

**TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN WILLIAMS**  
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**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON**  
**INFORMATION POLICY, CENSUS AND NATIONAL ARCHIVES**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM**  
**ON**  
**“STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND**  
**RECORDS COMMISSION”**

**JUNE 9, 2010**

Thank you Chairman Clay and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to participate in this hearing on the reauthorization of funding for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

I have been the Executive Director of the Commission since April 2008, and prior to that, I served as Deputy Executive Director for 4 years. During this time, I have had the privilege of overseeing a Federal grantmaking agency that helps Americans access historical records and that leverages its resources to maximum advantage. Ultimately we measure our success by the success of the grantees that each year develop and implement dozens of projects to publish, preserve, and make known the nation’s most important collections of archives and personal papers. They, in turn, measure their success not only by the amount of historical records they publish, preserve and make available but by how useful those archives are to scholars, researchers, teachers, and ordinary citizens in every corner of America.

Since 1964, the Commission has funded approximately 4,800 projects across the country. A summary of some of the results include:

- *Over 950 published volumes of documentary editions*
- *Hundreds of professionals schooled in the best practices in documentary editing and the stewardship of historical records*
- *Over 2,800 archives projects, resulting in the preservation and cataloging of thousands of historical document collections*
- *165 new archival repositories established in colleges and universities, museums and other non-profits, and governments, including Native American tribes*

All of these projects, in turn, have laid the groundwork for countless venues that increase our understanding of the American Story—from classroom use of documents in schools to special exhibitions at historical societies and museums; from the prize-winning biographies of the Founding Fathers to special television series on the Civil War; from the history of emancipated slaves to new digital online collections documenting everything from the history of the Florida Everglades to the work of noted conservationist Aldo Leopold.

Every day people in all corners of the country use the records preserved and made available through the grants awarded by the Commission. Through our grants programs, we are able to leverage funds from private and public resources to augment the Federal dollars we invest. In addition, the majority of Commission grants go toward supporting jobs that move these projects forward. In the panels this afternoon you will learn more about the work of historians, documentary editors, archivists and others and the catalytic role the Commission plays in advancing that work for public benefit. You will learn about the thousands of repositories across

the country that struggle with caring for and providing access to the nation's historical documents.

Over the next five years, the Commission seeks to address the following critical needs through its programs:

### **1. Publishing Historical Records**

One of the NHPRC's cornerstone grants programs is in Publishing Historical Records which supports projects that collect, transcribe, annotate and publish the historical records that document the American story from the early days of the Republic right up through the modern Presidency, the Civil Rights Movement, and more. To date, we have supported some 300 projects, and this body of work comprises a remarkable monument to American history. Publishing has taken a great leap forward in the Internet Age, and digital editions and online collections have become vital tools for both preserving and making accessible primary source materials. In the years ahead, we must simultaneously support historians and editors as they continue their careful research and ensure that these efforts creatively adapt to take advantage of online publishing and other innovations.

### **2. Archives and Historical Records**

The archives field must address several challenges in dealing with the tremendous backlog of unprocessed records, providing online access to collections using cost effective methods, and tackling electronic records. Over the past few years, the NHPRC has spearheaded an effort to address the "hidden" collections of historical documents by

offering new grant opportunities for implementing approaches to archival work that eliminate these work backlogs and get these historical collections known and available to the public in rapid order. We also are funding projects to digitize entire collections and put them online, using cost effective methods and a streamlined approach. The response to and results of these new programs have been positive—institutions ranging from Princeton University to the Denver Public Library are rapidly changing their approaches to archival cataloging and preservation, and providing online access to substantial collections through NHPRC grants. In addition, our investment in research and development in Electronic Records has enabled institutions and, increasingly, consortia of institutions to undertake important efforts to preserve and make available electronic records collections.

### **3. Targeted Grants Programs**

At present the NHPRC supports state historical records advisory boards with a program of modest-sized grants to develop statewide services and training in archival practices and to offer popular and effective regrant programs. The vast majority of state boards actively partner with the Commission in these vital efforts. In Missouri, for example, our partnership with the state board recently helped support a regrant program for 14 projects across the state, including the archives of Historic Boonville, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, and the architectural archives at the St. Joseph Museums. The Commission stands ready to do more of this kind of work to strengthen historical records preservation and use at the local level.

As noted earlier, the Commission is uniquely positioned to focus on a variety of historical records challenges and to use its programming to address them. For example, we are eager to develop a targeted grants program that focuses on improving access to the nation's records of servitude and emancipation. These documents are often extremely difficult to find and use, but they are critical resources for anyone doing genealogical and other types of research. Any program we develop must coordinate and support basic preservation, cataloging, digitizing and other essential activities that ensure improved public access and use.

Responding to these complex challenges is no easy task, but the American people expect and deserve no less. The National Archives serves as a hub for the nation's archives, and the NHPRC is a key part of that process. The Commission looks forward to serving as a true and effective Federal partner in preserving and facilitating access to the nation's historical records.

Thank you again for this opportunity to discuss the Commission with the Committee, and I look forward to answering your questions about the NHPRC and its work.