

Bills Aren't the Only Ones Here with Some History

GPO Historian of Bills Barbre Brunson was the Last Original Joint Committee on Printing Senate Employee Left at GPO



GPO Historian of Bills Barbre Brunson began her career as a summer intern with the Department of Agriculture in 1974.

"I worked on the Agriculture Dictionary and learned more terminology on dirt and soil than you can possibly imagine," said Brunson.

Later that year, she secured a job with the Senate Service Department where she was responsible for and later worked with the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) as a Senate employee.

Because of the nature of the work, the JCP Senate employees' offices were located at the GPO headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The Congressional Record Index team was transitioned from Senate employees to GPO employees in October of 2003. Brunson is the last of the original JCP Senate employees who converted to GPO employee and is still working at the GPO.

In the 1980's Brunson worked as an Editor at GPO proofreading the Congressional Record.

Brunson was eventually promoted to GPO Historian of Bills. As Historian

of Bills, Brunson is responsible for tracking the entire process of a bill. This means that she records action (such as amendments, debates, etc.) on all House and Senate legislation on a daily basis for publication in the daily online and printed monthly and annual History of Bills. Items followed may include actions accumulated over the course of both sessions of a given Congress. The History of Bills is published alongside the Congressional Record Index but is really its own separate collection.

"Essentially, my job is to track the entire process of how a bill becomes a law, documenting all actions on bills," said Brunson. "In addition, each year I coordinate with both the House and Senate to compile information on all of their bills for the annual House and Senate Journals."

"The process back in the day, prior to computers, for all work on bills, members and Executive Committees had to be handwritten on index cards that were processed, packaged in gray boxes and shipped to GPO," said Brunson. "Once the

Editor's Note:

Typeline staff had the pleasure of talking with Barbre Brunson in October 2020 about the important work she's done *Keeping America Informed* for 45 years. She was so excited to share her experiences and tell her story. We greatly appreciate her willingness to share those unique experiences. Sadly, Brunson passed away on November 27, 2020 before her story was published.



GPO Historian of Bills Barbre Brunson first worked in the GPO building as a Senate employee for the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP).

boxed index cards arrived at the GPO, all information was prepared to be typeset by hand and printed.”

The Congressional Record Index office made the transition to using computers; however the modernization process was not without its challenges.

“In order for us to transition our work to laptop computers, a complete rewrite of the programs we use for our work was required,” said Brunson. “The introduction of computers to complete our work has definitely made our process much faster, decreasing the size of the Congressional Index team from fifteen employees in the 1980s to eight employees today.”

As many of us during the COVID-19 pandemic have, Brunson has made a successful transition to telework and is still able to effectively perform her job duties.

“I really enjoy teleworking, mostly because I don’t have to commute to work,” said Brunson. “A typical day starts with me looking up and printing the entire Congressional Record, so I can read it and prepare the tag lines.”

“We had to make many changes in our processes very quickly when the stay-at-home order came down,” said Brunson’s Supervisor Philip Hart. “And we did it short-handed for the first two months because only half of our team had laptops until mid-May. I’m proud of our office for keeping the Index and the History up-to-date during the transition.”

The transition to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic has had its challenges for the Congressional Index team too.

“I’m pleased to be part of such a dedicated team,” said Brunson. “We manage our tasks really well and work hard to get things done, even if that means working late or on weekends sometimes.”

Hart describes her as a dedicated and conscientious worker who never misses an opportunity to celebrate a teammate or participate in GPO events. She even beat



Staff on the Hill email and mail their edits to Brunson weekly for updating.

Public Printer Bruce James for the top spot in the chili cook-off.

“She is the heart of the office making sure that all birthdays and holidays are observed,” said Hart. “Prior to COVID-19, people would come from offices all over GPO to see what candy and snacks she brought in to share with her co-workers. Even when we’re too busy around Christmas for an organized office party, she will bring in different treats each day for a week or more. We never have to worry about bringing or buying lunch that week.”

As a 40-plus year GPO veteran, Brunson stresses the importance of GPO teammates being detail-oriented.

“My advice to new employees is to always do the best you can do,” said Brunson. “Accuracy matters, especially because we’re documenting history. When I train a new employee I always stress the importance of crossing your T’s and dotting your I’s. Because of the work we do, in order to be correct you must be exact.”

Editor’s Note:

This is part of a series of articles focused on employees with 40+ years of Federal service. We look forward to sharing their GPO experience with you.

—Michelle R. Overstreet