

## SAA 2009 Leadership Forum

August 12, 2009

I am honored to represent the Congressional Papers Roundtable and participate in this Leadership Forum. I am a past chair (2003-2004) but a dedicated and ongoing member of the roundtable, having attended my first meeting in Atlanta in 1988, which I later realized was only four years after the roundtable was established.

I have two associations for the Congressional Papers Roundtable that I want to share with you. The first is an acronym: CPR. **CARDIO PULMONARY RESUSCITATION** comes to mind. As in the life-saving response the experienced congressional archivist gives to a newbie who suffers the heart-attack reaction to all the huge challenges we face in acquiring, processing, and managing these typically enormous collections. By enormous, I mean hundreds if not one, two, or three thousand linear feet in extent; with a few terabytes; multi-formats, including media and correspondence management systems; high profile donors; high-level institutional hierarchies involved in acquisitions; classified & privacy issues for access; appraisal debates at the series level for everything as well as at the item-level for some things, including electronic files; and ambitious outreach plans,

sometimes including establishment of interdisciplinary policy centers to promote awareness and use of the resources. As our current chair Linda Whitaker likes to say, “Modern political papers are an acquired taste.”

My second association focuses on one word: ROUNDTABLE, and a noble fantasy that all of us congressional archivists are knights at the table. Our grail is to bring holy order and access to these behemoth collections. Our aim is true; our archival quest in face of such daunting work is a bonding experience. Anyone who has faced one of these dragons is eager to share battle-earned expertise and spare the pain for a new congressional archivist.

Linda Whitaker asked me to fill in today as she is deeply involved with a full-day CPR preconference, including a tour and program at the LBJ Library, and a special forum with government documents librarian Cassandra Hartnett of the University of Washington. Cass is current chair of the GODORT of ALA, speaking to us about issues of access to government documents and publications, especially those in electronic format. I mention Linda and Cass in detail because it's typical of a preconference Wednesday for the Congressional Papers Roundtable. Like other roundtables, we have taken advantage of the day to schedule a program, tour, and

social lunch time for our own members. This fills out the day when our regular meeting is scheduled, but this custom also evolved because our session proposals repeatedly have been shut out by SAA program committees. We've been told that our proposals are *too narrowly focused*, but I believe program committees have worked too hard on their "themes" and failed to see our "congressional" proposals as paradigms for broader archival issues – such as this year's collegial dialog with a government documents librarian about preservation, appraisal decisions, and access to secondary electronic publications that complement the primary archival sources in our collections, OR the year we proposed a session about establishing repository profiles as research centers to advance documentation strategies and outreach programs. Ironically, when we failed to make the program with that proposal, we were invited to present our session to the Reference, Access & Outreach Section (who were aware of the session because they had agreed to co-sponsor our pitch). Unfortunately, we turned them down because we gave an abbreviated version of the program at our own roundtable meeting.

Sorry to be the squeaky wheel on that topic, but I know it's an issue for leaders of all sections and roundtables. When Peter asked Linda to talk to you about our roundtable's recent publication project and she had the scheduling conflict, she asked me to fill in for her because of my own leadership and contributions toward

this project. I'll talk more about it in a minute, but I want to comment about successful leadership aspects of our roundtable. It is not unusual that past leaders like me are readily available to carry on a project or step up to help when asked to do so. Many of us have ongoing interests and continue to contribute to CPR projects. I would say that there is a lot of mentoring and support, fostered in part by the presence of three ex-officio members on our steering committee who give continuity to so many of our projects: these are archivists from the historical offices of the Senate and the House, Karen Paul and Robin Reeder, as well as Richard Hunt and Matt Fulgham and others at the Center for Legislative Archives at NARA. They are invaluable liaisons for any of us who are working with serving members of Congress to acquire their personal papers; these ex-officio members also communicate first-hand news about records management issues for official records of Congress.

I also want to mention our roundtable as a cultivator of leaders. CPR has benefitted from outstanding leadership of individuals such as Herb Hartsook, Sheryl Vogt, Claudia Anderson, Carla Summers, Connie Gallagher, Jeff Suchanek, Todd Kosmerick, Cynthia Pease Miller, Pam Hackbart-Dean, and Mark Greene, to name a few of the individuals who have gone on to serve SAA in other roles, notably as chairs of the Mss Repositories, Oral Histories, or RAO sections, as a

founding member of the Privacy & Confidentiality Roundtable, as members of Council, on program committees, and indeed as president of the Society.

A second critical factor in the vitality of our roundtable is our record of collaboration on significant professional work, notably for agenda-setting conferences and for publication projects. One important past publication, for example, is *The Documentation of Congress*, a full-blown documentation strategy coordinated by Karen Dawley Paul with chapters written by several members of the roundtable and issued in 1992 as a Senate publication. Much earlier, roundtable member Frank Mackaman of the Dirksen Congressional Center, with co-sponsorship of NHPRC, convened archivists, historians, and administrators in 1984 at Harper's Ferry to examine issues related to congressional collections management, and he published the proceedings of that conference in 1986. Proceedings from a 1994 conference hosted by Norwood University and the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Portland, Maine, were also published. A chronology of other CPR milestones and projects, along with selected publications, is available from our SAA Website, so please do visit there to see what all I'm leaving out.

So let me tell you about this recent project that I was asked to describe as a model for how CPR collaborated with SAA publications. In Birmingham in 2002, a CPR task force was charged with writing guidelines for congressional collections in response to debate about institutional ethics and responsibilities in acquiring and managing contemporary political collections. This professional issue was first articulated at another of our preconferences, at the 2001 Forum on Capitol Hill convened before SAA's conference in Washington, D.C. Are you wondering "guidelines for what?" or "for whom?"? Those are just two of the questions I asked when I read the rough draft of the multi-authored text that was submitted to me; because I was chair, 2003-2004, I was ex-officio on the task force and asked to review the working draft before the Boston 2004 meeting. My questions to the task force triggered a storm of e-mails reflecting varied repository practices. I suggested the draft needed a unified voice and a strong central editor; the group finally agreed the guidelines project should reflect best practices. I felt guilty about stalling and effectively killing the project, but Mark Greene reassured me that leadership sometimes means putting a stop to things that are not working.

I mulled. I kept reviewing literature for clarity and definitions and model guidelines for various other professional projects. Fortuitously, NHPRC announced a grant cycle that included support for projects to advance standards

and guidelines for the archival profession. Around the same time I saw that announcement, I had a great moment of Aha! and awareness of what I call THE WISDOM OF OUR ELDERS. In particular, I studied Appendix D in the 1986 Harper's Ferry Congressional Papers Project proceedings, which comprised the report of a 1983 Ad Hoc Planning Group on a Manual for Congressional Papers that was submitted to SAA. It's a good thing this report was printed in the 1986 proceedings, because Amy Cooper Cary couldn't find it for me in the archives. The Harper's Ferry Report, long out of print, is now available from our SAA website. The report, with contributions from Patricia Arronsson and Lydia Lucas, among others, was remarkable in its clarity with a detailed outline of contents for the planned manual. One of its first bullets was that the guidelines should NOT be written by committee, but that grant funding should be pursued to contract an experienced archivist, preferably one located in D.C. After experiencing the many voices of committee authorship and the time delays from all of us who carried fulltime workloads with our day jobs, I really appreciated this strategy.

More than 20 years later, we made our move to complete this NHPRC project and amazingly, with dynamite support from SAA, we accomplished this, from grant proposal to publication in hand, in one year and eleven months. I pitched my grant-funded solution to our then-chair Alan Haeberle, who took it to the steering

committee before our annual meeting in Washington in 2006, where we gained general support for the project from roundtable members at our meeting. Cynthia Pease Miller, a consulting archivist recently retired from a long career as archivist in the historical office of the U.S. House of Representatives, for the Senate Finance Committee, and for the office of Senator Daniel Moynihan, agreed to be our contracted author. Past, present, and future-elect chairs of the roundtable laid plans *before* the D.C. meeting to move quickly: Alan Haeberle contacted Dan Stokes at NHPRC and gained valuable feedback on planning our proposal. Jeff Thomas, who was the incoming chair of the roundtable and leader of our project, set up a meeting with Dennis Meissner, chair of the SAA publications board, and Teresa Brinati, director of publications. They listened to our urgent and ambitious plans with interest and a little bit of amusement, I think. I remember Dennis advising, “Well, whatever you do, prepare the publication proposal with the same enthusiasm you are using to pitch the idea to us.” This was August. The grant proposal was due in October, but before then we needed to get the approval of the Publication Board and the official support of SAA, who we needed as a 501 (c) (3) to receive and administer the grant. Dennis Meissner accelerated his committee’s review of our application, and Nancy Beaumont worked closely with Jeff Thomas and Teresa Brinati on the budget and administrative details of the application. Via e-mail, tasks were delegated and coordinated. Linda Whitaker cranked out the first

draft of our proposal for the publication, which we all commented on and edited and revised. Kate Cruikshank and Jean Bischoff (and later Herb Hartsook) were the other members of our team. Cynthia Miller, our proposed author, gave us her feedback on the application, too. We found that the text we prepared for the well-structured SAA publication proposal form migrated well into the grant proposal. I solicited and organized letters of support for our grant; Alan continued to be our NHPRC liaison for questions. The pace of this application process was intense but energetic. We were euphoric when we received word that the grant was awarded to SAA for our publication project.

Cynthia Miller prepared her first draft in time for the team, which served as the editorial board, to review the draft at an exhaustive full-day meeting on a Tuesday the week of the 2007 meeting in Chicago. Teresa Brinati met with us that day as well, laying out production standards and timelines. Cynthia prepared at least six drafts of the guidelines for us in the months ahead, and we were all proud of meeting every one of Teresa's deadlines when it came to the proof stages. Our goal was to distribute the guidelines at the 2008 San Francisco meeting.

Amazingly, we accomplished that. We had a great team working on this project; I'd work with any of them again in a flash. Our roundtable communicates and networks with a necessary passion for the overarching issues related to managing congressional collections. The 1983 planning group, which actually prepared a

report before the founding of our roundtable, laid detailed plans for a project that we finally completed. We were grateful to NHPRC for supporting this professional guidelines project, and we were especially grateful to Nancy Beaumont, Teresa Brinati, and Dennis Meissner through their administrative and publications roles in supporting us.

Amazingly, we have another significant publication project just completed a few weeks ago, *An American Political Archives Reader*, which is a Scarecrow Press anthology edited by Karen Paul, Glenn Gray, and myself. Well over 400 pages, this volume includes reprints as well as new chapters on numerous aspects of political papers, most written by roundtable members but also including chapters by historians and political scientists. This one took over four years to finish, which makes me all the more amazed at our experience with the guidelines project. The Congressional Papers Roundtable is a vital network. If you visit our website, you'll find good information about us, including the grant application for our guidelines project and another report from Linda Whitaker about this same topic, and several of our publications and projects. Our roundtable thrives with strong leadership from members who continue to support projects, excellent communication through a substantial newsletter, an active steering committee, and

meaningful contacts with SAA administrators. Thank you to SAA for your support.