating his retirement from the White House.

Series 4: Miscellaneous, 1938-1947, consists of news transcripts and clippings. Some discuss the advancement of African Americans into formerly white-dominated professions.

Series 5: Photographs, circa 1920-circa 1965, undated, consists of photographs from John Pye's work and private life. Some photographs are inscribed portrait photos of Pye's employers, including Presidents Harding, Roosevelt, and Truman.

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## Arrangement

The John Pye papers are arranged by material type. Series 1 through 4 are housed in Box 1 and contain correspondence, clippings, and a book. Boxes 2 and 3 contain photographs. Box 2 contains loose photographs and Box 3 contains framed and oversized photographs.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

African American men  
African Americans -- Employment  
African Americans -- Washington (D.C.)  
Politicians -- United States

Types of Materials:

Books  
Clippings  
Correspondence  
Invitations  
Photographic prints  
Photographs

Names:

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923  
Pye, John  
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962  
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945  
Truman, Bess Wallace  
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972  
Wilbur, Curtis Dwight, 1867-1954

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical, 1925-1979, undated

*0.07 Linear feet (2 folders)*

Series 1: Biographical, 1911-1979, undated, measures 0.125 linear feet and is composed of newspaper clippings detailing the personal and professional life of John Pye and an account of John Pye's character by his niece, Elsie Pye McAfee, and his great grand-niece, Pamela Nelson.

Box 1, Folder 1                  Newspaper Clippings, 1925 - 1979

Box 1, Folder 2                  An Account of John Pye's Character, undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 2: Correspondence, 1911 - 1966, undated

*0.1 Linear feet (2 folders)*

Series 2: Correspondence, 1911-1966, undated, measures 0.12 linear feet and contains correspondence and invitations. Folder 3 contains letters of recommendation on Pye's behalf written to the Secretary of the Navy, the Post Office, and the White House. Folder 4 consists of invitations and letters collected by Pye during his employment at the White House, including an invitation to Harry S. Truman's presidential inauguration.

Box 1, Folder 3            General Employment, 1911 - 1966, undated

Box 1, Folder 4            Employment at the White House, 1942 - 1952, undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 3: Career, 1944 - 1952, undated

*0.23 Linear feet (1 folder, 1 book)*

Series 3: Career, 1944-1952, undated, measures 0.23 linear feet and is comprised of documents, certificates, and a broadsheet. Folder 5 contains a list of attendees for the White House Luncheon Club for 1946, 1947, and 1948, a certificate of recognition for Pye's civilian defense service in DC during WWII, and a signed broadsheet received upon his retirement from the White House in 1952. This series also contains *Harry S. Truman*, a book about President Truman written by his daughter Margaret Truman, in which she recounts memories of Pye during her father's presidency.

Box 1, Folder 5            White House, 1944 - 1952

Box 1                      *Harry S. Truman* by Margaret Truman, 1973

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



## Series 4: Miscellaneous, 1938 - 1947, undated

*0.01 Linear feet (1 folder)*

Series 4: Miscellaneous, 1938-1947, measures 0.083 linear feet and is composed of promotional materials and clippings related to political news and events. Items include a newspaper article documenting the D.C. medical society's vote to accept black members and a print copy of a broadcast by Martin Agronsky from January 21, 1947, on the problem of black federal employees in wartime government agencies.

Box 1, Folder 6

Miscellaneous, 1938 - 1947, undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 5: Photographs, circa 1920-circa 1965, undated

### 1.1 Linear feet (2 boxes, OV. Box 3)

Series 5: Photographs, circa 1916-circa 1965, undated, measures 1.10 linear feet and consists of loose and framed photographic prints. This series is housed in Boxes 2 and 3, of which Box 3 contains oversized and framed items. This series contains four subseries: Subseries 1: Professional life; Subseries 2: Portraits; Subseries 3: Personal life; and Subseries 4: Events.

Subseries 1 contains images of John Pye in work settings, alone, with colleagues, and with employers. One notable photograph in Subseries 1 shows John Pye buying the first war bond from President Roosevelt during a publicity presale in April 1943. Subseries 2 contains portrait photographs, mostly of Pye's employers and inscribed to Pye. Subjects include Presidents Truman and Roosevelt. Subseries 3 contains images relating to his personal life. Subseries 4 contains two candid images of President Truman taken during events.

### 1: Professional life, circa 1920-circa 1950

Box 2, Folder 1	Professional life, circa 1920-circa 1950
Box 3	John Pye with Secretary of the Navy Wilbur and President Harding
Box 3	John Pye buying first war bond from President Roosevelt, 1943

### 2: Portraits, circa 1920-circa 1950

Box 2, Folder 2	Portraits, circa 1920-circa 1950
Box 3	Photograph of President Truman inscribed to John Pye, circa 1950

### 3: Personal life, circa 1920-circa 1965

*Box 2, Folder 3*

### 4: Events, circa 1950

*Box 2, Folder 4*

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*