

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF NHPRC SUPPORT OF THE PAPERS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Previous Editions

The notion of publishing the papers of the American statesmen responsible for the founding of the republic dates back at least to the 1820s. After extensive research, Jared Sparks (later President of Harvard University) published the *Life and Writings of George Washington* (12 vols., 1834-1837; redated 1842). A nine-volume edition of *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, was published in 1856 by Adams's grandson, Charles Francis Adams.

Earlier editions of Jefferson's papers include Paul Ford's 12-volume *The Works of Thomas Jefferson* published in 1904 and Andrew Lipscomb and Albert Bergh's 20 volume *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* published between 1900-1910. Published at the same time was Gaillard Hunt's 9- volume collection of outgoing correspondence, *The Writings of James Madison*. John C. Fitzpatrick completed a 39-volume collection of the outgoing correspondence in *The Writings of George Washington* (1940), but did not include any letters received by Washington.

The problem with the previous editions is that they are incomplete. Typically, they include only one side of the correspondence, and many additional documents were scattered in diverse repositories around the world. Additionally, the earlier editions are missing much of the scholarly apparatus that enables readers to more fully understand the context and references from late 18th century and early

19th century America. Another problem with the early editions is that their editors occasionally deleted evidence of blunders or incompetence, and they intervened in documents to remove errors in spelling and grammar, and to enhance the prose of the original writers, making the early editions historically unreliable.



The Call for Federal Action on Documentary History

1887: Congress appoints a commission composed of the Secretary of State, Librarian of Congress, and Smithsonian Institution to report on historical manuscripts of the Federal Government and the policy to be pursued in their publication. The Commission apparently never met.

1891: In the annual report of the American Historical Association, J. Franklin Jameson publishes a paper on the Federal Government expenditures on behalf of U.S. history. Jameson calls for a Federal commission with “power to edit and publish not only materials in possession of the Government, but also those which are in private existence. Four years later, the AHA establishes a Historical Manuscripts Commission and appoints Jameson as its chair.

1905: President Theodore Roosevelt establishes the Commission on Department Methods, headed by Charles Keep, to consider the care of Federal records and the publication of historical materials. Jameson writes to the Keep Commission about European efforts, including the Dutch “Commission of Advice for National Historical Publications.”

January 1909: The Keep Commission issues its report, which includes a draft bill for a Commission on Historical Records. The report recommends the Federal Government not “confine its historical

publications which are in its own possession. That would be an unscientific course, substituting for such standards as make for rational completeness, criteria dependent on accidents of deposit or ownership.” The Keep Commission recommends an eight or nine member Commission with an annual appropriation of \$100,000 for at least 10 octavo volumes.

December 1909: U.S. Representative Samuel McCall introduces a bill to create a Commission on National Historical Publications with the authority “to defray, out of such appropriations as Congress may make...the cost of preparing and printing...such volumes of material for American history as it may deem most useful.” The bill is debated but no action is taken.

June 1934: Congress passes and the President signs “An Act to establish a National Archives of the United States” which also provides for a National Historical Publications Commission. The Commission meets for the first time in January 1935 and adopts a resolution calling for a publication on the origins of the Constitution.

March 1936: The Commission sends a report to Congress recommending a plan of publication for a documentary history on the Constitution. Three years later, a bill is introduced in the House to “collect, edit, and prepare for printing documents on the ratification of the Constitution.” No further action occurs. During the World War II, the Commission ceases to meet.



Modern Editions Begin

1943: Congress authorizes and directs the Thomas Jefferson Bicentennial Commission “to prepare a congressional memorial to Thomas Jefferson and prepare a new edition of the writings of Thomas

Jefferson, including material and unpublished manuscripts preserved in the Library of Congress and elsewhere....” Princeton University historian Julian P. Boyd is named editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* project and begins collecting material, aided by a \$200,000 subvention from *The New York Times* Company. Boyd’s plan calls for a complete edition based on the precepts and rigorous standards of scientific history. “The purpose of this work,” Body wrote, “is to present the writings and recorded actions of Thomas Jefferson as accurately and completely as possible.”

May 1950: Impressed by the just published Volume I of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, President Harry Truman proposes a comprehensive program for the publication of the public and private writings of persons who have contributed greatly to the development of the United States. The Commission reconvenes and undertakes a survey of scholarly opinion on a broad historical publications program.

September 1950: Congress passes the Federal Records Act which charges the Commission to “cooperate with and encourage appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies and nongovernmental institutions, societies, and individuals in collecting and preserving and, when it deems such action to be desirable, in editing and publishing the papers of outstanding citizens of the United States.”

Philip K. Hamer is named first executive director of the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC). The act also allows staff to be assigned to the Commission, which provide assistance to editing projects by undertaking archival research and compiling finding aids. The Act also adds four representatives from scholarly organizations to the Commission and requires it to meet at least once each year.

May 1951: The NHPC sends to President Truman a preliminary report on the publication of American leaders. Over the next several years, the NHPC assists—with support of the National

Archives and Smithsonian—in advocating the publication of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, among others.

April 1954: A report to the President on “A national program for the publication of historical documents” is released, envisioning the NHPRC as a cooperative program for the publication of historical documents; announcing plans for publishing the papers of historically significant Americans, as well as documentary histories, and appending a list of 361 persons whose papers deserved to be preserved and published.

1954: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* is established under the joint auspices of Yale University and the American Philosophical Society and was supported first by a generous gift from *Life Magazine* and subsequently by numerous grants from individuals, foundations, and two government agencies.

The Adams Papers project is founded at the Massachusetts Historical Society to prepare a comprehensive published edition of the manuscripts written and received by the family of John Adams. The Adams Papers project is funded originally by Time-Life Inc. and the Ford Foundation.

1955: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* project, after two decades of study and planning, is established at Columbia University, with financial assistance from Time, Inc. and the Rockefeller Foundation.

1956: *The Papers of James Madison* project is established at the University of Chicago to publish annotated volumes of his correspondence and writings.

June 1957: A House subcommittee debates a Joint Resolution calling for cooperation among NHPC, private and state historical commissions and agencies, and appropriate libraries, historical societies, universities, corporations, foundations, and civic organizations in forwarding a national historical publications project.

1961: Volume One of the *Papers of Alexander Hamilton* is published by Columbia University Press. Volume One of *The Adams Papers* is published by Harvard University Press.

1962: Volume One of the *Papers of James Madison* is published by the University of Chicago Press.

January 1963: The NHPC issues a report to President Kennedy that contains a proposal for a Federal grants program.



Federal Funding Begins

July 28, 1964: Public Law 88-383 launches the NHPC grant program. Congress appropriates \$350,000 to the NHPC.

September 1964: The Ford Foundation makes a \$2 million award to the Commission to support five Founding Fathers projects: Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison. Additional Federal grants are awarded in 1965.

1965: The National Endowment for the Humanities is founded. Founders projects also receive support through the NEH preservation grants.

1968: *The Papers of George Washington* project is established at the University of Virginia.

1974: The NHPC becomes the NHPRC when Congress adds “Records” to its name and includes a grant-in-aid program for archival projects. The Ford Foundation grant of \$2 million ends after 10 years, but additional funds arrive from the Heritage Committee of the American Bicentennial Commission.

1976: The first two volumes of *The Papers of George Washington* are published by the University of Virginia Press.

1979: The final chronological volume of the *Papers of Alexander Hamilton* is published. A supplemental volume, containing additional letters, and errata, and a cumulative index is published in 1987.



Digital Publishing

1988: With funding from The Packard Humanities Institute, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* begins the processing of creating a digital version of the Franklin papers. Initially available on CDs, the database of unannotated transcriptions goes online in 2006.

1993: The House Committee on Government Operations issues a report (103-125) advising the NHPRC to aggressively explore new technologies and formats for publishing historical documents. “Whenever possible, the Commission should make it a condition of its grants that source materials be available for unrestricted electronic dissemination.”

1995: The Model Editions Partnership brings together editors from seven on-going editorial projects and leaders from the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH) and the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) to explore electronic publication of historical documentary editions.

1999: The *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* is split off from the ongoing Princeton University project and a new team of editors begins the following year to edit them at Charlottesville under the aegis of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. Initially funded by a five-year grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, work on the Retirement Series officially began with the appointment of J. Jefferson Looney as project director in October 1999. The first volume of the Retirement Series was published in 2004.

2001: Using best practices from its two pioneering online reference works, The University of Virginia Press establishes its Electronic Imprint known as ROTUNDA.

February 2008: The Senate Committee on the Judiciary holds a hearing on "The Founding Fathers Papers: Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures" in response to concerns (first articulated in the 1982 and then again in 1997) that the pace of production of the printed volumes limits scholarly and public access to the complete archives. Extensive testimony from Senator Leahy, Archivist Allen Weinstein, historians David McCullough and Ralph Ketcham, Library of Congress representative Deanna Marcum, Pew Charitable Trust President and CEO Rebecca Rimel, and Stanley Katz, chairman, Papers of the Founding Fathers can be found at <http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/hearing.cfm?id=3077>.

September 2008: Congress passes and the President signs into law the "Presidential Historical Records Preservation Act of 2008," which includes a provision for the Archivist of the United

States to enter into cooperative agreements to provide on-line access to the published papers of Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Franklin, John Adams, Madison and “other prominent historical figures as determined appropriate by the Archivist of the United States.” The Act also calls for the creation of an **Advisory Committee on Founding Fathers Editorial Projects** to review the progress of the Founding Fathers projects funded by the NHPRC. The advisory committee shall be comprised of 3 “nationally recognized historians” appointed for no more than 2 consecutive 4-year terms.

November 2008: ROTUNDA releases the first version of its new consolidated Founding Era platform. As publications are added to the Founding Era collection, they will become fully interoperable: cross-searchable and navigable as a collection by chronology.

February 2009: The ROTUNDA American Founding Era Collection Early Access project is conceived by the NHPRC and carried out by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities’ Documents Compass group to provide scholars, students, and the American public the opportunity to see documents collected by the Founders edition projects at an earlier stage in the documentary editing process. Online early access is provided to some 5,000 documents.

December 16, 2009: President Obama signs the FY 2010 appropriations for the National Archives, including \$13 million for the NHPRC. Of the amount provided, \$4.5 million is for an initiative to provide online access to the papers of the Founding Fathers.

October 2010: The NHPRC and UVA Press sign a \$2 million cooperative agreement to make freely available online the historical documents of the Founders of the United States of America on

a new website hosted by the National Archives. The plan calls for a prototype web site including the contents of 154 volumes drawn from print editions of the papers of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison will be prepared by October 2011. The fully public version will be launched by June 2012 and will also include the 27 volumes of the *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. By June 2013, the Founders Online hopes to add the 39 published volumes of the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. The new resource will include the complete contents of 242 printed volumes, including all of the existing document transcriptions and the editors' explanatory notes.