

**Subject: Interview with Lee Gladwin former archivist with the Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division (NWME) at National Archives, College Park.**

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Interviewer: John Legloahec

Transcribed by: Carolina Palacios

**John: Why don't you state your name and your dates of service to the National Archives?**

**Lee:** Lee A. Gladwin, and began work on March 12, 1990, downtown branch [the National Archives Building in Washington, DC].

**John:** And you retired in January?

**Lee:** January 31, 2009

**John: Tell me a little bit about your educational background and how the degree(s) that you pursued prepared you for a job at the National Archives.**

**Lee:** I was a history major primarily, I thought I was going to go into teaching but then changed my mind. One of the things I always thought would be nice would be to work at the National Archives and possibly the Library of Congress. That goes back to my junior high school days when I was doing research on various topics. I was overwhelmed by the amount of things I could find either here or there. Anyway my major would be history with a minor in English for example. My major period's concentrations were Colonial American period up through the reconstruction. The topical area was social, cultural, and election history, and I have done virtually nothing with any of them but one article in the *Journal of Social History* on tobacco and sex, which you're not old enough to read yet.

**John: You actually started as a professor; you started out teaching before you came to the National Archives right?**

**Lee:** No, I started out as an assistant professor of history at what is now Shenandoah University in Winchester.

**John: How did that prepare you for your career at the National Archives, or did it not prepare you?**

**Lee:** No, none of the things I did actually prepared me for work as an archivist specifically. What my association was always doing research and I did a great deal here beginning early-to-mid 1950's and continuing up all the way to graduate school.

**John: After leaving Shenandoah University, you went to work for University Research Corporation, SAIC, and On-Line Computers. What was that work like?**

**Lee:** That was one of my career changes. After finishing up with what was then Shenandoah College, I needed something else. I applied at every place I could think of to get a job and I was at that time working on my doctorate. I noticed that the nature of the letters coming back to me after I put in an application there was a change of tone. When I first applied right after getting my masters they would simply say, "We don't have anything, sorry buddy." After I've gotten my doctorate and I started getting all these refusals coming back, they were sounding much more sympathetic.

At that time there were a million of us all wanting work and no one with a chance of getting anything so I kind of switched majors to curriculum design and instruction with a minor in history. I went to Carnegie Mellon and pursued a Doctorate of Arts degree and that led to quite a change in direction. There was a wizard upstairs I was told I should get to know because I was interested at that time, on how historians solve problems. I went upstairs and met the wizard, who turned out to be Herbert A. Simon. He was a genius in a number of fields and revolutionized the field of economics and was one of the founding fathers of artificial intelligence. That got me involved in studying the mind, its operations and the possibility of applying what I learned to design courses of instruction with what I was doing at SAIC, University Research Corporation, Oakland Research and some others.

The only piece of that that actually translated here was something I eventually called Impex (Imports & Exports). We have a number of files, probably a lot more now than when I first made their acquaintance. They were the import and export files and they covered I guess 20 years or so. When I first came here in 1990 we used to get regular calls for these files and I dreaded them, I just dreaded them. Diane Palmer was the archivist who worked with them and she very kindly made sort of a grid [a chart] that made it a little easier to look at each one of the files in the series and in sequence. There would be sometimes duplicate pages, say 1991 duplicated from pages 1990 and later on that might not occur but you leave some other instructions. So what I did was I wrote a program in George Washington basic, which took her charts, changed them to rules and added a front end to it. It took the information from the archivist or whoever was preparing a price quotation you could type that in and would use the rules against information that I digitized from Diane's charts. Within maybe less than a minute you had a printout of a quotation that would ordinarily have taken hours and I don't think the program survived. I think it was one of the things that got thrown out when I left. They changed Imports and Exports several years ago so what I designed, while good for the earlier 20 years or so...

**John:** They found a different way of doing it.

**Lee:** Well, it wouldn't work now. You would have to do a massive job of revising all the lines of basic code. I doubt that anybody is going to take the time to do it. I went and worked over a year and a half on it. When we had people coming in from the sense classes I'd hand them the Palmer method and they would do it, I'd just go through and print it and run the program and they would just [makes gesture] chairs would hit the floor.

**John: You spent your entire career at the National Archives working with electronic records—was there a reason for that? Did you not think about changing?**

**Lee:** Oh, I was definitely thinking about it. I tried at least twice before once after graduating from college but there was nothing. There was a job freeze in the federal government you couldn't get in anywhere. Then I tried after the masters degree to get in, couldn't get in at all, another job freeze. So after the doctorate, while I was still working as a beltway bandit and at one point I wound up temping. Some of the temp jobs were good working as an office assistant and very careful when I filled out my applications for these jobs. I never mentioned the masters or the doctorate otherwise they wouldn't believe you. The first time I tried it I went to Woolden Shoe store in Winchester, Virginia and I made the mistake of saying I have the masters, I have the doctorate. You know I meant the doctorate very proud of it and the owner of the store said, "Well these cash registers are offly complicated I just don't think you can handle them." I said, "I can handle an IBM tops A" but I didn't get the job.

So later on, I was working as a temp at the place I was working at before I came here was some sort of an insurance clearing house where people would send in their claims and you took the written claim and you

entered it into a database that was basically the job. What they didn't tell me when the temp agency assigned me to it, was that it was a sweatshop. You came in, you reported exactly on the dot whenever you were supposed to. They had the desks and the chairs evenly spaced all of them exactly six feet apart so you wouldn't talk to anybody else. The only thing you could see was straight ahead other than your screen and the wall and the clock, a very prominent clock, [points]. At ten o'clock, a fifteen minute break we all got up and we tramped over to the machines and got a drink or some crackers, "oops, your 5 minutes are up back to your desks" and so we did. They monitored out keystrokes and then they let you know, you're going too slow, or if you speed it up of course you're going faster but you're making more mistakes. Lunch hour was the same thing, "everybody up, you have half an hour for lunch" and they'd walk you over to this place where you could eat and they would walk you back. I couldn't take it. Somehow I happened to come across an ad that there was a job here. It could have been anything if it would have been a janitorial job I would have jumped at it, it wasn't that bad it was just archivist. So I applied and Tom Brown told me later, because I couldn't believe he wanted me for it, that he looked for someone with a historical background and a background in computers and I had both.

**John:** The rest is history.

**John: What was your impression of the National Archives when you first joined the staff?**

**Lee:** It was actually quite different from coming to do research. I know that when I came here anything had to be better than what I had been doing. I was kind of looking forward to being able to on my lunch hours time off going down to the reading room and doing research, I never gave that up. When I came here... I think the only thing that struck me was a little bit of awe, the sense of history. We were on floor twenty which you could look up and there were these old sliding windows that didn't slide anymore and they were still carved with tarps. They were blacked out, the original blacked out windows dating from WWII so I felt safe from German bombers.

Other than Tom, the first person I met was Peggy Adams and about that time she was made head of reference and she got her GS-13 about the same time. We were in this huge room, well to me it was this huge room, with a very high ceiling and she had one desk to my right side and I was to her left. She was trying to make... with a compact computer an old yellow looking thing. Then she said when she first came there she didn't even have that. They gave her a typewriter. The first thing she typed on it was her request for a computer. So she had that and occasionally on occasions I got to use that, later they brought in some leading edge and they scattered those around. There was something else they used, I can't think of the name of it, a special hardware system for doing things like SOS...but I can't remember now what they called it.

I was her first employee coming in March and did it all. I wrote the letters, answered a lot of phone calls, I remember one of the first phone calls I received was from a girl. Usually phone calls wouldn't come in until about 8 o'clock or so. They gave you a chance to get some coffee and wake up before you got this call. It must have been 7 am, I just had gotten in and at that point I was barely finding my way up the elevator and to the office. This woman said "I'm (whatever her name was and she was military in the Navy), and we got all these punch cards and we were just wondering if you would like to have them." I said boy did you get the wrong person but I listened to her and I took down lots of notes and I said "Well I can't do anything with this but I'll give them to someone who can." I gave the information over to Tom and it turned out that was the naval group China punch cards that were worth a great deal later on. I had no idea in the world what they were then I figured, I better tell somebody.

**John: You were really instrumental in developing many of the pieces that facilitated the work for the center for electronic archives. If you can talk about sort of those pieces and how they worked, how they functioned and how it improved the work of the archives staff.**

**Lee:** We have to look back at how we were doing things in 1990. We did not have computers so if you did something you used the typewriter. We were creating price quotations as I remember then we used a typewriter. Letters of course had to be done like that and we did get lots and lots of letters to be done. Eventually of course we got the computer and that speeded that up considerably. We did have I can't remember what we called our first system for tracking, what we call NOIS now. I think originally it might have been called XRA; Peggy can probably give that one to you right away. We had a system that worked of a main frame out of John Hopkins University. It was written in, I can't think of the language, B2, I think, but anyway it needed to be expanded quite a bit. We started it off with just a few fields like the person's name; we tracked that for somebody who was ordering something. We'd get their name and what they ordered, maybe something else, but there weren't that many items.

As the program became better and I started taking courses out there, Peggy would say "Wouldn't it be nice if we could do this to it, could we have this broken down by months, by physical year." Well that always meant that you added a couple more fields and then she would get another idea further, "let's track something more." Eventually the order form NOIS just, well you've seen it now I don't know how many fields there are but my gosh, there are far more than we ever contemplated and that made life somewhat easier for us but the other thing that we did not have but that we were tracking all the time were the interactions with the public whether they were telephone calls. We got a lot of phone calls in those days there was no email, later on of course email. We had a lot of people that wrote to us, actually sent letters with stamps.

We would take these cover sheets that we still use, they are lined but it's an actual sheet itself. You pulled it and that was the cover and then you put down the date and whatever information and then you stapled it together with anything else a copy of the letter you just sent. They were off lee hard to find afterward. We usually kept three stacks all shuffled in the wall. You kept your present month, and then the two months before that and when you were done, we sorted then by record group. They would be bundled with these huge rubber bands. Peggy would go through them and find things that needed correction and she'd flag them and they'd come back. You had to redo them all over again. Once she was done with it, they went to Tom and within a few days he'd come walking downstairs with this huge mass with little post-its all over it. Then they'd get together and they would talk about it and maybe you'd had to do something over again.

A lot of time went into that, but sometimes the hardest part for us other than having to rewrite a lot of stuff was finding something. Somebody would call right and say "I talked to you a month ago about..." whatever it was. So you went back and started digging through, and sometimes they really were right maybe it was the previous week, or a few weeks before but sometimes they were way wrong. You would go back to the current month, and to previous months then you took a walk up a couple of flights to the vault which was nothing as big as the vaults you have here. If you hung a rubber duck in there it would be appropriate, like something of a butcher shop. It was cold, it was uncomfortable. We had cardboard boxes that were loaded with these stacks of notes. On the outside of the box would be written June through October say and then you would go there and pick out the months just before the ones downstairs. You would go through, go through one by one by one. I can remember spending like two days going through, looking and it turned out the one case I really remember well, the guy was off by a year. So I kept pleading with Peggy, can we put together a program like NOIS to track these things and finally just about the time we came out here [College Park] something possessed her to agree that we needed a tracking system. So to NOIS we then created NALDS that was the other main program we had

just before we came out here or very soon afterwards. NOIS we sort of inherited and then augmented greatly but NALDS was starting to run right around 1994 about the time we came here.

Now the next thing, and one of the kinds of requests we had was always for casualty records. At that time we didn't have AAD, we didn't have any of the systems I later developed. What we had were the printouts. So what you did was you took these huge printouts that were very cumbersome to deal with and you went to the Xerox machine and you xeroxed the record that you wanted of course you got some others with it as well but you wanted to have the whole record. Then you sat down with the code book on one side and a sheet of paper on the other, and you went through and you knew how long each field was and you'd count off and you'd separate the fields. Then you would look at whatever was in that field and you went back to the documentation and you wrote it out, and eventually you'd type up something. You capture the information in each field and type it out with a typewriter, or later on with a computer. What I did, after I got out of here, was create a system that preceded AAD. We loaded all those casualty databases, POW databases into AAD. Well first we put it into excel because that is the easiest way that I know to edit them, then I would import it into AAD and from there we could search them, sort them, and print them out right away. The forms looked very much like the forms we were filling out by hand or manual methods and that really speeded things up for us.

**John: You mentioned obviously Tom and Peggy, who else was working in the records staff with you? I mean how many people were undertaking this?**

**Lee:** The next person to arrive was Ted Hull. He came in I think it was December of 1990 and that was to save us. Trying to remember, Dawn, I can't think of Dawn's last name. He found virtually his own replacement, somebody he knew Gary Stern. I'm trying to remember, her last name was Lau but I can't think of her first name. But there was pretty much a regular turnover from downtown until we came up here. Gene Kidde is another one who came downtown and then moved out here. Anita Pintado came out here with us, I think they were the only ones that came out and followed us out here.

**John: Switching gears for a minute, you've already mentioned your love for research and things like that. One of the things I think you're known for is your extensive work and your published articles on World War II code breaking. Let's take some time and talk about that and how that came to be with you and how you pursued that?**

**Lee:** Hmm... I think I always had an interest in World War II records probably beginning with the naval group China things and working to develop these database systems for them. I was interested in code breaking, there were so many codes involved with some of these records we didn't really know or understand a lot of them we just didn't know. I would wind up going down to modern military records for a lot of the paper documentation that wasn't transferred with the records. Some of what we had was just flat wrong for tags and we had been given the documentation for 1947 which was well after the war, what we needed was what was actually printed during the war. I was able to find that with the help of the people in modern military and finding a lot of things that no one else had. Part of it was working with at least in the WWII POW files; it was much more difficult to figure out. They had these codes but there weren't code books for all of them, so that meant a whole lot of additional work. Such as going on various websites finding people for whom you had a code and you would read something about them "oh, a T-2 it was some sort of transport a glider. That meant that you had to go through the WWII POW database and just update all the T-3's you could find. So I visited a lot of WWII POW websites and wherever they had that information then I would go back and update our records. That's were an awful lot of the codes came from in the cases where we didn't already have something here. That was a whale of a lot of fun.

**John: Let's comment about the efforts that were required to bring the Center for Electronic Records from downtown out here (College Park) and what was your role in getting everything out here?**

**Lee:** I didn't get everything out here. No, we were all just responsible for packing up pretty much our own things. We might have been asked to get some other things ready. I know everybody was living with boxes and packing them up and writing on the boxes their name and where they wanted these things to go when they got here. That was pretty exciting.

**John:** The Center was one of the first divisions to come out here, is that correct?

**Lee:** Yes, we came in February now there were a few that come the previous fall. They were maybe administrative offices but we were one of the first of the divisions. I went back a few weeks or possibly a few months after we moved here I went back and visited old number 20 and just gagged. The dust was so thick. I always wondered why I was coughing and sneezing and I realized when I got back there we had all that 75 years of accumulated dust everywhere.

**John:** Crazy.

**Lee:** You people do not know how much you have here.

**John:** It's a great building.

**Lee:** Oh yes, and you have space and it's clean. What I did here prepared me for what I do now, which is now I'm actually being an archivist not just reference. The Leesburg United Methodist Church decided that they wanted a historian and it turned out that most of what I do is the work of an archivist; organizing all their materials and preparing accessioning lists and then...marking the location of things. In some cases things are underneath display cases, some of them are still in the church office, some of them are in people's homes. They were told they needed to get things out of there during the war, and then when we started meeting again afterwards everyone was supposed to bring it back. Well, they didn't. That was the War Between the States and we're still waiting for some of these people to bring them back.

**John: You sort of have been touching on various pieces of it, but let's sort of take it from beginning to end, the reference function in the center for electronic records. From when something comes in, in whatever format it comes in what happens to it?**

**Lee:** Now it's very systematic but when I started the letters or whatever would come in I think Peggy simply would dole them out. Of course when I was here it was simple, she would look at it, open the envelope and hand it to me. We got quite a bit of mail; occasionally we got telephone calls but not quite so many. Of course there were no emails at all. We would get the request; a lot of them would be for casualty records and especially around Memorial Day. We'd get people who were putting up memorials to Vietnamese, the casualties of the Vietnam War. We had these state lists and we would take one or two of those, or whatever they requested, put it in an envelope and mail it out. It would be similar if they were calling and you would take down the information and say "ok we would get back to you, as soon as we can find an answer for you."

The basic nature of reference has not changed its how it's done. They now meet, well when I was here they were meeting every afternoon at 2:30 and divvying up whatever came in whether it was phone calls, letter.

Which is a better way, you weren't just having all that stuff dumped on you whether you really wanted to handle it or not, you just had to.

Of course the other part of it is that everything is so mechanized. We didn't have AAD but once that came along it changed everything. For me having NALDS and NOIS as systems to work with make everything so much easier to track and to produce statistics sometimes even for things that were requested by the trust fund. We were the only place in the building where they could go and say, "We have our records showing what was ordered, the amounts, the costs, can you match these up with your system?" Well we could. Nobody else could do that because nobody else was tracking things the way we were or maybe still do.

**John:** Before we move on, we've been using a couple of acronyms and for the benefit of the transcriptionist lets them straight. NALDS does that stand for anything?

**Lee:** "N" always stood for whatever we were at the time (...) the National Archives would be "N." I'm forgetting what the rest of it stood for. It was the acronym of the department.

**John:** The other one is NOIS?

**Lee:** NOIS that would be the National Archives or NWME Order Information System; NALDS would be the NWME Automatic Log Data Sheet but "N" stood for all kinds of things.

**John: Let's talk about your professional involvement and as this is an interview for the National Archives Assembly, did you have any roles in the Assembly? Any impact?**

**Lee:** No.

**John:** Were you a member of the Assembly?

**Lee:** Oh, I was a member but I was never an officer or anything like that.

**John: How about any other professional organizations? Did you get out and spread the word?**

**Lee:** The one organization that I belonged to was one for cryptic analysts, cryptographers I'm trying to remember, I can't remember now. Their main publication was crypto logia and I wrote quite a few articles for them.

**John:** You had several articles in there.

**Lee:** I got kind of pushed into it by John Taylor who kept telling me, "oh, you got to look at some of this stuff over here." It had just come in and was being processed, and usually an archivist is just processing something, no one looks at it. John kept saying, "go over there, and take a look at this stuff." So I did, and it just turned my life around for like 10, 15 years working on code breaking in both theaters: the European and the Pacific theater.

**John:** If John Taylor told you to do something you did it.

**Lee:** And now I'm finding I'm having trouble doing the research when I should be working as an archivist. Boy, but for a while there, I was having a ball. I'd go down there, eat at my desk, and then gallop downstairs to the second floor and just read whatever I put in a slip for that morning. So I'd get 20 minutes or so in each day.

**John: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the National Archives?**

**Lee:** That, I really don't know. I'm so busy thinking about the challenges of what I'm going to do as the archivist of this little church archives and also as of last week, I am also archivist of the Old Stone Church Foundation Archives. We are the oldest Methodist society in Virginia, founded in 1766. They got all these old records going way back. They need to be organized, they need to be preserved, all essentially the same things you're doing here. It might not differ quite so much except, you got space!

**John: Do you have any impressions, thoughts, or comments on any of the challenges that came up during your tenure here? How you think? I think the PROFS case would be one of the first things to come to mind, but I think that was prior to your arrival right?**

**Lee:** I was here for that but it didn't really affect my work, unless it involved getting some statistics right away. For example double checking figures given to us by the trust fund. I really didn't have much to do with any of that.

**John:** Keeping under the radar.

**John: What would you say would be the significant turning points in your career?**

**Lee:** There were probably several. I think first just coming here as a junior high school kid and doing research and going to the Library of Congress too and just seeing all that information. The thought that was so much out there you could learn and know about some really interesting events or people. That was probably the first influence. And then much later meeting Herb Simon at Carnegie Melon, that was a total revolution in my head to start thinking about just "how do historians solve problems." If you looked inside their mind, how would you find historical information organized, how would they retrieve it so quickly and easily? Could you do this for a student?

That was sort of what I was doing when I came here. It also lent itself naturally to code breaking which was of interest to people in artificial intelligence and it certainly kept me occupied for a good many years. Though not much at this point, you're just too far away.

**John: How do you view your time here?**

**Lee:** In the past 45 minutes?

**John: Somebody asked you to summarize your career here at the National Archives, however long you want to take to do it. What would you tell them?**

**Lee:** Well, I would think of those things that I created that made our lives a whole lot easier. Including INPHYX and NALDS and NOIS and all the systems I've put together to help us print out requests for casualty lists, POW lists. I think about that a lot but I also think more and more about the people because it was really like a family. You do miss that when you go on and you miss the structure. What I'm trying to do now is sort of recapture that.

**John:** I miss your coffee personally.



**Lee:** Well, thank you. I do appreciate that. Yeah I used to think, if I can get the coffee made, make it properly. At least I've done one thing right today.

**John:** There were several mornings, cause I'm making the coffee now, there are certain mornings that it doesn't get made.

**Lee:** Well, you heard the story about Peggy, didn't you? This was one that Greg Lamotta told me. You may have heard it. Greg and I used to switch on and off making the coffee. Well anyway, one day Peggy came by and thanked him for the coffee and said that it was pretty good. He didn't have the heart to tell her that he hadn't made any coffee that day. She had gotten yesterday's. Usually she gets in around 10, that time the coffee pot is off and it might be luke warm if she's lucky, but she'll drink it anyway. If you give her crankese oil, she'll drink it.

**John:** She's been off coffee for a little while. I'm wondering if the world is beginning to spin off its axis because she hasn't been drinking as much coffee anymore.

**Lee:** Hmm, I'll have to talk to her about that. Well I've been off it too for medical reasons. When the church secretary makes coffee I go over, I don't drink it, I smell it; just the aroma of it.

**John:** For the last question, I sort of had it on a list of questions that I had players choice. If there's something you want to address, this is the question that has been rolling around in my head, that I think would sort of be a good summary and conclusion. **Somebody from 10, 15 years down the road, they come across this interview, and they are just starting out their career at the National Archives. They pop this in, and they are watching it. What does Lee Gladwin want to tell the new NARA person who's just starting here?**

**Lee:** Enjoy it, cause it's a wonderful, wonderful place, and wonderful people. It's an exciting place to hold a document. To me it was always like being there, if I could touch the document. When I was there, I could see somebody else who wrote that paper and sort of imagine them writing it. I was recently at the church going through some things cataloging them and found a receipt for something that was dated 1 September 1939. Immediately I could hear the German tanks rolling into Poland. Wherever you are, you're going to have a wonderful time here, it's a time machine. Much more than that, it's family!

**John:** It's a great answer! You have anything else? Thank you very much, Lee.