

# Progress at a 'cutting-edge agency'

*Excerpts from the Archivist's recent State of the Archives Address:*

Shortly after becoming Archivist of the United States 33 months ago, I heard the National Archives and Records Administration described by a local cynic as a "mere housekeeping agency," one presumably untouched by the dramatic changes in technology and management affecting the supposedly more cutting-edge agencies in our government.

It did not take me many days into my new post to recognize that describing NARA as "a mere housekeeping agency" was equivalent to describing the Department of Defense as a "mere weapons-making agency." The question of "What does the National Archives do?" is more appropriately answered by asking "What *doesn't* it do?"

First and foremost, of course, NARA collects and manages for administration and public access the institutional records of all three branches of the American government.

In the process, it also oversees the declassification of, and conditions for access to, the classified records of the Federal Government.

Through its Electronic Records Archives and other programs, NARA has been developing the new technology to serve the electronic records needs of the American government and society—from scratch, no less.

In a newer mission, NARA has been working closely with state and local government archivists to develop more effective strategies for assisting records recovery, restoration, and access following natural or man-made catastrophes.

The National Archives has also been developing innovative programs that strengthen civic literacy for American citizens.

We are engaged in all of these efforts as well as in other special projects—for example, processing the millions of pages of documents related to Nazi and Japanese war crimes and the files of the 9/11 Commission and maintaining an extremely active national public programs schedule. Every day, NARA also helps tens of thousands of genealogical and family history researchers and American veterans and men and women of the armed forces, in metropolitan Washington, our 14 regional archives, 17 Federal records centers, and 12 Presidential libraries scattered throughout 20 states.

Not bad for a "mere housekeeping agency."



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I want the entire NARA staff to know how deeply I appreciate the passion and commitment you have displayed as we worked together this past year with limited

resources and a reduced staff. Because of your efforts, we have made substantial and visible progress, even under these less-than-ideal conditions. Your work is paying off for NARA by moving us ahead on several fronts to expand public access to the all-important records of American democracy.

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Seventy or so members of our staff in Washington and College Park are now working to reduce—and eventually eliminate—the backlog (optimists would call this a surplus, but I do not) of three billion—yes, billion—pages of unprocessed records, including many that must be reviewed for declassification. In fiscal year 2007, more than 450 million pages of records were processed. We were able to reach these impressive numbers through teamwork and creativity.

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There have been some delays in building the Electronic Records Archives, ERA, but we are working closely with the contractor, Lockheed Martin, toward the goal of bringing the project back on schedule within the next several months. The NARA team, assisted by Lockheed Martin, has been working virtually 24/7 over the past several years to complete successfully this first phase of the "archives of the future."

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Recently, we have had to adjust to funding levels that fall far short of projected needs and rising operating costs. As a result, of necessity we have taken some significant steps to adjust to this period of austerity—hopefully of limited duration—during the current budgetary impasse. This has created a difficult work environment for our reference and research room staffs at Archives I and II. I want to thank the staff members involved

for meeting this extraordinary challenge.

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I also want to recognize those individuals who have 40 years or more with the National Archives. Leading the list, of course, is John Taylor, who came to NARA just a few days after the end of World War II in 1945. John now has 62 years of service with the National Archives. Others are Frances Brooks, Aloha South, Elizabeth Safly, Rosemary Paul, Kenneth Casey, Charles Johnson, Bernard Gardner, Anthony Bahr, Richard Gorman, Mildred Logan, and Edwin Stokes, Jr.

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In addition to NARA employees, we are fortunate to have volunteers who come to various locations every day to assist in our work—public programs, records processing, and service to visitors. They receive no pay—they volunteer because they care deeply about this agency and the work we do. I want to salute all of them.

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NARA has not only made significant progress on all fronts in 2007 despite the shortage of resources. We have laid the groundwork for even more accelerated progress in the years to come as the National Archives prepares to commemorate its 75th anniversary in 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein".

ALLEN WEINSTEIN  
Archivist of the United States

*This column originally appeared  
in the December 2007 issue  
of the NARA Staff Bulletin.*