

An American Political Archives Reader

Edited by
Karen Dawley Paul
Glenn R. Gray
L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin



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of the Congressional Papers Roundtable was part of this effort to reach beyond the Beltway by creating a national forum for archivists to discuss congressional papers issues. In addition, award-winning guides to the research collections of the House and Senate were produced by the Center for Legislative Archives.

A major turning point occurred in 1990 when P.L. 101-509 established the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress and simultaneously improved the status of the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives. This committee broadened regular discussions about the records of Congress still further by including the clerk of the House, the secretary of the Senate, appointees of House and Senate leadership, and the archivist of the United States. Its accomplishments can be traced through the four *Reports* that are reproduced on the Center for Legislative Archives Web site. Many of the specific projects described in these reports were first articulated in *The Documentation of Congress*, published in 1992 (S. Pub. 102-20). This report was the product of the Congressional Papers Roundtable and its Documentation Task Force headed by the Senate archivist.

Another important building block was the establishment of the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress (ACSC) in 2003, testimony to the fact that research institutions were beginning to focus energies on building better documentation of the Congress. Through its 501(c) (3) status and its annual meetings, it has again broadened the discussion by including historians and political scientists to further illuminate what to preserve and how best to make it available. The ACSC is exploring various options to make congressional sources available through the Internet.

While much progress has been made in the over 30 years since the initiation of efforts to better manage these invaluable historical resources, there remains much to do. Preserving and making available the records of Congress and the political process is an enormous undertaking, requiring enormous resources that are efficiently managed. It requires continued coordination among numerous individuals and groups, including those who create, collect, preserve, use, and finance the preservation of congressional collections. This volume is designed to inspire those who are interested in participating in this fascinating endeavor. It also sheds light on where we started and where we have come. Together, we may create even more effective ways to manage this important segment of the historical record. Like the history of Congress itself, progress happens when many come together for a common goal. In this case, it is the documentation of our political process.

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Reflections on the Modern History of Congressional History

Richard A. Baker
U.S. Senate Historian

HOUSE RESOLUTION 307

On March 5, 2008, within minutes of accepting an invitation to prepare an address on "the modern history of congressional history" to the annual meeting of the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress (ACSC), I received an urgent message. "Turn on C-SPAN to watch what's happening on the floor of the House of Representatives!" As the image flickered onto my computer monitor, I heard Representative Robert Brady (D-PA), chair of the Committee on House Administration, say, "[This legislation] reminds members of the importance of maintaining and archiving their papers so that future leaders and citizens may learn and understand the decisions that we have made." The camera then shifted to Brady's Republican counterpart, Vernon Ehlers of Michigan. "As members of Congress," said Ehlers, "we are routinely faced with an abundance of notes, letters, and other papers that cross our desk each day. For each of us, there is the temptation to rid ourselves of today's notes and papers and begin each day anew, free of the scourge of clutter." He continued, "It would be easiest to discard these items along with the rest of the day's castoffs, but, as history has shown us, it is often those mundane items that have painted the most accurate and detailed picture of our nation's history. These papers and their contents separately may tell us very little about the place and time in which they were created, but they are threads that, when woven together, create the fabric of our democracy."¹ The House then proceeded to adopt a resolution "expressing the sense of Congress that Members' Congressional papers should be properly

¹ Presented at the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, May 2008.

maintained and encouraging Members to take all necessary measures to manage and preserve their papers." Several months later, on June 20, the Senate unanimously joined the House in awarding its approval.²

Senate Archivist Karen Paul and I do not usually do a lot of dancing in the office. But, on any list of euphoric days in the modern history of congressional history, the morning of March 5, 2008, would surely be near the top. In 33 years as Senate historian, I have come to appreciate the potency of three simple words when strung together in a paragraph: "Congress," "democracy," and "history."

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDY OF CONGRESS

As the existence of the recently established Association of Centers for the Study of Congress affirms, history-based programs and agencies designed to explore the role of Congress in our democratic republic exist in an abundance unimaginable just a generation ago. Today, Congress employs close to 40 historians, archivists, and curators. This strong cadre is enhanced by 15 professionals at the National Archives Center for Legislative Archives. Staff at the center preserve and interpret House and Senate holdings amounting to 180,000 cubic feet of bills, resolutions, memoranda, and correspondence. The recent explosive growth of electronic records has added a new unit of measure to the center's holdings, which now include between five and six terabytes of data. Prior to 1975, with the exception of small curatorial programs, none of these staff positions existed.

How do we account for this remarkable burst of institutional support for the organized study of congressional history?

To frame an answer to that question, we must look at "The Scandal," "The Celebrations," and "The Dividend."

THE SCANDAL

Nixon

At the center of the scandal is President Richard M. Nixon. In response to revelations of the break-in at the Watergate headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, the Senate in 1973 created its Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities. That panel held 47 days of hearings and set in motion the process that led to Nixon's resignation. Nixon's efforts to withhold and destroy presidential records raised a long-deferred question: "Who owns the papers of federal officials, including those of U.S. senators and representatives?" The congressionally mandated National Study Commission on Records and Documents of Federal Officials—known as the

Public Documents Commission—concluded in 1977 that presidential and congressional papers, then considered the private property of those who possessed them, should be defined by statute as public property.³ Congress considered that recommendation but chose only to deal with the papers of the nation's future chief executives by passing the 1978 Presidential Records Act. The prevailing sentiments among legislators regarding the remainder of the Public Documents Commission's proposal seemed to be "Who would want our papers?" and "Think how much they would cost to archive!"⁴

The Public Documents Commission had based its recommendations, in part, on testimony at a forum on congressional papers in December 1976. University of Michigan historian Robert Warner had commented, "In a sense, the problem of the papers of members of Congress is very great, indeed perhaps more considerable than either the Supreme Court or the presidency." He continued, "We have [had] 37 presidents and 102 Supreme Court Justices, but we have had almost 11,000 members of Congress."⁵ Warner underscored complex issues of ownership, inadvertent loss, and the huge volume associated with these papers. Several years later, as archivist of the United States, he used that position to support major improvements in the preservation of congressional archival materials.

The aftershocks of the Watergate affair rumbled across the political landscape of the 1974 congressional election campaigns. Newly elected members, dubbed "Watergate Babies," arrived in Washington committed to inaugurating a more transparent government. In 1975, this spirit moved the Senate to create two reform-oriented, temporary panels: the Commission on the Operation of the Senate and the Select Committee to Study the Senate Committee System. The latter panel recommended that the Senate institute arrangements for timely and equitable access to its records.⁶ The Senate responded and in 1980 mandated that most of its confidential records be opened 20 years after their creation.⁷

In this post-Watergate reform climate, and on the eve of the bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution, historian Arthur Schlesinger reminded Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) that most executive branch departments have historical offices. "Why should not the Senate have one? I need not add that Congress would be in a much stronger position when it complains about executive secrecy if it at least kept pace with the executive in opening up its own files."⁸ Senator Mansfield and Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-PA) successfully sponsored legislation establishing the Senate Historical Office, which opened in September 1975.⁹

New Harmony

The major historical and archival professional groups took note of these Watergate-inspired developments. In October 1976, they invited to a strat-

egy session 41 historians and archivists concerned with the recent papers of still-active public figures. This gathering at the restored historic Indiana village of New Harmony proved to be anything but harmonious. The historians emphasized timely access, while the archivists counseled patience to ensure that the "chilling effect" of premature disclosure would not impel the creators of public papers to withhold, destroy, or place excessive restrictions on them.¹⁰ Despite the conclave's contentiousness, the acquaintances forged there helped to shape the discussion for years to come.

Dirksen Center

The mid-1970s also witnessed the earliest moves toward the creation of congressional research centers. In 1976, President Gerald Ford traveled to the hamlet of Pekin, Illinois, to dedicate the Everett Dirksen Congressional Center. He made this trip out of affection for his one-time partner in the Capitol Hill Republican leaders' news conferences dubbed the "Ev and Jerry Show." An unfortunate side effect of that visit occurred when a zealous squad of Secret Service agents ripped open sealed boxes of unprocessed records in a futile search for explosive materials. Perhaps they were looking for evidence of a Dirksen plot to make the marigold the national flower. Only Dirksen Center Director Frank Mackaman would know if there are still any bombshells hidden among the Dirksen papers.

Later that spring, the Dirksen Center conducted an inaugural symposium that attracted 60 historians, archivists, and librarians curious about this new facility and concerned about mounting problems of conserving congressional papers. Dirksen Center Board Chair James Unland noted the late senator's dream "to humanize the history of the legislative process." Unland prophetically noted, "This [conference] is the beginning of his dream."¹¹ In his keynote address, Archivist of the United States James B. Rhoads—a member of the Public Documents Commission—observed that in the aftermath of the Watergate affair, "we see a growing interest in the Congress as a countervailing force to the executive branch." He warned, however, of the great costs of preservation, the expense to researchers of traveling to such widely dispersed resources, and the privacy concerns raised by opening relatively recent materials.¹² Weeks later, Senator Roman Hruska of Nebraska, a Dirksen protégé, inserted the conference proceedings in the *Congressional Record* so that, as he put it, "Senators who are considering disposition of their own papers may have some understanding of the considerations involved."¹³

Funding

The challenges expressed by archivist Rhoads signaled the need for significant funding. A pioneering federal grant to a congressional papers

repository came in 1974—\$1 million to process the papers of former House Speaker Sam Rayburn.¹⁴ In 1978, following the death of former Vice President and Senator Hubert Humphrey, Congress appropriated \$5 million to the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. In an emerging tradition of balancing such grants between Democratic and Republican honorees at the same time, Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee inserted another \$2.5 million for the Dirksen Center.¹⁵ He honored his father-in-law and predecessor as Senate GOP leader, joking that Republicans could do the job for half of what the Democrats required for Humphrey. Sixteen years later, in 1994, the Dirksen Center made up that discrepancy by obtaining a further federal grant of \$2 million to process the papers of former House Republican Leader Robert Michel. This second Dirksen grant came as part of a package that awarded \$2 million to Boston College to manage the records of former Democratic House Speaker Thomas O'Neill. Other such bicameral and bipartisan pairings would follow.¹⁶

1978 Conference on Senators' Papers

In September 1978, Watergate, the New Harmony Conference, and expanding precedents for providing federal funds to process the papers of former members inspired the Senate to conduct a symposium on "The Research Use and Disposition of Senators' Papers." Senate leaders Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Howard Baker, both displaying increasing interest in management of the historical record, welcomed the 250 historians, archivists, and congressional staffers to the historic Senate Caucus Room. Throughout the two-day gathering, participants struggled to identify common ground. Historians who preferred to save everything, and archivists who insisted on having the final say about what to discard, had their eyes opened by Senate staff members who cited mail deliveries to member offices as high as 10,000 letters per week. This staggering volume in those pre-terabyte days created pressures for quick disposal of seemingly less significant items. "The scourge of clutter!" Participants noted that senators in 1978 would accumulate more paper in a single year than their predecessors of 30 years earlier would have amassed in an entire career on Capitol Hill. The 180-page conference proceedings included the first checklist of "Steps Toward Establishing a Records Disposition Program [for members of Congress]."¹⁷

Professional Endorsement

This fertile environment of the late 1970s produced two significant new historical membership associations: the Society for History in the Federal Government and the National Council on Public History. Working with

established historical and archival organizations, both created committees on government records. Simultaneously, an informal organization of Washington-area historians, dormant for a quarter-century, resurfaced. Soon, the "D.C. Historians' Group" was attracting more than 120 academic and federal historians, archivists, and librarians to its semiannual luncheons at the George Washington University faculty club. A by-product of the Nixon scandal, a splendid network was now in place!

THE CELEBRATIONS

Bicentennial Fever

On Capitol Hill in 1977, Robert Byrd became majority leader of the Senate. A longtime believer in historical knowledge as the firmest pillar for a representative democracy, Senator Byrd, together with Howard Baker and other congressional leaders, contracted "Bicentennial Fever." From a legislative branch perspective, there was a great deal to celebrate. Congress recently had been instrumental in bringing down an "imperial president." It had also overridden a presidential veto to enact legislation reasserting its constitutional war-making powers and had strengthened its role in the nation's budgeting process.

The 1976 American Revolution Bicentennial commemoration provided the motivation for the Senate to complete a grand restoration to their 1850s splendor of the Capitol's former Senate and Supreme Court chambers. Used for events associated with the Senate's institutional history, the Old Senate Chamber reminded audiences of the "Golden Age" of the "World's Greatest Deliberative Body."¹⁸ Yet, the 1976 bicentennial disappointed those who had hoped it would spur creation of projects and programs with an enduring impact. Congressional leaders vowed not to miss the next opportunity: the forthcoming bicentennial of the Constitution and the resulting federal government.

In 1981, the Senate, under Republican leadership for the first time in 26 years, began some serious long-range planning. Previously, "long-range planning" for history-related events on Capitol Hill usually amounted to a short-range "quick fix" of hastily arranged ceremonies. American University historian Anna Nelson called this "history without historians." Howard Baker, the new majority leader, established the Senate Bicentennial Study Group. Senator Baker selected as chair his predecessor, the former Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott—a cofounder of the Senate Historical Office. The Study Group included eight current and former senators, the librarian of Congress, the archivist of the United States, and noted constitutional scholars. It met three times over the following two years. The panel's five-

year game plan included revival of the long-out-of-print *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* and compilation of a guide to the papers of all former senators. Numbered among other projects were the first comprehensive finding aid for the historical records of the Senate at the National Archives, narrative histories of the Senate and its committees, a documentary film, and commemorative postage stamps.¹⁹

House Historical Office

These recommendations begged a large question. "Who would undertake companion projects for the House of Representatives?" Although the House had taken the initiative in the mid-1970s to create a joint congressional committee on the American Revolution Bicentennial, that panel's staff had long since departed. As the Senate Bicentennial Study Group was preparing its final report, key House members began to pay attention. Most notable among them were House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (D-MA) and Rules Committee Chair Richard Bolling (D-MO). Representative Bolling, one of the institutionally oriented "wise men" of the House, sponsored legislation to create a House Historical Office, and Speaker O'Neill appointed a national panel of distinguished scholars to guide that office.

Then, without warning, on September 24, 1982, a small band of fiscally conservative House members struck. Interpreting this initiative as merely a gimmick to improve the public image of the House, they offered as their best argument against such an office the fact that the Senate had one. To the acute embarrassment of Speaker O'Neill, who was out of town, they mustered the votes on a quiet Friday morning to kill the plan. This prompted Representative Newt Gingrich, a Ph.D. in history, to lament,

- if my colleagues think the organization of ideas, the organization of our history as an institution is irrelevant;
- if my colleagues think the people's house deserves less than the White House mess or the limousine cost for the State Department;
- if my colleagues think it does not matter that young historians and political scientists are going to learn early in their careers it is pointless to study the institution of the House because you can not find the papers; you can not get the documents and you might as well go down to the White House because that is where the action is, that is what you can write about easily;
- if my colleagues want to vote for self-contempt and for ignorance, they have a chance. Walk in and vote 'no.'²⁰

Ultimately, the House took the advice of Gingrich, who would become its speaker in the following decade. In place of a permanent historical office, members created a temporary House Bicentennial Office. Speaker O'Neill organized a national talent search and appointed as head of that

new office University of Maryland historian Raymond Smock. The new director wisely organized a bipartisan steering committee of House members, with Representative Lindy Boggs (D-LA) as chair.²¹

Congress Returns to Philadelphia

Within months, Smock had assembled a staff and set to work—along with the Senate Historical Office—on a full bicentennial agenda. The highlight of that agenda was a ceremonial meeting of Congress in Philadelphia on July 6, 1987, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Constitutional Convention's Great Compromise. That agreement provided for states to be represented equally in the Senate and in proportion to their respective populations in the House. With a joint congressional meeting at Independence Hall and separate sessions in the Senate and House chambers of Congress Hall, the event drew more than 200 members of Congress. A picture-perfect day and thousands of spectators inspired members to enjoy the occasion and to anticipate similar programs over the coming two years, culminating in a 1989 celebration of the bicentennial of Congress.

Harpers Ferry Conference

Creation of the House Bicentennial Office spurred efforts—initiated at the Senate's 1978 conference—to provide members of Congress and legislative committees with a full range of archival services. In 1984, the Senate hired Karen Paul to be its first professional archivist. Previously archivist at the University of Virginia and a National Archives staffer on loan for two years to the Senate Historical Office, Karen, with her House counterparts, helped to organize the Congressional Papers Roundtable within the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Karen and her colleagues also worked with Frank Mackaman of the Dirksen Center and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to organize a three-day conference in 1985 at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. In its report to Congress, the conference highlighted "the often severe problems of space, money, and staffing encountered by libraries and historical agencies that acquire, arrange, and describe these important historical materials." Noting the approach of the congressional bicentennial, the report emphasized "the need for improved records management techniques in congressional offices" and called for establishment of minimum standards for the collections themselves and for the archival repositories that accept them.²²

1989 Bicentennial Events

The 1989 congressional bicentennial year featured what came to be seen as a never-ending round of ceremonial activities. Early one bright spring

morning, trucks from the U.S. Mint lumbered into the Capitol Building's east front plaza bearing mammoth coin striking machines. On June 14, House and Senate leaders, members, and favored staff lined up for the opportunity to strike commemorative five-dollar gold pieces. Congress had authorized a three-coin bicentennial set, the sales of which ultimately contributed \$30 million to underwrite costs of the Capitol Visitor Center.

In separate ceremonies, the Senate and House unveiled bicentennial first-class postage stamps. Planning for that event sparked a search for an object to serve as an iconic representation of each body. The Senate selected the golden eagle and shield that surmounted the presiding officer's dais in the Old Senate Chamber. From the former House Chamber, now Statuary Hall, the House chose sculptor Carlo Franzoni's magnificent *Car of History*. This work in marble depicts Clio, the muse of history, riding in a chariot, looking over her shoulder to record in a ledger events of the past. The chariot's visible wheel houses an ornate clock.

In a March 4, 1989, appearance before a joint meeting of Congress, historian David McCullough used Franzoni's masterwork as a stage-setter. In remarks entitled, "Time and History on the Hill," he began and ended with a vignette about early nineteenth-century clockmaker Simon Willard. McCullough lamented the popularity of the modern digital clock. He termed it "a perfect symbol for much that is out of balance in our day. It tells only what time it is now, at this instant, as if that were all that anyone would wish to know, or needs to know." Franzoni's clock, however, "with two hands and an old-fashioned face . . . tells us what time it is now, what time it used to be, and what time it will become."

At work on the biography of Harry Truman that would earn him a Pulitzer Prize, McCullough enumerated the outstanding members of past Congresses for whom no adequate life accounts existed. His list included House Speakers Joseph Cannon and Thomas Reed, and Senators Carl Hayden, Joseph T. Robinson, and George Aiken. "[C]ompared to what has been published about presidents and the presidency," he said, "we have hardly begun. The field [of congressional biography] is wide open. The opportunity for a new generation of outstanding congressional scholars couldn't be greater. . . . We are all of us so accustomed to seeing our history measured by the presidency that we forget the extent to which the real story of the country can be found here [on Capitol Hill]. . . . Above all, we need to know more about Congress because we are Americans. We believe in governing ourselves."²³

Ken Burns's Film

The 1989 bicentennial production that reached the largest audience was Ken Burns's 90-minute Public Broadcasting Service film *The Congress: The*

History and Promise of Representative Government. Narrated by David McCullough, this work premiered on March 13, 1989, at Washington's National Theater before an audience of several hundred members of Congress. Produced concurrently with Burns's *Civil War* series, and using the same fiddle music and some of the talking heads, *The Congress* was quickly overshadowed by its more heart-wrenching co-creation. Its greatest impact was most likely felt in schools throughout the Midwest, thanks to free distribution by a regional phone company, but it continues to be seen on television and DVD. This film represented the first comprehensive effort to assemble visual material to support a major documentary on Congress.²⁴

Capitol Bicentennial

The congressional bicentennial of 1987 to 1991 merged smoothly into the U.S. Capitol bicentennial of 1993 to 2000. In 1992, the Office of the Architect of the Capitol and the private U.S. Capitol Historical Society announced plans to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the 1793 placement of the Capitol's first cornerstone. A highlight of the Capitol bicentennial was the May 9, 1993, helicopter removal of the Statue of Freedom from its perch atop the dome to the Capitol's east front plaza. Workers labored for nearly six months to reverse the effects of 130 years of acid rain and lightning strikes. On a spectacularly beautiful October 23 morning, congressional leaders welcomed President Bill Clinton at the west front to deliver remarks on the history of Congress and the Capitol. Then the intrepid chopper hoisted the gleaming statue back to its accustomed platform.²⁵

Over the next seven years, the Capitol bicentennial fostered projects of enduring value. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol produced a richly illustrated, 500-page history of the construction of the Capitol, by its architectural historian William Allen.²⁶ That office also published a collection of essays by Capitol Curator Barbara Wolanin and other scholars on the Italian fresco artist Constantino Brumidi—the "Michelangelo of the Capitol."²⁷ The Capitol Historical Society sponsored an annual symposium featuring experts on the building's art, architecture, and political history, with proceedings published by the Ohio University Press.²⁸

The Senate Historical Office obtained the long-observed shorthand journals of the U.S. Army engineer Montgomery C. Meigs, who from 1853 to 1861 directed construction of the Capitol's House and Senate extensions and dome. The Historical Office arranged for the translation of that obsolete system of shorthand and produced a 900-page, award-winning volume entitled *Capitol Builder*. Meigs offered a daily accounting that extended beyond construction issues to include detailed accounts of daily life in pre-Civil War Washington.²⁹

The Capitol bicentennial culminated in the year 2000 with a groundbreaking ceremony for a long-needed Capitol Visitor Center.

THE DIVIDENDS

Numerous tangible dividends emerged from the commemorations that extended from the mid-1980s through 2000.

National Archives Independence

In 1985, Congress granted the National Archives independence from its unhappy status as a subordinate unit of the General Services Administration. Archivist of the United States Robert Warner had privately promised that one of the first fruits of independence would be a separate division devoted to managing the long-neglected records of the U.S. Congress. Congress did its part by enacting legislation adding funding and staff to the newly organized Center for Legislative Archives. The center eventually grew from three overburdened custodians to an exceptional cadre of 15 historians and archivists. They have produced useful finding aids, including the first comprehensive guides to the official records of the Senate and House, and notable exhibitions.³⁰

In the statute that expanded the Legislative Archives Center, Congress created the permanent Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress.³¹ That 11-member panel, meeting twice each year since 1991, is chaired by the secretary of the Senate and the clerk of the House. It includes the archivist of the United States, the historians of the House and Senate, and six outside professionals in the fields of history, political science, and archival management. Over nearly two decades, the Advisory Committee has proven to be a potent engine for keeping issues concerning the documentary record of Congress sharply in focus for that institution's officers and leaders. The value of such a structure is becoming increasingly evident as we confront the myriad challenges of preserving electronic records.³²

In 1991, the archivist of the United States selected Michael Gillette to direct the Center for Legislative Archives. Formerly head of oral history programs for the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Gillette brought a welcome fund of energy and creativity to the center.

The Encyclopedia of Congress

Preeminent among Gillette's contributions was the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Congress*, published by Simon and Schuster in 1995. An editorial team, comprised of a journalist, a political scientist, and a historian, recruited more than 500 scholars, members of Congress, journalists, and others with practical experience and theoretical knowledge on the workings of this complex institution. This project evolved into a robust network of experts, most of whom would never otherwise have had reason to communicate with one another, let alone to read one another's work. The

Encyclopedia of Congress, with its 1,000 separate entries, stands as a singular achievement in recent congressional history.

A Century of Lawmaking

As the *Encyclopedia* was going to press in 1995, the Library of Congress formed a team of congressional documents specialists and information technology experts to produce a new resource, unprecedented in scope. Their goal was to provide online access to the official printed records of Congress's first century. The project, "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: Congressional Documents and Debates," now includes searchable text of a linked set of congressional journals and floor proceedings for the century between the First Continental Congress of 1774 and the 43rd Congress of 1875. By the year 2000, this vast documentary treasure had become available to anyone with Internet access.³³ Since then, subscription services have evolved to offer fully searchable content of the Congressional Serial Set from 1817 to 1980, including 12 million pages of legislative reports and documents. Soon the *Congressional Record*, electronically available for proceedings since 1989, will be fully accessible through the Internet, back to its first volume in 1873.

C-SPAN

The experts who worked on many of the above-mentioned projects included individuals who were becoming increasingly familiar to the public thanks to the cable network C-SPAN. The development of C-SPAN, from its founding in the mid-1970s to the advent of gavel-to-gavel televised coverage of House and Senate floor proceedings by 1986, paralleled and reinforced the growth of historical programs on Capitol Hill. Throughout those years, C-SPAN Chair Brian Lamb had contemplated an extended series of programs on the history, art, and architecture of the U.S. Capitol. His dream finally came true in May 2006 with a nine-hour series, *The Capitol*. In a review, *American Heritage Magazine* observed that "*The Capitol* proved as enthralling a history lesson as TV has ever offered—and a dazzling art and architecture survey in the bargain [that guided] viewers where tourists never tread."³⁴

Capitol Visitor Center

Thirty years of focused study on Congress and the Capitol culminated in December 2008 with the opening of the \$621 million, 580,000 square-foot Capitol Visitor Center. Since the 1980s, private financial contributions and sales of bicentennial coins produced significant revenues to defray the

cost of exhibitions in a gallery that spans the length of two football fields. Unlike the bicentennial of 1976, however, Visitor Center planners did not have to search for resident experts. Three decades of growth in congressional history offices and expertise proved invaluable. Just as historians and archivists enjoyed the dividends of "bicentennial fever," now Congress and its leaders reaped the benefits of its well-established historical offices. Staffs of the House, Senate, and Architect of the Capitol's historical and curatorial programs joined with congressional specialists from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution. They also worked closely with academic scholars in the fields of women's history, African American studies, and Native American culture to develop detailed exhibition scripts. In this, the team was guided by Ralph Appelbaum Associates, museum exhibit designers, whose deeply impressive work can be viewed at Washington's recently opened Newseum and the Holocaust Museum. For the first time, Congress will have a user-friendly visitor center, accessible to people of all ages, to promote inquiry and discussion surrounding the nation's "first branch" of government. The center's gift shops will expand the reach of the center's exhibitions, films, and interactive features by offering a range of educational materials conveniently available under one roof. The existence of these commercial outlets, patronized annually by an anticipated 3 million visitors, is likely to attract the attention of authors and publishers ready to exploit this newly energized market.³⁵

Congressional scholars now have access to a vast public. C-SPAN routinely features the writers of books about Congress in its various book programs. DVDs of its recent series on the Capitol sell by the thousands. Historians employed by the Senate, House, Architect of the Capitol, and the National Archives Center for Legislative Archives create interpretive text for publications—both printed and Web based—that reach an audience numbering in the multiple millions. The Web pages of the nation's congressional research centers have a correspondingly wide reach.

Over the past third of a century, resources and networks for the study of Congress have expanded far beyond Everett Dirksen's dream "to humanize the history of the legislative process." For congressional studies centers, however, this expansion presents significant challenges. To remain vital, centers and collections initiated in a burst of enthusiasm with the high-profile donation of a single member's collection must maintain long-term reliable funding sources, shape programs attractive to ever more diverse audiences, and refresh their principal holdings with collections of subsequent generations of former members. The future will not smile on centers devoted to just one former member, no matter how prominent or accomplished.

Ensuring continued vibrancy for the study of Congress is the public's insistence on the right to know about the processes by which the nation sets

its priorities. David McCullough got it exactly right. "Above all, we need to know more about Congress because we are Americans. We believe in governing ourselves."

NOTES

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