

## **Founding Fathers Advisory Committee**

### ***Public Meeting***

December 13, 2010 2 PM-3:30 PM

National Archives Building, Room 119

Washington, DC

#### **Committee Members Present:**

Edward Ayers, Richmond University (Chair)

Mary Beth Norton, Cornell University

David Hackett Fischer, Brandeis University

#### **NARA Staff Present:**

David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States

Kathleen Williams, NHPRC Executive Director (Committee DFO)

Lucy Barber, NHPRC Deputy Executive Director

Timothy Connelly, NHPRC Director for Publications

Keith Donohue, NHPRC Communications Director

Christine Dunham, NHPRC Office Coordinator

Patrice Murray, NARA Policy & Planning staff

Mary Ann Hadyka, NARA Policy & Planning staff

David McMillen, NARA External Affairs Liaison

#### **Members of the Public Present:**

Lee White, National Coalition for History

Edward Lengel, Papers of George Washington project

C. James Taylor, Adams Papers project

Jed Brinton, ConSource

David Gilliland, Pew Charitable Trusts

#### **Introductions and Opening Remarks**

The Archivist of the United States thanked the three Committee members for agreeing to serve and read the Committee charter into the record. He announced that he had selected Dr. Edward Ayers to chair the Committee and had appointed Kathleen Williams, Executive Director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), as the Federal official assigned to assist the Committee. Mr. Ferriero expressed his interest in completing these monuments to the Founding Era, and assisting with a more expeditious progress and online access to these resources.

The Committee members made opening remarks. Dr. Mary Beth Norton expressed her commitment to the Committee by relating her experience with new online searchable databases and the importance of having reliable transcriptions and annotation.

Dr. David Hackett Fischer gave as an example, the forgotten diaries of John Adams as a case where primary source materials produced new historical interpretations. Such scholarship and production take time and cannot be rushed, he stated, and it is as important to guarantee the quality of this work as it is to extend free access. While Congress is interested in the acceleration of production, he expressed concern about the loss of quality, and he also expressed interest in considering an expansion of the projects. He wondered if the Committee might expand the group of Founders to include other statesmen of the time, and he also recommended changing the name of the advisory group to the “American Founders” Committee. Of equal concern, he stated that many of the volumes are out of print and cannot be obtained.

### **Adoption of Agenda Mission, and Scope of Work**

The Committee accepted the meeting agenda. As Chair of the Committee, Dr. Ayers noted his affection and appreciation for the projects and read the objectives and scope of the Committee as determined by its charter.

### **Summary of Committee Procedural Decisions**

The Committee had decided on the following:

- It will post meeting materials on an online website
- It will use a wiki for Committee correspondence and work
- It will meet once a year
- It will seek to meet with representatives from all of the projects

### **Overview of the Current State of the Founders Editorial Projects**

Kathleen Williams then reported on the current state of the projects. (See the related PowerPoint presentation slides and meeting materials.) Additionally Ms. Williams noted that the five ongoing editorial projects--Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Franklin—are the focus of the Committee’s effort. (The Jefferson retirement series does not receive funding from the NHPRC and is not part of this group.)

Williams stated that the projects are working on multiple volumes simultaneously and the present data being reviewed today gives a snapshot of work to date. She noted that the project budgets and funding levels also vary and that the National Historical Publications and Records Commission only commits one year of funding at a time. Completion dates also vary based on the number of volumes left to complete and the rate of production. She described a special initiative undertaken in 2009 known as the “Early Access” pilot project. It focused on materials that had not-yet-been published by the editorial projects. The project placed a subset of these documents (5,000) online by examining copies of original documents and completing preliminary verification of the early versions of transcripts that had been completed by editorial project staff. In response to a question from the Committee, Ms. Williams noted that NHPRC staff will in subsequent communication with the committee provide more details on the data collection process undertaken by the pilot project staff.

Williams also described a new online initiative undertaken in late 2010 through a cooperative agreement with the University of Virginia. Entitled the “Founders Online - Published Volumes” initiative, it will make freely available online all of the published volumes from the Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison projects plus the already completed Hamilton volumes. The NHPRC hopes that the Franklin papers project will be involved with this initiative as well. As a result, for the first time the materials contained in the hundreds of volumes produced by these projects will be freely available online through a single resource. Williams noted that the Founders Online - Published Volumes project is seeking active public input as it is built over the next three years. Williams added that a very important task for this year is to determine how to post the unpublished transcripts online for free. The “Early Access” pilot project provided useful information and data, but the best method of providing access to this material must be finalized over the next several months. Williams will keep the Committee informed as this work is carried forward.

Dr. Norton expressed that it would be useful to see the performance objectives for each of the Founding Fathers editorial projects that receive support from the NHPRC. In response, staff of the NHPRC will provide the most recent application narratives for each of the projects, which detail these objectives. When asked to explain why some of the projects have encountered problems meeting all of their performance objectives, Ms. Williams observed that staffing issues and changes in publisher’s schedules are the most likely cause for delays.

To the question regarding ongoing digital editions, Ms. Williams mentioned that almost all of the Founders’ projects have undertaken digitization on their own with separate funding and have their own individual online efforts. She added that as valuable as this work has been, the intent of Congress is to have one online resource with all of the Founders documents freely available. Dr. Ayers stated that the Committee should think beyond simply searching. The Committee

should think about text mining and exploring other techniques for analyzing this material that would make this project a model for scholars, students, and the general public.

Dr. Fischer reiterated the importance of free access to the papers. He added his concern for any future limitations of an approach using XML, his interest in finding out the extent of project documents that have not been published or posted online, and in revisiting the completed Hamilton papers (27 volumes) to see if they could be expanded for the online version.

### **Public Comments**

The Committee chair then invited questions and comments from the public. Lee White, with the National Coalition for History, asked how dependent the online work was on the Congress in order to fund and maintain the availability of the Founders' materials. Ms. Williams noted that, after the initial efforts to put all of the published and unpublished materials online, it is estimated that it will cost \$150,000 annually to maintain and update this resource over the following decade.

She reminded those present that the current cooperative agreement focuses solely on the published materials. The additional earmarked funds for the effort--\$2.5 million--should cover the costs of putting the remaining unpublished material online, but she reiterated that it is too early to tell how those funds should best be invested. She also mentioned that the National Historical Publications and Records Commission would welcome a joint meeting between the Committee and the Commission in 2011.

Edward Lengel of the Washington Papers stated that the editors would welcome a meeting with the Committee and suggested that the Committee visit the editorial projects. Dr. Ayers replied that the Committee welcomed the opportunity to meet with the editors.

An additional question from Jed Brinton of Consourse concerned the issue of copyright and if any use restrictions were planned for the new website. He asked if documents could be used elsewhere online, or would there be restrictions on the use of the transcriptions and/or the annotations. Ms. Williams replied that the Committee and NARA will need to investigate this question further. C. James Taylor with the Adams Papers responded that anyone wishing to quote from those papers pursues this through Harvard University (publisher of the Adams Papers) and that there may be costs involved. Regarding the rights issue, Ms. Williams noted that a portion of the Rotunda cooperative agreement focuses on payments to rights holders. Dr. Ayers noted that the question of what "access" actually means is an important consideration for the Committee as it moves forward.

Dr. Fischer wondered if it was possible for the Committee or the editors to take action to ensure that the existing volumes remain in print and available. He also closed his comments with thoughts on the history of the editorial projects and their importance to free societies.

Lee White suggested that the Committee might want to participate in a future session of the Organization of American Historians annual conference for outreach purposes.

### **Next Steps**

Additional written comments can be submitted to the Committee at any time, Ms. Williams concluded, and she said that a public website will be available in spring 2011.

Chairman Ayers adjourned the first meeting of the Founding Fathers Advisory Committee at 3:30 PM.