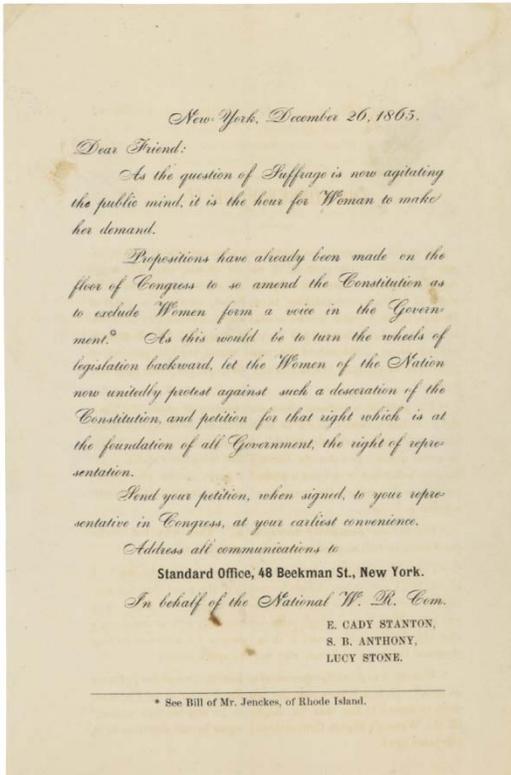


OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Women's Suffrage Petition, 1865
Image courtesy of National
Archives and Records Administration

“Propositions have already been made on the floor of Congress to so amend the Constitution as to exclude Women from a voice in the Government. As this would be to turn to the wheels of legislation backward, let the Women of the Nation now unitedly protest against such a desecration of the Constitution, and petition for the right which is at the foundation of all Government, the right of representation.”

— Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, December 26, 1865

The Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives is the custodian for all noncurrent official records. The records generated by House committees document not only the public proceedings of committees, such as hearings and legislation, but the “behind the scenes” work of staff, constituents, and lobbying groups. House Records capture the work of committees that document important legislative chapters in United States history.

FAST FACTS

- **House Rule VII**

House Rule VII requires committees to archive their records with the Office of the Clerk. This rule has been in effect since the 101st Congress (1989–1991).

- **Early Records Lost**

In August 1814, when the British set fire to the Capitol during the War of 1812, clerks were unable to remove papers from the burning building. Some of the records destroyed include the last volumes of the records of the Committees of Ways and Means, Claims and Pensions, and Revolutionary Claims, and the “secret journal” of Congress containing the confidential proceedings, which were eventually published by order of the House.

- **Location**

The Center for Legislative Archives of the National Archives and Records Administration stores, preserves, and makes official House Records accessible to the public. House Records have been stored at the National Archives on Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown Washington, D.C., since 1946. Before 1946, the records of the House were stored several locations, including the Capitol Building and the Cannon House Office Building, often in less-than-ideal conditions for valuable historic documents.

- **Number of House Records**

There are more than 740,000 cubic feet of House Records stored at the Center for Legislative Archives, which amounts to more than 1 billion pages of records, dating back to 1789.

- **Number of House Records Transferred**

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- **Examples of Official Records**

Types of official records generated by committees include files related to hearings held by the committees; legislation, executive communications, petitions, and memorials referred to the committee; material related to oversight and investigations under the committee’s jurisdiction; and “working files,” such as background material, research, memos, and correspondence.

- **Ownership**

Unlike executive branch agencies that transfer their noncurrent records to the National Archives, House Records always remain the property of the House.

- **Access**

House Records are closed to the public for 30 years from the date of their creation and for 50 years in cases where the records contain sensitive information. After this time period, the records are publicly accessible and can be used by researchers.

- **Member’s Papers**

The records of Members of Congress remain the personal property of Representatives and Senators. Members often donate records to repositories at a college or university.

TEACHING TIP

Analyzing primary sources: Select a document from the [image gallery](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/gallery.html) on the Center for Legislative Archive's Web site (<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/gallery.html>).

- Have students review the document and answer the following questions:
 - Who created the document?
 - When was it created?
 - What does it say?
 - Does the document have any notable features?

- Next, have students reflect on the document by asking them to rephrase its message in their own words.

- Discuss ways to do further primary resource research to answer any questions the document raises.