
The National Archives: Serving Government, the Public, and Scholarship, 1950-1965

By James Gregory Bradsher

The two decades that followed the Second World War were years of expansion within the federal government in general and within the National Archives in particular. Through numerous government programs, American citizens received home loans, income supplements, education subsidies, improved highways, price supports, and many other services. Foreign nations received monetary aid and advisors to help rebuild after the war. In the process of delivering these services, the federal government generated millions of cubic feet of records that became the responsibility of the fledging National Archives.

In this era of expanded government services, it is not surprising that the National Archives was transformed from a small historical agency into a nascent bureaucracy with responsibility for records management, a presidential libraries system, a network of federal records centers, an expanded Federal Register program, and a national historical publications grant program as well as for preserving and making available the permanently valuable records of the federal government. These new responsibilities came as a result of a general National Archives commitment to serving other federal agencies, the general public, and scholarship. It was this tripartite commitment that shaped the National Archives in the years from 1950 to 1965.

On June 3, 1948, Wayne C. Grover became the third Archivist of the United States. A seasoned federal civil servant, trained archivist, and records management specialist, Grover was well equipped for directing the National Archives in the post-war period. It was a period, he would quickly learn, that was filled with problems and challenges, changes and increased responsibilities and in which the National Archives would be required to serve the government, the public, and scholarship in more ways and more often than it had during its first fifteen years. It was also a period that would find Grover's small institution becoming a relatively large organization, responsible for federal records as well as for federal archives.¹

Grover faced many challenges when he became Archivist, and the greatest of these was the placement of the National Archives within the government hierarchy. Within a few months of assuming his new position, Grover was fighting a losing campaign to keep the National Archives from being subsumed into the about to be created General Services Administration (GSA). But on July 1, 1949, the National Archives found itself part of GSA. That it was not further subordinated within a bureau of records management was the result of Grover persuading the new administrator of general services, Jess Larson, that the Archives could effectively coordinate both programs. On December 1, Larson placed a records management division within the newly renamed National Archives and Rec-

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¹Donald R. McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934-1968* (1978), pp. 214-216.

Millions of American families visited the "Charters of Freedom"—the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights—during the 1950s and early 1960s, years of intense American patriotism.





Archivist Wayne C. Grover and Deputy Archivist Robert H. Bahmer view an Archives exhibit in 1949.

ords Service (NARS) of the General Services Administration.²

The loss of independence was a "serious blow to the morale of the staff, the pride of the profession, and to the standing of the institution among the cultural agencies of the world." Most of the staff regretted their institution's loss of independence and feared that archival activities would be relegated to a minor role within the agency and that records management would predominate. Some others optimistically believed that archival activities would benefit from the new relationship with GSA, especially if the larger organization would provide sufficient staff, funds, and space to allow growth and increased archival services. As a small cultural institution, they argued, the National Archives had generally suffered at appropriation time. But even the proponents of reorganization were concerned about the political implications of being associated with a mammoth, service-oriented bureaucracy headed by a politically appointed administrator.³

²Ibid., pp. 220–233; H. G. Jones, *The Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (1969), pp. 40–65; Robert W. Krauskopf, "The Hoover Commissions and Federal Recordkeeping," *American Archivist* 21 (Oct. 1958): 371–399; Oliver W. Holmes, "The National Archives at a Turn in the Road," *ibid.*, 12 (Oct. 1949): 339–354; Wayne C. Grover, "Recent Developments in Federal Archival Activities," *ibid.*, 14 (Jan. 1951): 9.

³Jones, *Records of a Nation*, p. 61; Ernst Posner, "The National Archives and the Archival Theorist," *American Archivist* 18 (July 1955): 209; Grover, "Recent Developments," pp. 9–10; Holmes, "National Archives at a Turn," pp. 351–354; Krauskopf, "Hoover Commissions," p. 381.

Ever the pragmatist, Grover made the best of what he perceived to be a less than ideal situation. Fortunately, Larson was sympathetic to NARS and allowed Grover to direct archives and records management activities with a minimum of administrative hindrance. Larson knew that there was much to be done and that Grover was capable of accomplishing the difficult tasks that faced the new agency. This was especially true with respect to its obligations to other federal agencies. During Grover's administration, from 1948 to 1965, approximately two-thirds of the NARS staff and budget was allocated to services of one kind or another to various government agencies. For the most part these were records management and disposition activities.⁴

The passage of the Federal Records Act in September 1950 had a major impact on the Archives' ability to provide these records management services. The act pulled together most of the previous legislation related to the National Archives, giving more authority to GSA and charging GSA with improving procedures, methods, and standards pertaining to the creation of records, their maintenance and use when current, and their disposition when no longer current. In addition, it authorized GSA to operate federal records centers. The act also directed heads of agencies to make and keep records that adequately documented their agencies' organization, functions, and essential transactions and to operate effective records management programs. To ensure that agencies created, maintained, and disposed of their records in an efficient manner, GSA was authorized to inspect agency records management practices. Fortunately for NARS, Larson immediately delegated all of these responsibilities to the Archives.⁵

The NARS records management goals were to reduce the growth and volume of records and to make those that remained more useful, simpler, and less expensive to maintain. To that end NARS during the 1950s began producing records management handbooks, providing technical assistance training programs for agency personnel, and conducting surveys of agency programs in order to obtain a better perspective on what was actually being done in the agencies. By the mid-1960s over 200,000 civil servants had attended NARS training sessions on records disposition, forms improvement, mail manage-

⁴Grover, "Recent Developments," pp. 9–10; Herbert E. Angel, "Federal Records Management Since the Hoover Commission Report," *American Archivist* 16 (Jan. 1953): 14–15.

⁵Ibid.; Grover, "Recent Developments," pp. 8–12; Krauskopf, "Hoover Commissions," pp. 384–385.



President Eisenhower inspected the federal records center in Denver in September 1953.

ment, correspondence management, source data automation, directives management, and files improvement. To determine how well agencies were complying with the Federal Records Act, NARS in 1963 began auditing agency records programs.⁶

Beginning in 1950, NARS also provided low-cost storage to federal executive agencies, the courts, and Congress. The first NARS records center was opened in 1950, at which time other federal agencies employed almost six thousand individuals at over one hundred records centers and more than two hundred other storage facilities. Surveys conducted by NARS found that the federal government, by using fewer, larger, better located, and centrally administered centers, would achieve substantial economy and efficiency. By 1955, most agencies agreed; the number of non-NARS records centers had dropped to forty. By that time, the National Archives was operating ten centers with a staff of

⁶Ibid., pp. 386–393; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 193–194; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 241, 275–276, 282–284; General Services Administration, *Annual Report of the Administrator of General Services for the Year Ending June 30, 1954* (1955), p. 4; hereafter cited as *GSA Annual Reports*, with the fiscal year given; *GSA Annual Reports*, FY 55, p. 2; FY 56, p. 2; FY 57, pp. 3–4; FY 58, p. 10; FY 59, p. 24; FY 60, pp. 10–11; FY 61, pp. 15–16; FY 62, pp. 41–42; FY 63, pp. 51–52; FY 64, p. 52; FY 65, p. 29.



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barely five hundred to administer about two and one half million cubic feet of records. By January 1966, fourteen centers, with more than seven hundred employees, were storing and servicing nearly nine million cubic feet of records. This was an extraordinary record of service to other federal agencies.⁷

Records did not just sit in the records centers ignored and unused. NARS appraised unscheduled records and transferred valuable records to archival units. Records that had no continuing value and that were eligible for destruction were destroyed. By 1966 the records centers were responding to some five million reference requests a year, a figure five times higher than a decade earlier. A congressional committee in 1966 found that by storing records and providing various reference services, the records centers had saved the government an estimated \$250 million since 1951, a figure that was far more than the total budget of NARS for the 1951–1966 period.⁸

When NARS was created in December 1949 the federal government had custody of some twenty million cubic feet of records and was creating about two million cubic feet annually. Twenty years later it had custody of almost twenty-eight million cubic feet and was creating over four million cubic feet of records a year. During the intervening years the federal government created some sixty million cubic feet of records and destroyed over fifty million cubic feet. Ensuring that temporary records were appraised and properly destroyed, which allowed for greater efficiency and economy, was perhaps one of NARS' greatest contributions to the federal government during Grover's administration, as well as before and since.⁹

Although many of the services provided by NARS to the federal government related to records management, they were by no means the

only type of services provided. The presidential library system, which included four libraries by 1965, provided preservation and reference services for the papers and records of former presidents and other federal officials. The Federal Register Division published laws, regulations, and presidential documents for the executive and legislative branches of government and in 1959 began a program to assist agencies in the preparation of documentation for publication. The Federal Register Division was also responsible for receiving and preserving original copies of congressional bills, orders, resolutions, and votes; certifying, publishing, and preserving amendments to the Constitution; and receiving and preserving certificates of the electoral votes for president and vice president. In 1955 the division also became responsible for receiving and preserving interstate compacts.¹⁰

In addition to providing documents to federal agencies for exhibit purposes, the archival divisions of NARS performed reference services for all branches of the federal government. In fact, during the early 1950s more than half of the archival reference services rendered by NARS were for various agencies of the federal government. Such reference requests usually stemmed from official considerations of national policy, agency operating programs, and administrative problems. Members of Congress frequently called upon NARS to provide records or information needed in connection with committee or other legislative activities. Inaugural committees consulted records of earlier committees while planning inaugurations, and agency attorneys used records to obtain data to support the government's cases before courts, commissions, and other tribunals. Agencies used records to obtain information needed for developing programs and establishing legal or administrative precedents.¹¹

In spite of the rapid expansion of the federal government in the years after World War II, the National Archives did much more than provide support services to other federal agencies. As the size, visibility, and responsibilities of the agency expanded, so also did the demand for services on the part of the general public. The National Archives was quite sympathetic to this plea; indeed, one of the fundamental missions of the agency was to make the public more aware

⁷Ibid., FY 52, p. 59; FY 53, pp. 9–11; FY 55, p. 5; FY 59, p. 26; FY 61, p. 17; Krauskopf, "Hoover Commissions," p. 394; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 175, 177, 180; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 240–241, 275–279.

⁸Herbert E. Angel, "Archival Janus: The Records Center," *American Archivist* 31 (Jan. 1968): 11–12; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 177–180; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 242–243, 278.

⁹For NARS disposition activities, including developing General Records Schedules which authorized the destruction of routine housekeeping records common to most federal agencies, see *ibid.*, pp. 195, 245, 251, 278; Isadore Perlman, "General Schedules and Federal Records," *American Archivist* 15 (Jan. 1952): 27–38; Martin I. Elzy, "Scholarship Versus Economy: Appraisal at the National Archives," *Prologue* 6 (Fall 1974): 183–188; *GSA Annual Reports*, FY 53, p. 3; FY 54, p. 3; FY 62, p. 44; FY 63, p. 54; FY 64, pp. 54–55; FY 65, p. 31.

¹⁰Ibid., FY 53, p. 20; FY 60, p. 18; FY 61, p. 22; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 138–139.

¹¹Robert H. Bahmer, "Keep The Record Straight," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 63 (July 1954): 234–236; *GSA Annual Reports*, FY 52, p. 72; FY 53, p. 13; FY 54, pp. 14–15, 17–18.

As a result of legislation sponsored by President Truman, the presidential library system expanded in the 1950s and 1960s. The Harry S. Truman Library opened in 1957 in Independence, Missouri.



The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa, opened in 1964, more than thirty years after the former president left office.



The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library was opened in 1962 in Abilene, Kansas, as part of a complex that includes a chapel and the former president's birth place.



President Kennedy had a life-long interest in American history and won a Pulitzer Prize for his book, *Profiles in Courage*. In 1962, he opened a Naval history exhibit at the Archives in the company of the famed historian, Samuel Eliot Morrison.

of their federal documentary heritage.

One basic service to the public was the publication of government laws and regulations in uniform editions. The Federal Register Division performed this vital task through the publication of the *Federal Register*, a daily newsprint compilation of federal laws and regulations. By the early 1950s, the Federal Register Division was also responsible for publication of the *United States Statutes at Large*, the *United States Government Organization Manual*, *Abstracts of Defense Regulations*, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*. As the government expanded during the 1950s and 1960s, so also did the number of laws and regulations. To help the general public understand how to use these voluminous and complex publications, the division began issuing brief informative pamphlets on finding U.S. statutes and U.S. Code citations.¹²

In addition to publishing thousands of pages of laws and regulations each year, the Federal Register Division also began compiling and publishing the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the*

United States and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. These publications included news conference transcripts, statements, messages, speeches, and other presidential materials. These volumes, as well as other Federal Register publications, are used daily by citizens, journalists, scholars, and government employees to ascertain the actions of the federal government on specific issues.¹³

Another NARS activity of interest to the general public which grew during this period was the presidential library system. "Library" is something of a misnomer since these institutions contain a mixture of archival material, personal papers, books, and museum objects. Before 1950 NARS operated only one presidential library—Franklin D. Roosevelt's at Hyde Park, New York—and it was operated under a statute that applied only to Roosevelt's materials and library. But in 1950, at President Truman's prompting, a section was included in the Federal Records Act that allowed NARS to receive the papers of other presidents and of other government officials. To provide for the systematic es-

¹²Ibid., FY 52, p. 80; FY 56, pp. 14–15; FY 64, p. 59; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 191, 218, 262–263; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 136–138.

¹³Ibid., pp. 139–142; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 294–295; GSA *Annual Report*, FY 57, p. 14.

tablishment of presidential libraries, Congress passed an act that allowed GSA and NARS to accept not only the papers of presidents and their associates, but also the land, buildings, and equipment necessary to establish presidential libraries.¹⁴

During the 1950s and 1960s the presidential library system grew in size, popularity, and use. By the mid-1960s there were four libraries in active operation: Roosevelt's in Hyde Park; Truman's in Independence, Missouri; Eisenhower's in Abilene, Kansas; and Hoover's in West Branch, Iowa. The Kennedy and Johnson libraries were in the planning stage. The four libraries in operation in the mid-1960s were very popular. Over half a million people visited these institutions each year to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the lives and times of these presidents and their administrations.¹⁵

Exhibits were yet another type of service to the general public which was expanded during this period. They provided a way of reaching out and educating average citizens about their documentary heritage. One dramatic way that many Americans became aware of their national archives was through visits to the "Freedom Train" which toured the country for eighteen months ending in January 1949. The train carried and exhibited many of the nation's treasured documents, including several from the National Archives. During its tour approximately 3.5 million people viewed the documents, and thousands more viewed the documents when they were exhibited at the National Archives during 1949 and 1950. Many more millions of people would come to the National Archives during the 1950s and 1960s to view its priceless treasures, especially the engrossed copies of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. In 1949 less than 80,000 people came to the National Archives to view its exhibits. That figure climbed to over 400,000 by 1956, to over 600,000 in 1960, and topped 1,000,000 in 1962.¹⁶

Many visitors to the National Archives did more than just view the exhibits—they used its holdings, its archives. Many of these users were

genealogists, interested in studying their family histories. To assist them in their research, NARS published a *Guide to Genealogical Records in the National Archives* and established a central reading room to make microfilmed records more accessible to researchers. In 1957, when the room was first opened, a little over five thousand rolls of microfilm were available for use. Four years later nearly thirty thousand rolls were used. To make records more available to the public and to protect them from constant use, the National Archives continued to publish selected series of records on microfilm. By 1965, more than sixty-seven thousand rolls were available for research and sale.¹⁷

Many citizens sought documentation from the National Archives to defend or establish some legal right. Annually, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, researchers sought evidence in land records, passenger lists, census records, personnel files, and other records to establish proof of their age, place of birth, date of entry into the United States, citizenship, title to land, or some debt or obligation owed them. Organizations also used information to establish legal rights. In 1954, for example, an association of manufacturers used Office of Price Administration records to document rights and a labor union obtained copies of National War Labor Board records that shed light on a wartime wage agreement affecting current collective bargaining negotiations.¹⁸

Records from the National Archives also served the American people in a variety of other ways. The television and motion picture industries were routinely furnished copies of films and other materials for incorporation into their productions. Journalists frequently requested and received information and materials for use in their publications. In 1954, for example, one feature writer was aided in finding materials on the lives of assassins of American presidents. Another requested and obtained pictures showing the body of John Paul Jones being exhumed in Paris in 1906. Commercial firms also made use of records in the National Archives. One firm, in 1954, obtained help in locating records relating to the cargoes of certain wrecked ships in order to search for salvageable sunken treasure.¹⁹

In addition to serving federal agencies and the general public, NARS also served scholarship. During the Grover years NARS responded to

¹⁴Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, "General Legislation for Presidential Libraries," *American Archivist* 18 (Oct. 1955): 337–341; David D. Lloyd, "The Harry S. Truman Library," *ibid.*, 18 (Apr. 1955): 107; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 291–292, 296; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 144–147.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 154, 164; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 263–264, 298–301, 303–304.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 191, 218, 254–256, 312–313; Milton O. Gustafson, "The Empty Shrine: The Transfer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the National Archives," *American Archivist* 39 (July 1976): 271–285; GSA *Annual Reports*, FY 52, p. 70; FY 53, pp. 11, 16; FY 56, p. 13; FY 59, p. 30; FY 62, pp. 45–46.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, FY 55, pp. 11–12; FY 61, p. 20; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 90–93; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 253, 311; Wayne C. Grover, "Towards Equal Opportunities for Scholarship," *Journal of American History* 52 (Mar 1966): 717–719.

¹⁸GSA *Annual Report*, FY 54, p. 16.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, FY 53, p. 14; FY 54, p. 16.

thousands of requests made by scholars and others engaged in historical study, and NARS archivists provided leadership, guidance, and assistance to the archival community. To ensure that scholars and others were aware of the contents of their nation's archives, NARS published various guides. In 1948, the National Archives published a 684-page *Guide to the Records of the National Archives*, and additions to an existing open-ended series of specialized subject guides were published during the Grover years. These included *Federal Records of World War II*, which

appeared in 1951, and subject guides on records relating to the Civil War and Latin America published during the early 1960s. The holdings of the National Archives were also made known through listings of new accessions and articles in scholarly journals and in issues of *National Archives Accessions*, which was published quarterly from 1940 to 1954 and periodically thereafter until 1967.²⁰

²⁰McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 170, 253–254, 312; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 101–102; GSA Annual Report, FY 54, p. 19.



Microfilm publications became a vital part of the National Archives effort to serve scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s. By 1965, more than 67,000 rolls of Archives microfilm were available for purchase and research.

As scholars became more aware of their nation's archives during the 1950–1965 period, their use of them increased significantly. In fiscal year 1949 the National Archives staff provided over 377,000 reference services which included documents furnished and inquiries answered. Seventeen years later this figure had increased to over 538,000. Information and materials were provided on almost every conceivable subject. In 1954, for example, research was conducted on the geology of the Antarctic, literary figures in diplomacy, the vertical integration of the steel

searchers. The presidential libraries also made their holdings available to scholars conducting research on the lives, times, and administrations of Presidents Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. By the mid-1950s the records centers also were making records available to scholars, and by the end of the 1960s regional archives branches were established in the centers to provide more effective service.²²

Another NARS activity that provided important services to scholarship was the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC).



Another service to scholarship was the National Historical Publications Commission, which encouraged institutions and organizations to collect, preserve, edit, and publish the papers of "outstanding citizens in the United States."

industry, loyalty oaths during the Civil War, American commercial relations with Thailand, the activities of the American Congo Company, the impact of the New Deal on Puerto Rican political movements, foreign immigration to the antebellum South, the interrelationships between American and English labor organizations, and biographical data on various figures, including Robert M. La Follette, Edwin M. Stanton, and James Fenimore Cooper. One researcher requested information on a resolution introduced by John Quincy Adams in the House of Representatives in 1840 relating to the pensioning of bloodhounds serving in the U.S. Army.²¹

But the archives units were not the only NARS units providing records and information for re-

Through its programs, documentary sources for the study of American history were made available to millions of citizens. Established and placed under the National Archives in 1934 to encourage the publication of historical documents, the commission remained relatively inactive until 1950. After that date the NHPC began to play an important role as a catalyst for the nation's documentary publishing efforts. Under the Federal Records Act of 1950 the NHPC was charged with encouraging state and local governments and institutions and organizations to collect and preserve, as well as to edit and publish, "papers

²¹Ibid., FY 53, p. 14; FY 54, pp. 15–16; FY 55, p. 12; FY 65, p. 33; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 218, 309.

²²Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 155, 165–166, 183–184; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 287–288; Gerald T. White, "Government Archives Afield: The Federal Records Centers and the Historian," *Journal of American History* 55 (Mar. 1968): 833–842; William R. Petrowski, "Research Anyone? A Look at the Federal Records Centers," *American Archivist* 30 (Oct. 1967): 581–592.

of outstanding citizens of the United States and such other documents as may be important for an understanding and appreciation of the history of the United States." Further authority was granted the NHPC in 1964 when Congress enabled the commission to make grants for collecting, describing, preserving, compiling, and publishing (including microfilming) documentary sources significant to the history of the United States.²³

In addition to encouraging the preparation and publication of documentary editions, the commission also prepared publications under its own imprint. In 1952 the NHPC staff began compiling annual volumes of *Writings on American History*, and in 1961 Executive Director Philip M. Hamer compiled and published *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*. With a staff that never numbered more than ten, and with limited grant funds, the NHPC was not able to undertake very many projects. But the work of the commission was nevertheless a significant contribution to the world of scholarship during the 1950s and 1960s. "The work has been so revolutionary," noted H. G. Jones in 1969, "as to comprise one of the most important archival developments of this century."²⁴

The NARS staff also contributed to scholarship and to the archival profession during these years. In addition to publishing articles on NARS holdings and archival practices, staff members also lectured to college classes and participated in archival and historical association conferences. As an agency, NARS joined with the American Historical Association in several projects, including one to microfilm captured German records. NARS staff members were particularly active in the Society of American Archivists—speaking at annual meetings, serving as officers, and contributing articles and features to *The American Archivist*. The staff also assisted and cooperated with state, local, and territorial archivists and participated in various international archival programs.²⁵

Serving government agencies, the general public, and the archival and historical communities left little time and precious few NARS resources for other archival activities. This was

particularly true with respect to project and preservation work. And the work facing the National Archives when Grover became Archivist in June 1948 was staggering, considering the fact that its holdings had increased by almost 300 percent since 1941, while the staff had declined by 10 percent. By June 1948, the NARS archival units had custody of more than 850,000 cubic feet of records, including almost 40,000 stored in a building in Suitland, Maryland. Many of these records were of questionable or indeterminate value, but had been accessioned because the source agencies needed a place to deposit records. Needless to say, the National Archives had a major space problem. To alleviate this situation, the Archives staff made an effort to rid NARS of records that did not have continuing value. By 1955, over 75,000 cubic feet of records were transferred to the newly established federal records centers until they could be properly appraised, and another 84,000 cubic feet were destroyed after reappraisal. In spite of these efforts, however, the Archives still had over 750,000 cubic feet of archival materials in 1956—and that was the low point for the post-war period.²⁶

Three factors contributed to a rapid acquisition pace during the late 1950s. First, there was an increase in available space as a result of the weeding effort. The second factor was a law passed by Congress in June 1957 that required agencies to turn over valuable records to NARS when they were fifty years old, unless they were still needed for current business. And third, and most important, was the transfer to NARS in January 1958 of some 100,000 cubic feet of military records held in a records center in Alexandria, Virginia. Fortunately, the facility and many of its personnel were also transferred to NARS by the military. By January 1966 NARS had custody of 900,000 cubic feet of records—almost the same volume as in January 1950. During the intervening years NARS had accessioned approximately 225,000 cubic feet of records, but it had also rid itself of a nearly equal amount. As the agency became more adept at appraisal, it would no longer accept records of questionable value.²⁷

The permanent holdings of NARS were made available to thousands of researchers annually. But the process of making those records avail-

²³Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 118–119, 124, 130–131; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 264–268, 311, 318; Grover, "Towards Equal Opportunities," pp. 720–722; *GSA Annual Report*, FY 60, p. 15.

²⁴Jones, *Records of a Nation*, p. 133; see also *ibid.*, pp. 125, 128–129.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 184–185; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 170–189, 269, 287–289, 313, 326–327, 359; *GSA Annual Report*, FY 62, p. 45.

²⁶McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 192, 194, 217, 219, 251, 309; Grover, "Recent Developments," pp. 10–11; Grover, "The National Archives at Age 20," *American Archivist* 17 (Apr. 1954): 102; *GSA Annual Reports*, FY 52, pp. 70–71; FY 53, pp. 11–12; FY 54, p. 13.

²⁷*Ibid.*, FY 61, p. 18; FY 62, p. 44; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 258, 309, 331–332; Grover, "Recent Developments," p. 11; Grover, "National Archives at Age 20," p. 102.



Between 1950 and 1966 the records center received over ten million cubic feet of records, saving the federal government far more than the total spent for the entire operation of the National Archives Records Service.

able put a considerable burden on the limited staff of the National Archives during the Grover years. Allocating over half of its resources to keeping up with reference activities left only limited resources available for other archival activities, particularly description and preservation. As early as 1949 Grover had made an effort to address the problem of the lack of finding aids. The lack of finding aids hindered reference services, and Grover called for all of the National Archives holdings to be fully described by 1955. But Grover could not make it happen, and the limited staff, with increased accessioning and reference work, fell even further behind in its description work. By 1962 NARS had abandoned its attempt to fully describe all of its holdings and was resigned to providing minimal descriptions for many series of records. Although this expediency permitted internal control over records, the brief descriptions provided only minimal assistance to researchers.²⁸

In addition to not being able to adequately describe its holdings, NARS also found it difficult to make much headway in preservation work.

By the time Grover became Archivist the National Archives already had an immense preservation problem, with millions of fragile documents needing rehabilitation. Surveys undertaken during the 1950s indicated that between eight and nineteen million documents were in varying degrees of deterioration. Without adequate resources, however, only half a million documents were being rehabilitated annually. In the mid-1950s NARS decided to stop full-scale preservation activities and instead concentrated its limited resources on preservation microfilming. In 1957, for example, one million items were microfilmed, while another four hundred thousand were preserved by other means. Five years later over two million sheets were microfilmed and over one million were rehabilitated by other means. Despite the progress made in microfilming and other preservation techniques during the 1960s, millions of documents and other records still required rehabilitation at the end of the decade.²⁹

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 104–105; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 97–98, 102–107.

²⁹*GSA Annual Reports*, FY 52, p. 76; FY 53, p. 17; FY 56, p. 7; FY 57, pp. 9, 19; FY 58, p. 15; FY 59, pp. 28–29; FY 60, p. 15; FY 61, p. 19; FY 62, p. 45; Grover, "National Archives at Age 20," p. 105.



Wayne C. Grover's retirement after seventeen years as Archivist of the United States was a transition point in the history of the Archives. Here Grover receives the congratulations of future Archivist James B. Rhoads.

The preservation and description demands and other problems facing NARS in the mid-1960s were the result of inadequate funds and staff. Between 1942 and 1964 the staff of the archival units increased by 4 percent while the records they were responsible for increased by 50 percent. Other parts of NARS also lacked the necessary funds and staff to fully meet their responsibilities. The NHPC was inadequately funded and staffed, and the Federal Register staff increased by only 10 percent between 1950 and 1966, while their workload increased by 300 percent. The records management staff, which was reduced by 7 percent between 1962 and 1966, was unable to provide all the services agencies were requesting of it. By the mid-1960s the records centers were filled with millions of cubic feet of unscheduled records, and NARS lacked the resources to appraise them. As if to add insult to injury, the holdings of the records centers increased by 20 percent between 1960 and 1966,

while the staff decreased by 13 percent.³⁰

Grover, who had never been pleased with NARS' subordination to GSA, became quite irritated with GSA officials in the early 1960s. He was appalled by GSA restrictions on his decision-making and by administrators who "seemed to be more interested in accountability than service, in reports than fresh ideas." He was also displeased by the inadequate funding that NARS received and by the fact that the workload increased but the staff did not. Grover most certainly agreed with H. G. Jones' observation that "not only NARS and its objectives but the nation as a whole has been shortchanged as a result of organization subjugation." Taking stock of the situation in late 1965, Grover, with thirty-two years of federal service, including seventeen as Archivist, decided to retire. He believed that in

³⁰McCoy, *National Archives*, p. 310; Jones, *Records of a Nation*, pp. 86, 90, 98, 102-103, 132, 196, 198.

retirement, as well as in the process of retiring, he could call for NARS independence from GSA. He was convinced that independence was necessary if NARS was to regain its image and place as one of the great cultural institutions of America.³¹

On November 2, 1965, Grover sent a letter to President Johnson indicating his intention to retire and recommending his longtime deputy, Robert H. Bahmer, to be his successor. He also recommended the re-creation of the National Archives Establishment as an independent agency. Grover's career at NARS was now at an end, but not his interest in NARS. In retirement he lobbied for a more effective NARS and for its independence. Despite the problems facing NARS and the work still undone when he retired, Grover could look back over his tenure with a sense of

pride and accomplishment. The institution he inherited in 1948 had a relatively insignificant impact and influence on the federal government, the public, and scholarship. In that year his institution, with a staff of 338, primarily engaged in traditional archival work, operated a single presidential library, had a minimal role in records management, oversaw an inactive NHPC, and was responsible for only a few Federal Register publications. By 1966, all of that had changed—the small institution had become a large organization with increased responsibilities and an impressive record of achievement in serving the federal government, the public, and scholarship.³² □

³¹Ibid., p. 232; McCoy, *National Archives*, pp. 342–345.

³²Walter Robertson, Jr., "NARS: The Politics of Placement," *American Archivist* 39 (Oct. 1976): 486–489; Grover's letter of resignation reprinted in the *American Historical Association Newsletter* 13 (Sept. 1975): 7–8.