

## **THE FIRST DECADE OF THE SOCIETY FOR HISTORY IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

BY DENNIS ROTH

On September 13th 1979 nearly 200 people interested in the history of the federal government assembled in the auditorium of the Forrestal Building in Washington, D.C. to listen to speakers talk about the importance of history. The program was sponsored by the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History which had been established in 1976 by the American Historical Association in response to the academic job crisis which had begun at the turn of the decade. Ron Spector, a historian with the Center for Military History and a member of one of NCC's action committees, had organized the conference. A few minutes before the opening of the conference Jack Holl of the Department of Energy History Office, which had secured the use of the auditorium, asked Spector for a few minutes on the program. Spector readily granted his request, although neither he nor anybody else knew what Holl wanted to say.<sup>1</sup>

At 3:00 p.m., following a talk by Smith College professor Alan Weinstein, Spector introduced Holl. The audience sat up straighter in their chairs. Many sensed what was to come. Holl spoke of the crisis affecting the profession, the "second-class" citizenship of non-academic historians, and the need to organize. He then suggested that an organization be formed which would represent the interests of those concerned with history in the federal government. He proposed a meeting to discuss his idea.<sup>2</sup> After Holl had finished his speech, several people rose to comment on what he had said. Most supported Holl. Approximately sixty years after the first professional historians had entered the government, the Society for history in the Federal Government (SHFG) was about to become a reality.

War had provided the original impetus for the creation of federal history programs. The War Department hired several historians in 1918. During World War II their numbers swelled. The Army had wanted to record its World War I history but because of bureaucratic problems nothing was ever published. The Army did not want to make the same mistake again. After Pearl Harbor it hired many historians who began the monumental task of documenting the war.

World War II also marked the beginning of an interest in recording the civilian history of the federal government. Harold Smith, Director of the Budget was a member of the Public Administration Committee of the Social Science Research Council and had a strong interest in recording administrative history. Historians and political scientists were contacted and meetings held to discuss the formation of a committee on the records produced by the war. On March, 1942 President Roosevelt sent Smith a letter calling for the creation of the Committee on Records of War Administration.

The Bureau of Budget War Records Section also encouraged other federal agencies to establish history programs to "capture the records" of the war. By September, 1944 forty government agencies had history units. By the end of the war interest in the civilian history of the Executive Branch had begun to wane. The War Records Section was terminated in June 1946, and most of the history units in civilian agencies were closed down by June of the following year. The military history programs, however, continued to thrive.<sup>3</sup>

During the war and early post-war years historians moved easily between academia and the federal government. By the early 1950's the membrane had become less permeable and corps of professional federal historians had begun to form. In 1952 the American Historical Association (AHA) conducted a study of federal historical programs with the ostensible purpose of improving their

professionalism. Paul Scheips, who had just become an Air Force historian, wished the study had been broader and had covered issues such as the location and organization of history programs. Although nothing ever came of the study, it seemed to mark a division between academic and government historians. The restricted scope of the study seemed to indicate that academic historians questioned the professionalism of their colleagues in the government.<sup>4</sup>

During the next two decades these barriers hardened. Government historians were considered to be "second-class" citizens and generally accepted their lot. In 1969 and 1970 anti-Vietnam War protesters almost had government historians expelled from the American Historical Association, although Fred Beck recalls hearing stories about professorial protesters approaching government historians at the convention about jobs for their students.<sup>5</sup> Whether these little incidents of hypocrisy actually occurred or not, the attempted expulsion frightened some of the "old guard" federal historians and confirmed them in their belief that keeping a low profile was the best policy.

The early 1970's also saw the beginning of the academic job "crisis". New Ph.Ds found it increasingly difficult to get teaching jobs and many of those who did merely became the first of the so-called "Gypsy Scholars", teachers who went from school to school in a succession of one-year jobs. Some left-wing intellectuals actually seemed to applaud the crisis because they believed it would radicalize a new generation of scholars.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, most professors did not think this way. Instead they started to look to the federal government as a source of employment. For twenty years federal historians had been all but invisible in the profession. Academics were now noticing them but more as potential employers than as professional colleagues. For instance, Wayne Rasmussen, who for nearly fifty years was chief

historian for the Department of Agriculture, recalls receiving phone calls from professors saying "I have a graduate student. He's pretty good, although not good enough for an academic department. Do you have an opening?"<sup>7</sup>

Many university historians believed without question that government historians were inferior. Why else would they work in the government, where their freedom to research and write was supposedly more limited, when they could have gotten a teaching job? The job market crisis, however, challenged these assumptions and began to give non-academic historians more influence.

From 1976 to 1979 the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History was the principal means by which this influence was felt. Originally established to help find jobs for graduate students, it turned into the mid-wife for the "public history" movement and the Society for History in the Federal Government. It was sponsored jointly by the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians, although until its transformation into a lobbying organization in 1981, its staff felt they were working for AHA. That was natural because AHA provided most of NCC's budget as well as an office in its Washington, D.C. headquarters.<sup>8</sup>

In 1976 Mack Thompson, the Director of AHA, asked Richard Hewlett to chair NCC's federal resource group. (Other resource groups dealt with state and corporate issues,) Hewlett had received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and since 1957 had been the chief historian for the Atomic Energy Commission. (After the AEC was abolished, he became the first chief historian for the Department of Energy, created in 1977 by the Carter Administration.) At that time Hewlett was one of the most respected veteran federal historians. His publications had received excellent reviews- He was a skilled diplomat with many Washington contacts.<sup>9</sup> In addition, he had written a series of articles arguing the importance of contemporary and federal government history.<sup>10</sup> When

Phil Cantelon came to Washington in 1976 to work in an exchange program with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare he recalls that Hewlett's ideas about federal history were then more "advanced" than his.<sup>11</sup> Most historians were still looking at the government as a job market while Hewlett was interested primarily in the professional aspects of federal history.

In the summer of 1977 Arnita Jones took over the NCC job. She began to work closely with federal historians and was sensitive to their interests. For instance, since 1971 the American Historical Association had been holding so-called "alternative careers" sessions at its annual meetings. Anna Nelson remembers them as being "dreary" affairs made even drearier by the adjective "alternative" which in the context seemed to imply second-choice or even second-rate. Recognizing that non-academic historians were offended by the name, Jones persuaded the Association to stop using it.<sup>12</sup>

Jones established a strong cooperative relationship with Hewlett. Under his leadership, the Federal Resource group met 5 or 6 times a year. One of their first objectives was to get the Office of Personnel Management to strengthen the employment standards of the 171 historian series. Neither they nor an early committee of the SHFG succeeded in this effort. OPM did not revise its standards until 1988 when it required entry-level historians to have a minimum number of undergraduate history courses or courses in closely related fields.

Another project was to publish a directory of federal history programs. Hewlett and others had long recognized that the relative isolation of federal historians was detrimental to their professional growth. Compiling a directory would be one way of creating a community of federal historians. Questionnaires were sent out to historians known to the committee. A list was compiled and

printed using the word processor at the History Office of the Department of State, one of the first in the federal government.<sup>14</sup> The directory was issued in 1978. Although it was far from complete, it began to increase communication among federal history offices.

David Trask assumed the post of Chief Historian (officially known as The Historian) for the State Department after an academic career at *[blank in manuscript]*. Having spent 20 years in the university world he was struck by the absence of opportunities for professional enrichment available to federal historians.<sup>15</sup> The only meeting which brought together a cross-section of government historians was the semi-annual D.C. Historians Luncheon hosted by the George Washington University history department. In the spring and fall about 60 or 70 historians would gather at the university's student center for drinks, lunch and informal discussion. After lunch attendees introduced themselves and said a few words about their activities. It was (and still is) a pleasant affair but it left federal historians such as Jack Holl feeling unsatisfied. It dangled the prospect of a professional society but it never went beyond being a social gathering.<sup>16</sup>

Trask saw the need for a conference of federal historians or "official historians" as he preferred to call them. Trask was a member of the NCC Federal Resource Group but decided to organize a "Conference of Official Historians" on his own initiative.

On September 23, 1977 approximately 200 invited historians assembled at the Department of State for a day-long conference. They heard speakers, most of who were from the military services or the Department of State, talk about topics such as professional ethics and document declassification.<sup>17</sup> Trask had hoped the conference would start something and recalls that a few people did ask him about forming an organization. His view was that it would be better to wait and

see if others were interested before trying to form a new organization.<sup>18</sup> The importance of this meeting was later acknowledged by the coordinators of the September 13, 1979 meeting who referred to their gathering as the "Second Meeting of Federal Historians".<sup>19</sup>

The NCC Federal Resource Group and the 1977 conference were the principal antecedents to the Society for History in the Federal Government but there were others as well. The preparations for celebrating the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 had resulted in an increased historical awareness throughout the country. Historical societies expanded their memberships and the "public history" movement began to define itself. These events had an effect, albeit indefinable, on the way in which federal historians perceived their jobs. For instance, Ron Spector believes that the formation of the Society was "inevitable" given these conditions and that it "rode the wave" of the nationwide history movement.<sup>20</sup>

The Watergate scandal from 1972 to 1974 and its aftermath also played a part. President Nixon's unsuccessful attempt to protect presidential papers from public use led to the creation of National Study Commission on Records and Documents (1976–77). Anna Nelson was a member of the Commission and an activist in the public history movement. She believes the Commission was instrumental in bringing many historians "out of the closet" and credits it with allowing historians to give some of their first public testimony on a matter of public policy.<sup>21</sup>

The Commission also brought together historians and archivists, two groups which had been somewhat suspicious of each other over the years. Archivists worried that historians kept their own private archives in contravention of federal records legislation, while some historians believed archivists were often too quick to dispose of records. According to Nelson, the work of the

Commission helped them to find more common ground.<sup>22</sup> President Nixon had enlisted the Administrator of the General Services Administration, who oversaw the National Archives and Records Administration, in an effort to protect his presidential papers from public view. The possibility of further political involvement in historical records management troubled archivists and historians. Both groups began to doubt the wisdom of keeping the National Archives within GSA. In a 1977 article Richard Hewlett was the first federal historian to call for an independent National Archives.<sup>23</sup> Many archivists secretly applauded his stand.

Successful movements, even those with the modest goal of improving the status of a professional group, often produce a firebrand who can dramatize issues and raise consciousness. David Clary was such a person. Clary had worked for several years with the National Park Service before joining the U.S. Forest Service in 1976 as its first professional historian. Clary was representative of the new generation of federal historians — well-educated, more loyal to history than any particular agency, and proud to be a non-academic historian. He felt more keenly than most of his peers the second-class status of federal historians. From 1977 to 1979 he was a constant gadfly.<sup>24</sup> In several speeches and articles he castigated academic historians for their alleged insularity and called for a return to the nineteenth-century ideal of the historian as a person involved both with ideas and affairs of the world,<sup>25</sup> Clary raised hackles because he did not mince words. Indeed, his writings often expressed a thinly veiled contempt for academic history. Some federal historians were put off by his tough language but many others sympathized with him. Clary left the federal government in September

of 1979 and was not involved in organizing the SHFG but he is generally recognized as having been a "lightning rod" and inspiration for the cause of federal history. According to Phil Cantelon, an early leader of the movement: "If Clary had not existed, we would have had to invent him."<sup>26</sup>

In the summer of 1979 a small group of historians informally met several times at the Department of Energy. Richard Hewlett was at the center of this circle. George Mazuzan, who had only recently become the chief historian at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, recalls that Hewlett exhorted "the younger historians to get together."<sup>27</sup> He was not necessarily advocating the establishment of a new professional organization but his assistant, Jack Holl believed that was the only thing to do.

Holl had come to Washington, D.C. in 1975 from the University of Washington. According to him, not all of his professional energy was being absorbed by his job." The movement of federal historians was the outlet he needed. Holl was also resentful of academic historians and, detecting what he thought was a note of patronage, did not like the term "public history" coined by university professors. Following the usage established in other occupations, he preferred the title "professional historian". However, by the time he had expressed his views "public historian" had already become entrenched.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to his passion for the cause, Holl brought to his task an ability to run meetings fairly and expeditiously. This was an important asset because several of his colleagues initially distrusted his motives. He was soon able to allay most people\*s fears by the democratic, yet efficient way in which he conducted meetings.<sup>29</sup>

Holl's call for a new organization had greatly agitated Mack Thompson, the executive director of the American Historical Association. Even Richard Hewlett was uneasy because he feared the situation might get out of control. Arnita Jones recalls that at the time the situation was seen as

"radical". Some top military historians even half-jokingly referred to the movement as the "Historians<sup>1</sup> Soviet" to indicate their misgivings.<sup>30</sup> All of this later became rather amusing in view of the Society's development into a moderate professional organization.<sup>31</sup>

These historians and others represented the older generation, most of whom had joined the government in the early post-war years. They were comfortable in their positions and did not want to drive a wedge between themselves and the major professional organizations. Having heard David Clary's strong rhetoric, they feared the federal history movement would turn into something like a trade union. Because the movements' leaders were all mid-level historians in their 20's and 30's, the "senior" historians most likely also regretted their loss of influence. After the summer of 1979 Richard Hewlett purposely distanced himself so that it would not appear that he was using his NCC role to nurture a new organization.<sup>32</sup> The only "older" historian in the original core group was David Trask but, having been in government only three years, he was the exception who proved the rule. He believed federal historians should first "call the academics to account and then join them". In the following months Trask was a mediator between the generations. On one occasion he invited three "senior" federal historians to the Cosmos Club to in an attempt to persuade them that the SHFG was not a radical splinter group. Soon thereafter they joined the Society.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after the September 13th conference, Maeva Marcus, head of the Supreme Court's Documentary History Project, persuaded Chief Justice Warren Burger Co allow historians to use a meeting room at the Court. Although Marcus was one of only a handful of women involved in the movement" (the old girls network", as they called themselves), their influence was far out of proportion

to their numbers. Anna Nelson of George Washington University was ubiquitous In the early days, involved in everything from federal documents to the establishment of a House of Representative History Office. In addition, she wrote an important article for NCC entitled "History without Historians" pointing out that several government agencies had "history" programs (actually misnamed public information programs) but no historians. This short article dramatized the need to establish professional standards in federal history offices, something only a formal society could do. And, of course, Arnita Jones was instrumental in her role as the director of NCC.<sup>34</sup>

On October 16, 23 historians constituting a "Steering Committee" met at the Supreme Court. At the suggestion of Phil Cantelon, Jack Holl was appointed as chairman of the committee. The Steering Committee agreed that some kind of organization was needed but they were not yet prepared to specify the membership. They tentatively picked the name Council on History in the Federal Government.<sup>35</sup> Two meetings later David Allison suggested Society for History in the Federal Government.<sup>36</sup> The discussion over the name was part of a debate over how broad the organization should be. Jack Holl was an "inclusivist" and wanted to permit anybody interested in federal history to be a member, including contractors such as Phil Cantelon who had worked with the Department of Energy History Office. Several military historians, on the other hand, were "exclusivists" because they were afraid these contractors might get inside information about contracts.<sup>37</sup> The "inclusivists" won; hence the decision to use the preposition "for" rather than the supposedly more restricted "on".

The "inclusivists" also prevailed in the matter of the annual fee. Richard Hewlett had previously suggested a \$100 fee. He reasoned that although a large fee would restrict membership it would insure their active involvement.<sup>38</sup> At the October 16th meeting the Steering Committee voted for a \$10 fee.

(In later years fees were always increased reluctantly.) Hewlett's Idea, however, was used by the National Council on Public History which was organizing at the same time. Most of its leaders were professors teaching public history courses in universities and colleges. Its goal was to promote the field of public history in all of its aspects, whether in state and local government, business, or academia.

Pervading all the discussions were the issues of openness and democracy. Most of the participants had in some way been involved in the politics of 1960's and brought with them ideas of "participatory democracy" inherited from that decade. Charles Hendricks of the Army Corps of Engineers was perhaps the most outspoken in this regard.<sup>39</sup> He (and others such as Martin Reuss) were sensitive to any hint, however small, that the organization would be captured by a small clique. For instance, initially it was decided to call the leaders of the Steering Committee "the Directory Committee" but this was soon changed to the less elitist title of "the Administrative Committee".<sup>40</sup>

In general Holl was able to guide these discussions to a successful resolution but there were dropouts along the way. Alex Roland, a well-respected historian from NASA, submitted his resignation because he feared the Society would turn into a glorified job bureau.<sup>41</sup> Kathy Jacobs of the Senate Historical Office resigned because she detected too much hostility towards academics.<sup>42</sup> Her boss, Richard Baker, shared those feelings. The Steering Committee, however, was anxious not to alienate Baker who headed an important historical office. Maeva Marcus was unofficially delegated to "work on him".<sup>43</sup> He was eventually won over and later became a stalwart member of the Society and its fourth president.

By the time of the third monthly meeting debate over philosophy had largely given way to the practical concerns of forming an organization. In the words of David Trask, the "worker bees began to take over".<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly the main worker bee during this period was David Allison. Jack Holl humorously recalls that he would often ask Allison for something only to get it before he wanted it.<sup>45</sup>

David Allison joined the Naval Research Laboratory as its first historian in 1978 after receiving a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Princeton University. Like other historians new to Washington, D.C., he made a pilgrimage to see Richard Hewlett and ask his advice on setting up a new historical program. Allison was a "one-man band" and felt professionally isolated. He did not know about the informal meetings during the summer of 1979 but he was present at the September 13th meeting and "jumped" at the opportunity to work on the Steering Committee.<sup>46</sup> Allison quickly established a reputation for seriousness and industry. His youth and desire for professional association combined to make him an indefatigable member of the committee.

Allison volunteered to draft the Society's constitution. He gathered constitutions of other professional organizations and took them on vacation to New Mexico where he wrote the document. Allison's principal concern was to incorporate the democratic spirit of the committee's discussions into the draft. He did this in two ways. In the first place, the President was made responsible for setting meeting agendas, carrying out decisions, and representing the Society, but in all other respects the members of the Executive Council were equals. (The Executive Council consisted of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and three general members. Today it has four general members.) Secondly, Allison provided for Action Committees which any member of the Society could join. Since it was understood that the Action Committees would do most of the work, this constitutional

provision guaranteed the Society would remain relatively open.<sup>47</sup> Today it is generally agreed that the action committees, which are re-organized or disbanded as needs change are the most important and innovative feature of the by-laws.

Following the Steering Committee's first meeting a letter and questionnaire were sent to many federal history offices. It listed nine goals for the organization, including educating the public, government officials, and professional societies about the value of federal history, publishing a newsletter, holding conferences, and developing guidelines and standards for history programs.<sup>48</sup> Encouraged by the generally positive response, the Steering Committee authorized Phil Cantelon, the only member of the Steering Committee experienced in filing for a non-profit organization, to incorporate the Society in Washington, D.C.<sup>49</sup> Anna Nelson's post office box became the Society's first mailing address.<sup>50</sup>

On April 16, 1980, the Society held its first annual meeting at the Department of Energy Auditorium. The members approved the by-laws. Senator Robert Morgan of North Carolina gave the keynote address on the need for an independent National Archives, William Appleman Williams, President of the Organization of American Historians, spoke about cooperation between academic and federal historians.<sup>51</sup> Williams followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, Richard Kirkendahl, who had actively sympathized with the federal history movement at a time when the other organizations were either hostile or indifferent towards it. His encouragement was perhaps one reason why the anti-academic elements in the federal history movement never predominated. Thus, seven months after Jack Holl's call, the Society for History in the Federal Government was established.

As Ron Spector observed, the Society was probably an inevitable outgrowth of developments in the historical profession in the 1970's. Nevertheless, its healthy continuance was not so readily assured. For instance Marty Reuss recalls that in 1980 David Trask asked him if he thought the Society would survive.<sup>52</sup> Others also had doubts about the Society's longevity. Arnita Jones' departure from NCC in September 1979 created a temporary vacuum (not filled until Page Miller took the job a year later) which may have motivated people to join and become active in the SHFG.<sup>53</sup> But something more was needed. In the early 1980's James Watt, the pro-development Secretary of the Department of the Interior, gave the environmental organizations a cause around which they could rally. The General Services Administration's management of the National Archives was the SHFG's James Watt.

The National Archives was created in 1936 and existed as an independent agency until 1949 when Congress, acting on the Hoover Commission's recommendation, placed it under the General Services Administration. The rationale for this transfer was that it would increase efficiencies and give the National Archives a strong advocate in budget battles. The problem, however, was that it subordinated the Archives to an agency created to manage buildings and purchase supplies. The tendency of its administrators was quite naturally to view the Archives' records as another type of supply. For two and a half decades GSA and the NA were able to co-exist but this uneasy relationship started to unravel in 1974 when it appeared that the Nixon tapes issue would politicize the Archives.<sup>54</sup> From that point on momentum began to build to make the Archives independent.

In 1979 James Rhodes, the Archivist of the United States, resigned his position. Many historians feared he would be replaced by an unqualified political appointee. At the September 13, 1979 meeting, the attendees passed three resolutions, one of which was to send a letter to the

Administrator of GSA urging the selection of a qualified professional.<sup>55</sup> In 1980, Dr. Robert Warner, chief archivist at the University of Michigan, became the Archivist of the United States.

In November 1979 GSA Administrator Admiral R.G. Freeman III announced his intention to disperse many groups of records held in the Washington D.C. National Archives to Regional Records Centers. Cost and space limitations were the reasons given for the proposed move. Federal historians, as well as many academic historians, strongly opposed this decision. In the interest of economy valuable record groups were to be broken up and decentralized, which would make it much more difficult to access them. This seemed to be a blatant example of GSA's space management mentality taking precedence over the requirements of archival administration. As a result of this action, 200 midlevel managers and employees of the Archives formed an ad hoc group called the National Archives Concerned Professionals.<sup>56</sup> They wrote President Carter asking for a delay in the dispersal plan and suggested a commission be formed to study the feasibility of an independent National Archives.

On January 10, 1980 Jack Holl sent a strongly-worded letter to presidential advisor Stuart Eizenstat.

"What we ask is that the Archives be run as it should be — as a public trust. We do not think that decisions which radically change the manner in which researchers must work should be implemented without broad consultation with historians and archivists in and out of the federal government. Alternatives must be considered fully and in good faith. Unfortunately, however, the present GSA Administrator has displayed a gross insensitivity to the needs of the public which he is bound to serve. This insensitivity is matched by the contempt which he shows his own

subordinates, as reflected in his comment to a group of archivists (WASHINGTON POST. 22 December 1979): 'I'm an expert in almost every area you work.'

"Because federal historians use agency records so frequently, they are probably most directly affected by the recent decentralization decisions. What we ask is that beginning immediately, no further records be transferred to Federal Records Centers without prior review by a committee."<sup>57</sup>

On February 8, 1980 Freeman issued a statement declaring a willingness to reconsider his decision. He claimed that his previous announcement had been misunderstood but to anybody reading between the lines it was clear that he had backed down.<sup>58</sup> Less than six months after the September 13th meeting the SHFG had demonstrated its usefulness to potential members. But this was just the opening round. A month earlier the Steering Committee, upon the motion of Martin Reuss, voted to support an independent National Archives.<sup>59</sup> For the next four years Archives independence would occupy the SHFG more than any other issue.

Before describing the role of the SHFG in this effort, it is necessary at the outset to say that its leader was Page Miller of the NCC. Making the Archives independent required legislation and legislation required lobbying, which was not something federal employees could easily do. Until 1982 it was also something which the NCC was not authorized to do. This meant, however, that NCC had little reason to exist since the National Council on Public History and the SHFG had assumed most of its original functions.<sup>60</sup>

As the new director of NCC, Page Miller was acutely aware of this fact. So too were David Trask (who in 1981 became the second President of SHFG) and Anna Nelson, as well as others. On March 20, 1982 the three of them met and "hatched" the idea of turning NCC into a lobbyist and a broad-

based coordinator of historical organizations. On March 25th Trask wrote Joan Hoff-Wilson, the Executive Secretary of the Organization of American Historians, that "my political instincts tell me that the moment may be ripe for a real breakthrough along the lines indicated."<sup>61</sup> A few weeks later Trask followed this up with a detailed 6-page memorandum. He pointed out that "world of history has suffered many defeats in Washington because of its failure to develop professional research and planning in defense of its interests . . . Meanwhile crises materialize at rabbit-rate. . . . We must begin operations now, while at the same time developing a lobby of professional dimensions and skills." The next month Anna Nelson attended the OAH annual meeting in Detroit where she made the case for transforming NCC into the lobbying arm of the historical profession. In December that was done.<sup>62</sup>

Page Miller immediately began the coalition-building needed to pass a bill for Archives independence. Rational arguments and expert testimony were not enough because the National Archives was far down in the list of congressional priorities. To counteract this inertia Miller worked to get historians and archivists throughout the country to apply pressure on their representatives. On October 19, 1984 this strategy was finally rewarded when President Ronald Reagan signed the Archives independence bill.<sup>63</sup>

The SHFG was a member of the coalition. Its members could not lobby but they testified and provided information as well as encouragement to Page Miller. They also worked closely with the Archives to improve reference and research services.

Martin Reuss was the first chairman of the Archives Committee. Its membership grew rapidly and it was soon divided into four subcommittees. With one exception the Committee assumed leadership on issues related to the Archives.

When Ronald Reagan became President drastic budget cuts were proposed for many agencies, including the National Historic Records Publications Commission (NHPRC), which is affiliated with the Archives and funds the publishing of historical records outside the Federal Government. A group called the Coalition to Save our Documentary Heritage, headed by Charlene Bickford of George Washington University, lobbied against cuts which would have terminated NHPRC.<sup>64</sup> The SHFG Council directed the Archives Committee to assist the Coalition. The Coalition was able to restore some of the funds. Its members also got involved in the struggle for Archives independence.

In 1981 Marine Corps historian Jack Shulimson became chairman of the Committee. He had been an archivist and was a frequent user of the National Archives. Shulimson was especially concerned with the adverse effects of Reagan Administration budget cuts on the Archives' ability to provide reference and research services.<sup>65</sup> In a letter to David Trask, Deputy Archivist Edward Weldon said that he had a better understanding of the "effects of the neutron bomb" after studying the effects of lay-offs on the Archives' operations.<sup>66</sup> Shulimson sympathized with the Archives' budgetary problems but he also felt that archivists were often too willing to dispose of potentially valuable records even when they had adequate resources.<sup>67</sup>

Soon after Dr. Robert Warner became Archivist of the United States in July 1980, he met with Jack Holl and the SHFG Council. They agreed to cooperate but with the understanding that Warner would have to be discreet since he still worked for GSA.<sup>68</sup> When David Trask became SHFG President in 1981 he also developed a good relationship with Warner. On April 26, 1982 Trask became the first SHFG officer to testify before Congress when he spoke out against Archives' budget cuts at a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service, and General Governmental Appropriations.<sup>69</sup> Trask was concerned that any criticism of the Archives would

"undercut" Warner. On Archives' issues he preferred to work through NCC. Shulimson, on the other hand, closely followed the deterioration of the Archives' services in the early 1980's and wanted his committee's concerns presented directly to the agency. According to committee member Fred Beck, they did not think that independence in itself was a "panacea" for all of the Archives' problems.<sup>70</sup>

These differing viewpoints made for some spirited discussions at council meetings. Shulimson always came armed with a draft memorandum detailing shortcomings in archival services. Trask would argue that the timing was wrong or that the language was too strong. Agreement was eventually reached. On February 10, 1983 Trask sent a letter asking Warner to look into several problems, including inadequate finding aids, a lack of microfilm readers, overcrowding in the main research room, a proposed users' fee which might discourage low-income researchers, and limited research hours.<sup>71</sup>

When Wayne Rasmussen became the Society's third president in 1983 he also differed with Shulimson's approach. He now acknowledges that Shulimson's persistence resulted in improved archival services.<sup>72</sup> The presence of archivists on the committee, including Assistant Archivist Frank Burke and Sharon Gibbs-Thibodeau, was important in preventing any real friction between historians and archivists. They let the committee know when they thought it was going too far.<sup>73</sup>

From 1980 to 1984 members of the Archives Committee were involved in an almost "endless" round of meetings. Officers of the Society repeatedly testified before Congress and wrote letters supporting increased funding for the Archives or its independence. In 1983 President Trask helped abort a tentative attempt to replace Archivist Robert Warner with a political appointee. When

Warner left in 1985, it appeared that his successor would be a political appointee without archival experience. The appointment of a professional, Donald Wilson, in 1987 was largely the result of the lobbying activity of history and archival organizations, including the SHFG.<sup>74</sup>

## CONTRACTING OUT LIBRARIES

According to Bill Dudley, council meetings during the first Reagan term often were conducted in a "crisis" atmosphere.<sup>75</sup> The Archives was the leading crisis but following right behind was the Office of Management and Budget's regulation A-76 which encouraged agencies to contract out for services available in the private sector. OMB interpreted A-76 to include agency libraries and audio-visual archives. In some cases, such as the Department of Labor, historians worked in libraries. Many more historians depended on the libraries' research material.

When it appeared in late 1982 that the Department of Defense and other agencies would contract out libraries and archives, the Council was at first skeptical that anything could be done. It took a previously uninvolved member to motivate them.<sup>76</sup>

Blanche Coll retired from the federal government in 1979 after a 35-year career as historian and social scientist for several agencies. Coll had attended the first organizational meeting but since then had not participated very much in society affairs. However, she "went through the roof" when she heard about the contracting out of libraries. She contacted Jack Shulimson who invited her to attend a meeting of the Archives Committee. Several weeks later she presented her case before the Council.

She convinced them to take on the issue and drafted Trask's first letter to Secretary Richard Schweiker of the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>77</sup> The Society's main argument concern was that the profit motive and the management of documents were not compatible.

"For a number of reasons — lack of necessary knowledge and experience being the primary one — contractor management cannot be expected to comprehend properly the requirements for running a Department library in the federal government. As a result of the bidding process, a contractor may be inclined to keep salaries and expenses at a minimum, thereby encouraging turnover of personnel in positions where performance is dependent on accumulated knowledge and experience. Under such circumstances, reference work would certainly deteriorate, and the long-term perspectives and interests of the Department would be compromised. Moreover, attempts to weed out the collection by personnel who are unfamiliar with the Library 's specialized holdings and their place in the national library network would be particularly threatening to the integrity of the collection."<sup>78</sup>

HHS did not contract out their library but the Society was not always so successful. For instance despite a petition to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, the department chose to contract out their "Still Media Depository".<sup>79</sup> (In 1985, the private contractors terminated this relationship, and the depository reverted to its former status.)

Paul Scheips, who was the SHFG council secretary until 1983, constantly kept this issue alive as did the editor of the Society's newsletter, Jud MacLaury, whose office was located in the library of the Department of Labor. Blanche Coll was elected to the council in 1983 as a result of her work on behalf of libraries and served until 1986 as one of its principal voices of "common sense".<sup>80</sup>

In March of 1983 council member David Allison testified before an OMB hearing considering revisions in A-76. According to him, the contracting out of libraries would not save money but would instead buy "amnesia".<sup>81</sup> The next month the Naval Historical Center received some inquiries about the possible applicability of A-76 to its library. This was the first time an historical program had been threatened but when word reached its director, he persuaded his superiors to stop it.<sup>82</sup>

In August OMB issued a revision which "cautioned agencies that certain research functions in libraries are not commercial and probably should not be contracted out". It advised agencies to apply A-76 on a "case-by-case basis". Although this revision did not completely exclude libraries, the council considered it to be a "limited victory".<sup>83</sup>

In 1986 Blanche Coll looked back on her three years of involvement with A-76. The SHFG and NCC had probably kept contracting out from spreading throughout the system of federal government libraries. They had been succeeded in keeping the Department of Transportation's library "in-house" but not that of the Department of Energy. While at the Department of Defense "in 21 of 25 cases in-house people won out." Despite these victories she cautiously concluded that because A-76 was still on the books "a judgment on long-term effects — particularly such matters as institutional memory — is clearly premature."<sup>84</sup>

The Archives and A-76 involved institutions with which federal historians worked. The Society was also called upon to tackle issues dealing with the way federal historians worked.

## ORAL HISTORY RESTRICTIONS

In January 1981 James Currie had been the historian at the Department of Education for only few months when he attempted to get an oral history from out-going Secretary Shirley Hufstadler who had been a federal circuit court judge before taking a job in the Carter Cabinet. Currie asked President Jack Holl who told him that anything which became a part of the official record could be requested by outside researchers under the Freedom of Information Act. He got contradictory advice from his department's legal counsel and the Judge Advocate General of the Army. When he asked representatives of the presidential libraries whether the interview would be confidential if he conducted it on off-hours with his own equipment, they were not able to guarantee him immunity from F01A. Secretary Hufstadler was unwilling to accept anything short of what she considered was legal certainty. She gave an interview but refused to talk about some topics. Currie was frustrated over losing material and began to question whether FOIA could be amended to exclude oral histories. Currie found that many federal and academic historians sympathized with his problem. The Deputy Assistant Attorney General handling the Reagan administration's proposed revisions to F01A told him the administration might be willing to propose oral history exemptions. Here, however, was a problem. Academic historians and other outside researchers strongly opposed the administration's attempt to prevent full disclosure of information by amending FOIA. An oral history exemption, while relatively harmless in itself, could, they felt, establish a precedent for more serious restrictions on FOIA.<sup>85</sup>

Currie brought the problem to the attention of federal historians at the SHFG annual meeting on April 14, 1982. The members passed a resolution urging the Council to study and endorse exemptions to FOIA to enforce donor restrictions on oral history tapes and transcripts.

Richard Baker, chairman of the Committee on Federal Historical Programs appointed Donald Ritchie, who worked for him in the Senate Historical Office, to head a subcommittee on oral history. As the oral historian for the Senate Historical Office and an officer in the Oral History Association, Ritchie had a strong interest in the matter.<sup>86</sup>

The subcommittee considered Curried recommendation but concluded an FOIA amendment would contradict "historians' longstanding efforts to limit FOIA exemptions. Instead, at the suggestion of subcommittee member Trudy Peterson of the National Archives, they urged the Council to work to amend the Federal Records Act (FRA) so that the National Archives could accept with restrictions oral histories conducted through federal historical offices as gifts from the interviewees. The FRA already permitted the acceptance with restrictions of oral histories donated to the Presidential Libraries of the Archives. This would solve the problem because FOIA specifically protects from disclosure data excluded by a statute.<sup>87</sup>

On July 7, 1982 the Council unanimously accepted the subcommittee's recommendations and began to look for support from the major historical organizations because the SHFG could not lobby for legislation alone.<sup>88</sup>

On October 5, 1982 Samuel Gammon, Executive Director of the American Historical Association, wrote President Trask of his qualified support for the subcommittee's report.<sup>89</sup> But that was as far as it went. It soon became apparent that neither AHA nor the "Organization of American Historians wanted any kind of oral history legislation.

According to Joan Hoff-Wilson, the executive secretary of the Society was making a “Mountain out of a mole hill” because nobody had ever demanded to see oral histories under FOIA. She opposed so-called “invited” restrictions on information.<sup>90</sup> President David Trask felt caught in the middle. As president of the Society, he felt compelled to support the Council and subcommittee. Personally, however, he believed that there was unnecessary anxiety over the issue. He wrote Hoff-Wilson that the “argument for the resolution is that the failure to protect interviews will dry up volunteers or minimize frankness. This, I fear, is akin to the argument that premature release of classified information dries up intelligence sources. I personally doubt that either argument is true.”<sup>91</sup>

Needless to say, Ritchie, Currie, and the others on the subcommittee did not think they were exaggerating the problem. Although no one had ever attempted a legal test, the potential threat seemed to exert a “chilling effect” on oral history programs and on occasion resulted in byzantine absurdities. For instance, one legal counsel urged erasing tapes because they differed from the edited transcripts while another advised keeping transcripts “in a box at random” to protect the interviewees’ privacy.<sup>92</sup> Ritchie’s and Currie’s frustrations led to some strong words. At one point, Ritchie accused the Joint Committee representing the major history associations of having “wimped out” when it cautioned against amending the FRA. Writing to Hoff-Wilson in March 1984, he chided the Joint Committee for “dragging its feet.” Currie’s language was even blunter. In a letter to Hoff-Wilson, he threatened not to renew his OAH membership and referred to the “weasel-worded response by the Joint Committee.”<sup>93</sup>

In 1984, after a year of inactivity, Baker asked Ritchie to reconstitute the subcommittee. Ritchie asked Hank Schorreck, historian of the National Security Agency, to chair the subcommittee because he did not want people thinking he was the only one interested in the oral history question. The subcommittee quickly grew to 14 people, twice its original membership. It was clear the Society had a stake in resolving this problem. According to Ritchie, "The Society ought not to be perceived as ignoring, postponing, or rejecting its responsibilities on this important issue. There is always the risk of losing, but taking no action at all may ultimately result in an even greater loss." <sup>94</sup>

One of their first steps was to meet with Archivist Robert Warner who advised them against seeking changes in the Federal Records Act because it might result in other amendments being added to it. He felt the solution was already there if the Society could redefine oral history so that it fit under existing FRA restrictions. Sue Falb, FBI historian, suggested talking to counsel John Kaminski of the Library of Congress. <sup>95</sup> Kaminski provided the key when he told Ritchie that the grantor of an oral history could claim copyright and then could donate it as a gift with restrictions if necessary. This would solve the problem for those agencies authorized by law to receive restricted access gifts. To cover those agencies without such authority the subcommittee worked on an arrangement by which restricted oral histories could be donated with a deed to the National Archives. The subcommittee was careful to define oral history in a very specific way so that material such as the Richard Nixon presidential tapes could not be included. <sup>96</sup>

It took the Archives a year to reach a decision. At one point this delay provoked a sharp letter from SHFG President Richard Baker. Acting Archivist Frank Burke replied that the delay was

caused by the need to secure legal opinions.<sup>97</sup> The agreement to accept restricted access oral histories was soon forthcoming. It was shown to the Justice Department which agreed that it "made sense." In August of 1987 Burke submitted the agreement and deed to all agencies. Federal historians now had three options. They could (1) accept copyrighted restricted oral histories under their own authority; (2) accept them and then donate them to the National Archives; or (3) accept them without any restrictions at all.<sup>98</sup>

The legal efficacy of this arrangement was not guaranteed. It was not as fool-proof as an FOIA amendment, something that Currie still thought was necessary. But, as John Karoinski pointed out, in any future legal test judges would probably support the restrictions because the Society and the National Archives had "seized the high ground" by defining the issue.<sup>99</sup>

In general Ritchie and other members of the subcommittee were very pleased at the outcome of their years of work. In 1983 they had conducted a survey and found that dozens of agencies and subdivisions were doing oral history. They had been very conscious of the need to proceed openly so that their conclusions would be trusted. For them it was a "good example of an organization identifying a problem and working patiently to address it despite the fact that everybody else had washed their hands of it." It was also another example of the Society's ability to bring historians and archivists together.<sup>100</sup>

At a breakfast meeting at NCC headquarters in 1987, Ritchie met Joan Hoff-Wilson who remembered being suspicious of oral history restrictions but now complimented the Society for having solved the problem. The Society was the first historical organization to address some of the difficult legal and ethical problems surrounding oral histories. Other historical organizations are now beginning to turn their attention to them.<sup>101</sup>

## PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

On June 22, 1982 Marty Reuss of the Army Corps of Engineers wrote President Trask about a matter that had concerned him since the organization of the Society. He told Trask he felt that the SHFG had not done enough to "sell itself" to field historians, such as he had been while working for the U.S. Army Logistics Center in Fort Lee, Virginia in 1977. Reuss pointed out that field historians, especially those isolated in one-person offices, were less concerned with the National Archives and A-76 than they were in constantly having "to sell their own program to the agency director or commander". Reuss recommended that the Society produce an ethics statement which would help educate historians as to their duties and protect them against pressures to alter or distort their writing of history.<sup>102</sup>

During his career Reuss had detected what he thought was a cavalier attitude towards plagiarism among some non-historian federal employees. He also was aware of cases in which alleged "backroom politics" had resulted in important appointments in federal history programs. He felt these kinds of incidents were additional reasons for writing an ethics statement.<sup>103</sup>

In early 1984 he frankly told the Council why he thought a professional ethics statement was necessary.

"The (Professional Ethics) subcommittee believes that many federal historians, especially those who may not have graduate level training in history, are not fully aware of the standards they should follow in their jobs. They do not adequately understand the difference between what they should do and the jobs of, for example, public affairs specialists or management analysts.

Furthermore, managers of historians frequently have little or no training in history and need help to understand how to oversee professional historians. Both types of problems tend to be greatest in small historical programs." <sup>104</sup>

In early 1983 Reuss formed a subcommittee to draft an ethics statement. The subcommittee quickly decided to change the name of the document to "Principles and Guidelines" because they wanted to "concentrate on the more basic question of the professional responsibilities of federal historians."

In December Reuss delivered to the Council a 2¼-page statement of "Principles and Standards" covering general principles, research, writing, and contract history. The document was written as a list of commandments prefaced by the words "Federal historians shall" or "shall not". Some members of the Council strongly opposed any kind of ethics statement. The ten commandments tone of the document strengthened their resistance to it. One Council member wondered whether sanctions would accompany the statement. Reuss denied any such intention. <sup>105</sup>

The two strongest opponents were council members Blanche Coll and Richard Baker. Coll believed that "as soon as you need an ethics statement you might as well give it up. It's not going to stop anything." <sup>106</sup> Richard Baker feared that "it will fall into the hands of our academic brethren, confirming their darkest suspicions about our branch of the craft. To state, for instance, that federal historians shall not monopolize research in agency history is to confess that they do." <sup>107</sup> President Wayne Rasmussen was not as vehement but thought the appropriate behavior should come naturally "to any professional historian, whether he/she is working in the Federal sector." (In later years he

thought he should "have encouraged Marty more" and perhaps have opened the issue to wider discussion within the Society.)<sup>108</sup> Vice-President Richard Hewlett and Secretary David Allison felt, on the other hand, that a re-written statement might have some value.<sup>109</sup>

Reuss was not prepared to give up despite the generally poor reception the draft had received. He felt there was an "inordinate sensitivity to what academicians might think" and a failure to understand the problems encountered by isolated field historians "as they attempt to educate their supervisors about the proper role of the historian."<sup>110</sup>

By May Reuss had become frustrated over the Council's inaction and suggested in a memo to members of the subcommittee that it might be necessary to "advertise our statement in other channels (OAH, AHA, THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN)."

Subcommittee member Don Ritchie exercised a moderating influence at this point. He pointed out to Reuss that his experience with the oral history restrictions demonstrated that academic historians had little "empathy" for the concerns of federal historians and that if "we can't sell the principles inside the Society, why should we think there would be a market outside." In the meantime Richard Hewlett had drafted his own statement of principles, as had the National Council on Public History, Ritchie proposed endorsing "Dick Hewlett's draft "Principles and Standards," perhaps with some amendments. . . . since I think it's the best of the three proposals."<sup>111</sup>

Hewlett had left the federal government in 1980 to become an historical consultant. He was elected as vice-president in 1983 but rarely attended meetings because business trips kept him on the road. His intervention at this point, however, was most helpful. Rasmussen later credited him "with being a tower of strength" in resolving the impasse.<sup>112</sup>

Hewlett's draft had replaced "shall" with "should" and was written in a more general and less peremptory style. For instance, the section dealing with the writing of historical studies emphasized the various freedoms and rights historians should enjoy while writing them rather than the way they should be written, which was the approach used in the subcommittee's draft.

Reuss was quite willing to work with Hewlett. A new draft based mainly on Hewlett's statement with some wording from the subcommittee's was sent to the Council in October. On December 18, 1984 they unanimously voted for it, thus making the SHFG the first national historical organization to adopt a statement of principles. (The previous month in a case of "independent invention" the California Committee for the Promotion of History had also issued a similar statement).<sup>113</sup>

In an article on the statement in the PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Reuss admitted it was "hardly perfect". For example, it had not discussed the "limitations of the craft" nor "where one simply cannot learn from history." Nevertheless, he thought it was an important step in educating both federal historians and their supervisors about what history could do and how it should be practiced. By 1988 Reuss could not cite any cases where the statement had protected historians, "although I haven't solicited them". On the other hand, he maintains that if it helps just one historian it will have been worth the effort.<sup>114</sup>

## THE THREE PILLARS

When David Allison assumed the presidency in 1987, his predecessor, Dick Baker, counseled him that his three most important responsibilities would be the newsletter, the directory, and the annual meeting.<sup>115</sup> In effect, Baker was telling Allison that issues and crises may come and go but that a professional organization needs regular publications and meetings to maintain itself. Publishing a newsletter was one of Allison's main concerns when he was on the Steering Committee in early 1980. He asked Sharon Gibbs (now Gibbs-Thibodeau) of the National Archives to be the first editor. He also suggested it be called THE FEDERALIST.<sup>116</sup>

The first issue of the quarterly newsletter came out in the summer of 1980. It contained eight pages of general news, including an article about the appointment of the new Archivist of the United States, Robert Warner. During the first year of its existence it operated on a "shoestring basis". Gibbs-Thibodeau and Allison wrote most of the articles and rarely turned down any news in those days when copy was hard to come by. Jim Buchanan of the Supreme Court provided them with some typeset headlines but otherwise the FEDERALIST was typewritten. Treasurer Bill Dudley did not believe the Society could afford the \$100 cost of setting type.<sup>117</sup> The newsletter was (and still is) reproduced and mailed by Huff Duplicating, a firm in downtown Washington, D.C. located by Paul Scheips.

Gibbs-Thibodeau edited the first four issues (a fifth was handled by Paul Scheips) until her election to the Council in 1981, Jud MacLaury of the Department of Labor became the next editor. MacLaury's first concern was to improve THE FEDERALIST'S appearance by having it typeset. Secondly, he wanted, to insure that it came out regularly and on time. (During the first year there had

been some delays.) The Society's finances had improved and MacLaury was authorized to use a typesetter.<sup>118</sup> The newsletter expanded to twelve pages and included a "President's Corner" where the Society's chief officer could voice his opinion. In one instance this led to one of the most "difficult" Council Sessions.

In the spring of 1983, a few months before the end of his presidency, David Trask wrote a column about the problems of former ambassador to Chile, Nathaniel Davis, who, according to the book and movie entitled *MISSING*, had allegedly known about the kidnapping of a young American caught up in the coup against Salvador Allende but had done nothing to help him. Trask cited this incident as an example of the way in which federal officials were being abused and ended his column by mentioning a defense fund that had been set up for Davis.

At the next council meeting several members took strong exception to the column because they feared solicitations for a political defense fund could result in the loss of the Society's tax-exempt status. The members did not to abridge the presidents' freedom of expression but they agreed that in the future presidents should allow the editor to comment on proposed columns.<sup>119</sup>

Otherwise MacLaury's tenure as editor was uneventful. As a first-time editor of a newsletter, he found he had to constantly "shepherd" it through its production stages but he discovered from other editors that careful monitoring was "par for the course". In general there was little reader comment so he assumed "we were doing a good job."<sup>120</sup> The council occasionally discussed the idea of "beefing" up the *FEDERALIST* so that it would have some substantive articles that went beyond news and comment. A journal was also proposed as a way of attracting new members, especially

those outside of Washington, D.C. who could not attend Society meetings. As attractive as both of these ideas were, the hard reality was that SHFG did not have the money to support them. Richard Baker observed during his presidency from 1985 to 1987 that the SHFG had reached a point where it could not attract new members without spending more money but that it could not get the money because it did not have enough members.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, David Trask, Blanche Coll and others concluded that the Society should concentrate its efforts on the Washington, D.C. area and not worry about producing high-cost publications which might attract only a few new members outside that region.<sup>122</sup>

In 1984 Jim Cameron of the Government Printing Office became an assistant editor and in 1985 took over as editor. In 1986 the newsletters publication became irregular. Cameron found he could not devote enough time to it so the job was turned over to Wendy Wolff, at that time an independent historian but now a member of the Senate Historical Office. The Publications Committee helped Wolff issue her first two newsletters. The committee continues its involvement by helping her plan the content of the *FEDERALIST*.<sup>123</sup>

The NCC directory of federal historians had been well received. Thus, one of Jack Holt's first decisions as president was to work on a new and expanded edition. He asked Roger Anders, his colleague in the Department of Energy History Office, to head a directory committee. For several months in the summer and fall of 1980 the committee sent out questionnaires and compiled data. Most history offices cooperated, although a few historians with intelligence agencies were at first reluctant to include their programs.<sup>124</sup>

Assembling data was one thing but publishing them was another matter. Treasurer Bill Dudley was on the committee and informed its members that the Society could not afford to spend several

thousand dollars in publication costs. Faced with this reality the committee considered the undesirable alternative of photocopying it. At this point David Trask and Dick Hewlett proposed asking the American Historical Association to partially defray the costs. The idea was greeted with some skepticism by the other members because the AHA had been completely indifferent to the Society. But when Jack Holl and Roger Anders talked with the AHA's Mack Thompson they were startled when he readily agreed to pay \$2000 of the estimated \$3000 in costs in exchange for getting 1000 copies of the 1500 publication run.<sup>125</sup> A similar arrangement was negotiated for the directories which came out in 1984 and 1987.

The 1984 committee was headed by Dennis Roth. The committee made a concerted attempt to include more personnel from the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, National Archives and the National Park Service, agencies which at that time were not well represented in the Society's membership. Few problems were encountered, although the Air Force did not want to list all of their historians for fear their program, the largest in the federal government, might become a target of congressional budget cutters.<sup>126</sup> One year later their worst fears were realized, but the directory was not the source of their problems.

On June 10, 1985 President Wayne Rasmussen was interviewed by the WASHINGTON POST about the SHFG. The reporter on his own initiative included a chart taken from information provided by the Office of Management and Budget showing that of the 596 historians in the large federal agencies, 214 were in the Air Force. A staff member for the House appropriations committee read this story and saw in it a convenient way to cut the military budget. As a result during the next two years, the program suffered a 2 million dollar reduction and the loss of jobs. Naturally these demoralizing blows made the Air Force even more reluctant to have their program publicized in any way.<sup>127</sup>

When Roger Anders was again asked to head the directory committee in 1986, this was one of the problems he faced. Fortunately, Dan Mortensen, an Air Force historian was on the committee and helped work out a compromise by which Air Force staff historians were not shown with their programs but were included in an alphabetical listing of names and telephone numbers. The listing of contract historians also became an issue. Many offices did not want to show contractors, again because they did not want to attract the attention of budget cutters. The committee agreed not to show contractors for any office that did not want them displayed. Only the Arms Control Agency and the Department of Energy listed contract historians. For the first time retirees and members unaffiliated with a federal office, such as Wendy Wolff at the time, were included in the alphabetical listing of names.<sup>128</sup>

The annual meeting held in April is the single most important event in the Society's calendar. It is a time to renew friendships and become informed of the activities of federal history offices. Since 1980 approximately 200 historians (a little less than half the membership) have attended each annual meeting. As Page Miller has observed, seeing 200 or more people in one room gives federal historians a sense that they belong to a useful organization.<sup>129</sup>

The annual meeting has been organized by the Program Committee. When Paul Scheips was its chairman he established the principle that the programs should be broad-based and should discuss issues of common concern to federal historians.<sup>130</sup> In the main this principle has been followed since the first meeting in 1980 when Senator Robert Morgan spoke about independence for the National Archives.

In the early 1980's politicians continued to be featured speakers but the committee eventually wanted to phase them out and devote all of the day's time to presentations by professional historians or archivists. Pat Harahan, chairman of the committee in 1985 and member in other years, believes

that the 1985 meeting represented "a notch up" in quality. Sessions on "Oral History as Evidence", the "Bicentennial of the Constitution", and "The Future of the National Archives" were all stimulating and well-received.<sup>131</sup>

The Society's most ambitious event took place in 1987 when it hosted, at the suggestion of Pat Harahan, a joint meeting with National Council on Public History at the Capitol Hill Hyatt Regency. The 3-day meeting also included several practical workshops put on by federal history offices. The meeting was very successful but the expense and planning effort "stretched the Society to its limits". The next year most members were glad to return to the traditional one-day affair at the Library of Congress.<sup>132</sup>

In the fall the Society sponsors an annual dinner. It is usually held at an officers' club and is attended by about 60 or 70 members. At the first dinner Richard Hewlett spoke about his 25-year career as a federal historian. In honor of his distinguished service to the cause of federal history, this annual lecture bears his name.<sup>133</sup>

## THE PRESIDENCIES

Jack Holl became the Society's first president in 1980. Under the terms of the by-laws he served a one-year transition term, while his successors were to serve a two-year term until a 1986 change in the by-laws made the term one year. Holl ran unopposed because the nominating committee did not want to risk a change in leadership at a time when the Society's survival was not guaranteed.<sup>134</sup>

Holl's tenure was devoted mainly to implementing the by-laws and discussing the problems of the National Archives. Council meetings were held at lunch time in the Department of Energy History Office.

Holl appointed Ron Spector to head a committee to investigate the public history programs which were sprouting up all over academia, Spector suspected that most of these programs were inadequate and would only produce more unemployable historians. Spector's committee devised a questionnaire which they sent to all history departments with public history programs. Their analysis of the responses indicated that for the most part they were being taught by professors who had had no experience in public history and were not qualified to teach the subject. Spector's blunt conclusion was "that it was amateur hour out there". The Council, however, was reluctant to do much with the study (it was eventually published in the *FEDERALIST*) because it did not want to be too critical at a time when these programs were just getting started. Besides there was a feeling that it might alienate potential allies in the public history movement.<sup>135</sup>

Bill Dudley of the Center for Naval History was elected to be the first Treasurer, a position he held until 1984. Dudley had held a similar post for the Military Classics organization and had learned how to manage money. During his four years as treasurer he kept a tight hold over the Society's finances and was largely responsible for its solvency. Like a conservative banker he wanted good justifications before releasing money from the Society's account.<sup>136</sup>

Paul Scheips of the Center for Military History was appointed, as provided in the by-laws, to be the first Secretary. (Phil Cantelon was secretary of the Steering Committee). Scheips had initially been skeptical about the Society but when he saw that it was not becoming an anti-academic union he became one of its most ardent supporters. Scheips became something of a "speaker's bureau" for

Jack Holl, arranging for him to give several talks about federal history. At Council meetings Scheips kept detailed minutes. He also began to organize the Society's records and store them in archival boxes.<sup>137</sup>

In 1981 the Nominating Committee again considered Holl's name but he decided he did not have enough time for the job. The Reagan Administration had promised to abolish the Department of Energy. During 1981 most of its employees, including the historians, were preoccupied with the survival of the department and their jobs.<sup>138</sup>

David Trask replaced Holl on the ballot and ran against Bill Dudley who realized that he was token opposition because he was not yet known to many federal historians. Trask had strong opinions and was willing to stick by them. Maeva Marcus was elected to be the Society's first (and at this writing only) female vice-president. Meetings were held at the Supreme Court after work and often went on for several hours. Marcus and Trask were both strong-willed individuals and did not always agree. Marcus was often allied with Council member Richard Baker. Jack Shulimson's presence at Council meetings also added drama. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Trask Council was riven by factionalism but there was more "tension" than in later years. The fact that the Society was still experiencing growing pains accounts for many of the animated discussions which took place.<sup>139</sup>

Many people expected that David Allison would succeed Trask. Perhaps no one had committed more time and effort than he to the Society. His name was placed in nomination along with Wayne Rasmussen who had been suggested by Paul Scheips.<sup>140</sup> Rasmussen won by a narrow margin.

Until that point Rasmussen had not been deeply involved in the Society and had in fact voted for Allison. But he was one of the most respected and best-liked federal historians, having

served as historian in the Department of Agriculture for 45 years. He was also well-known in the academic community and many who voted for him thought he would bring prestige to the organization as it was reaching maturity.

When he took office in 1983 he had no "agenda" other than seeing the Society prosper and grow. For three years the Council had held long meetings. One of Rasmussen's first decisions was to inform the Council that his meetings would last only until he heard his wife honk their car horn outside the Senate Historical Office building. He did not want to devote an excessive amount of time to his new duties and he thought this would be a good way to force council members to reach decisions. His second decision was to ask David Allison to serve as secretary. Allison accepted 2 or 3 days later and then proceeded to "work like everything."<sup>141</sup>

Rasmussen's presidency was an era of "good feelings" brought about by his good-humored non-confrontational approach. Vice-President Richard Hewlett once told Rasmussen that his council was the "only committee he ever really enjoyed being on."<sup>142</sup>

During Trask's tenure an awards program had been discussed and most of the groundwork had been completed. Rasmussen's Council finally implemented the program consisting of the triennial Franklin Delano Roosevelt prize for outstanding contributions in the study of federal government history, the annual Henry Adams prize for the best book-length publication, the annual James Madison prize for the best article, and the annual John Wesley Powell prize for a project "demonstrating excellence in the fields of historical preservation and historical display." Originally the Society had wanted to co-sponsor awards with the National Council on Public History but relations between the two organizations were not close at that time. Thus the SHFG decided to proceed on its own. On the other hand, the Society's relationship with AHA was strengthened when the SHFG

became one of its member organizations. In 1984, four years earlier such a suggestion would not even have been considered by most SHFG members who felt alienated from the AHA. It was a measure of the SHFG's self-esteem that this affiliation could now be made without dissent. In fact, Rasmussen pronounced it a "coup" for the AHA, by which he meant that the AHA needed the affiliation more than the Society.<sup>143</sup>

An endowment fund was also established during Rasmussen's presidency. Within a few years members had contributed several thousand dollars to it. (Paul Scheips came up with the idea and Rasmussen was the first to contribute to it.)<sup>144</sup>

Under Rasmussen membership in the Society reached its peak. In 1981 membership was around 280. A year later it was approaching 400, in 1985 it was close to 500, a figure it has not reached since then. Rasmussen, like all the other presidents, was anxious to recruit new members from outside the Washington, D.C. area and from the Smithsonian Institution and the National Archives.<sup>145</sup> Virtually all of the Society's presidents have expressed disappointment that they could not break through the 500 barrier. Every year the SHFG gains approximately 40 new members but at the same time loses about the same number to non-renewals. The fact that membership stabilized at about 450 in 1984 seems to indicate that membership "outreach" will probably not be very successful without major investments in new benefits such as a journal or regional meetings.

When Richard Baker assumed the presidency in 1985, he had to contend with the first major internal threat to the Society's existence since 1979. Many Air Force historians blamed the Society for the budget cuts they suffered in 1985 and 1986. Directors of large history programs (mostly military)

began to wonder if the SHFG hurt more than it helped. Through quiet diplomacy, Baker prevented defections.<sup>146</sup> As a result, there was only a small drop in membership from 1985 to 1987.

By late 1985 Baker believed it was time for the Society to make some long-term plans. Nearly seven years had passed since the Society's first organizational meeting in 1979, which he thought was a kind of "magic" number requiring some serious self-reflection.<sup>147</sup> The Executive Council asked Bill Dudley to chair a Long-Range Planning Committee consisting of himself and the three former presidents.

The 9-page report was given to the council on April 3, 1986. It contained 9 recommendations calling for, among other things, more joint sponsorship of meetings, the establishment of satellite branches, enlarging the newsletter, and a "part or full-time secretariat . . . to serve as a permanent point of contact, facilitating liaison with other organizations and individuals." According to the committee, the Society "must shun policies that foster stagnation, and ultimately, decline as members depart seeking broader horizons and new challenges."<sup>148</sup>

As a member of the Nomination Committee, Roger Trask had found some people reluctant to serve as officers because of the long terms. In 1984 he proposed that the President's term be limited to one-year and that the Vice-President automatically succeed. In addition, he suggested that Council Members\* terms be shortened from three years to two and that their number be increased from three to four. He believed this amendment would increase the circulation of leadership in the Society. In 1986 the Society's members overwhelmingly approved his amendment.<sup>149</sup>

David Allison had been Baker's Vice-president and thus succeeded him in 1987. As Vice-president he had helped Baker work out an arrangement with the University of Maryland whereby a

graduate student would be the Society's part-time office manager. The Long-Range Planning Committee had recommended that the Society develop some kind of permanent staff support. The Council had hoped to share a facility with other professional organizations but dropped this idea because of a lack of funds. A few days after he became president in July 1987 the Society's office at the University of Maryland was opened. It will operate on a three-year trial basis.<sup>150</sup>

The third directory came out in the fall of 1987 and the spring 1988 annual meeting was successful. In general, the Allison presidency was "quiet". No big issues or crises disrupted the normal round of Society business.<sup>151</sup>

Marty Reuss succeeded Allison, becoming the Society's sixth president. In July of 1988 Representative Stephen Solarz (D, NY) proposed a bill that would have required all cabinet-level departments to have history programs. A meeting was scheduled for federal historians to discuss the bill with Solarz but was called off when it became apparent that it did not have universal support. Remembering the lesson of the Air Force budget cuts, historians in large history programs wished to avoid any publicity that might draw attention to them.<sup>152</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Society for History in the Federal Government has become the "voice of federal historians." It has established itself as an important history association which, during the last ten years, has helped shape the outcome of several important policy debates. Perhaps most significantly it has created a community of federal historians, most of whom worked in isolation and anonymity before 1979. On the other hand, it has had less success in promoting the creation of new historical programs. The Society played a part, along with the consulting firm History Associates, in convincing

the Federal Reserve and the General Accounting Office to employ historians and it helped persuade the House of Representatives to open its Bicentennial History Office but over a ten-year period these must be considered relatively minor gains. As Ron Spector has noted, most decisions to begin or end history programs are made by agency managers on their own initiative. The reluctance of some historians to publicize themselves indicates that federal history still has a way to go yet before it is a truly self-confident profession.

## NOTES

1. Interview with Ron Spector, 8/4/88
2. Personal reminiscence
3. Anna K. Nelson, "Federal History Offices, Records and the National Archives: A Preliminary Study," prepared under contract No. LC 1958/CRS 79-77 for the House Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights, 11/21/79, Anna Nelson's papers.
4. Interview with Paul Scheips, 7/19/88
5. Telephone interview with Fred Beck, 11/3/88
6. I recall reading an article in THE NATION in either 1971 or 1972 expressing this view.
7. Interview with Wayne Rasmussen, 8/9/88
8. Telephone Interview with Arnita Jones, 8/23/88; Interview with Page Miller, 8/15/88
9. Interview with Roger Anders, 7/25/88
10. Richard G. Hewlett, "Historians in Federal Science Agencies," a paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Washington, D.C., 11/14/75, Page Miller's papers; "A Paper Presented to the National Study Commission on Records and Documents of Federal Officials," 11/12/77, Anna Nelson's papers.
11. Interview with Phil Cantelon, 8/17/88
12. Interview with Anna Nelson, 9/22/88
13. Interview with Jack Holl, 7/17/88
14. Interview with David Trask, 9/21/88
15. Trask Interview
16. Holl interview
17. Trask Interview
18. Trask Interview

19. Jack Holl to Roland G. Freeman III, 12/11/79, Department of Energy Records, "Council for History in the Federal Government".
20. Spector Interview
21. Anna Nelson Interview
22. Nelson Interview
23. Richard G. Hewlett, "A Paper Presented to the National Study Commission on Records and Documents of Federal Officials, 1/12/77, Anna Nelson\*s Papers.
24. I worked for David Clary from 9/78 to 9/79. I observed him in action.
25. David Clary, " Earning a Living in History: Advice for the Unemployed (or Unemployable) Historian," and "Write When You Find Work: Advice for Graduate Faculty in Training Employable Historians," papers presented for a session sponsored by the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, Dallas, TX, December 29, 1977.
26. Cantelon Interview
27. Interview with George Mazuzan, 7/23/88
28. Holl Interview
29. Interview with Jack Shulimson, 8/4/88
30. Shulimson Interview; Interview with Bill Dudley, 7/24/88
31. Miller Interview
32. Richard G. Hewlett to Mack Thompson, 10/4/79, Box 4 SHFG records, NCC 1979; Richard G. Hewlett to Monte Wright, 11/8/79, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence 1979.
33. Trask Interview.
34. Anna K. Nelson, "History Without Historians," AHA NEWSLETTER (Vol. 16, no.2, February 1978); Dudley Interview.
35. Minutes of the Steering Committee, 10/16/79, Department of Energy Records, "Council for History in the Federal Government".
36. SHFG minutes, regular meeting, 1/30/80, Marty Reuss' papers.

37. Holl Interview
38. Cantelon Interview
39. Interview with Marty Reuss, 8/12/88
40. Minutes of the Steering Committee, 11/15/79, Marty Reuss' papers.
41. Alex Roland to Jack Holl, 11/19/79, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence 1979.
42. Shulimson Interview
43. Interview with Maeva Marcus, 7/26/88
44. Trask Interview
45. Holl Interview
46. Interview with David Allison, 8/16/88
47. Allison Interview
48. "Dear Colleague," 11/29/79, Box 4 SHFG records, Council on History in the Federal Government, Founding of 1979.
49. Cantelon Interview
50. Nelson Interview
51. Report on the Meeting of the Society for History in the Federal Government, 4/16/80, Box SHFG records, Annual Conference, 1980.
52. Reuss Interview
53. Miller Interview
54. Rodman W. Paul, "Historical Advisory Committees: NASA and the National Archives," PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW (Vol. 44, no. 3, August 1975), p. 394.
55. "Resolution on the Appointment of the Archivist of the United States," 9/13/79, Page Miller's papers.
56. Holl Interview

57. Jack Holl to Stuart E. Eizenstat, 1/10/80, Roger Anders' papers.
58. Statement of Rowland G. Freeman III, Administrator of General Services, 2/8/80, Department of Energy Records, "Council for History in the Federal Government".
59. SHFG minutes, regular meeting, 1/30/80, Marty Reuss' papers.
60. Miller Interview
61. David Trask to Joan Hoff-Wilson, 3/25/82, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence, 1982.
62. Nelson Interview
63. Page Putnam Miller, "Archival Issues and Problems: The Central Role of Advocacy," THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN (Vol. 8, no. 3, summer 1986).
64. Charlene Bickford to Coalition Members and Friends, 10/1/81, Marty Reuss' papers.
65. Shulimson Interview
66. Edward Weldon to David Trask, 10/20/81, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence, 1981.
67. Shulimson Interview
68. Holl Interview
69. *[Blank in manuscript]*
70. Beck Interview
71. David Trask to Robert Warner, 2/10/83, Box 6 SHFG records, Minutes February 1983.
72. Rasmussen Interview
73. Beck Interview
74. SHFG National Archives Liaison Committee, Report to the Executive Council, 3/9/88, Box 7 SHFG records, Executive Council Minutes, January-December 1988.
75. Dudley Interview
76. Interview with Blanche Coll, 9/8/88
77. Coll Interview

78. David Trask to Richard S. Schweiker, 12/3/82, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence, 1982.
79. David Trask to Caspar Weinberger, 2/11/83, Box 3, SHFG records, General Correspondence, 1983.
80. Coll Interview; Interview with Jud MacLaury, 8/3/88
81. "SHFG Testimony at Hearings on 'A76'," THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 4, no. 2, June 1983).
82. Dudley Interview
83. THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 4, no. 3, September 1983).
84. THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 8, no. 1, Spring 1987).
85. Interview with Don Ritchie, 9/9/88
86. Ritchie Interview
87. Ritchie Interview
88. Subcommittee on Oral History Restrictions, 6/30/82, Box 9 SHFG records, Oral History Committee.
89. Samuel R. Gammon to David Trask, 10/5/82, Box 3 SHFG records, General Correspondence, 1982.
90. Joan Hoff-Wilson to Donald Ritchie, 5/4/84, Donald Ritchie papers
91. David Trask to Joan Hoff-Wilson, 11/2/82, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence 1982.
92. Donald A. Ritchie "Oral History in the Federal Government," THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY (Vol. 74, no. 2, September 1987), p. 594.
93. Donald A. Ritchie to Joan-Hoff-Wilson, 3/6784; James T. Currie to Joan Hoff-Wilson, 4/8/84, Donald Ritchie's papers.
94. Donald Ritchie to J. Samuel Walker, 3/18/83, Donald Ritchie's papers.
95. Anders Interview
96. Ritchie Interview

97. Richard Baker to Frank Burke, 1/23/86, Box 3 SHFG records, Correspondence Sent and Received 1985–87.
98. Ritchie Interview
99. Ritchie Interview
100. Ritchie Interview
101. Ritchie Interview
102. Reuss Interview
103. Reuss Interview
104. Minutes of the Executive Council, 2/8/84, Box 6 SHFG records.
105. Martin Reuss, "Federal Historians: Ethics and Responsibility in the Bureaucracy," *THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN* (Vol. 8, no.1, winter 1986), p. 16.
106. Coll Interview
107. Richard A. Baker to Wayne D. Rasmussen, 2/24/84, Marty Reuss' papers, now part of SHFG collection.
108. Rasmussen Interview
109. Rasmussen Interview
110. Reuss Interview
111. Donald Ritchie to Martin Reuss, 5/22/84, Marty Reuss' papers, now part of SHFG collection.
112. Rasmussen Interview
113. Reuss Interview
114. Reuss Interview
115. Allison Interview
116. Allison Interview
117. Sharon Thibodeau Interview, 8/2/88

118. MacLaury Interview
119. MacLaury Interview
120. MacLaury Interview
121. Interview with Richard Baker, 7/17/88
122. Trask and Coll Interviews
123. Interview with Wendy Wolff, 9/9/88
124. Anders Interview
125. Anders and Holl Interviews
126. Personal reminiscence.
127. "Federal History Yields Policy Support," WASHINGTON POST, 6/10/85; "GAO Study Follows Defense History Cuts," THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 7, no. 2, Summer 1986).
128. Anders Interview.
129. Miller Interview
130. Telephone Interview with Pat Harahan, 11/17/88
131. Harahan Interview
132. Harahan and Baker Interviews
133. THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 1, no. 2, fall 1980).
134. Shulimson Interview
135. Spector and Baker Interviews
136. Thibodeau and Dudley Interviews
137. Scheips and Holl Interviews
138. Shulimson Interview
139. Allison, Baker, and MacLaury Interviews

140. Scheips Interview
141. Rasmussen Interview
142. Rasmussen Interview
143. Rasmussen Interview
144. Rasmussen and Scheips Interviews
145. Rasmussen Interview
146. Baker and Allison Interviews
147. Baker Interview
148. "Long Range Planning Committee Report," 4/3/86, Box 9 SHFG records, Links with the University of Maryland.
149. Interview with Roger Trask, 7/14/88
150. "SHFG Plans Link with University of Maryland," THE FEDERALIST (Vol. 7, no.4, Winter 1986).
151. Reuss Interview
152. Reuss Interview
153. Spector Interview