

IV. REFERENCE

IV. A. On-Line Finding Aids and Data Bases

IV. A.1. Guides to House and Senate Records

Given the rapid increase in researcher use of information technologies, the Center and repositories holding members' personal archives should seek informed and creative ways to facilitate access to their archival collections. The committee is pleased to note that by the end of 1995, the Center had on-line versions of its two major award-winning finding aids: *Guide to the Records of the United States Senate at the National Archives* and *Guide to the Records of the United States House of Representatives at the National Archives*. These represent the first elements of the Center's presence on the Internet/World Wide Web, providing researchers with readily accessible aids connected with an E-Mail link to NARA. This program greatly expands public knowledge of and access to the holdings of the Center. Utilizing hypertext linkage technology, the Center's on-line presence will be a web of interconnected files, allowing researchers to explore a wide variety of general descriptions or to look into more detailed descriptions of record series. The on-line *House Guide* and *Senate Guide* will point users to other finding aids that the Center may choose to make available, and to other electronic sites beyond those of NARA that hold congressional materials.

Over the next five years the Center should expand its presence on the Internet/World Wide Web by including more detailed finding aids, such as those for the Senate National Defense Committee (Truman Committee), the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, and the preliminary inventories for the House and Senate. In addition, the descriptions for those records that are available as NARA microfilm publications will be made available on-line. The Center should also make available on-line the finding aids to other significant depositories of congressional materials in cooperation with these institutions, although, due to the inherent technical limitations that now exist for optical character scanning, many of these finding aids will need to be rekeyed into machine-readable form. The Center should investigate the option of contracting this task to the private sector.

The Center should investigate using its on-line site to highlight selected parts of its holdings. Particularly significant congressional documents can be commemorated with a digitized image of the record, accompanied by brief descriptions and reading lists. An example would be the legislative draft of the constitutional amendments that became the Bill of Rights. Particularly significant legislation can be packaged as an on-line unit for use by teachers that will include digitized images of documents, charts, maps, and photographs with chronologies, narratives, and lesson plans included. These units would be modeled after those of the educational document packet on the history and operation of Congress.

The Center's electronic access initiatives will require some experimentation to determine the potential researcher and public interest in having legislative finding aids and documents available on-line. It is important that these initiatives be coordinated with the offices of the secretary of the Senate, clerk of the House of Representatives, the Senate historian, the Legislative Resource Center in the House of Representatives, and with interested congressional research libraries around the country.

IV. A.2. POW/MIA Data Base

Since receiving the records of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs in 1993, the Center has played a major role in providing access to the documentation of American Prisoners of War and Missing in Action during the Vietnam War. The Center's efforts to support scholarly and family research in this area include the creation of an automated index to the largest collection of Vietnam-era POW/MIA documentation in existence: 17,000 files consisting of over 800,000 pages of casualty files, sightings, intelligence files, witness depositions and personnel files, recorded on 580 reels of microfilm produced by the Library of Congress' Photoduplication Service. The Legislative Archives Vietnam Index (LAVIndex) provides the only efficient means to access this massive collection. It is available to researchers in the Congressional Research Center and in the Library of Congress. The Center should research ways to make the LAVIndex available to researchers on the Internet.

IV. B. Establishing a Modern Research Facility

A paramount objective of the Advisory Committee is to encourage the development of a Congressional Research Center at NARA. In 1995 this process began with the acquisition of the former East Research Room of the National Archives Building and relocation of the Center's reference staff to adjacent office space. Combining a reception area, consulting room, staff offices, and research area, the space forms the hub of the "Congressional Research Center." It houses NARA-created finding aids, a variety of published indexes, the main collection of reference sources including the *Journals* of the House and Senate; the *Annals of Congress*, *Congressional Globe*, and *Congressional Record*; the *Congressional Directory*; various Congressional Information Service and Congressional Quarterly publications; finding aids to members' personal papers in other repositories; and myriad reference materials relating to Congress and its records.

The initial success of the new facility points to greater accomplishment in the future. This embryonic Congressional Research Center should be developed to serve as a clearinghouse for information on document collections related to the history of Congress. With technological change sparking innovation, the Center can be a proving ground for computer technology utilizing advances in information retrieval systems. A wealth of CD-ROM and on-line data bases are available for tracking current legislation as well as accessing historical materials relevant to the study of Congress and the legislative process. An Internet hookup should link the Congressional Research Center with the burgeoning network of electronic bulletin boards, data bases, and other signposts along the information superhighway. Potential links to Capitol Hill's on-line systems would allow the Center to maintain up-to-date information on legislation before the Congress. Gophers and World Wide Web pages open a new world of possibilities for the Center to fulfill its clearinghouse mission by providing a vital link between researchers and off-site electronic information resources. These efforts require coordination with House and Senate offices, with support agencies, and with other institutions pursuing similar documentation goals.

In addition, the Research Center can showcase its expanding oral history collection, a portion of which has been digitized and organized in the Oral History Info Text System. A user-friendly text retrieval system should provide access to a growing collection of oral histories drawn from a variety of sources, a dynamic addition to the material the Center will make available on-line.

The literature on Congress is vast and rich. Acquiring a major private book collection on Congress would not only complement the Center's expanding electronic resources, but would also establish the Center as the research institution of choice for congressional scholars. Many of the presidential libraries have extensive book collections that researchers and staff find invaluable. The Congressional Research Center's library would provide a context for the records and would be a valuable resource to the archivists who prepare descriptions of the records.

The Center for Legislative Archives' Congressional Research Center has the potential to become an invaluable resource for students of congressional history by taking advantage of emerging technologies while recognizing the merit of acquiring valuable print resources.