

PROJECT SUMMARY

I. Purposes and Goals of the Project

The long-term goal of *Papers of the War Department 1784-1800* is to collect and present digital copies of the papers that were destroyed by fire in the War Office in 1800, offering more than 45,000 documents long believed unrecoverable online as high-resolution images linked to a fully-searchable database. The project staff at the George Mason University's Center for History and New Media has made substantial progress toward those goals over the past fifteen years. Digital copies of all the correspondence have been collected into a single robust database. The website <wardepartmentpapers.org>, which launched in 2008, currently makes more than half of the collection visible with simple name and date searches, and the entire collection will be accessible online via those name and date searches by June of 2010.

This proposal seeks funding to undertake a critical remaining part of the project: entering the detailed finding data that will allow researchers, teachers, and scholars to search the documents using the powerful and flexible search engine built by the technical staff at the Center for History and New Media. Simple name and date searches enable scholars who know exactly what document they are looking for to locate it; the addition of detailed search data will allow researchers to search for people, places, things, events, and ideas in the entire collection, and to prioritize their searches in any number of ways. Detailed finding data also includes a one-sentence summary of a given document, allowing scholars to quickly determine the nature of the documents returned in their searches—whether a given hit is a pay receipt, a letterbook, or an internal War Department report, for example, and what its contents contain.

The addition of the detailed finding data to be funded through this grant will make the entire collection exponentially more useful and more accessible to scholars, teachers, and students. By enabling site visitors to search on any number of terms and to prioritize their searches according to their interests, rendering the database searchable will open the collection to scholars outside the narrow field of early American military history. And it will realize the vision the project's founders began with more than fifteen years ago, making this unique collection of documents long thought lost available to a wide audience: a digital reconstruction of America's first "national archive."

II. Plan of Work for the Grant Period

Over the three years of the grant, project staff will input detailed finding data for 24,000 documents, roughly half of the collection, into the database. In each year, project staff will enter the search data for 8,000 documents and incorporate that data into the project's database, linking search terms to the high-resolution documents that already exist there. This is careful and painstaking work; extracting the relative data requires an Assistant Editor to read the documents, individually and closely, extracting the names, dates, places, things, events, and ideas contained within. The final step in the data entry process is drafting a brief summary of the document to help researchers evaluate their search results more efficiently.

III. Products and Publications to be completed during the Grant Period

The data entered under this grant will be available to users through the website. The online nature of the edition allows us to make updates in real time: each day, as the Assistant Editors finish their work, the new finding data is immediately incorporated into the database.

Real-time updates means that the collection will continue to grow, and to become more useful to visitors, each day. Over the three years of the grant, the project will enter finding data for 24,000 documents, roughly half of the entire collection.

IV. Contact Information for Project Directors

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V. Performance Objectives

Our goal under the auspices of this grant is to enter detailed search data for 24,000 of the documents in the collection—roughly half of the total—and to incorporate that information into our online database.

- Year one: enter detailed finding data for 8,000 documents; incorporate the new data into the existing database and publish it online
- Year two: enter detailed finding data for 8,000 documents; incorporate the new data into the existing database and publish it online
- Year three: enter detailed finding data for 8,000 documents; incorporate the new data into the existing database and publish it online