

Meeting Minutes
Founding Fathers Advisory Committee of the
National Archives and Records Administration

February 28, 2012

Attendees

Advisory Committee

Edward Ayers, University of Richmond, Committee Chair

Mary Beth Norton, Cornell University

Jack Rakove, Stanford University

National Archives

David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States

Kathleen Williams, Executive Director, National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and Designated Federal Official (DFO) for the Committee

Lucy Barber, NHPRC staff

Timothy Connelly, NHPRC staff

Keith Donohue, NHPRC staff

Christine Dunham, NHPRC staff

David McMillen, External Affairs Coordinator, National Archives

Invited Guests: Editors of Founders Editorial Projects

Edward Lengel, University of Virginia, The George Washington Papers

David Mattern, University of Virginia, The James Madison Papers

Barbara Oberg, Princeton University, The Thomas Jefferson Papers

Ellen Cohn, Yale University, The Benjamin Franklin Papers

Jeff Looney, Monticello, The Thomas Jefferson Retirement Papers

C. James Taylor, Massachusetts Historical Society, The John Adams and Adams Family Papers

Presenters

Penny Kaiserlain, University of Virginia Press

David Sewell, University of Virginia Press

Mark Saunders, University of Virginia Press

Susan Perdue, Documents Compass, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Holly Shulman, Documents Compass, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Public Guests

Stephen Wellum, The Heritage Foundation

Stanley Katz, Princeton University
David Gilliland, Pew Charitable Trusts

Welcome

The Archivist of the United States, David S. Ferriero, and the Committee Chair, Edward Ayers, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. Chairman Ayers outlined the initial themes for the meeting: the projects are making good progress, the digital world holds promise, and all projects are looking at their resources and staffing challenges. He stated that the charge of the meeting was to learn from the projects and determine how best to represent them to the Committee's various audiences, including the Archivist, Congress, and the President. Specifically the Committee wants to determine what issues and constraints the projects face; if the projects would want to scale up and if so, what would be required; the development of the digital components; and what the Committee can do to add to the progress of the projects. The Committee then approved the meeting agenda.

Presentations

Founders Online Initiative

The meeting proceeded with an overview and presentation of the *Founders Online* Initiative. Kathleen Williams provided the Committee with background information on the project. Prompted by a 2008 Congressional hearing and a subsequent report by the NHPRC, the Commission set aside \$4,500,000 in FY 2010 to provide online access to the transcribed papers of the Founders. The goal is to create a free online resource that includes the documents of key individuals – John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington. There are two components to accomplish this online charge. First, the contents of approximately 250 published volumes, including all the edited documents, their annotation and any other text, will be posted online. Secondly, the “Early Access” portion of *Founders Online* will include the unpublished transcriptions of approximately 60,000-70,000 additional transcribed documents. Presentations from the managers of each project then followed.

(1) Founders Online – Published Volumes and Website

The University of Virginia Press is developing the *Founders Online* site. The Press is also responsible for ensuring the online preparation of the already published material. *Founders Online* will be released to the public in its initial version in June 2012, and subsequent materials and functionality will be added until all work is completed in December 2014. Representatives from the Press -- Penny Kaiserlian, Mark Saunders and David Sewell -- provided the Committee and guests with an overview of the design and development of the site, along with a live demonstration. The Press staff noted that the University of Virginia began working on a Digital

Imprint project over ten years ago. It evolved into what is known as Rotunda, a paid subscription site providing access to several of the Founders' Papers. In October 2010, UVA entered into a three-year cooperative agreement with the National Archives to create an entirely new, freely available tool that gathers the transcripts of the Founders' papers online. The Press is now nearly half-way through the agreement and thus far has signed its own agreements with five of the six projects to make their published material available online through this new website. The Press is still in discussion with the Franklin papers. The June 2012 public release of *Founders Online* will feature the papers of five founders: Adams, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Washington.

The *Founders Online* website is using Marc-Logic XML software to develop the interface; this product is also used by several Federal agencies. When Rotunda was developed, the target audience was a scholarly, collegiate audience, and the intent was to preserve the look and feel of the letterpress version. During early discussions about the online project, the Archivist asked for a new approach, featuring a new platform and interface to bring documents to the public, including teachers and students. An important goal of *Founders Online* is to create an accessible and user-friendly site that reaches a broad audience; from K-12 students and teachers through those engaged in scholarly research. At its initial release in June 2102, *Founders Online* will include the contents of 187 volumes, totaling about 100,000 document transcriptions, with additional content to follow in subsequent months.

UVA Press discussed the research and development stages of the project and highlighted the design and functionality of the site. The challenges in the web presentation include heterogeneous content, source structure and translation to online equivalents, as well as scaling up to accommodate a much larger user audience. UVA has been working with several collaborators and has conducted focus groups to receive user input and feedback. The *Founders Online* site will eventually be located at the URL, *founders.archives.gov*, but will be hosted on servers at UVA. Additional feedback after its first release will be incorporated into the site's appearance and functionality. The Press plans to begin alpha testing of the site with a selected user group at the end of March.

The editorial projects have already been involved in an ongoing manner with the review of their content on Rotunda. When the URL for the *Founders Online* is ready, it will be available to the editorial projects for proofing and testing. However, not a lot of additional staff time will be required by the editorial projects, as UVA is working with existing data that has already been vetted and made available on Rotunda.

David Sewell then illustrated some of the search features and sorting capabilities. He explained that the search grammar is very similar to what Google uses, so the project is confident that the public will be able to use it with ease. There will be a Help Page to explain the search functions, but the intent is to try to create a site that enables users to find what they are looking for without

having to refer to the Help Page. Sewell reported that annotation text will be part of the full text search and that *Founders Online* may have an Advanced Search Page, depending on user feedback. The Committee suggested that the developers might want to consider a way to highlight when a returned search result came from the annotations.

Sewell further demonstrated the site's search capabilities. The search tool allows for an "or" search, as well as the ability to find a word that is within ten words of another. There is also a "not operator" with a minus sign and, by default, the search tool is case insensitive. Searches are also grammatically standard. For example, a search using the word "sink", will return results listing "sinks", "sinking", "sunken" etc. In addition, other facets can be added to the search page, and the site will likely have a "date picker". The project may use a consultant to develop an easier way to conduct date searches, as a pop-up calendar is difficult to use for such an extended period of time as is covered by these materials. The site does not currently have a wild card with asterisks search option, but the project team thinks that this will be a useful future option.

When asked about how the site will handle spelling, Sewell reported that Marc-Logic provides a number of possible options. He also noted that a thesaurus is on the "wish" list and could be useful when dealing with pre-modern spelling. This has been implemented to a limited extent with Rotunda. The designers are confident that the site will be intuitive to public users, but additional user feedback will be considered based on the next round of testing. Ellen Cohn had a further question on the spelling variations of proper names. Sewell replied that the correspondence author and recipient names have been normalized. However, standardized spelling of names across projects has not been attempted, and this would require editorial input. In addition, if searching for references to people, one would need to search for the exact spelling of the name or try wild card spelling. Sewell suggested again that if the editors were aware of common spellings of names, the project could use that in order to create a thesaurus

The *Founders Online* programmer created the code that went through the digitized index to identify, with a high degree of precision, documents that are referred to within the text. However, the index metadata has not currently been added to the document so that it is part of the search. The *Founders Online* project team wants to make certain that users are not receiving false positives in the search results. The indexes are digitized and the ability to extract from them exists, but the developers do not want to confuse the public. As such, this will not be included in the first release, as a fair amount of user testing remains.

The editors also asked how to conduct a search within a search. Facets can be used to narrow the search further and a help question mark box will be added that will explain this in more detail.

Committee members commented that they felt that using the word "Not" was more intuitive than a minus sign when searching and asked for the reasoning behind that decision. The search logic

is based on Marc-Logic grammar logic. This is the de-facto web standard but the *Founders Online* site will have the ability to customize this.

Other aspects of the site that were discussed include the following points. There will be hyperlinked cross-references when the annotation refers to something and calendar items are treated as documents. Jim Taylor also suggested putting “Not Found” in the title for correspondence. In addition, if there are two versions of the same document posted, readers will need to look at the annotations to distinguish the two. In the June release, there will be no ability to save searches, but the project anticipates creating this functionality in the future. A login will not be required and searches can be printed. Sewell reiterated that the website URL would be sent to the project directors for testing.

(2) Founders Online - Early Access to Document Transcripts

Susan Perdue and Holly Shulman, senior staff members at Documents Compass, then briefed the Committee on the status of the “Early Access” component of *Founders Online*. In September 2011 Documents Compass, a division of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, entered into a three-year cooperative agreement with the National Archives to prepare for online access approximately 68,000 document transcriptions that have not yet appeared in printed volumes. The intent behind this effort is to provide the public with access to these documents *in advance* of full completion of scholarly work of the editorial projects (hence the phrase, “early” access). The Early Access project is fairly labor intensive, with the verification work and associated tasks being carried out by 22 project staff. Primary challenges include ensuring the accuracy, completeness and efficiency of the transcription and document encoding processes and accommodating different editorial processes and workflows that exist among the editorial teams. The use of digital tools ensures an efficient and well-managed process by creating a paperless and fully-documented workflow. Although only in its third month, the Early Access project has completed the proofreading work on 1150 documents and it has loaded the Madison documents onto its Document Management System. Once completed, all early access transcriptions will be added to *Founders Online*, marked or watermarked as Early Access documents. Early Access documents will be integrated into the *Founders Online* site, combining the efforts from this project with the efforts being carried out by the UVA Press into one online tool.

The Committee followed the presentation with questions about quality control, project staffing, and work flows. Ms. Perdue and Ms. Shulman noted that the vast majority of the historical documents already have been transcribed by the editorial projects, at least as a basic level, with the exception of some Adams materials. They indicated that Documents Compass would process all documents it receives for verification and encoding work during the course of the project. As completed volumes are published in the future, the Early Access versions of document transcriptions will be removed from *Founders Online*. In others words, as the final authoritative versions of document transcriptions are completed, these will replace the “early” versions. This

may take several years to complete. They also noted that, as the Hamilton project has concluded and all materials have been published, there is no “Early Access” component to these materials.

Issues still to be addressed include developing a method of including documents that receive a level of editorial attention but ultimately are not chosen for publication. Ms. Perdue and Ms. Shulman acknowledged that the Early Access project would need to find an effective way to treat these materials. There is also the question of supplemental material that could be posted to *Founders Online*, but then will need to be described as separate from a published volume. In these cases, the text is verified, but it is not annotated and no volume or page number will be listed.

Committee member Mary Beth Norton asked about the integration of Early Access into Founders Online and if the metadata will be sufficiently regularized. The Documents Compass staff noted that in terms of the full text search, results should be consistent and understandable to users.

A brief discussion followed regarding how users should cite “early access” materials from *Founders Online*. Ms. Williams asked the editors to advise the Committee and the Founders Online teams as to the proper format for citations of “authoritative” documents (those already annotated and published by the projects) and “preliminary” documents (the “early access” versions). Once those formats have been established, the *Founders Online* website will include instructions to users as to how to cite the two types of documents. The editors also expressed concern that releasing these documents was not merely a matter of improved transcriptions, but also of providing correct information, including dates, names, etc. Ellen Cohn noted that the Franklin Papers attempts to keep a list of all changes made to its website.

Early Access staff commented that it would be a significant undertaking to replace the Early Access documents with the documents that will appear in future published volumes. They noted that one way to accomplish this is to assign unique identifiers. Ms. Perdue stated that every Early Access document has its own unique identifier, and Documents Compass can coordinate with the projects and the UVA Press on this.

The editors also noted that Early Access is not a substitute for producing digital and letterpress editions, as the latter feature extensive annotation, comprehensive indexes, and fully verified information. They urged that the presses and the projects be reassured that the Committee regards these undertakings as important. Chairman Ayers reiterated this and suggested that the Early Access project is an amplification or enhancement of the work of the editors, but one that does not replace the scholarly work of the editions. Kathleen Williams suggested that the NHPRC should communicate this as staff talk about *Founders Online* and explain that the editorial projects are and will remain the source material for *Founders Online*. Through subsequent discussion, it was suggested that this point could be explained on the “About” page

of the website, and that this message could be conveyed in the forthcoming Report to the President and to Congress. The Archivist stated that this was an important message to convey in June with the initial release of *Founders Online* and important to convey to Congress.

Updates on the Projects and Conversations with the Editors

Chairman Ayers began the next portion of the meeting by noting that the digital plan is a way to make these materials more accessible and asked the projects to report on their status and future plans. The editorial projects each briefly updated the Committee on the status of their respective projects.

George Washington Papers

Ed Lengel informed the Committee that the Washington Papers are entering the end phase of the letterpress and digital volumes. The Washington Papers publishes an average of two volumes per year and are on schedule to complete the project by 2023, or two years earlier than prior estimates. The staffing is complete and is at eight full-time staff. The project is also working on special projects, such as the financial series. Washington's financial papers have never been published before and so the project is collaborating with Documents Compass with the goal of creating a born-digital edition to allow free access and permit the data to be searched and manipulated, along with a currency conversion tool. The project also hopes to link to document images. This three-to-five year project is moving forward while continuing to seek funding. This project can serve as a model for the other financial records projects.

Dr. Lengel stated that the Washington Papers project feels it has the resources to do both the digital and letterpress editions. In addition, most of the staff is trained on the job and the project invests in their professional development.

Thomas Jefferson Papers

Barbara Oberg, director of the Thomas Jefferson Papers at Princeton, noted that when the project began, public and private partnerships and outreach were crucial components. Both are still important today. A milestone in the project came when it reached the years of Jefferson's Presidency. The project is now working on the year 1803. The Jefferson Papers at Princeton has a partnership with the Retirement series at Monticello. Dr. Oberg observed that this is a good partnership and that the volumes are coming out at a similar pace.

The staff consists of six editors, one editorial assistant and one annotation checker. The project has a database of master files that it has shared with Documents Compass. The project also has topical series, including the legal series and the financial series, but no core funding is directed toward these series. The financial records should be going online and the legal series is still in progress. The project has had a large amount of private funding, including support from the Pew

Charitable Trusts and the Packard Foundation. As a condition of its Pew support, the project does not seek funding from the National Endowments for the Humanities.

James Madison Papers

David Mattern with the Madison Papers then described the status of that project. Thirty-four volumes are complete, or more than half of the total planned volumes, and one volume is currently going to press. The Congressional series is finished and there are three other ongoing series – Secretary of State, Presidential, and Retirement. The project has a stable staff of three full-time editors, two support staff, one copy-editor and one editor-in-chief.

Thomas Jefferson Papers - Retirement Series

Jeff Looney with the Jefferson Retirement Papers pointed out that the retirement series is not an NHPRC project. It was founded in 1999 with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts. The goal of the project is to be done by 2026 and thus far, it is on track. This project was born digital from the beginning and uses digital files for publishing and to submit to Rotunda. The project is currently working to create TEI compliant tags.

A separate project involves the digital archive of the family letters. There is also a featured letter series online. The project is creating a free online cumulative index as it progresses. The staff consists of five editors, approximately one and a half editorial assistants and two digital technicians. Most of the staff learns digital skills on the job. Currently the level of staffing is stable. However, Dr. Looney expressed concern that as the project progresses closer to completion, for example, five years from completion, staff might leave and would be difficult to replace. Staffing also affects the schedule of publishing. Dr. Looney could also see the possibility of funding a multi-year project to enhance the work that has already been completed.

Benjamin Franklin Papers

Ellen Cohn observed that the Franklin Papers is looking toward the end of the project. Forty volumes have been published, up through the year 1783. The project has focused a substantial amount of effort on Franklin's time in France. It will be a major transition when the project returns to his years in the United States. A major challenge will then be finding subject specialists. Finding the staff that the project needs is a challenge and there is high turnover at present due to retirements. The staff consists of three assistant editors and two half-time staff. Most of the staff does not have a documentary editing background. The project is currently working on three volumes and has done the planning and groundwork for the final volumes of the Philadelphia period. The project is scheduled to end by 2020. The final work to be performed will include a cumulative index. For the last ten years, the project has merged indexes

into a cumulative index that is fully searchable on Yale's website; however, merging indexes is a challenge as Dr. Cohn reported.

The Franklin Papers are online thanks to the Packard Humanities Institute. The documents were first made available on compact disc and then on a website managed by the Institute. The Project has provided the papers and the published volumes to the site. Some of the French translations have been completed, but not all. The Project has also produced a biographical dictionary that is online and there are now biographical sketches on everyone who wrote to Franklin.

The Documents Compass staff followed this point by noting that the Mellon Foundation is interested in supporting the creation of biographical identifications extracted from the annotations. The "People of the Founding Era" project, currently underway at Documents Compass, is building on top of the information and work that already exists.

John Adams and Adams Family Papers

Jim Taylor reported that the Adams Papers project recently has cut nine years off the project's completion date, and it is now expected to be complete by 2041. The Adams Papers project is unique in that there are several people and generations that are a part of the project. The project is now focused on the Founding Era. Forty-six volumes have been published, ten of which are not about John and Abigail Adams. The project now only publishes in two series, the public papers of John Adams and the family correspondence. There is almost twice as much work to be done in the public papers. Just recently, staff has successfully expanded the size and number of document per volume while keeping on schedule with its production schedule. In addition, the Online Adams Catalog (OAC) has just been completed and a large volume of work is online.

The Adams Papers project consists of eight full-time staff, making up twenty-five percent of the Historical Society's work force. This results in other responsibilities being assigned to project staff. Dr. Taylor noted that he had the newest staff, most of which were age forty and under and had been with the project for less time than the staff of the other editing projects. The Adams Papers sends the new editors to classes to aid in their professional development. However, a major concern is maintaining the staff, as the average age makes them more prone to move on.

Dr. Taylor also mentioned that there had been an idea to create a separate Executive series and publish all three series at the same time. The project created a new plan in 2008 that accelerated publication under the two existing series with more staff. However, he observed that after a certain point, it becomes more and more difficult to plan to accelerate the production schedule.

In the course of these summaries, several editors noted that they needed to correct the handouts about finances and publishing schedules. Williams encouraged them to submit financial updates as well as more detailed information about publication plans.

Project Challenges

As part of the ensuing discussion, the editors expressed a number of challenges to the projects, including concerns about staff succession. Staff members with a number of years of experience will be retiring in the next few years, and as the projects get closer to completion, additional staff will be likely to leave. Due to the training and time investment of staff members, it will be very difficult to replace departing staff.

The editors also expressed their opinion that additional funds would not necessarily accelerate the pace of completion, except in the case of the Adams Papers and special projects, such as the Washington financial papers. The Washington financial papers are not currently supported by the NHPRC, but the project is actively seeking additional funding for this work. Jim Taylor with the Adams Papers noted that he could accelerate with additional funds. Kathleen Williams reiterated that stable ongoing funding is an important issue. Jeff Looney also stated that he was interested in ensuring that there was funding to continue the digital projects. Ms. Williams noted that the NHPRC knows that it must assume maintenance for sustaining the *Founders Online* site and \$150,000 per year over the next ten years must be set aside for this purpose.

The editors also observed that there is only a certain publication rate that the presses can handle. Chairman Ayers suggested that the Committee could focus on efforts to broaden and deepen the work, for example by focusing on the digital work or outreach, rather than just acceleration and that perhaps the Committee is thinking more about leveraging than acceleration. The digital initiatives are one way of addressing acceleration of the projects. The Committee is attempting to provide the fullest accounting of and advocating for the projects' work and it is important to counter the idea that the *Founders Online* site is the end.

Chairman Ayers asked if graduate schools were producing historians equipped for documentary editing positions and thus supporting documentary editing as a career opportunity. He also asked if there were ways to strengthen the field. The editors provided feedback on the status of the professional field and noted that most people do not intend to become documentary editors initially and that the field could benefit from increased support, awareness, and public opportunities. The editors observed that a number of history program directors do not support the field of documentary editing and that it is harder and harder to find these types of positions as the funding decreases. In addition, the community needs to remind others that this is a scholarly pursuit.

The editors also stated that it was a challenge to keep their office spaces, as all universities are pressed for space, which in some cases has prevented the projects from expanding.

Upon the request of Chairman Ayers, Kathleen Williams reminded everyone of the statute's charge to the Committee, including recommending executive or legislative action that would accelerate completion as well as to provide an annual report to the Archivist and Congress that

included information on all of the funding received by the projects. The report will break out the project funding by general categories such as private, Federal and individual funding. Congress also expects information on the frequency of publication through the end of the projects and as a result, information on specific production schedules would be necessary. Information will also be needed on outreach and educational activities, while making clear that these activities are often outside of Federal funding. It was noted that not all of the projects regularly supply their outreach activities to the NHPRC, and the Committee is seeking ways to gather this data. Kathleen Williams stated that as a first step, a survey was sent out to gather standard project data on finances and publishing schedules. Information on outreach, scholarly citations, and other uses should be developed and sent to the editorial projects.

Next Steps: The NHPRC staff will pull together information from editorial project narrative reports and other sources to assist the Committee in authoring its annual report to Congress on the state of the editorial projects. Chairman Ayers hopes to complete this report by May 2012.

Editorial projects are asked to submit corrected and/or more detailed information on finances and publishing schedules. In addition, if they do not normally provide the NHPRC with outreach, citations and other uses of their work, the Committee requests that they submit that information as well.

The Committee will also contact the projects for additional information and follow-up and the Committee report will synthesize the comments of the editors. Chairman Ayers listed some of the questions for the Committee and editors to consider:

- What is the best case to make for additional resources?
- What does it mean to be sustainable?

Committee member Jack Rakove suggested that it was important to remember that no other nation has ever attempted to publish its founders' papers or to create a comprehensive public record. He followed that the Committee will want to stress in its report what a remarkable enterprise this is, both a notable activity and a cause for celebration. Chairman Ayers concurred and stated that this was the Committee's chance to crystallize those sentiments. He then closed the meeting.