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BARBARA O'NEIL BRETT, ARCHIVIST, NWMD
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INTERVIEWEE: BARBARA O'NEIL BRETT, ARCHIVIST, NARA, NWMD

INTERVIEWER: CHARLES JOSEPH BRETT, BRANCH CHIEF, FMS,
U.S. DEPT. OF TREASURY

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INTRODUCTION BY: BARBARA O'NEIL BRETT

Today is Thursday, October 18, 2007. This is Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist, at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, who is being interviewed at 2:30p.m. today by Charles Joseph Brett, a former NARA staff member and present Branch Chief, Records and Information Management at Financial Management Service (FMS), U.S. Department of Treasury in Hyattsville, Maryland. Both Barbara Brett and Charles Brett are long time Federal employees with Barbara having 30 years of Federal service and Charles having 37 years of Federal service. Charles, a lifetime member of NARA's Assembly is interviewing his wife, Barbara O'Neil Brett, here at Archives 2 in College Park, Maryland for the NARA Assembly Legacy Project. This oral history interview will be part of the permanent records of Record Group NAA, National Archives Assembly. These legacy interviews document the administrative history of NARA.

CHARLES BRETT: It is October 18, 2007 and I have the pleasure of interviewing Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist in NARA's Initial Processing and Declassification for the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

My name is Charles Brett and I am Barbara's husband and a lifetime member of NARA's Assembly.

Barbara, I am going to go through a series of questions with you for this project. To begin, why did you decided to work for the Federal Government in July 1974?

BARBARA BRETT: I always wanted to work for the Federal Government. My father, Harold Francis O'Neil, was in Federal service for 33 years including 4 years of military service in WWII. My father worked as a Records Officer and Management Analyst at the National Archives and the Dept. of Labor in Boston, MA.

I remember when President Kennedy called us to action by telling us: "To ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.". I was 10 years old when JFK was elected President in 1960. I felt at that time that serving my country was something I should do so I joined Federal service in July 1974 when I was 24 years old. My father retired from Federal service in June 1974 and I joined Federal service the next month.

CHARLES BRETT: Describe your first job in the Federal government. What agency did you work for? What were your duties? Did you enjoy this position?

BARBARA BRETT: Yes, I enjoyed my first Federal job. It was in Boston, my hometown. I was down along the waterfront working for the Defense Contract Supply Agency (DCASR) as an Accounting Technician GS-0520-4/5. (GS is General Schedule, 0520 is the series for accounting technician, 4/5 are the Grades 4 and 5).

I worked for a retired Marine Corp. Sgt., Joseph Silva, who was all fire, tattoos, and crew cut. I learned a lot from my first Federal supervisor, Joseph Silva. One of the things that he told me, which I remember all these years later, was "to always remember that you have to follow orders unless the order is illegal or immoral.". I always thought that was good advice and I have tried to follow it through the years.

CHARLES BRETT: Very good. When did you join the National Archives in Washington, DC?

BARBARA BRETT: I joined the National Archives in DC on February 3, 1975. I transferred here from DCASR in Boston. It was a promotion. I was a Grade 4/5 Accounting Technician in Boston and I got a GS-1421 Grade 6 Archives Technician job at NARA as a History Major.

CHARLES BRETT: Very good. How was DC different from your hometown of Belmont, MA?

BARBARA BRETT: Quite different. I grew up in a white middle-upper class suburb of Boston (Belmont). Boston is very buttoned-up, very proper, very prim. In those days (the 1950's and 1960's), there was not a mix of ethnic groups. You were either Italian or Irish in Boston and its suburbs. The African-Americans lived in Roxbury. The Jewish Americans lived in Brookline.

So when I came down to DC to work for NARA, I was totally surrounded by all different races and nationalities. In 1975, I remember going to the Drug Store (People's Drugstore) on the 700 block of 14th Street NW in DC at lunchtime to pick up something and I was in line to pay. The Rolling Stones came on the radio with one of their hit songs and immediately the clerk clicked the radio on full blast and all the customers in line were dancing in the aisles of the drug store.

You would never have seen that in Boston. In Boston, they would have been playing classical music on the radio and all the customers would have been buttoned-up.

So I said; "Wow! I am in a different place here in DC!". I loved DC from the minute I arrived here by train from Boston.

CHARLES BRETT: Wonderful. Describe your first job with NARA. Who did you work for? What were your duties?

BARBARA BRETT: My first job when I came to Washington, DC in 1975 was to work in NARA's Declassification Division. Mr. Alan Thompson had just

established this division about a year before (circa 1974) and he basically was hiring all U.S. History majors which I was from Boston College. Mr. Thompson also reached out to hire the returning Veterans from Vietnam. He personally went to a VA Job Center in DC, introduced himself to all the Vietnam Vets including African-American Vets and told them that he had jobs for them in his new Declassification Division. Mr. Thompson hired some of these Vets on site. He is the only supervisor I ever knew in 30 years of Federal service who personally went out and hired Veterans. One of his hires was Wayne Thompson who retired from NARA in July 2007 after 35 years of Federal service including his time in the military. Wayne served in Vietnam.

We had to declassify the classified records from WWII using the Executive Order and agencies guidelines. We did the records from 1941 in one year. Then we did the records from 1942, 1943, 1944, until 1945 when the war ended. We all had Top Secret clearances because a lot of the military records during war time are stamped Top Secret.

We had to review word for word each document and declassify what we could. We had guidelines from different Federal agencies. Of course, a lot of that information was still held/protected if it contained information about sources, intelligence methods, war plans, that type of thing.

It was really an exciting time because the entire office was recent college graduates who were history majors and who had a love for their nation's history. It was an interesting office to work in.

CHARLES BRETT: So you were working with people of your same age group basically?

BARBARA BRETT: Yes. We were all the same age (early 20's).

CHARLES BRETT. Wonderful. How did your job duties change over time from 1974 to 2007?

BARBARA BRETT: Wow! I have had a lot of different job duties in that time-frame. I started as an Accounting Technician in DCASR. Then, I was an Archives Technician GS-1421-6 when I came to work for NARA in DC. I immediately realized that I would be starving as a Grade 6 in DC. There was not much of a difference between being a Grade 5 in Boston and a Grade 6 in DC. You are still hungry. Mr. Thompson, my supervisor, said on my very first day (February 3, 1975), "If you want to move up, you had to go back to school and get a second degree, a Master's Degree in U.S. History.". I told Mr. Thompson: "I did not have any money for graduate school because I am only a Grade 6.". Mr. Thompson said: "Not to worry. NARA pays for every other class."

So with that promise for partial payment, I took the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) and did very well on it. I applied to Georgetown University Graduate School. I decided if I was going to have the government pay for half of my graduate degree, I would go to a good school. I was accepted into Georgetown University and that is where I went.

When I earned my 30 graduate credit hours in U.S History, Mr. Thompson, a man of his word, promoted me to a GS-1420 Grade 7/9/11 Archivist. I was an Archivist for a number of years at NARA. In 1976, I was a Grade 7 Archivist who worked in Declassification at the Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. In 1977, I was a Grade 9 Archivist who did Military Reference at the Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. In 1977 and 1978, I was a Grade 11 Archivist in the newly established Machine-Readable Archives at 711 14th Street NW in Washington, DC. Grade 11 was the top of the grade for Archivists in the 1970's and 1980's. I could go no further at NARA.

Then, I was hungry again – thinking somewhere there is a Grade 12 or a Grade 13 out there. So, I left the National Archives to go to work for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts as a Management Analyst, GS-343-12/13 in their Records Management Program. I was promoted to a Grade 12 and then a Grade 13.

I worked as a Management Analyst for about seven or eight years and then I thought maybe I would like to get into contracting to see how the buying and the selling goes in the Federal government. They were hiring Contract Specialists to buy for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO) so I transferred to the AO's Procurement Branch and did that for a while working under Don Seay. I really enjoyed being a Contract Specialist GS-1102. That career path led me to working for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) since DEA was hiring contract specialists to gear up for the drug war in the 1980's and they still are fighting that war.

I joined DEA as a GM-1102-13 Contract Specialist. After a year and half, I transferred within DEA to become a GM-343-13 Management Analyst and Assistant Branch Chief in DEA's Records Management Branch where I was in charge of DEA's policy manuals and reports. (GM stands for General Manager.)

Then in 1994, my father, Harold Francis O'Neil, became ill up in his home in Cape Cod, MA. Both he and my mother, Margaret Mary O'Neil, needed help. Someone had to go up to Massachusetts to help out my parents. I was one of their five children who lived in three states. Two children lived in Massachusetts, one child lived in Indiana, one child lived in California, and I lived in Virginia. I told my parents that I would help them.

In May 1996, I earned a second Master's Degree in Education (M.Ed.) at Marymount University in Arlington, VA and become certified to teach in Virginia so I could teach in Virginia and go back and forth to Cape Cod during summers and school breaks to help my parents. I taught social studies at Fairfax High School, McLean High School, and St. Louis Middle School. I also taught Geography and Religion. I am a certified Catechist.

In May 1998, I rejoined Federal service at the National Archives in College Park, MD. I worked as a Procurement Analyst for NARA-NAA. In June 1999, I transferred to the National Archives in DC and worked as the first Customer Service Coordinator for Archives 1. In September 2002, due to the adverse

reaction I had to the Archives 1 renovation, I transferred to Archives 2 in College Park, MD and accepted a position as a Grade 12 Archivist in NWMD, Initial Processing and Declassification Division. This is the same division where I worked in 1975. My career had come full circle.

CHARLES BRETT: I hope you don't mind but I want to take you back a little bit to the late 1970's. Did you work anywhere else besides Declassification during this time-frame?

BARBARA BRETT: Yes. In January, 1977, I went to work at NARA's Machine-Readable Archives at 711 14th Street NW in DC. I worked there as an Archivist till December 1978. NARA was just starting up the Machine-Readable Archives Division. This was when NARA was trying to determine what to do with these bits of information that were on computer tapes. They decided that these were also records and some of them were permanent records. They were just in a different format. The Machine-Readable Archives Division was hiring beginning Archivists to work with this new record type. I worked with great staff like Colonel Donald Harrison, Dr. Bruce Ambacher, Dr. Kenneth Thibodeau, Dr. Sharon Gibbs (Thibodeau), Dr. Thomas Brown, Jon Heddesheimer, and Charlie Gellert among others. We had a wonderful group of Archivists. The Division Director was Dr. Charles Dollar whom his staff nicknamed "Chuck Buck". Dr. Dollar was a former Baptist Minister who held monthly wine and cheese parties for his staff. Our division had free reign because our office was over on 14th St. NW which was seven blocks from the main Archives building located at 7th St. NW.

Our jobs required us to meet with various agency heads and records officers and try and get them to schedule their machine-readable records so NARA could accession those agency records of permanent value. We had to review their records to make sure that we had the code books and other documentation to read these machine-readable records.

The machine-readable records that I was reviewing were classified records since I still had a Top Secret clearance from my Declassification work days. I reviewed

Vietnam War records such as "Operation Phoenix" and other records of that type.

The 1970's were an exciting time to be an Archivist. I was on the ground floor of NARA's Declassification Division and also NARA's Machine-Readable Division.

CHARLES BRETT: What changes did you witness over the past 30 years as a Federal employee at NARA and at other Federal agencies?

BARBARA BRETT: I think the biggest change I noticed was the change in the type of workers who were coming on board. When I first came to DC in 1975, the National Archives professional staff were mainly white and mainly males. There were very few women. I was one of a few female Archivists at the time. We had Dr. Mabel Dietrich, who was one of the few female executives at the time on mahogany row which is what they used to call where the NARA executives offices were downtown at Archives 1 because all the furniture and all the doors were beautiful mahogany. Of course, we worked behind in the stacks but the executives had mahogany row.

That's the biggest impact on NARA's workforce. Women started being hired and other minorities, African-Americans, started being hired by NARA. Now, NARA is trying to hire more Hispanics and Asians. That has been a major change since I first started Federal service.

CHARLES BRETT: What about your experience with various Federal agencies in terms of their size?

BARBARA BRETT: I started working for the Federal government with DCASR in Boston and that agency was very small. It was located in a subset of an old warehouse. It was right there along the waterfront in South Boston. DCASR was a very small agency. You knew everyone. You knew the staff in Personnel (Human Resources). You knew the staff in Budget. You knew them on a first name basis. That was great!

Then, I came to the National Archives in DC and we were still a little, small fish. At the time, when I came in 1975, NARS (National Archives and Records Service), the predecessor to NARA, was under GSA (General Services Administration), which was as large agency. GSA was keeping their thumb on the National Archives and we resented it. It was almost like the American Revolution all over again with the Patriots (NARS) and the English (GSA) on the other side. We (NARS) wanted our freedom.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was a medium size agency as was the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts where I worked.

I enjoyed working at agencies where you knew people. When you could go down the hall to get something (a supply, a form) and they knew who you were. You respected each other's work and you got it done. You made a deal basically to work together for the good of the agency.

CHARLES BRETT: Very good. Among the Federal agencies that you mentioned, which did you enjoy working for the most (DCASR, NARA, AO, DEA)?

BARBARA BRETT: Each one had their own special flavor and their own excitement. I would say of all the them I enjoyed working for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) the most because it was very exciting.

I came on board in April 1987 to the DEA. In March 1985, one of DEA's Special Agents, Enrique (Kiki) Camerana, along with his pilot had been captured, tortured, and killed by drug traffickers in Mexico. DEA was advised that there was tape recording of the torture and death of Special Agent Camerana. Immediately, DEA had agents looking for the murderers and the doctor who had kept Special Agent Camerana alive during his days of torture. Camerana's pilot was buried alive in the same shallow roadside grave which held the broken body of Special Agent Camerana. DEA offices world-wide celebrate Red Ribbon Week in October to honor Special Agent Camerana and his sacrifice to keep illegal drugs out of the United States.

That was so commendable and heroic that someone would give up his/her life and still do so to protect young children from drugs. I just thought that was something that I could do something with, so I was proud to be part of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Once again, I had shifted over to an agency that was mostly guys. You felt very secure in the building because most of the staff were Special Agents and they were carrying weapons. When I traveled for DEA to field offices on inspections, I traveled with Agents and they were always "carrying" (weapons) as they say. That was an exciting time, my seven years, working for the DEA.

CHARLES BRETT: Among the agencies you have worked, which agency offered the most opportunities for advancement?

BARBARA BRETT: I would say it would be a toss-up between the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The U.S. Courts were going through a major change in 1978. The U.S. Bankruptcy Courts had been under the purview of the U.S. District Courts. The Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1978 broke those courts apart noting that the U.S. Bankruptcy Courts were large enough to stand on their own. When they did this, the U.S. Bankruptcy Courts had to have their own forms, their own records schedules, support staff, courthouses if they did not already have space.

Everything just exploded in 1978 and I was at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts working in Records Management at the time. I had to do field surveys of U.S. Bankruptcy Courts and we selected a group of courts to survey based on their size (small, medium, and large courts). We had to wrench some of the records out of the courthouses because some of the Judges saw their cases as their own private children and not Federal records that belong to the U.S. government. So, that was an exciting time.

At the DEA, I had a lot of professional growth too because of the drug war which we are still not winning unfortunately. A lot of money was being given to DEA along with a lot of resources so we could get some good things done.

CHARLES BRETT: I have an additional question about your time at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. Describe your role as Manager of the Federal Women's Program at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

BARBARA BRETT: As I had said earlier, when I had first joined the Federal government in 1974, very few women and minorities were in the government. If they were working for the government, they were Secretaries or Clerk Typists, support staff. So there wasn't anybody in middle-management or above who was a woman. OPM (Office of Personnel Management) decided to correct this imbalance and they came up with the Federal Women's Program. I was the Co-Manager of the Federal Woman's Program at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts from 1978-1984. In that role, I encourage a lot of female staff to go back to school to further their education so they could compete for better jobs. We encouraged Upward Mobility Programs so a woman could get out of a dead-end job and get a job that had more advancement. We also had an AO staff member, Linda Holz, whom we selected for our agency's representative at OPM.

The Federal Woman's Program was throughout the Federal government and at DEA, when I worked there from 1987-1994, DEA had an Upward Mobility Program called "Women on the Team". I was in that program when I worked at DEA. It was a good time (the 1980's) for women trying to move up in Federal service.

CHARLES BRETT: Because women's roles were expanding in the Federal government or were trying to be expanded as opposed to what they had been.

BARBARA BRETT: Yes.

CHARLES BRETT: Describe your role as the first Customer Service Coordinator for the National Archives in DC.

BARBARA BRETT: The Customer Service Division was an outgrowth of a Task Force at NARA in the mid-1990's. They felt that there should be a Customer Service Coordinator at the Archives 2 (A2) in College Park, MD and a Coordinator at the Archives 1 (A1) in Washington, DC to help serve the needs of our researchers, our customer base. I was the first Customer Service Coordinator selected for Archives 1. I went downtown to A1 and filled that position in June 1999. I stayed in that position till September 13, 2002. I only left the position because they were renovating the A1 building and unfortunately, I have allergies and they don't really mix well with paint fumes, dust, and debris. I stayed working at A1 as long as I could. Then, it was either cough up a lung for Archives 1 or move out to Archives 2. So, that is how I ended working back at Archives 2 in College Park, MD.

CHARLES BRETT: Interesting change. Describe the professional organizations you joined and your roles in same.

BARBARA BRETT: I have joined several professional organizations throughout my Federal career. I was the Co-Manager of the Federal Women's Program in the 1980's. During the 1980's to the present time, I was also active in MARAC, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference. In the 1980's and 1990's, I was also active in ARMA, Association of Records Managers and Administrators. I wrote articles for ARMA's DC Chapter newsletter and gave presentations.

Throughout my years at NARA, I was also active in NARA's Assembly. This 2007 Legacy Project is a part of the Assembly's Record Group. I was the Director of the Career Development Program of NARA's Assembly for a couple of years (2003-2004).

From 2002 to 2007, I was active in NARA's Afro-American History Society (AAHS). I was the AAHS Secretary for a couple of years and attended many AAHS programs.

I was also active in ASAP, Association of Access Professionals, and in the U.S. Treasury Department's Historical Society during the time-frame of 2002-2007.

In August 2007, I joined NARFE, National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association. I was elected President of NARFE Chapter 1665, Northern Virginia Chapter, in October 2007.

CHARLES BRETT: Very good. In your 30 years of Federal service, who would you rate as your best Supervisor and why?

BARBARA BRETT: I had two outstanding Supervisors in my Federal career. When I worked for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO), Rick McBride was in charge of the AO's records program. When I left NARA in 1978 to move up, I was assigned to Rick McBride's staff. The first thing that Rick said to me when he reviewed my SF171, Resume, was: "Barbara, I see you received your 30 graduate credits in U.S. History from Georgetown University but you did not finish your Master's Degree. I want that to be one of your goals.". I said: "Ok". Rick encouraged me to go back to Georgetown University Graduate School to finish and obtain my M.A. degree in a timely fashion. Rick also encouraged me to work in different areas of Records Management. I had wanted to stay working in writing Records Schedules for the AO and for our field offices. However, Rick wanted me to try the Vital Records Program and the Forms Management Program. When the U.S. Bankruptcy Courts broke off from the U.S. District Courts, Rick assigned me the tasks of their Records Management functions. Rick McBride was a great Supervisor. He encouraged you to grow intellectually and on-the-job. He always had an open door policy. Rick was great!

The other AO Supervisor was Don Seay, who was in charge of the AO's Procurement and Contracting Branch. When I went over there in 1982 to do some buying and selling for the U.S. Courts, Don was just terrific – both on the job and off.

Thanks to Don Seay, my husband, Charles Brett, and I have had our home in Arlington, Virginia since 1987. Prior to 1987, we were living in our home in Vienna, Virginia near Tysons Corner and the traffic there was horrendous.

Don Seay met me in his office at the AO and showed me a map of Northern Arlington where the Metro Subway Orange Line was coming. Don said: "See this line right here. This is where the subway is coming. Go there and buy a house there. The house will double and triple in value. You will be set for life.". I thought Don was kidding but I took his advice and Charlie and I are living in the North Arlington house which we paid only \$150,000 in 1987 and is now worth \$700,000 in 2007. So, Don Seay had good advice.

Both of these men (Rick McBride and Don Seay) were treasures.

CHARLES BRETT: What were some of the challenges you faced in your career?

BARBARA BRETT: Challenges early on were the fact that there were so few women role models in upper level management positions and there was no networking because there were so few women which made it very difficult. You were sort of learning as you were going along. Fortunately, I grew up with three brothers (Harold, Paul, and Robert O'Neil) so I was always around men.

I was also a Daddy's Girl. My father, Capt. Harold Francis O'Neil, who was a highly decorated (Silver Star, Bronze Star, 3 Purple Hearts) WWII hero, was the reason I went into Federal service. When Dad retired from Federal service as a Grade 13 Records Officer from Boston's Dept. of Labor in June 1974, I joined Federal service in July 1974 at DCASR. I just really worshipped my father.

So, if I were dropped in a room with all men, I had no problem watching what they were doing. They would sort of mentor me – telling me to do this or to do that. It really helped. I learned how to organize my time, how to set milestones for projects, how to do Pert Charts for projects, how to speak in front of a group, how to speak off the cuff, how to know when to speak so as not to tip your hand sometimes. Basically, I would say that the hardest challenge in my career was not having any female role models. The new generation does not have this problem.

CHARLES BRETT: What were some of the many accomplishments of your career?

BARBARA BRETT: When I look back on my Federal career, some of the accomplishments I am most proud of were in 1975 when I worked for Declassification at the National Archives. I worked on declassifying WWII records. To know that those WWII records were going to be released to the public made me very proud. We had Captured German records. We had records about the Death Camps. To know that this information was going to be out (declassified) for the public was a wonderful feeling of accomplishment.

Another accomplishment was in 1978, when I went to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO), and I traveled and did inspections of the newly formed U.S. Bankruptcy Courts to schedule their records. To know that their permanent records were going to be sent to the National Archives and not being left somewhere in a courthouse where there could be a fire or a flood or some other calamity, and we would never see those special cases.

I also enjoyed working for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) from 1987-1994. I was in charge of DEA's Policy Program. I trained DEA staff on editing and how to write policy and procedures. I traveled for DEA and did files surveys for seven DEA field offices in California from Carlsbad down to the Mexican border.

I would say that those three agencies (NARA, AO, and DEA) stand out in my mind as really special.

Some of the many accomplishments of my Federal career include:

1. One of the first staff in NARA's Declass Division in 1974.
2. One of the first staff in NARA's Machine-Readable Division in 1977.
3. The first Customer Service Coordinator for Archives 1 in 1999.
4. The Federal Women's Manager for the AO circa 1980-1984.
5. Assistant Branch Chief in Records Management at DEA 1988-1994.
6. Wrote Vital Records Manual for U.S. Courts in 1982.

7. Re-designed entire forms for use in U.S. Bankruptcy Courts in 1978.
8. Conducted Forms Management Workshops for Clerks of Court in 1986.
9. Traveled to DEA Field Offices for Files Inspections – 1991.
10. Awarded initial Drug Testing Contract for DEA, FBI, Secret Service, and U.S. Marshals Service in 1988.

CHARLES BRETT: Did you do any teaching?

BARBARA BRETT: Yes, I did. I ended up being a teacher during my break in service (October 19, 1994 – May 17, 1998). I was supposed to be a teacher when I graduated from Boston College (BC) in 1971. I was in BC's School of Education for three years (1967-1970). In those days, female students at BC could only attend classes at either the School of Education or the School of Nursing. Women's careers were limited to teachers and nurses.

In the Fall of 1970, Boston College finally opened up its School of Arts and Sciences to women. Now women could be in pre-law and pre-med. I was one of only seven women who were accepted into BC's School of Arts in Sciences for graduation from there in 1971. I had been on the Dean's List (A's and B's) and the President's List (all A's) during my 3 years at BC or they would not have taken you into BC's School of Arts and Sciences. They were very selective as to which females they were going to admit to Arts and Sciences those days. I was proud to be one of the initial seven.

However, always in the back of my mind, I had wanted to teach. From the time I was as small child, I had a chalkboard in my home's basement classroom. I used to pretend I was teaching. I would line up my dolls and they were my students. From the time I was four years old, I wanted to be a teacher.

So, whenever, I had a government job that I could teach or mentor someone, I just loved it. I used to do forms workshops for the courts. I got to go to Palm Springs to do a forms workshop because one of the U.S. Bankruptcy Judges had a beautiful second home in Palm Springs. He did not want to fly himself or his staff to Washington, DC so we had to go to Palm Springs. Tough duty but someone had to do it!

On the flip side, I had Cleveland in the rain when I had to do a forms presentation workshop there. Cleveland is in the center of the country and we were trying to bring together staff from the U.S. Bankruptcy Courts throughout the country. That workshop was a disaster. It was raining heavily. I am at Cleveland's Airport waiting for my suitcase at the baggage claim. I finally see my suitcase. It had been sliced open and all my clothes are flying off every which way. I said to myself: "This is not going to be too good. It doesn't look like a good deal here.". However, I got through it. The Cleveland workshop was very interesting.

Then, I also did some teaching when I worked at DEA. No one had ever had any workshops/programs in Records Management to teach staff about scheduling records, about the importance of the policies and procedures, and about forms. So, I conducted those workshops for DEA Headquarters and field personnel.

I was able to use my education background wherever I worked.

CHARLES BRETT: You have had quite a few experiences, obviously. Describe your remembrance of the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing of April 1995.

BARBARA BRETT: The Oklahoma City bombing was during the initial six months when I went on break from Federal service (October 19, 1994 – May 17, 1998) to obtain a second Master's Degree, a M.Ed. from Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. I had taken a break in service to help my elderly parents, Lt. Col. Harold F. O'Neil and Margaret M. O'Neil, in Cape Cod. I was preparing to go to class that April 1995 morning and I turned on the TV news real quick before I left home. There was an Oklahoma City Federal building that had collapsed or so it looked like. There were people running around. There were smoke and debris. I really did not know what I was looking at on the television. So, I put down my books and I sat down and turned up the volume on the television. They had a little line of text below the smoldering ruins stating: "This is the Federal building in Oklahoma City. A bomb has gone off and there are numerous dead including children at a Day Care Center on the ground floor."

I was just horrified. I immediately ran to the kitchen and picked up the phone and called my husband, Charles Brett, at his office at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. My concern was: Is this something where they are hitting several Federal buildings in different cities? You, Charles Brett, being a Federal employee might be at risk too. So I called Charles. Thank God, it was just an isolated case. They arrested all the people involved and justice was served in the Oklahoma bombing.

That was when it really struck me that there are some people in this country who are really very angry at the Federal Government and its employees. Whether it is anger directed at the FBI for Waco or at the Veterans Administration because someone did not receive good service or whatever it is. They will turn to violence and they do not care who they take out. That was an eye-opener in 1995.

CHARLES BRETT: Describe your memories of the 9/11/2001 terrorist attack.

BARBARA BRETT: I was back in Federal service then. I had rejoined NARA in May 1998. I was working downtown at Archives 1 in Washington, DC so I was right in the hot spot when the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 hit. It was a beautiful September day, similar to today with blue skies, sunshine, and temperature 75 degrees. I remember thinking: "What a glorious Fall day!".

I was working with researchers in the 4th floor of the Archives 1 building. I was the Customer Service Coordinator. I was also the Fire Warden. I never had to use my Fire Warden duties till that day on September 11, 2001.

I went down the hall to Room 410 so I could relieve one of the Archives Specialists so I could work with the researchers there. She had left her personal computer (pc) on and I looked over at her pc and she had on the news on MSNBC. On the screen, were the twin tower buildings (World Trade Center) of New York City. There was a plane sticking out of one of the towers with a big fireball. Both buildings were still standing. I had no idea what I was looking at so

I turned up the pc speakers. The news reporter said that a plane had hit the building. At that point, we thought it was just a fluke accident. Someone had flown too low, maybe due to inexperience. Then, when the second plane took out the other tower within minutes, it was decided we were at war. Someone is out to get the United States.

I never heard from my Branch Chief (Ken Heger) on September 11, 2001. He was in Disneyland in California for his birthday. The second-in-command, his Assistant (Gary Morgan) never left his office in the second floor to come up to the 4th floor to tell his staff anything on that fateful day.

So, I decided since I was the 4th floor Fire Warden, I had to do something. I went and told the Researchers in Room 400 and in Room 410 that we will be evacuating the building (Archives 1 in DC). There has been an incident in New York City. Then, one of the researchers looked out the window and saw billowing smoke. He thought the White House was on fire that it had been hit by a plane like the Twin Towers in NY.

Our worst fears were that DC was next. So, I looked out the fourth floor window and said that smoke is not coming from the White House. The smoke is coming from Virginia over the 14th street bridge. At that point, I knew the Pentagon sat off the 14th street bridge. I knew a third plane had hit it. It had hit the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.

We had to wait at Archives 1 sitting between the Capital Building and the White House on Pennsylvania Ave. NW at 7th Street NW, until the Archivist, John Carlin, who worked at Archives 2 in College Park, Maryland, in a relatively safe zone, would release his staff at Archives 1 in DC.

As the Archives 1 Fire Warden, I kept people calm and told people not to leave yet that we awaiting the release from Archives 2. The DC police were called up, of course. There were fire trucks. The FBI had FBI Special Agents with automatic weapons up on the Hoover Building Roof at 9th and Pennsylvania Ave. NW. There were Haz-Mat vehicles flying up the sidewalks of 7th Street NW towards Pennsylvania Ave. The emergency vehicles were using the sidewalks because

the streets were jammed with total gridlock.

All other Federal agencies in Washington, DC had been released from duty before the staff at Archives 1 in DC were released. I saw the Federal Trade Commission staff released. I saw the Smithsonian staff released. The Department of Justice staff had also been released while the staff at Archives 1 in DC were just waiting to hear from NARA in College Park, Maryland.

Finally, around 10:30a.m., over an hour after the first airplane hit NY City's Twin Towers, the staff at Archives 1 were released.

I sent an e-mail to my family in Massachusetts, Indiana, and California telling them that I loved them and that we were at war. We were told by the DC Police: "Do not go into the subway system. There could be bombs." There were no buses running in DC on 9/11. All of sudden drivers creeping along in gridlock traffic started yelling out to people stranded on the sidewalks of DC, where they were going, as make-shift carpools were being formed. People were getting other people home as best they could.

I remember seeing mothers and fathers pushing strollers with young children along the DC sidewalks trying to get home. Their children thought it was a game. The children were yelling "Wee" as they were rolling along. Their parents were just running for their lives to get them and their children to safety. Their children had been in Federal Day Care Centers in those DC Federal Buildings (FTC, Smithsonian, DOJ) that had been released.

Fortunately for you, Charlie, you were teaching a Records Management class that day at Archives 2 in College Park, MD. Do you want to say how you drove down to DC to get me on September 11, 2001?

CHARLES BRETT: Well, we received the word around 10:00a.m. in College Park, MD at Archives 2 that there had been some attacks. There was some confusion in College Park also. We were finally released around 10:15a.m. or perhaps a bit earlier because we were

working out here with the Archivist (John Carlin). One of my students needed a ride downtown. Since I was going to come and pick you up in DC, I offered the student a ride. I drove her downtown so she could get on the subway. We had not been alerted in Maryland that there was a problem with the subways. It took me about 2.5 hours to drive from College Park, MD to Washington, DC.

I left Archives 2 around 10:45a.m. or thereabouts and picked you up in DC around 12:30p.m. - 12:45p.m. We had to go thru Maryland to get home to Virginia. We could not go through DC streets as they were total gridlock.

BARBARA BRETT: Yes. Normally, that is a 45 minute drive from Archives 2 in College Park, MD to Archives 1 in DC. On September 11, 2001, it took you 2.5 hours to 3 hours because of the traffic gridlock around DC, the police vehicles, and the security checkpoints.

CHARLES BRETT: At Capitol Hill in DC, you had to be careful. The police were stopping cars and checking driver's and passenger's identifications to see if you were a terrorist or not.

I remember listening to planes flying overhead in DC and luckily there were F-16's. They were our planes. They had fighter capacity.

BARBARA BRETT: We heard those planes too while I was waiting for you. It really sent shivers in people because we did not know if they were foe or friendly planes. We thought: "What next? What building gets hit next?".

CHARLES BRETT: I could recognize them (the planes). I looked up every time I heard an airplane engine and they were ours, thank Heavens. Nothing else (no commercial planes) were going to fly that day obviously.

CHARLES BRETT: We also had a bad situation here locally in the Maryland and Virginia area back in September – October 2002 which created a lot of confusion and fear among people. I am mentioning the Sniper Slayings.

What was your reaction to the Sniper Slayings?

BARBARA BRETT: I had just been re-assigned from Archives 1 in DC to Archives 2 in Maryland. I had gone thru September 11, 2001 in DC and the very next day on September 12, 2001 when the Archives opened in DC, I was right there at my post. I was not going to let terrorists keep me from doing my government job. That was quite an experience to go thru - that week in DC. I saw men have heart attacks on the days after 9/11 being taken away in ambulances from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) when I was going there for lunch. It was a very tough time to work in DC around 9/11/2001. There were numerous bomb threats to DC Federal buildings including NARA and the FTC which required evacuations.

On September 16, 2002, I was transferred to Archives 2 in MD to work in Declassification because of the major renovation at Archives 1 in DC which caused me to have trouble breathing (due to the dust, fumes, paint, tar etc.). When I came back to Archives 2 in MD to work, the very first week or so that I was back at A2, these two killers decided to go on a rampage. First, they went to Hillandale Shopping Center on NH Ave. in Silver Spring, MD, which is right up the road from Archives 2. They shot a man by the Hillandale Liquor Store.

Then, late September 2002, was when we really got to know about these killers when they started going around Montgomery County in MD and killing people at bus stops sitting on benches, men cutting grass in MD, people pumping gas in VA, and a bus driver in MD. It seemed like no one was safe.

I remember going downstairs to the A2 Café to have lunch and hearing over NARA's public address system: "It's unsafe to go outside. All employees are to stay in the building for lunch." I have never heard such a warning in my life. That warning was about the snipers who were roaming around this area killing innocent fellow Americans in the name of who knows what.

Everyone was grateful that the police finally found the snipers.

I remember driving home with you (Charles Brett) on the Beltway (Rte. 495) back and forth from MD to VA and seeing white panel trucks. You sort of wondered because the police were saying that witnesses had seen white panel trucks in the area of sniper shootings. You are wondering if you are actually going to make it home or is someone in a white panel truck, that work men use, going to kill you on the Beltway.

It turns out the snipers did not have a white panel truck. They had an old beat-up dark color four door car. Thank God for the truck driver, who found the snipers asleep in a road side truck stop rest area, and justice was served. Unfortunately, we lost a neighbor and fellow Federal employee. She was killed in Falls Church, VA at the Seven Corners Shopping Center parking lot which isn't too far from our home in Arlington.

CHARLES BRETT: Yes, I remember those events.

CHARLES BRETT: Did you prefer working in Archives 1 in Washington, DC to working in Archives 2 in College Park, MD? If so, why?

BARBARA BRETT: They both have their pluses and minuses. What I love about being out at Archives 2 in College Park, MD is nature. You can look out here and see the beautiful trees and foliage. There is a walking trail and a Fitness Center. It's a sense of serenity and quiet because there is nothing else going on. It's just the Archives here. I gave a nickname to the Archives 2 building where I now work. I call Archives 2 "the ice cube tray in the woods" because the building is so modern with its square windows that it looks like an ice cube tray and the building is surrounded by woods on the University of Maryland's golf course.

The Archives 1 building in downtown DC is at 7th and Pennsylvania Ave. NW which is a very vibrant area. I really miss working downtown. It was my favorite location because downtown DC has the museums, the art galleries, the restaurants, the hub-bub on the street, and the homeless people. You have a really interesting mix of people in DC that you do not see at Archives 2 in Maryland. At Archives 2,

there are just the 1,200 or so NARA staff, the researchers who come and go, and the contractors. At Archives 2, you do not have that real good mix like you have in a city such as downtown DC where Archives 1 is located.

CHARLES BRETT: What changes would you like to see in the Archivist series at NARA?

BARBARA BRETT: I have been an Archivist on and off for 30 years. When I started in 1975, the Archivist GS-1420 series began as a Grade 7, after a year, a Grade 9, and after another year a Grade 11, which was the top of the GS-1420 series. After must be 40 years or so, OPM decided Archivists could go to the Grade 12. During this whole time, people, who were Personnel Specialists went to a Grade 13, Management Analysts went to a Grade 13, Budget Analysts went to a Grade 13, Contract Specialists went to a Grade 13 and so on. Archivists were one of the few professional series that stopped at a Grade 11 or Grade 12.

What I would like to see is some respect for people who are care-taking our nation's history, who are describing our nation's records so researchers can use them, who are declassifying those records, which can be declassified, and protecting those records which cannot be released. I would like to see the Archivist GS-1420 series go to a Grade 13 like other professional series.

CHARLES BRETT: After more than 30 years working for the Federal government, what will you miss most when you retire on February 29, 2008?

BARBARA BRETT: I think I will miss most the contributions we give to our country. I signed up to do this work for my nation. I am still going to do volunteer work. I am going to be active in NARFE, National Active and Retired Employees Association. I have been asked to run as the President of the Northern Virginia Chapter 1665 of NARFE which I am doing. It looks like I will be elected Chapter President. (Note: Barbara Brett was elected President of NARFE Chapter 1665.) I will be active in NARFE over the next several years.

Some of the things I will miss as a Federal employee are the work itself, the importance of the work, and the people who work with you. I have known a great group of people over the past 30 years including some co-workers, some support staff, and some supervisors. I will miss some of the people whom I have treasured.

CHARLES BRETT: What will you miss least?

BARBARA BRETT: I guess what I will miss least is sometimes how long it takes to get things done in a bureaucracy. I am sort of a Type A, impatient person, and sometimes I would like something to move quicker. However, because the ways things go in the government, it takes a while for all the checks and balances to work out. That is probably what I won't miss - some of the pokiness, delays that come along with the bureaucracy.

CHARLES BRETT: Is there anything else you would like to add?

BARBARA BRETT: Yes, I would like to thank you (Charles Brett, husband of Barbara Brett) for interviewing me on behalf of the National Archives Assembly. I would like to ask you a few questions since you worked here at the National Archives for 13.5 years (March 1998 to November 2001) in Records Management (NWML).

Would you want to say what your favorite Federal job was during your 37 year Federal career?

CHARLES BRETT: I think teaching Federal employees Records Management and conducting briefings on Records Management at Federal agencies in order to share information and to contribute to people's work product. So, I would say the teaching aspect of my job at NARA and the briefing program on Records Management for Federal agencies and their responses.

BARBARA BRETT: You worked at several Federal agencies as did I. You started at HUD, then went to the Dept. of Commerce, where you

were the ITA Records Officer, from Commerce Dept. to NARA where you worked in NWML, Records Management. Now, you are a Branch Chief in Records and Information Management at FMS (Financial Management Service) at the Dept. of Treasury in Hyattsville, MD which you joined in November 2001. You are still in Records Management after all these years.

CHARLES BRETT: Yes, I am still in Records Management.

BARBARA BRETT: What will you miss when you retire on February 29, 2008 after 37 years of Federal service?

CHARLES BRETT: I will miss the interaction of working with people in offices to schedule their Federal records. Particularly, now, we have 50 major automated systems at FMS in Treasury. We only have about 30% - 35% of those systems scheduled for disposition with NARA. So, the legacy I am going to leave is finishing that project. That will be a major focus for FMS.

Thank you very much for allowing me to interview you, Barbara.

BARBARA BRETT: You are welcome.

CHARLES BRETT: It has been a very great honor for me to interview you on behalf of NARA's Assembly. I think you have done a great honor to our country by your Federal service.

BARBARA BRETT: Thank you. What I look forward to is February 29, 2008 when you and I do retire. As they say: "Grow old with me. The best is yet to be."

CHARLES BRETT: I am with you, honey.

BARBARA BRETT: Thank you.

CHARLES BRETT: Thank you.

This is Barbara O'Neil Brett speaking. My oral history of October 18, 2007 is dedicated to my husband of 29 years, Charles Joseph Brett, who has served our country as a Federal employee for the past 37 years.

I also dedicate my oral history to my family – my father, Harold Francis O'Neil (1919-1998) who served his country as a Capt. in the 28th Infantry, Company K in WWII earning a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts. After WWII, my father settled in Belmont, MA and worked for the National Archives in Waltham, MA and the Dept. of Labor in Boston, MA as a Records Officer. My father retired in 1974 with 33 years of Federal service. My father had a Master's Degree in Education from Northeastern University and taught business classes at night at Harvard. He was also a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force reserves for 20 years. My father taught his children the value of hard work, courage under fire, and love of country.

I also dedicate my oral history to my mother, Margaret Mary O'Neil (1918-2000) whose parents (Patrick and Annie) came to Boston from Galway, Ireland circa 1908. My mother was a registered nurse who set aside her career to raise five children and then resumed her career when her youngest child, Robert, was in college at the University of Massachusetts. My mother taught her children to be color-blind, to be kind, and to love one another.

Finally, I dedicate my oral history to my four siblings: My older brother, Dr. Harold Francis O'Neil, Jr. (born 1943) who teaches Educational Psychology at USC; my older sister, Phyllis O'Neil (born 1947) who is an Administrative Assistant for the Radiology Department at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, MA; to my younger brother, Dr. Paul O'Neil (born 1953) who is the Director of Wild Acres Psychiatric Treatment Facility in Lexington, MA and to my youngest brother, Dr. Robert James O'Neil (1955), who has taught entomology for over 24 years at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

I regret to add that my youngest brother, Dr. Robert James O'Neil, died on February 6, 2008 at age 52 after a ten month valiant battle with cancer. He leaves behind a wife, Elizabeth, a nurse who teaches

nursing at Purdue University and practices nursing at a local clinic; and four children – Jenny, Nat, Jon, and Elspeth O’Neil. My youngest brother was a kind, generous, loving, and caring brother, husband, father, and teacher. He left behind these same wonderful traits in his children who carry on his caring ways with his eldest child, Jenny, being a teacher.

My younger brother, Dr. Paul O’Neil, is also battling a fatal disease, amyloidosis. Paul has a wife, Beth, a nurse, and two children: Alison and Brian. We are all hoping for a cure to this deadly disease which strikes people down in the 50’s.

I am so proud of my entire family and their various services to our country – be it military service, civilian service, nursing, or teaching.

I close with a tribute to my ancestors’ homeland (Ireland):

ERIN GO BRAGH.
LONG LIVE IRELAND.

Thank you.

October 18, 2007 Interview Notes
Transcribed by: Barbara O’Neil Brett, Archivist, NARA-NWMD,
For the NARA Assembly Legacy Project
Record Group NAA.

Gift of Historical Materials of Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist, NARA NWMD
To The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

1. 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, Barbara O'Neil Brett, (hereinafter referred to as the Donor), hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America, for eventual deposit in the National Archives of the United States (hereinafter referred to as the National Archives), the following historical materials (hereinafter referred to as the Materials):

Recording (media) of an oral history interview with Barbara O'Neil Brett conducted on October 18, 2007 by Charles Joseph Brett, Branch Chief, Records and Information Management, FMS, U.S. Department of Treasury on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project. Includes a cassette tape and a DVD of the interview.

Transcript of an oral history interview of Barbara O'Neil Brett, conducted on October 18, 2007 by Charles Joseph Brett on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

2. Because the Materials were generated in connection with the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project-an oral history project designed to capture the institutional memory of retiring NARA staff-the Donor stipulates that the Materials be accessioned into the National Archives and allocated to the donated historical materials collection of the National Archives Assembly. This collection is designated as NAA and is entitled, Records of the National Archives Assembly.

3. The Donor warrants that, immediately prior to the execution of the deed of gift, s/he possessed title to, and all rights and interests in, the Materials free and clear of all liens, claims, charges, and encumbrances.

4. The Donor hereby gives and assigns to the United States of America all copyright which s/he has in the Materials.

5. Title to the Materials shall pass to the United States of America upon their delivery to the Archivist of the United States or the Archivist's delegate (hereinafter referred to as the Archivist).

6. Following delivery, the Materials shall be maintained by NARA at a location to be determined by the Archivist in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and provided that at any time after delivery, the Donor shall be permitted freely to examine any of the Materials during the regular working hours of the depository in which they are preserved.

7. It is the Donor's wish that the Materials in their entirety be made available for research as soon as possible following their deposit in the National Archives.

8. The Archivist may, subject only to restrictions placed upon him by law or regulation, provide for the preservation, arrangement, repair and rehabilitation, duplication and reproduction, description, exhibition, display, and servicing of the Materials as may be needed or appropriate.

9. The Archivist may enter into agreements for the temporary deposit of the Materials in any depository administered by NARA.

10. In the event that the Donor may from time to time hereafter give, donate, and convey to the United States of America additional historical materials, title to such additional historical materials shall pass to the United States of America upon their delivery to the Archivist, and all of the foregoing provisions of this instrument of gift shall be applicable to such additional historical materials. An appendix shall be prepared and attached hereto that references this deed of gift and that describes the additional historical materials being donated and delivered. Each such appendix shall be properly executed by being signed and dated by the Donor and the Archivist.

Signed: Barbara O'Neil Brett
Donor

Date: February 29, 2008

Pursuant to the authority of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, the foregoing gift of historical materials is determined to be in the public interest and is accepted on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein.

Signed: _____
Archivist of the United States

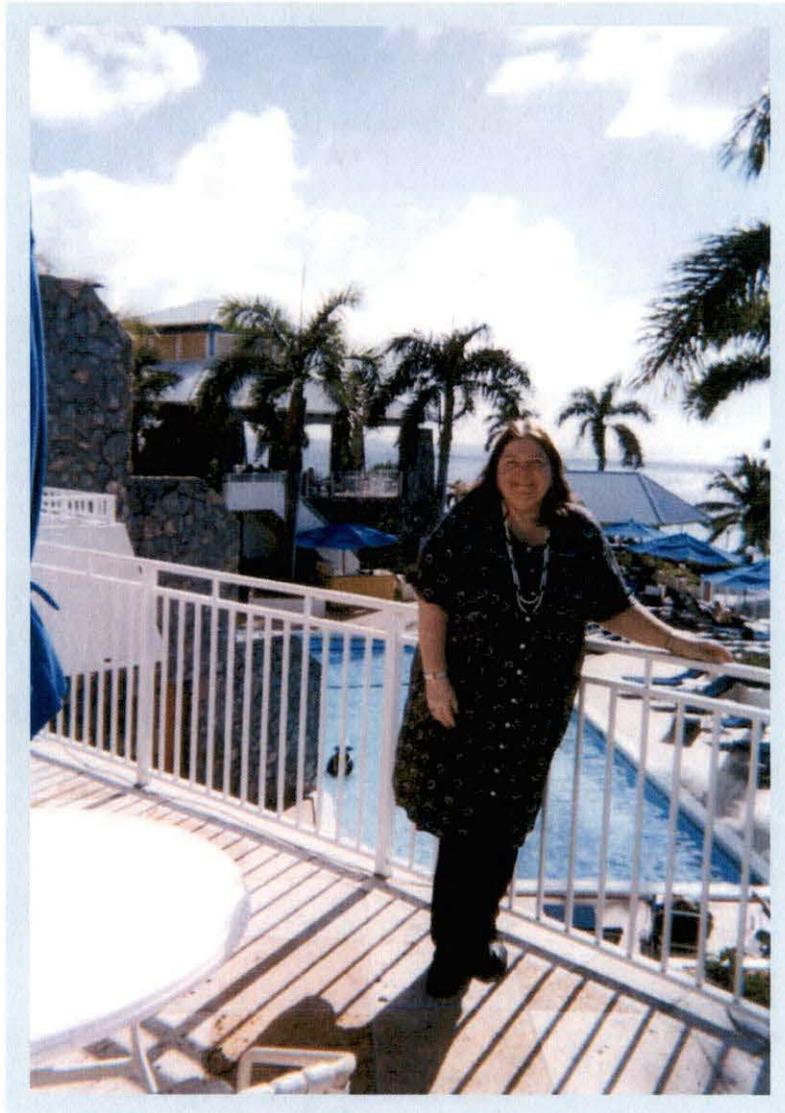
Date: _____

RETIREMENT PARTY FOR BARBARA BRETT

Monday, February 11, 2008

2 p.m.-4 p.m.

Lecture Rooms D & E



Please join NWMD in bidding a fond farewell to Barbara Brett who is retiring after 30 years of Federal service. To make a contribution, please contact in Room 2600 Aysha Ismail 837-1719 and in Room 6330 contact Sheila Clay 837-0456, or Sonya Greve 837-0606, or Brenda Randolph 837-1709.