

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives Oral History interview
Subject: James "Bert" Rhoads
Interviewer: Rodney Ross
Date: December 29, 1984

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MR. RODNEY ROSS: This is Rod Ross, and this is Saturday, December 29, 1984. I shall be speaking with James B. Rhoads, the fifth Archivist of the United States. We are in Chicago at the Hyatt Regency in Illinois Center, at the 99th annual meeting of the American Historical Association.

Bert, let's begin with a discussion of your early background, before you joined the National Archives. Who were your parents, and when and where were you born?

MR. JAMES B. RHOADS: My parents were James Harrison Rhoads and Mary Keenan Rhoads. I was born in Sioux City, Iowa on September 17, 1928.

MR. ROSS: Where did you grow up and was there anything remarkable about your childhood?

MR. RHOADS: I don't know if there was anything remarkable about my childhood. We moved rather frequently. I spent some time growing up in each of the Dakotas and in Texas.

MR. ROSS: What was your father's profession?

MR. RHOADS: My father was a minister.

MR. ROSS: Of which denomination?

MR. RHOADS: Seventh-day Adventist.

MR. ROSS: What schools did you attend? I presume with moving about, you attended umpteen grade schools.

MR. RHOADS: Umpteen grade schools.

MR. ROSS: Where did you go to college?

MR. RHOADS: I went to Southwestern Junior College in Keene, Texas for one year. I went to Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska for one year, and then I attended the University of California at Berkeley, and received my bachelor's and master's degrees there.

MR. ROSS: What were the years of your attendance at Berkeley?

MR. RHOADS: 1948-1951.

MR. ROSS: What was your Master's thesis?

MR. RHOADS: My Master's thesis was a study of the history of the cross-filing practice in California politics. California had a unique flaw that enabled candidates for political office to run in the primary on both the Republican and Democratic ticket, or a minor party ticket. And if they won the nomination to both major parties, then, except for the possibility of some minor party opposition, they were elected at

the time of the primary election. Earl Warren, for example, won the governorship, I think, a couple of times that way.

Eventually, after I wrote my thesis, it was modified to the point where, in California now, people rarely win both party nominations. But it was a unique feature of California's political system.

MR. ROSS: How did it happen that you came to apply for a job at the National Archives?

MR. RHOADS: I don't think I ever actually applied for a job at the National Archives. I took what then was called the junior professional exam. I forget what its equivalent is now. I was in California then, and began receiving letters of inquiry from various government agencies. I remember I had an offer to be a classification trainee specialist for Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, among other things, and I finally took a job as an organization and methods examiner for the Department of the Air Force in McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, where I had my first introduction to such things as forms control. I was Forms Control Officer for the Air Materiel Command at McClellan Air Force Base for a few months.

After I'd been at McClellan for maybe three months, I received an inquiry from GSA [General Services Administration] about a position in the National Archives and, with a history major in college and a master's degree in history, this seemed to offer a more interesting career than what I was currently engaged in.

So, I indicated an interest and one thing led to another. We sold off our few sticks of furniture, crammed everything else in our Studebaker, and headed east. My first position at the National Archives was as a GS-5 archivist position in what was then called the Motion Picture and Sound Recording Section.

MR. ROSS: Before continuing further, when you say, "We moved out east," how plural is "we"?

MR. RHOADS: My wife and myself. My wife is Angela Handy Rhoads and we were married in 1947.

MR. ROSS: Is she also from the west?

MR. RHOADS: She's from Texas.

MR. ROSS: And you had no children then at the time?

MR. RHOADS: Not at that time.

MR. ROSS: What I'd like to do for a good part of the initial portion of the conversation, is for you to describe, step by step, the various positions you held at the Archives; the GS level; your main responsibilities and accomplishments; who your co-workers and supervisors were; and then how and why you left each of the positions for an advancement.

MR. RHOADS: Well, I arrived at the National Archives on December 15, 1952. By coincidence, that was the day that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were enshrined in the Exhibition Hall. They had actually been transferred from the Library of Congress, I think, the day before, or maybe two days before. A big ceremony with [President Harry S.] Truman and [U.S. Supreme Court] Chief Justice [Fred M.] Vinson and so on had taken place at the Archives earlier in the day before I first set foot there.

MR. ROSS: I take it there were two ceremonies, one two days before, with the magnificent procession from the Library Congress down the avenue.

MR. RHOADS: That's right.

MR. ROSS: And then the second, entombing of the—

MR. RHOADS: Enshrine, I think, is the word they would prefer to have used.

MR. ROSS: -- enshrined.

MR. RHOADS: So, the 1952 Presidential elections, of course, had been held shortly before we left California, and I had been at the Archives only about a month when General Eisenhower was inaugurated for his first term as President, and one of his campaign promises was to clean out and cut down the size of the government in Washington.

So, there were some personnel cuts and some of them affected NARS, and after about three months in the Motion Picture and Sound Recording branch, I found myself rified [laid off due to Reduction in Force (RIF)]. For a while, it looked as though I was going to be out on the street, and I began looking for alternative jobs. I remember hearing that the CIA was hiring people, and I went over there for an interview. I suppose that if I had been offered something, I might've taken it, much to my subsequent regret. But there were some lower-level non-professional positions available, and I was bumped, in effect, to a vacant position in the photo lab.

MR. ROSS: Let's go back for a second and talk about your initial impressions of the Archives and your initial responsibilities with the Motion Picture and Sound Recordings branch.

MR. RHOADS: Well, I was impressed by the Archives. Visual impression was significant. Once I got back into the stacks, I was mightily impressed by the volume of material. I had some glimmering of the variety of it but I think most people who come in at that level into one unit have enough to learn in their own little immediate bailiwick that they're not all that concerned about other things that may be there.

MR. ROSS: [Interposing] When you were a child or a high school student or a college student, can you remember hearing of the National Archives, and having any vague impression of what it was?

MR. RHOADS: No, not as a child or a high school student, I don't think, but in college, and certainly in graduate school at Cal, I had a general idea. I knew it was the institution that kept the government's permanently valuable records. I had talked with some graduate students who had done research there. Some of my professors had and—

MR. ROSS: [Interposing] Who were some of your professors at Cal?

MR. RHOADS: My thesis supervisor was Lawrence Kinnaird. Kenneth Stampp was one of my professors. Bill Davis, who later became State Archivist of California, was one of my professors. Walton Bean.

MR. ROSS: When you were coming to Washington, did you have either an exulted feeling that you were going to be working for the National Archives of the United States, or was this simply another job?

MR. RHOADS: No, no. I felt pretty good about it. It was a national institution that, obviously, was specializing in matters of historical concern. I had always, since a child, been interested in history, and my specializing in history once I got into college was a natural progression. I was pleased and proud to be an employee of the National Archives from the outset.

When I got bumped, I got a little disillusioned, and would have left almost simultaneously with my receiving word of my RIF, we learned that my wife was pregnant with our first child. So, I had some economic concerns, too.

MR. ROSS: When you were working initially at the Motion Picture and Sound Recordings branch, what did you do?

MR. RHOADS: A variety of things. There was some reference activity, people coming in to look at motion pictures on the Moviolas, and also orders for pieces of footage. I remember finding the materials on the reels of film and marking them and sending them down to the lab.

I did some minimal, sort of, descriptive work. I guess the thing that I remember best of all is a special project that I was involved with. When Eisenhower became President, there was a good deal of pressure on him to clean out all the Democratic officeholders, and one of them who was slated for departure, at least by some leading Republicans, notably Senator [Everett] Dirksen, was Wayne C. Grover [Third Archivist of the U.S.]. Grover was aware of this, and apparently was trying to figure out things to do that might put some roadblocks in the way of those intentions. He apparently hit on the idea of trying to find film footage that might have special meaning for Members of Congress, and inviting them down to the National Archives to see it.

So, this project involved going through the Congressional Directory, finding out which Members of Congress were veterans, and what World War I or World War II outfits they had been in, and then checking our holdings to see if we had any footage on those outfits. Normally, individuals wouldn't be identified. After identifying that material, it was pooled together, copied, and made into a film that was shown at least to some members of Congress. It was kind of ironic in certain ways because May Fawcett, who was the Chief of the Motion Picture and Sound Recording section, according to the scuttlebutt that was going up and down the halls of the National Archives—and I have no reason today to doubt it—apparently was in league with Dallas Irvine, who was the Chief of the War Records division, as part of the inside cabal that was cooperating with Dirksen and his friends on Capitol Hill in trying to get Grover ousted and someone else brought in.

So, it's, as I say, ironic that it fell to her section to do the basic work that enabled Grover to at least make one form of counterattack against this effort.

MR. ROSS: I was going to save this for later, but as long as you're going to have a chance to see the tape transcript before the public does, what can you say of Dallas Irvine?

MR. RHOADS: Dallas Irvine was a fascinating man. He was certainly one of the smartest people I ever knew, in terms of sheer intellectual ability. His IQ must have been off the top of the graph. Very articulate. His flights of abstract reasoning got beyond me, and most other people that I knew, pretty quickly.

He was a prima donna. He was a man of great ability and great promise that I think was not fully realized because of some flaws in his character. There had been a series of turf battles, that is as good a word as any to describe them. That had involved a lot of the division directors, before I came to the National Archives.

MR. ROSS: Would you like to name a couple of names?

MR. RHOADS: Oh, Paul Lewinson, Marcus Price. Certainly people like [Theodore R.] Schellenberg were involved and Phil Bauer, but a lot of those who were involved were already gone by the time I came. I don't remember the circumstances, but I remember there were a number of times when I had occasion, as a branch chief, to go back into a lot of the files that had accumulated in the course of these disputes.

Some of these were about petty things. Some of them were about basic principles. It was a part of the Archives' coming of age and finding its way and thrashing out what its position would be on various basic issues. And anyone who assays to write the real history of the National Archives up to about 1950 really needs to spend a lot of time on those files to find out who the actors were, what their positions were, the way in which they fought their battles, and what the alliances were between various people.

MR. ROSS: Later, I'd wanted to talk about Ted Schellenberg, and perhaps now might be as good as any. Solon [Buck] seemed to think that he was, you know, the key force in the cabal of 1947 or so, against Buck, I understand, and Grover and Hamer. What was your relationship with Ted Schellenberg and how did you view him during the whole time you were at the Archives?

MR. RHOADS: I never felt close to Schellenberg. He was the top of the pinnacle, and I was at the bottom of the heap for a while, and even by the time he retired, I think I was branch chief. So, I was never thrown into a close daily working relationship with him, and he was, sort of, an authority figure for me.

He was obviously a very intelligent person, reserved, rather stiff and formal, at least in dealing with those who were way down the ladder from him. I had respect for Schellenberg, although I saw some warts on him. I never felt any great feeling of warmth for the man. He was not an easy person to warm up to, or at least I didn't find him so.

MR. ROSS: We'll get back to Schellenberg as we work our way up through your progression. So, you were ruffed from the National Archives, and then how did you happen to hear about the photo lab opportunity?

MR. RHOADS: The photo lab was in the same division at that time as the Motion Picture and Sound Recording section and the Still Pictures section. It was all part of what was then called, I think, the Audio Visual Records branch. And I guess in my short time there, I'd made a decent impression on my supervisor and on Marcus Price, who was the division or branch chief, and I think they wanted to take care of me when they found that they had this vacancy in the photo lab. They were being helpful.

MR. ROSS: So, it was coming back as GS-3 after how long at the hiatus?

MR. RHOADS: Oh, no hiatus at all. One Friday, I quit work in the Motion Picture section, and the next Monday I reported to Harry Baudu, who was chief of the photo lab.

MR. ROSS: Was Harry Baudu a character or...?

MR. RHOADS: Yes, he was a character.

MR. ROSS: Would you like to describe?

MR. RHOADS: He was an old... He was a retired naval officer who was basically a Navy photographer, and he knew a great deal about photography and about photographic technology. He never spoke below a shout. Later, I learned that it was because he was becoming deaf, and didn't realize how loud he was talking. That was only part of it, I think. He liked to shout and throw his weight around, and he ran a

pretty taut ship. All of the Navy jargon came out. The floor was a deck and the can was a head. He was opinionated and he was tough, but I think he did a good job in running the photo lab. He was hard to get along with sometimes, could be sort of intimidating to a young kid working for him, but—

MR. ROSS: [Interposing] During World War II, I believe the OSS had a photo lab in the National Archives building. Was that lab still in existence when you were working there?

MR. RHOADS: I think it was. I think it got moved out maybe within the first year I was there. But I do remember there was some kind of a lab facility that was doing hush-hush things, and was not under control of the National Archives but it was located in the building.

MR. ROSS: Recently, the National Archives posted a fee schedule advance for items that photo lab and others, were asked to reproduce. Do you have any idea of prices back then, the early to mid-1950s?

MR. RHOADS: They were much less than they are today. I seem to recall that an 8" x 10" glossy black and white photograph went for 75 cents.

MR. ROSS: The other thing, it seems like it takes forever for the photo lab to fill an order, four or five, six weeks. Was it anything like that when you were there?

MR. RHOADS: I think it depends on the kind of material. There were full pipelines on special order microfilming, as I recall. Orders for photographic prints were probably backlogged a little bit.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[START TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MR. ROSS: This is side B of our first tape with Bert Rhoads, December 29, 1984. We're talking about Bert's second job at the National Archives in the photo lab and you can continue. You were saying?

MR. RHOADS: A lot of the document copying work was done by photostat and, of course, that was a slower and more cumbersome process than the Xerox machine, but I don't think there were big backlogs there. I think the biggest backlogs were in special order microfilm.

MR. ROSS: Had the Archives started its massive microfilming project of putting its records on microfilm for sale?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. That had begun sometime in the 1940s. When I was in the photo lab, that program was a significant part of our work.

MR. ROSS: I presume that as, say, an underling, you had nothing to do with arrangement of papers for microfilming?

MR. RHOADS: No. The things I did in the photo lab were prime photostats, dry photographic prints, operate a camera, a microfilm camera, do some microfilm inspection, and deliver photostats, microfilms to the various units in the National Archives building that had ordered from the lab. That was the way I first learned my way around the National Archives building was behind a cart that I pushed all over the place.

MR. ROSS: Was that how you met Sarah Jackson?

MR. RHOADS: That was undoubtedly the occasion. I'm sure that's when I first met Sarah, and when I first met a lot of other people around the building.

MR. ROSS: Would you like to say a few words about Sarah?

MR. RHOADS: I guess that was probably when I first knew Sarah. Sarah was, in those days as ever since then, a friendly and helpful person, who obviously knew a great deal about the holdings of whatever her unit in the War Records branch was at that time. Sarah and people like her were then, and I'm sure are now, most essential part of the National Archives.

MR. ROSS: When you mention Sarah and people like her, could you elaborate on other people of that caliber, people who may not have risen to executive positions, but knew the records and were just incredibly helpful to researchers?

MR. RHOADS: One person who comes to mind immediately as meeting those specifications is John Taylor. You know, I'm not sure anything would be served by my trying to recall all of the people I have known in my career at the National Archives who played that kind of a role. Many of them have left or gone, but they've always been there, thank goodness the unsung heroes of the National Archives.

MR. ROSS: Yeah. What was the policy at the National Archives for developing subject specialist versus developing archivists? During your years as Archivist of the United States, did you see a discrepancy between those two sides and what way did you come down?

MR. RHOADS: I think we're talking about perhaps two categories of individuals who came to work for the Archives. There have always been some non-professionals, people who either didn't have their bachelor's degree in the right thing, or people who perhaps had never finished college and who were in the 1421 series. They hadn't had a lot of specialized training in archives, but worked with the records, used the records over many years, and developed a great deal of knowledge and expertise. Their number is legion.

When I came to the National Archives, there were an awful lot of so-called professional archivists, who also were essentially of that character, except that they had a degree and this made by archivists, rather than Archives assistants.

Most of them, I guess, are now gone from the scene but among those people are the John Taylors. They have stayed with essentially the same records since the first day they walked in the door of the National Archives. It was my feeling when I became involved with developing the Archives' internal training program, the training agreement, with the GSA, that what we wanted to do with new archivists who came in was to give them rotational assignments, in the form of class work experience, to give them a promotional ladder. When I came to the Archives, there were no automatic promotions.

I came in as a GS-5, and until somebody got promoted up because somebody else had died or retired or something, there were no vacancies and that was, kind of, a deadening prospect. Later, that was improved somewhat with the first major internal training program under Schellenberg, beginning about 1953 or 1954, I guess, where the Grade 5 archivist could look forward, after a year or two, to fairly certain promotion to GS-7.

It was obvious to me that we were falling behind other kinds of professional positions in the Civil Service, where a person could come in at Grade 5 or Grade 7 and get on the fast track to an 11. I felt

that to be competitive, to be able to attract young people with good potential, we needed to offer more than that.

So, my idea was that, okay, we require a Master's degree or at least a year of graduate study, bring in the people at the Grade 7 level. Assuming they do the right things and continue to show the right promise, a couple of years after that, there'll be GS-11s. Most of them then are going to wind up at about that point in the unit where, hopefully, they will begin to develop subject matter expertise, perhaps on the basis of a better understanding of what the total feel is all about. Then, they may be the proceeding generation of archivists.

We had, at the point I say "we," I mean Bob Bahmer [Robert Bahmer, fourth Archivist of the U.S.] and myself, had high hopes that we could develop the grade structure, where at least a few people who were undeniable authorities in their fields could advance to as high as Grade 14 or 15, purely on the basis of their subject matter expertise. This would have to be expertise in a broad field. They would have to have a stature in their field that brought them national recognition. We never anticipated there would be very many people like that, but we thought that there might be a time when there would be a few, and that the younger archivists coming in who didn't choose to or weren't well suited for supervision, administration, management could develop their careers to a pretty good level on the basis of their subject matter expertise.

The point at which you reach the fork in the road, decide whether you want to be subject matter specialist or manager, is probably at around the GS-12 or 13 level. So, I didn't view these two concepts as necessarily being in conflict with each other in any way.

MR. ROSS: Okay. Let's continue with the upward climb of your career at the National Archives. When did you leave the photo lab and for what position?

MR. RHOADS: I must have left the photo lab in the fall of 1953, and I went into a GS-5 archivist position, and cut back my professional rank in the Cartographic Records branch. Herman Friis was the chief of the branch. Herman was very knowledgeable in his field. Herman always took, I think, a great deal of interest in me, and encouraged me to develop my skills, my knowledge. He encouraged me to write and publish. The first things I published were at his explicit encouragement. Herman, I think, was happy and successful as chief of the Cartographic branch.

Apparently, some people got caught in some conflicts later on after I left the branch. He and Dallas Irvine were selected as two senior subject matter specialists, supposedly the first of their kind in the Archives, Senior Specialist in Military Archives, and Senior Specialist in Cartographic Archives, and there seemed to be, sort of, a sidelining of them. It took place at the time of the general reorganization, but that was after I had left the Cartographic branch.

I was in the Cartographic longer than I was in any other unit in NARS during my career there, until I became Archivist of the United States.

MR. ROSS: How long was that? Three years?

MR. RHOADS: No. It was longer than that. I guess it was at least six years. It was 1959 or 1960 before I moved on.

MR. ROSS: Were you doing both reference and projects?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. I did both reference and projects, a little bit of appraisal work.

MR. ROSS: For reference, who would be clientele that would come to use the maps of the Archives?

MR. RHOADS: Historical geographers, lawyers. I think it was during the time of the Tidelands controversy over offshore oil on their ship. There was a lot of activity by lawyers looking for maps that would address their legal claims one way or another. Quite a variety of people and some historians, I remember meeting Allan Nevins there.

MR. ROSS: When you talked about, say, lawyers' interest in maps for Tidelands, can you speak a bit about the kind of different record groups worth of maps that Cartographic had, and the kinds of sources, and the originating agencies that a researcher would seek, such as somebody interested in proving whether a certain state had ownership.

MR. RHOADS: I suppose evidence of that sort of thing could probably be found in more than one record group. The area that I was immediately responsible for included the Army Corps of Engineers, which was a rich record group for historical maps. I also had some responsibilities, I think, for some of the agricultural record groups' census. There was a surprising diversity of potential users of those materials, and I guess during the time I was there, I had something to do with the Bureau of Indian Affairs' maps, too.

MR. ROSS: What kind of projects did you work on during your term with Cartographic?

MR. RHOADS: I did some inventories, and I did a good deal of reference work, a good deal of basic arrangement work.

MR. ROSS: What does it mean to do arrangement with maps?

MR. RHOADS: Well, maps perhaps more than typical textual records, I think, may come in a variety of arrangements, a lot of them in bad physical condition, maybe with no arrangement. It's just a collection of maps that has accumulated in some attic. So, there was the problem of trying to discover what the original arrangement scheme, if any, had been, and reconstructing that.

A lot of the maps were in bad shape, and we were developing programs for sending them down to the photo lab to the restoration lab to get them cloth-backed and laminated and flattened and so on, and then putting identification numbers on them, putting them in large folders, and map roll. So, I did other than perhaps really sophisticated appraisal work on maps. During my time there, I had a taste of all aspects of archival work, as they applied to cartographic material.

MR. ROSS: As you mention the word appraisal, the appraisal function of the National Archives seems to have swung back and forth and forth and back as far as whether the Custodial Unit should do the appraisal and whether there should be a specific appraisal division or section or branch. Could you discuss how the appraisal question has swung back and forth, forth and back?

MR. RHOADS: When I first came to the Archives, I guess all the basic appraisal was done within the Custodial Units, and you didn't really have an appraisal expert within each of those units. You had archivists at various grade levels appraising the records that, presumably, they were most familiar with.

Those appraisals underwent reviews of varying degrees of rigor by the branch chiefs or division chiefs before they worked their way up to the archivist to be signed. It was about 1962 when the Archives was

reorganized along more or less functional lines. One of its purposes, obviously, was to get Schellenberg out of his position as Director of Archival Management. They established an Office of Records Appraisal, and put him in charge of that.

I think that was probably the first time that the appraisal function had been organizationally segregated in that way. Once everything got sorted out after that reorganization, it's my recollection that the members of the Appraisal Division were basically responsible for appraising textual records. That division relied on Audio Visual, Cartographic. Later, this was true of machine readable records, to do at least the initial appraisal on their own records, and that may have made good sense. I didn't, I think there was something to be said for it.

I suppose that one of my least understood actions as Archivist may have been when I finally moved all of the disposition and appraisal functions into the Office of Federal Records Centers, staffed by professionally qualified archivists but organizationally located there. In my view, there simply wasn't enough progress being made in scheduling records for disposal under the previous organizational setup. And given the nature of the Office of Federal Records Center's chief mandates, its main functions, it was clear to me that this would be an organizational context in which the people of that staff would be under pressure to get this scheduling done. Almost all of the attention of the Appraisal Unit up to that time, too much of it, I felt, had gone toward appraising records that were probably of permanent character. Everyone knew that at the beginning, and as a result of backlog of action, some of it could be handled in a fairly cut and dried manner. The bulk of Government records just wasn't getting done. And I felt that if you had a staff of professional archivists, who would indeed be concerned about the identification and preservation of permanently valuable records, but were operating in an organization of context where there was pressure on them to get this other scheduling done, that you'd wind up with a more balanced and productive program, and I think we did.

MR. ROSS: I think we may well get back to that, but you mentioned that in your early career, Herman Friis had encouraged you to do writing. Somewhere along the line, you did a 10- to 15-page paper for the American University. Where does that fit in?

MR. RHOADS: That must have been a two-semester course in the History and Administration of Archives, taught by Ernst Posner at the National Archives, but as an American University course.

MR. ROSS: What was the approximate time that you took that course? Were you in Cartographic?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. That was the course I referred to in my remarks yesterday, and those notes that I referred to were dated December 1956. So, I think what I did was take, probably, at the beginning of '56, the second semester it seems to me that I took first and then probably in the fall of '56, I took the first half of the course. The [Solon] Buck [second Archivist of the United States, 1941 to 1948] piece I might have done early in the year.

This was the first coursework that I took for credit that was applicable towards my doctorate.

MR. ROSS: What were your impressions of Ernst Posner?

MR. RHOADS: I think Ernst Posner was one of the finest human beings I have ever known. He was an excellent lecturer, a very wise man, as well as a very knowledgeable man in, it seemed to me, all aspects

of archive history and practice. I guess I progressed in my feelings about Posner from being extremely respectful and very impressed to having a very warm personal feeling for the man.

MR. ROSS: How did it happen that you chose Solon Buck as a research topic?

MR. RHOADS: I don't remember.

MR. ROSS: Did you interview Buck?

MR. RHOADS: I think I did, yes, I did.

MR. ROSS: Had he left the Library of Congress by that time?

MR. RHOADS: I interviewed him at the Library of Congress in an office there. I think he may have, I think he was no longer Chief of the Manuscript Division there, but he had some AAJ position, I think, and the library continued to let him use an office there. He wasn't Secretary. He may have been Treasurer of the AAJ or something.

MR. ROSS: Well, he was Treasurer for 20-something years. I think it was the late 1930s to the late 1950s. So, it could well be.

MR. RHOADS: Yes. I guess one reason I have a recollection of Boyd Shafer, who was then the Secretary of the AAJ, coming in and interrupting our interview and getting Buck to sign a check. Why I remember that, I don't know, but I think he probably was Treasurer of the AAJ and I think he had retired from the library. If not, it was soon to happen.

MR. ROSS: Buck had quite a reputation as a very strong notable personality. How did he strike you?

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]

[START TAPE 2 SIDE A]

MR. ROSS: This is Rod Ross. This is side A of tape number two of the conversation with Bert Rhoads, December 29, 1984 and we're in the midst of discussing an interview that Bert Rhoads had with Solon Buck in the 1950s. You were saying about Dr. Buck?

MR. RHOADS: There were a lot of stories still making the rounds in the Archives about Buck, including some that were told me by branch and division chiefs. Believe it or not, even at that time, we were probably less than discreet, telling a very junior member of the staff. But Buck did arouse strong feelings on the part of the people he worked with, and they weren't all favorable. He was a nitpicker and a difficult taskmaster, and I heard too much about that to discount it entirely. But I must say that the side of him I saw was quite different.

He very kindly received me for that interview. He was gracious. We didn't spend a lot of time together, but I guess what I remember best of all was that every time I got something in print—whether it was an article on Minnesota History, which may have interested him, of course, given his background in the Minnesota Historical Society, or a preliminary inventory or what have you—he always sent me a little note on a postcard saying he'd read it and was favorably impressed with it, congratulated me on it, maybe made a substitutive comment or two, which I thought was rather remarkable.

Here I was, a GS-7 or at most a GS-9 during those years, and he took the time to do that. Now, admittedly he was retired and maybe didn't have a lot of other things to do but I—

MR. ROSS: [Interposing] Did you make it a practice to send things to him or—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] No, no. He apparently kept a very close eye on publications that came out of the National Archives, and that sort of thing. I don't remember sending him any of my things. One factor here was that his wife, Elizabeth Hawthorn-Buck, worked at the National Archives.

I guess I first became acquainted with Elizabeth when I was pushing my cart on behalf of the photo lab. She was in the Exhibits and Publications branch. She had come to work at the Archives after he had left the Archives, I should say. She was doing editorial work on Archives Publications, primarily.

She was a very nice, warm person, and seemed to take an interest in me. I guess I may have mentioned to her that I was doing this thing on her husband, and it may have been partly through her good offices that I got in to see him. That may have affected his taking a look at things that I published and commenting on them to me. But Buck was an old man by then, and not nearly as active as he had been in the earlier stages of his life, and maybe he, like some other people, mellowed a bit with age. But I never personally saw this difficult side of him. He was always very considerate to me.

MR. ROSS: He took a similar interest in other archivists?

MR. RHOADS: I don't know.

MR. ROSS: Now, again, we're jumping ahead. In the year or two or three before you became Archivist of the United States, would you say that you were, you know, the golden-haired boy who was being groomed for the position? When did you first have a feeling that that was the case?

MR. RHOADS: There was a time in my career during the early 1960s, when I was being moved around from one job to another with such frequency that I remember wondering, you know, "Are they giving me these varied experiences because they think maybe someday I'll be good enough to be a Division Director? Or is it that I'm not cutting the mustard and they're shuffling me around to try to find a niche for me that I can do?"

I guess that it didn't really dawn on me that I was being groomed for the top job until Bob Bahmer called me into his office shortly after Wayne Grover had left, and said that he'd like for me to be the Deputy Archivist. Maybe I was pretty slow on the uptake, but I never, I never really thought of myself as a potential Archivist of the United States until that happened.

MR. ROSS: Okay. Where does your working for your Ph.D. fit into your life career at the Archives?

MR. RHOADS: It fit in during, I guess, half of my career at the National Archives. I began working on it in the mid-1950s on a part-time basis, and finally got my degree in 1965 at just about the point that I became Assistant Archivist for Civil Archives.

MR. ROSS: What was your dissertation in?

MR. RHOADS: It was a study of the 1920 Presidential campaign of the Socialist Party. This was the year that Eugene V. Debs ran for President from the Atlanta Penitentiary. It was an interesting episode for minor party politics in this country.

MR. ROSS: Who were some of the professors you studied with at American University?

MR. RHOADS: Arthur Ekirch, I guess more than anyone else; Ernst Posner, of course, in the archival courses; Donald Dozier; and Harold Davis. I feel that I'm leaving out one or two.

MR. ROSS: Were you taking your degree primarily so that you could have a Ph.D. after your name, or had you thought about leaving the Archives to teach, or did you think it would be necessary for professional status?

MR. RHOADS: I think more the latter. By the time I got very far into my Ph.D. program, I had pretty much decided to make the Archives my career, and I realized that my chances of advancement would be enhanced by having a degree.

MR. ROSS: Let's continue with your advancement. You said you left Cartographic after a number of years. Where did you go from Cartographic?

MR. RHOADS: I went from there to the Exhibits and Publications branch.

MR. ROSS: Who was head of that at the time?

MR. RHOADS: Al Leisinger and I had been GS-9s in Cartographic when I left and got my GS-11 by going to Exhibits and Publications. I was Assistant Branch Chief there and was in immediate charge of the microfilm publication program, initially, and gradually I got fairly heavily involved in the Exhibits program.

MR. ROSS: Would you like to say something about Al Leisinger?

MR. RHOADS: I learned from Al. Some of the things I learned were things not to do, but Al taught me a lot. He was, and I imagine still is, a person who had a very broad knowledge of the whole of the National Archives, a good grasp of its history and its dynamics. I know that Al later developed a reputation for being a person with a lot of ideas, but not very good on the follow-through and accomplishing things.

Maybe he was, even at that time, beginning to be tagged that way, but I didn't see that side when I worked for him. But I know that on the annual inspections, Phil Bauer and Ted Schellenberg would come in and give him a hard time about things that hadn't gotten done, but it seemed to me I saw a lot getting done, from the perspective that I had then. And Al gave me an opportunity to develop.

That was really my first supervisory job. Looking back on it, I think I probably wouldn't have been nearly as likely to be selected for that position if I had not had a period of service in the photo lab, where I learned about microphotography and microfilm publication. I think that may have given me a little edge in the competition for what was then considered to be a very good job for a young person.

MR. ROSS: I'm not familiar with the annual inspections. What are they? Were they still being done when you were Archivist of the United States?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. They were modified and decentralized somewhat during the time that I was Archivist. But certainly from the time that I came to the Archives until somewhere during my own tenure as Archivist, there was a procedure whereby every year, the top brass would descend on each organizational unit and closet themselves with the chief or the chief and his or her top staff, go over

programs, look at how well or how completely the previous year's work program had been accomplished, and talk about what might go into next year's work program.

At least on some occasions, they made a visual inspection of the stack areas of the Custodial Unit, and may have pointed comments about ragged housekeeping practices, and so on. So, it was an event that people responsible for National Archives' organizational units looked forward to with a great deal of anticipation and foreboding.

I think it was basically a good practice because it did give branch and section chiefs a chance to have at least one formal opportunity a year to tell the archivists and their principal assistants what they needed, what they wanted to do, and so on, and it enabled the brass to have a better idea of what was going on down below.

As the organization got larger and more units were created, it came to be a tremendous drain on time, even spending half a day with each unit added up to an awful lot of full days that I found that I just couldn't any longer afford. So, basically, I delegated that responsibility to the office heads.

MR. ROSS: Getting back to your position with Exhibits and Publications—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] Right. I think it was not faithfully carried out unless it was known that I was going to be there. I'm afraid that the whole concept sort of petered out once the top person ceased to involve himself in it on a personal basis. I think that's unfortunate, but I'm afraid that's what happened in many parts of the organization. It didn't in Federal Records Centers. There, if anything, a program strengthened, and there's been a very rigorous and vigorous annual inspection program there. But in some other parts of the organization, that's not true.

MR. ROSS: Solon Buck had a reputation of being intimately involved with everything. Where did Wayne Grover fall in?

MR. RHOADS: Well, the responsibilities of NARS increased very substantially during Grover's time as Archivist. I suspect that Buck was more intimately involved than Grover himself was able to be, but Grover involved himself in a lot of details, and when he didn't, his deputy Bob Bahmer did.

MR. ROSS: Can you speak about the relationship between Bahmer and Grover?

MR. RHOADS: I think it was a very close relationship over a long, long period of time, certainly from the time that both of them came back into the National Archives after World War II until Grover's death. They didn't always see eye to eye on everything, but they worked very effectively as a team. They knew each other awfully well.

They had the same basic objectives. I think they complimented each other. Bahmer sort of played the role of Mr. Inside and Mr. Tough Guy, and Grover played more the outside role, and found it difficult to be as tough as Bahmer had to be at times. I think there were times when Bahmer sort of resented being relegated to that role of being the guy with the black hat, while Wayne was doing all these cushy things on the outside. But, basically, they were an effective team, I think, and they worked well together.

MR. ROSS: Was Edward Campbell head of the National Archives building during the time period when you were with Exhibits and Publications?

MR. RHOADS: No. Let's see, when I first came to the Archives, he was in the National Archives building in Records Management. I think he had something to do with scheduling records and then, I guess, during the 1950s, he was made the Regional Director. I guess they were then called the NARS Regional Commissioner for Region 3. So, he was moved over to the Regional Office building, and was there until he came back as Assistant Archivist for the National Archives when I was Archivist. I brought him back.

MR. ROSS: Did he have a predecessor, or was the organization simply not set up that way?

MR. RHOADS: Schellenberg, of course, for many years was Director of Archival Management, and that is a position that equates very closely to the Assistant Archivist for the National Archives. When Schellenberg was moved over to head the new Office of Appraisal, they split what was then, in effect, the Office of the National Archives into two offices, the Office of Military Archives and the Office of Civil Archives. Herman Kahn and Phil Bauer and then myself as Assistant Archivist for Civil Archives. On the Military Archives side, I guess Conn was over there initially and then, well, I can't remember.

Sherrod East was brought in eventually and was Assistant Archivist for Military Archives during the time I was in Civil Archives. I had been dubious about that division when I first saw it taking place, and as I worked within that system and eventually as head of one of those two Archives offices, I became more and more convinced that that was bad organization.

So, one of the first things that I gave some attention to after I became Deputy Archivist was making some reorganizational alignments with Bahmer's permission, and we pulled the office back together, and Sherrod East was, somewhat against his will, made Assistant Archivist for the National Archives. Bauer had retired by this time, and I don't know whether Sherrod simply liked the old organizational structure better or whether this was just more of a job than he wanted or what, but after the year or maybe less, he retired. At that point, Campbell was brought in to head up the office.

MR. ROSS: Since we mentioned Sherrod East, he was head of something called Departmental Records branch. Could you describe what that was, and how it got folded into the National Archives?

MR. RHOADS: There's a lot about that that I don't know but it seemed to be, sort of, an Archives of the Army. It was part of the Adjutant General's office. The AGO has always had certain records responsibility for the Department of War, and then the Department of the Army. Most of the materials in the Departmental Records branch were World War II vintage.

I don't know why this outfit was established, why these things weren't brought into the National Archives. I guess they didn't have enough age on them. The National Archives probably didn't have room for them because there was a lot of classified material there. Probably, the Army wanted to hang onto them.

MR. ROSS: Were these stored at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. I guess during the late 1950s, that was transferred from the Department of the Army to the National Archives, and became World War II Records Division, or something of the sort.

MR. ROSS: Were all the personnel transferred as well?

MR. RHOADS: I think so. Most of them were. Ken Munden was one of those people, Phil Brower, Eddie Reese, a number of other people. A lot of those people didn't have what we considered professional

qualifications, although some of them had been classified as archivists, I believe, by the Department of the Army. So, we had to introduce, kind of, an anomaly into our personnel structures when we took that over.

MR. ROSS: Okay. Let's go back to your career. What were some of the main projects you did with microfilm publications during your tenure there?

MR. RHOADS: There was a continuous flow of new projects coming on line. For a time, we supervised a pool of young archivist trainees, whose full-time job was to arrange records and prepare targeting materials and so on to get them ready for microfilm publication. Dick Jacobs was in that pool. That's when I first knew Dick.

So, there was a steady flow of material through that pipeline. We were concerned about keeping sales up so that the 10 percent overcharge would continue to finance creation of new microfilm publications. It was through a trust fund. During the time that I was there, I think microfilming become more or less tacitly recognized as an important preservation tool, and a lot of the microfilm publications that have that T-tag on them are from that period. "T" stood for temporary, and these were filmed without all of the editorial apparatus as a means of getting them quickly filmed. We were targeting things that were in bad physical condition or showed some signs of deterioration. The idea was to retire the records from active use, and require the researchers to use film copies.

MR. ROSS: Were the records then destroyed?

MR. RHOADS: No. That was considered as a possible option. There may have been one case where something was destroyed, but there was a reluctance to take that final, irrevocable step. The idea was that we would film under T-numbers. The records that needed it for preservation purposes, that we would convert those to Ms by adding on the editorial apparatus when they seemed to meet the basic criteria for microfilm publications. A lot of them were so converted and that took a lot of effort.

MR. ROSS: Where do the Ms fit in? What did M stand for?

MR. RHOADS: "M" stood for microcopy or microfilm publication. The program was originally called the File Microcopy Program, and I think in the late 1940s, that was changed to the Microfilm Publication Program.

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A]

[START TAPE 2 SIDE B]

MR. ROSS: This is side B of tape number two of a December 29, 1984, conversation with Bert Roads. You mentioned the Trust Fund. I know it was established long before you joined the Archives. How did that work for microfilm publications?

MR. RHOADS: Basically, a revolving fund had been set up within the trust fund to accommodate, I guess not only microfilm publication, but also other kinds of copying work. The seed money for that came from, I understand, a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation sometime in the 1940s. As far as microfilm publication was concerned, basically, the way it worked was that we set prices for reference copies, sale copies of microfilm at 10 percent above cost, which was allowed by law, and used the 10 percent profit to finance additional microfilm publications. During much of the time that I was involved with it in the

early to late 1950s and early 1960s, we were beginning to see a great flourishing of graduate education in the United States, and a lot of schools that had had no graduate programs were beginning to establish them, and they found they didn't have any significant primary source materials for the use of graduate students in History.

So, it was kind of a boom market. A lot of institutions were buying large quantities of National Archives microfilm publications to build up their stock of primary source materials. As I recall, we felt that we had to sell about six to eight copies within two years to break even. So, we were looking at the salability of the material as part of the determination of what we would film.

MR. ROSS: I know there were whole sections of State Department correspondence.

MR. RHOADS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ROSS: What were some of the other main types of materials?

MR. RHOADS: There were an awful lot of AGO [Adjutant General's Office] records, military personnel records from the Civil War period, for example, that were filmed while I was there. Some of that was done on a contract. I think the Daughters of the Confederacy probably financed the filming of some of the Confederate Service records.

There was a good deal of Office of Indian Affairs material filmed during that time, as I recall, a lot of General Accounting Office material. We were supporting the territorial papers program. It was during that time that they began issuing film supplements to the territorial papers, selective microfilm to accompany the published volumes, which were simultaneously made more selective.

MR. ROSS: Who did the selection process?

MR. RHOADS: As I recall, it was the work unit of each branch or division. They would recommend that certain things be microfilmed based on physical condition, the extent to which they were being heavily used by researchers, and other factors. Some things are a lot easier to prepare for microfilm than others, you know. Then those recommendations, I guess, would go up to Schellenberg's office, and then they'd be deflected to us. We had some say, at least as far as the preparation of the technical apparatus was concerned, and in terms of scheduling them. If we thought that something that had been recommended by a branch for microfilm publication just wasn't going to sell, we were in a position to get it postponed indefinitely.

MR. ROSS: Again, jumping around, you mentioned territorial papers. They were an odd thing. They came into the Archive Center as a separate bureaucracy.

MR. RHOADS: It was a transfer of function from the Department of State in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

MR. ROSS: Was Clarence Carter—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] Clarence Carter came over with the project from the State Department.

MR. ROSS: Had he long since left by the time you were working in the microfilming unit?

MR. RHOADS: I think he was gone by the time I was in Exhibits and Publications, but he had been there for several years after I came to the Archives.

MR. ROSS: Did the Archives feel uncomfortable with having that project as a separate project, or was it taken over and simply made an Archives function?

MR. RHOADS: No. It maintained its own, sort of, separate identity. Maybe there was some discomfort about it. I don't recall being aware of it.

MR. ROSS: Since the project pretty well is wound down, was it John Porter Bloom—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] He was the last editor, yes. John was brought in before I became Archivist. I think he was brought in as editor about the time I became Deputy Archivist, about the time Grover left. So, I hadn't known him before. I had nothing to do with hiring him. Those kinds of projects are extremely time-consuming. The territorial papers probably sold fewer copies than most of the major documentary publication projects that are sponsored by the NHPRC [National Historical Publications & Records Commission], for example.

A decision was made toward the end of my time as Archivist to wind it up short of completing all of the territorial papers, for example, Alaska and Hawaii. I think it was a combination of timeframe and geography. I was concerned about stopping it even though I felt it had a sort of marginal value compared with other things that were not being supported as well as they should be. So we convened an advisory group chaired by Richard Leopold, as a matter of fact, or at least he was a member of the committee, to take as objective a look at the whole as they could, and make recommendations on the future of the program. We had not participated in their deliberations, except just to respond to requests for information. Their recommendation was that we ought to wind it down at some foreseeable point, and not let this just spin out indefinitely.

I don't know the present status, but I guess there was never any successor to Bloom.

MR. ROSS: I think that's correct. I'm not sure whether Iowa was the last state—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] I think maybe so.

MR. ROSS: Where did you go from microfilm to your next position? Or, before asking that, had Bess Glenn and Karl Trever long since left Exhibits?

MR. RHOADS: Karl Trever left Exhibits not too long before I went there. He went upstairs as Grover's special assistant for Presidential Libraries and [Albert] Leisinger had been his assistant in Exhibits and Publications. I guess, in effect, I succeeded Leisinger. I think Leisinger was promoted to be Chief of Exhibits and Publications, and that left his former position open, and I was hired to do that. So, Trevor left just before I went into Exhibits and Publication.

Bess Glenn, I guess, must have retired at about that time. I can't remember exactly when. She was there for quite a while after I came to the Archives and she may have retired.

MR. ROSS: Did you have anything to do with the Exhibit side in the office?

MR. RHOADS: Eventually, I did. Initially, my major responsibility was for the microfilm publication program but I did come to be involved in the Exhibits program.

MR. ROSS: Were there any particular exhibits you worked with that stand out in your mind?

MR. RHOADS: Well, we revamped the States of the Union exhibit, which had been, sort of, a permanent exhibit in the circular gallery. It was looking a little shabby and some of the records that were on supposedly permanent exhibit were showing some signs of deterioration. This was maybe my first major involvement. Also, Alaska and Hawaii became States during that time. So we had to squeeze them in, and do some shuffling around to get them in. Eventually, we pretty much revamped that exhibit.

MR. ROSS: This is different from the Formation of the Union exhibit?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. We did some revamping of the Formation of the Union exhibit, too. Now, this was in the circular gallery behind the shrine where the written word. We had a number of small special commemorative exhibits. At that time, we were more successful than we were for a number of years afterwards, in enticing visiting VIPs to come to the National Archives. I remember we had the President of Germany and President of the Philippines and King of Morocco, and we would put up some kind of a little special exhibit of their visit to Washington. It would perhaps have to do with earlier relations between our two countries and so on, and show them around the exhibition hall, and take them to the Archivist's Office, and present them with a nice copy of some of the items that had been on exhibit. We'd give them a cup of coffee and let them meet the Administrator of General Services, and send them on their way.

MR. ROSS: The exhibits part of the Archives, and the great mass of what goes on have always seemed to me, really two separate things. As Archivist of the United States, did you ever have any problem with whether to put funds for basic archival programs? Did you view them as public relations?

MR. RHOADS: I felt that exhibit programs, outreach programs, could have a significant public relations effect. I think I viewed those programs more as being a means of popular education. I felt that in a democracy such as ours, the public records belong to the people in the final analysis, and that it was inappropriate to slant all of our services toward what some people would call an elitist clientele. Every common working man, every school child has as much inherent right to benefit from the archival holdings of this country as the most distinguished professor of history. So that was in the back of my mind as decisions were made. There was some time when we were able to afford some expansion of that kind of activity.

The big curtailment, of course, came, I guess, under Admiral [Roland G.] Freeman [Administrator of the General Services Administration]. It took place early in the Reagan Administration, after I had left. I think if I had been Archivist at that time, I would've had to agree with what [Sixth Archivist of the United States Robert M.] Warner did, and cut that activity more heavily than our core function, undeniably the basic care and use of those records.

I never felt that the outreach programs were as important. I felt if we could afford both, it was a good thing to do. But if I'd had to make some deep, deep chops as Archivist, I would've taken more out of public programs than out of the Archives because it's good to have. It serves a useful function but it's not the center of our being.

MR. ROSS: Would you, in very hurried fashion, indicate your steps from microfilm to Archivist of the United States.

MR. RHOADS: I'm having trouble sorting out my chronology here. I think at the time of the reorganization in the early 1960s, when they set up this functional type of organization, I was Chief of

the Foreign Affairs branch. The reorganization came after a few months, and I wound up as Chief of the Diplomatic, Legal and Fiscal Reference branch.

From there, and this is where I'm not sure about my chronology, I think it was at that point that I became Manpower Officer for NARS. Shortly after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Office of Presidential Libraries was established, and I was moved to a staff position in that office.

From there, I went to the Office of Archives as Assistant Archivist and I became Deputy Archivist.

[END TAPE 2 SIDE B]

[START TAPE 3 SIDE A]

MR. ROSS: This is tape number three side A of the conversation between Rod Ross and Bert Rhoads. This tape begins on the afternoon of December 29, 1984. We're in Chicago. First, the relationship between the National Archives and the General Services Administration. The Archives had become a part of GSA a couple of years before you joined the Archives. From your perspective, once you became Archivist of the United States, what were the negative features of association under the GSA?

MR. RHOADS: I became Archivist perhaps right after the first independence movement. The independence movement, I think, had given the administrator of General Services enough of a scare that he was willing to grant some important concessions, and give us the things that we needed that we hadn't had here before. I think probably that administrator, like most of them, would have been reluctant to appoint as Archivist someone he saw as an over-advocate of independence. I had concluded that independence was not going to come from this effort, and that if we could get some important improvements in our status, some leeway that we hadn't had before, that that was probably the best deal we could make at the time.

So I took at least a public stance of being supportive of GSA relationship when I became Archivist, and the upshot of it was that we got some significant budget increases. We got not only the permission, but also the encouragement of the administrator to develop our outreach programs, to establish the National Archives Advisory Council, to begin publishing Prologue, to have a series of scholarly conferences, applications that resulted from them, and to do a lot of things that it seemed to me needed to be done and were overdue at the National Archives.

GSA under Lawson Knott held its side of the bargain, so to speak. When he was replaced after President Nixon was elected with Robert Kunzig, Kunzig was very much interested in the Archives, and basically supported and sympathetic to it. Kunzig had a tremendous ego. He was a hard man to please on a personal level. I worked hard at keeping him happy on a variety of fronts. But in return, he supported our budgetary requests. I don't think there were any decisions of importance that affected NARS that he didn't consult with me on and not always, but almost always, he accepted my recommendations. I kind of breathed a sigh of relief when he left, but I didn't realize how good we had had it with him as administrator. The bad part of it was that he was touchy and sensitive and had this huge ego that needed to be nourished constantly in a variety of ways.

He was succeeded by Arthur Sampson, and for the few months of Sampson's tenure, things proceeded fairly well, at least from my point of view. He was supportive and seemed to be reasonable. That began to unravel when various questions relating to Richard Nixon's papers began to surface. Sampson was

loyal to his president, loyal to a fault, perhaps, and he began to be suspicious, I think, first of all of certain members of the Archives' staff doing things that he viewed inimical to the President's interests, and perhaps as unnecessary. Then, I think the focus of his suspicions broadened to include me and the whole top staff of NARS. We entered probably what was the most difficult period of NARS' relationship with GSA that had existed at any time up to that time and probably since, with the possible exception of some of the things that went on under Admiral Freeman after I had left.

When Sampson left, he was succeeded by Jack Eckerd of Florida, a drugstore magnate. He was a very decent, honorable person, I think, whose main interest in NARS was what records management could do to cut the cost of government. It was his feeling, and he really wasn't in office long enough to make any serious attempt to see whether this could be turned around or not, was that the government ought not to do anything, or GSA at least, no part of GSA ought to do things unless it could save the government money. Of course, the Archives as such doesn't save the government money. It costs the government money, and shouldn't be expected to cost it increasing amounts as time goes by. So I don't know how we would have fared under Jack Eckerd had he been in there longer. But he was at least a person who was direct and candid, whom you could talk to straight from the shoulder.

Eckerd was succeeded by Jay Solomon when Jimmy Carter was elected President. Jay was also from a business background, but was a completely different kind of person. He appeared to be much taken with the arts and cultural scene in Washington, and was inclined to view the National Archives as a part of that, to some extent. I always thought that his views on many things were fuzzy, and that he was too willing to accept the last thing that anybody told him on any issue. I think he was a little bit too gullible to be effective in the position of Administrator of General Services, and he changed course frequently. He was a difficult person to work for, not because he had any malign intentions toward the Archives, or not because he disliked me. I think we weren't particularly close, but there was no personal animus between us, I think. But you never really knew where you stood and where you stood yesterday with him on a given issue might be completely different the day after tomorrow. And these changes in position, decisions reached very quickly were obviously not based on any careful study or consideration of a situation. As I said, I'm afraid that it depended on who got to him last.

So that was not an entirely happy situation. There was a fairly long interregnum after Jay Solomon left before Admiral Freeman came in. During most of that time, at least, Paul Goulding, who had been Solomon's Deputy Administrator, was Acting Administrator, and Goulding was a very nice, decent person to work for. He was sympathetic and helpful. I don't think had any illusions about succeeding to the job himself. He had come out of the office of Senator [Claiborne] Pell of Rhode Island. I always viewed Senator Pell as a friend of the Archives. He'd served on the NHPRC. I guess it was when it was the NHPC. So I think Paul came to GSA favorably predisposed toward us, and that showed, and we had a good relationship for a few months.

Then Admiral Freeman came in. About that time I decided to take advantage of an opportunity for early retirement that presented itself because of a reorganization. It involved the splitting of region three from what came to be called the National Capital Region, and this provided an opportunity for anyone with 20 years' service or 50 years of age to take an early retirement. The offer lasted for a period of about three months, and at some point toward the end of that three months, after having seen something of Admiral Freeman, I decided that I didn't have the stomach to educate my sixth Administrator of General Services, so I retired.

MR. ROSS: So you faced a whole lot of things that I'd like to discuss on the way. If we go back to the very beginning, you talked about your coming in just after the first independence movement had subsided. Now, I presume the second independence movement is the one that HG Jones was associated with.

MR. RHOADS: No. The first.

MR. ROSS: Am I correct that when Grover resigned in 1965, in large part because he wanted to channel his energies to achieving an independent nationalized—

MR. RHOADS: [Interposing] That's correct.

MR. ROSS: —house? Didn't H.G. Jones come in in the late 1960s?

MR. RHOADS: Yes. Grover left late in 1965, and joined the forces of what was called Operation Exit. This led to the establishment of a committee on the status of the National Archives. Membership was from the AHA [American Historical Association], the OAH [Organization of American Historians], possibly another organization. In effect, the committee commissioned HG to prepare a study with an historical dimension on the National Archives, how well it had progressed towards its goals, what effect the GSA relationship had had, and that was the genesis of the Book of Records of the nation. Of course, by the time that was published and it was out on the street, we're talking about 1969. I guess I had been Archivist for a year before the book was actually formally published.

MR. ROSS: Why didn't independence come about at that time?

MR. RHOADS: I think it may be instructive to compare that effort with the more recent one, which has indeed been successful. This recent and successful effort had a longer gestation period, so maybe it was born more fully formed, if you please. For a long time, there were frustrations of various kinds that were quite obvious and apparent to both archivists and the people to whom archivists are important. And there kept being added to this additional "atrocities," if you please, and one built on the other.

Also, maybe this is partly because of the longer gestation period, there came to be a much larger, more diverse, more effective outside network of institutions, organizations, and so on that supported this. There was a very effectively lobbying operation. I think much of the credit goes to Page Miller of the AHA and Charlene Bickford of The Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage for having been very effective on the congressional front. I don't think there was much currying of favor of Congress in the first effort. I think that Grover and his associates hoped they would be able to use whatever currency they had with Lyndon Johnson, and hopefully get him to make some executive decision. That would have the effect of either separating NARS from GSA, or at least throwing the full weight of the Administration behind that effort in Congress.

Johnson's Office of Management and Budget [OMB], which did indeed take the step of spending a good deal of time studying the situation, came up with recommendations that did not meet the expectations or the hopes of the people involved in Operation Exit. OMB did come up with recommendations that were useful to us shortly after I became Archivist. Those related to getting some of these concessions and improvements in status from GSA that I discussed earlier.

MR. ROSS: What was your role in the second independence effort?

MR. RHOADS: I think it began one Sunday morning, when I received a telephone call from Don Young, who was special assistant to Arthur Sampson. Don said he didn't think I would mind being interrupted on a weekend to be told that we have an agreement with (former President) Richard Nixon on his papers. This was within a month after Nixon's resignation. I said, "That's interesting. What kind of an agreement?" And he said, "Well, it's kind of a long, complex agreement." And I said, "I think I'd better see a copy of it." He said, "Well, I'm calling from the office. If you want to come down, you can certainly have a copy."

So I hopped in the car, drove down to the GSA building, and picked up a copy of the Nixon-Sampson agreement, with signatures of both Richard Nixon and Arthur Sampson. I took a few minutes to read it and I was appalled, both by the content of the agreement and by the fact that I had known nothing of any negotiations leading up to it.

I think it needs to be made clear that Arthur Sampson was acting within his legal rights, statutory rights as Administrator of General Services. There's nothing in the law that says that you have to refer decisions of this kind to the Archivist of the United States for advice, or that you have to follow his advice. But this was the first time that a decision of this importance and this magnitude and this political sensitivity had ever been unilaterally assumed by the Administrator of General Services. It did not bode well for the future, as far as I could see.

I took a copy home, and I think I called Arthur Sampson that afternoon or evening, and told him that I was upset and concerned and felt trouble lay ahead, that there was no way I could associate myself in support of that agreement, that the decision made on personal grounds. In addition, I would lose all credibility within my profession, any ability to lead the National Archives because it would be viewed as bad news everywhere. I think he asked me what problems I had with it. I mentioned a few of the things, and he tried to calm me into believing that I had misread both the letter and intent of the agreement, and that none of the Nixon papers or tapes were going to be destroyed, and all that stuff. I said, "Well, I'd go back and read it over again, and I'd talk to him again in the morning about it."

We did, and by that time, he was worked up. He was nervous. He was a little shrill. And I think he was afraid that I was going to go public in some dramatic way about this. I hadn't been in the office very long before I had a call from the White House Counsel's office. The Deputy Counsel to the President was Bill Casselman, who had served a period as general counsel of GSA. Bill Casselman was a fine person, a nice, decent fellow. His boss, President Ford, had been in office just about a month, I guess, at that time. Ford's chief counsel was Philip Buchen, whom I had never met. Bill asked whether I could come over to the White House and talk with him and Phil Buchen. I said, "Of course. I'll be right over." As I was driving over, I was thinking, "Bert, I think you've bought it. Enjoy your last day as Archivist."

The conversation with Buchen and Casselman opened, as I recall it, after some initial pleasantries with a lawyer like defense of the agreement, and the circumstances which had led to it—that President Ford wanted to put Watergate behind him, and this was part of the package that was needed to do so. Also, the interesting argument, that provisions for the destruction of the tapes—which Mr. Sampson had assured me was not the intent of the agreement at all—was justified because these tapes never should have been created in the first place. It was a dastardly thing for Nixon to have had those tapes created. People's rights had been violated in the creation of the tapes without their knowledge, and that it was only fair and just that they be destroyed.

I told him that I understood what he was saying, but that I took a different view of the ethics of the situation. The tapes had been taken. They were a record that existed. It was a record that would have to be handled with a great deal of care and sensitivity so that people wouldn't be unnecessarily hurt, but there was undoubtedly a great deal of material that was of historical and value interest in the tapes, and that given my position, there was no way I could agree that it was a good thing to destroy them.

I guess we agreed to disagree on that issue. I came to know Phil Buchen much better later on, and I respect him as a decent, honorable, thoughtful gentleman. He certainly behaved as a gentleman to me that day.

There was a point in the conversation where I reiterated to them what I had already told Sampson—that there was no way I could publicly support the agreement, and that I could understand that that might mean that my services were to be dispensed with, and if that were so, I was prepared to accept that. Buchen said, "No, that isn't what we have in mind at all. There's a new crowd in the White House." It sticks in my mind that there may have been some open allusion to the fact that the arguments were gone, and that it wasn't their role to come in and fire people right and left if there was disagreement with the Ford administration. That certainly was implied in some of the things that were said.

In fact, he went on to volunteer to give me a letter, which he would sign as Counsel for the President that would absolve me of any need to support this decision. After some delay, he did that. I think from that time on, I felt no compunction, moral or otherwise, to support the current relationship between NARS and GSA. I thought that GSA had passed a certain point, and that I had been convinced, perhaps too late, that this was not a healthy situation—that these atrocities could happen, and that some basic change, hopefully independence, had to be the objective from then on.

I don't know that I ever made any public pro-independence speech until after I left the office of Archivist, but it was certainly no secret, I think. It was certainly no secret among the people whom I worked with closely at the Archives. It was no secret in GSA that I favored independence. Some of the subsequent GSA Administrators as they came in, told me that they understood why I felt this way, that I really ought to change my position on it because that had been a single aberration, which wasn't likely ever to happen again. I remained unconvinced, and I think subsequent events bore out the reasons for my suspicions.

I did what I could without taking a public position diametrically opposed to that of my immediate superior. Some of this was subterranean work. Some of it was casual, or confidential conversations with members of Congress. Some of it was on the Public Documents Commission, where I served as the Administrator's designee. And you may recall that one of the recommendations of the Public Documents Commission was that NARS should be returned to its independent status. We had to fight kind of hard for that.

After I left the National Archives, I did go public as strongly as I knew how. First of all, in a speech that I had been slated earlier to give at the Cosmos Club, and then subsequently in testimony twice to Senate committees and once before a House of Representatives committee, I believe. I made as strong a case as I could, based on my own personal experiences, for a rupture of the relationship with GSA.

MR. ROSS: What relations did you have with Page Miller?

MR. RHOADS: I'm not sure that I ever met Page Miller until after I had left the National Archives. I think I first met Page perhaps at a Christmas or New Year's reception at Trudy Peterson's house, possibly the end of the year that I left the Archives or the next year. But the second independence movement in its fullest flower didn't really get cranked up until Freeman came in, and started making some of his drastic demands and proposals. When that happened, against the background of the horrible experience with Sampson, I think that's what clinched a lot of people's minds, that this is a situation that just shouldn't be tolerated any longer. It was after I had left the Archives that Page Miller and Charlene Bickford and an awful lot of other groups began to formally lend important, effective, meaningful support to the independence movement.

MR. ROSS: You were Archivist of the United States when Richard Nixon was elected to the Presidency.

MR. RHOADS: Yes.

MR. ROSS: The time before when a Republican succeeded a Democrat, the incumbent Archivist for the United States was greatly worried that he would be sacked.

MR. RHOADS: Yes.

MR. ROSS: Did you have similar concerns?

MR. RHOADS: Yes.

MR. ROSS: Could you elaborate on what kind of efforts you undertook to assure the continuation of your job?

MR. RHOADS: Well, I had been in the job I guess no more than six months when Nixon was elected, and less than a year when Nixon's new Administrator of General Services came on board, Bob Kunzig. Kunzig obviously had a mandate to sweep clean everything at my level and GSA and above and some below that. And he did, in fact, make an almost clean sweep. When he came in, he was forthright about his intentions to do so. It may be that I owe my retention in office to the death of General Eisenhower. He was to be buried at the Eisenhower Library in Kansas. I felt it was at least appropriate, and perhaps an obligation of the Archivist to be present during that ceremony. Mr. Kunzig also felt that it was equally important, and maybe even more appropriate that the Administrator of General Services be present at the ceremony.

So we flew there together, and spent a little time in the GSA regional office in Kansas City. Then people from the Eisenhower Library drove us out to Abilene. We stayed next door to each other in the motel, and came back together, and so on. So we had a chance to get acquainted. I think the person who drove us out from Kansas City to Abilene was Al Thompson, as a matter of fact. I think Kunzig decided during that trip that he kind of liked me. He could be a very entertaining fellow. I mean, he could be pretty disconcerting the next minute. But on the flight out, he obviously wanted to talk politics, my politics. I told him that I came from a Republican family, and that when I first registered to vote, I registered as a Republican, but I had always considered myself a liberal Republican. I happened to know that Kunzig also considered himself a liberal Republican, but what I told him was true.

I said that when the Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater in 1964, I figured my party had left me. And the day after his nomination, I changed my registration to Democratic. I really considered myself a political independent, but living in Maryland, with its closed primary system, if you wanted to be a part

of the action, you had to be registered with a party. Frankly, I felt more comfortable in the Democratic Party than I did in the Republican Party as it had come to be. So I said, "The fact that I'm not a Republican today, I guess you can blame on Senator Goldwater." He said, "God damn that son of a bitch. He damn near ruined the Republican party."

I think from that time on, there was no real question about my dismissal as Archivist for political reasons within at least Nixon's first term. There were other things that were going on, and Kunzig knew they were going on. Some of these may have come after the Kansas trip. But he said, "In order for me to keep you on, I need to be able to show the people at the White House that there's some support for you." Well, Herb Angel, who was Deputy Archivist, had sort of spearheaded an attempt to try to drum up some letters in my support from Archives people, from a historical profession and other people, whose names might mean something at the White House. We knew that some letters had gone in, and some of them were being referred over to GSA. Kunzig said, "I need at least a Republican congressman or two who's willing to go to battle for you."

I had recently met Representative Edward George Biester, Jr. of Pennsylvania. He was from the Bucks County district there, and was sort of a liberal Republican. He had been personally very friendly, and I thought that he might be disposed to provide what was needed. So I talked to him, and he became rather bureaucratic about the whole thing. He said, "It's not considered good form in the House of Representatives to support a candidate for a job who is not one's own constituent, unless you have earlier gotten the support of your own congressman, assuming he's a Republican in this case." I said, "Well, my own congressman, Larry Hogan, is a Republican. But I don't have any contact with him." Biester said, "Well, if you can line up Larry Hogan, I'll be very happy to support you."

So I started bugging Hogan's office and I never did get through to Hogan. His staff wouldn't give me the time of day, and things went on like that for a while, and I was obviously getting nowhere. So, there was another young, quite junior Republican congressman I had met through some mutual acquaintances in my neighborhood, Howard Pollock of Alaska. I told Pollock very candidly what my situation was, that I couldn't seem to get through to Hogan, and that Biester would not do anything unless I lined Hogan up, and that I was sort of dubious of success on that front. Pollock said, "Bert, why don't you write me the letter you want me to send to the White House?" And I said, "Fine."

So I went back and I composed a letter that had Howard Pollock saying everything I could possibly want him to say about me, and I sent it to him, and he had it retyped verbatim on his stationery, signed it, and he sent it. By this time, I don't think that a letter from Howard Pollock probably swayed the head hunters in the White House, but it gave Bob Kunzig what he needed in order to defend his position to the decision he had already reached, that he wanted to retain me. So that, in a nutshell, is how I hung on by my toenails the first round.

MR. ROSS: When you were discussing your relationship with the Nixon administration, you did not mention by name Mary Walton Livingston. Would you care to discuss where she fits into the whole question of your relations with the Nixon administration?

MR. RHOADS: I'd known Mary Walton for a number of years, and had always had a high regard for her as a person of quick mind and a great deal of industry and integrity. Mary Walton's actions in the whole Nixon papers situation caused me a great deal of grief. She became lionized in certain quarters as the conscience of the Archives, and I wouldn't want to take that away from her. I'm sure that she proceeded

according to what she thought was the right thing to do. Mary Walton reached some conclusions, I think not implausibly, that she didn't bother to check out carefully, and when the Watergate grand jury or special prosecutor's office...

MR. ROSS: This is side B of tape number three of the December 29, 1984, conversation with Bert Rhoads. We'll continue.

MR. RHOADS: Mary Walton had already talked to people in the press and, given the circumstances under which that had happened I wasn't critical of her for that. It made me a little uneasy because she spoke with an assurance about certain things that I didn't feel were completely proven as yet, and then she apparently had several long sessions with the special prosecutor's taskforce. I don't know entirely what she told them.

I do know that some of the questions that I was subsequently asked by the same people certainly indicated to me—and I want to be careful about how I phrase this because I don't know what precisely Mary Walton told them—but from the questions I was getting, it appeared to me that she had reached premature conclusions about the facts affecting certain things that had happened. And I think this would be in character for Mary Walton. Once she'd arrived at a conclusion, by God that was it, and she was going to stick with it and not agonize over it a lot.

They seemed to feel that there had been some kind of hanky-panky between myself and Bob Kunzig about backdating the deed of gift on Nixon's vice presidential papers. There had not been. But Mary was a very self-assured and undoubtedly very convincing witness and she had impressed them and it was very difficult to... I don't think I ever shook the opinion entirely of the special prosecutor.

I had a hell of a grilling on several occasions from a lawyer by the name of Jay Horowitz, I believe. Part of this may have just been lawyering me to see what he could get out of me, but he was very determined to get some kind of confession out of me. I wasn't about to give that because it just hadn't happened. Finally, after maybe three sessions, two at least, he threw up his hands and he said, "Okay, you don't get me any choice but to take you before the grand jury and cross-examine you very intensively." So he did that, and that wasn't a very pleasant experience.

In retrospect, I was probably foolish for not having engaged an attorney to advise me or counsel me. But I knew I was telling the truth, and I guess I figured that that was insurance enough, although that was perhaps a little naïve. In any event, obviously the grand jury did not hand down an indictment against me, and eventually, that problem passed from the scene.

I don't bear Mary Walton any ill will because I feel that she did what she thought was the right thing to do. I do feel that she caused me a great deal of grief by reaching some of her conclusions, which were slightly off-base too soon, and sticking with them.

MR. ROSS: Was Steve Garfinkel on the scene at this time? If so, was he of any assistance to you, one way or another?

MR. RHOADS: I guess Steve was around, but he was in a pretty junior capacity at that time, I think. I believe at this time probably Bob Yock was the General Counsel or the person who was taking care of NARS legal business. No, I don't think that I had any particular assistance from the GSA General Counsel's office on this. I think they felt that that might not be appropriate. I know that the special

prosecutor's office also questioned how Kunzig, who by that time was a federal judge, and probably a lot of other people in GSA, and I think the GSA lawyers felt that they would be in sort of an impossible situation. I think they felt that if we needed legal counsel, this was a kind of a tangled web. We'd have to go get our own.

MR. ROSS: Thinking back over the next 10 years, a second question which caused difficulty between the White House and Archives had to do with certain pieces of jewelry given to the Nixon family by certain Saudi Arabians. Can you discuss that? Does that bring any events to mind?

MR. RHOADS: It doesn't bring a lot to mind. Nixon, like all Presidents before him and I guess to some extent Presidents since, received gifts from other heads of state, either on the occasion of their visiting a foreign country or the foreign potentate coming here or other occasion. We had set up a system, I think at the beginning of the Nixon administration, whereby all of those things were registered over at the White House. Our people had some role to play in the registration procedure. We provided storage for at least some of those things.

I don't remember being particularly sensitized that there was anything seriously wrong there until Maxine Cheshire of *The Washington Star* or maybe *The Washington Post*—who was, I think, personally enamored of jewels and precious objects of various kinds—decided that there was something rotten in Denmark and began to make inquiries. I remember that we tried to accommodate her as far as we could. We showed her certain records and I think we honored her request to see some of the items. So a lot of the grist for the stories that appeared under her byline were the result of our having cooperated with her. There was no reason I shouldn't. We did. I can't remember now exactly the nature of the scandal or alleged scandal.

The thing I remember most distinctly about this was that Jay Solomon became Administrator at just about the time this was going on, and he became very enamored of all this business. He believed everything that Cheshire told him, so he wanted to see all these things. He came over to the Archives and we spent hours digging this stuff out and letting him look at them. Finally, he decided, "Wouldn't it be a grand thing to invite all the TV networks in and display all of this loot that the Nixons got?"

I conveyed, I'm sure, something less than the enthusiasm he would have liked to see for this event, but I really didn't have any grounds for refusing to cooperate. It didn't seem to me that any high moral issue was at stake here. I didn't really see the purpose, unless it was to sort of pander to the press. On the other hand, there was nothing sinful about it that I could detect. I was very uncomfortable all during the thing. I remember that Dick Jacobs and I were on camera at least at one point.

I heard later that Mr. Nixon was personally very upset with both Dick and myself for having played a role in this. I guess I don't blame Mr. Nixon much. But it was a distasteful thing as far as I was concerned, and it's something that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't been part of GSA. But I didn't feel like I really had any grounds to go to the mat with Jay Solomon over this. But it was an unpleasant situation, an episode that I wish had never happened.

MR. ROSS: Let's get into the subject of your tenure as Archivist? What would you say were the main concerns that you dealt with then, the main accomplishments that you achieved?

MR. RHOADS: One of my concerns was that it was beginning to become apparent by the time Wayne Grover left office, some of it became apparent during the first "war for independence," it became

apparent again during the Lowenheim affair that a great gulf had developed between the National Archives and Records Service, and perhaps basically the historians of this country. They were obviously unaware of what some of our concerns and requirements were. We were probably not sensitive enough to some of their needs and requirements. They were not supporting us on issues that were very important to us, and we just weren't talking with each other at the right levels on any systematic basis.

So there were several things that I tried to do to build bridges at the beginning of my time as Archivist. I don't want to take all the credit for this myself because a lot of the ideas, certainly, were jointly developed and jointly supported by Bob Bahmer and myself during the time that we worked together as Archivist and Deputy. Because some of these things had a gestation period of more than nine months, they came into being formally after I became Archivist. Some of them are perhaps more important to me than others, and others were perhaps more important to Bahmer.

We did several things in an attempt to rebuild the bridges which had existed between archivists and historians: launch the National Archives Advisory Council; publish *Prologue*; hold a series of scholarly conferences, which would result in publications; and try to find other ways of encouraging historians to make use of the research resources of the National Archives. One of those initiatives was a program to place copies of at least the most frequently used microfilm publications in the new regional archives branches. The establishment of the regional archives was another one of those initiatives.

I think, by and large, those initiatives worked well and paid off. For example, reference services. I don't remember the figures exactly, but you can check them in the records of the National Archives. For the last four or five years, reference service was sort of on a plateau, neither rising nor dropping significantly, and this was during a time when education in this country was a growth industry, graduate education in particular. Graduate departments of history were overflowing with students, but our level of research services was flat.

After we began these initiatives, I think within a couple of years, or within five years, our reference statistics had more than doubled, two and a half times. This is rough. Now, obviously, that isn't the only measure of how effective initiatives of this sort have been, or how well the institution is doing at its job. But I think it is an indication that some of the things that we launched had some of the desired effects.

Another interest of mine, and it began when I was Deputy Archivist, was improved recruitment and training of young archivists coming into the National Archives. I think I referred to that earlier in our interview. One of my objectives, sort of a secondary objective in terms of timing, but perhaps of almost equal importance, was that establishing a journeyman grade for archivists at grade 11, would provide the basis for a substantial upgrading of other job classifications within the National Archives. In time, that worked. During my time as Archivist, branch and division chief jobs went up in grade: branch chiefs from 12s to 14s and division directors, for the most part, from 13s to 15s.

We managed to get several super-grades in the process, by one means or another. I doubt that this would have been possible, given the way classification specialists and personnel decide on the appropriate grades for jobs, unless we had had this much higher grade level in place for working-level archivists. Obviously, it gave some of these people more money and that's nice and I was glad that it had that effect. But the object was, to be in a position to be more competitive for outside talent, and also to make the archival profession able to hold up its head on an equal basis with other professions within federal government structure.

MR. ROSS: So far, you haven't mentioned to a great extent records management and records centers.

MR. RHOADS: Before I get into that, let me mention one other thing that I think was possibly even more important in terms of positive accomplishment than what I've mentioned here before—the success that we had in making records more accessible. There probably isn't time to go into at least one aspect of this in the detail that it deserves today, but I'll be glad to talk more about that another time.

When I became Archivist, the Freedom of Information Act had just been passed, and we saw this as an opportunity to get some agency-imposed restrictions removed or revised for records that most of us felt were unrealistic. So we launched a project to have all agency-imposed restrictions and other restrictions reviewed against the permissible categories of restricted material rated under the Freedom of Information Act. We notified the agencies of origin what we were doing, what our conclusions were, and gave them an opportunity to try to argue us out of our interpretation if they could. And if we weren't convinced, then we could open things up.

Well, a lot of material got opened up in that process. Something that probably was more widely known, of course, was the major developments with regard to security classified information. I'm not sure that I do have time to go into that in detail. But let me talk about it briefly, and perhaps you can formulate follow-up questions for another session.

Again, this was largely an offshoot of Watergate, although I'm not sure that we knew it right at the beginning. But some of the people who had been involved, at least peripherally in the Watergate cover-up, had been given orders apparently by President Nixon directly, to devise a new executive order on national security that by God, the stuff that really needed to be kept secret, he wanted a foolproof system devised so that it wouldn't get out. But there was a lot of stuff that had security markings on it that didn't make any sense at all, and there ought to be some system that was more responsive to the real needs of national security.

One of those people who, I think, knew Bill Casselman's General Counsel of GSA. He was put in touch with me through Casselman's good offices. He had the job of preparing some kind of initial draft of an executive order. I was called over and I think I met with him in Casselman's office in GSA. We exchanged some preliminary views, and then we began working with him a little more intensively. Dick Jacobs was our point man on a lot of what happened later on this front. It's not generally known, but I think we had a great deal of influence on the final form of that Nixon executive order, and we deserve a lot of the credit for its being as progressive a document as it was.

I think it helped some too that the Archivist was made a member of the Interagency Classification Review Committee [ICRC], which was supposed to police the new system and hear appeals from supposedly improper denials of access to security classified material. John Eisenhower had been made the first chairman, but John resigned from his chairmanship about a year after the ICRC was established, and I was appointed acting chairman. I served as acting chairman for the next three years until the Carter Administration changed the executive order, and substituted something else in place of the ICRC as a governing mechanism.

One of the essential parts of this whole executive order was that there was to be periodic review of classified materials. A large proportion of those classified materials that were of an age where review was required were in the National Archives. We were able to secure a substantial budget to support a

sizeable staff of people to engage in the classification review and other declassification activities. This had the effect of opening millions and millions of pages of formerly classified material to scholars and the general public.

MR. ROSS: Is this solely, you know, Al Thompson on this or was there someone who was a predecessor to Al Thompson at that time?

MR. RHOADS: I believe that Al Thompson was named director of that division as soon as we'd gotten our supplemental appropriation for the money to start hiring people, and set up an organizational unit, a division within the office of the National Archives. I believe Al was the first division director. Al was not involved much in what led up to the issuance of the Nixon executive order or the getting of the appropriation or some of those things. But he, of course, became an extremely important part of the effort once it was in place.

MR. ROSS: You were enumerating key accomplishments of the volunteers. Are there others?

MR. RHOADS: Another concern of mine was that, submerged as we were within GSA, we didn't have the visibility that a major cultural institution ought to have. I always, perhaps incorrectly, but I don't think so, sort of equated us with the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution as the national library, the national museum, the National Archives.

And of course, our organizational situation was such that we were less able to fend for ourselves in the Office of Management and Budget and Capitol Hill. But we have certain characteristics and objectives in common, and I guess I was inspired by the success of Dillon Ripley as Secretary of the Smithsonian in making that institution visible and socially useful on a broad scale. And while I realized that we were a quite different kind of institution, I felt that there were ways that we could be involved that we hadn't been.

I remember Wayne Grover being terribly upset because the Archivist of United States was not made a member of the Civil War Centennial Commission, although any of its activities relied heavily on records in the National Archives. I resolved to make sure that that sort of thing didn't happen again if I could prevent it. And the Archivist was indeed made a statutory member of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission.

[END RECORDING]

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

James B. Board

in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I,

James B. Board of Washington, Washington
(name) (city and state)

do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of a personal interview conducted on December 29, 1954 at the Hull Agency Hotel in Chicago, Illinois and prepared for deposit in the National Archives. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the National Archives; provided that until January 1, 1961, pages 6 through 64 shall be restricted from research access. Thereafter, these pages shall be available to all researchers.
- (2) Until January 1, 1961, the tape recording shall be restricted from research access. Thereafter, the tape recording shall be available to those who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Consistent with points #1 and #2, copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the National Archives to researchers upon request.
- (5) Consistent with points #1 and #2, copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives.

James B. Board
Donor: James B. Board

Frank B. Smith
Special Agent in Charge
Archivist of the United States

November 14, 1955
Date

11-13-55
Date