



# National Archives and Records Administration

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## *Congressional Committees on the District of Columbia, 1808–1946*

The U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 8) empowers Congress to exercise exclusive management and legislative control over the national seat of government. The Federal Government moved to the District of Columbia on December 1, 1800. On January 27, 1808, the U.S. House of Representatives created the Committee on the District of Columbia, which considered all petitions and memorials referred directly to the House relating to the affairs of the District. The committee also assumed oversight of legislation regarding the administration and development of the District. (Previously, specific matters relating to the District of Columbia were handled by temporary select committees, or the Committee of the Whole.)

The U.S. Senate followed with its own Committee on the District of Columbia on December 18, 1816. In addition to specific District matters, the Senate committee also considered national issues that affected the District, such as temperance, slavery, public health, taxes and sales taxes, and amendments to criminal and corporate law. Both the Senate and House committees also dealt with private claims relating to residents from the District.

The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 transferred many responsibilities (such as private claims legislation) from both Committees on the District of Columbia to other committees, and reduced the amount of records created. Petitions and memorials, for example, fell to a minimum. In 1977, the Senate merged its Committee on the District of Columbia into the newly formed Committee on Governmental Affairs. The House Committee on the District of Columbia eventually merged with the Committee on Government Reform.

### **Types of Committee Records**

The records of the Committees on the District of Columbia in both chambers of Congress from 1808 to 1946 fall into several basic series:

- **Committee Minute Books** (House only): Bound volumes that document the dates and times of committee meetings, members present, measures discussed, and decisions made.
- **Legislative Dockets**: Bound volumes that list entries for petitions, resolutions, or bills referred to the committees, usually arranged by subject matter.
- **Committee Papers**: Miscellaneous records that may include petitions and memorials, legislative case files, subject files, manuscript committee reports and unprinted hearing transcripts, copies of printed bills, correspondence, and executive communications.
- **Committee Papers and Reports** (Senate only): Original committee reports, and other papers related to specific bills, resolutions, and petitions, arranged chronologically by Congress.
- **Petitions and Memorials**: Petitions and memorials from individuals, groups, organizations, and resolutions of state legislatures, referred to the committees. These records contain the most useful information about individuals and local history issues. They are usually arranged chronologically or by subject matter for each Congress. Petitions and memorials relating to individuals are arranged alphabetically.

## Access to the Records

1. The Center for Legislative Archives in the National Archives Building has custody of the records of the U.S. Congress. The records of the Committee on the District of Columbia for both the Senate and House fall respectively within the **Records of the United States Senate (Record Group 46)** and the **Records of the United States House of Representatives (Record Group 233)**. Most of the records exist in textual form.
2. Most reports issued by the House and Senate Committees on the District of Columbia are published in the multivolume *American State Papers* and the *U.S. Congressional Serial Set*. The *American State Papers* contains published congressional documents from 1789 to 1838, arranged according to 10 topical classes or series. The volumes in each class usually include a section on **Reports of Committees**. An alphabetical index at the end of each volume will identify the reports and documents that relate to the District of Columbia.
3. The *Serial Set* comprises a compilation of congressional documents published since 1817, including reports related to bills and resolutions sent from committees to the House or Senate floors. Documents and reports are arranged by Congress according to several publication class series. The series **House Reports** and **Senate Reports** generally contain reports submitted by committees. Subject indexes appear in each volume of the *Serial Set* from 1817 to 1897. Documents and reports can generally be located using the volume or serial number.
4. The following microfilm publications also reproduce records relating to the House and Senate Committees on the District of Columbia from the early Congresses:

\_\_\_M1267, *Transcribed Reports of the Committees of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–1841*. 15 rolls. DP. The transcribed reports document actions taken on matters referred to the committees and final disposition of issues by the entire House. **Roll 5** contains reports from the Committee on the District of Columbia for the 10th through 27th Congresses (1807–1841).

\_\_\_M1256, *Transcribed Reports of Committees of the U.S. Senate, 1817–1827*. 2 rolls. DP. Bound volumes of committee reports arranged chronologically by the date they were presented on the Senate floor. There is no index to these records.

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