

Editor's Note

Federal historians are profoundly aware of the essential role of federal records in our constitutional system. Records have helped establish, protect, and transform our political and social order. Several articles in this issue demonstrate the historian's obligations to promote records preservation and access, and to explore them to find meaning from the past. Historians have championed a national archive since at least the 1890s, and thus have a special, protective affinity for the National Archives and its nationwide system of regional archives. The General Service Administration's threat to relocate federal records from Washington, DC, in the early 1980s stirred federal historians not only to advocate an independent Archives but to establish the Society for History in the Federal Government to promote their professional interests and help protect records.

Charlene Bickford, our 2014 Roger R. Trask Award recipient and lecturer, was at the center of those struggles over 30 years ago, and later she served as SHFG president. She continues to advocate on behalf of those issues, particularly for documentary work and support of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Her longtime work as director of the First Federal Congress Project has allowed her a privileged view of early congressional records. Her Trask Address, published here, testifies to the importance of the documentary process—of preserving, transcribing, and annotating important records. Her discussion of how President George Washington and the Senate approached the new constitutional requirement of “advice and consent,” thus setting a precedent for that process, demonstrates the value of preserving that crucial body of records. That first review of a president's nominee involved a senator's personal retribution, Washington's regret and anger at rejection despite his personal advocacy, and Senate insistence on secrecy in its deliberations. The records thus reveal the complex and personal dynamics in that precedent-setting moment—in a proceeding more tangled than a formal negotiation over rules. The records make such insights possible.

Other articles illustrate the value of federal records. Margo Anderson's investigation into the use of Census Bureau data to remove Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II provides important lessons for the collection and use of Big Data in our own time. During the war, the Franklin Roosevelt administration and Congress passed the Second War Powers Act, allowing release of confidential

individual-level information. Over the years, Census officials had denied their complicity in supplying such data to the military, but Anderson credits archivists for helping her discover materials detailing the Bureau's actions. Her work is testimony to the value of records preservation for a constitutional society and of the historian's core task to find meaning in past actions. As she reminds us, the stakes for misuse of private and personal data in times of national crisis are far more menacing today. Hunter Hollins explores the connections between visual and textual messaging in war bond posters and the mobilization of public support for war efforts in World Wars I and II. His story of the personal and professional backgrounds and motivations of four artists help us appreciate the inspiration for and poignancy of their art, and thus how their visions served the highly effective war bond campaigns of government agencies. Brian Lee takes a closer look at the civil rights record of the John F. Kennedy administration, finding that the president and Attorney General Robert Kennedy acted early on (1961) to enforce the *Brown v. Board of Education* mandate for integration in public education. Their active and aggressive attempts to redefine, extend, and exercise the legal authority of the Justice Department to reopen schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, clearly argues for reevaluation of the Kennedy record. We benefit from Lee's clear explication of the legal and judicial developments that enabled increased federal intervention and enforcement in that pivotal era.

Based on presentations delivered at SHFG's 2014 annual conference, House Historian Matt Wasniewski and Senate Historian Donald A. Ritchie point to their offices' greatly improved services to researchers amid increasing interest in political history. They invite more researchers to take advantage of more available committee records, declassified records, oral histories, information on minority members and women, and other online resources. These expanded outreach efforts will help stimulate new studies of Congress. Raymond W. Smock, former House Historian, notes the difficulty of writing the history of Congress because "it has no face" and we lack a comprehensive documentary history. But such histories are essential because "virtually every aspect of American history has a congressional story to it." He suggests using the papers of former members, scattered in various archives nationwide, as another resource. Those materials will reveal an underexplored element—the connection between citizens and Congress—and allow a broader framework for envisioning the face of congressional history.

How we preserve and collect materials is also important. Steven Lubar discusses the critical question of collection policies at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Longstanding curatorial freedom to collect based on

research interests has led to great inventories that are never used, high storage costs, and unpreparedness for new topical exhibits. Changes are underway with the appointment of collection specialists, he explains, allowing curators to focus on making “connections between artifacts and history,” especially in the exciting formats made possible by the digital age.

We hope you enjoy these investigations into the history of the federal government and its role in U.S. history, as well as reviews of the work being done by federal offices and historians. Thank you for your support of SHFG, which makes our publications possible. My thanks also to our reviewers and to assistant editor Judson MacLaury for his careful readings of these texts.

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