

**HISTORY OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT'S CHIEF CLERKS/ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANTS TO THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY**



**Incoming Administrative Assistant John W. Martyn (left) shaking hands with outgoing
Chief Clerk John C. Scofield (right) at his retirement ceremony 6 January 1931**

**Edwin H. Steiner
Civilian Personnel Historian
Department of the Army
September 1978**

The Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army is the Army's civil service job which can be traced back the farthest in the history of the War Department. Its roots begin with the act of the first Congress establishing the War Department under the Constitution, 7 August 1789. After providing in Section I for the "Department of War" and "a principal officer therein, to be called the Secretary for the Department of War," section II creates the Chief Clerk as the only other position specifically provided for in the organizing statute. *

Sec 2, And be it further enacted, That there shall be in the said department an inferior officer, to be appointed by the said principal officer, to be employed therein as he shall deem proper, and to be called the chief clerk in the Department of War, and who, whenever the said principal officer shall be removed from office by the President of the United States, or in any other case of Vacancy, shall, during such vacancy, have the charge and custody of all records, books and papers, appertaining to the said department.

* Because the "Historical Revision Notes" which were part of the coverage of this position in the U.S. Code (Title 10, Sec 3016) through the 1958 edition carried its legal basis back to an Act of 3 March 1853, some confusion about the true origins of the Chief Clerk of the War Department has resulted. Thus, a "Chronological History of the Position of Administrative Assistant," which appears to have been developed in 1950 as part of the case for supergrade status, credits that act of 1853 as having created the position, when it was really only one of a number of legal rebirths for a job which was already 63 years old at the time, (The Act of 1853 merely raised the salaries of the chief clerks of all the Departments from \$2000 to \$2200; later editions of the U.S. Code have dropped the reference to it.)

This was a new position which did not then exist in the predecessor organization of the War Department under the Articles of Confederation, although Joseph Carleton's position of Secretary to the Secretary at War from 1782 to 1785 had some of the same responsibilities as those assigned by Congress to the new Chief Clerk. Secretary at War Henry Knox had abolished the earlier job in 1786, using its authorized salary of 1000 dollars per annum to hire two clerks at 500 dollars each. One of these was his own brother, William Knox; and the other was John Stagg, Junior. They were destined to be the first and second Chief Clerks, respectively.

Before establishing this position for the War Department, Congress had already created the Chief Clerk in the Department of State (or Foreign Affairs as it was first known) and then went on to provide for them in all of the other early departments. *A list of all incumbents and their tenure dates is appended to this history.

Principal Assistant Acting Secretary. Historian Leonard White has described the Chief Clerks of the departments as the "principal reliance of department heads" and "the pivot on which daily business turned." #Except during the Civil War, when assistant secretary positions first existed in the War Department on a temporary basis, the Chief Clerk continued to be the second ranking position in the Department until 1890, when the position of Assistant Secretary was first established on a permanent basis. (The Under Secretary job was created in 1940.)

When vacancies occurred in their cabinets, Presidents Washington and Adams designated the secretaries of other departments to fill in as Acting Secretary in addition to their regular duties. Secretary of War Timothy Pickens was also Acting Secretary of State for almost four months before his appointment to the latter job was effective 10 December 1795, for example, after which he continued As Acting Secretary of War until Secretary James McHenry entered on duty 6 February 1796.

*Purists may object that the act establishing the Treasury Department 2 September 1789 did not provide for a "Chief Clerk"; but it did assign the same responsibilities to the position it designated as "Assistant Secretary". As by far the largest and most organizationally complicated of early departments, Treasury was the only one initially authorized to have an Assistant Secretary, but not for long because that job was abolished in 1792 and Treasury soon had a Chief Clerk like all the other departments. (By 1800 for sure.)

#Leonard D. White, The Jacksonian, page 352.

Secretary of Navy Benjamin Stoddert was also Secretary of War ad interim for the first two weeks of June 1800 between Secretaries of War McHenry and Dexter.

The first change in this pattern in any department occurred in 1809 when President Jefferson named John Smith, who was Chief Clerk of the War Department (1804-11) as Acting Secretary of War during the interim between the Secretaryship of Henry Dearborn and William Eustis (17 Feb-Mar 1809). Four other Chief Clerks were designated by residents to act as Secretary of War ad interim. George Graham had this distinction for more than a year (22 Oct 1816 to 10 Dec 1817) between secretaries William Crawford and John C. Calhoun, when the President's entrance on duty was delayed. Two Chief Clerks each served as Secretary of War ad interim for one month: Philip Randolph in 1831 between Secretaries John Eaton and Lewis Cass and Albert Lea in 1841 between Secretaries John Bell and John Spencer. The last Chief Clerk officially designated as Acting Secretary held that honor for only one day. This was Samuel J. Anderson, who filled in on 23 July 1850 before MG Winfield Scott was designated to act during the rest of the interim between secretaries George Crawford and Charles Conrad.

- a) Pay. The salary of the Chief Clerk of the War Department was originally established by Congress at 600 dollars per annum. This was 200 dollars less than was set for the Chief Clerk of the State Department but somewhat in line with the differential established between the Secretaries, with State and Treasury granted 3500 dollars compared with 3000 dollars for the Secretary of War. Between 1789 and 1814, the pay of the Chief Clerk more than tripled to \$2000 and remained at this latter rate until 1853. Beginning on 1 July 1853, the Chief Clerk was designated Superintendent of the Northwest Executive Building, housing the War Department, and was paid an additional \$250 yearly. During the next 70 years, the Chief Clerk's salary gradually rose to \$5200.

A salary listing of \$5200 in the Official Register for 1925 indicates that the position of Assistant and Chief Clerk had been placed in Grade 12 of the Clerical, Administrative and Fiscal Service under the Classification Act of 1923. Before World War II, the Administrative Assistant and Chief Clerk position had risen to Grade CAF-15, the top grade provided by law at that time. Since the Classification Act of 1949 combined the earlier services into the General Schedule and added the three super grades, this job was evaluated as GS-16 in 1950, raised to GS-17 in 1954, and to GS-18 in 1960, and returned to GS-17 in 1966.

- b) Civil Service Status. After more than a century of serving at the pleasure of the Secretary of War, the position of Chief Clerk of the War Department was included in the competitive civil service under the civil service rules promulgated by President Cleveland 6 May 1896. Before that date, the competitive civil service had been limited to positions with salary rates well below those of the chief clerks of departments. The earlier rules promulgated by President Arthur 7 May 1883 in the first application of the Civil Service Act of 16 January 1883 had limited application in the departmental service to positions with salaries of not less than \$900 nor more than \$1800 per annum. The 1896 order blanketed in all positions above the earlier limit, excepting only those subject to Senate confirmation.
- c) Title Evolution. The first change in the title of the Chief Clerk of the War Department occurred in 1908 when it became Assistant and Chief Clerk. * It continued that way for the rest of John C. Schofield's record setting incumbency (1899-1930). Then, in Circular A, 2 January 1931, Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley announced the appointment of John W. Martyn as "Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of War, effective 1 January 1931. In addition to other responsibilities, the Administrative Assistant was charged with the duties heretofore assigned to the Assistant and Chief Clerk".

At first, that seemed to end use of the venerable title of Chief Clerk, but it lingered on for more than twenty years, at least in relations with Congress. Although four editions of the Congressional Directory listed Martyn only as "Administrative Assistant", the old title survived in the subordinate positions of "Assistant Chief Clerk", which continued unchanged in the listings. Beginning with the June 1933 edition of the Directory, Martyn's listing was changed to "Administrative Assistant and Chief Clerk". The traditional title may have been reassuring to Congressmen, who had been used to dealing with Chief Clerks in all of the departments as major sources of information about departmental affairs. Whatever the reason, the position continued to be listed as Administrative Assistant and Chief Clerk in both, the Congressional Directory and the Government Organization Manual through the editions of 1952. #Thus did an eighteenth-century title survive past the midpoint of the twentieth.

*Some early listings show the Chief Clerks of the departments as "Principal Clerks", which was the title that the Act establishing the Treasury Department specified for

the top clerical position in each of its major organizations. Application of that title to the chief resulted from confusion on the part of persons unfamiliar with the differences specified by law or the exercise of an egalitarian license to treat both types of positions the same.

#Army was not the last to have a Chief Clerk in its secretariat, only the next to the last. The title lingered one more year in the Post Office Department in the unlikely combination of Chief Clerk and Director of Personnel.

Roots of Civilian Personnel Management. From the beginning, the Chief Clerk of the War Department was responsible for the preparation of instruments of appointment and changes in status for civilian employees, for submission of the quarterly payrolls to the Treasury, and for maintenance of appropriate records including copies of the oaths of office required for all employees. Later, as the War Department grew and subdivided, the Chief Clerk began to issue rules about office hours, employee conduct, and other matters which constituted the first personnel policies.

The Civil Service Act of 1883 and the new appointment procedures that followed so increased the work that the Appointment Division was established within the office of the Secretary of War in 1898. It was headed by the Appointment Clerk under the supervision of the Chief Clerk. Increasing responsibilities were reflected in the change of the name from Appointment Division to Civilian Personnel Division in 1919 and the appointment of the Department's first Director of Personnel in 1939. Meanwhile, the Administrative Assistant continued to sign his name "By order of the Secretary of War" on instruments of appointment and change in status of civilian employees throughout the War Department until that task became so overwhelming that others had to be authorized to sign his name for him. Beginning in 1940, field offices were established to process most of these actions outside of Washington. They carried facsimile signatures of the Administrative Assistant initialed by the field office managers.

Although the authority to process personnel actions was delegated to installation commanders in 1942, the Administrative Assistant had a continuing role in the monitor-ship of the civilian personnel program of the War and Army Departments through the rest of the 1940's. This role was described in the January 1950 edition of the Congressional Directory as follows: "As chief executive officer, he is responsible for the Department of the Army Civilian Personnel established policy and procedures necessary to the adequate functioning of such program."

With the establishment of the position of Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Forces) in 1951, these responsibilities for the civilian personnel program were reassigned to the Assistant Secretary from the Administrative Assistant. * Although the monitor-ship of this Department wide program is no longer his responsibility, the operating personnel office for the Secretariat as well as certain Field and Joint/DoD activities continues under his supervision.

* The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Forces) continues to

have staff supervision over the Department's civilian personnel program; but operational supervision of the Office of Civilian Personnel was transferred to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, in 1955. (Now the Directorate of Civilian Personnel in Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.)

Other Functional Spin-Offs. The civilian personnel program is only one of many activities which began in the Secretary's office under the supervision of the Chief Clerk and evolved into separate organizations. Military appointments and orders were processed in the Secretary's office until the Adjutant General's Department was established in 1813. Veterans' pensions and Indian affairs were other functions which started modestly within the Secretary's office before becoming "departments" within the War Department and then leaving to evolve as the Veterans Administration and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Counterparts. Two other positions are of special interest because they resulted from the traumatic split-offs from the War Department of the Navy and Air Force Departments. In between those two surgical operations, there may have been a temporary copy in the Confederate War Department.

- a) Navy. The first counterpart of the War Department's Chief Clerk was the Chief Clerk of the Navy Department. It was created by the act of Congress in 1798 which established the separate Navy Department and assigned to it part of the responsibilities and files of the War Department. Navy's Chief Clerk became its Administrative Assistant and Chief Clerk in 1936. In 1942 that position was divided. The Administrative Assistant became primarily a financial advisor to the Secretary of the Navy in the days before the position of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Financial Management) was established in 1954. (The position of Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy continued to appear in Congressional Directory listings, however, through 1961, when the longtime incumbent, John H. Dillon, may have retired.) Meanwhile, the Chief Clerk was recast as the Administrative Officer in charge of what became the Administrative Office of the Navy Department.
- b) Confederacy. The act of the Confederate Congress establishing its War Department 21 February 1861 provided for a copy of the establishment which the Confederacy's President, Jefferson Davis, had headed as Secretary of War (1853-57). The Confederacy's Secretary of War was "to appoint a chief clerk thereof, and as many inferior clerks as may be authorized by law". Limited research so far on the Civil War period has not found the name of any incumbent or any other evidence that the position of Chief Clerk of the Confederate War Department was ever filled. J. B. Jones' A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, in which he describes his experiences as a clerk in the Confederate War Department from May 1861 until its fall, mostly within the Secretary's office, never refers to himself or anyone else as being the Chief Clerk.
- c) Air Force. the position of the Air Force was based when this became a separate department in 1947, Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the

Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of War and can be considered something like a twin* of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army also established at the same time. Although the Army may have inherited more of the traditions of the War Department (a situation which may give it more interest in the history of this position), the Air Force position has an equal claim on the roots going back to the Chief Clerk of the War Department and 1789.

*The Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force is not, however, an identical twin to the Army job. Army continues to provide the Air Force with some of the services which remained under the supervision of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army. The position of Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Management) established at the same time also included some responsibilities which in Army remained in the Administrative Assistant job.

CHIEF CLERKS OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT

William Knox	11 September 1789 – 15 June 1790
John Stagg, Jr.	16 June 1790 – 15 November 1797
John Caldwell	1 December 1797 - 31 May 1800
John Newman	1 June 1800 - 31 December 1801
Joshua Wingate, Jr.	1 January 1802 - 1804
John Smith	1805 - 28 April 1811
Daniel Parker	1 July 1812 - 23 November 1814
George Graham	15 March 1815 - 21 October 1816
Christopher Van Deventer	10 December 1817 - 19 February 1827
Charles J. Nourse	20 February 1827 - 2 May 1829
Philip G. Randolph	4 May 1829 - 19 June 1831
John Robb	11 July 1831 - 19 October 1833
Daniel Kurtz (Acting)	20 October 1833 - 31 January 1835
Cary A. Harris	1 February 1835 - 4 July 1836
John T. Cochrane	5 July 1836 - 12 March 1837
Samuel Cooper	13 March 1837 - 9 July 1838
John T. Cochrane (2nd tour)	10 July 1838 - 31 March 1841
Albert Miller Lea	1 April 1841 - 31 October 1841
Daniel Parker (2nd tour)	1 November 1841 - 31 March 1846
Archibald Campbell	1 April 1846 - 12 April 1849
Samuel J. Anderson	13 April 1849 - 17 August 1850
John D. McPherson (Acting)	18 August 1850 - 15 September 1850
George T. M. Davis	16 September 1850 - 4 March 1851
John Potts	5 March 1851 - 9 March 1853
Archibald Campbell (2nd tour)	10 March 1853 - 3 March 1857
John Potts (Acting)	4 March 1857 - 31 March 1857
William R. Drinkard	1 April 1857 - 15 February 1861
John Potts (Acting)	1 March 1861 - 31 March 1861
J.P. Sanderson	23 March 1861 - 30 June 1861
James Lesley, Jr.	1 July 1861 - 31 October 1861
John Potts (2nd tour)	1 November 1861 - 24 July 1872
Henry T. Crosby	25 July 1872 - 30 June 1882
John Tweedale	1 July 1882 - 7 March 1899
John C. Scofield*	8 March 1899 - 31 December 1930

*Title changed to Assistant and
Chief Clerk in 1908

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS TO SECRETARY OF WAR/ARMY

John W. Martyn	1 January 1931 - 31 January 1960
Robert H. Willey	1 February 1960 - 15 October 1961
James C. Cook	16 October 1961 - 30 December 1965
John G. Connell, Jr.	31 December 1965 - Present