

## CHRONOLOGY OF ADVANCES IN MANAGING CONGRESSIONAL PAPERS

- 1974** The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) receives funding to support the preservation, arrangement, and description of historical records, particularly those relating to government.
- 1976** Conference on the Access to the Papers of Recent Public Figures, sponsored by the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists, takes place in New Harmony, Indiana. Proceedings published.
- 1978** Conference on the Research Use and Disposition of Senators' Papers (Washington, D.C., September 14-15). Historians, archivists, and congressional staff meet to consider "who uses senators' papers and why?" Proceedings published.
- 1978** *The American Archivist* (Vol. 41, no. 3) includes three articles on congressional papers discussing their unique characteristics and challenges.
- 1980** The Dirksen Congressional Center sponsors the first national conference on congressional leadership. The nineteen presenters relied on oral histories, quantitative data, and archival materials. There is a call for more study in a time of rapid change. Proceedings published as *Conference on Understanding Congressional Leadership: The State of the Art* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1981).
- 1983** Ad Hoc Planning Group on a Manual for Congressional Papers submits to the Society of American Archivists (SAA) a report calling for a manual designed to help archivists with the decisions and procedures required to manage congressional collections. The report is remarkable for its clarity and practicality as well as its list of enduring issues.
- 1984-1994**  
Congressional papers emerge as the poster child for the ills associated with twentieth century collections. Six articles in *The American Archivist* cite these papers as bulky, redundant, and under-utilized; hidden and unprocessed; and competitively solicited yet poorly managed. They contain every conceivable format and are often the subject of public disputes and tricky donor relations. These are high stakes collections for the repository that collects them and the archivist who processes them.
- 1984** At the SAA annual conference in Washington, D.C., twelve archivists involved with congressional collections meet informally "to share common concerns and get acquainted." After completing the petition process, the first official meeting of the Congressional Papers Roundtable is held in 1986 in Chicago at the SAA annual meeting.
- 1985** Sponsored by NHPRC and the Dirksen Congressional Center, nineteen historians, archivists, and administrators convene in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, to examine issues relating to congressional papers. The organizers emphasize systematic "airing" –not

resolution — of issues at the conference. These issues range from donor relations and records management to the costs and mechanics of preservation and access.

Congressional papers are declared important because the U.S. Congress as an institution is unique. There is a call for redoubling the efforts to preserve them. Barely discussed, and certainly not resolved at Harpers Ferry, were the issues of appraisal, negotiation, acquisition, transfer, processing, and servicing these collections.

- 1985** The first edition of *Records Management Handbook for United States Senators and Their Archival Repositories* by Karen Dawley Paul is published by the Senate Historical Office. This benchmark publication presents guidelines for Senate office-based records management. Recommendations within the handbook are voluntary and as such, subject to uneven adoption. The handbook becomes the only reference available for repository-based archivists faced with unprecedented backlogs. Many congressional collections currently held by repositories bear little resemblance to the recommended records management guidelines.
- 1986** NHPRC issues the *Congressional Papers Project Report* (Harpers Ferry Report) from the 1985 conference with recommendations for establishing minimum standards for congressional collections and repositories. Manuals, publications about collections management, and strategies that improve training of archivists are listed as high funding priorities. SAA is listed as a significant “actor” in this process. The 1983 report of the Ad Hoc Planning Group on a Manual for Congressional Papers, with detailed recommendations for its contents, is included as Appendix D. This report is now out of print but available in electronic format at the Congressional Papers Roundtable Web site. <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/cpr/projects.asp>.
- 1990** Congressional concern for preserving the documentation of Congress led in November 1990 to the creation of the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress (P.L. 101-509), consisting of the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate, the historians of both House and Senate, appointees of the House and Senate leadership, and the archivist of the United States.
- 1991** *Guidelines for the Disposition of Members’ Papers*, prepared by Cynthia Pease Miller, is distributed by the U.S. House of Representatives Historian’s Office. Continually updated in-house, a professionally published guide is released in 2006.
- 1992** *The Documentation of Congress: Report of the Congressional Archivists Roundtable Task Force on Congressional Documentation* (Washington, D.C., S. Pub. 102-20), Karen Dawley Paul, project director. Documentation strategy reviews the wide variety of archival sources supporting the study of Congress.
- 1994** The Congressional Papers Roundtable, as part of the SAA annual conference in Indianapolis, sponsors its first workshop on The Acquisition, Processing, and Reference of Legislative Collections. Taught by Herbert J. Hartsook and Cynthia Pease Miller, this workshop is subsequently presented five additional times over the next nine years in different locations across the country.

- 1994** Congressional Papers Conference, Portland, Maine. Sponsored by Norwood University and the Margaret Chase Smith Library, archivists, historians, scholars, and politicians meet to discuss the preservation, use, and accessibility of the personal papers of members of Congress. Proceedings are published.
- 1996** Faye Phillips. *Congressional Papers Management: Collecting, Appraising, Arranging and Describing Documentation of United States Senators, Representatives, Related Individuals and Organizations*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company. Hardback text. 191 pp.
- 2001** At a Congressional Papers Forum held before the SAA annual conference in Washington, D.C., participants discuss the emergence of congressional research centers and the desirability of concentrating multiple collections in institutions with supporting resources for effective archival management, reference services, and outreach initiatives. Congressional staff attending the forum discuss records management practices in members' office. Proceedings published in March 2002. (S. Pub. 107-42)
- 2002** The Congressional Papers Roundtable (now more than 200 members) forms a task force to draft archival guidelines for repositories. The project stalls for lack of funding, consistency, and coordination.
- 2003** The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress is formed. Its mission is to inform and educate students, scholars, policy-makers, and members of the general public on the history of Congress, the legislative process, and current issues facing Congress; to encourage the preservation of material that documents the work of Congress, including the papers of representatives and senators; and to support programs that make those materials available for educational and research use.
- 2005** Greene & Meissner article "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing" *American Archivist* (Fall/Winter 2005) resonates for those coping with intractable backlogs of twentieth century materials. There are striking similarities between this article, previous calls for change, and the 1983 Ad Hoc Committee recommendations. Congressional paper collections are prime subjects for this type of review.
- 2006** The fourth edition of *Records Management Handbook for United States Senators and Their Archival Repositories* is published.
- 2006** *Records Management Manual for Members* published by the Office of the Clerk, United States House of Representatives.
- 2006** The Congressional Papers Roundtable Steering Committee resolves to apply for a grant to the NHPRC to support the writing, publication and distribution of a repository-based "Guidelines for Managing Congressional Papers" to meet the demand for practical, up-to-

date information by archivists and administrators at the hundreds of repositories throughout the country housing congressional collections.

**2007** The NHPRC awards grant to the Society of American Archivists in support of the Congressional Papers Roundtable's "Guidelines for Managing Congressional Papers" project.