

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS

Congressional Papers Roundtable Annual Report 2003-2004

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Summary

Sections III-VI. of this annual report will convey the vitality of the Congressional Papers Roundtable, a truly outstanding “interest group” of archivists who deal with myriad issues in their professional efforts to manage congressional collections. The membership list of the Roundtable numbers 215; 159 or 74% of the list are either individual members or represent institutional members of SAA. The strength of the Roundtable is in the peer communication and collaboration amongst its members. The Roundtable has an excellent newsletter and a developing Web site that is building sources to support archival work with congressional collections.

Significant to note in this report are outreach efforts of the Roundtable. Members of the Roundtable participated in a national association promoting preservation of archival resources for the study of Congress. Members of the Roundtable reached outside of our professional organization to historians and political scientists to discuss scholarly use of congressional archival collections. We have new partnerships with the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress and the American Political Science Association to advocate preservation and use of congressional archives. Within the profession, other Roundtable members submitted session proposals related to congressional collections at regional archival conferences.

To the leadership of SAA, the Congressional Papers Roundtable strongly advises a *RETURN* to two-hour meeting schedules for roundtables at the annual conference. Roundtables offer significant programs and opportunities for peer networking, as do sections. Roundtables foster meaningful mentoring relationships – a significant benefit for the organizational health of the Society of American Archivists.

The Congressional Papers Roundtable urges SAA Leadership to consider feedback from

the Boston conference on selection of session proposals for future meetings. Sixty members who attend a roundtable meeting should not be considered a “too narrowly focused” audience and multiple co-sponsorships of session proposals should not be dismissed by a program committee.

The Congressional Papers Roundtable addresses the “diversity” initiatives of SAA by continuing to solicit wide geographic and institutional representation in steering committee membership and program participants. The Roundtable has proposed in the past and will continue to sponsor program sessions that promote congressional collection contents as historical evidence documenting the diverse population of America.

It is a professional honor to submit this annual report on behalf of the Congressional Papers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists.

L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin Chair, 2003-2004

Steering Committee, 2003-2004

L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin, Chair University of Delaware Library

Naomi Nelson, Chair-elect Emory University

Jeff Suchanek (Immediate Past Chair) University of Kentucky

Jean Bischoff (2002-2004) University of Kansas

Alan H. Haeberle (2002-2004) Office of Senator Orrin Hatch, U.S. Senate

Liz Scott (2003-2005) St. Michael’s College, Vermont

Jeff Thomas (2003-2005) Ohio State University

Ex Officio Members of the Steering Committee

Karen D. Paul, Senate Historical Office, U.S. Senate Robin Van Fleet Reeder, Office of History and Preservation, U.S. House of Representatives Kate Snodgrass Mollan, Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives and Records Administration

Newsletter Editors/Web liaison

Glenn Gray, California State University, Fresno

Katie Senft, New York University Archives

Sarah Keen, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

Accomplishments and activities

Kate Snodgrass Mollan, Center for Legislative Archives, NARA, continued to maintain and expand the content of the online guide to congressional collections: Congressional Collections at Archival Repositories. She expanded indexing of the guide to include collections by name of the Member of Congress and by state represented in addition to the original list of collections by institutional repository. The guide, originally a project of the Roundtable, has achieved greater national visibility on the NARA Web site. The CPR Web site has a direct link to the NARA

site: http://www.archives.gov/records_of_congress/repository_collections/

Newsletter co-editors Katie Senft (New York University Archives) and Glenn Gray (California State University, Fresno) issued two newsletters (February and July 2004): <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/newsletters/feb2004.pdf>

<http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/newsletters/jul2004.pdf>

Senft and Gray continued the Roundtable tradition of providing substantial newsletter content with feature articles, Roundtable business and meeting minutes, and repository news from numerous CPR members.

In addition, Senft and Gray maintained the electronic mailing list for CPR members, using the email list to distribute announcements and relay professional queries from colleagues.

Sarah Keene, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, served as Web liaison for the Roundtable. She established and maintained a Roundtable presence on the SAA Web site. <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/>

James F. (Jim) Cartwright, University of Hawai'i, contributed *Reference Works for Congressional Papers Repositories: A Bibliographic Essay*, which was added to the Projects and Publications section of the CPR Web

site: <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/publications/cartwright.doc>

Jean Bischoff, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas, surveyed archivists and compiled a list of research institutions sponsoring grants and fellowships

for research in congressional collections. The list is available from the CPR Web site: <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/grants.asp>

Jeff Suchanek, University of Kentucky and past chair of the Roundtable, chaired a task force on Guidelines for Congressional Papers Repositories. The task force was charged “to produce a publishable document that would be: 1) distributed to all members of Congress to aid them in selecting and evaluating an archival repository for their personal papers, 2) made available to repositories already housing congressional collections so they may evaluate their own practices and procedures, 3) made available to repositories considering acquisition of congressional collections so they may better understand the institutional commitments such acquisitions require.” Extensive email correspondence and editorial material was exchanged between Suchanek and the following members: Kimberly Butler (North Central College); Mark Greene (University of Wyoming); Herb Hartsook (University of South Carolina); Karen Paul (U.S. Senate Historical Office); Jeff Thomas (Ohio State University); Sheryl Vogt (University of Georgia); Katharine Winters (University of Wyoming); L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin, ex officio (University of Delaware). Considerable debate emerged over conceptual end-product of the publication, and the problem of writing the guidelines for two different audiences: Members of Congress *and* archival repositories.

Other activities

Karen Paul, Senate Historical Office, United States Senate, and Secretary of the Association of Centers for Study of Congress (ACSC), reported in July 2004 CPR Newsletter on the May 2004 second annual meeting of the ACSC at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C. The May meeting was attended by several members of the Roundtable. Among reported topics of interest to CPR members were trends in scholarship on Congress, the archival mission of centers, and preservation priorities (particularly for electronic records) for congressional collections. Future annual conferences are planned for Washington, D.C., in 2005, and Storrs, Connecticut, in 2006.

Chair Rebecca Johnson Melvin exchanged several emails with political scientists Sean Kelly (Niagra University) and Scott Frisch (California State University, Channel Islands). The Congressional Papers Roundtable has found enthusiastic and strong allies in these two political scientists in advocating archival research in congressional collections. Kelly attended the ACSC meeting in May 2004 and contributed an article to the July 2004 CPR Newsletter. He is working with Richard Hunt, Director of the Center for Legislative Archives, NARA, to develop an American Political Science Association “short course” on congressional archival research to be held prior to the 2005 ASCS meeting.

Archivists Beth Bowers (Suffolk University), Rebecca Johnson Melvin (University of Delaware), and Jessica Kratz (NARA) will participate in a panel at the Northeastern

Political Science Association meeting in Boston on November 12, 2004. Moderated by Sean Kelly, the program title is “Congressional Archives as an Untapped Data Sources for Political Scientists.”

Kathleen Cruikshank, Lilly Library at Indiana University, submitted and had approved a session proposal for a conference of the American Association for History and Computing (an affiliate of the American Historical Association) to be held in Seattle in January 2005. As a participant of the session, “How Can We Tell You What We’ve Got? Describing Archival Collections in the Digital Age,” Cruikshank will be speaking about describing large collections and using a congressional collection as an example.

Linda Whitaker, Arizona Historical Foundation, Arizona State University, organized and submitted a session proposal to a “super-regional” archives conference, CIMA/NWA/SCA/SRMA meeting to be held in Las Vegas in April 2005.

Karen Paul, Senate Historical Office, agreed to begin planning for a forum prior to the SAA annual meeting to be held in Washington, D.C., in 2006. The forum will attract members of the congressional archives community, including CPR members, archivists on the Hill, and other interested parties. A 2001 forum, held in Washington, D.C., was a great success.

Preparation for the Boston Conference

On behalf of the Roundtable, in October 2003, Chair Rebecca Johnson Melvin submitted two session proposals to the Boston program committee: one on developing repository identities as research centers and a second on strategies for improving access to archival collections in processing backlogs. Roundtable members Karen Paul (Senate Historical Office) assisted with preparation of the first, and Jan Zastrow (University of Hawai’i) assisted with preparation of the second.

Both proposals, each with multiple endorsements from other sections and roundtables, failed to be accepted by the Boston program committee. Feedback from the program committee indicated that the research centers proposal was “too narrowly focused” – they failed to agree that use of congressional research centers as a *case study* was a useful discussion model for the topic – and that the backlog proposal lost out to a “better” proposal on the same topic.

Ellen Swain, Chair, Reference Outreach and Access Section, contacted the CPR chair and expressed disappointment that the session proposal “Getting Centered,” which the RAO Section had co-sponsored, failed to appear on the Boston conference program. She asked if CPR would offer an abbreviated version of the session to the RAO Section meeting at the Boston conference. Because CPR already planned to reformat the research centers program for our own Roundtable meeting, we were not able to do this

for RAO.

Jeff Suchanek, past chair of CPR, prepared the slate of candidates for the Roundtable for 2004-2005.

Jan Zastrow, Hawaii Congressional Papers Archivist, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, suggested, planned, and organized a Boston pre-conference tour of a congressional repository. (See Moakley Archives item below.)

Issues for SAA Leadership

In response to requests for Boston program planning schedule information, Chair Rebecca Johnson Melvin corresponded with SAA Council Liaison Elaine Engst and SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont about the meeting time allotted to the Roundtable during the Boston conference. The chair requested an extension of the Roundtable meeting to a full two hours, equal to the time allowed SAA section meetings. In a phone conversation, Beaumont advised that the Boston schedule could not be adjusted but that we were free to extend informally our meeting time from 5:30-7:30 pm. (Considering the late hour of the meeting and the scheduled start time of the meeting reception at that hour, this was not done.)

In the same phone conversation with SAA Executive Director Beaumont (February 2004), the Chair pressed the shorter roundtable meeting schedule as an issue of fairness in treating SAA roundtables equally in relation to SAA sections. The Chair urged the Director to revisit the topic with SAA Council on the importance of equal treatment for all SAA interests groups. In addition to shorter meeting time, SAA Roundtables are not being supported with SAA-hosted electronic mailing lists or discussion lists.

In response to pre-Boston calls for program proposals for New Orleans, the Chair again communicated with SAA leadership to relay concerns of the Congressional Papers Roundtable. Specifically, emails were exchanged with New Orleans program co-chairs, Boston program co-chairs, Executive Director Nancy Beaumont and other members of the SAA Leaderlist, including incoming president Rand Jimerson. The Chair raised two issues: clarification about usefulness of "co-sponsorship" from other roundtables and sections for program proposals and the need for equal treatment of roundtables and sections, most importantly with scheduling of meeting time at the annual conference. Rand Jimerson responded on July 31 that our concerns "have been heard and will be addressed."

Boston annual conference, August 4-8, 2004

Beth Anne Bower, archivist of the John Joseph Moakley Archives at Suffolk University

Law School in Boston hosted a pre-conference program, tour, and reception for 24 of her Roundtable colleagues on Wednesday, August 4.

Herb Hartsook, University of South Carolina, organized a social dinner at Maggiano's restaurant in Boston on Wednesday evening, August 4, attended by approximately 24 Roundtable colleagues.

The steering committee convened for a breakfast meeting at 6:45 – 8:00 am, Thursday, August 5, 2004.

The task force on Guidelines for Congressional Papers Repositories convened for a lunch meeting on Thursday, August 5, 2004. Rebecca Johnson Melvin committed to reviewing model guidelines by late October/early November 2004 for the task force.

The Roundtable met 5:30 – 7:00 pm, Thursday, August 5, 2004. The meeting room was full, attended by more than sixty people. The program component of the meeting was a short, reformatted version of the "Getting Centered" session proposal. The topic was discussed by panelists Nissa Dahlin-Brown (Howard Baker Center for Public Policy, University of Tennessee), Connell Gallagher (Special Collections, University of Vermont), Karen Paul (United State Senate Historical Office), Jeff Suchanek (Wendell H. Ford Research Center and Public Policy Archives, University of Kentucky), Jeff Thomas (John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy Archives, Ohio State University), Sheryl Vogt (Richard Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia), and Tom Wilstead (Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut).

With 45 minutes allotted to this panel presentation and numerous other items on the Roundtable agenda, the meeting was hard pressed for time. The chair asked Elaine Engst, SAA Council liaison for the Roundtable, to convey our strong request that SAA roundtable meetings be returned to two hour meeting slots, on par with meeting time allotted to SAA section meetings. The meeting adjourned and Naomi Nelson assumed the position of Chair of the Congressional Papers Roundtable, 2004-2005.