



**Special Collections and University Archives**

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**Manuscript Group 72  
Governor John S. Fisher Collection**

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Last Modified June 19, 2018**

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**Governor John S. Fisher Collection, Manuscript Group 72**  
**Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Special Collection and Archives**  
**2 boxes, 2 linear feet**

**Biographical Note**

John Stuchell Fisher (May 25, 1867-June 25, 1940) was the [29<sup>th</sup> Governor of Pennsylvania](#) (January 18, 1927-January 20, 1931). He was born near Plumville in South Mahoning Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania. His parents were Civil War veteran Samuel Royer Fisher (February 15, 1832-January 14, 1911) and Mariah McGaughey Fisher. John Fisher went to Indiana public schools and graduated from Indiana High School in 1884. He graduated from Indiana State Normal School (ISNS) on July 15, 1886 with a Normal School Teacher's Certificate – Bachelor of Elements diploma. At the age of 19 began his teaching career near his family's home at the Ox Hill School. During this time, Fisher continued his studies at ISNS, and he earned a second diploma – Master in the Elements on July 5, 1888.



Fisher taught school in Plumville and Indiana for seven years before becoming principal of Indiana public schools in 1891. While teaching in Plumville, he met a fellow teacher named Karen Happuch "Hapsie" Miller (April 14, 1868-January 14, 1922). They were married at the First United Presbyterian Church in Indiana on October 11, 1893. The Fishers had four children; their son Robert Miller Fisher (September 5, 1894-January 21, 1968) was married to Gladys Fern Washburn Fisher (May 16, 1900-November 28, 1992). While teaching, Fisher began to study law with former congressman and attorney Alexander W. Taylor. In August 1893, John Fisher was admitted to the Bar of Indiana County, and he practiced law with his own firm Cunningham and Fisher. Fisher entered the political arena as the Indiana County Republican Chairman in 1897. He was elected to the Pennsylvania State Senate in 1900, where he served for eight years until 1909. Fisher would serve on the state's Commission on Constitutional Revision.

As a founder and lifetime board member of Indiana Savings and Trust Company, John Fisher was pivotal in assisting New York Central Railroad in the purchase of coal lands in Indiana and surrounding counties. Fisher helped found the town of Clymer as a community for miners and, as president of the Dixon Run Land Company; lots were sold to the Pennsylvania Coal and Coke Corporation. Fisher and associates also started the Clymer Brick and Fire Clay Company, a supplier for many of the buildings in Clymer and Commodore, but later selling the brick works. By 1911, Fisher was president or director of Indiana Savings, the brick company, and the land company, as well as an electric company, the Pennsylvania Good Roads Association, vice president of Indiana

Hospital, general counsel for New York Central Railroad, and vice president of the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Corporation (CBC). By 1919, he added to his credit presidencies of Beech Creek and Beech Creek Extension Railroads, subsidiaries of the New York Central, and director of Juniata Public Service [electric] Company. His business, law, and political experiences led Governor William Sproul to appoint Fisher as the state's banking commissioner in 1919 and to a commission that studied possible revisions to the state constitution.

From 1919 to 1922, Fisher served in the cabinet of Governor William Cameron Sproul as State Commissioner of Banking. Fisher considered running for governor in 1922, but withdrew from the race and campaigned for Gifford Pinchot, a support that surprised Governor Sproul and Republican Party bosses who were backing George E. Alter. Four years later, Fisher gained key support from the influential Joe Grundy, a Bucks County millionaire. Grundy disliked the powerful Philadelphia politician William S. Vare who was pushing Edward Beidleman, the lieutenant governor. Former governor John K. Tener and Thomas W. Philips, a wealthy Butler County oilman, competed in the Republican primary. Fisher was widely popular because of his publicized fight against the Capitol Building graft, endorsements by churches for his moral and pro-Sunday Blue Laws stand, support from farmers because of his farm boy background, his fight for child labor legislation while Senator, a pledge to sever his business and trusteeship connections (a promise he kept), and his campaign speeches supporting strong workmen's compensation and better working conditions. Voters were not persuaded by party bosses who tried to paint Fisher as a wealthy, anti-labor businessman. Fisher carried fifty-seven counties and a controversial victory. Beidleman had led in the vote count due to strong support in the Philadelphia region until votes were counted in Allegheny County. Vare's organization charged that there was vote fraud, but a Pittsburgh judge ruled against them and Fisher was declared the winner 641,934 votes to Beidleman's 626,640. The Republican primary proved to be the real political battle that year because Fisher crushed his Democratic opponent, Philadelphia Judge Eugene C. Bonniwell, in November by an unprecedented three to one margin and became the first governor in state history to receive more than one million votes.

Fisher went onto win the governor's seat in the 1926 election. He served as Pennsylvania's 29<sup>th</sup> Governor from January 18, 1927-January 20, 1931. Once Fisher was in office, there was a call to end primaries and return to the old convention system. They reasoned that forces like Vare's organization, political enemies of Fisher and Governor Pinchot, would have been defeated in a convention setting. However, as senator, Fisher had been a sponsor of legislation creating the state primary and he instead opted to push for election reforms to reduce the chances of ballot fraud. Fisher also battled Vare's sister-in-law, state Representative Flora M. Vare, when he defeated her proposal for a constitutional amendment giving everyone over age 65 a dollar per day pension. Fisher projected the annual cost of such a pension \$36.5 million, which he said would have to be taken away from education.

While Fisher was not regarded as a skilled politician, he was admired as a good governor. Governor Fisher concentrated on a sound fiscal policy and public works construction, which earned him the nickname as "the Builder." New legislation authorized the

governor to create the state Department of Revenue; form a Securities Commission under the Department of Banking; strip financial powers from the Department of State and Finance and change the name to Department of State; create the State Farm Products Show Commission to conduct the annual Farm Show; and reorganize the Department of Internal Affairs. With less waste in the use of tax dollars, Fisher was able to direct revenues to improve the state's normal schools; build 4,000 miles of new roads; build a new hospital for the mentally ill; add 450,000 acres to the state forest lands; acquire the Indiantown Gap military reservation; adopt the use of voting machines; enlarge the scope of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission; and build the State Farm Show Building and the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Bridge in Harrisburg. Fisher also instituted reforms in worker's compensation and floated a \$59 million dollar bond to build welfare institutions.

There was a major labor strike in the soft coal regions between April 1927 and July 1928, but eighty-seven coal companies were convinced to stop using the generally hated Coal and Iron Police who enforced company interests, often brutally. Fisher signed legislation limiting their power, but after his term, he regretted not abolishing their authority. Fisher also attempted to restore unity in the Republican Party, but some members of the U.S. Senate launched a political attack upon the governor, stirring national attention. Fisher amended Governor Pinchot's scathing certificate of election in 1926 in which Pinchot said that Vare's election was "partly bought and partly stolen." This led to a Senate investigation and denial of a senate seat to William Vare. Fisher wanted Vare to be seated, but instead, this prompted a vicious attack on Fisher led by Senator Gerald Nye of South Dakota in which Fisher was also accused of buying his election. A barrage of verbal attacks was renewed in 1929 against Fisher when he appointed Joseph Grundy to fill the vacant senate seat caused by the Vare denial. Senator Nye vowed to block the Grundy appointment even though Grundy had bi-partisan support in Pennsylvania. Fisher angrily referred to some senators as "degenerates" and both Grundy and Fisher denounced senators who opposed Grundy as "narrow visioned." The Senate backed down and voted to seat Grundy with no dissenting votes. However, Grundy lost the next election and Fisher grew less supportive of Grundy.

Fisher left office at the highest point in his popularity and before the Great Depression fully impacted Pennsylvania. His term as governor focused on fiscal responsibility, public works, and conservation. Under his administration, Governor Fisher was responsible for the Department of Internal Affairs to build 4,000 miles of new roads and add 450,000 acres to the State Forestry Reserve. His conservation efforts led to the establishment of Cook Forest State Park.

Fisher was active in business and civic affairs in Indiana, Pennsylvania, for many years. In 1902, he was named to the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, Indiana State Normal School (later Indiana State Teachers College). After leaving office, former Governor Fisher resumed the practice of law and served on the boards of several financial establishments. He was a consultant to his son Robert's law firm. Fisher was also president of the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution, chairman of a fire insurance company in Pittsburgh. Fisher served as President of the Board of the Indiana Hospital, and he organized the Savings & Trust of Indiana, Pennsylvania. He was also a board member of Pennsylvania State College (Penn State University). John S. Fisher died

in Pittsburgh on June 25, 1940, and he is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Indiana, Pennsylvania. At the Convocation of Indiana State Teachers College (formerly Indiana State Normal School), the John S. Fisher Auditorium was named in memory of alumni and former governor John Fisher on April 7, 1949.

### **Scope and Content**

The Governor John S. Fisher papers are housed in three archival boxes. These papers include miscellaneous publications from Governor Fisher's term in office from 1927 to 1931, as well as some bound publications and photograph albums from his teaching and political career. The materials in the collection date from 1917 to 1936. Governor Fisher's Indiana State Normal School (ISNS) diplomas from 1886 and 1888 are in [Record Group 87](#).

### **Provenance**

This collection was donated to the IUP Special Collections and University Archives by Governor John S. Fisher's daughter-in-law Gladys Fern Washburn Fisher (May 16, 1900-November 28, 1992).

### **Restrictions**

None, this collection is open for research. Property rights reside with Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), and the IUP Special Collections and University Archives. Literary rights are retained by the creators of the records and their heirs. For permissions to reproduce or publish, please contact the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist.

### **Processor**

The collection was organized and the finding aid was updated by Harrison Wick on June 19, 2018.

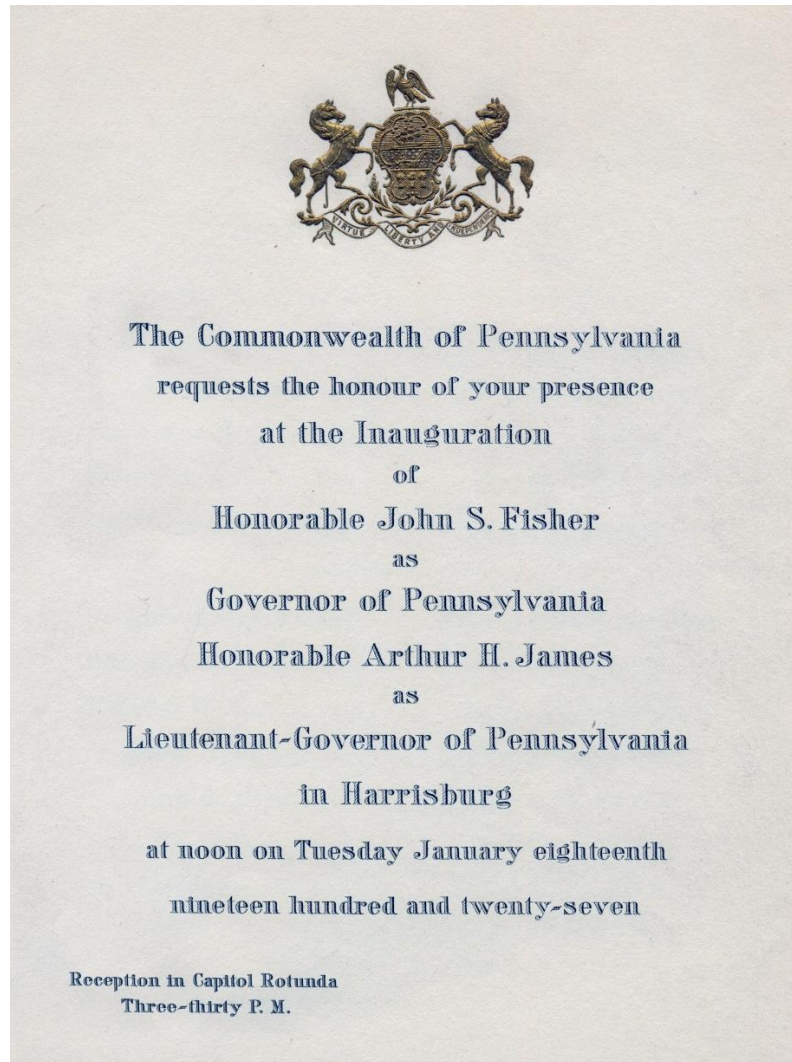
### **Container List**

#### **Box 1 (Publications)**

1. Reports: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Audit Reports, 1916-1927
  - a. Honorable S. S. Lewis, Auditor General, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Preliminary Report Audit, State Workmen's Insurance Fund, January 1, 1916 to December 31, 1922 (December 19, 1923)
  - b. Report Section I, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (April 24, 1922)
  - c. Report Section II, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (April 24, 1922)
  - d. Report Section III, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (May 11, 1922)
  - e. Report Section IV, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (May 18, 1922)
  - f. Report Section V, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (May 25, 1922)

- g. Report Section VI, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Treasury Department, May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921 (June 19, 1922)
    - h. Resume, Audit Report, Department of Internal Affairs, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, June 1, 1925 to May 31, 1927 (October 31, 1928)
  2. Reports: Accountants Report to the Auditor General, 1917-1922
    - a. Final Section of Accountants Report to the Auditor General, covering audit and examination of the books, records, and accounts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Treasury Department, for the period from May 7, 1917 to April 30, 1921
    - b. Accountants Report to the Auditor General, covering audit and examination of the books, records, and accounts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Treasury Department, for the period from May 1, 1921 to April 30, 1922
    - c. Accountants Report to the Auditor General, showing financial status of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, May 31, 1921
  3. Report: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of State, Audit Report, Three Year Period, June 1, 1925 to May 31, 1928, Honorable John S. Fisher, Governor
  4. Report of Department of Mines, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, June 1, 1925 to May 31, 1927 and June 1, 1927 to May 31, 1929
  5. Report of the Delaware River Bridge Joint Commission of Pennsylvania and New Jersey to the Legislatures of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey and the Council of the City of Philadelphia, 1926 and 1930
  6. The Budget of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the fiscal biennium 1927 to 1929 submitted to the General Assembly by John S. Fisher, Governor, January 31, 1927
  7. Report of Department of Internal Affairs, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, June 1, 1927 to May 31, 1929
  8. Report: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction, Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, for the two-year period ended May 31, 1930, submitted by John A. H. Keith, Superintendent of Public Instruction (October 1, 1930)
  9. Reply to the Audit of Main and Company as requested by the Governor, John S. Fisher, 1928
  10. Dedication: George Washington Bridge, spanning the Turtle Creek Valley on the Lincoln Highway in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 10, 1932 contains typed speeches and original photographs
  11. Scrapbook of newspaper articles kept by John S. Fisher, 1930s (1936-1937) mentions Dr. Charles Foster, former President of Indiana State Teachers College
  12. Newspaper Articles, 1927-1940:
    - a. *Indiana Evening Gazette*, January 18, 1927
      - i. "Indiana Man is Inaugurated Governor"
      - ii. "Text of Fisher's Inauguration Address"
    - b. *Pittsburgh Post*, "John S. Fisher becomes Pennsylvania Governor," January 19, 1927
    - c. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "Pennsylvania inaugurates governor," January 23, 1927
    - d. *Indiana Evening Gazette*, "... In Our Teachers College," March 12, 1932
    - e. *Indiana Democrat*, "State Teachers College Opens Fall Term," September 20, 1933

- f. *Indiana Progress*, "Thomas Sutton Chairman of Teachers College Board for the 37<sup>th</sup> Consecutive Year," 1935
  - g. *Indiana Progress*, "Teachers College Faculty Club Honors Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Sutton at Annual Dinner Thursday Evening," March 27, 1935
  - h. *Indiana Progress*, "More than 50 years of service to local college ends for Thomas Sutton," August 26, 1936
  - i. *Indiana Democrat*, "College Board Holds Meeting," January 13, 1937
  - j. *Indiana Democrat*, "Break Ground at Local College," March 9, 1938
  - k. *Indiana Progress*, "College Expansion Program is Launched," March 9, 1938
  - l. *Indiana Progress*, "State Teachers College, Indiana, PA: Map of the campus to show old and new buildings," March 23, 1938
  - m. *Indiana Progress*, "Dr. Fausold Resigns as College President," February 22, 1939
  - n. *Indiana Evening Gazette*, "Prominent Educator elected ISTC President," June 20, 1939 (Dr. Leroy A. King, who president of Indiana State Teachers College from 1939 to 1942)
  - o. *Indiana Evening Gazette*, "Death calls John S. Fisher in City Home: Former Governor of Commonwealth dies after long illness – Indiana County Native served his county and state well," June 25, 1940
  - p. *Indiana Evening Gazette*, "ISTC Graduates First Civilian Flying Class," October 23, 1940
13. Thesis about John S. Fisher: The political career of John S. Fisher, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1927-1931 by William Ainsworth Cornell, Indiana State Teachers College Class of 1947, submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, 1949 (photocopy)
14. Biographical Information about John S. Fisher and his family:
- a. [Governor John Stuchell Fisher](#)
  - b. Find a Grave: Samuel Royer Fisher (February 15, 1832-January 14, 1911) father
  - c. Find a Grave: John Stuchell Fisher (May 25, 1867-June 25, 1940)
  - d. Find a Grave: Karen Happuch "Hapsie" Miller Fisher (April 14, 1868-January 14, 1922) wife
  - e. Robert Miller Fisher (September 5, 1894-January 21, 1968) son
  - f. Gladys Fern Washburn Fisher (May 16, 1900-November 28, 1992) daughter-in-law
15. Memorabilia and Photograph:
- a. Photograph of Park Press, Indiana, Pennsylvania, 4x4 Black & White print, no date (circa 1900-1910)
  - b. Program: The Ladies Aid Society of the First Baptist Church present Miss Florence Fisher assisted by Mr. B. F. Rothstein in scenes from Modern and Classical Plays, Jefferson Theatre, August 18, 1908
  - c. Invitation sent to Hope Stewart (Dean of Women at Indiana State Normal School in 1927): The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requests the honor of your presence at the Inauguration of Honorable John S. Fisher as Governor of Pennsylvania at noon on Tuesday, January 18, 1927 (see next page)

**Box 2 Oversized Publications (2 Publications)**

1. Commission on Constitutional Amendment and Revision, Pennsylvania, 1920: photograph album containing autographed studio portraits of John S. Fisher, and other Pennsylvania State Officials
2. The Budget of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the fiscal biennium 1929 to 1931 submitted to the General Assembly by John S. Fisher, Governor, with recommendations of the Governor for appropriations for the period June 1, 1929 to May 31, 1931

**Items on Display or in other Collections (2 Framed Photographs and 5 Documents)**

1. Greeting card of Governor John S. Fisher (1927-1931) signed with biographical information, donated by Harrison Wick, in 2018 (on display)
2. Governor John S. Fisher (two signed and framed formal portrait photographs) – on display, one of which is inscribed, “To John M. Phillips, with affectionate regards to an old friend, who did more than all others to restore wild life to the forests and streams of Pennsylvania, John S. Fisher, Christmas 1936”
3. Event Passes for John S. Fisher at Indiana State Normal School, 1915-1916:



- a. Pennsylvania State Normal, Indiana, PA, November 1, 1915, this complimentary ticket admits John S. Fisher and Company to all lectures and entertainments given under the auspices of the Lecture Course Committee during the School Year 1915 and 1916, signed James Ament, Principal (Indiana State Normal School) – on display with signed Fisher portrait in Stapleton Library, Room 302.
  - b. Athletic Association, Pennsylvania State Normal School (Indiana, Pennsylvania) admit Senator John S. Fisher to Football Games, Season of 1916, signed by John E. Smith, manager
4. John S. Fisher’s diplomas from Indiana State Normal School in [Record Group 87](#) (see below)



“Bachelor in the Elements” Diploma, Indiana State Normal School (ISNS), July 15, 1886



“Master in the Elements” Diploma, Indiana State Normal School (ISNS), July 5, 1888