

Views in Review: A Historiographical Perspective on Historical Editing

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In a letter of 19 March 1823 James Madison commented to Edward Everett,

On reviewing my political papers & correspondence, I find much that may deserve to be put into a proper state for preservation; and some things that may not in equal amplitude be found elsewhere. The case is doubtless the same with other individuals whose public lives have extended thro' the same long & pregnant period. It has been the misfortune of history, that a personal knowledge and an impartial judgment of things rarely meet in the historian. The best history of our Country therefore must be the fruit of contributions bequeathed by contemporary actors & witnesses, to successors who will make an unbiassed use of them. And if the abundance & authenticity of the materials which still exist in the private as well as public repositories among us shd. descend to

hands capable of doing justice to them, the[n] American History may be expected to contain more truth, and lessons, certainly not less valuable, than that of any Country or age.¹

Significantly, the last sentence from this Madison quotation appeared on the title page of the National Historical Publications Commission's 1963 report. Implied was that the commission considered itself the beneficiary and executor of Madison's trust and that it shared Madison's faith in the paramount value and instructive power of American history. The same sense of historical self-importance and special mission of spreading the "truth" has descended from Madison's time to our own. As Jesse Lemisch pointed out eight years ago, the inception of the current program of modern, scholarly historical editing projects² in the early

¹ Gaillard Hunt, ed., *The Writings of James Madison*, 9 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900–1910), 9: 128–29.

² The projects considered in this paper include those which have been underway for some time and have published at least one volume that has been reviewed in scholarly history journals. The projects are: Adams Family; John C. Calhoun; John Carroll; Henry Clay; Jefferson Davis; Benjamin Franklin; Ulysses S. Grant; Nathanael Greene; Alexander Hamilton; Joseph Henry; James Iredell; John Jay; Thomas Jefferson; Andrew Johnson; Henry Laurens; James Madison; John Marshall; George Mason; Robert Morris; James K. Polk; Booker T. Washington; George Washington; Daniel Webster; and Woodrow Wilson.

The institutional projects under consideration are: *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*; *Documentary History of the First Federal Elections*; *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*; and *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*.

Microfilm projects have not been included.

1950s was colored with the political overtones of the Cold War era.³ In the commission's report of 1954, the opinion was expressed that

Publication of the papers of the Nation's leaders, even in a critical period of international crisis, would be evidence both at home and abroad of an abiding faith in the future of the Nation. In times like these when the democratic world is seriously threatened by enemies within and without its borders, they believe that an understanding of the American heritage and of the ideas and ideals upon which it rests is vitally important. . . . The publication of well-edited primary sources is an investment in the future. . . . They will . . . yield year after year national and international benefits of enduring character.⁴

A decade later, reflecting the international political situation of the early 1960s, the commission was promoting these projects with the claim that "only a free people could dare reveal the whole of its past triumphs and failures . . . [which required] no manipulated or authoritarian pattern of interpretation."⁵ The preservation and publication of presidential papers as a symbol of the openness of American society was made explicit by one of the editors of these projects at about the same time as the 1963 commission report.

Lyman H. Butterfield wrote that these activities

will guarantee historians the means of re-creating *whole men* and essential keys to the *whole truth* about their periods of activity on the American scene. I know comparatively little about libraries and archives in Soviet Russia, but I have not heard of a library built to house the papers of Joseph Stalin and to make them available in orderly stages to scholarly investigators. Nor would I be inclined to trust any compilation of his papers or biographical or monographic work on Stalin until these things are done.⁶

Such expressions reflect Madison's assumption that later generations of historians, because of their detachment, would write "impartial" and "unbiased" history based on the manuscripts of public men such as himself. The conviction that "the *whole truth*" could be derived from such sources paralleled Madison's belief that the American history written from these materials would contain great truths and lessons. The self-conscious preservation and transferral to posterity of their papers by the public "actors & witnesses" of Madison's generation were indicative of a keen appreciation of their own historical importance. This emphasis on individuals

³ Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Bicentennial and the Papers of Great White Men," *AHA Newsletter* 9 (Nov. 1971): 7-21, *passim*.

⁴ National Historical Publications Commission, *A National Program for the Publication of Historical Documents: A Report to the President by the National Historical Publications Commission* (NHPC: Washington, D.C., 1954), p. 14. See also Lester J. Cappon's review of volume 1 of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, in the *Journal of Southern History* (hereafter cited as *JSH*). Cappon says: "National and world-wide issues of the mid-twentieth century have reawakened an appreciation of his [Jefferson's] kinship with free men in their struggle against bigotry and tyranny in many forms." (*JSH* 16 [1950]: 532.)

⁵ National Historical Publications Commission, *A Report to the President Containing a Proposal by the National Historical Publications Commission to Meet Existing and Anticipated Needs over the Next Ten Years under a National Program for the Collection, Preservation, and Publication, or Dissemination by Other Means, of the Documentary Sources of American History* (NHPC: Washington, D.C., 1963), p. 3.

⁶ Lyman H. Butterfield, "The Recent Past," in L. H. Butterfield and Julian P. Boyd, eds., *Historical Editing in the United States: Papers read at the 150th Annual Meeting of the American Antiquarian Society* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1962, reprint, 1963), p. 28.

prominent in history has continued down to our own day and is reflected in the current editions of papers which are a part of and contribute toward partial history, rather than the whole of our past aimed at by both Madison and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Largely owing to Madison's self-awareness, and that of other public figures, we do have a rich heritage of documents worth preserving. But the commission's assertion that "it does not directly promote the study of history or concern itself with the writing of history"⁷ is insupportable; and its belief that "these editions will endure because they are above suspicion of partisanship and because in their inclusiveness they anticipate the changing interests of future historians"⁸ is highly questionable. Not the commission itself so much, but its expression of a widely held assumption that these projects are value-free and exist outside of the continuum of American historiography deserves scrutiny. Of course the commission's activities and the editing of these volumes promote the study of history, and a particular kind of history, usually centered around a single figure of public prominence. As one reviewer has said, "The enormous investment of professional

financial resources in such projects is a continuing reaffirmation of belief, even faith, in the towering importance of biographical study in the pursuit of understanding of the past."⁹

Involved also is the writing of history; hardly any of these editions claim to be publishing volumes devoid of historical interpretation. And the history written in them has at times revealed limited perspective, outdated historiography, or careless scholarship of the editors. *The Papers of James Iredell*, particularly, has come under heavy attack for poor editing, inaccurate texts, and outmoded and superficial, or else silent, treatment of issues of current historiographical interest.¹⁰

Such criticism points to one of the distinguishing characteristics of these modern editions: the historical notes written around the documents. These emendations have come to be expected in the editions, but have also become a focal point of controversy about them.¹¹ Almost thirty years ago, with his review of the first volume of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Lester Cappon heralded the beginning of the era of comprehensive, scholarly editions. He singled out as particularly noteworthy Julian Boyd's editorial notes for being "gems of historical criticism, as interesting and provocative as the

⁷ NHPC, *A Report to the President*, p. 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹ Thomas B. Alexander, review of *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 2, in *JSH* 38 (1972): 147.

¹⁰ Reviews of *The Papers of James Iredell*, vols. 1–2, by Philander D. Chase, in *American Historical Review* (hereafter cited as *AHR*) 82 (1977): 1062; by Charles Cullen, in *Journal of American History* (hereafter cited as *JAH*) 65 (1978): 412–13; and by Marvin L. Michael Kay, in *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WMQ*) 35, 3d series (1978): 588–89.

For similar criticism of other projects, see Edwin A. Miles, review of *The Papers of James K. Polk*, vol. 3, in *JSH* 42 (1976): 284–85; Forrest McDonald, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 20–22 and 23–24, in *WMQ* 33, 3d series (1976): 678–80 and *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 671; John Tracy Ellis, review of *The John Carroll Papers*, vols. 1–3, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 736–37; Seward W. Livermore, review of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vols. 23–24, in *AHR* 83 (1978): 1356–57; and David Ammerman, review of *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, vols. 1–2, in *JAH* 66 (1979–80): 127–28.

¹¹ Many reviews of the editions reveal implicitly and explicitly this expectation. See, for instance, Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*

manuscripts to which they pertain.”¹² Far more than Cappon could have anticipated at the time, Julian Boyd, by his methods of historical and textual criticism, established new standards for historical editing.¹³ Fifteen years after his initial review, Cappon consequently put forth “A Rationale for Historical Editing Past and Present,” in which he defined the new breed of “scholar-editors” as historians whose responsibility lay “in transmitting authentic and accurate texts . . . and . . . in making these texts more intelligible.”¹⁴ To achieve the latter he advocated the Boydian method of relating the particular documents of the man to the larger body of records of the age. Part of the editor’s function was to provide interpretative and critical commentary. Cappon asserted that “if research has provided the hard core of his editing, there is no sound reason

why he should not write history from the documents at his command.”¹⁵ Such justification of historical editing is indicative of the concern, expressed then and since, that the historical profession has not accorded editors proper recognition and status as serious historians and scholars.¹⁶

At the same time, however, their volumes have been promoted as definitive—a status that may be claimed for a conventional work of history, but that rarely proves to be so. Modern scholar-editors have wanted it both ways: that they be considered practicing historians, but that their product be considered beyond the reach of time. The admonishment of Charles Beard seems appropriate here:

Every student of history knows that his colleagues have been influenced in their selection and ordering of mate-

(hereafter cited as *MVHR*) 46 (1959–60): 705; Jack C. Barnes, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, in *JSH* 26 (1960): 231; Lester J. Cappon, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vols. 13–15, in *JSH* 26 (1960): 234; Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 5–6, in *MVHR* 50 (1963–64): 115; E. James Ferguson, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 5–6, in *ibid.*: 119–20; Charles Sellers, review of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 3, in *JSH* 30 (1964): 357; Cecelia Kenyon, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 2–5, in *WMQ* 21, 3d series (1964): 130–31; Noble E. Cunningham, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 8–9, in *JSH* 32 (1966): 544; Forrest McDonald, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 5–13, in *WMQ* 26, 3d series (1969): 115; Dewey W. Grantham, review of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vols. 5–6, in *JAH* 56 (1969–70): 890; Norman K. Risjord, review of *The Papers of George Mason*, vols. 1–3, in *JAH* 58 (1971–72): 986; Joseph A. Ernst, review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 1, in *WMQ* 31, 3d series (1974): 515–16; Edmund S. Morgan, review of *The Adams Family Correspondence*, vols. 3–4, in *AHR* 80 (1975): 490–91; Kent Newmyer, review of *The Papers of John Marshall*, vol. 1, in *JAH* 62 (1975–76): 359–60; Ludwell H. Johnson III, review of *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. 2, in *JSH* 42 (1976): 119–21; Philander D. Chase, review of *The Papers of James Iredell*, vols. 1–2, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1061; and Warren W. Hassler, Jr., review of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 6, in *JSH* 44 (1978): 126–27.

¹² *JSH* 16 (1950): 533. See also David Potter’s prescient review of the first volume, in *MVHR* 37 (1950–51): 312–14.

¹³ See Leonard W. Levy, review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 1, in *MVHR* 49 (1962–63): 504; Joseph A. Ernst, review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 1, in *WMQ* 31, 3d series (1974): 515–16; Merrill D. Peterson, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vols. 18–19, in *WMQ* 32, 3d series (1975): 656–58.

¹⁴ *WMQ* 23, 3d series (1966): 57.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Julian P. Boyd, “The Next Stage,” in Butterfield and Boyd, eds., *Historical Editing in the United States*, pp. 29–48, *passim*; and Stanley J. Idzerda, “The Editor’s Training and Status in the Historical Profession,” in Leslie W. Dunlap and Fred Shelley, eds., *The Publication of American Historical Manuscripts* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Libraries, 1976), pp. 11–29.

rials by their biases, prejudices, beliefs, affections . . . and if he has a sense of propriety, to say nothing of humor, he applies the canon to himself, leaving no exceptions to the rule. The pallor of waning time, if not of death, rests upon the latest volume of history, fresh from the roaring press.¹⁷

The editors and volumes of the current papers projects are not exempt from this injunction. Historian-editors have their biases like other historians, but they can hide them behind the duality of their function. Aileen Kraditor, in a review essay, pointed out the possibilities of prejudicing the perspective through the editor's role in selecting the documents. She convincingly demonstrated "that different editorial frameworks and the decisions made within them affect the reader's picture of the subject to a far greater degree than he probably imagines."¹⁸ The criteria of selection "can be interpreted differently by different editors and by the historians who use the volumes. Especially is this true now, when historians are reexamining the relationship between individual psychology and group activity."¹⁹

A fine balance must be sought be-

tween inclusiveness and selectivity. Some historians have viewed the comprehensiveness of the modern editions as embodying a "distracting disproportion" by which important documents are engulfed by a horde of minutiae.²⁰ Yet other scholars have lamented the omission of any document²¹ and believed the inclusion of routine items may yield "otherwise elusive information." That the interests of historians change, making what may once have seemed trivial significant, is an argument used for including all apparently relevant material.²²

Ultimately the choice lies with the editor, and concealed within the editor is the historian with his notions of significance and his conscious and unconscious historical values.²³ On the other hand, the historian can use his role as editor to legitimize the researching, writing, and publishing of historical monographs within the volumes of edited papers. An extensive investigation of the Hamilton-Beckwith affair was justified by Julian Boyd as "obligatory in view of the fact that the documents tracing the evolution of Jefferson's policy cannot be understood unless the validity of those to which in some degree they are a response is assessed."²⁴

¹⁷ Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," in Hans Meyerhof, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 141.

¹⁸ Aileen Kraditor, "Editing the Abolitionists," in *Reviews in American History* 1 (1973): 519.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

²⁰ *Reviews of The Papers of John Marshall*, vol. 1, by Robert K. Faulkner, in *WMQ* 33, 3d series (1976): 154-55, and by Maxwell Bloomfield, in *AHR* 81 (1976): 1225; and review by David Herbert Donald, of *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. 2, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1329-30.

²¹ Forrest McDonald, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 23-24, in *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 671.

²² Robert M. Weir, review of *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, vols. 4-5, in *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 667.

²³ For instance, Robert A. Rutland implicitly criticized Merrill Jensen for incorporating his bias toward the Confederation period in vol. 1 of *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* by allotting a major portion of the space to documents relating to the Articles of Confederation. But, said Rutland, "every historical editor has a frame of reference." (Rutland's review is in *WMQ* 34, 3d series [1977]: 479-80.)

²⁴ Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 19 vols. to date (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 17:37. See the critical reviews of this volume by Dumas Malone in *New York Times Book Review*, 12 Sept. 1965, pp. 44-45; and by Merrill D. Peterson in *WMQ* 23, 3d series (1966): 155-58.

The example set by Boyd has been followed in varying degrees by other editors. Reviewers of *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* have found the editing "prolix," "excessive," "irrelevant." Laudatory of the editors' efforts, Ludwell H. Johnson found the annotation so "extensive" and "exhaustive" (but at times irrelevant) that investigators of collateral subjects would find the Davis volumes exceedingly helpful. David Herbert Donald commented that a biographer would need look no further for any material he might want to consult. Donald urged the editors to follow Robert A. Rutland's injunction: "Footnotes rarely endure and may serve an editor's vanity more than a scholar's needs. Thus we would do well to check our impulses, annotate sparingly, and leave the scholar free to make his own interpretations of Clio's wanderings."²⁵ Is it really appropriate for the editor to aggrandize his function to the extent of usurping the historian's task?

Such massive collecting of documents and comprehensive annotating may be a boon to investigators who cannot afford the time and money for research as thorough, but there may be negative effects for the historians using these volumes. Noble E. Cunningham, in reviewing the impressive array of documents gathered by *The Documentary History of the First Federal*

Elections, 1788-1790, said, "Future historians of these elections will miss the excitement of doing their own research, but they can be reasonably confident that, when this series is complete, they will have the full evidentiary record before them when they begin to write."²⁶ This statement is arresting in its implications. That historians will no longer need to do their own research raises serious questions about the future quality of their work. The inclusiveness and convenience of these modern editing projects could well inhibit rather than encourage the writing of good history. The very process of independent research is the source of that inspiration which provides new insights and original interpretations. Eliminating the excitement from the historian's job may produce very dull history indeed.

There is also a danger in being lulled into believing that the evidence is complete, accurate, and objective as it is presented in the modern, "complete" editions. Almost every project reaches a point at which it becomes necessary to omit some documents. The issues of how much has been omitted, and what the criteria were in choosing, are not always carefully delineated or applied consistently in the volumes. The user may unquestioningly assume he has all the relevant or significant material before him when in fact he may not.²⁷

²⁵ Reviews of vol. 2 of *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, by Ludwell H. Johnson III in *JSH* 42 (1976): 119-21; by Charles P. Roland in *JAH* 62 (1975-76): 951-52; and by David Herbert Donald in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1329-30.

²⁶ *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788-1790*, vol. 1, reviewed by Noble E. Cunningham in *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 482. See also the review of vol. 1 by John S. Pancake in which he comments that the "reader feels positively pampered." (Pancake's review is in *JSH* 43 [1977]: 289.)

²⁷ See Dewey W. Grantham, review of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vols. 18-19, in *JAH* 63 (1976-77): 167; and Forrest McDonald, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 23-24, in *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 671.

The collateral questions not only of a text's accuracy but of which text is used, although raised by a few reviewers,²⁸ are not so frequently asked by historians or by historical editors as a recent literary critic thought essential. G. Thomas Tanselle has faulted historical editors for their superficial and inconsistent approach to textual matters.²⁹ But his advocacy of applying the standards of the Center for Scholarly Editions (CSE) to historical editions tended to obscure the differences in the uses made of literary and historical documents. That the eclectic approach sponsored by the CSE is a matter of debate within the literary profession went unnoted. As Peter Shaw pointed out, the historical editor treats the document as a fact. While perhaps slighting the nuances which literary editors appreciate, he does not produce bowdlerized versions claiming to represent the author's true, though unexpressed, intent.³⁰ Tanselle may be justified in attacking the "partial modernizations" of historical editions as inconsistent and insensitive to the author's style and language, but the eclectic texts of the literary editions are no less subjective and oblivious of historical context.

The attempt by the editor of whichever profession to clarify the author's intentions is a risky business better left

to the reader. When the editor presents an interpretation of the author's character and motives, he may seriously mislead the reader. Even the way in which the documents are organized in the volumes can create an inaccurate impression. James H. Hutson has criticized the Adams Family project for the decision to publish the various papers in separate series. The predominantly political writings in the general correspondence of *The Papers of John Adams* gives the effect of "disembodied intellectualism, of ideas wrenched from their social context."³¹ To the extent that the editor's particular perspective informs his decision concerning the organizing and grouping of documents, the impressions created by the sequence of materials are a result of his historical values.

In reviewing *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Brooke Hindle explored the potential for distortion in the presentation and interpretation of documents by the historian-editor. Hindle raised the question of "whether the editor's vantage point and the image he holds of Franklin influences his editing Any interpretive essay must distort by generalizing upon the papers contained; this one distorts by overemphasizing English politics and Franklin's own activities—which are, in some instances, not much reflected

²⁸ J. A. Leo Lemay, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 18, in *AHR* 81 (1976): 1224; Charles Crowe, review of the same, vols. 16–19, in *WMQ* 35, 3d series (1978): 155–59; and William L. Joyce, review of *The Papers of John Adams*, vols. 1–2, in *American Archivist* 41 (1978): 190.

²⁹ G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editing of Historical Documents," in *Studies in Bibliography* 31 (1978): 28–29, 32–33, 35, 55.

³⁰ See Peter Shaw, "The American Heritage and Its Guardians," in *American Scholar* 45 (1975–76): 739–41.

³¹ Review of *The Papers of John Adams*, Series III, General Correspondence, vols. 1–2, in *WMQ* 35, 3d series (1978): 751–53. On the same point, see Christopher Collier's review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 1, for limiting the publication to Morris's public papers as Superintendent of Finance. Collier argues that since the most controversial aspect of Morris's career was the combining of his private with his public business, the editors ought to be inclusive so that the reader may come to his own conclusions (*AHR* 80 [1975]: 1042–43). See also Donald Roper, review of *John Jay: The Making of a Revolutionary, I: Unpublished Papers, 1745–1780* (*WMQ* 34, 3d series [1977]: 134–36).

in the papers.”³² In a subsequent review Hindle expanded upon his objections to the editorial concentration on Franklin’s role in imperial politics at the expense of colonial political, cultural, and scientific matters. He postulated the conclusion “that the project has become unworkable. The saturation scholarship pioneered by Julian P. Boyd may have led historical editors down a blind alley, and it may be time to confess the crisis.”³³ Hindle’s assessment of the situation appeared on the crest of a wave of increasingly critical commentary upon the priorities of these long-term editorial endeavors.

The attack essentially has been three-pronged. The question raised earliest has also recurred more recently, although with a somewhat different emphasis: who deserves to be edited and published in letterpress volumes? Charles Sellers, in a review in 1960 of the first volume of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, doubted the utility of extending such “comprehensive publication” to secondary historical figures and suggested that the resources be put into collecting the documents into one dep-

ository and making them available on microfilm.³⁴ Such a policy in fact has been instituted by some of the newer projects, in conjunction with a selected edition of published papers.³⁵

Yet there are a number of “secondary” figures whose papers are being published in comprehensive editions. These men are not the Founding Fathers but the next generation of prominent American politicians, who tended not to be as historically minded or catholic in their interests and intellects as the revolutionary set. By general report, their letters, what there are of them, make tedious reading. Many of these men did not write much or well and did not bother to save what was written. These circumstances have led reviewers to look forward to future volumes perhaps containing more, and more important, letters of the subject. Reviewers have commented also that the editing of the documents is superior in quality to the documents themselves.³⁶ This seems an inversion of the editorial purpose; the notes should explicate the documents, not improve upon them.

³² Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 14–15, in *JAH* 60 (1973–74): 96–97. William B. Willcox, the editor, has been roundly criticized on all of the points mentioned in the preceding paragraph. J. A. Leo Lemay, in his review of vol. 18, said that “at its worst, it is a deliberately selected edition, rather than a complete one, of unsound texts, full of officious editorializing” (*AHR* 81 [1976]: 1224). See also David Ammerman, review of vol. 20 of the same, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1321–22.

³³ Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 16–17, in *JAH* 60 (1973–74): 1073. ³⁴ *JSH* 26 (1960): 240.

³⁵ Most notably, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*. See reviews by Maurice G. Baxter, of vol. 1, in *JAH* 62 (1975–76): 360; of vol. 2, in *JAH* 63 (1976–77): 977–78; and by Norman D. Brown, of vol. 1, in *JSH* 41 (1975): 542. Also, about *The Papers of Joseph Henry*, see n. 55, below.

³⁶ Those who have borne the brunt of such commentary are James K. Polk, Andrew Johnson, and, to a lesser degree, John C. Calhoun. Robert V. Remini said of Polk that he has been “fantastically lucky” and well served both then and now. The implication is that Polk has gotten better than he deserved both in Charles Seller’s “fine” biography and in the “superbly yet unobtrusively edited” papers (review of *The Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 3, in *JAH* 62 [1975–76]: 950). See also reviews of vol. 4, by the same, in *JAH* 65 (1978–79): 726–28; and by Edwin A. Miles, in *JSH* 44 (1978): 462.

In regard to *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, J. H. Parks, in commenting on the paucity of Andrew Johnson items, said that “the serious student may find the editors’ notes more interesting and valuable than the letters reproduced” (review of vol. 4, in *JAH* 64 [1977–78]: 110). See also his reviews of vols. 1 and 2, in *JAH* 55 (1968–69): 404–5; and 58 (1971–72): 121; and Thomas B. Alexander, reviews of vols. 1 and 4, in *JSH* 34 (1968): 453–54, and 43 (1977): 131.

Such projects may well serve to inflate the stature and importance of certain personages in our past and to allocate time and money that could better be expended elsewhere. In his November 1971 *AHA Newsletter* article, "The American Revolution Bicentennial and the Papers of Great White Men," Jesse Lemisch probed this question further. He argued that the publications program had been excluding "those who were not great, not white, not men." He has since contended that history in America in the 1970s encompasses a broader definition than that of "notable," "distinguished" people and has urged that the National Historical Publications and Records Commission redirect its thinking and support toward assembling and publishing records of the "inarticulate."³⁷ Interrelated with the question of whom to publish is the question of amount of time and money spent. Criticism on these grounds increased as publication schedules and

costs were steadily revised upward. Concomitantly, the issue of detailed annotation and "editorial imperialism" came to the fore as the pace of publication in many of the projects slowed down and the editorial apparatus burgeoned.³⁸ Indicative of the situation is that the quotation given at the beginning of this article was taken from an edition of Madison's writings published seventy years ago; the current Madison project has to publish almost thirty-five years of his life before it reaches this letter. To varying degrees many of the projects are in a similar state of arrears. As put by Leonard Levy, "These volumes are being edited for posterity, and their publication will probably continue until their audience arrives."³⁹

This wave of condemnation against the elaborateness and costliness of the projects had reached its peak by 1975. The protest markedly subsided thereafter. Extensive editorial apparatus began to be praised again and little com-

For *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, see John A. Munroe's comment that Calhoun "remains a non-person, an office," in his review of vol. 4, in *JAH* 57 (1970-71): 135. See also his reviews of vols. 2 and 8-9, in *MVHR* 50 (1963-64): 306, and *JAH* 64 (1977-78): 1064; and Harry Ammons, review of vol. 8, in *JSH* 41 (1975): 549-50.

³⁷ Jesse Lemisch, "The Papers of Great White Men"; and "The Papers of a Few Great Black Men and a Few Great White Women," in *The Maryland Historian* 6 (1975): 48, and 63-65.

³⁸ Sellers raised the question of time and money in his review of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 1, in *JSH* 26 (1960): 240. Leonard Levy was one of the first to attack extensive annotation, and did so in his reviews of *The Papers of James Madison*, vols. 1-2, in *MVHR* 49 (1962-63): 505-6, and of vol. 3 in *JAH* 51 (1964-65): 299-301. Critical reviews on both of these points became more frequent in the latter part of the 1960s and may be linked with the appearance of vol. 17 of the Jefferson Papers in 1965, which contained a disproportionate number of editorial notes and was not published until four years after the preceding volume. Criticism seems to have been spurred on after Lemisch's attack in 1971. It had reached a crescendo around the time of Hindle's review in 1974. See, for instance, Dumas Malone, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 17, in *New York Times Book Review*, 12 Sept. 1965, pp. 44-45; Merrill D. Peterson, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 17, in *WMQ* 23, 3d series (1966): 155-58; John Howe, review of *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, in *ibid.*: 652; W. W. Abbot, review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 4, in *AHR* 74 (1968-69): 709; Leonard W. Levy, review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vols. 4-7, in *JAH* 59 (1972-73): 116-17; Robert McColley, reviews of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 18, in *JSH* 38 (1972): 656-57, and of vol. 19, in *JSH* 41 (1975): 256; Brooke Hindle, reviews of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 14-15, in *JAH* 60 (1973-74): 96-98, and vols. 16-17, in *ibid.*: 1071-73; E. James Ferguson, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 16-17, in *ibid.*: 409-11; Glyndon Van Deusen, review of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 4, in *ibid.*: 415; Donald Fleming, review of *The Papers of Joseph Henry*, vol. 1, in *ibid.*: 1073; and Joseph Ernst, review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 1, in *WMQ* 31, 3d series (1974): 516.

³⁹ Review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vols. 4-7, in *JAH* 59 (1972-73): 117.

ment was made about the rate at which volumes were published.⁴⁰ On the other hand, projects which seemed to have responded to earlier criticism and to economic pressures by limiting editorial notes, abstracting some documents and leaving out others, have recently come under attack for these now perceived sins of omission.⁴¹ The shifts in the attitudes of reviewers toward these papers projects have root in contemporary historical developments. In his important article "The American Heritage and Its Guardians," Peter Shaw noted Edmund Wilson's suggestion of similarities in the 1960s between the Vietnam War and the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA, subsequently CSE). They both "lacked modesty of scale."⁴² The goal of being error-free and definitive had "an innocently millenarian, American flavor to it."⁴³ As pointed out in the beginning of this article, the modern histor-

ical editions and NHPC partook of this millenarianism.⁴⁴ The majority of historians who reviewed the volumes in the 1960s tended to share in the zealotry of American idealism and pride, which had its political counterpart in our involvement in Vietnam.

As countervailing currents of protest overwhelmed the war effort and engendered distrust of many traditional aspects of American society, so did historians come to question the utility and lavishness of the publication of America's national political heroes of the past. Involved in their attack were the dissolution of consensus about America's past, and present, and the division among historians over the kind of history to be written. The self-examination of the early 1970s infected the NHPRC, editors, and reviewers alike. The scrutiny brought about a diversification as well as a defense of historical editing projects.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Kent Newmyer, review of *The Papers of John Marshall*, vol. 1, in *JAH* 62 (1975-76): 359-60; Merrill D. Peterson, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vols. 18-19, in *WMQ* 32, 3d series (1975): 656-58; Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 18-19, in *JAH* 63 (1976-77): 975-76; E. James Ferguson, reviews of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 20-21 and 22-23, in *JAH* 63 (1976-77): 368-69 and 64 (1977-78): 107-9; George M. Curtis III, review of *The Diaries of George Washington*, vols. 1-2, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1060; Lowell H. Harrison, review of the same, in *JSH* 43 (1977): 431; Philander D. Chase, review of *The Papers of James Iredell*, vols. 1-2, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1061; and Warren W. Hassler, Jr., review of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 6, in *JSH* 44 (1978): 126-27.

Among these reviewers are Merrill D. Peterson, Brooke Hindle, and E. James Ferguson, all of whom had criticized, in previous reviews, the use of space, time, and money. In comparison to the scholarly contributions made by the editors in their explanatory notes and essays, these reviewers seemed no longer to mind the inefficiencies of the editorial apparatus.

⁴¹ See Robert G. Sherer, review of *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 3, in *AHR* 81 (1976): 214; Dewey W. Grantham, review of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vols. 18-19, in *JAH* 63 (1976-77): 167; Hugh Hawkins, review of the same, vols. 16-20, in *AHR* 82 (1977): 1091; Paul W. Brewer, review of *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788-1790*, vol. 1, in *ibid.*: 1324; Steven R. Boyd, review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 10, in *ibid.*: 1325; Winton U. Solberg, review of *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, vols. 1-2, in *JSH* 43 (1977): 442; Donald Roper, review of *John Jay: The Making of a Revolutionary, I: Unpublished Papers, 1745-1780*, in *WMQ* 34, 3d series (1977): 134-36; Linda Grant DePauw, review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 3, in which she does take cognizance of the necessity for economizing, but suggests that microform production is preferable to limiting the editorial apparatus (*AHR* 83 [1978]: 1340-41); Noble E. Cunningham, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 24, in *JSH* 44 (1978): 111-12; and Charles Royster, review of *The Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vols. 1-2, in *WMQ* 35, 3d series (1978): 749.

⁴² Peter Shaw, "The American Heritage and Its Guardians," *American Scholar* 65 (1975-76): 748.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 749.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Shaw would agree with this.

⁴⁵ E. Berkeley Tompkins, "The NHPRC in Perspective," in Dunlap and Shelley, eds., *The Publication of American Historical Manuscripts*, pp. 94-95.

In the late 1970s, opposition to the modern editions dwindled, just as nationally the capacity for critical appraisal became exhausted. The relapse into quiescence has helped legitimize what has by now become the traditional approach in modern historical editing initiated by Boyd over thirty years ago.⁴⁶ The Bicentennial gave a big boost to the reversal in attitude.⁴⁷ "A marked renaissance of interest in history, and especially in historical sources" has been announced.⁴⁸ The papers projects could be promoted as popular reading. They were hailed "as monuments to the two hundredth anniversary of Independence"; they would remain "long after the lesser and grosser aspects of the Bicentennial are deservedly forgotten."⁴⁹

The view of the modern historical editions as monuments which would last for generations has recurred with the birthday of the Revolution which projected the authors of these documents into fame and history. But the

current complacency with the course pursued by most editing projects ignores the "crisis" which Hindle and others perceived in the early 1970s. The problems, however, remain unresolved. As Peter Shaw said, "the guardians of our tradition have succeeded in keeping it out of print."⁵⁰ That this is so can be traced back to Madison's bequest. Modern "scholar-editors" seem to continue to feel that Madison's trust has descended directly on them, that they are executing the charge of unbiased use of the documents and of purveying the truth. In the process of doing justice to our documentary inheritance, ever more money, more time, and more detailed historical exegesis of the texts has been rationalized. It is time to stop, as Hindle urged, and, further, to recognize that these projects are not like the great cathedrals. Not only should they not take centuries to be completed, but also they may not and perhaps should not endure that long.

⁴⁶ George M. Curtis III, in his review of *The Diaries of George Washington*, vols. 1–2, praised them "as a monument to creative editing." He acknowledged that "the new Washington project is vulnerable to criticism from those seeking greater economies in publication or heavier emphasis upon lesser known figures." However, Curtis appeared to think it inconsequential that thousands of dollars and a decade of effort were spent to publish two volumes of Washington's diaries which had been produced in a complete and unbowdlerized edition fifty years before (*AHR* 82 [1977]: 1060). For a critical review of the same on these issues, see Mary Beth Norton in *JAH* 64 (1978): 1062–63. Her review, which would have been unexceptionable a few years ago, stands out among current reviews for its hostile stance toward the new edition.

The recent increase in laudatory reviews may be partly attributable to the numbers of reviewers who are themselves editors. With a few exceptions, rather than being more exacting of colleagues in their own field, they are less so than historians generally. Perhaps this is because historical editors are still on the defensive within the historical profession and prefer not to bring adverse attention to historical editing. Among the reviewers cited here, Philander D. Chase, Charles Cullen, George M. Curtis III, E. James Ferguson, Don Higginbotham, James H. Hutson, Merrill Jensen, Ralph L. Ketchem, and Robert A. Rutland all have been or are historical editors. The author of this article also must be counted among them.

⁴⁷ Several reviewers have welcomed the publication of first volumes of the newer projects as auspicious events of the Bicentennial. See for instance, J. Edwin Hendricks, review of the *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, vols. 1–2, in *JSH* 44 (1978): 624–26; Don Higginbotham, review of *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 1, in *JAH* 64 (1977–78): 394; Donald O. Dewey, review of *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, vols. 1–2, in *ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴⁸ John S. Pancake, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 20–21, in *AHR* 81 (1976): 206–7.

⁴⁹ Merrill Jensen, "The Bicentennial and Afterwards," in Dunlap and Shelley, eds., *The Publication of American Historical Manuscripts*, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Peter Shaw, "The American Heritage and Its Guardians," *American Scholar* 65 (1975–76): 749.

At one point within our generation, Max Farrand's *Records of the Federal Convention* and Edmund C. Burnett's *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* were considered to be acceptable by the standards of modern editing.⁵¹ Yet it has recently been found necessary to redo completely Burnett's work, and the Madison Papers have under consideration the prospect of a new edition of the notes on the Constitutional Convention.⁵² *The Writings of George Washington*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick some forty-five years ago and published in thirty-nine volumes at public expense, is now considered inadequate. Rather than remedying the omissions of Fitzpatrick, the current editors are redoing Washington's papers in their entirety. How secure are any of these projects against some future school of revisionist editors? And the more history that is written in these volumes, the more vulnerable they are.⁵³ Is it inconceivable that some editor will find unacceptable Julian Boyd's anti-Hamilton history contained in the most recent volumes of

The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, and find imperative a new edition free of such editorializing?⁵⁴ Or will someone decide that the imperial political emphasis in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* must be corrected?

There appears to be only one way out: to deescalate the claims and expectations of these projects; to consider them, like any other work of history, as a project of a particular generation out of whose values they evolved. A number of alternatives have been suggested or are being tried. Several approaches seem viable. One would be to follow the suggestion of Hindle and the practice of *The Papers of Joseph Henry* and *The Papers of Daniel Webster*: publish an exhaustive microfilm edition of the papers accompanied by selective, extensively annotated, topical, letterpress volumes.⁵⁵ Another would be, as proposed by Charles Sellers and Joseph Ernst, to collect copies of all the manuscripts in one place and produce a well-indexed and complete microfilm publication of the documents.⁵⁶ Another idea, ap-

⁵¹ Butterfield and Boyd, eds., *Historical Editing in the United States*, pp. 12-13, 15-18, and 35; Lester J. Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing Past and Present," *WMQ* 23, 3d series (1966): 65-66.

⁵² In fact, *The Papers of James Madison* has been criticized for not including all of Madison's speeches in the Federal Convention. Steven R. Boyd has asserted that if the speeches are not included later, it will make the edition less than definitive (review of vol. 10 in *AHR* 82 [1977]: 1325). The decisions of the editors of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* to print summaries of letters to and from Franklin and to omit the first part of the autobiography in its proper chronological sequence have been called unjustified. The edition is thereby incomplete (David Ammerman, review of vol. 20, in *AHR* 82 [1977]: 1321-22; J. A. Leo Lemay, review of vol. 18, in *AHR* 81 [1976]: 1224).

⁵³ An opposing view has been taken by Linda K. Kerber in her review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vols. 3-10. She rejected the editor's reasons for omitting interpretative essays as "misguided worries." She thought the costs of the editing projects small in comparison to many other expenditures in our society. Wondering whether any editor really believed his edition would not be subjected to historiographical reappraisal, she suggested editors should embrace the chance to stamp their character on their work. Her main concern was that inexpensive editions be made available to a wider audience. She did not discuss whether that goal is compatible with her other contentions (*WMQ* 35, 3d series [1978]: 147-55).

⁵⁴ See Robert McColley, reviews of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 18, in *JSH* 38 (1972): 656-57; and of vol. 19, in *JSH* 41 (1975): 256-58.

⁵⁵ Brooke Hindle, review of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vols. 16-17, in *JAH* 60 (1973-74): 1073; Donald Fleming, review of *The Papers of Joseph Henry*, vol. 1, in *ibid.*, p. 1073; and I. Bernhard Cohen, review of the same, in *AHR* 80 (1975): 181-83. See n. 35, above.

⁵⁶ Charles Sellers, review of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 1, in *JSH* 26 (1960): 240; and Joseph Ernst, review of *The Papers of Robert Morris*, vol. 1, in *WMQ* 31, 3d series (1974): 516.

proached tentatively by *The Papers of James Madison*, broached by E. James Ferguson, and strongly urged by Linda K. Kerber is to omit documents which have been published with reasonable competency elsewhere. This could eliminate much duplication of effort, duplication sometimes with little improvement in accuracy.⁵⁷ One of the fallacies upon which these modern editions are based is that the texts are virtually error-free and supersede, in terms of completeness and expertise, all that has gone before. It is quite likely that substantive mistakes can be found in every volume. Some former editions such as Gaillard Hunt's of James Madison and Edmund C. Burnett's of the members of the Continental Congress, although lacking in completeness, attain a very acceptable standard of accuracy. The elusive goal of perfection and the deceptive lure of immortality have led the historical editing profession into an exaggerated view of its importance and of its func-

tion. Comprehensive letterpress editions of the documents of preeminent Americans have preempted most of the energy and resources; the standard, once set, has become increasingly difficult to depart from. The distorted perception of priorities has inhibited the trial of divergent methods and diverse types of projects. Attention and money ought to be diverted to the preservation of records which are in danger of perishing altogether.⁵⁸ The aim should be to make available in one form or another, to a wider audience, authentic and inexpensive reproductions of as great a variety of manuscript collections as possible.⁵⁹

More imagination and effort should be devoted to new kinds of projects.⁶⁰ For instance, many state archives contain large bodies of petitions which could be grouped chronologically and topically. They would provide a marvelous source of social and political history and a means of getting at the "inarticulate" of our past. Another

⁵⁷ See Robert A. Rutland, et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, 12 vols. to date (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962-), 8: 110 n., 363 n., and 9: 23-24 nn., 4, 15-17, 127; E. James Ferguson, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 16-17, in *JAH* 60 (1973-74): 409-10; and Linda K. Kerber, review of *The Papers of James Madison*, vols. 3-10, in *WMQ* 35, 3d series (1978): 154-55.

⁵⁸ See on this point William L. Joyce, review of *The Papers of John Adams*, vols. 1-2, in *American Archivist* 41 (1978): 190.

⁵⁹ These goals have also been emphasized by Peter Shaw, in "The American Heritage and Its Guardians," in *American Scholar* 65 (1975-76): 750; and by Linda K. Kerber (see n. 53, above).

⁶⁰ In recent years, NHPRC has broadened its scope. The commission responded to criticism by New Left historians, of the elitism of the original editing projects and to the increased interest in pluralism in the American past. The redefinition of NHPRC's mandate, from the publication of the papers of America's great statesmen to the preservation and publication of records and papers of a wider range of subjects, reflected the change in political climate and the shift of interests in the scholarly world. By the expansion in the types of projects, the records and publications programs have come to include women, Blacks, other ethnic minorities, reform and labor movements, as well as men notable in political, scientific, or cultural realms. But when the lists of projects are scrutinized, the numbers and appropriations are still heavily weighted in favor of exceptional individuals or groups, and prominent institutions.

The commission's support for the preservation and cataloging of local and state records is commendable; let us hope that more money and imagination will be expended in developing other and less accessible records concerning common people and less well-known institutions. The other important shift in NHPRC's emphasis has been to projects more modest in scale and expense. The most impressive fact still remains that the bulk of NHPRC's support has gone to the "great, comprehensive historical enterprises" which continue to consume disproportionate time and money in ratio to their productivity and utility (see National Historical Records and Publications Commission, *Report to the President* [NHPRC: Washington, D.C., 1978], pp. i, v-vi, 5-6, and 23-50, *passim*).

source, fast disappearing, are the retiring railwaymen who have worked on this country's railroads for the last forty or fifty years. A wealth of documentation could be provided through the collection and preservation of oral histories of the men and of the institutional records of the companies and unions. The ongoing projects ought to devote more energy to publishing the documents and less to the writing of history in the form of annotation. As expressed by E. James Ferguson and Robert McColley, there seems to be in operation "some undiscovered law about historical editing that would relate the duration of the project to the growth of editorial apparatus,"⁶¹ which in turn takes over the project and all but submerges the actual papers from view.⁶² If the effect of this law is not reversed, these projects will

be consigned to the fate described by Tristram Shandy:

When a man sits down to write a history, . . . if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various Accounts to pick up: Inscriptions to make out: Stories to weave in: Traditions to sift: Personages to call upon: Panegyricks to paste up at this door: Pasquinades at that: . . . To sum up all; there are archives at every stage to be look'd into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies, which justice ever and anon calls him back to stay the reading of:—In short, there is no end of it. . . .⁶²

⁶¹ E. James Ferguson, review of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vols. 16–17, in *JAH* 60 (1973–74): 411.

⁶² Robert McColley, review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 18, in *JSH* 38 (1972): 657.

⁶³ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1940), pp. 36–37. The passage is quoted also by Merrill D. Peterson in his review of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 17, in *WMQ* 23, 3d series (1966): 158.

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