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Founding Fathers Face the Senate

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Founding Fathers Face the Senate

Charlene Bickford

On December 15, 2007, *The Washington Post* published an article by staff writer Jeffrey H. Birnbaum titled “In the Course of Human Events, Still Unpublished: Congress Pressed on Founders’ Papers.” This article focused on complaints that the editions publishing the papers of Founders John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington, collectively known as the Founding Fathers Papers (FFP), which noted historian David McCullough called “as worthy as any publishing effort that I know of,” take too long to finish and are not accessible enough in the electronic age of free online resources. Comments from Rebecca W. Rimel, president of the Pew Charitable Trusts, and Daniel P. Jordan, president of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, even left the impression that the editors of these projects were somehow purposefully refusing to adopt technology that would allow them to make faster progress. The article gave little notice to the recent progress that the projects have made on electronic publication. Also, when citing projected finish dates, the article did not mention the number of volumes remaining to be published.

Directors of the projects publishing these editions were surprised to learn that Rimel had retained former Congressman Michael A. Andrews (D-TX) to “organize an effort to persuade Congress to provide more oversight for the projects and scare up more funding for them.” The article also revealed that Rimel and Andrews had assembled a “heavyweight group of advocates.” In addition to McCullough and Jordan, supporters of the effort include Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein; and Deanna B. Marcum, an associate librarian of Congress who represents Librarian of Congress James H. Billington on the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary

HOME » HEARINGS » FEBRUARY 7, 2008

"The Founding Fathers' Papers: Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures"

Senate Judiciary Committee
Full Committee

DATE: February 7, 2008
TIME: 10:00 AM
ROOM: Dirksen-226

OFFICIAL HEARING NOTICE / WITNESS LIST:

January 24, 2008

NOTICE OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

The Senate Committee on the Judiciary has scheduled a hearing on "The Founding Fathers' Papers: Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures" for Thursday, February 7, 2008, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 226 of the Senate Dirksen Office Building.

By order of the Chairman
Witness List
Hearing before the
Senate Judiciary Committee
on
"The Founding Fathers' Papers: Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures"

TESTIMONY

[DAVID MCGULLOUGH](#)

[DR. STANLEY N. KATZ](#)

[DR. DEANNA MADRUM](#)

[REBECCA RIMEL](#)

[DR. ALLEN WEINSTEIN](#)

[DR. RALPH KETCHAM](#)

MEMBER STATEMENTS

[THE HONORABLE PATRICK LEAHY](#)

The full text of the testimony given at the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing on the Founding Fathers Papers is available online.

Rotunda: New Digital Scholarship from the University of Virginia Press

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WHAT'S NEW?

Updated: 12 March 2008

ROTUNDA

New Digital Scholarship
from the
University of Virginia Press

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Efforts by Founding Fathers Papers projects to provide electronic access to editions through the University of Virginia Press's Rotunda project and other means are seldom mentioned by recent commentators.

Responses to the criticisms by Rimel and her supporters were sought, and Princeton University Professor Stanley N. Katz, chairman of the Papers of the Founding Fathers, Inc., and the American Historical Association's representative on the NHPRC, is quoted as saying: "This is not an industrial process, this is a skilled process. Scaling up would be difficult for us if we are to maintain the general character of the volumes that we have now." The painstaking work of documentary editing, particularly the annotation, is briefly described in the article, though the ubiquitous example of the snippet of a document accompanied by a much longer footnote is presented as the norm. Papers of George Washington (PGW) editor Theodore J. Crackel spoke for the editors when he commented on the possibility of speeding production, saying, "We would love to have the volumes done and would love to do them more quickly, but physical and fiscal constraints indicate that's not likely to happen." In fact, the PGW, which has been organized by series from its inception and has an enviable publication record of two volumes per year, has long been considered a model of expeditious publication, and the fifty-two published volumes of that series are available online through the University of Virginia Press's Rotunda. A cooperation between the press and Mount Vernon has also made a free online version of the published *Washington Papers* without the editorial apparatus available on Mount Vernon's website. Washington's published diaries are available on the Library of Congress's website "American Memory."

The article neglected to recognize this and other progress that has been made in the realm of digitization, particularly neither the outstanding work being done by the Rotunda project, in cooperation with Founding Fathers editions, on digitizing the large corpus of existing volumes and presenting them online on a sophisticated, cross searchable, and accessible site, nor the availability of all the texts of Franklin's writings and correspondence through that project's website. And it gave no recognition to the fact that the editors of these projects do not run closed shops but are frequently engaged in efforts to reach out to the wider community through project websites, cooperative ventures with historic sites such as Mount Vernon and Montpelier, participation in teacher-training institutes, assistance with exhibits, and more, in addition to assisting scholars such as McCullough.

The general sense of the editorial community was that the article, while it conveyed a clear recognition of the importance of these

editions, presented a story line and cost and production figures (some of them inaccurate) that would raise red flags with Congress and the Administration. And, it was not long before these concerns were borne out.

At the time that the *Washington Post* article appeared, Congress was struggling to come up with a final agreement to fund the federal government for FY2008, including the two federal funders of these editions, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the NHPRC. The constituency's high hopes for a large increase in the NEH's appropriation had been dashed, but things were more encouraging on the NHPRC front. Though the Bush Administration defended its decision to zero out both the NHPRC grants program and the funds to administer the work of the Commission for the third year in a row, the Democratic chairs and Republican ranking members of the newly created House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Financial Services and General Government reacted favorably to having both the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the NHPRC under their jurisdiction and supported not just restoring, but substantially increasing, funding for the grants program. Though the full Senate had never acted upon the proposed Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Bill, it was clear from the bill passed by the House and the decisions of the subcommittee and full Senate Appropriations Committee that there was a commitment to increasing the grant funding for NHPRC to at least \$8 million in FY2008. Eventually the negotiations over the final omnibus appropriation for the whole federal government resulted in a final figure of \$7.5 million, a 36 percent increase over FY2007 but still 15 percent less than the level of grant funding in FY2004, the high water mark for NHPRC funding in actual appropriated dollars.

This much welcomed increase in funding was accompanied by the following committee report language:

The Appropriations Committees are concerned about the lengthy amount of time currently required to complete the publication of the Founding Fathers historical papers projects. These projects began in the 1960s and are expected to continue two or more decades until completion. Mindful of the technologies and tools currently available, the Committees believe the Archivist should accelerate the process for delivering the papers of the Founding Fathers to the American people. Therefore,

the Archivist is directed, as Chairman of the NHPRC, to develop a comprehensive plan for the online electronic publication, within a reasonable timeframe, of the papers of the Founding Fathers and to submit this plan to the Committees on Appropriations no later than 90 days after the enactment of this Act.

This commentary and directive to the Archivist of the United States surprised those who had been advocating for NHPRC funding and clearly resulted from the work done by Pew's hired lobbyist and the team of advocates working with him and sent the message that the appropriations committees had been influenced by their arguments.

On January 20, 2008, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* took up the issue, publishing an article entitled, "Founders Letters Lag in Delivery: Slow Publication Vexes Scholars" by staff writer Edward Colimore. The online version of the article was illustrated with a video prepared at the offices of the Jefferson Papers at Princeton University, providing viewers with a glimpse into the work of an editorial project.

The *Inquirer* reporter demonstrated understanding of the enormity of the task facing the FFP and sought the viewpoints of the editors. Ellen Cohn, director of the Franklin Papers, is quoted as saying: "Most people who haven't actually seen what we do don't have any idea how intricate it is and how easy it is to make mistakes—and how spectacular it is when we do it well." John Stagg, director of the Madison Papers, makes the point that the current staff of these editions remains saddled with the publication expectations set in the mid-twentieth century, before the enormity of the task was understood. Encouragingly, the author of the *Inquirer* piece gives at least a passing mention to the time that the directors of these editions must spend raising money.

As was the case with the *Washington Post* piece, the article focuses upon speeding up what is seen as too slow a process, and Rimel is quoted as saying that the delay in publication is "a national embarrassment, though I'm not blaming the people who have been toiling in the vineyards for so long." A proposal is mentioned by Stan Katz that an unannotated version of the papers be put up online, which he contends "can be done relatively quickly," while the annotated volumes for serious researchers could be produced on a longer timetable. McCullough calls for "better organization and more money" and is quoted as saying, "You can tell a lot about a society from how it spends money. If this society is unwilling to spend it

on something of such immense and colossal importance, then something is seriously wrong.”

Less than a month after the final passage of the FY2008 appropriations package, word was received that another congressional committee had decided to take an interest in the FFP. Perhaps at the behest of David McCullough, Senate Judiciary Committee chair Patrick Leahy of Vermont scheduled a full committee hearing. Since the Judiciary Committee has no jurisdiction over either the authorizations or appropriations for the two federal agencies that have provided funding for the FFP, this hearing could be characterized as a quite unusual nonjurisdictional oversight hearing.

The February 7 hearing drew roughly forty interested public attendees, most from the historical/archival community, including several ADE members, staff from the NEH, NHPRC, and the National Archives, AHA Executive Director Arnita Jones, National Coalition for History Executive Director Lee White, and a representative from the National Humanities Alliance. In addition to Chairman Leahy, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and newly appointed NHPRC member Senator Benjamin Cardin of Maryland were in attendance. Every other senator on the committee sent a staff member to the hearing, an indication of a relatively high level of interest.

Chairman Leahy opened the hearing by noting his personal interest in the topic and commenting that it was a pleasure not to have to swear in the witnesses.¹ His opening statement included a strong endorsement for the importance of the FFP and the need to improve public access to them. Stating that “the works of our Founding Fathers are part of the identity and heritage of every American, and we should do everything possible to make certain that these Papers are available, accessible and affordable to the American people,” he expressed concern that the editions were unfinished and the volumes were not widely accessible. His stress was on increasing availability through electronic access:

Countless Americans have gained valuable insights and developed important connections to our national heritage

¹ The hearing testimony plus a webcast of the hearing can be found at: <http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearing.cfm?id=3077>.

by simply viewing the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights on display at the National Archives. For this reason, I support the prompt digitization of all of the Founding Fathers' Papers, so that this information can be made available to all Americans via the Internet. If Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton and Franklin could pipe into this discussion today, we all know that they would ask, "What are you waiting for?" Harnessing the exquisite power of the Internet to preserve and proliferate the Founders' papers is a marriage made in Heaven.

The committee had invited David McCullough, Allen Weinstein, Deanna Marcum, Rebecca Rimel, Stanley Katz, and historian Ralph Ketcham to testify. McCullough went first, and his statement contained the following ringing endorsement of the work of the FFP to date:

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank you for the chance to speak before this committee in support of the Founding Fathers Project. What has been achieved thus far with the publication of the papers of the Founders is all of an exceedingly high order. I want to attest to that emphatically, as one of the many—the countless number of historians, biographers, scholars, and students—who have drawn again and again on the great wealth of material to be found in these incomparable volumes. Their value is unassailable, immeasurable. They are superbly edited. They are thorough. They are accurate. The footnotes are pure gold—many are masterpieces of close scholarship.

Over the past twenty years and more I have worked with—depended on in particular—the volumes of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson papers. I could not have written my last two books, *John Adams* and *1776*, without them. I know how essential the papers are to our understanding those great Americans and their time.

Just this past week, for my current project, I wanted to find out what all was contained in the 80-some crates that Thomas Jefferson shipped back home to Virginia, in the course of his five years of diplomatic service in

France—all the books, art and artifacts, the scientific instruments, and the like. The range and variety of the inventory would, of course, reflect much about the mind of the man. So I turned to the Jefferson papers hoping there might be something. And, sure enough, there it was, in Volume 18, the whole sum total in a footnote that runs nearly six pages in small type. I know what work had to have gone into that footnote, the care and attention to detail. There have been times when I've spent a whole day on one paragraph just trying to get it right, to be clear and accurate.

The men and women who have devoted themselves to the publication of the papers are not skilled editors only, they are dedicated scholars. Their standards are the highest. Their knowledge of their subjects often surpasses that of anyone. I have worked with them. I know them. I count them as friends. Several in particular have guided and helped me in ways for which I am everlastingly grateful.

They are the best in the business and the high quality of the work they do need not, must not be jeopardized or vitiated in order to speed up the rate of production. There really should be no argument about that.

McCullough's expressed concern was for more expeditious publication without any loss of the "close scholarship" that he has come to depend upon. He employed a Berlin Airlift analogy, citing the fact that when one airfield was not enough to handle the number of planes needed to deliver the needed food and other supplies, they built another airport. Suggesting that this two airport solution already existed with the Jefferson Papers and at the Adams Papers, he called for more resources for similar efforts at other projects. Given the structure of the editions mentioned, McCullough's "two airport" solution apparently applies to both projects that have series under way at two locations and those with more than one series in progress at the same location. In that case, McCullough could have also recognized that both the Madison and Washington Papers are divided into series, with staff for each series.

Archivist Weinstein followed McCullough and began with a history of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's long-

term role in first encouraging the creation of the individual Founding Fathers projects and, beginning in 1964, serving as one of the funders for FFP projects. Revealing his thinking as he worked to comply with the directive in the report accompanying the FY2008 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act, he stated:

This important work must be completed at an accelerated pace, and we must find ways to partner with others outside the federal government in new and creative ways to reach this goal and achieve the most cost-effective solutions.

With the advent of the Internet, on-line versions of the documentary editions are both possible and desirable. Without sacrificing work on the scholarly editions, the National Archives' NHPRC hopes to develop a plan to produce on-line editions of all major published and unpublished collections of the Founders' papers at the earliest possible moment. Achievement of this goal will require cooperation among all of the scholars and university presses involved, as well as steady support from the Congress on a time-table geared to early completion of the on-line editions.

Some projects have already begun to work toward this goal. For example, the project to publish the papers of Benjamin Franklin has made available on-line the complete collection of its printed volumes, as well as unpublished transcripts of Franklin's papers. The online materials are freely available to the public.

Stating that the NHPRC would make "public access" a requirement for the FFP in future grants and work with the FFP editors to establish "meaningful benchmarks" for progress, Weinstein said that the "NHPRC would need to negotiate an agreement with the project sponsors to release and post on-line unannotated transcripts of the raw materials for future printed volumes." Weinstein did not stipulate whether or not these unannotated transcripts would also be unverified.

The archivist discussed the issue of the rights held by the several university presses that have published the FFP volumes for decades and admitted that these institutions had considerable investment and financial interests in these editions, but he suggested that the new model for open

access requires a different way of thinking about how these materials are distributed and at whose expense.

Significantly, Weinstein concluded by saying: “Only the closest cooperation among the main actors in this process—the National Archives’ NHPRC, the documentary editors, and our congressional supporters—will produce the desired outcome: timely and cost-effective on-line editions of the Founders’ writings and the finest scholarly editions possible in our lifetime.” Unfortunately he could not mention the fact that the Administration had again zeroed out the NHPRC and certainly could not be expected to support a proposal for increased grant funding.

Deanna Marcum used her testimony to highlight some of the digital efforts of the Library of Congress, including the digitization of the Manuscript Division’s collections of the papers of presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Madison and to propose that the library become involved in providing digital access to the FFP volumes and unpublished materials. She cited the example of the American Newspapers project to show how a cooperative venture to digitize the FFP, where the Library of Congress would host the content, might work, saying:

Digital technology gives us the ability to deliver content—of all types—to the users’ digital devices. To take the content we have preserved and sustained over the years to our users, we must convert it to digital form and deliver it to the devices preferred by our users. NEH, as part of its We the People initiative, decided to provide grants to states to convert selectively their microfilmed newspapers to digital form. NEH asked the Library of Congress to assume responsibility for hosting the digital content, preserving it, and making it accessible to today’s and future users. The specifics of our memorandum of understanding are quite simple. NEH uses its grant funding to support the states’ conversion of microfilm to digital files. The Library of Congress has funded staff to develop the specifications for digitization, software tools for production, a user interface to the content, and the long-term preservation of the digital resources. NEH has provided a scaled administrative fee to support these Library activities.

Marcum's testimony ignored the interests of the university presses that are and have been publishing the FFP for decades at considerable expense and little or no profit. The work under way at the University of Virginia Press to digitize both FFP and Founding Era volumes, the digitization of the Adams Family volumes at the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Franklin Papers' presentation of transcripts on its website before publication went unrecognized as well. Instead, she offered the Library of Congress as a digital publisher concluding: "The raw materials of history should be instantly and freely accessible for all. The Library of Congress would be honored to play a role, assuming a combination of appropriated and private funding, in providing that access."

Rimel's testimony began with a strong endorsement of the importance of the Founding Fathers Papers as "American scripture" and argued that "completing the effort to publish the writings of the Founding Fathers and ensuring that they are made readily available to every American—and people around the world—are vital to understanding our past and to navigating our future." She cited studies that proved the high interest in the Founding Fathers in this country and around the world. But the bulk of Rimel's statement dealt with what she contended was unacceptably slow progress and the lack of "accountability" and "transparency" in the operation of the FFP projects. At the same time that she asked the Judiciary Committee to provide congressional oversight of the FFP projects and ways to speed their progress, she urged:

When it comes to documents as significant as these, from a time as distant as the 18th century, enlightenment requires more effort than simply acquiring and reading the original journals, correspondence and other writings. As this committee looks to speed access to the papers, I urge you not to abandon the essential steps of research, historical editing and annotating. This important scholarly work provides the critical context that enables us to determine the meaning of our founders' words. The editing and annotating process is essential to our understanding of history.

Rimel gave the committee the following advice:

To be successful, a new approach will be necessary, one that includes an accelerated publication schedule and increased public access to the ideas and thoughts of

our nation's founders. I respectfully recommend three objectives for a congressional oversight plan:

First, Congress should draft a plan for completion of this project and conduct regular oversight until it is finished. The Senate Appropriations Committee has directed the Archivist to submit a plan by the end of March to make these materials available online, and these recommendations should be carefully considered.

Second, expeditiously complete the letterpress projects. The original goal of the Congress more than 50 years ago is still valid today. This scholarly work is important. Sufficient funding, coupled with appropriate reporting requirements, will be necessary to complete the projects in a timely manner. More accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness must be introduced to this process. The handling of the Jefferson papers should be carefully reviewed as a model of how the ongoing projects might become more efficient.

Finally, the published volumes should be digitized—along with the original, unannotated documents—and placed on a single, easily accessible and searchable Web site, such as that of the Library of Congress. Access should be free, available to anyone who can access the Internet.

The task of providing a more complete picture of the difficult, painstaking, and time-consuming work that goes into creating a documentary edition, and the current status, publication records, and work plans of the FFP fell to Stan Katz. Katz's sixty-seven page written testimony, complete with a short history of modern documentary editing, a publication history for the FFP (207 volumes to date), and information about the digital efforts and substantial progress already made by the FFP sets the record straight on the history and current status of the five ongoing projects. Lists of published and projected volumes with details about publication dates, material covered, and number of pages are provided for each project. These lists reveal that the publication record for volumes of the FFP has improved in recent years, during the same period that these projects have also been involved in planning for or implementing electronic publications.

Copies of representative difficult documents, including monetary reports in Jefferson's tiny script and a digital photograph of an almost invisible document, are supplied, along with the edited versions from printed volumes. A letter from Penelope Kaiserlian, director of the University of Virginia Press, enclosing a report on the very impressive progress of their efforts to digitize Founding Era documentary histories was also submitted for the record, along with a report on the research assistance provided by and educational efforts of the FFP.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Katz's submission is the letter written by Adams Papers director James Taylor to Thomas Lindsay, director of the NEH's *We the People* program, in 2006 in behalf of himself and the editors of the Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison Papers. The text of the letter, which was accompanied by statements of work to be done and budgets from each of the project directors, is as follows:

The editors of the founding fathers projects and Stan Katz have requested that I collect from them the information you requested concerning our ideas and cost estimates for producing verified and encoded transcriptions of the first four presidents' papers for an NEH digital publication. We have exchanged ideas and generally agree on several points that you will see in the enclosed narratives. Below is a summary of some of those points.

1. We are considering for selection all documents not yet published in the modern editions, through the presidencies of each man. The inclusion of the papers created during the long retirement periods of some of the men would extend the project far beyond five years. It is understood that a retrospective digital edition of all the published volumes will be completed as part of the Rotunda Project by the University of Virginia Press.
2. The estimated number of documents ranges from a low of 7,500 for the Adams Papers to 17,000 for the Washington Papers.
3. The editors insist that the documents presented in digital form must maintain the highest standards of accuracy as represented in the print editions.
4. The regular ongoing work must not be interrupted by the digital project.
5. Office space will be a problem and some projects may need to move work off-site. This presents management as well as cost issues.

6. Each project will need some time and funding for preparation. Hiring appropriate staff, completing document management systems and finishing document searches, as well as other preliminary, work will take several months.
7. There must be coordination among the projects to determine XML encoding standards.
8. The combined estimated budget for the four projects is \$13,319,875.

At the time, the chairman of the NEH, Bruce Cole, was engaged in a stealth, but unfortunately unsuccessful, effort to put together a funding package for digitizing both the published volumes and unpublished materials of the FFP. Stan Katz's testimony is highly recommended to all readers of *Documentary Editing*.

Syracuse University Professor Emeritus of History Ralph Ketcham provided the final say from the panel on the issue. He led off his testimony with the statement: "The Founding Fathers Project has become the most lasting and significant effort to preserve the national heritage of the ideas and institutions upon which our political system rests." Ketcham related the history of the FFP and the origins of the longstanding coalition of private and public supporters and praised the high standards set by the earliest editors of the modern generation and continued by their successors, stating that they

developed methods and benchmarks of thoroughness and accuracy for documentary publication that were so path-breaking that all previous such publication was rendered inadequate and incomplete, and all subsequent such publication has had to try to live up to those standards. As the volumes have come out—well over 200 in all by now—the projects themselves became legendary, and were seen as in a class by themselves for every scholarly and other public purpose.

Ketcham went into his own observations on the work that goes into editing documentary volumes and expressed doubts that the quality of the editorial enterprise could be maintained if publication was speeded up.

I do not think that the present rate of publication, with present staff and funding, and providing that the focus of the staff remains on gathering, validating, editing, and preparing for publication of those papers according

to the long-established and widely approved standards noted above, can be much hastened. Efficiencies and improvement of technique can, as they have often in the past, probably speed things up some, but the projects already do very well on that score; even new technologies are unlikely to be major factors.

In contrast to other speakers, Ketcham argued against online presentation documents prior to publication.

Even if it were possible to present the editorial files to the public in some fashion, what might be presented? What form, and what part of the file on any given document could be offered? In any case, there would seem to be no possibility of presentation that would not require large amounts of highly skilled work—probably only doable by the editorial staff deeply familiar with the documents—time, then, taken away from the demanding work of preparing the documents for publication, which would further delay that essential process. All of this raises serious questions about any proposal to give the public immediate or quicker access to the “treasured documents.”

All three senators present then engaged in asking a few questions of the panelists, and all stated their support and appreciation for both the papers of the Founders and the editions that publish those papers. Senator Kennedy related his experience as one of the readers of the letters between John and Abigail Adams at a program in Boston’s Faneuil Hall, which the Adams Papers staff played an instrumental role in producing. Senator Cardin commented that he was proud to have been a supporter of the establishment of and funding for the Carroll Family Papers. The senators were unanimous in their belief that the American people, and particularly students, need to be exposed to and familiarize themselves with the writings of our Founders. Though the senators didn’t offer any concrete proposals for how the goal of free electronic access could be achieved, they did indicate that they would continue to pay attention to this issue and take an active interest in Archivist Weinstein’s upcoming report.

On February 18, a third major U.S. newspaper chose to cover this issue when the *Los Angeles Times* published “A Tussle over the Founding Fathers’ Words” by Sarah D. Wire. Wire begins by contending that

“the names and public acts of the founding fathers are familiar to many Americans, but their thoughts have remained a mystery.” Considering the wealth of thoughts revealed in the surviving documentary record, the more than two hundred volumes of the FFP already published, biographies, earlier editions, volumes of selected writings, at historic homes and other Founder-related sites, and the numerous sources of information on the Internet on the Founders, this statement is puzzling and clearly inaccurate. Despite this questionable start, the article does a credible job of describing some of the steps editors take to prepare documents for publication.

The article focuses on digitization and quotes Brian Lee, a spokesman for the NEH, as saying that it is crucial to make the FFP available online and that the quickest way to do that is “in the form of nonedited papers.” It cites the 2006 letter from the editors of the ongoing FFP proposing to make all the papers available online through a single searchable database in five years with an investment of \$13 million.

Wise also checked into the efforts already under way to digitize and present the FFP volumes and interviewed Penny Kaiserlian, about Rotunda. Kaiserlian described a sliding scale one time only fee system for access to Rotunda under which the price for individuals and high schools would be roughly 10 percent of the cost for large research libraries. Such pricing could definitely increase access at public libraries and schools. According to Kaiserlian, “Once a library buys it, they have it forever.” This idea is countered by the Deanna Marcum argument that the cost would prevent the public from accessing the documents and that the Library of Congress should become the home for the digital FFP.

Some participants in the March 4 Congressional visits made for Humanities Advocacy Day (HAD) were questioned about the publicity and issues relating to the FFP and the charge to the archivist to come up with a plan for electronic publication. In at least one office visited it was clear to HAD advocates that the Pew team of Rebecca Rimel and Mike Andrews had already made their case and sought support.

As the writing of this article was concluded, the Archivist of the United States had obtained an extension of the deadline to report a plan for completing the digitization of the volumes and digitizing the unpublished Founding Fathers Papers to the Congressional Appropriations committees. Given the fact that the Bush Administration, which rather ironically had twice recognized the work of the *Papers of George Washington* at White House ceremonies, chose to zero out the NHPRC for the third year in a

row, it seemed unlikely that any plan calling for increasing federal resources for the FFP would pass muster with the current Office of Management and Budget and be passed on to the Congress. Congress could, of course, decide to take action on its own without a recommendation from the Administration.

Most in the editorial community who work on book editions have difficulty envisioning how online publication of the yet-to-be-published documents could be accomplished quickly without the risk of sacrificing both reliability and true intellectual access to the documents, as well as slowing the production of the volumes. The question is one that documentary editors have already spent years struggling to resolve, and it remains the central issue of the ongoing debate over the Founding Fathers Papers. All federally funded editions could feel the impact of its resolution.

Down a Potholed Road

Documentary editing, though not the Founding Fathers this time, again made the news in the January 22 *New York Times* article by Motoko Rich, “Editing of Frost Notebooks in Dispute.” The article quotes David Orr, who reviewed *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*, a one-volume compendium edited by Robert Faggen of Claremont McKenna College, for *The New York Times Book Review*, as saying “Any Frost reader will benefit from Faggen’s thoughtful introduction and be intrigued by the way in which concepts from these largely aphoristic journals animate the poems and vice versa.” Orr’s comments are quoted as typical of the favorable reviews that the volume had received, but Rich then goes on to describe a brewing controversy over the reliability of the transcription of the notebooks. In a review published in the October 2007 issue of *Essays and Criticism* James Sitar, now archive editor at the Poetry Foundation, critiqued Faggen’s work, claiming that his own comparison of the transcriptions with the originals of just four of the forty-seven Frost notebooks Faggen worked with turned up “more than one-thousand errors.” Most of the examples cited in the criticisms by Sitar and those from a forthcoming review by William Logan in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* center on Faggen’s interpretation of Frost’s spelling. Logan contends that the errors make Frost look like “a dyslexic and deranged speller” who often “made no sense.”

An excellent February 8 article, “The Impossible Art of Deciphering Manuscripts” by Megan Marshall, in the online publication, *Slate*, opens a window on the complicated issues faced by documentary editors as they struggle to decipher the papers written by and to their subjects. The author recognizes that the five years that Faggen spent transcribing and editing the Frost volume “pales in comparison with the number of years many scholars—and teams of scholars—have devoted to making sense of the hard-to-decipher handwriting of authors from Thoreau to Henry James to the less-well-known but no less prolific 19th-century American diarist Caroline Healey Dall.” Marshall interviewed both Elizabeth Witherell, director of the Thoreau Edition, and the editor of Dall’s diaries, Helen Deese. A couple of selected quotes provide a taste of the substance of this article. Readers of *Documentary Editing* will immediately recognize the truth of Beth Witherell’s statement that “human beings are not meant to be consistent. Every time we force ourselves into consistency, we fail.” Her description of reading and transcribing Thoreau’s journals as “like driving down a deeply potholed road—you read along and when you come to a word you can’t understand, you back up and run at it again with the force of what you do know” certainly evokes similar experiences with the “deeply potholed” roads of individual handwriting. The *Slate* article is highly recommended.