

THIRD REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE RECORDS OF CONGRESS

I. MEMBERS' PAPERS

A. Records Management

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the quality of records management in members' offices varies, and has advocated records management improvements since 1992. Accordingly, the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate developed guidance to members' offices in the form of handbooks, consultations, and staff briefings. House and Senate staff routinely work closely with archivists from repositories around the country to facilitate the preservation and transfer of members' collections when they retire from service.

The Legislative Resource Center publishes *Closing a Congressional Office: A Guide to the Disposition of Official Papers and Records*, which is available on the Clerk's web site and is included with the Clerk's formal personalized offer of archival consultative service to non-returning members. At the December 1999 meeting of the Advisory Committee, the Clerk announced a proposed reorganization of the Legislative Resource Center to include the creation of an historical services division, which would in addition be responsible for administering the Clerk's archival responsibilities. The reorganization, subsequently approved by the Committee on House Administration, culminated in the summer of 2000 with the hiring of an historical services manager and an archival specialist. The division also employs two research assistants.

The Senate Historical Office publishes a *Records Management Handbook for United States Senators and Their Archival Repositories* and an accompanying pamphlet with checklist for members' staff. The handbook is designed to guide staff as they set up an office, perform records disposition, and ready the collection for donation. In addition, specially tailored assistance with archiving electronic records is provided to Senate offices that are closing. The Senate Historical Office also encourages Senators to hire a professional archivist to prepare the collection for transfer to an archival repository.

Hiring an archivist to close an office, however, cannot compensate for a lack of good records management in the office from the

beginning of the member's career. This especially is true for electronic records that must be migrated as systems evolve. It is impossible for an archivist to reconstruct documentation that is missing because it was taken away by departing staff, or because it was deleted from computer systems. Staff frequently comment during the closing of an office that they could have used good archival assistance "all along." Offices can benefit by adding a professional archivist to the staff well before a member retires. Past instances of this practice demonstrate several benefits to the office:

- determining filing protocols (textual and electronic)
- setting up files that contain substantive information
- managing disposition and retrieval of files through appraisal and indexing
- creating useful data bases that facilitate information retrieval
- performing research
- assisting staff with finding "facts"
- improving accessibility of information by building office systems that meet office needs
- providing records management to state offices
- shaping the historical record
- reducing both repository and office costs through records management assistance

The Advisory Committee wishes to encourage members to require good records management practices and to consider the advantages of having archival assistance on an ongoing basis. It is the best way to preserve a complete and meaningful record of contributions to the legislative process. A list of former senators who have made early provision for their collections is included as Appendix A to encourage other members to do likewise.

B. Preservation

Preservation Issues

In December 1999, the Advisory Committee agreed that a task force of Congressional Papers archivists would supply the necessary background for this section. The task force was assembled and provided information from two recent studies dealing with the nature and extent of preservation issues and the potential for addressing them.¹

¹Task force members include: Karen D. Paul, Chair, Senate Historical Office; Bryan Culp, Robert Dole Archives, University of KS; Connell Gallagher, University of VT; Edward Galloway, University of Pittsburgh; Mark Greene, Henry Ford Museum;

The Congressional Papers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists conducted a national congressional papers conservation/preservation survey in 1999. The survey was prepared and administered by Jeffrey S. Suchanek (Director, Wendell H. Ford Research Center and Public Policy Archives, University of Kentucky Libraries) and Mark A. Greene (then Curator of Manuscripts, Minnesota Historical Society). Responses from 54 repositories were received and a statistical report was compiled. (See Appendix B for a summary) The report shows that the ability of many repositories to continue to provide adequate administration of congressional collections in the future may rest on some combination of the following:

1) Repositories need to receive increased cooperation from the originating congressional offices. This will require a fundamental change in the way that many congressional office staff manage the documentation generated by their offices. A commitment to basic records management should be viewed as essential. Offices should:

- require good filing practices for textual and electronic files
- either microfilm or photocopy newspaper clippings
- label all permanently valuable sound and visual media
- migrate electronic records to open systems or use standard software

2) Repositories increasingly find it necessary to obtain financial assistance, either directly from the member of Congress and/or with his or her aid in identifying prospective donors. While the archivist and the repository share a responsibility to assist with fund raising and to identify potential grant sources, the reality is that grant money for congressional collections is far less available now than it was twenty years ago. Some effort to inform members and their staffs about the cost of caring for these collections and to build cooperation (from the beginning of a member's tenure) between the member's fund raising and the repository's development office would clearly benefit both members of Congress and the repositories that care for their collections. Repositories that have undertaken an energetic development effort generally have been pleased by the response. Members who undertake such fund raising while they are still in office usually find the task easier.

The second study was conducted by Emily B. Robison in partial fulfillment for a master's degree in Library and Information Science

Herbert Hartsook, University of SC; Todd Kosmerick, Carl Albert Center, University of OK; Cynthia Miller, Office of Senator Moynihan; Naomi Nelson, Emory University; Emily Robison, Louisiana State University; Carla Summers, University of FL; Sheryl Vogt, Richard Russell Library for Political Research and Studies; Thomas Wilstead, Thomas Dodd Research Center, University of CT.

at Louisiana State University (LSU) in August 1999. Her topic was a case study of electronic records in two senatorial collections donated to LSU. (See Appendix C for a summary.) LSU's experience with electronic records in congressional collections underscores the importance of increased communication with senatorial staff in order to better define the content of the electronic archive. It also reveals the fact that additional costs are associated with the preservation of electronic records. Early commitment on the senator's part is important because it allows the repository to collaborate with Senate office staff regarding a range of appraisal and preservation issues. Repositories that fail to engage in such dialogues with members of their delegation may find themselves accepting electronic records that they cannot preserve and access, or receiving collections where much of the electronic documentation (and therefore much of the historical record) is missing. Members can assist this process by designating a repository early in their careers so that the dialogue can begin.

Preservation Costs

Preserving congressional papers costs money, and both donors and curators need to take this into consideration when deciding to donate or acquire a congressional collection. While many variables affect total cost, a useful measure for estimating "processing" costs (i.e., the amount of money needed to arrange, describe, and provide basic conservation) is between \$80 and \$150 per cubic foot of records. This figure was derived from information supplied by the University of Alaska, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the University of Vermont, together with a review of published articles that systematically looked at the amount of time required to process a collection. (The range in cost per cubic foot reflects the fact that different types of series require different levels of processing.) This figure does not include the cost required to store a collection or to do advanced conservation on special media formats. The University of Kentucky's experience with the Senator John Sherman Cooper Papers demonstrates that overall costs can be higher than \$150 per cubic foot. This 350-foot collection was processed over a two-year period by one professional archivist, one full-time assistant, and several part-time students at a total personnel cost of \$135,000. Basic storage materials (boxes, folders, plastic sleeves) cost \$9,002.26.

Costs for video and film preservation vary widely depending on what needs to be done. A political collection at the University of Kentucky recently required the following: \$79.45 to clean and restore a 4-minute video; \$238.37 to clean and duplicate a 66-minute

video; \$223.45 to restore and copy a 34-minute video; and \$5,000.00 to clean, restore, make a preservation film copy and a VHS use copy of a 2-hour 16 mm film. (This last item has not been done due to the cost.) There are few figures available to gauge the costs of preserving electronic records in congressional collections. The total amount could include the cost of an archival preservation system (if the archives does not have one or the use of one), maintenance of the system, a cleaner/evaluation system, preservation copying, annual samples, software, and media refreshment/replacement. As electronic records include more word-processing files and relational data bases, the costs of migrating them to new file formats and data structures are difficult to calculate.² Emory University, repository of the Senator Sam Nunn collection, reports spending \$1,000 as a one-time cost for arrangement and description; \$400 per Senate term served for processing the data into usable form; \$2,000 for a server; \$500 for software for conversion; and \$500 for labor for copying the tapes. The total cost would be higher except for the fact that Emory has so much infrastructure in place to deal with similar record types.

Since these studies were completed, NARA's work to develop an Electronic Records Archive indicates that a comprehensive and scalable solution to the problem of preserving electronic records may be in reach. The cost of preserving electronic records may also be comparably reduced.

C. Funding Preservation

Building a Modern Political Collection

As an example of one way to address the larger preservation issue of providing adequate funding, the Advisory Committee includes the following discussion. It was first presented at a Congressional Papers Roundtable meeting in 1999 by Herbert Hartsook, Curator of Modern Political Collections at the University of South Carolina.

In 1991, the University of South Carolina established a Modern Political Collections Division in the South Caroliniana Library. Its purpose is to collect and preserve manuscript collections documenting contemporary South Carolina and, specifically, government at the state and national levels and politics within the state. The Division encourages scholarly research in its collections that

² One of the by-products of the National Archives study described in section II.A. is to empirically measure such costs.

include the papers of South Carolina's leaders in the state, the General Assembly, and Congress, as well as of Cabinet members. The division also collects the papers of political parties, organizations impacting on the political scene, and editorial cartoonists. Significant collections are received every year. There is an active oral history program with donors, key associates, and their staff as narrators, many of whom become good supporters of the documentary program.

Recognizing that legislative collections place unique demands upon repositories because of their size, complexity and variety of special media, the university is working to create an endowment to support Modern Political Collections. The current goal is \$1,000,000, and they are nearly half-way there. (It requires \$700,000 to fund a temporary full-time staff position and \$150,000 to fund a graduate assistantship.) Modern Political Collections has been aggressive about seeking funding support both for the endowment and to meet the exceptional costs of processing. *About half of their living donors have underwritten the costs of processing their own collections.* Endowment proceeds will fund a full-time position devoted expressly to political collections to supplement the current staff of two, as well as a graduate assistantship and research awards to scholars interested in twentieth century politics and government.

In many ways, the USC's Modern Political Collections Division qualifies as a model documentation program. The program's broad collecting focus has allowed it to successfully document contemporary political history in South Carolina. It clearly appeals to donors (who can be assured that their political collection will be well cared for and used), the researchers (who will find numerous subject-related collections in one convenient location), and to university administrators (who benefit from the program's national recognition and donor financial support). Successful fund raising has resulted in the Division achieving a relatively high-profile status within the university, which in turn brings additional support from donors. Donors are happy placing their collections in a well-respected repository that garners support from a variety of sources. Those who are still serving receive excellent records management and preservation assistance from the repository. The repository is able to become acquainted with the members' staffs, is able eventually to conduct oral history interviews with them, and thus furthers their goal of acquiring the best possible documentation and enhanced personal support. At the base of the program is positive and sustained collaborative engagement between the repository and its present and future collection donors.

Other ways to lower the total costs

The Advisory Committee recognizes that while successful fund raising requires careful ground work and may not be possible in every instance, members can contribute in other ways that help to lower the repository's total costs. By hiring a staff archivist or records manager, members can provide for improved records management, pre-processing of the collection, and preliminary preservation. They also may "designate" a repository early in their career so that the repository may begin to work with the office on a range of records management, appraisal, and preservation issues. By regularly communicating with their state congressional delegation, repositories can reinforce better records management and provide guidance on their documentation priorities.

Besides the University of South Carolina, there are other known examples of institutions that focus on public policy collections. They include: the Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership at the University of Wyoming; the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro; the California State Archives; the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center at the University of Oklahoma; Emory University; the Everett McKinley Dirksen Congressional Leadership Center; Leon and Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy at California State University at Monterey Bay; Louisiana State University; the Minnesota Historical Society; the P. K. Yonge Library at the University of Florida; the Richard Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia; the Robert J. Dole Institute for Public Service and Public Policy at the University of Kansas; Rutgers University; the Thomas J. Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut; the Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service at Washington State University; the University of Alaska; the University of Arkansas; the University of Delaware; the University of Hawaii; the University of Rhode Island; the University of Washington; the University of Vermont; and the Wendell H. Ford Research Center and Public Policy Archives at the University of Kentucky.

D. Preservation Criteria: A Checklist for Members

In December 1992, the Advisory Committee adopted a resolution accepting the recommendations of the report *Documentation of Congress* (S. Pub. 102-20) as "providing a model framework for discussion and planning of future coordinated actions among the Congress, the Center for Legislative Archives, and the hundreds of

archival repositories across the nation that specialize in preserving the historical documentation of Congress." The report outlined a comprehensive, coordinated approach to improving documentation of the legislative branch. Its recommendations were addressed to the three primary authorities responsible for preserving the historical records of Congress:

- the members and officials of Congress who are responsible for the management of information that is collected and maintained in their offices
- the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives that preserves and provides access to the official records of Congress, and
- the hundreds of archival repositories across the country that preserve and provide access to the personal papers that are deposited in them by members

The report stressed that active participation *by all three* is vital for the successful, cost effective preservation of the historical record. While many of the report's specific goals have been accomplished, including the provision of records management guidance in the form of handbooks, pamphlets, and seminars, the preceding sections of this present report reveal that uneven practices remain.

The preservation survey and the Louisiana State University study point out the continued need for better records management in members' offices. Both studies also highlight the importance of financial support for preserving members' collections that contain electronic records and high concentrations of special media. The success of the University of South Carolina's Modern Political Collections program demonstrates the benefits of sustained collaborative efforts between a repository and its donors and the value of focusing broadly on political collections as a specialty.

The committee notes that good records management thrives in offices where the member expresses a strong interest. To raise consciousness among members of Congress, it recommends that criteria (in the form of a checklist) be devised to highlight:

- the member's *responsibility* for ensuring preservation
- the importance of *requiring* good management in the office *throughout* a member's term of service
- the *benefits* of selecting a capable repository early in one's career
- the *potential* need for a member to provide assistance in raising funds to process and preserve the collection

Such guidelines could also be of use to grant-awarding agencies in weighing the relative "worthiness" of grant requests. In cases where all criteria have been met (i.e., the congressional office has

done everything it could to provide good management), the grantors would be assured that the award is for the purpose of dealing with legitimate preservation problems and not problems caused by negligence.

A checklist also could prove useful to repositories when they advise potential member donors. Not all archival repositories, especially those within a university, can control the disposition of education-related resources. University administration largely determines spending priorities, with the result that the funds raised by a retiring member frequently are designated for other projects. In addition, the archives staff may be forbidden to approach a member directly. There also are instances when library development funds have been appropriated to an educational institution on behalf of a former member, but they are used for other related needs and do not go toward preserving and providing access to the member's research collection. A member's checklist would communicate such needs directly to departing members without impinging directly on the priorities established by the university as a whole.

The checklist should encourage "best practices" within members' offices. It should underscore the members' responsibility with regard to requiring good record-keeping and information management practices. It should highlight the potential need for members' assistance with fund raising to meet the special preservation and access challenges inherent in their collections. The following points are useful to include in a list of criteria to be distributed to members of Congress:

- Establish an office policy (i.e. requirement) with regard to records ownership and records management
- Create a staff position with responsibility and sufficient authority to direct records management in the office
- Fill the position with an individual who is sufficiently trained
- For members who have served more than six years, or who are going to retire, consider hiring or sharing an archivist to begin processing the accumulated materials
- Select, *at the earliest possible time, a qualified* repository in the home state as the designated repository. A qualified repository is one that has the physical plant and archival staff expertise to administer a complex collection. Ideally, the repository has other similar public policy collections which will help ensure that the collection is in a research-oriented environment where it will be used.
- If no such repository exists, the member should consider using the gift to encourage the institution to create a public policy research collection

- Plan to assist with fund raising to acquire the resources necessary to preserve and make the collection accessible

E. Center-Repository Cooperative Ventures

In 1994, Advisory Committee member Sheryl Vogt undertook a survey of the Congressional Papers Roundtable to identify possible areas of cooperation between the Center for Legislative Archives and congressional papers repositories. A report was presented to the Advisory Committee in December 1994. (See Appendix D)

As a result of the survey, the Roundtable steering committee formally supported an alliance with the Center for Legislative Archives. A guest column in each Roundtable newsletter was offered to the Center and an ex-officio position for the Center was established on the steering committee. The Roundtable held its annual meeting at the Center in September 1995 and is planning a seminar in Washington in 2001. The Roundtable also sponsored the development and presentation of a two-day workshop on the acquisition, processing, and reference use of legislative papers. Designed to improve repository effectiveness in acquiring and preserving legislative collections, it covers all aspects of collecting: donor relations, negotiating the deed of gift, appraisal, processing, the design and preparation of finding aids and other materials to encourage use of the collection, and reference services. The workshop has been offered several times and is available to archival organizations who wish to sponsor it.

Following up on recommendations in the survey, the Center began to build a paper file of nearly one hundred finding aids to members' personal papers collections in repositories nationwide. The file ranges from published archival finding aids to press releases announcing the receipt of a collection. Arranged by state and cross-referenced by member name, it can be viewed in the Congressional Research Center in the National Archives Main Building. Since 1994, the distribution of electronic finding aids has been coordinated through the Special Collections Page of the Library of the University of Delaware. This site, "Congressional Collections at Archival Repositories" includes electronic links to the Center's web site, the on-line "Congressional Biographical Directory," other congressional sites, and an extensive list of congressional repositories of personal papers, with an additional level of links to electronic finding aids organized by repository.

Other finding aid materials on the Internet include the Center for Legislative Archives' electronic versions of the *Guide to the Records of the United States House of Representatives at the National Archives* and

the *Guide to the Records of the United States Senate at the National Archives*. The Center has also begun publishing a series of "Committee Resource Guides" that update the House and Senate *Guides*. They include brief committee histories, a list of past committee chairs, a list of subcommittees and their chairs, and other related information about the committee. The initial entry on the web site, and the prototype for the series, focuses on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Another new Center on-line collection is, "The Research Interview Notes of Richard F. Fenno, Jr.: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1959-1965." This includes over eighty interviews with members of Congress for Fenno's study on House appropriations politics. Recently, the National Archives and Records Administration web site has added a general search engine that allows users to conduct key word searches through all textual files on the site, including the research interviews. At present, there is no capability for a researcher to limit the key-word search to the interview notes alone.

The Center has also made available to the public series descriptions and digital images of selected records through the NARA Archival Information Locator (NAIL), the working prototype for an on-line catalog of the agency's nationwide holdings. The final version, the Archival Research Catalog (ARC), has advanced from the design phase to the testing phase and will be operational in 2001.

Collaboration between the Center and congressional archivists has led to information exchanges that enhance the effectiveness of both as they work to build a solid record of congressional documentation. It is recommended that the Congressional Papers Roundtable continue to collaborate with the Center, with staff in the House and Senate, and with individual members' offices in identifying and examining issues of mutual interest. It also is further recommended that the Center explore additional possible vehicles for further publicizing the holdings of members' personal collections. One possibility would be to create links to collection guides within the committee resource guides.