



New York State Archives

**New York State Governor Herbert H. Lehman Central Subject
and Correspondence Files 13682_53**

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	Herbert H. Lehman served as governor during the bulk of the Great Depression. His leadership and advocacy led to the state's adoption of the "Little New Deal," a series of state relief and reform programs. His central subject and correspondence files pertain to the establishment of unemployment insurance; state and federal social security legislation; slum clearance and the establishment of public housing; welfare assistance to communities; limiting of child labor; minimum wage legislation; crime prevention; and legal and constitutional reform.
Creator:	New York (State). Governor (1933-1942 : Lehman)
Title:	Governor Herbert H. Lehman central subject and correspondence files
Quantity:	107.1 cubic feet
Quantity:	106 16mm microfilm roll(s)
Inclusive Date:	1933-1942
Series:	13682_53

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Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically by subject. A single set of files was maintained throughout Governor Lehman's time in office. Dates are noted in folder list only in cases where files pertain to specific events or files are known to cover a limited date range.

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Administrative History

Herbert Henry Lehman was born in New York City on March 28, 1878. He married Edith Altschul in 1910 and together the couple adopted three children. A successful businessman and philanthropist, Lehman first entered government service as an officer during the First World War, rising from the rank of captain to colonel while serving with the General Staff Corps in

Washington, D.C. Governor Alfred E. Smith appointed Lehman to a number of Democratic Party and election campaign posts during the 1920s. With Smith's continued support, Lehman was selected as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's running mate in the 1928 gubernatorial election. Serving two terms as Roosevelt's lieutenant governor, Lehman developed policies aimed at combating the widespread unemployment and failures of banking institutions that accompanied the onset of the Great Depression.

When Governor Roosevelt sought and received the Democratic nomination for president in 1932, Lehman was nominated to run for governor. Elected by an overwhelming margin in his initial effort, he was subsequently reelected in 1934, 1936, and 1938. Following his 1938 victory, Lehman commenced the first four-year gubernatorial term mandated by a recent amendment to the state's constitution. In December 1942, he resigned the governorship upon President Roosevelt's request that he immediately assume the directorship of the newly created Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations.

Upon the organization's inception in November 1943, Lehman was elected first director general of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, a position he held until March 1946. He returned to politics later that year and was defeated in his initial bid for election to the United States Senate. However, Lehman triumphed in a special election called in 1949 to fill a seat vacated by the resignation of Senator Robert F. Wagner. In what would be his final bid for public office, Lehman was elected to a full senatorial term in 1950. In 1957, he returned to private life but continued to work for reform within the Democratic Party in New York City. Herbert Lehman died on December 5, 1963 at the age of eighty-five.

As governor during the bulk of the Depression years, Lehman's leadership and advocacy were instrumental factors in the state's adoption of the "Little New Deal," a series of state relief and reform programs that closely resembled the federal New Deal. Lehman supported state legislation that expanded relief for the unemployed and extended social security benefits to the elderly, physically disabled, and fatherless families. He worked effectively for the establishment of public housing, a minimum wage system, tighter controls on child labor, collective bargaining rights for workers, and government-fixed milk prices to increase the standard of living of the state's farmers. While often modeled after and paralleling its federal counterpart, New York's "Little New Deal" actually extended benefits to communities and individuals excluded from or inadequately represented by federal programs. Lehman, more than any of his predecessors in the governor's office, actively supported state intervention to assure a minimum standard of living for citizens unable to provide for themselves.

For further information concerning the life and political career of Herbert Lehman, see Ingalls, Robert P. *Herbert H. Lehman and New York's Little New Deal*. New York: New York University Press, 1975; and Ingalls, Robert P. "Lehman, Herbert Henry." In *American National Biography*, vol. 13, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 435-437. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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Scope and Content Note

The central subject and correspondence files of Herbert Lehman document the governor's effort to respond to social and economic conditions brought about or exacerbated by the Great Depression. Significant topics include establishment of unemployment insurance; state and federal social security legislation; slum clearance and the establishment of public housing to provide homes for low income families; welfare assistance to communities provided through the state's Temporary Emergency Relief Administration; mortgage industry crisis, the state's Mortgage Moratorium Act, and the operations of the Mortgage Commission of the State of New York; and income, production, and pricing issues associated with the state's milk industry. The records also document interaction and cooperation with federal agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, Civil Works Administration, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, National Recovery Administration, National Youth Administration, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Public Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration.

Topics specifically related to labor include state administration of workmen's compensation; the federal child labor amendment and state efforts to limit child labor; 1933 and 1937 state minimum wage laws; racial discrimination in state employment and employment at the 1939-1940 World's Fair; labor-management relations and collective bargaining; and specific strikes in the steel, milk, clothing manufacturing, and other industries.

The central subject and correspondence files of Herbert Lehman document a number of additional topics of social and political importance during the 1930s and early 1940s: Prohibition and the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment; "Crime, the Criminal and Society" conference (1935) and legislation aimed at crime prevention, prison reform, and improvements in various aspects of the criminal justice system; Law Revision Commission investigations and proposed statutory revisions; compliance with the federal Alien Registration Act of 1940; investigations of illegal gambling operations; special prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey's investigation of organized crime; illegal dog racing; flood control and state response to floods; 1938 Constitutional Convention and proposed amendments regarding home rule, judicial review, proportional representation, health insurance, workmen's compensation, and jury verdicts in civil cases; and the McNaboe-Devaney bill proposing disqualification of communists from public employment and from holding public office.

A significant portion of the records document the investigative powers of the governor. Multiple files document the governor's statutory authority to investigate or direct the investigation of charges against local government officials, including county district attorneys and sheriffs. Noteworthy among these records are charges of illegality and inefficiency in real estate assessment practices directed against New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Additional records relate to examinations and investigations of the management and affairs of various state departments, offices, commissions, and institutions, ordered by Governor Lehman under provisions of the Moreland Act. Specific examples include the Moreland Act Commission on the Quasi-Judicial Action of Administrative Agencies and the Commissioner Appointed to Examine and Investigate the Management and Affairs of the Insurance Department with Reference to the Operation, Conduct and Management of Title and Mortgage Guarantee Corporations Under

its supervision. Related records document the investigation and discharge, by order of the governor, of Colonel John G. Grimley, commanding officer of the 369th Infantry, New York National Guard.

The files themselves consist predominantly of original letters and telegrams from public officials and private citizens and organizations; unsigned copies of replies or memoranda from the governor forwarding correspondence to state or local government officials for action; and copies of state and local government officials' replies to the governor and/or the original correspondents. Cross reference sheets are present throughout the files, most often indicating that correspondence was filed by subject rather than correspondent. Other types of records include governor's cabinet meeting materials; public hearing minutes; drafts of letters by state agency heads for the governor's signature; press releases; annual and special reports of state agencies; draft copies of constitutional amendments, legislation, and resolutions; budget reports and summaries; gubernatorial messages, speeches, and proclamations; newspaper clippings; publications; and background materials. Moreland Act investigation files include public and private hearing transcripts, exhibits, correspondence, press releases, and final reports. Certain files documenting investigations of charges against local government officials include copies of hearing transcripts, exhibits, legal orders, and grand jury reports.

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

Access to certain records documenting Moreland Act investigations is restricted. Records are subject to review by State Archives staff prior to disclosure.

Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

This series has been microfilmed on 106 rolls and is available for use onsite or through interlibrary loan.

Alternate Formats Available

Items Online

High resolution images of selected original documents in this series are available in State Archives Digital Collections.

[New York State Governor Herbert H. Lehman central subject and correspondence files, 1933-1942](#)

Access Terms

- Governors--New York (State)
- Governors
- Depressions--1929--New York (State)
- Social Security
- Correspondence
- Industrial relations
- New York (State)--Politics and government
- Housing
- New York (State). Executive Department