

COUNCIL ON HISTORY IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

December 3, 1979

Dear Colleague,

In order to further historical programs in the federal government, a Conference for Federal Historians met on September 13, 1979. On that occasion an ad hoc group proposed the formation of a steering committee to investigate the professional needs and organizational future of federal historians, archivists, curators, and editors. This proposal was overwhelmingly approved by the approximately 150 conference attendees. Thereupon, on October 16, interested individuals from various agencies and constituencies in the Washington, D.C. area organized themselves into a steering committee. The committee discussed the purpose, functions, membership, and structure of an association to be known as the "Council on History in the Federal Government."

We believe that such an organization can engage in a number of activities within the federal government. In no particular order, possible activities include (1) educating both the general public and senior government officials about the manner in which historical programs can contribute to governmental organizations (2) addressing the question of professional standards for government historians (3) seeking a larger role in professional societies (4) working with the Office of Personnel Management to rewrite the job classification series of federal historians (5) recommending guidelines for the organization and operation of historical programs (6) assisting in the identification and preservation of historically significant documents (7) serving as a clearinghouse for information about job possibilities (8) publishing a newsletter to exchange information of common concern, and (9) holding conferences on a regular basis. Five committees have been established to explore in greater detail these and other activities.

Whatever functions the organization finally undertakes, it will not succeed without strong support from a large, active membership. The Council considers that its first priority is to gauge what measure of support can be anticipated from those concerned with history in the federal government. We recognize that these professionals perform a wide variety of functions, including editing, providing reference and consulting services, writing histories for the general public, preparing classified studies,

preserving records, manuscripts, buildings, and artifacts, mounting exhibits, evaluating grant proposals, and administering archival and historical programs. Indeed, one of our aims is to identify common concerns within this great diversity. We would therefore be grateful if you would complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me by January 1, 1980.

We will use these questionnaires to learn the directions and goals that potential members of the Council desire to pursue. The committee then anticipates calling a general meeting of the organization to be held in spring. Meanwhile, the committee will draft proposed by-laws for presentation to the membership.

Our mailing list is extensive but inevitably incomplete. If you have friends or colleagues who might be interested in this organization, please make copies of this letter and questionnaire and pass them along.

Sincerely,

Jack M. Holl
Chairperson,
Council on History in
the Federal Government