

An Overview of the U.S. Congressional Serial Set

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Last revised in October, 2006

The U.S. Serial Set is a bound series of over 14,000 volumes and contains within it nearly all of the hundreds of thousands of numbered congressional reports and documents published since 1817. The numbered documents and reports include many executive branch and legislative branch publications and until 1953, the *Serial Set* also included the official House and Senate journals.

Original and Current Authorization

Historically, the *Serial Set* began with a December 8, 1813, House Order, which stated: "Ordered, That, henceforward, all Messages and communications from the President of the United States; all letters and reports from the several departments of the Government; all motions and resolutions offered for the consideration of the House; all reports of committees of the House; and all other papers which, in the usual course of proceeding, or by special order of the House shall be printed in octavo fold, and separately from the Journals - shall have their pages numbered in one continued series of numbers, commencing and terminating with each session" (v. 9 *Journal of the House of Representatives*, pages 166-167).

There were also many subsequent orders and resolutions on the matter and a continuous series of page numbers per session was dropped in favor of the original pagination on each document. The current legal authority for the *U.S. Congressional Serial Set* can be found at the following cites in the U.S. Code:

44 U.S.C. Sec. 701 - "Usual number" of documents and reports; distribution of House and Senate documents and reports; binding; reports on private bills; number of copies printed; distribution.

44 U.S.C. Sec. 719 - Classification and numbering of publications ordered printed by Congress; designation of publications of departments; printing of committee hearings.

44 U.S.C. Sec. 738 - Binding of publications for distribution to libraries.

Contents of the *Serial Set*

The *Serial Set* is a somewhat changing composite of almost all House and Senate reports and documents published since 1817. It generally includes committee reports related to bills and other matters, presidential communications to Congress, treaty materials, certain executive department publications, and certain non-governmental publications.

The *Serial Set* does not normally include the text of congressional debates, bills, resolutions, hearings, committee prints, and publications from support agencies of Congress such as the Government Accountability Office and the Congressional Budget Office. However, by special order some 300 selected committee hearings were included, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Until 1952, the *Serial Set* included House and Senate journals of proceedings, even though these were not issued as documents or reports.

From their inception the *Serial Set* has always included House and Senate numbered reports including committee reports related to legislation, joint House and Senate conference reports related to legislation, and reports on other matters.

Committee reports related to legislation frequently accompany bills and resolutions that are sent from a committee to the House or Senate floor. These reports generally try to advance the case for the bill's consideration and explain its content. The text of the legislation, how it affects current law, or its budget implications may also be included.

Joint conference reports are almost always printed as House reports and are numbered in sequence with other House reports. Conference reports contain the agreed upon text between conferees of the House and Senate who have passed different versions of the same legislation. Also, the conference report will usually have a joint explanatory statement or an explanation from the managers of the bill. Committee reports and conference reports are two of the primary legislative history research documents used by lawyers, federal agencies, and the courts in deciphering the legislative intent of various laws.

Committee reports not directly related to legislation may include legislative activity reports, reports on special studies or investigations, reports on the printing of documents, and other matters.

The *Serial Set* has always included House and Senate numbered documents. These document series are the ones that have varied the most over time with some of their varying content is listed below.

The *Serial Set* has always included Presidential messages and documents sent to Congress such as proposed legislation, vetoes, the *Economic Report of the President*, and others, but it does not include presidential proclamations and executive orders. Presidential communications may be numbered as House or Senate documents.

Beginning in 1879 though 1976 the *Serial Set* included the Census Bureau's annual Statistical Abstract of the United States (numbered as a House document).

Beginning in 1882 and ending in 1933 the *Serial Set* included the biennial Congressional Directory (numbered as a House document).

Beginning in 1896 the *Serial Set* included and continues to include House and Senate procedure manuals and financial expenditure reports from the Secretary of the Senate (1916 to current) and the Clerk of the House (1896 to 1931 and 1975 to current). These are respectively numbered as Senate and House documents.

Beginning in fiscal year 1923 the *Serial Set* includes the annual the Budget of the United States Government with any appendices and supplemental publications (numbered as House documents).

Beginning in 1979 the *Serial Set* began including Senate Treaty Documents (until 1981 they were call Senate Executive Documents and had been assigned alphabetically arranged letters instead of numbers) and Senate Executive Reports, which recommend approval or disapproval of certain treaties or nominations.

The *Serial Set* has included a changing composite of executive branch publications, such as the agriculture yearbook (1894-1975), the minerals yearbook (1932-1968), annual reports of the public health service (1913-1952), patent decisions (1925-1953), foreign relations papers (1895-1955 and compilations from 1789-1901), geological surveys (1832-1945), reports on rivers and harbors (1817-1982), annual reports from various federal agencies (1817-1976), and other documents. These are usually numbered as House documents, but sometimes as Senate documents. Except for Presidential communications and the annual report

of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance Funds ("Social Security Trust Fund" - 1942 to current) few executive department publications are continued in the *Serial Set* today.

Finally, the *Serial Set* has always included various federally chartered corporation publications, such as the annual reports of the Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution, the annual report of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the proceedings of the national convention of the American Legion, the proceedings of the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and other publications (numbered as House or Senate documents).

Arrangement of the *Serial Set*

Since 1979 the arrangement of publication class series within a congressional session is organized according to the following pattern: Senate Documents, Senate Treaty Documents (until 1981 they were called Senate Executive Documents), Senate Reports, Senate Executive Reports, House Documents, and House Reports. Within each publication series the individually numbered reports and documents all generally follow a numeric ascending order and each publication class has its own volume or volumes.

Between 1953 and 1978 (83rd Congress to 95th Congress) the publication class series within a congressional session was organized according to the following pattern: Senate Reports (broken into three categories: miscellaneous reports on public bills, miscellaneous reports on private bills, and reports on special topics), House Reports (broken into three categories: miscellaneous reports on public bills, miscellaneous reports on private bills, and reports on special topics), Senate Documents, and House Documents. Because Senate reports and House reports were broken into subdivisions, the numeric ascending order of individually numbered reports within those volumes were also broken up.

Between 1902 and 1952 (57th Congress to 82nd Congress) the publication class series within a congressional session was organized according to the following pattern: Senate Journal, House Journal, Senate Reports (broken into three categories: miscellaneous reports on public bills, miscellaneous reports on private bills, and reports on special topics), House Reports (broken into three categories: miscellaneous reports on public bills, miscellaneous reports on private bills, and reports on special topics), Senate Documents, and House Documents.

Again, because of subdivisions in the Senate and House report series, the numeric order of the individually numbered reports was also broken up.

Between 1895 and 1902 (54th Congress to 56th Congress) the publication class series within a congressional session was generally organized according to the following pattern: Senate Journal, Senate Documents, Senate Reports, House Journal, House Documents, and House Reports.

Between 1847 and 1895 (30th Congress to 53rd Congress) the publication class series within a congressional session was organized according to the following pattern: Senate Journal, Senate Executive Documents (generally periodic reports from Executive Departments and related matters), Senate Miscellaneous Documents (generally other executive and legislative branch material included by special request), Senate Reports (generally reports from committee), House Journal, House Executive Documents (generally periodic reports from executive departments, but not in duplication of Senate Executive Documents, House Miscellaneous Documents (generally other executive branch material included by special request), and House Reports (generally reports from committees)

Between 1817 and 1847 (15th Congress to 29th Congress) the publication class series within a congressional session was organized according to the following pattern: Senate Journal, Senate Documents, House Journal, House Documents, and House Reports (begun in 1820, 16th Congress).

The *American State Papers*, published privately between 1832 and 1861, is a collection of executive and legislative branch documents dating between 1789 and 1838. Although not a part of the *Serial Set* numbering scheme the *Papers* are often associated with it and were published according to subject class not according to congressional session. The subject classes of the publication series are as follows: Claims, Commerce and Navigation, Finance, Foreign Relations, Indian Affairs, Military Affairs, Naval Affairs, Post Office Department, Public Lands, and Miscellaneous.

Numbering Schemes in the *Serial Set*

Generally, each document or report has its own numeric pagination so that *Serial Set* volumes containing more than one document or report would have more than one series of sequential numbers. Sequential pagination plans for a whole publication class in a congressional session was dropped at the very outset.

Each publication series of reports and documents has its own internal ascending numeric sequence with a unique number given for each document or report within a particular Congress or a particular congressional session. Until about 1854 (33rd Congress), the document or report number would appear on each page of the document or report. Until the early 20th century both House and Senate documents were numbered by session and House reports were numbered by session until 1881. Senate reports have always been numbered by Congress and all other publication series are now numbered by Congress as well.

Before 1979 session volume numbers were assigned to each publication series within each congressional session, with the documents and reports for each publication series generally bound together in ascending numeric sequence. A publication series might have a number of volumes within a series for a congressional session or it might have only one. Title pages with session volume numbers can be seen on most all the *Serial Set* volumes between 1854 and 1980. A table of contents page at the beginning of each volume with more than one document or report lists the sequential numbers and document or report titles which that volume contains.

In the past odd sized or extra long documents were frequently assigned their own session volume number and placed at the end of a publication series, out of numeric sequence, and the *Serial Set* volumes followed this practice. Also, between 1905 and 1939 reports on private bills and resolutions and those on simple resolutions were assigned session volumes with letters instead of numbers and separately printed at the end of a report series. Although in the *Serial Set* these volumes were assigned numbers, the practice further disrupted the sequential order of reports published in the *Serial Set*. In addition, session lettered volumes of the *Serial Set* were not widely distributed.

Between 1964 and 1978 (second session of the 88th Congress through the 95th Congress) each publication series within a congressional session was assigned a single session volume number with perhaps multiple parts and this pattern was also followed by the *Serial Set* volume number series. Thus during that time period many *Serial Set* volumes had multiple parts.

In 1895 serial numbers were assigned retrospectively to the entire series that was begun in 1817, and after that time these serial numbers appear on the spine of each officially published volume of the *Serial Set*. In many libraries the earlier volumes had their assigned number hand written on the spines. The serial

numbering sequence gave the set its popular name, but it was not until the *Serial Set* was published for the 97th Congress (1981-1982) that the series was given the official title *United States Congressional Serial Set* and since that time all volumes of the *Serial Set* have that name on their title pages. To be noted, however, is that some assigned serial numbers were not ultimately used in the *Serial Set*.

Indexing to the *Serial Set*

Some sort of indexing has always been a part of the *U.S. Serial Set*. For instance, from 1817-1897 (15th through 54th congresses) a subject index was placed in each volume that began a report or document series within a congressional session. For a listing of congressional documents published before 1817, see *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*; Papers Relating to Early Congressional Documents, compiled by Aldoplus W. Greely (56/1: S.doc. 428; 1900, 850 p. [placed in *Serial Set* vol. 3879 with a 1903 supplement in vol. 4735, H.doc. 745]).

Other early related indices or lists published by U.S. Superintendent of Documents include the *Tables of and Annotated Index to the Congressional Series of U.S. Public Documents* (1902; covers most of the documents in the *Serial Set* between 1817-1893); the *Checklist of United States Publications: 1789-1909*; and the *Index to the Reports and Documents of the 54th Congress, 1st Session to 72nd Congress, 2d Session; December 2, 1895-March 4, 1933, with Numerical Lists and Schedule of Volumes*.

For each congressional session from the 73rd to the 96th Congress (1933-1980) the Superintendent of Documents (GPO) published a separate *Numerical Lists and Schedule of Volumes*. The numerical list was organized in ascending numeric order by publication series for each congressional session, and the schedule of volumes showed which numeric reports and documents were assigned to which session and *Serial Set* volume number. These separate GPO publications were combined and republished in three volumes by the Williams S. Hein Company.

For the 97th Congress (1981-1982) GPO issued a full cataloged *Serial Set* index as a supplement to its *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* series titled *United States Congressional Serial Set Supplement, 97th Congress: 1981-1982: Entries and Index*. Published in 1985 it was later (1990)

accompanied by an addendum titled *Numerical Lists of the Documents and Reports*, but it had no schedule of volumes.

In 1988, beginning with the 98th Congress (1983-1984) GPO began publishing the *United States Congressional Serial Set Catalog*. At the beginning of this publications is a "Numerical List of Documents and Reports" and a "Schedule of Serial Set Volumes". The *Catalog* is usually published several years or more after the Congress it pertains. After the catalog for the 105th Congress (1997-1998) is published, GPO plans to discontinue it in paper and replace it with an electronic *Serial Set* catalog with numerous metadata entry points.

In a more timely fashion GPO publishes preliminary and final schedules of *Serial Set* volumes for each congressional session in its newsletter to federal depository libraries entitled *Administrative Notes Technical Supplement*. The newsletter is available on the web starting with information on the 103rd Congress.

The *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index (1789-1969)*, published by the Congressional Information Service, Inc. (CIS), now called LexisNexis Academic and Library Solutions, has now become the principal tool in identifying *Serial Set* volumes to congressional reports and documents published before 1970. The *Index* also covers certain documents printed by Congress before 1817 known as the *American State Papers*. The *Index* was originally issued in twelve parts covering certain time periods. Components include: (1) an index of subjects and keywords; (2) an index of names of individuals and organizations, usually related to private relief legislation; (3) a numerical list of reports and documents; and (4) a schedule of serial set volumes. There is also now a four volume index organized by bill numbers that relate to legislative reports and documents and a 16 volume index to the 54,000 maps located in the *Serial Set*.

There is an electronic version of the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index*, but it does not include a numerical list of reports and documents or a schedule of serial set volumes. The electronic version is part of the larger LexisNexis *CIS Congressional Master File I* on CD ROM, which includes indices to published and unpublished congressional hearings and Senate Executive Documents originally printed before 1970. The CD-ROM is no longer being published but the same material is available in the *CIS/Historical Index* file on the Lexis.com web site (under the folders Federal Legal - U.S.; Legislative Histories and Materials) or on Lexis Research software (under LEGIS;CISHST library and file). LexisNexis is a fee based, password protected service. The *CIS/Historical Index* can also be found by using the *LexisNexis Congressional* which is marketed to academic institutions.

Tips on Using the Electronic CIS Indices

The LexisNexis CIS/Historical Index can be used to obtain a *Serial Set* volume number for a specific, known congressional report or documents published before 1970. For example, after accessing the database use the sample search formula "h rp 234 89". In this example "h" representing "House", "rp" represents "Report", "234" represents the 234th numbered house report during a particular Congress, and "89" represents the 89th Congress (1965-1966). Use "s rp" for Senate reports, "h doc" for House documents and "s doc" for Senate documents. If you have only the Congress and the bill number use the formula "78 s 1201" or "89 hr 2107" with 78 and 89 representing the Congress and "s 1201" and "hr 2107" representing bill numbers within that Congress. Of course you can also search for terms used in the title or the assigned index (the *Serial Set* is indexed by keyword descriptors and the other indices generally have a thesaurus), but unless your search is limited to the *Serial Set* document type [and doc-type(serial set)] your results may also include published and unpublished hearings indexed before 1970.

The CIS/Index to Publications of the United States Congress (1970 to current) gives the user abstracts and indexing for congressionally published hearings, prints, reports, and documents published since 1969. The electronic version of this *CIS/Index* is also available on LexisNexis, but neither the paper nor the electronic version give you corresponding *Serial Set* volume numbers. The "Schedule of Volumes" to the *U.S. Serial Set* will assist users in the absence of this information available electronically. However, if you do have a report number and you want to find more information about it in the electronic *CIS/Index*, use the sample formula "H Rpt 107-23" with 107 representing a specific Congress (the 107th) and "23" the report number within that Congress. Congressional reports published after 1990 (102nd Congress and thereafter) are generally linked to the electronic text of the report in the LexisNexis *CIS/Index*.

The *Schedule of Volumes* presented or linked from 1970 to the present at www.llsdc.org/soucebook/sch-v.htm will assist you in identifying *Serial Set* volume numbers for reports listed under each public law number in the annual *CIS Legislative Histories Index*, a part of the *CIS/Index*, which is also available on LexisNexis in electronic form.

Source Libraries for the *Serial Set*

Before 1979 only 22 complete copies of *U.S. Serial Set*, with official looking color coated spines, were published and distributed to certain federal government "posterity" libraries. These included the United States Senate and House libraries, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Office of the Superintendent of Documents Library (now housed at the National Archives). In the past, depository libraries and international exchange libraries have generally received a less complete edition, such as no lettered session volumes between 1905 and 1939 and no (or few) documents that had previously been published by executive branch agencies. However, beginning with the 96th Congress (1979-1980) all depository and international exchange libraries could choose to select the complete *Serial Set* either in paper or microfiche (no one gets the fancy binding anymore). About 1,000 choose to do so, some 500 in paper and some 500 in fiche. Also many libraries have chosen to purchase the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Microfiche* (1789-1969) collection, which is regarded as probably the most complete set available.

Libraries that own the *Serial Set* may not choose to loan its individual volumes, but they may allow visitors to view and photocopy portions of it. Selected libraries in the Washington D.C. area holding some or all of the *U.S. Serial Set* are listed in *Union List of Legislative Documents* published by the Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C. A search on OCLC with the term "Serial Set" should reveal most of the libraries that own the set. You can also search the catalogs of major U.S. libraries in your geographic area. The U.S. Congressional Serial Set Inventory, now hosted by the University of North Texas Libraries (<http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/ssi/>) reveals the *Serial Set* collection volumes, for the years 1789-1968, of some 18 participating institutions, including the U.S. Senate Library.

Beginning with the volumes released for the 105th Congress (1997-1998), only regional depository libraries, or one library in each state without a regional collection, are to receive the *Serial Set* in paper format through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). Some libraries that formerly obtained the *Serial Set* in paper format have continued the series in microfiche (with *Serial Set* volume polymer dividers). Others make direct hard copy purchases of the *Serial Set*, or bind the documents and reports themselves according to the GPO schedule of volumes list. Beginning with the 105th Congress, depository libraries that have selected to receive individual U.S. Senate and House documents and reports in

paper have also received paper sheets of *Serial Set* title and table of contents pages for possible binding with the proper documents and reports.

Other Sources and *Serial Set* Projects

Selected 19th century and early 20th century (1833-1917) documents and reports from the *U.S. Serial Set* have been optically scanned and placed on the Library of Congress American Memory Project web site collection known as *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation*. Although the documents are not word searchable you can browse the documents by congress and there are navigators to the set largely using original indexing. The selections include selected maps, correspondence on the emigration of Indians, pension rolls of the United States, a statistical view of U.S. population from 1790 to 1830, Indian land cessions, journals of the Confederate Congress, and selected other documents and reports. Usually there are a few documents available in each congress. One caution is that users are able to access only one page at a time and printing those pages generally results in showing only about two thirds of the text on a printed sheet.

Readex, a division of Newsbank, Inc., is gradually releasing a digitized collection of the complete U.S. Congressional Serial Set (1817-1980) with the American State Papers (1789-1838) (<http://www.readex.com/scholarl/serlset.html>). The company is employing a very extensively researched metadata and indexing system that, with a guided search form, allows researchers to search in 15 different fields including in the full citation text, in the all text field via the OCR generated ASCII text, in a title field, in a subject field, in an author field, in a bill/resolution number field, in a congress/session field, in a publication number field, in a geographic location field, in a language field, in a Serial Set volume number field, in a personal name field, in a publication category field, in a uniform title field, and in a year of publication field. The collection also allows you to browse by hierarchically arranged subjects, by publication category, by standing committee authors, and by congress. Printing or downloading can be done by page, by group of pages or by document. Currently, Readex has digitized and made available the *Serial Set* for the 19th century.

LexisNexis (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic/serialset/>) has digitized the complete *Serial Set* from 1817 to 1969, including the American State Papers (1789-1838), from its CIS microfiche collection. Lexis is using modified metadata and indexing from its extensive *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* with access to institutional subscribers through the LexisNexis Congressional service or by

standalone subscription. Access through the former allows researchers to use regular Lexis string searching while access by the latter is through guided search forms. The service permits full text searching of words in the OCR generated ASCII text as well as through eleven index categories -- by CIS and title page, by document type, by legislative number (Statutes At Large citation, bill number or public law number), by subject term, by keyword indexing to illustrations and statistical tables, by author (corporate or personal), by petitioners or witnesses, by document or report number, by Serial Set volume number, and by Superintendent of Documents number. Printing or downloading is available by page, group of pages or by document. The project was largely completed in December, 2005, but LexisNexis is gradually digitizing, from original copies, drawings and color maps that were not very clear in the digitized copy of its CIS microfiche collection.

Also on the LexisNexis Academic and Library Solutions (LNALS) web site (http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic/research_resources/impeachment/) there is comprehensive document that references many historical *Serial Set* and other congressional documents entitled *Federal Impeachment Materials* (together with condemnation, censure, reprimand and reproof materials) by August Imholz, Jr. It is arranged both chronologically (1795-1999) and alphabetically by the last name of the person being brought up on charges before Congress. There is also a related web site entitled *Session Dates of U.S. Congresses: 1789-2001*.

LexisNexis Academic and Library Solutions (LNALS) has a document offprint service (1-800-227-2477) (formerly CIS Documents On Demand) that allows customers to purchase individual congressional documents, reports, bills and hearings in microfiche or in paper blow backs from most any of the CIS microfiche collections. However, they will no longer perform research assistance or rush delivery of documents. Instead, customers should provide LNALS with the proper CIS or ASI accession number.

Maryellen Trautman, U.S. Government Publications Librarian at the National Archives Library in National Archives and Records Administration has produced a Web publication entitled *Library Resources for Administrative History* (http://www.archives.gov/research_room/alic/government_publications/administrative_history_index.html). One of the parts or chapters in that publication describes the background and indexing to *U.S. Congressional Serial Set* and the *American State Papers*.

A rough numeric guide to *Serial Set* volumes organized by Congress (not session) can be found in the *Table of Congressional Publication Volumes and*

Presidential Issuances published by the Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C. on their web based *Legislative Source Book*, which also includes this article. By using subtraction you can see that in recent congresses the *Serial Set* averages around 100 plus volumes during a single two year, two session congress. However, in the early part of the twentieth century a 300 to 500 volume *Serial Set* per congress was fairly common. In the past many more Executive Branch publications (especially various annual reports) were published as House and Senate documents, but later in the century Congress became more selective in what it choose to publish, and now few executive branch documents are published by Congress except those transmitted by the President. Some of this decrease was due to the recommendations of the Congressional Serial Set Committee, established in 1979 as an advisory committee to the Joint Committee on Printing of the United States Congress.

Please note that recent Congressional reports and documents are now available for free on the web from the 104th Congress (1995-1996) forward through GPO Access or Thomas (reports only). Commercially, congressional reports are also available electronically from 1990 forward through LexisNexis and Westlaw or from CQ.com from 1989 forward (see CQ Archives). Westlaw's legislative history file (LH) also has selected committee reports related to public laws going back as far as 1948 and Lexis has House and Senate documents from 1995 forward. The Thomas database has information on congressional bills back to the 93rd Congress (1973-1974), including any report numbers associated with those bills. The "Schedule of Serial Set Volumes" can then be used to locate the *Serial Set* volume that contains the report.

For more information about the *U.S. Serial Set* see *U.S. Congressional Serial Set: What it Is and its History* (based on a talk by Virginia Saunders) and *U.S. Congressional Serial Set: Assigned Serial Numbers Not Used* by August Imholz, Jr. and Virginia Saunders, both on GPO Access (FDLP). Virginia Saunders is the staff person at GPO that oversees the production of the *Serial Set*. See also the extensive "User Guide" in the hard copy of the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index*. Some of the information in this article was originally derived from the publications noted in this paragraph.

*This article was written by Richard J. McKinney, Assistant Law Librarian, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Washington, D.C. A special thank you goes to Margot Gee, Emily Carr and August Imholz, Jr. who made valuable suggestions or assisted in its production. Gratitude is also expressed to the staff at the U.S. Department of Interior Library, for allowing their *Serial Set* collection and indices to be used by the author.