MINUTES, Roundtable Meeting, Chicago, August 27, 1986

Connie Gallagher, chair, called the meeting to order saying he hoped that the roundtable would remain informal. Lydia Lucas discussed the "Standards for Congressional Collections" statement approved and now used by the NHPRC. The statement grew out of a 1984 conference sponsored by the NHPRC. Connie noted that the standards are not 'cast in stone' but represent an excellent beginning. They highlight the responsibilities involved in managing congressional collections and serve as a checklist for self-analysis, particularly for repositories who are considering the prospect of acquiring congressional collections.

Cynthia Miller reported on the forthcoming Guide to Congressional Papers. Information from NUCMC is in the database. Funding for publication has been appropriated. Survey forms are available from Cynthia and should be returned to her early in 1987.

Margery Sly reported that 60% of the Roundtable members contacted responded to her survey on access for her paper on case files at the meeting. Those who are interested may obtain copies from Margery.

Ben Primer no longer works with congressional papers and has relinquished control of the bibliography project. Connie will review the work completed to date and he and Margery Sly will look for additional volunteers.

Mike McReynolds, discussing the work of the new division of NARA for congressional/legislative records, noted that Senate records are closed for 20 years and House records for 50 years. Lobbying is now underway to shorten the House restrictions. McReynolds and JoAnn Williamson encourage and welcome inquiries from colleagues regarding classified documents and national security questions. Congress has tightened restrictions on classified records relating to areas such as foreign policy, defense, atomic energy, investigations and intelligence. Investigative and atomic energy records are considered the most sensitive tending to remain classified. Archivists should definitely seek advice and declassification for all documents stamped TOP SECRET or SECRET; documents stamped ADMINISTRATIVE or CONFIDENTIAL are far less problematic. Michael Dabrishus mentioned that White House documents are not necessarily stamped, but instead may contain classification notes typed at the top. In the past a more casual approach was taken by those who classified and used classified records. It was suggested that guidelines/procedures concerning classified records be included in a future issue of the Roundtable newsletter.

Connie solicited further recommendations concerning Roundtable activities. Robert Blesse suggested a questionnaire to get people's areas of expertise, later to be distributed and published through this newsletter. The Roundtable could serve as an information and resource
referral system for archivists working with congressional papers. A general discussion ensued. The advantages of appraising, in DC, the papers of sitting members of Congress before transfer to a home site was mentioned. The question of manuals was raised. A draft manual on the arrangement and description of congressional papers exists, but the SAA does not want to publish them manuals. Also, it is not known whether a records management handbook for the House, comparable to the Senate manual, will be published. It was observed that access to computer records is difficult. Ed Oetting noted that the appraisal of records arranged solely by document number is impossible. File access codes are essential if one is to recreate files and identify subject categories. Retention schedules for House computer tapes are crucial to prevent the premature dumping of records. Cynthia Miller will ask the staff of the House Information System (HIS) to send a notice regarding current policies and practices to the newsletter.

Related issues, including the papers of AA's were discussed. Are they particularly rich? A listing of records in a particular collection that were destroyed after courtesy storage in the Suitland Records Center may be obtained from David Peterson, office head for the Federal Records Centers at NARA. It was noted that cooperation between the various states and NARA in appraising and preserving congressional records will become increasingly important. Since congressmen and congressional staff are not particularly concerned with records, the impetus for concern and change must come from outside Congress. Roundtable members liked the general, open and informative discussion style of the meeting.

A program proposal for the 1987 SAA meeting was considered and the group agreed upon the topic "Problems of Automation as Applied to Congressional Papers." It was recommended that the program include a discussion of the appraisal of paper records arranged in machine-readable form and that speakers include an AA familiar with automation, a representative from the HIS, and an archivist. The actual proposal included a speaker from the HIS, one from the Senate Computer Center, an archivist, and an AA familiar with automation as a co-chair. Latest word is that the session has been approved. Karen Paul will be the Chair, the 2 automation people will be decided soon and Mary Boccaccio will be the archivist.

JoAnn Williamson does have a complicated procedure for sending xeroxes of classified documents to the Declassification Section for declassification. If she will send it to the newsletter, we'll include it the next issue.

Recent word is that the Senate Foreign Relations committee has opened many of its records. As the newsletter gets more information, we'll keep you informed.

Did you know?? that the Senate Computer system is on contract? Apparently the CMS system in on a 2 year contract which has been recently renewed and the system updated and enhanced. The Office Automation system is on a 3 year contract. The ATMS system, an old centralized wp system is being phased out and the OA system will replace it. The Senate has had the CMS system for 7 years now and many
of the bugs are worked out. It is likely to stay. The Computer Center has a new staff person working on creating archival tape software. Of the 3 systems in use only Honeywell provides archival tapes. The other 2 systems, Prime and Data General, don’t have that capability yet.

LSU as been given the papers of Senator Russell B. Long. The collection includes over 740,000 items and weighs 812 tons. LSU also holds the collections of Huey Long and his brother Earl K. Long as well as those of Congressman Gillis Long.

Boise State University has received a grant from the Association for the Humanities in Idaho for $48,393.00 in gifts and matching to process and index the papers of Frank Church. $32,385.00 is a private gift from the BSU Foundation and $16,008.00 is through the matching program.

Recently Ralph Hansen from Boise State has noted a problem I had with the Javits papers. He says "When the papers arrived here we made a preliminary survey and found four boxes of papers of Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut. .... Recently we found three boxes of Senator Paul Douglas papers.... The combination of lost Church boxes and finding boxes of two other Senators in with Church gave us some concern. Because Stanford had unsuccessfully sought the missing boxes we had reconciled ourselves to never seeing them again. When we found Douglas we began to wonder if some Church boxes might yet turn up. We wonder whether the boxes were misplaced in the National Records Center." In New York, I found 14 boxes of Representative Gillis Long in with the Javits materials. Since he was still in office, I called to see where they wanted them sent and we sent them along. We were missing about 10 boxes of Javits records which at least during the time I was there never did turn up. This seems to be an increasing problem. Your best bet if you find materials is to contact the Senate or House Historical Office to find out where the rest of the collection is and make contact and if you are missing materials, hope someone will find them soon.

Burton Altman had an article in the Society of Florida Archivists Newsletter and has given us permission to reproduce it.

An Automated Retrieval System For Congressional Papers

Archivists and manuscripts collections derive various benefits from using automated information retrieval systems. Valuable storage space and staff time are saved by maintaining records on magnetic kisks and retrieval time is shortened. This article discusses how the dBase data base management software was used to develop an automated retrieval system for the unpublished papers of a well known Florida statesman.

The Claude Pepper collection at Florida State University is a large and growing body of materials that span his years as a U.S. Senator, 1937-50, and U.S. Representative, 1963-present. These materials include the papers of his late wife, Mildred, and a vast assortment of photographs, recordings and memorabilia that cover his years as a public servant. Because Congressman [eller's official and personal papers comprise the major portion of the collection, continue to grow in volume, and will be in demand by researchers, it was decided that these papers should have a practical, efficient retrieval system.
The Pepper papers have been organized according to the archival principle of provenance, to preserve the original arrangement and integrity of the files. They have been divided into standard record groups, i.e., Senate papers and series, i.e., Senate correspondence. Before the retrieval system was established, an NCR, "no carbon required" slip was typed for each folder, listing the folder number, folder title, series and box numbers, and inclusive dates for each folder. All copies of the NCR slip were filed in a card catalog drawer according to series number. If some materials had been indexed down to the folder unit level, the main slip remained in the drawer arranged by series number, and the remaining slips were detached and filed by name and subject in separate drawers.

After all copies of the NCR slips had filled several catalog drawers, a typist transcribed the data from the slips to container lists, which became the main finding aid to the papers. With the growth of this collection, it was inevitable that supplements had to be typed to keep the finding aids current.

With the passage of time, several drawbacks to this system became evident. As more materials were processed, the typing of supplementary finding aids became a more labor intensive. Paperwork would increase, not only from the proliferation of supplementary lists, but also from the filing of NCR slips in separate drawers. It would also be more convenient to have a single, alphabetically sorted list.

There were also potential problems for researchers. For example, the only way a user could search for a topic manually was by the first term of a folder title which was often arranged alphabetically first within the series, then chronologically. A method was needed whereby one could search for a variety of materials on a similar topic, and could define the parameters of the search by additional terms and dates. As an example, a researcher might wish to examine Pepper's role in the Federal Arts Program, but only in Florida between 1936-38. A manual search for such information in the files might be quite lengthy.

To address these concerns, a data base management system was needed whereby information could be manipulated to make searching more efficient. The Ashton-Tate Company had produced dBase II, a software program which had been very effective in managing information with a microcomputer. Its successor, dBase III, was even more powerful and flexible. Because of its enhancement features, dBase III was selected to operate with the IBM-PC microcomputer. dBase III uses powerful, yet simple, English commands that allow one to add, insert or delete information in a file or series group. One can select all or part of a file and display it on the screen or print it. Up to 128 fields and 4,000 characters per record can be used.

dBase III was found most compatible with the method information was organized in the Pepper Papers finding aids. The container lists contained column headings such as Box Number, Folder Number, Title, and Inclusive Dates, with the series number on the top of each list. Each series number is considered a file in the data base, and each column heading a field. Within each file, the data, such as box number, is designated a record. With this structure in mind, and utilizing a set of simple commands, database file can be created.

Another advantage in using dBase III as an information management tool has been its ability to find information in a record very quickly, no matter how large the file. For example, one can search within a character field for a specific item, instead of just for the first term.
ina field. One can also set up more than one condition for obtaining specific information from a file by using relational operators such as 'equal to,' 'less than,' or 'greater than,' or logical operators, used to combine conditions, such as 'and,' 'or,' and 'not.' It can also tell the user how many records satisfy a given search condition before it is attempted.

dBase III has a new, extremely fast SORT command for alphabetizing the files, and also utilizes an even faster indexing technique to keep them in alphabetical order indefinitely, so that there is no need to resort as new materials are added to the collection. Such a feature eliminates the necessity of creating supplementary container lists. Another nice feature of the dBase III is the print-out of the data files. Each file prints out the fields and records in a columnar format, exactly identical to the container list. Updating of such lists can be done very quickly, eliminating the need for extensive retyping.

At the present time, Congressman Pepper's processed Senate files have been entered on a series of floppy disks using dBase III. Because these materials are still being received, space has been apportioned on the disks to accommodate additional records. The anticipated purchase of a hard disk drive will provide even greater capacity to store information and eliminate the need to keep an extensive number of floppy disks. Additional space will be saved because, with dBase III's search ability, there will no longer be a need to keep extensive card catalog index files for the NCR slips.

Thus far, dBase III has proven to be a practical data base management system for this collection. While it has successfully retrieved information in several trial searches, its effectiveness as a research tool for library users has yet to be explored.

Please send information, questions, answers, news notes... to
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