

GERALD R. FORD

PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES
FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

THE GERALD R. FORD LIBRARY AND MUSEUM



Former President Ford addresses guests at the dedication of the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, MI, on September 17, 1981.

The Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum are separated by 130 miles but joined in a common program under one director. The library/archives is on the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan, Ford's 1935 alma mater. The museum overlooks a city park on the Grand River in Grand Rapids, MI, where Ford grew to adulthood and won repeated election to Congress.

The separation is unique among the nation's Presidential libraries. It is a compromise between competing claims on Ford's loyalties and affections, certainly, but the split location is an experiment as well. The experiment is in the use of two sites to

better accomplish the twin missions of every Presidential library. A museum excites interest and learning about American history and public affairs through exhibits and other popular programs. Nearly 40 million people have visited Presidential museums over the years. An archives, by contrast, provides the raw information that people need to interpret their past, chart their future, and hold their government accountable. Although millions benefit indirectly when archival material is distilled into books, news stories, and television programs, an archives is by nature a place for quiet analysis.

Both buildings were built with private funds and opened to the public in 1981. The National Archives maintains the buildings and runs the programs, but it relies on the Gerald R. Ford Foundation and other partners to fund special programs such as research grants and new exhibits.

THE LIBRARY IN ANN ARBOR

The Ford Library's research room seats only 15 at full capacity, but the patrons are surprisingly diverse, as a recent autumn illustrated. Scholars from Britain, Canada, Israel, and Germany photocopied stacks of documents to carry home for analysis. While graduate students cast hesitantly for material on the Turkish invasion of Cyprus or agricultural price supports, a former Director of Central Intelligence zeroed in on



Scholars, students, and patrons examine documents in the library's research room.

specific files for his memoirs. A journalist examined files that helped him explain would-be assassin Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme as an icon for the failure of 1960s social protest.

Not all of the autumn researchers were writing books, articles, and papers. Memorandums on the space program pleased a local engineer on an extended lunch hour, and dozens of wary undergraduates filtered in and out to complete a 3-hour archival exercise for their class, "Information Sources for the Mass Media." The Ford Library's director, meanwhile, led a semester-long political science seminar on the various ways Presidents organize and manage their staffs.

Many people use the library without setting foot in it. By the end of a given year, archivists will have answered over a thousand requests for information or reproductions from callers and correspondents all over the world. The queries will have come from magazine and television production staffs, the White House and Congress, public schools and private homes, renowned institutions, and earnest doctoral students.

The focus of these interests is nearly 20 million original historical paper and audio-visual items—option memorandums, meeting minutes, campaign plans, telephone

notes, correspondence, photographs, films, videotapes, and more. There is even a long telegram on economic policy from a then-obscure and unsuccessful Arkansas congressional candidate, Bill Clinton. Most of the material, enough to fill several moving vans, was written or received by the hundreds of men and women who worked in the Ford White House complex between 1974 and 1977. Other material dates from Ford's long career in Congress and brief term as Vice President.

Starting in 1977 and continuing to the present, Ford Library staff have added millions of pages of related material, often donated by individuals who value the way history enriches the future. The library shelves have gained such material as an unpublished memoir of human rights policy, dozens of research interviews, and a private diary of the Nixon-Ford transition.

The result is an immense information trove on the 1970s, a decade rich in drama and consequence. A generation of domestic politics echoes from the resignation of Richard Nixon, the post-Watergate assertiveness of Congress and the press, Ronald Reagan's run for the 1976 Republican nomination, and Ford's appointments of George Bush as envoy to China and then as Director of Central Intelligence. The vivid collapse of Saigon, the Helsinki

Accords on human rights and national boundaries in Eastern Europe, and the shock of the Arab oil embargo helped shape foreign policy for years to come. Mrs. Ford's support of the Equal Rights Amendment or President Ford's war-by-veto against federal spending prefigured social and economic issues of later years.

The library is more than a place for storing 20 million documents and seating those who would read them. The library is really a bundle of programs designed to make the gargantuan mass of paper and film truly accessible. Archivists provide expert advice and practical assistance in finding information that people want, and nothing illustrates this better than PRESNET. An automated database with a precision that is unsurpassed in the archival profession, PRESNET describes about 50,000 folder titles of historical material, helping the public quickly locate material on any topic.

Description and reference, however, come only after a long process. Archivists first locate, acquire, and organize materials. Archivists also find and temporarily restrict certain kinds of information—national security classified and investigative information, for example, or material that could clearly cause an invasion of an individual's privacy. These decisions can be highly controversial, and the review process takes a large chunk of staff time.

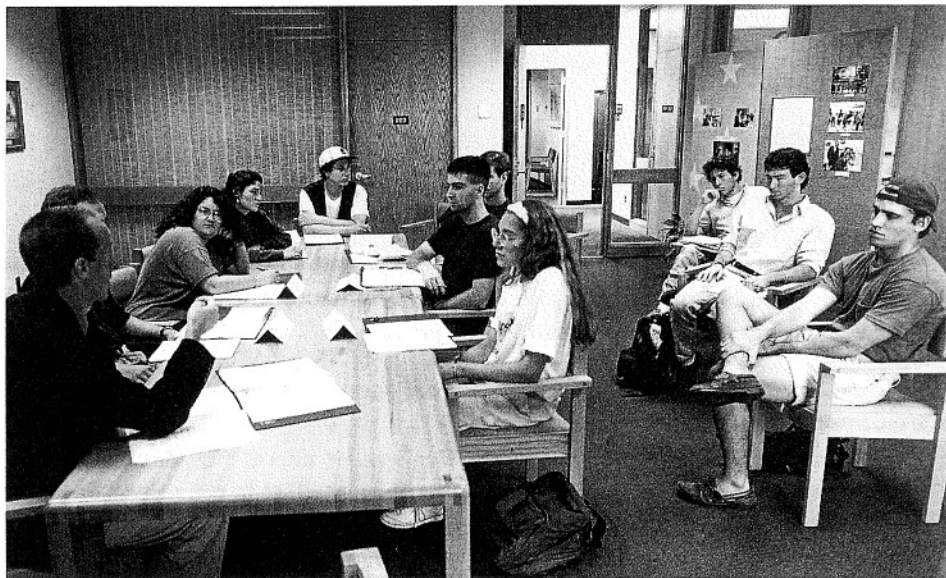
The sensitivity and complexity of "archival processing" require archivists to



master the history of the period. They study the politics, policies, and the policy-makers. At the Ford Library, different staff members concentrate on such tasks as acquisitions, preservation, security declassification, automated systems, audiovisual materials, reference, and teaching.

These activities take place in an attractive building on the University of Michigan's North Campus, a sort of suburban annex linked by frequent commuter buses to the Central Campus in downtown Ann Arbor. A low-lying brick and bronze-tinted glass structure with abundant natural lighting and oak trim, it has proven a pleasant and functional home since 1980.

The library is devoted first to the care and use of its historical materials, but its attractive lobby and auditorium spaces make it a popular site for small-scale academic events and public programs co-sponsored by the Gerald R. Ford Foundation and other groups. Although the library hosts a variety of events each year, the focus of public programming is at the Museum in Grand Rapids, MI.



TOP: Before taping the library's televised conference "The Presidency and the Constitution," moderator Fred Friendly warms up the panel, which included (left to right) Attorney General Edwin Meese, Dan Rather, Gary Sick, Stansfield Turner, and Representative Dick Cheney.

BOTTOM: Library Director Frank Mackaman teaches a class on the 1976 campaign to University of Michigan honor students. Undergraduates compose the majority of the library's patrons.