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August 2004: Volume 23, Number 2

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Ohio (18 Districts)

Politics in Northwest Ohio

Ohio has eighteen Congressional Districts. In accordance with the United States Constitution, the districts must represent approximately equal populations and are reviewed against new census figures each ten years. This and other maps are available from the [U. S. Department of the Interior](#).

Ohio holds a key place in this year's presidential election, just as it has in elections past. Perhaps the reason that the state is crucial to a party's national success, is that politics within the state have always reflected national concerns. Northwest Ohio in particular highlights the contrasts between regions considered more rural or conservative and those which are more urban or liberal. Earlier issues of the *Archival Chronicle* have dealt with grassroots politics (August 1994) and with women in politics (August 2000). Still other manuscript collections available to researchers at the Center for Archival Collections deal with northwest Ohio politics as they relate to the national scene.

1803-1865 Western State

The years from statehood through the end of the Civil War were a time for Ohio to consolidate and organize. Although the state had been admitted to the union in 1803, the northwest section was the last to be settled and was still very much a frontier region. People were mostly concerned with establishing farmsteads and an economic base for the future. When politics was discussed in [family](#) correspondence, it revolved around the questions of national unity that led up to the [Civil War](#). Ohioans were part of the national discussion and reflected the full spectrum of political beliefs.

Newspapers are a particularly good source for documenting political activity. Each community often had a Democratic newspaper, a Whig (or later, Republican) newspaper, and sometimes an independent newspaper. To get a "balanced" view, readers would have to compare the publications, which often commented on what appeared in their rival's pages. With limited distribution and no national broadcast media for competition, each community newspaper published speeches by state and national leaders, the text of legislation, and political editorials. Our [Guide to Newspapers at the CAC](#) lists the newspapers available to researchers.

1865-1900 Prosperity and Panic

With the close of the Civil War, Ohio took a very prominent place in national politics. Except for Chester Arthur and Grover Cleveland, all the nation's presidents were [Ohio natives](#) * and all but Cleveland were Republicans. This era saw the national economy shift from agriculture to a business/industrial base. However, the transition was a rocky one, and periods of prosperity alternated with serious financial panics. Again, newspapers are an important source for information on local attitudes toward national issues.

The [Joseph Brigham Papers \(MS 755\)](#) illustrate the rise of a typical Ohio public servant. The son of early settlers, Brigham served during the Civil War, and returned home to farm, becoming active in the Grange movement. He was soon elected sheriff of Fulton County and went on to serve in the state senate. Brigham rose to become the National Master of the Grange and was appointed Assistant Secretary of Agriculture by President McKinley. The manuscript collection available to researchers at the Center for Archival Collections documents all these varied activities.

1900-1930 Progressive Era and Economic Boom

Corruption in business and in political patronage led to a nation-wide demand for reform. More direct voter participation, greater accountability by public officials, and regulation of business practices were among the changes enacted in the early years of the century. [Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones \(MS 204\)](#) was the mayor of Toledo who best typified this reform movement. His employment practices for both his private business and for municipal employees included the eight-hour day and paid vacations.

[Frank Thomas \(MS 653\)](#) of Bowling Green became interested in politics while working in the pressroom at the *Wood County Democrat*. First elected to city council in 1899, in 1910 he became the first Democrat in over fifty years to be elected to represent his district in the state legislature. Long a supporter of labor and a previous officer of the Ohio Federation of Labor, while in the Ohio Senate he co-sponsored the bill creating the Industrial Commission of Ohio which provided assistance to families of those injured or killed in the work place.

Charles Nauts (MS 609) was a product of Ohio's late nineteenth-century Republican Party. Working as a sewer contractor, he became increasingly involved in Toledo and Lucas County party politics. This collection includes letters on political issues as well as those regarding Nauts' political career and activities. He worked successfully to be appointed Tax Collector of northwest Ohio by President Harding, a position he held until his death in 1930. There are also letters from Senator Mark Hanna and President Herbert Hoover thanking him for his support.

1930-1960 Depression, War, Recovery

With the 1932 election, Democrats regained power nationally, thanks in large part to the advent of the Great Depression in 1929. **Frazier Reams (MS 55)** served as a Democratic Congressman from Ohio's 9th District from 1951-1954, but he had been active in national politics since the late 1920s. His collection mainly documents his years of public service as Prosecuting Attorney for Lucas County, Public Welfare Director, and Congressman. However, it would be a mistake to think that President Roosevelt's economic measures were unopposed. Included in the **Fred Adams Collection (MS 503)** are anti-New Deal flyers and much Republican campaign material from this critical period. Adams was a long-time (1936-1952) state senator, serving actively on the Post-War Planning Commission.

On the socialist end of the political spectrum are the papers of **Karl Pauli (MS 475)**, an outspoken freethinker, labor activist, and advocate of atheism. In addition to his correspondence, the collection includes his writings on topics ranging from taxation to collective bargaining. In contrast, the letters to the editor in the **Noah Prowant Collection (MS 522)** provide a glimpse of the views of a typical conservative voter during World War II.

1960-2000 Social and Political Ferment



Women and minorities took their place firmly in the political scene. The **Ella P. Stewart Collection (MS 203)** spans over 60 years of the life of a Toledo African-American businesswoman (pictured at right) and the part she played in support of civil and women's rights. Her influence extended far beyond northwest Ohio, as she served as a delegate to the International Conference of Women of the World and as an officer of the Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association, and was a UNESCO Commissioner.

Irma Hotchkiss Karmol, succeeded by her son **David Karmol (MS 200 and MS 207)**, respectively, represented the 44th District of northwest Ohio in the State Assembly from 1974-1982. The bulk of their correspondence is with their constituents and covers such timely topics as child abuse, health care, and energy conservation.

The two largest political collections held by the CAC represent the two northwest Ohio Congressional districts during much of the second half of the twentieth century. The constituent files particularly highlight the nation's political concerns during this turbulent time.



The Congressional Papers of Thomas Ludlow Ashley (MS 159), Democratic Congressman from the Ohio Ninth District from 1955-1980 (pictured at left), consists of over 215 linear feet of correspondence, subject and committee files, clippings, and press releases covering Ashley's political career, including the period of the Vietnamese Conflict and Watergate. During his long career he served on the House Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee, the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, and the House Budget Committee. In addition, Congressman Ashley also served as Assistant Majority Whip.

The Congressional Papers of Delbert Leroy Latta (MS 546), Republican Congressman from the Ohio Fifth District from 1958-1989 (pictured at right), consists of over 255 linear feet of correspondence, subject and committee files, clippings, press releases, and publications covering Latta's political career, including the period of the Vietnamese Conflict and Watergate. Among his committee appointments were the

House Rules Committee and the Budget Committee. The letters from his constituents offer a rare insight into how the public generally felt about matters which affected them directly, such as agriculture, concerns about aging (Social Security), and wider national issues such as the Vietnam War, foreign policy matters (immigration, the Iranian hostage situation, OPEC), abortion, and prayer in schools.

Northwest Ohio represents a cross-section of American political opinion through the years. Although often considered comparatively rural and conservative in outlook, voters here have also reflected national trends in reform and party choice. The collections highlighted here are just a few of the many which deal with politics. Researchers are invited to review our complete list of holdings in our [Political Bibliography](#).



--Lee N. McLaird

* Ohio's Presidents

Ulysses S. Grant (1868-1876)
Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1880)
James A. Garfield (1881)
Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)
William McKinley (1896-1901)
William Howard Taft (1909-1913)
Warren G. Harding (1921-1923)[\[Back to *\]](#)