

Papers of the War Department 1784-1800

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PROJECT SUMMARY

1. Purpose And Goals Of Project. Theodore Crackel launched *the Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* at East Stroudsburg State University (ESU) in the fall of 1994. The purpose and goal is to make available some 50,000 War Department documents that have been recovered through a multi-year search of hundreds of repositories—documents that detail much of our nation’s formative decades in a way that has never before been possible, and documents that would have all along resided at the National Archives had it not been for the fire in November 1800 that destroyed the originals. The project is now poised to present to students and scholars this valuable and heretofore inaccessible archive of early American history, and to do it online and for free.

2. Significance and Relationship to NHPRC Goals and Objectives. “Follow the money,” it is said, if you want to understand events, and in the early days of the Republic that money trail usually passed through the War Office. During the 1790s seven of every ten dollars of the federal budget (debt service excepted) passed through the hands of the Secretary of War. The War Department did business with commercial firms all across the nation; it was the country’s largest single consumer of fabric, clothing, shoes, food, medicine and weapons of all kinds. It also operated the nation’s only social welfare program, providing veterans’ and widows and orphans benefits to thousands of individuals and families.

The *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* is, therefore, much more than a mere military record of the period. It was through the War Department that the people regularly engaged their new government, and through the Secretary of War that the government had contact with them. For that reason, a wide spectrum of researchers—historians, political and social scientists, authors, genealogists, and museum curators—will use the documents being gathered by the project. This record is also a window onto a time when there was no law beyond the Constitution, a time when the administration first worked out its understanding and interpretation of that new document.

Papers of the War Department 1784-1800 contributes to accomplishing the NHPRC goals of “protect[ing], publish[ing], and otherwise mak[ing] accessible historically significant records, and improv[ing] the methods, tools, and training of professionals engaged in such documentary work.” The project also supports the Commission’s goal of “enabl[ing] the nation’s archivists, records managers, and documentary editors to overcome obstacles and take advantage of the opportunities posed by electronic technologies.” Specifically, *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* is a groundbreaking effort to exploit the potential of the electronic delivery of documents and to provide free and open access to our documentary heritage. It will be a model of what can be done with today’s technology to make documentary editions more “user-friendly” and, at the same time, more cost-effective and comprehensive. Equally important, we will be pioneers in promoting “open access” to the nation’s documentary heritage—permanently offering this historically important collection for free to scholars, students, and the general public.

3. Plan of Work for Grant Period. The *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* is at a critical juncture in its decade-long history. A great deal has been accomplished at ESU. Unfortunately, Crackel's departure in August 2004 to edit the George Washington Papers has left the project without professional leadership, and there is not the support or staff to continue the project at ESU. The danger now is that the project will be orphaned, and the huge investment of both time and money (much of this from NHPRC) in making these records available will be lost.

The Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University (GMU) proposes to take over the project and bring it to a successful conclusion. GMU is very well positioned to match the high standard of work established for the War Department papers project at ESU. Indeed, perhaps uniquely among U.S. institutions, GMU combines the scholarly, technical, and institutional qualities (including substantial staff with credentials in military history, the history of the early republic, historical editing, and especially digital history) necessary to complete the project in a professional and timely manner. In addition to providing its own institutional resources, GMU has secured a commitment from the Center for Military History (CMH) to provide financial support to the project, if NHPRC approves the transfer to GMU and provides funding for the project. We also have the support and encouragement of Crackel, who will assist in the transfer in the project and chair our advisory board.

Our major goals for the nineteen months covered by this proposal are to: (1) transfer the project to a new home at GMU; (2) develop the technical infrastructure for delivering the papers online; (3) complete the process of locating documents in additional archives and libraries; (4) complete the digitization of approximately 7,500 remaining documents; (5) enter basic metadata for approximately 11,000 remaining documents and link individual image files to these new records as well as 4,000 others that have not yet been linked; (6) provide detailed finding information (including document abstracts) for 6,500 additional documents; (7) launch a public, beta test bed for the online papers that would include one-quarter of the entire collection.

4. Products and Publications to be Completed During the Grant Period. Although much of the work of the next nineteen months will involve transition and the building of infrastructure for the project, we still intend to publicly launch the project on the web during this period. We will create a *Papers of the War Department 1784 to 1800* (Series 1) website, which will offer access to 12,500 documents, including full content searching to approximately one-quarter of the collection.

5. Key Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Roy Rosenzweig, Mark and Barbara Fried Professor of History and New Media, Department of History, George Mason University, MS 3G1, Fairfax, VA 22030; (703)-993-4532

Editor-in-Chief: Christopher Hamner, Assistant Professor of History, Department of History, George Mason University, MS 3G1, Fairfax, VA 22030; (703)-993-1250

Project Director: Tom Scheinfeldt, Assistant Director, Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, MS 3G1, Fairfax, VA 22030; 703-993-4213

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

- (1) Transfer the project to a new home at George Mason University;
- (2) Develop the technical infrastructure for delivering the papers online;
- (3) Complete the process of locating documents in additional archives and libraries;
- (4) Complete the digitization of approximately 7,500 remaining documents;
- (5) Enter basic metadata for approximately 11,000 remaining documents and link individual image files to these new records as well as 4,000 others that have not yet been linked;
- (6) Provide detailed finding information (including document abstracts) for 6,500 additional documents;
- (7) Launch a public, beta test bed for the online papers that would include one-quarter of the entire collection.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

1. Purpose and Goals of Project

The Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University (GMU) proposes to develop further and ultimately complete the ambitious project that has been launched and carried forward with great energy and success at East Stroudsburg University (ESU) under the leadership of Theodore Crackel and with support from NHPRC and other funders. The broad purpose remains the same as before: to make some 50,000 documents of the early War Department—many long thought irretrievable—available to scholars, students, and the general public. These documents will allow scholars to reassess and examine in new detail many events of the nation's early decades. Our major goals for the nineteen months covered by this proposal are: (1) transfer the project to a new home at GMU; (2) develop the technical infrastructure for delivering the papers online; (3) complete the process of locating documents in additional archives and libraries; (4) complete the digitization of approximately 7,500 remaining documents; (5) enter basic metadata for approximately 11,000 remaining documents and link individual image files to these new records as well as 4,000 others that have not yet been linked; (6) provide detailed finding information (including document abstracts) for 6,500 additional documents; (7) to launch a public, beta test bed for the online papers that would include one-quarter of the entire collection.

Purpose. We are working to provide scholars, students, and the general public with a uniquely valuable and heretofore inaccessible archive—the *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800*. Of all the federal departments created under the Constitution, the War Department had the broadest reach, and its records should have provided valuable insights into the history of the early years of the new republic. But a devastating fire that consumed the War Office in 1800

destroyed these records. In the two centuries since that fire, the story ended there. Now there is to be a new chapter. These important records have been reconstituted by bringing together some 50,000 documents (copies and originals) found through more than seven researcher-years of labor across the nation and overseas.

Work is now moving forward rapidly to prepare this unique and valuable archive for free, public access via the Internet. *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* will soon restore this important missing segment of the nation's documentary heritage. A new generation of scholars, using this resource, will be able to reassess earlier interpretations of this era in light of a vast new store of material. With no official War Department records available, historians up to now have had only that small portion of the record that is available in the American State Papers, the Territorial Papers, the Papers of the Continental Congress, the published papers of a few of the nation's founding fathers, and a limited number of important manuscript collections. *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* has cast a much wider net, examining more than 3,000 collections in more than 200 repositories (*see Appendix B*) in 31 states and 4 foreign countries. More than 700 other repositories were contacted by mail or e-mail.

Goals. Our goals are to offer unprecedented access to the documents we have found and to do so as expeditiously as possible. Initially, the project had planned to make the papers available on DVD-ROM but the spread of ubiquitous Internet access makes the World Wide Web the logical distribution medium for the papers. The low cost of bandwidth and storage means, moreover, that we will be able to offer the *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* free of charge to anyone with Internet access. We believe that this is the future of documentary editions, and we see this project as blazing a trail toward open access to the nation's documentary heritage—the first documentary edition project, as far as we know, to publish

solely on the web and to adopt a model of free public access to all of its products. Cost considerations make it impossible to offer fully transcribed versions of the documents. But keywords and phrases drawn from the text will allow a near-full-text search of the documents. Every person, organization, place, item, idea, issue, or action mentioned in the text will be entered in the content database. Digital images will be accessible through key word searches of both bibliographic entries (date, author, recipient, source, etc) and the documents' content.

2. Significance and Relationship to NHPRC Goals and Objectives

Significance. The significance of the *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800*, which reconstitutes the lost records of the early War Office, will be obvious for scholars of early national military history. But the *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* provide much more than the military record of the period. These documents will likely prove at least as valuable to students of economics, politics, and ethnic, gender, and family studies as they will to military historians. Military documents are rich in information with relevance far beyond the confines of military history. The changing ration and clothing allowances reveal much about the life of the common men in these years. The documents relating to the government contracts that furnish thousands of uniforms, shoes, weapons and other items shed new light on business organization and on the various associated trades. The commercial transport of supplies (and the recorded cost of such movements) yields a vast amount of unexploited economic data relative to the infrastructure of the new nation. The detailed record of the Army's contacts along the nation's borders illustrates many aspects of American foreign relations, and the chronicle of the War Department's day-to-day dealings with the Indians illuminates both the formation and execution of policy towards Native Americans. The documentary record of all this will be available in the

Papers of the War Department 1784-1800, thus filling one of the great gaps in the record of the early republic.

In the period 1784-1800, the War Department was responsible for Indian affairs, veteran affairs, naval affairs (until 1798), as well as militia and army matters. During the 1790s, the Secretary of War spent seven of every ten dollars of the federal budget (debt service excepted). The War Office did business with commercial firms and merchants all across the nation; it was the nation's largest single consumer of fabric, clothing, shoes, food, medicine, building materials, and weapons of all kinds. "Follow the money," it is said, if you want to learn what really happened, and in the early days of the Republic that money trail usually led to the War Office. For example, the War Department operated the nation's only federal social welfare program, providing veterans' benefits (including payments to widows and orphans) to more than 4,000 persons. It also provided internal security, governance, and diplomacy on the vast frontier, and it was the instrument that shaped relations with Native Americans. In many respects, the papers lost in the War Office fire of 1800 constituted the "national archives" of their time.

With the continued support of the NHPRC and other agencies (especially the Center for Military History), GMU and CHNM will soon make the recovered *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* available to scholars, teachers, genealogists, and the general public—and in an electronic format that combines digital images with a powerful search tool that will provide unprecedented intellectual access. In addition to the usual bibliographical entries such as date, author, recipient, and source, we will record for each document all names, places and things, ideas and events mentioned in the text. Researchers will be able to establish complex search criteria; one might, for example, ask to find all documents written in June 1797 by Secretary of War James McHenry to General James Wilkinson that mention either horses or rations or both

horses and rations. To ensure future orderly migration of the project files (image and text) to new storage mediums, to new platforms, and even to new applications, we will employ widely accepted, non-proprietary file formats —TIFF for images and ASCII for text. The database architecture for the project will similarly use open standards and open source software—in particular, MySQL and PHP—and present the images online as jpegs, which load much more quickly than TIFFs. And the entire collection will be served for free to a nation-wide audience via the World Wide Web.

“All the papers in my office [have] been destroyed,” wrote Secretary of War Samuel Dexter on November 19, 1800. On the night of November 8, a fire had burned all of the correspondence, records, and books in the War Office. For more than two hundred years they have been lost to scholars. The completion of the *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* will finally make the record of this wide-reaching government activity available.

Relationship to NHPRC Goals and Objectives. The *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* contributes to achieving NHPRC goals and objectives—most particularly its mission “to protect, publish, and otherwise make accessible historically significant records, and to improve the methods, tools, and training of professionals engaged in such documentary work.” As a project that was born digital, it also contributes to the Commission’s specific goal of “enabl[ing] the nation’s archivists, records managers, and documentary editors to overcome the obstacles and take advantage of the opportunities posed by electronic technologies by continuing to provide leadership in funding research and development on appraising, preserving, disseminating, and providing access to important documentary sources in electronic form.”

In digitally reconstituting the destroyed early records of the War Office, *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* will restore a critical segment of the nation’s lost documentary

heritage. The *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* is a ground-breaking effort to exploit the potential of the electronic delivery of documents and to provide free and open access to our documentary heritage. It will be a model of what can be done with today's technology to make documentary editions more "user-friendly" and, at the same time, more cost-effective and comprehensive. The project, thus, accords strongly NHPRC's goal of insuring "online access to...vital documentary sources" and "mak[ing] the best of the materials of these modern editions available to the widest possible audience."

3. Transfer of Project to GMU and Plan of Work

Transfer of Project (Why GMU?). The *Papers of the War Department* project finds itself at an exciting but perilous juncture. An enormous amount has been accomplished under the leadership of Theodore Crackel and his colleagues at ESU. Unfortunately, Crackel's departure in August 2004 to edit the George Washington Papers at the University of Virginia left the project without professional leadership, and there is not the support or staff to continue the project at ESU. The danger is that the project will be orphaned, and the huge investment of both time and money (much of this from NHPRC) in making these records available will be lost. In effect, these papers—first destroyed in the 1800 fire and then recovered and reconstructed through Crackel's dedicated efforts—could be lost a second time.

We believe, however, that transferring the project to GMU will allow the project to move toward an expeditious conclusion. GMU is very well positioned to match the high standard of work established for the War Department papers project at ESU. Indeed, perhaps uniquely among U.S. institutions, GMU combines the scholarly, technical, and institutional qualities necessary to complete the project in a professional and timely manner.

In terms of scholarship, GMU maintains a deep and long-standing commitment both to U.S. military history and the history of the early republic. Under the leadership of former professor Joe Harsh, a leading Civil War military historian, GMU built a reputation for rigorous and thoughtful military history, a reputation that will be extended with the hiring this year of Assistant Professors Christopher Hamner and Meredith Lair. As the War Department papers speak as much to the social, cultural, and economic history of the early republic, the successful completion of the project will also rely on scholarly expertise in additional areas in which GMU excels. In particular, the scholarship of Rosemarie Zagarri and Randolph Scully will bring a range of relevant perspectives to the editing and interpretation of the War Department papers (*see Appendix A for CVs for these GMU faculty who will serve on the Advisory Board*).

In terms of the technical experience required by the War Department papers project, GMU brings an extraordinary breadth of both traditional historical editing experience and digital history experience to the table. The project will benefit from Professor Jane Censer's specialized period knowledge and her decade-long experience as a historical editor for the *Frederick Law Olmsted Papers* at American University, where she oversaw the publication of several published volumes. In addition, GMU's graduate program has included historical editing as part of its curriculum for more than two decades. We offer a regular course in editing taught by Charlene Bickford and Ken Bowling, the editors of the First Federal Congress Papers Project. That course provides us with a large cadre of graduate students who could potentially assist on this project.

Of particular importance, CHNM provides deep experience in and commitment to work in digital and online history. Since 1994, CHNM has used digital media and computer technology to democratize history—to incorporate multiple voices, reach diverse audiences, and encourage popular participation in presenting and preserving the past. CHNM maintains more

than a dozen online history projects directed at diverse topics and audiences, making them available at no cost through its website. Among these are several projects directly relevant to the *Papers of the War Department*. These fall into three categories. First, CHNM has extensive experience assembling, maintaining large digital archives and databases. CHNM's *September 11 Digital Archive*, for example, has collected, catalogued, and preserved more than 150,000 digital objects related to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and in 2003, the archive was accepted as the Library of Congress' first major digital acquisition. Other database and digital archival projects currently under way include the *Critical Infrastructure Oral History and Digital Archive* project, funded by the National Institute of Standards of Technology and the *Business Plan Archive*, a partnership with the University of Maryland and the Internet Archive funded by the Library of Congress's National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP).

Second, CHNM has made a mark as an innovator in designing and building historical data mining tools and search engines. Among these tools are *H-Bot*, a web-based software tool that allows users to type straightforward questions about historical dates, events, or people to conduct a focused and algorithmically filtered search of the Internet to find the answer, and *Syllabus Finder*, which mines Google databases for course syllabi on virtually any topic.

Third, CHNM has long been a leader in online historical education and public programming, and its *History Matters*, *World History Matters*, and *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* projects reach an audience of millions each year. Under GMU's leadership, *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* would fall to the executive management of CHNM's Director, Roy Rosenzweig, a pioneer in digital history and winner of the National Humanities Center's Lyman Award for innovative use of information technology in humanistic scholarship and teaching, and to Tom Scheinfeldt, CHNM's Assistant Director.

Finally, in terms of institutional support, both the Department of History and Art History and CHNM promise rich environs for *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800*. Often drawing upon students with professional experience in the historical and cultural institutions of the Washington, D.C. area, GMU's History graduate programs have experienced tremendous growth in the past decade. The M.A. program is the largest such program in the country, and in only its fourth year, the Ph.D. program was recently ranked 51st in the nation by U.S. News and World Report. Both programs include courses in historical editing, archival methods, and digital history, meaning GMU graduate research assistants will bring a unique combination of academic training and work experience to the War Department Papers project. Likewise, CHNM has significantly expanded its operations in recent years, now employing nearly thirty staff members and working under an annual budget of more than \$1.3 million. With the help of an NEH Challenge Grant, CHNM has raised a \$2 million endowment, which provides a stable, long-term financial base for the project. With the help of an Academic Excellence Equipment Award from Sun Microsystems, CHNM maintains a secure, state-of-the-art server, which will be used for this project.

Work Plan. The project will build on a strong base established by ESU. They have accomplished a great deal with modest funding over the past decade. Most notable of those accomplishments has been the remarkably successful effort to locate the lost papers of the War Department in dozens of collections across the country. Although the departure of Crackel in August 2004 has slowed work on the project in the past year, ESU has still made considerable progress. Of the approximately 50,000 documents located, approximately 39,000 have been both scanned into digital form and have had basic bibliographic metadata (Data Entry I) created

within the database. Much more extensive descriptive metadata (Data Entry II) has been added for approximately 12 percent of the collection (6,000 documents).

The first step by the GMU team will be to carry out the transfer of the project to the new location. That includes the physical relocation of the paper documents and files of the project as well as the digital files and database and the establishment of an office on the Fairfax campus. But even more important is the transfer of intellectual and editorial control over the project. Fortunately, Crackel has generously offered his help (without compensation) in this difficult process. An important part of this process will be a detailed assessment of the overall state of the project, including a review of the quality of the digital files and the metadata that has already been created and entered. We will produce an internal report on the state of the project as part of this phase of the work, which we expect will last approximately three months. During that time, we will also be filling out the project staff, in particular hiring the project's managing editor.

The next two phases of the project—technical and editorial—will be carried out in tandem rather than in sequence. The technical work on the project will start with building a new database architecture for the project. The project files currently reside in a Microsoft Access database, which has served the project well so far, but which is not robust enough to provide public access over the web. CHNM has considerable experience with online databases and will build an infrastructure using the open source MySQL database. Then, we will transfer the records from the existing database to the new one. Finally, we will write the middleware (using the open source programming language, PHP), focusing initially on creating an administrative and editorial interface to allow editors to work on the documents directly online. When that is completed, we will shift to creating the interface and programming for serving the papers to the

web. The goal would be to have a working beta of the site and the database infrastructure by the end of the nineteen-month grant period.

In this technical side of the project, we will be starting from scratch since that was a phase of the project that had not been begun at ESU. In the editorial work, however, we will be building directly on the work already accomplished there and we will be following the template set out by them. There are three main tasks, but they will be carried out simultaneously rather than sequentially.

First, we need to complete the work of locating relevant documents that have not yet been added to the collection. The most time-consuming work involves a systematic search of era newspapers, which often published War Department documents, especially letters. Additional documents (some requested previously but never delivered; others we have more recently learned about) need to be gathered and scanned from the Massachusetts State Archives, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Harrington Library in Pittsburgh, and the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. In addition, the Continental Congress Papers need to be systematically searched for relevant War Department records.

Second, we need to finish the digital scanning, image processing, and basic data entry for approximately 11,000 documents. These documents include many of the previously unreported documents from the National Archives, a miscellaneous group of documents for which scanning and data entry was postponed for a variety of reasons, and the new documents that still need to be located and added to the collection. For example, ESU held off on digitizing materials from the Henry Knox Papers in the hope that a better quality microfilm would become available (or they would get permission to scan the originals). Of these 11,000 documents that need to be processed, approximately 3,500 have already been digitized but have not had basic metadata

added; the rest need both image processing and basic data entry. In addition, we need to link individual image files to these 11,000 new records as well as 4,000 others that have not yet been linked

Third (and most important and most time consuming) is the content data entry or what the project has called "Data Entry II." This process entails creating an abstract or gist of the document, including drawing from each document the key words and phrases (especially names, groups, places, issues, and ideas) that will empower users with a near-full-text search capability. This is a labor-intensive task, and with documents written in so many (often difficult) hands there are no shortcuts. This is one of the project's most critical efforts, for it is this that will allow the detailed user searches that make our product so unique. It is also a vital quality control step in the project. Undergraduate students did much of the initial basic, data entry and it, not surprisingly, contains errors. The editors doing the content data entry will be responsible for checking the basic metadata that has already been completed as well as insuring that there are no multiple copies of the same document and that the data records and image files are correctly linked. So far, most such quality control checks have found that the records are in good shape, but the project has also learned that error correction is a very time-consuming process. Given the substantial work in completing the gathering, scanning, and data entry for the remaining documents, the time involved in carefully assessing the work already complete and building and establishing a new office and staff, and the time-consuming nature of the content data entry, we estimate that we will only be able to complete Data Entry II for 6,500 documents in the nineteenth months of this grant. Naturally, work will accelerate in the subsequent phases of the project, and we estimate the project will be fully completed in an additional four years beyond this grant period, if we receive adequate funding. Such estimates are, of course, based on what

we have been told by ESU about the state of the collection and the time that they have estimated for different work processes. We will have to confirm this against the full and careful audit of the collection that we will undertake when we come into possession of the project.

An additional area of editorial work is the creation of supporting materials such as a biographical directory of key military and political figures who appear in these papers. Although this will not be a major focus of the project, it is something that will be important to making the collection useful and accessible to the widest audience. But we will not be undertaking that work in this phase of the project funding.

Finally, because this project will extend beyond the proposed grant period and because we are planning on making this material permanently available for free, it is important to say something about the long-term sustainability of the project. We are confident about the project's future because we have commitments of support from both GMU and the Center for Military History (CMH). (*See letters in Appendix D.*) GMU is making a substantial cost-sharing commitment to the project both during and after the nineteen-month proposed funding period. That includes not only the formal cost sharing shown on the budget (e.g., staff time and indirect costs) but also office space, server space, website maintenance, and storage space for documents in the GMU Library. Moreover, both the College of Arts and Science and the Library have made a long-term commitment beyond the initial grant period. The Center for History and New Media is also committed to the project, and it has a \$2 million endowment that provides a long-term stable funding base for its operations. Even when the project is fully complete and there are no more grant funds, we are committed to keeping the website running. We estimate the long-term maintenance costs to be modest and well within our current funding from our endowment and the university.

Further guaranteeing the future of the project is the generous support that the CMH will be providing to the project (*see Appendix D for letter*). Subject to the Commission decision to transfer the project to GMU and provide funding, CMH is committed to providing approximately \$90,000 per year to the project for at least the next five years. In addition, they would be willing to take over the hosting of the project if for any reason GMU was not able to maintain it. As part of our long-term planning for the project, we will also begin addressing issues of digital preservation. Fortunately, CHNM's participation in the Library of Congress's NDIIP project puts in close touch with the latest developments in digital preservation. But in addition to working to insure the permanence of the digital files, we will consider creating a digital microfilm of all of the project files as a back-up copy.

The chart on the next page lays out in the work plan visually for easy reference.