

# Using the Congressional Serial Set for Genealogical Research

**Jeffery T. Hartley**  
**Chief Librarian, Archives Library Information Center**  
**alic@nara.gov**

## Background / History

- Also called the Congressional set, Congressional series, and "sheep set"; most commonly just referred to as "Serial Set"
- Established in 1817 (15<sup>th</sup> Congress) to provide a uniform system of Congressional publishing
- Publications of the first 14 Congresses (1789-1817) were assigned a special series of numbers, 01 to 038, known as the American State Papers
- Serial number attached to each volume as it is published; currently nearing 15,000 volumes
- *Citing the Serial Set*: should include session of Congress and publication number. The Serial Set volume number is not required, but is helpful in locating the document or report
  - *S. Doc. No. 512*, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess. (1833).
  - *H.R. Doc. No. 736*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess. (1899).

## Arrangement

- Separate or distinct series: House reports, Senate reports, House documents, Senate documents, Senate treaty documents, and Senate executive reports; also some Miscellaneous Reports on public/private bills
- Miscellaneous documents include presidential messages, including vetoes; reports on budgets; and the president's annual State of the Union Address; annual reports of Federal departments and agencies (especially nineteenth century); and "works of reference value" such as *How Our Laws Are Made*, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, the *Constitution of the U.S.A.: Analysis and Interpretation*
- Arranged by series and then by report/document number
- *American State Papers* are divided into ten subject classes, and then arranged by document number: Foreign Relations, Indian Affairs, Finance, Commerce and Navigation, Military Affairs, Naval Affairs, Post Office Department, Public Lands, Claims, and Miscellaneous; each ASP volume has an individual index, and all but one have table of contents

## Indexes to Serial Set

- **Greely (1789-1817)** : *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817: Papers Relating to Early Congressional Documents* (S.doc. 428, 56-1)

- **Tables and Index (1817-1893):** *Tables of and Annotated Index to the Congressional Series of United States Public Documents*
- **Document Index (1895-1933):** *Index to the Reports and Documents of the [54<sup>th</sup>-72<sup>nd</sup>] Congress, with Numerical Lists and Schedule of Volumes, 1895-1933*
- **Numerical Lists and Schedule of Volumes (1933-1980):** Continues Document Index
- **Monthly Catalog** - Congressional Serial Set Supplements; essentially a renamed, reformatted *Numerical Lists*
- **CIS US Serial Set Index, 1789-1969**
  - Available in ALIC on CD-ROM; also in print at Archives II and in the Center for Legislative Archives
  - CD-ROM covering 1970-1997 available at Archives II
  - Search by title, subject and keyword, private relief and related actions (private legislation affecting persons or organizations), or report/document numbers
  - *One major note for the CIS index:* the CD-ROM only covers index information provided by CIS. It is NOT full-text searchable. Individuals' names often do not appear, although they might be included in a report
- **1909 Checklist** includes Serial Set volume numbers for federal agency annual reports through 1909
- **Grassroots of America** is an index to the land grants and claims in the American State Papers

### Accessing the Serial Set

- Digitized version from Lexis-Nexis available on NARA Public Access PCs via <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp>
- Currently available in print in the Library at Archives I, and on microfiche at Archives II; also available through other federal depository libraries around the country
- ASP available at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>
- *Selected* digital copies of reports from 25<sup>th</sup> through 64<sup>th</sup> Congresses available at the Library of Congress' American Memory Collection "A Century of Lawmaking": <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwss.html>
- 104<sup>th</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> (1995-2012) Congresses available online through GPO's FDsys (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>)

## **Types of documents/information in the Serial Set**

- Private claims, pension reports (Revolutionary War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, Mexican War, WWI; rules on pension applications for WWII)
- Petitions for relief
- Patent lists, complete with illustrations; Annual Report of the Patent Office
- Land grants and claims
- Requests for land for national parks, such as Yellowstone National Park
- Lighthouse and lighthouse keepers' reports
- Official Records of the War of the Rebellion
- Official register : persons in the civil, military, and naval service of the United States, and list of vessels
- Maps of exploration and boundaries for statehood
- Land surveys for post roads, railroads, and property borders
- Indian treaties
- Military registers
- 1790 census volumes (List of Heads of Households at the first census)
- Rules on census enumerations
- Census statistics
- Daughters of the American Revolution Annual Reports, including grave registers
- Special Congressional publications such as *Guide to the Records of the U.S. Senate at the National Archives, 1789-1989*, and *Guide to the Records of the House of Representatives at the National Archives, 1789-1989*
- Annual reports of nongovernmental associations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America; Veterans of World War I of the United States; proceedings of the National Encampment, United Spanish War Veterans; and National Convention of Disabled American Veterans

## Select bibliography

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Government Documents in the Archives Library Information Center (NARA)  
<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/govt-docs.html>

Overview of the U.S. Congressional Serial Set, Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C., Inc.  
<http://www.llsdc.org/sourcebook/sch-v.htm#over>

The U.S. Serial Set: What it is and its history (GPO)  
[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/fdlp/history/sset/index.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/history/sset/index.html)