

Some Thoughts for an Aspiring Historical Editor

By HASKELL MONROE

Texas A & M University

EARLY in 1791, Ebenezer Hazard, the resourceful printer, editor, and collector of Americana, proposed to publish *A Collection of State Papers, Intended as Materials for an History of the United States of America*.¹ After Thomas Jefferson saw the first work in this series, he expressed pleasure at viewing what he termed "curious Monuments of the Infancy of our Country." The Virginian mourned the loss of some priceless items and urged the completion of Hazard's work. "Time and accident are committing daily havoc on the originals . . . let us save what remains; not by vaults and locks, which fence them from the public eye and use in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of Copies as shall place them beyond the reach of accident."

Perhaps no contemporary effort of historians will have such lasting importance among scholars in future generations as the projects that seek to follow this Jeffersonian admonition and supply the "multiplication of Copies" of historical materials. Now, almost 50 editors are at work on comprehensive editions of the papers of great national leaders of the past. Surprisingly vast quantities of time, effort, and financing are necessary to complete these projects. But the abiding importance of these ventures, the magnitude of the investments in manpower and money make it imperative to attract to documentary editing young scholars of the greatest promise.

A number of accomplished and experienced editors of historical materials have carefully described what they believe are the grave responsibilities of this relatively unknown specialty.² Each of these

The writer was editor of the Papers of Jefferson Davis when he read this paper on Oct. 1, 1968, at the 32d annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Ottawa, Canada.

¹ Hazard's broadside was headed, *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, A Collection of State Papers, Intended as Materials for an History of the United States of America* [Philadelphia? 1791].

² R. L. Pools, et al., "Report on Editing Historical Documents," in University of London, Institute of Historical Research, *Bulletin* (London, 1923); Worthington C. Ford, "The Editorial Function in United States History," in *American Historical Review*, 23:273-286 (1917-18); Clarence E. Carter, *Historical Editing* (Washington, 1952); Lyman H. Butterfield, "Historical Editing in the United States: The Recent Past," in American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings*, 72:283-308 (1963); Lester J. Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing, Past and Present," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 23:56-75 (1966). In addition to these essays, there are carefully reasoned discussions of editorial method in the first volume of each of the current documentary projects, especially in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 1:vii-xxxviii (Princeton, 1950).

essays combines the virtues of philosophical reflection upon the editor's obligations to scholars and laymen and the pragmatic realities of experience. The essays are the products of years of toil among sometimes illegible documents, discerning reviewers, and parsimonious publishers. They also narrate a record of American documentary work that has changed completely since Jared Sparks edited *The Writings of George Washington* and took the liberty to "improve" the General's English, so completely that he altered the meaning of many Washington letters.³ Charles Francis Adams strove to avoid this temptation to change the documents when he prepared his grandfather's *Works*.⁴ A similar philosophy motivated the editors of 12 groups of documentary volumes published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in the period from 1885 to 1910. These series, which included the papers of Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, Rufus King, Abraham Lincoln, James Madison, George Mason, James Monroe, Thomas Paine, and George Washington, were a marked improvement upon any earlier works of this sort in American historiography. Since the 87 volumes in these series from Putnam's contained little more than the manuscripts from the Library of Congress for the 12 men, each of the series omitted vast quantities of relevant materials. Although the present desire to produce volumes that are truly comprehensive in scope could not have been fulfilled in the years before the invention of the microfilm camera and the Xerox machine, the editors of these earlier volumes achieved a respectable level of accuracy and scholarship in spite of their technological limitations.

The current surge of documentary projects owes its impetus to Julian P. Boyd's splendid work on *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Not only has his skill and dexterity shown other editors how to meet the modern requirements of editorial authenticity, accuracy, thoroughness, and comprehensiveness of the materials published; but presentation of the first volume of the *Jefferson Papers* to Harry S. Truman prompted the President to direct the National Historical Publications Commission to prepare a plan for making available "the public and private writings of men whose contributions to our history are now inadequately represented by published works."⁵ The NHPC responded with a report to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954, *A National Program for the Publication of Historical Documents*. Today, 95 volumes are in print from the 38 projects that have been approved and assisted by the NHPC.⁶

³ Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (12 vols.; Boston, 1837).

⁴ Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams* (10 vols.; Boston, 1850-56).

⁵ White House Press Release, May 17, 1950.

⁶ Projects supported by a Ford Foundation grant to the National Archives Trust Fund for the Commission's use for these specific projects are: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Princeton University, sponsor; Julian P. Boyd, editor (18 volumes published); *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, American Philosophical Society and Yale University, cosponsors; Leonard W. Labaree, editor (13 volumes published); *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*,

These volumes and the comments they have aroused serve as a background for consideration of the state of historical editing today. No single documentary volume in this generation has received—and probably merited—such enthusiastic praise as the first of the *Jefferson Papers*. All reviewers gave it unreserved praise. Dumas Malone, whose biography of the man from Monticello is recognized as definitive, concluded, “Both publishers and editors will be readily forgiven if they do somewhat less in later volumes, but unquestionably they are off to an im-

Columbia University, sponsor; Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke, editors (15 volumes published); *The Adams Papers* (John, John Quincy, and Charles Francis Adams), Massachusetts Historical Society, sponsor; Lyman H. Butterfield, editor (13 volumes published); *The Papers of James Madison*, Universities of Virginia and Chicago, cosponsors; William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, editors (5 volumes published).

Projects assisted by appropriated funds under P.L. 88-383 are: a Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution and First Ten Amendments, National Historical Publications Commission, sponsor; Robert E. Cushman, editor (copy for Volume 1 at Government Printing Office); a Documentary History of the First Federal Congress, National Historical Publications Commission and George Washington University, cosponsors; Linda De Pauw, editor (copy for first two volumes ready for press); *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, South Carolina Archives Department, sponsor; W. Edwin Hemphill, editor (3 volumes published); *The Papers of Henry Clay*, University of Kentucky, sponsor; James F. Hopkins, editor (3 volumes published); *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, University of Tennessee and Tennessee Historical Commission, joint sponsors; LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, joint editors (1 volume published); the Correspondence of James K. Polk, Vanderbilt University and Tennessee Historical Commission, joint sponsors; Herbert Weaver, editor (first volume to be published in 1969); *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, South Carolina Historical Society, sponsor; Philip M. Hamer, editor (1 volume published); *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, the Ulysses S. Grant Association and the Southern Illinois University, joint sponsors; John Y. Simon, editor (volume 2 in press); the Papers of Jefferson Davis, Rice University and the Jefferson Davis Association, joint sponsors; Frank E. Vandiver, editor (no volumes published to date); *The Papers of Henry R. Schoolcraft*, Wayne State University, sponsor; Philip Mason, editor (2 volumes published); the Papers of Isaac Backus, Brown University, sponsor; William G. McLoughlin, editor (volumes 1 and 2 to be published in 1969 by Brown University Press); the Papers of John Charles Fremont, University of Illinois, sponsor; Donald Jackson, editor (no volumes published to date); the Papers of John Marshall, William and Mary College and the Institute of Early American History and Culture, joint sponsors; Stephen G. Kurtz, editor (no volumes published to date); *The Susquehanna Company Papers*, Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, sponsor; Robert J. Taylor, editor (6 volumes published); Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents, 1789-1829, University of Missouri, sponsor; Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., editor (no volumes published to date); a Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, University of Wisconsin and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, joint sponsors; Merrill Jensen, editor (no volumes published to date); and the Papers of James Iredell, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, sponsor; Don Higginbotham, editor (no volumes published to date).

Other projects endorsed by the Commission that are assisted professionally—primarily by searching for and supplying photocopies of documents in Government custody—and often also financially by helping to secure funds from sources other than those available under P.L. 88-383 are: the Letter Books and Diary of Robert (“King”) Carter of Virginia, Virginia Historical Society, sponsor; Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., editor (no volumes published to date); the Correspondence of John Dickinson, Public Archives Commission of Delaware and Friends of the John Dickinson Mansion, cosponsors; Leon deValinger, Jr., editor (no volumes published to date); the Papers of George Mason, Regents of Gunston Hall and Institute of Early American History and Culture, joint sponsors; Robert A. Rutland, editor (no volumes published to date); *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, With Letters and Related Documents*, University of Illinois, sponsor; Donald Jackson, editor (project completed in 2 volumes); the Papers of Archbishop John Carroll, American Catholic Historical Association and Catholic University, joint sponsors; William D. Hoyt, Jr., editor (no volumes published

pressive start.”⁷ A respected student of colonial history exclaimed, “This is the most monumental editorial task ever undertaken in this country, and one eminently deserving the commendation not only of Americans, but of the world.”⁸ A student of the middle period agreed that the work “shows an immense project is being triumphantly executed”; the biographer of John C. Calhoun added, “From every point of view the work is well and soundly done”; and a highly competent student of the early national era concluded, “The first volume gives evidence of the astonishing breadth and exacting scholarship that will characterize the entire work.”⁹

Other reviewers noted Boyd’s editing skill, his care for detail, and his prudent attention to type, paper, binding, and other technical matters.¹⁰ Another reviewer attempted to summarize the importance and purpose of the volume and the series to follow. “The object of this mighty endeavor is to make accessible in accurate and legible form every line written by or to Thomas Jefferson, barring only completely trivial memoranda and purely formal documents.” He continued, “The purpose is not merely to present what Jefferson wrote but also to make plain, as far as is humanly possible, why he wrote it.” Then this observer made an assertion which haunts every editor, for he announced the magnitude and duration of the project: “This tome is the first from a press of a set that is expected to run fifty volumes, to be a dozen years in production, and to sell, complete, for at least \$500.”¹¹ Even the skill

to date); *The Papers of Rutherford B. Hayes*, Rutherford B. Hayes Memorial Library, sponsor; Watt P. Marchman *et al.*, editors (2 volumes published); the Papers of John Jay, Columbia University, sponsor; Richard B. Morris, editor (no volumes published to date); the Papers of General Philip J. Schuyler, University of the State of New York, sponsor; Milton Hamilton, editor (no volumes published to date); *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, James F. Beard, editor (4 volumes published); *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Woodrow Wilson Foundation and Princeton University, joint sponsors; Arthur S. Link, editor (4 volumes published); the Papers of Joseph Henry, American Philosophical Society, Smithsonian Institution, and National Academy of Science, sponsors; Nathan Reinhold, editor (no volumes published to date); the Journals of Stephen H. Long’s Mississippi River Expeditions, Minnesota Historical Society, sponsor; Lucile Kane, editor (no volumes published to date); the Correspondence of Washington Irving, Modern Language Association, sponsor; H. L. Kleinfeld and Ralph Aderman, editors (no volumes published to date); the Papers of Booker T. Washington, University of Maryland, sponsor; Louis R. Harlan, editor (no volumes published to date); the Papers of Robert Morris as Superintendent of Finance, 1781–84, Queens College of the City University of New York, sponsor; E. James Ferguson, editor (no volumes published to date); and the Papers of Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., University of Connecticut and Connecticut State Library, sponsors; Albert E. Van Dusen and Glenn Weaver, editors (no volumes published to date). See also *The Present Program of the National Historical Publications Commission* (Nov. 1968) for other categories of projects sponsored by the Commission.

⁷ Dumas Malone, in *New York Times Book Review*, May 21, 1950, p. 1.

⁸ Louis B. Wright, in *Yale Review*, 40:156 (1950).

⁹ David Potter, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37:314 (1950–51); Charles M. Wiltse, in *American Political Science Review*, 44:753 (1950); Adrienne Koch, in *New Republic*, June 26, 1950, p. 18.

¹⁰ Lester Cappon, in *Journal of Southern History*, 16:532–534 (1950); David C. Mearns, in *Saturday Review of Literature*, May 22, 1950, p. 11–12.

¹¹ Gerald W. Johnson, in *New York Herald-Tribune Book Review*, May 21, 1950, p. 1, 12.

of the editor of this splendid series has not been able to meet such a daring schedule; and, with printing costs advancing so steadily, the business manager of the Princeton University Press would be shocked today to have to make a price commitment for the entire series.

Among the other documentary ventures, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, *The Adams Papers*, and *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* have attracted highest praise from the reviewers. One commentator went so far as to refer to the *Franklin Papers* as a "superlative edition," when he praised the editors' "accuracy, thoroughness, and judiciousness of scholarship."¹² Most critics agreed with the author who praised the "impeccable scholarship" in the Franklin volumes and added, "The editorial introductions to the documents and the footnotes continue to be of a superlative order of scholarly excellence."¹³ These introductions and explanatory notes, which first distinguished the Jefferson volumes, also embellish the Franklin series and never fail to impress the user of the volumes with the scope of the editors' omniscience in explaining the documents and the circumstances under which the materials were written.

The mammoth work of editing the papers relating to John, John Quincy, and Charles Francis Adams clearly displays the scrupulous care to be expected from any venture relating to these exemplary Puritans. Also, there is the mark of the Boyd editorial method in the Adams volumes, for Lyman H. Butterfield, editor-in-chief of the entire project, worked on the *Jefferson Papers* for 5 years. Here again are the prudently phrased notes, detailed indexes, and lucid introductory essays that are models of verbal dexterity. One observer remarked, "Mr. Butterfield and his associates have performed their task with such care and precision that a reviewer can say little beyond expressing his admiration of the result."¹⁴ Another historian of the Revolutionary era thought the first Adams volumes "make up a work that it is impossible to praise too highly. . . . Edited with consummate skill, beautifully printed, and generously illustrated, it is a splendid achievement that indicates quite clearly the quality of this mammoth editorial venture, the most ambitious and important of our generation."¹⁵ But it remained for the President of the United States to pay the ultimate compliment to the *Adams Papers*: "Butterfield and his associates have set standards of editorial judgment and care that would have met with the satisfaction of the three principal Adamases."¹⁶

Arthur Link's accomplishments in editing *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* have received praise that rivals that showered upon Boyd. "If the subsequent volumes . . . hold to the standard set in this one, the books

¹² Gordon J. Wood, in *Journal of Southern History*, 33:553-556 (1967).

¹³ Max Savelle, in *American Historical Review*, 67:428-431 (1962).

¹⁴ Thad W. Tate, in *Journal of Southern History*, 28:493 (1962).

¹⁵ Page Smith, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 48:686-688 (1962).

¹⁶ John F. Kennedy, in *American Historical Review*, 68:478-480 (1963).

will be invaluable not only to the students of the man but of the times of his youth as well," announced a former Wilson associate; and a noted observer of 20th-century America agreed: "The advent of the first volume of the *Wilson Papers* heralds the beginning of an enterprise of massive dimensions and commensurate scholarly value."¹⁷ While Link has attracted general commendation for the scholarly nature of his work, the reviewers agreed with the comment that the "first volume is editing that is scholarly without being pedantic."¹⁸

Five documentary projects, those for Jefferson, the Adamsses, Franklin, Hamilton, and Madison, have been designated as "priority" efforts by the NHPC, because of the importance of these men and the relatively urgent need for comprehensive editions of their papers. The last two projects represent the greatest degree of diversity in editorial practice among the current documentary publications. While the Hamilton volumes manifest a sort of spartan excellence with a minimum of explanatory matter, the Madison works are embellished with intricately detailed notes. The editorial restraint of the staff at work on the papers of the first Secretary of the Treasury has resulted in a steady output of volumes, a pace which seems to guarantee the completion of the Hamilton series within another decade. Yet the comparatively limited quantity of descriptive notes has caused some observers to concur with the critic who pointed to the inadequacy of explanatory materials, "The carefully edited volumes contain . . . ample editorial notes for scholarly use, though one must look elsewhere for the information that it was during these months of 1791 that Hamilton's affair with Mrs. Reynolds began."¹⁹ On the other hand, another authority on the period defended the editor's restraint, "Syrett and his friends are treading a plainly sensible path between the easy luxury of saying too much and the foolish austerity of saying too little."²⁰

Coeditors William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, on the other hand, have presented users of the *Madison Papers* with introductory and explanatory matter exceeding that in any of the other documentary volumes both in quantity and depth. Some analysts have defended the detailed notes. "If the editors had stopped with presenting the text of the papers," one commentator declared, "it would have been work well done and worth doing. But it would have been thin fare indeed. . . . Julian Boyd's approach to the editing of the Jefferson Papers is one of elegant restraint, which is exactly right, but Madison's editors were astute enough to know that this would not do for their man."²¹ Other reviewers have criticized the exhaustive detail of the notes, some

¹⁷ Jonathan Daniels, in *New Republic*, Oct. 29, 1966, p. 27; Frank Freidel, in *American Historical Review*, 73:243-244 (1967).

¹⁸ Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., in *Journal of American History*, 54:376-378 (1967).

¹⁹ Noble Cunningham, in *Journal of Southern History*, 32:543-544 (1966).

²⁰ Clinton Rossiter, in *American Historical Review*, 72:294 (1966).

²¹ W. W. Abbot, in *ibid.*, 68:476-478 (1963).

with such reserved comments as: "In many instances the space devoted to the footnotes far exceeds that required for the text of the document. Where should the editor stop?" and "Occasionally the research seems unnecessarily labored."²² Another observer has registered a biting indictment after surveying two Madison volumes. "I object to the editorial imperialism and compulsiveness that characterize these volumes," he announced. "The editors have the collecting proclivities of a pack rat and they promiscuously include just about everything . . . and they treat every item, even the most trivial, to lavish editorial annotations which frequently amount to pedantry." Later, the same reviewer was even more censorious:

With a sharp eye for the irrelevant and farfetched, they have generously squandered their magnificent editorial talents by assembling and massively annotating every document remotely connected—and sometimes unconnected—with Madison during the ten months from March through December of 1781. . . . Given their present rate of progress and incapacity to judge what is worthy of inclusion and of annotation, the editors have plunged headlong into making the profession of editing look purely pedantic. Volume III sometimes seems intended as a satire on the now flourishing industry of editing the papers of our great statesmen.²³

Three other projects are worthy of note: those for Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun because of the importance of the subjects and the one for Andrew Johnson because it is an exemplary new enterprise. Perhaps the most laudatory comment about James F. Hopkins' work on *The Papers of Henry Clay* was: "The editing of the papers is superb; the notes are accurate, informative and critical."²⁴ Most of the evaluations were a bit more reserved, but all reviewers have noted that Hopkins was following what one observer identified as "the precision that has come to distinguish the science of historical editing at its mid-twentieth century peak of perfection."²⁵

The three Calhoun volumes, the first edited by Robert L. Meriwether and the second and third by Edwin Hemphill, demonstrate editorial differences of style and practice. Because the noted States' rights philosopher served as Secretary of War so early in his career, the editors of the Calhoun venture have had to deal with an awesome profusion of documents early in their work. For instance, one commentator noted Hemphill's "editing" as a "model of effectiveness, characterized by accuracy, clarity, and a sure sense of what is required for the best use of his materials." At the same time, this writer questioned the editor's decision to include so many routine items from the War Department and believed that a scholar would think the book "tells him considerably

²² Donald Jackson, in *American Academy of Political and Social Science, Annals*, 362:200 (Nov. 1965); Richard B. Morris, in *Saturday Review*, July 28, 1968, p. 41.

²³ Leonard Levy, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49:504-506 (1962), and in *Journal of American History*, 51:299-301 (1964).

²⁴ Clement Eaton, in *Saturday Review*, Jan. 16, 1960, p. 67.

²⁵ Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., in *Journal of Southern History*, 26:238-240 (1960).

more than he really wants to know."²⁶ After other reviewers questioned the wisdom of printing such a plethora of the Calhoun correspondence in the War Department,²⁷ Hemphill prudently altered his procedure and made the third volume more selective in content, though stating the location and type of excluded materials.

Like the Wilson project, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* marks a move to publish historical documents from a period of U.S. history that has been relatively untouched by any other current documentary publication. LeRoy Graf and Ralph W. Haskins have achieved an admirable beginning in the first Johnson volume, so observers have concurred. One comment was that the work "meets the highest canons of scholarship"; another that the editors "have done their work well"; and a third that "Elaborate organization, durable and attractive format, effective employment of type size and spacing, and informative heads for ready identification of date and document proclaim that this was conceived and executed as a definitive edition."²⁸

After surveying each of these projects, it is worthwhile to examine some particular strengths and weaknesses of these ventures in order to describe the ideal documentary volume. Perhaps the most grievous indictment of any documentary publication has been the assertion that the first volume of the *Naval Records of the American Revolution* (another NHPC project sponsored by the Navy Department) suffered simply from an inadequate search for materials and thus failed to include many important items.²⁹ The same appears to be true of the recent volume of *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas* (not an NHPC project). A lesser matter, beyond the control of the editor, but nevertheless regrettable, is the deletion of parts of letters from Grant to his

²⁶ Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., *ibid.*, 29:523-524 (1963).

²⁷ John A. Monroe, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 50:306-307 (1960); Holman Hamilton, in *American Historical Review*, 69:166-167 (1963).

²⁸ Ralph J. Roske, *ibid.*, 73:1637-1638 (1968); W. S. Powell, in *Library Journal*, 93:1140 (1968); Thomas B. Alexander, in *Journal of Southern History*, 34:453-455 (1968).

One of the practices regarding documentary projects that seems questionable is to assign them for review by the same individual. A brief survey of the major historical journals reveals that Broadus Mitchell reviewed the first seven volumes of the *Hamilton Papers* for the *American Historical Review*, 67:741-743, 68:480-481, 767-768, 69:786-787 (1962-64). Max Savelle commented on the first nine volumes of *Franklin Papers* and the *Autobiography* for the *American Historical Review*, 66:170-171, 750-752, 67:428-431, 68:762-765, 69:162-163, 70:183-186, 71:1054-1055, 72:1077-1078 (1960-67). Among the three major historical journals in this country, only three scholars offered their evaluations of the first three volumes of *The Papers of Henry Clay*: Glyndon G. Van Deusen for the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 47:122-124, 48:510-511, and *Journal of American History*, 51:302-303 (1960, 1961, 1964); Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., for the *Journal of Southern History*, 26:238-240, 27:536-537, and 30:356-357 (1960, 1961, 1964); and Charles M. Wiltse for the *American Historical Review*, 66:173-174, 67:437-438, and 69:1080-1081 (1960, 1962, 1964). Although the competence of each of these individuals to evaluate these works and the convenience for the editor of having a reviewer ready to study the next documentary volume are beyond question, a variety of readers offering different insights would provide the documentary editor with a more balanced critique of his work.

²⁹ Athan Billias, in *Journal of Southern History*, 31:450-452 (1965).

wife because "It is the wish of her descendants that this material remain unprinted."³⁰ Sometimes the lack of explanatory notes in the Calhoun volumes is annoying, as is the fact that all notes in the Clay works are placed at the end of each item, no matter how many pages the printed document may require. For some unique reason, Franklin footnotes are numbered 1 through 9, over and over again, sometimes to utter confusion.

Since these publications will be used so often as reference works, it is imperative that they have indexes that are models of adequacy and serviceability. Yet the indexes in the Clay, Grant, and Franklin papers and in the *Naval Records* volumes fail to include enough subject headings and apparently rely only upon name and place entries. In more mechanical matters, the bindings of the Clay and Calhoun series are unattractive, inappropriate for the significant contents included within the covers of those works. Also the individual Clay volumes are probably too large; each includes about a thousand pages and as a result already sags on library shelves. Perhaps the reason for the bulk of each opus in this series was the announcement that it would be a 10-volume set. The editors of the *Johnson Papers* may have headed themselves toward the same dilemma when they announced on the dustjacket of their first publication that the set "will number some ten volumes." Anyone who has worked on any of the documentary ventures soon learns that it is impossible to estimate the quantity of printed matter that any great American's papers will total. Certainly no publisher should be so foolish as to offer a guaranteed price for each future volume or a package cost for the entire series.

These shortcomings are relatively minor, however, and the projects assisted by the NHPC have many outstanding features. The introductory essays in the Jefferson, Adams, and Hamilton volumes are superb. So are the explanatory materials for the individual items in the Madison, Johnson, and Jefferson tomes. The indexes in both the Jefferson and Adams series are models of quality. A glance at the paper, layout, design, and typography of the Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, and Johnson works immediately impresses the observer with the contribution that careful use of each of these elements can make to both the utility and durability of the series, as well as to their visual charm. Although it may be possible that the Madison editors have leaned too far toward detail in their notes, and that the Calhoun and Hamilton directors have tended to omit many explanatory notes, the Wilson pages are models of selectivity and balance. Elsewhere, some of the brief essays on comparatively specialized topics within these books are so well done that countless students in future years will use them as starting points for even more detailed study. Such discussions as Hemphill's of the

³⁰ John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 1:xxxiii (Carbondale, Ill., 1967). "In some early letters the deleted material contains unfavorable reactions to the Mexican people; in later letters the omissions involve minor personal matters."

problems of the War Department when Calhoun took control of that office, the delightful account of Franklin's preparations for the famous kite experiment, a uniquely informative summary of Wilson's use of Graham shorthand, and the explanations of Hamilton's state papers will never need to be modified or corrected. Yet they are succinctly and felicitously phrased.

No one concerned with documentary editing should be so naive as to assume, however, that all editors must follow exactly the same pattern of style. There are problems unique to the subjects of these projects and to the corpus of materials that they left behind. For instance, the editor of the forthcoming Papers of Booker T. Washington must work with about a million items. Arthur Link had to learn how to decipher the Graham shorthand used by Wilson; Ed Hemphill discovered that almost two-thirds of all the correspondence to and from Calhoun dated from the 8 years he served as head of the War Department; and the editor of the Papers of Jefferson Davis was astonished to learn that the collection of Confederate records in the National Archives, Record Group 109, covers almost exactly a mile of linear shelf space. Each project has different obstacles to overcome; therefore what may be most appropriate for one might not suffice for another.

On occasion, reviewers seem to forget these difficulties. For example, after studying the third book of *Calhoun Papers*, one observer avowed, "Yet it all makes dull reading."³¹ Surely he did not assume that this was to be narrative history in the normal sense. Although the volume had offered him 3,000 documents, competently prepared for both specialist and amateur to use, he expected wit. These works are not intended for use as light entertainment. These are to be the protein in the Nation's diet for all time to come—the basic materials from which any literate man will be able to understand how the United States came to be what it is.

Thus, any prospective editor must begin with the patient ability to sift constructive criticism from complaints and empty praise from justified acclaim. Patience may be the most needed personal characteristic for a documentary editor. He will have to be able to survive the questioning of sponsors who do not understand the long delay between the beginning of the effort to the appearance of the first volume. In fact, this interval is about 6 years and may well be the most significant part of the task of preparing a comprehensive edition of the papers of a historical personage.³² To rush the first volume unheedingly may cause it to be faulty in content and style and may result in the entire series becoming inadequate in its inclusiveness and reliability. But when the time of gathering documents is completed, then the sponsors of the

³¹ James Rabun, in *American Historical Review*, 78:1637 (1968).

³² The number of years between the beginning of work and the appearance of the first volume for the various older projects is: Jefferson: 6, Clay: 7, Calhoun: 7, Franklin: 5, Adams: 7, Hamilton: 6, and Madison: 6.

work and the scholarly public as well have every right to expect a steady flow of printed volumes. Both the Hamilton and the Wilson projects are models in this regard. If such a flow is not forthcoming, each of the major projects will take so long to complete that they will not be of use to this generation.

When the time comes to plan a documentary volume, it is most needful to have the counsel and enthusiastic support of an experienced press. Such supposedly lesser concerns as paper, binding, type, design, and layout are vital to the utility of these works. It is imperative that the documentary and press editors be able to learn as much as possible from each other as the first volume is planned. The documentary editor must insure that his volume has all the minimum ingredients for maximum use by both scholars and laymen alike. Thus, there must be an understandable essay on editorial method to be followed in all future works in the series. A list of editing symbols and abbreviations must be attached to the first essay, but such professional items should be kept to a minimum so that nonspecialists will not be bewildered by the sometimes unknown tongues of the historian and the printer. Would it not also be highly appropriate to precede the edited documents with a detailed chronology of the subject's life for the period covered by the documents that follow in that volume and with a brief narrative summary for that period of his life as well? This would serve to put the man in his times and would afford an opportunity to mention the important events that are not reflected in the extant documents.

Internally, each document printed should be accompanied by enough explanatory data to permit the reader to locate the original manuscript without difficulty. The notes must explain the document enough for the user to know the circumstances under which the original was prepared. These notes should be on the appropriate printed pages to which they refer and not at the end of the document. Every person, place, event, and topic of importance mentioned in the documents should be identified as briefly as possible. Somewhere in the volume, there should be a genealogical chart for the subject of the series, a chart so carefully researched that it will become the definitive work on the subject. After the documents have been selected for inclusion in the printed volume, the editor and his staff should carefully ponder whether all such items should appear in full, in abstract, or in calendar fashion. On occasion, the more routine items will be so numerous that even any of these three ways of reproduction would be impossible. Then, when it is impossible to include a mass of materials in the printed pages, is it not in order to include a sample of the routine corpus and briefly explain the location and quantity of the materials excluded from the series?

It is highly appropriate to append related items at the end of the chronological series. For instance, the edition of *Andrew Johnson Papers* includes a splendidly concise appendix of the Tennessean's brief comments and recorded votes as a member of the State assembly and of the

Congress. A bibliography of related primary and secondary works also is in order, for students of all sorts may be expected to use the documentary series as points of historical departure. Finally, the index must be given as much attention as possible, although it may be an unglamorous part of editorial labor. To fail to conclude the venture with a good index is to deny the volume the potential use that the vast investments of time, energy, and money demand.

If the neophyte still wants to pursue the sometimes lonesome road to editorial obscurity, he must return again to the question of what materials are to be included in such work. The words "comprehensive edition" are all things to all people. But in reality, this phrase does not answer the question. No matter which historical personage is involved, the printed edition will require the editor's skill in selecting what materials to include in full, what to present in abstract or calendar, and what to omit. Perhaps an authority on colonial history phrased the question appropriately when he asked "whether this 'definitive' collection of papers should be strictly a collection of documents for the documents' sake or a broad and inclusive documentation of the man's mind in the context of his times."³³ The emphasis on the times is most appropriate, for if a man is worthy of coverage with a comprehensive edition of his papers, then he was a maker of his times.

The editor must determine in advance whether or not he feels it appropriate to interpret the materials before him. Some noted editors have disagreed on this point. Clarence E. Carter, who directed the superb work on the *Territorial Papers* for many years, insisted: "The editor must eschew any and all forms of interpretation; he cannot deal with his documents in a subjective fashion. There is no exception to this rule."³⁴ Julian Boyd was equally firm in his rebuttal of this philosophy, arguing that the historical editor "must address questions that the historian or the biographer usually does not have the need or the time to ask."³⁵ Current opinion seems to be with Boyd, as expressed in a recent evaluation of the editing craft: "If the editor's responsibility requires him to clarify and explain, his mastery of documents in their historical context qualifies him to offer an interpretation as worthy of respect as that of the historian within the framework of his particular subject."³⁶

There is no argument over the primary responsibility of accurate transcription of the documents. A half-century ago, a great editor phrased this as the duty "to furnish the material in its full and unaltered

³³ Max Savelle, in *American Historical Review*, 66:750-752 (1961).

³⁴ Carter, *Historical Editing*, p. 25.

³⁵ Julian P. Boyd, *Number 7: Alexander Hamilton's Secret Attempts To Control American Foreign Policy, With Supporting Documents*, p. xv (Princeton, 1964).

³⁶ Lester Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 23:73 (1966).

shape."³⁷ Earlier, J. Franklin Jameson had expressed his purpose in this regard more frankly, when he proposed "to print every sentence *verbatim et literatim*." He noted his awareness that "Some may object to this Chinese fidelity which preserves a writer's casual errors of spelling more faithfully than he would himself have preserved them; but on the whole American editing needs to err on this side."³⁸ What both men would have insisted upon then and now is the authenticity of the document to be printed, the accuracy of the transcription, the collection of the full corpus of materials relative to the man, and the thoroughness that makes the materials useful to readers of the printed volume. The achievement of these four goals cannot be passed over lightly, for they require not only much time and patience but a vast amount of knowledge and ability among the members of the editorial staff. Editing cannot be hurried, neither can it permit any compromise with the highest canons of scholarship. The editor must remember his mastery over his shop, his role as final judge in all matters, and his lasting responsibility for any misinformation or error.

With such an awesome set of duties awaiting him, the prospective editor may be driven away from the trade, away from what one commentator labeled that group of "sleuths and venturesome serendipitists."³⁹ One experienced editor even thought that his academic colleagues believed he was "a useful albeit somewhat erratic adjunct to the writing of history."⁴⁰ If he does his work well, however, the editor can smile at those who wonder about the somewhat queer being who finds joy in discovering a hitherto unknown collection of letters or worries about the authenticity of a signature on an old document. Instead, he may recall John Kennedy's gratitude after reading six volumes of the *Adams Papers*. "Not only are we grateful that the Adamses have been such indefatigable conservationists of all they have written and recorded; we are thankful, too, that the Adamses themselves have been so precious and endlessly a natural resource."⁴¹ This is what historical editing is all about—the conservation of the nation's truly important natural resources.

³⁷ Worthington C. Ford, "Editorial Function," in *American Historical Review*, 23:284-285 (1917-18).

³⁸ Jameson, ed., *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, in American Historical Association, *Annual Report . . . 1889*, 2:17 (Washington, 1900).

³⁹ Max Savelle, in *American Historical Review*, 66:170-171 (1960).

⁴⁰ Ford, "Editorial Function," in *American Historical Review*, 23:282 (1917-18).

⁴¹ John F. Kennedy, *ibid.*, 68:480 (1963).

