

Editor's Note

The history of the federal government is especially relevant these days as we struggle with serious challenges to our constitutional foundations. Federal history workers do their part in dozens of agencies by preserving documents, producing histories, and educating the public about the federal past. The SHFG's exemplary newsletter, *The Federalist*, provides additional depth and coverage on federal historians' work. In addition, we always look forward to the annual Roger R. Trask Lecture for a compelling view of such work from a prominent member of the federal community.

In this issue, we are pleased to feature the 2017 Roger R. Trask Lecture by **Sam Walker**, former historian of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and a founding member of the SHFG. Dr. Walker recalls his service to the Commission through books, articles, public outreach, and reports to administrators. His comments highlight the benefits of agency history to decision makers and others by providing perspective, balance, and facts. Walker recalls that his work was well received by administrators and others, and he reports that he was not censored or guided in research topics, content, or conclusions. In that respect, his agency has been enlightened—one of many agencies that recognize the value of a historian's judicious perspective and role in producing valuable historical resources. Yet, we know that a number of federal offices are very guarded about their performance and mission, and either omit a history program or carefully adapt their historical messages. Walker's talk and career thus present the ideal and answer his question of "Why We Write." In so doing, he eloquently expresses the essential role of the federal historian in effective agency performance and public service.

Our first article attempts to explain President Woodrow Wilson's changing war aims during World War I, an inquiry vital to understanding the roots of America's subsequent and longstanding quest for a liberal international order. In an insightful and well-reasoned analysis of Wilson's messages and actions, **John A. Thompson** rebuts claims of the president's consistent search for "a peace without victory." Instead, we see Wilson's transition to the war aims of German defeat, an end to the *status quo ante* of great power alliances, and a new international framework based on a "partnership of democratic nations." Wilson, Thompson concludes, was not purely idealistic, but was guided by external events and public opinion; he was

“more tactical than strategic.” How enlightening it is to follow Thompson’s tale of Wilson’s navigation of and leadership in the transformative political moment of the Great War.

How do we understand the contradictions between Alexander Hamilton’s advocacy of a strong central government and his support for state powers? **Kate Elizabeth Brown** explores Hamilton’s understanding of the complexities of federalism and the constitutional conflicts he witnessed, as with the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions. While we view him as a proponent of a strong central government, Brown explains that he appreciated the utility and necessity of state powers when they worked in conjunction with federal powers. He resolved potential conflicts in Federalist Numbers 32 and 82 through the concept of concurrence, by which some state powers could duplicate and work alongside federal powers, not in conflict with them. This was a practical construction that enabled the unique U.S. federal framework to function, and one that jurors came to appreciate and rely on. Brown succeeds in widening our view of Hamilton’s constitutional and legal legacy, and convincingly portrays him as a more “nuanced and tolerant statesman.”

Stephen J. Rockwell provides a convincing case for the emergence of “bureaucratic autonomy” in the Washington administration—much earlier in our history than we normally place it. His thoughtful study of Secretary of War Henry Knox’s skilled leadership in policymaking, particularly in Indian affairs and military organization, reveals how a talented and forceful administrator could innovate and lead, could develop policies and then gain presidential and congressional approval for them. Rather than military suppression of Indian tribes, for example, Knox urged more economical, humane, and effective treaties and trade policies, and developed a network of Indian superintendents and field agents that continued in later administrations. Rockwell’s study joins other current works that urge more complex and nuanced understandings of the operations of executive branch departments in the Early National era.

Kevin McQueeney challenges us to rethink the historical origins of 20th-century federal housing developments—tying them to post-Civil War housing programs for newly emancipated African Americans. He finds that the creation and administration of the earlier housing programs was guided by official racial and paternalistic assumptions and practices that resurfaced later to form the basis for Public Works Administration projects between 1935 and 1938. These assumptions and practices included segregated housing to contain racial conflicts, the feared spread

of disease, a paternalistic emphasis on employment, strict regulation of rooms, and “policing of morality.” Understanding this continuity allows us a longer perspective on federal relief programs: how they were grounded in contemporary racial beliefs, and why and how they were developed.

Primary sources tell us much about the past, but their use requires contextual consideration of the persons who generated them and their perspectives. **John M. Lawlor, Jr.**, confronts these issues in a unique article that explores national Indian policies in the 1870s and also the life of a newspaper editor who opposed them. Lawlor uses Jesse Hawley’s detailed 1876 editorial to frame discussion of the several ways that federal policies effectively promoted Native “extermination”—an ambiguous contemporary term. The author also explores Hawley’s personal and cultural roots and how they conditioned his views. The result is a merging of one person’s intellectual development with the dramatic sociopolitical and cultural events that he witnessed—a perspective that takes us deep into the divisive societal questions that defined that era.

Cherisse Jones-Branch examines the expanding and diversifying roles of women farmers during the period 1913–1965 through their relations with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Underused records of the department’s Cooperative Extension Service reveal women’s agency: their enthusiastic partnerships with home demonstration agents, and their quest for knowledge and for ways to improve their work lives and farms. We learn of their crucial roles during the world wars. Some farm women worked in scientific and administrative roles, and others demonstrated leadership in the struggle for civil rights and justice in lending practices and in national and international farming associations. Spanning that period of racial segregation in the Extension Service, the article allows us a fuller picture of agricultural relations with the federal government. It demonstrates simultaneously the USDA’s expanding appreciation of women’s importance to farming and women’s widening role in the improvement of farming conditions and productivity.

Likely, few of us are aware of how our military museums preserve artifacts. **Maria Christina C. Mairena and Dennis P. Mroczkowski** offer a primer based on their experiences as curators at the Virginia National Guard Historical Collection. We learn about the historical development of a dual-track system of National Guard museums and the Army museum system as well as the special knowledge and duties required. National Guard curators must distinguish state from federal property, navigate distinct databases for inventory control, and understand how to qualify for certification by both the Museum Division of the U.S. Army’s

Center of Military History and the American Alliance of Museums. Certification is essential for a Guard museum to receive federal funding for its activities and thus enhance its work. The bureaucratic requirements and knowledge are daunting, and we come away with respect for the National Guard curator as “the nexus wherein the two systems overlap to produce an effective national museum system.”

I am also glad to introduce our new book review section and thank Book Review Editor Terence Christian for his inaugural efforts in launching this useful feature. If you are interested in reviewing books, please contact him at terence.a.christian@gmail.com.

My thanks to Assistant Editors Judson MacLaury and Caryn Neumann, as well as our outside readers, for their varied help and careful reading of articles.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and that you will support the work of the Society for History in the Federal Government with a membership, if you have not already done so.

Benjamin Guterman
Editor, *Federal History*