

RULING IS TERMED AID TO HISTORIANS

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But Little Impact Is Expected

on Previous Records

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 —

Judge Charles R. Richey's ruling today that the Government owns the papers and documents of former Presidents is likely to have little impact on access to the records of Richard M. Nixon's predecessors. However, the ruling is likely to be important to historians in the future, according to scholars and government experts.

Virtually all the records of the dead former Presidents are already under Government control, according to Daniel J. Reed, the assistant archivist of the United States, who is in charge of Presidential libraries.

But many important papers were not available during these men's lives, and similar restrictions most likely would have been set by Presidents in the future.

Shortly after leaving the Presidency, William Howard Taft began to gather the records of his Administration.

"I do not think that I ought to burden the White House with these things," he stated, "and, therefore, want them sent to me."

Deemed Own Property

Recent Presidents have donated their papers to libraries operated by the Government, but they retained ownership and often asserted restrictions on the access to the papers.

As a practical matter, according to Daniel J. Reed, the assistant archivist of the United States, who is in charge of Presidential libraries, today's ruling by Judge Charles R. Richey will have little impact on access to the papers of past Presidents.

From Hoover On

The Presidents from Hoover through Johnson turned over their papers and documents to Government-operated libraries. All the documents that were not given to the Government during their lives were willed to the Government after their deaths.

Virtually all of the Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt papers are open to public inspection, with only a few documents of the Roosevelt Administration concerning war secrets still embargoed.

Mr. Reed estimated that access to 10 to 20 per cent of the papers of President Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson was still controlled. For the most part, he said, that is because of national security classifications. A team of archivists is at work on these papers, constantly making more and more of them open to inspection, he said.

While these Presidents lived, however, access to the documents was much more difficult.

In 1962, Mr. Kennedy had to send an envoy to the Eisenhower farm at Gettysburg, Pa., to obtain records of a conversation between General Eisenhower and Harold Macmillan, whose tenure as Prime Minister of Britain overlapped the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations. If President Eisenhower had refused to cooperate, the Kennedy Administration would not have been able to review important diplomatic documents.

Truman Refused Access

Mr. Truman, until his death nearly 20 years after leaving the White House, kept some of his most important records in file cabinets in his office in a wing of the Truman Library at Independence, Mo.

He refused access to those papers not only to independent scholars but also to the chief State Department historian who wanted to check the completeness of department publications of diplomatic documents against Mr. Truman's records.

The Presidential libraries are operated, under a 1955 law, by the National Archives and Records Service. The agency is authorized to accept and care for in perpetuity the papers of any President, former President or other official of the United States at public expense. The libraries must be built at private expense and then donated to the Government.