

# **Policy Statement of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum and the Center for Legislative Archives on December 8, 1941 Day of Infamy Speech**

On December 8, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stood at the podium of the chamber of the House of Representatives to ask a joint session of Congress for a declaration that a state of war existed between Japan and the United States. The Reading Copy of Roosevelt's famous War Message to Congress (Day of Infamy Speech), one of the landmark documents of United States history, has been missing since the day it was delivered. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum and the Center for Legislative Archives join to contest thirty-year old assertions that this important document has been accounted for in the records of the United States Senate. We also aim to heighten public awareness of its missing status in hopes that the Reading Copy will someday be identified and be placed in the Roosevelt Library with President Roosevelt's papers and speech files. A careful review of the handling of the Reading Copy on December 8, 1941 and a close examination of related documents in the custody of the Roosevelt Library and the Center for Legislative Archives have led the staffs independently to reach two significant conclusions:

*After President Roosevelt delivered his address to Congress, the Reading Copy was returned to the White House.*

In his memoir, *Affectionately, F.D.R.* (1959), the president's eldest son, James Roosevelt, wrote that he took the Reading Copy from his father, returned with it to the White House, and removed the speech from his coat before it disappeared. President Roosevelt was so concerned about the lost Reading Copy that he wrote to his son wanting to make sure that he did not still have the speech. In the letter, FDR hoped that the document could be found and sent to the Roosevelt Library because the speech was "just about equal in importance to the First Inaugural Address." Grace Tully, the president's personal secretary who prepared the Reading Copy and maintained the president's speech files, also wrote in her memoir, *F.D.R. My Boss* (1949), of her distress over the missing document after the president returned to the White House on December 8th. She had Mike Reilly, chief of the White House detail of the U.S. Secret Service, investigate. The Secret Service, Tully reported, "traced it from the Capitol via Jimmy [James Roosevelt] to the White House foyer where it was last seen sitting on top of the coat rack to the right of the front door. There the trail ended."

*News accounts, statements by National Archives officials, and National Archives publications and exhibits stating or implying that the president left the chamber of the House without the Reading Copy, and that in 1984 the missing document was found in the records of the U.S. Senate, lack factual foundation.*

An April 2, 1984, *New York Times* article reported that a National Archives staff member discovered a copy of the December 8, 1941 speech in Senate records while she was searching for documents for an exhibit celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the National Archives. When the document was shown to the Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries and the Director of the

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, according to the article, the two National Archives officials “verified that it was the long-lost speech... The two officials had no explanation of how the speech had made its way into the Senate files but said it had *presumably* [emphasis added] been picked up by a Senate aide and filed with other documents...”

The extent to which the original document was examined by the Library Director or Roosevelt Library staff is unclear. Nevertheless, this version of events was perpetuated by the National Archives in an article that appeared in the Winter 2001 issue of *Prologue* magazine about the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the speech. As a result, this story has been restated further in the media and in the permanent exhibits on display at the United States Capitol Visitor Center.

Hand-written emendations on the Senate copy – some of which appear to be in Franklin Roosevelt’s handwriting and which are unusual for a copy of a presidential speech presented to Congress – may have contributed to the earlier National Archives officials mistakenly concluding that the Senate copy was the president’s reading copy. The speed with which the speech was drafted by the president and put into final form by his secretary and staff on the afternoon of December 7<sup>th</sup> prior to a Cabinet meeting that night and the Joint Session the next day may have resulted in the unusual circumstance of the president marking-up the copies himself.

We also believe that the “wish was the father to the thought” and the National Archives officials “found” what they very much hoped to find in this document. But the Center also holds a virtually identical but separately typed copy of the president’s speech in the records of the House of Representatives, which

also bears a presidential signature and has hand-written emendations to the text. The officials failed to look for and examine this House record in 1984, an effort that might have prevented their erroneous declaration. Although the 2001 *Prologue* article did mention in passing the presence of the House copy, this fact did not alter the mistaken analysis and conclusion that the Senate copy was the Reading Copy.

Furthermore, neither the Senate nor House copies resemble the unique physical features of the reading copies that Grace Tully meticulously assembled for the president's speeches and which she diligently filed in the president's papers now at the Roosevelt Library. Among the distinctive characteristics of the reading copies were a heavy stock 8 ½ x 11 inch paper, rounded corners, triple spaced and typed in blue ribbon ink, and three holes down the left side so that the pages could be placed in a three ring binder during reading.

And so it is the determination of the staffs of the Roosevelt Library and the Center for Legislative Archives that the nearly identical Senate and House documents are the official copies of the address that the president conveyed to Vice President Henry Wallace in his capacity as President of the Senate and to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. They are not the Reading Copy prepared by Ms. Tully and used by the president to deliver his speech.

From the First Congress (1789-1791) forward, it was customary for presidents to provide the Senate and the House with official copies of their addresses and other papers of high intrinsic value which were filed in record series identified as *President's Messages, Reports, and Communications*. Internal descriptions of records at the Center suggest that Senate and House copies of Roosevelt's address of December 8, 1941 were received in this customary manner, that archivists attached no special significance to the Senate copy, and that they

were routinely filed as the official Senate and House copies of the presidential message.

The *Preliminary Inventory to the Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1946* (1950) entry for the Seventy-seventh Congress (1939-1941) includes the *Presidential Messages* series without any reference to the December 8, 1941 address. An extensive card file index of individual documents with locations includes a card titled, *Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Message to Congress Asking for a Declaration of War on Japan)*, and the description, “For the Senate Copy, see the file Sen. 77A-H1”. The *Guide to the Records of the United States Senate at the National Archives, 1789-1989: Bicentennial Edition (1989)*, published five years after the appearance of the April 2, 1984 *New York Times* article, made no reference to Roosevelt’s Reading Copy of the December 8, 1941 address, but indicated that the Center held “President Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Day of Infamy’ speech asking for a declaration of war in 1941” in the *Messages, Reports, and Communications* series for the Seventy-seventh Congress. Although a Senate clerk wrote on the back of the Senate document “Dec 8, 1941, Read in joint session”, this marking does not mean that the document was the copy from which the president read.

### *Conclusion*

The Franklin D. Roosevelt President Library and Museum and the Center for Legislative Archives jointly affirm and acknowledge that the Reading Copy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s December 8, 1941 War Message to Congress remains a missing document. The assertions that FDR either left the Reading Copy on the podium or handed it to a clerk appear to be purely speculative and contradict the first-hand accounts of James Roosevelt and others at the White

House on the afternoon of December 8, 1941 and the days that followed, and the findings of a Secret Service investigation prompted by the president's personal secretary.

Characterizing the Senate document as the Reading Copy that the president used at the podium lacks factual foundation, is inconsistent with the available evidence, and hinders efforts to recover the missing document. We believe that every effort should be undertaken to publicly correct the historical record. The National Archives could then pursue a campaign to raise awareness of the missing Reading Copy and enlist the public's help in finding it and finally placing it in the Roosevelt Library where Franklin Roosevelt hoped it would go nearly 75 years ago.