

**Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
March 20, 2012**

“Funding for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission”

**Testimony of Gregor Trinkaus-Randall
President, Society of American Archivists**

Chairman Emerson, Ranking Member Serrano, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Society of American Archivists, representing more than 6,000 professional archivists and archival institutions in the U.S., respectfully requests that **Congress restore funding of \$5 million for the National Archives and Records Administration’s National Historical Publications and Records Commission.**

From municipal records offices and historical societies throughout America to the National Archives’ main facilities in Washington, D.C., archives preserve our stories and cultural memories as a public trust and make them available to all. Just as we protect our country’s natural resources to sustain our way of life, we must also safeguard our nation’s archives to ensure that we pass from one generation to the next the evidence of past events, our record of progress, and the values that we as a society uphold.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission is the *only* federal program whose specific purpose is to help us meet this national obligation by funding critical projects to preserve non-federal records.

NHPRC funding has declined each year since it peaked at \$13 million in FY 2010. At the same time, the need has grown exponentially among our nation’s 14,000 archives and manuscript repositories to fund the employees and technologies needed to cope with the

challenges of preserving and enabling public access to our record – challenges that include digitization of paper records, preservation of born-digital records, and recovery of historical records in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Since 1965, the NHPRC has awarded more than \$200 million in competitive grants to more than 45,000 historical and genealogical societies, colleges and universities, state and local government archives, and other institutions and non-profit groups in all states and territories. Funds have been used to preserve historical records in all formats, initiate electronic records programs, create cost-effective models that are shared among archives, prepare and implement disaster plans, and support training and education of the “citizen archivists” and paraprofessionals who assist in caring for our nation’s archives. These grants make accessible records and documentary editions for use by classroom teachers, students, scholars, public officials, lawyers, local historians, genealogists, journalists, and many others.

An analysis of existing grant programs demonstrates that, on average, 75% of NHPRC funding supports new jobs, principally for the skilled professionals who preserve, digitize, organize, and catalog historical records. Further, NHPRC dollars leverage funding from non-federal sources, with most grants requiring a one-to-one match of federal dollars invested.

NHPRC’s competitive grants have a distinguished record of supporting innovation at the state and local level that has a major impact on federal records. These grants have made substantial contributions to:

- ***Improving the accessibility of the historical record.*** NHPRC has focused funding on both digitizing historical records that exist only in paper or other perishable format and ensuring the preservation of electronic records as hardware and software evolve. This support has helped repositories throughout the country to make important primary sources available more

quickly and easily to students, scholars, and other researchers – often in their own homes, classrooms, or offices.

- ***Addressing the growing challenge of electronic records.*** NHPRC has provided seed money to help records programs address the explosion of computer-generated records. The work accomplished using even the modest funding available has been essential in creating scalable solutions that can be applied in towns, counties, states, and organizations across the U.S. Without such work, the nation faces historical amnesia as its documentary heritage exists increasingly in transitory and highly perishable electronic formats.
- ***Making community connections to national history.*** NHPRC’s competitive re-grants to states have made it possible for smaller, local grassroots organizations to receive grants of even a few hundred dollars that have made a significant difference. These organizations are key to preserving the diversity of the American record and ensuring that it is not just the history of the great cities and prominent individuals, but also of small communities and everyday life in every corner of the country, that is preserved for future generations.

NHPRC is the ***only*** federal program that focuses on documentary records programs and projects. It is the ***only*** federal program that links federal archives with those held by states, counties, municipalities, universities, and nongovernmental organizations. It is the ***only*** federal program that specifically supports Americans’ right and need to know their heritage and the workings of their public offices. NHPRC grants have provided essential support for this ongoing national goal – yet its funding falls ***far*** short of today’s need.

Given the importance of the competitive grants administered by NHPRC and the remarkable return on investment that this agency has realized, the Society of American

Archivists strongly endorses funding of the NHPRC competitive grants program in FY 2013 at a level of \$5 million. We simply *must* stop putting our national heritage on the chopping block. We must appreciate what is lost when we do not give priority to understanding who we are and what we have accomplished. Preservation of our national heritage, spirit, character, and principles is a commitment that we all must share.

Our nation's founders clearly understood the importance of a comprehensive and accurate public record. *We must do no less!*

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted By:

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Founded in 1936, the Society of American Archivists is North America's largest organization of professional archivists, representing 6,013 members across the U.S. and in 20 countries. Archivists are the professionals who are entrusted by society to ensure access to our nation's records, to ensure the authenticity and integrity of those records, and to preserve and make accessible a credible and reasonably complete historical account of government and other aspects of society.