

## **Fox-Cindy-Transcript**

**Title card: Cynthia Fox, Deputy Director of the Textual Archives Services Division (retired), interviewed by Susan Abbott, Archivist for the Assembly Legacy Project, recorded May 10, 2012**

**Susan:** What was there in your background that made the Archives even of interest to you?

**Cindi:** Well, actually, I may be the only person who set out to become an archivist at the National Archives. All the stories people tell about how they wandered through the door. I actually wanted to be an archivist, and I wanted to be an archivist at the best place in the world, which would be the National Archives. I was teaching school in Ohio. My husband was teaching at Oberlin College, and I wasn't happy. And so I did a week in [a] Gestalt workshop and whole life planning. And at the end of it, I either wanted to be a researcher for *Time* or *Newsweek* magazine, or I wanted to be an archivist at the National Archives 'cause I like doing research, but I didn't like doing the writing part of history. And so, that summer, we house-sat for somebody in New York City, my husband and I, and I went to the H.R. office at *Newsweek* magazine, and I explained what I like to do, and what I thought would be good at. And she said, well, that the researcher positions, there were more writers in training. And I said, well, that's not for me. So then I wrote a letter to the National Archives, and I got an answer and I said, "How do I become an archivist?" and they told me. And so I went back to graduate school and got a master's in archives and museums. And then in the end of 1978, there was an opportunity to do a co-op internship here at the National Archives.

And so I applied for it, like you apply for a regular job, and in January of '79 I started as a co-op intern, and you would work for six months and then go home for six months. And so I worked for six months, went back to North Carolina, finished up my, my graduate degree, and graduated that December with my master's and then came to work permanently in January 1980.

**Susan:** OK, so where did you start then?

**Cindi:** It was the Judicial and Fiscal Branch in 1979. When I got the permanent job it was in the same place. I was working for Clarence Lyons, and my first supervisor when I came to work permanently was Mike McReynolds. Oh yeah.

**Susan:** Still kicking out there.

**Susan:** He's still kicking out there. In fact, I had lunch with him and (unintelligible name) on Wednesday. (Laughs)

**Susan:** So, so Fiscal, Judicial. So what kind of records were those at that time?

**Cindi:** Well, Treasury, Treasury records and then the judicial cluster was the courts, the Supreme Court and Justice Department. I started actually in fiscal records. I was working with Terry Matchette, who was at that time an archives technician working in Coast Guard. And so my first records were actually those Coast Guard records that we've talked about so often.

And my my first letter ever was a reference report. And I had, I had no idea of the significance of being able to sign something, but Terry was so happy I got to sign something as an intern, because at that time, you know, nobody got to sign their own letters.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** Yeah, so. My first letter I ever did was a reference report on a lighthouse. And she walked me through the whole thing and then I got to sign it.

**Susan:** Wow.

**Cindi:** Yeah, wow. That was a long time ago.

**Susan:** Yeah, boy things have changed.

**Cindi:** 10-E-2.

**Susan:** So I was going to ask you about training, but that was done during your internship.

**Cindi:** Well, I was in this and when I came back in '80, I was in the CIDS program, so I did the two-year, Career Intern Development System training that was in place at that time. Yeah.

**Susan:** So was that pretty much the same as it later came to be? Was it rotations?

**Cindi:** It was, yeah. It was on the job training in rotations and pretty much the same way that the archivists training program works now. Yeah. It was, it was probably the best experience I ever had, because you got a chance to go out and meet people in other operations, and you had a chance to see what all the different pieces of NARA--at that time, NARS--did. And you got a chance to show what you could do, which is great for development, you know, for later on.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** So I had a terrific experience in the Career Intern Development System. My, my CIDS paper was kind of a bust, because I was trying to figure out how we could use a computer to produce name indexes from slip files that we had in the Justice Department records. And it would have cost so much money that it would have been prohibitive to do it. But so, actually, it led me, though, to the first experience that I had, which was--with volunteers, rather--which was, I hired staff aides to do the roll lists for passenger arrival records that we had accessioned in '82. We had a bunch of, we had boxes and boxes--we still have 'em, they're up there. And we got them in '82, '83. And I got staff aides to come in and sit there with a little Radio Shack laptop in the stack and put in roll lists, because there was no other way to do it.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** So that was my first experience with volunteer staff aides.

**Susan:** And computers.

**Cindi:** And computers, right? Yeah, we got a, there was a technology assessment staff at that time, a guy named Bill Holmes had come from Social Security or something. And the Archivist had created this kind of think tank, he thought, and Roger (unintelligible) was part of that. And they had purchased several of these LANs, local area networks that were produced by Radio Shack. And it was a CPU (shrugs negatively) and had 8-inch disks. I mean, it was ... and then you had these terminals that came off of it. So you could have, we had, in the outer office, you had one big unit and then two side terminals that people could use, and they could then store their stuff on this CPU. And we also had this little laptop. And I could take the little laptop into the stack and let them enter the stuff, because we didn't want to bring the records out.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** And so they would go in the stack and enter all this information and come back and then Holmes had written me this little dump program, so I could dump the stuff into the computer, and then we could produce a roll list and box labels, actually.

**Susan:** Nice.

**Cindi:** So those little, little pin-fed box labels that are on some of those rolls, that came from that RadioShack computer.

**Susan:** Who knew it was going to be 30 years later--

**Cindi:** 30 years later, they'd still be there.

**Susan:** And still our finding aid.

**Cindi:** That's right. You got it. Yeah.

**Susan:** And actually, probably the most useful way of creating finding aids that we have is those. OK, well, it's better than a box list.

**Susan:** Exactly--what's better than a box list? Knowing what's in the box is half the battle.

**Cindi:** Yeah. So what was, what was NARA like then? I mean, we were all in one building, right?

**Cindi:** Yeah. We were all here in this building.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** We were under GSA. So it was a different kind of a place. We had an administrative staff, but it was much smaller, because a lot of the stuff was done over at GSA. There was no H.R., there was no procurement, that was all done over at GSA. Well, I say, "no procurement," there were people here who helped us write contracts and that kind of thing, but there was, basically, all that kind of housekeeping stuff was done at GSA.

Everybody came to work, it was a very rigid kind of place. The phones in the stacks were black, and they were made out of steel, and they had dials on them, and they had cloth cords. And we all had these ancient, manual typewriters that we did our drafts on. And there were, of course, people had desks in every stack, there was not enough room for anybody in the offices. And it was, it was a very collegial space. This building is a vertical building, and so you would run into people in the elevator. And everybody came at the same time, everybody left at the same time, and everybody went on break at the same time.

And so, when I first came here, there was a a snack bar in the basement, and the tables were movable. And a group of young archivists would always move the tables together. And it was referred to as the YAA, the Young Archivists Association. And they would go to break every day at 10:00 and every afternoon at 3:00. And that was how you--because there was no email--so that was how you caught up with what everybody was doing.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** And I did a paper, I did a presentation for an SAA conference for the management roundtable. And it was about the corporate culture of different institutions, archival institutions; it was actually kind of a fun panel. And I did ours. And what I discovered when I went through this exercise that you do to figure out what the culture is like, that we were about

substance. We were about being right. And not about form. Pretty wasn't as important as right. And so that, that, I think, is pretty much who we were. It was, it was a really--everybody was here for the same purpose, to preserve and make available the records. And I mean that it was a really kind of collegial, collegial place.

**Susan:** Right. Right. Yeah. So I was going to ask you about the typical day, but it sounds like you just described that.

**Cindi:** Well, I did work in there. (Both laugh)

**Susan:** I had a question about what was significant about the records you worked with. But, Supreme Court, that's kind of obvious. And fiscal and judicial, unless there's anything else you'd like to say about that.

**Cindi:** The significance of the records.

**Susan:** Yeah. Or how interest and demand might have changed over time.

**Cindi:** Well. The Treasury records, the early Treasury records, are kind of expansive, in that they document all the government. I mean, everything that the government did is documented in financial records. And so the Treasury cluster included at that time, RG 217, the what was then called the General Accounting Office. It's now Auditors of the Treasury. But that record group was a go-to place for finding all sorts of information about the way the government operated, from the transportation accounts of the individual members of Congress to horse claims, how many horses did some farmer give to the Union Army? You know. I mean, there was, there was so much information there about everything, that, I guess, that was the most challenging body of material and probably one of the richest sources that has never been mined because it's so bloody difficult to use.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** But there's just an incredible amount of information in there. Those records are so significant. I don't know. We've never been able to actually get a good handle on them because

of the vagaries of time. I think finding aids for some very complicated series were never accessioned or were never created. I mean, maybe they were all two-legged finding aids, that's certainly a possibility. But those--underutilized because they're so difficult but so significant, some of the oldest records we have in this institution.

**Susan:** You weren't always in reference, didn't you move out, do some other work as well before you went into management?

**Cindi:** I got RIF'ed.

**Susan:** That's right.

**Cindi:** In February of '82, I lost my job, um, part of the Reagan (clicks as if to indicate dislike) downsizing of the Federal government, they came through and took out everybody who had less than two years of service. So I separated one day, and then the second day I came back to work for the Trust Fund. So I never actually left the building. But three of us, Emily Soapes, and Vicki Walsh, and I were picked up by the Trust Fund to do what they called publications development. And basically, we were supposed to come up with microfilm catalogs, updated microfilm catalogs, and new subject area microfilm catalogs for the sale, because most of the money the Trust Fund made at that time was in microfilm publications. And so we were hired to do these catalogs. In addition, we also did the first big genealogical guide. The genie guide before that had been a trade size, 6 by 9, no-color publication and very thin, maybe maybe 400 pages. And Katherine Coram and Connie Potter were both hired to do work on the genie guide, doing the editing and the compilation. And so that's when Connie got her foot in the door.

But that was pretty much what we did. Then I got pulled back into permanent by then acting Office of the Head of the National Archives, Jim Moore, gave me a job in Special Media, Special Archives. It was, it was a kind of a floating position. I was supposed to do six months here and six months there, and work in all the different types of media. And so I went to work in, um, I went to work in motion pictures and work for Les Waffin in Motion. And I did appraisal and accessioning there. And then I went--that for six months--and then I went to work for Trudy Peterson, who was at that time the Branch Chief in what was then called Machine Readable, which became Electronic Records. And so I did six months there, also working in accessioning

and appraisal. And then I got a job at what was then called NCD in Records Appraisal. I got, I got my 12, I got a promotion to go to NCD and I worked there for six months. And in the end, two years, almost to the day, from the time that I got RIF'ed, I got back into what had become Judicial, Fiscal, and Social while I was away. But I got my old job back, it was February of 20-- of 1984. I came back and I went back into--and then I was in, I was working in Justice records and not Treasury records at that time. And I that's when I worked on that accession of the Immigration and Naturalization Service microfilm, that's when we started that roll list big project and everything, that was in '84.

And then in '86, Trudy, by that time, had become the Assistant Archivist for the National Archives, Trudy Peterson. And so she asked me to take over a new position she wanted to create, which was Staff Development Officer. And that's when I went into Administration.

**Susan:** OK, all right. And that's where I come in the picture, I think.

**Cindi:** Yes! Because I hired you. (Laughter from both)

**Susan:** That's right. You did.

**Cindi:** I did. I hired some really cool people, actually. Deb Wall. She was Deb Steidel at the time. I hired, you know, really important people.

**Susan:** So that was about '88, '89?

**Cindi:** That was '86, '87.

**Susan:** Is that right, OK. Yeah. And then I, then I was--Tom Brown was the head of the administrative staff at that time. Then I was his deputy, and we hired Mary Rephlo to take over staff development. And then I got the head of, I got Tom's job when he went to work in what became Electronic.

**Susan:** Was that NNB or something like that?



**Cindi:** Yeah, it was. NNB.

**Susan:** OK, um, I guess we'll move into challenges and issues you've encountered in your career,

**Cindi:** Challenges and issues. Well, um, I guess there've been a number of them, a number of them. The first biggest one was doing what needed to be done without adequate staff and support. In 1990--in 1991, Trudy Peterson asked me to take a look at the possibility of using staff aides to do larger projects. By that time she was Acting--no, she was still NM at that time, and so we talked to a number of people, and there was a lot of opposition. The union was opposed to bringing in volunteers to do work that staff should be doing. And the, the conservators were concerned about unpaid help handling records. And so those were two issues that we had to overcome by pointing out to the union that this was work that could never be done by staff, because we couldn't afford to hire them. It wasn't like we were taking work away from staff. It was work we couldn't do. And the union agreed with us that that was the case. And then we dealt with the conservator issue by having intensive training of the volunteers who were going to be doing the work.

But we recruited about 50 volunteers--no, that's not right, that's not true. First of all, in February of '92, we had a pilot project to test the concept, and we had 20 volunteers altogether. And Mary Jane Dowd was the archivist who had responsibility for coordinating and liaise with the records custodians, because the first records that we were going to do were compiled service records. They wanted to do the compiled service records. And the idea was to do the Union ones that had never been microfilmed and arrange them for microfilming, so that they would be ready to go under the camera if we ever got money. And then Trudy's idea was to find grant money and outside money to pay for the preservation microfilming.

But the pilot, the pilot project lasted probably for about three months. And we declared victory and then went out and recruited 50 volunteers and created what became, what Trudy, named the Civilian Conservation Corps. That's the Civil War Conservation Corps, not Civilian Conservation Corps, the CWCC, she named it that. And it was a phenomenal group of people. I mean, we had Ph. D's, and retired lawyers, and retired economists, and all these wonderful people who came in, and gave us time, and worked really hard. And we've done an enormous

amount of work with them. They did the compiled service records for the Union and they did the United States Colored Troops. And then we got money to film the United States Colored Troops. Then they did the Freedmen's Bureau. And then, finally, they started in on the pension files for the Union widows and survivors. That's still going on right now to make those available online. So, I mean, they, they stayed with us for a really long time--through the renovation, through everything. They stuck it out, and they were phenomenal.

That was a really--I'm very proud of having been associated with them, because I think they did a lot of really good work. So that was, that was one area that we had some controversy, and we overcame it, and we created something I think is probably a model of public-private partnership that you never find anyplace else.

**Susan:** Right. Right.

**Cindi:** Second area, the whole issue of replevin and theft. For most of my career at the National Archives, there were, there were a couple of notable thefts of archival material from institutions here in Washington, including the National Archives. But the day-to-day kind of things that pop up for sale, there wasn't a lot of interest in admitting that we were vulnerable, and there wasn't a lot of interest in going after things that weren't unusual. There were a couple of replevin cases where they went after--the Schoolcraft map, for example--where they could, the lawyer said we could prove that we had it once. It was in private hands, now, somebody took it and it belongs here. So there were a couple of bigger cases like that, but nothing, nothing that approaches what's going on now. And I think probably eBay and the Internet and Antiques Roadshow have all taught us that we are vulnerable, because people now know what some of the stuff we have is actually worth. And it was very, it may not have been obvious to all the staff because this machine was starting to move, the Office of Inspector General had begun to look at this as something that they needed to be involved in and engaged in.

And the lawyers became more receptive to the idea of going after things. And they began talking about, well, what would the criteria be if we were going to go after stuff?

In the meantime, there are an awful lot of opposition among the older establishment, because it meant that we were admitting we had been vulnerable all along, and that was very difficult

for some people. You know, again, I always assumed that we probably were pretty safe for a long time, because nobody had a clue what stuff was worth. And then they became aware of it. And it, it made us more vulnerable. It also makes the thieves more vulnerable, because the eBay thing has been the way that most people have been caught. And then I suddenly found myself being a resource person in this whole quest to figure out whether or not we had to go after something. And you know, who, which staff member would you talk to to find out if something had value, and what would that value be. And then we had the terrible Howard Harner case, which actually was just dumped in our laps. And this was a trusted researcher who had worked very closely with the Civil War subject area expert, Mike Musick.

And it turned out he had rifled the Adjutant General's Office Correspondence Files for profit. And it was just awful. Everybody felt violated, because it was a trusted researcher, it was somebody that people had gone out of their way to try to help them find what they were looking for. And it turned out that they wanted to steal it. It was just awful. I think that might be the worst, the worst of it. I mean, some people were eclectic. They stole from State Department, and they stole a little bit here. This guy focused, homed in on one series, Adjutant General's Office, and just raped it, pillaged and plundered, you know. And I remember the judge when we went to the-- he was, he admitted he had done it. And I remember we went to the sentencing hearing, and there were like--we filled the back of the courtroom with archives people. And the judge looked back and said, "Do you see how many people are here? You see how important what you, what you did, what you stole was, that all these people would come here to make sure that you paid for your crime?" And Harner started crying, and he felt awful. He violated, you know, trust. That was--in terms of, of unusual events and that kind of thing, I think that would probably be up there. Yeah, yeah.

**Susan:** Yeah. Well, how about changes in administration? Would that affect much of how you did your job or not, not really?

**Cindi:** Administration in terms of the White House administration, or administration here?

**Susan:** Here, I would say.

**Cindi:** Well, you remember I said back in the early part of my career, I did that, that analysis of the corporate culture of the National Archives?

**Susan:** Yes.

**Cindi:** During the ten-year reign of the Governor from Kansas, we moved away from that, and it became, we became more interested in form, how it looked, and less in substance. And I'll give you a specific example. We were trying to develop a descriptive program, an automated description program. Been trying for, for a decade. And at the same time, when we, when we originally started working on the, on the subject, pretty much nobody else was. But then as we continued to muddle through in different versions of what was the archival information system, and then, you know, as we continued to muddle through, the rest of the profession became aware of online cataloging, and everybody seemed to be going to MARC. And so we chose something completely different, so that we would never be able to marry up or sister up with the rest of the world. And I never understood why. And it, it appeared, at least to me, and this is just an opinion, that it was about being the National Archives and being special and not being right anymore.

You know, not saying we need to to be listening to what the rest of the profession is doing, so that we can create this enormous amount of information in what would become the Internet, you know, but instead of that, we went and did something completely different. And so we continued to muddle. And it probably isn't until--we went through all these iterations of when to make things available online. And you have personal memories, I'm sure, of entering all that data about those bloody service records from the Rough Riders. You know, I mean, they made it as hard as they possibly could. And I mean, they said they wanted to make it available and then they made it is as difficult to make something available as possible. All I ever wanted was one whole series in EAD. It's all I ever wanted. And so we did the Rough Riders' service jackets, because it was the anniversary of the Spanish-American War, and we had digital images made and all of that. And it wasn't until all that was done and all the work to enter the data, because you had to write a physical description of the record, and you had to do all this stuff, that I found out that they didn't, they didn't use the entire service record. The service jackets for the Spanish-American War have medical files in them, but it would have made it too big.

**Susan:** No.

**Cindi:** So they only did the cards.

**Susan:** No.

**Cindi:** Yeah. That's form over over substance. That's what that is.

**Susan:** Yeah, yeah, that's disappointing.

**Cindi:** And that happened. And I think, I think in terms of morale and that professional camaraderie that I mentioned earlier, something happened in there that just, it changed, it changed.

**Susan:** Were there any significant controversies that we haven't talked about? I was going to ask you, I guess, when this assembly was first created. Were you around for that?

**Cindi:** Oh yeah, yeah. I was not part of the cabal. I wasn't high enough in the, I was just a CIDS trainee at the time, but I attended that first organizational meeting at the auditorium on the sixth floor.

**Susan:** On a Saturday, right?

**Cindi:** On a Saturday, we all came in on a Saturday. What had happened was that there was a new administrator at GSA, Admiral Freeman, and Admiral Freeman came in and wanted to cut costs. And he looked at the Archives and he said, "We have all these facilities out in the regions out all over the country, but they don't have many records. All the records are here in Washington. Why don't we ship some of them out? And he proposed creating subject centers, so World War One would be in Fort Worth or--you know, that was his proposal. And that would save a ton of money because rent was cheaper out in the hinterlands and staffing was cheaper out in the hinterlands, and, you know, NARS could finally, you know, be part of the cost cutting effort. And the hue and cry from the research community and from the professional community

was huge, just huge. The destruction of provenance, just taking record groups apart was beyond anybody's comprehension.

And so the staff actually became very active, and the Assembly became our voice at the time. And so I was a member right away. I helped out on the newsletter, *The New Archivist*. I helped type it and write articles for it. I wrote a column for a number of years called, "Did You Know?" Just stuff that people might not have been aware of, because we didn't have email and it was, you know, no Internet at the time. And I never actually held office in the Assembly. I'm not sure why, but the timing was just never right. They did ask me several times to do several different things. And I just, the timing wasn't right.

**Susan:** So ultimately, ultimately, what happened to the admiral?

**Cindi:** Oh, he left.

**Susan:** He left.

**Cindi:** Yes. The *Post* did a nice little piece about him and it said that he had dropped anchor in the Federal Triangle, and we had then gone after him with our torpedoes (both laugh) And he didn't like it much. So he left.

**Susan:** And that was the beginning of independence, right?

**Cindi:** Yes, that was the beginning of independence. And at the same time that the Assembly was doing that, Bob Warner, who was the new Archivist of the United States, was busily trying to put together support for an independent National Archives, which occurred in 1985. The Assembly was part of that whole effort, always was. And Bob Warner credited the administrators of General Services for their help in gaining independence, because he said if they hadn't been so stupid, we'd probably still be part of GSA. Admiral Freeman was followed by Gerald Carmen, who is, was a used tire salesman from New Hampshire. And Adrienne Thomas decided, recommended that we make some T-shirts with the state motto of New Hampshire, which was "Live Free or Die" and put "National Archives" under it. (both laugh) We had T-shirts made, the Assembly did, had the T-shirts made. But anyway, Carmen was

remembered most because he said, he came to to talk to the staff here, and he said to us that we were the jewel in the crown of the General Services Administration, and that every time he walked in the building, it made him tingle.

**Susan:** Oh, and so that's the source of the quote.

**Cindi:** NARS makes me tingle.

**Susan:** Now we know.

**Cindi:** Gerald Carmen.

**Susan:** It is revealed. (Cindi laugh Well, let's talk about some of the things you brought. And I also had a question about Mary Walton Livingston and her role in the resignation of Nixon. Did she, didn't she find something? A document that was dated ...

**Cindi:** Richard Nixon had a collection of vice presidential papers, and he was going to donate them at some point to the Eisenhower Library, or to his own library had he been elected. And they were going to change the law about whether or not he could take a tax writeoff for the donation. And so he asked the then-administrator to backdate the deed of gift so that it would fall under the previous rule, and he'd be able to take the tax writeoff, and they would be donated to the Eisenhower rather than holding on to them for the Nixon Library. And Mrs. Livingston worked in Presidential Libraries at the time. And she refused to do it. And so that was the big flap about Mary Walton. She, she was just too honorable. She wasn't going to do it.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** And so it became known that he had attempted to, to bend the rules.

**Susan:** I see, OK, interesting.

**Cindi:** That predated me, though. I wasn't here then.

**Susan:** OK, well, what have you brought to show us?

**Cindi:** Well, I have a funny story that I wanted to share. When I was working in NNFJ, the Judicial, Fiscal, and Social Branch, I had a, we were over in 5W, that was our office area. And it was lunchtime, and I was sitting in the office pretty much alone, and a young man walked in. In those days researchers were directed back to the stack offices. It wasn't like it is now, so much security. And so this young man walked into the office, and I'm sitting there by myself and he was Korean, I think, Asian for sure, and probably Korean. And he finally made me understand he wanted to see Nixon's resignation letter.

Well, the problem, of course, was he was in 5W, and he really wanted to be in Diplomatic, which was in 5E. And I couldn't leave the office, because I was the only person there. And I thought about trying to explain to him how to get to 5E. And I thought, nah. So Clarence Lyons, who was the branch chief, had been--had worked in Diplomatic, had been assistant branch chief in Diplomatic Records. And while he was there, the Nixon resignation letter had been delivered to the Archives. And so he and a number of people had gotten copies. It had been photographed right away, and they had made Xerox copies of it. And Clarence had one in a frame on his wall. And so I thought about it for a second, and I got up and I said, "Wait here." And I went in his office, and I took it off the wall, and I came in, and I showed it to him. "Is this what you want?" "Yeah! Yeah!" So I took it, frame and all, to the Xerox machine, made a copy of it in the frame, came back, and handed it to him. And to this day, I wonder what happened when he went back to his village and explained that Richard Nixon's resignation letter was hanging on the wall in an office at the National Archives. (Both laugh)

**Susan:** Oh, my.

**Cindi:** But I like that.

**Susan:** Yeah. Yeah, that's great.

**Cindi:** So that's, that's what that is. (holds it up again) And you can see Henry Kissinger's initials and the time.



**Susan:** Nice.

**Cindi:** Now, Agnew's resignation letter never made it here. They say we lost it, but we didn't. It never came. That's one of the reasons why they got this one over here so fast, that afternoon it was delivered here. They didn't want it to go missing.

**Susan:** Yeah, I guess not. That'd be the end of that.

**Cindi:** I did bring some *New Archivists* from the old days. This is from '85. This is the "free at last" button we had made. So it's on the cover. But I did bring some some things that folks might be interested in seeing. One of them is the *Old Archivist*, which was a spoof that was done. You have to remember that we didn't have email, so you couldn't just do a PDF and send it around. So you had to, like, print these things up. And so this was a takeoff, a spoof on the *New Archivist*. And it was just the kind of thing that we did in those days because--and this issue of the *Old Archivist* was edited under contract by Phil Muntz and Dallas Irvine, both of whom had retired years before this.

But it was, it was 1984. So it's kind of fun. It was kind of a different place, I guess, back in those days, the fact that you had to go someplace else, and talk to people to find out what was going on outside your sphere. And I think, in fact, I know two things happened to change that that aspect, that social nature. One was Archives II. I moved out to Archives II when I was acting director of Preservation. And that would have been, a long time ago, when was that? Anyway, and so I was out there, and I was unpacking my stuff, you know, and it was it was getting towards 3:00 in the afternoon, and I thought, well, I'll go down to the snack bar because it'll be breaktime, and I'll see who's out here and see what's going on and see what the skinny is. So I go down to the breakroom, the cafeteria at 3:00 and it was empty. Everybody left at 2:30 to beat the traffic.

**Susan:** Everybody got there at 5:30-6:00 in the morning.

**Cindi:** Yeah, exactly. So you know, I mean it was very, it was a very different feel and Archives II is a horizontal building, not a vertical building. So you don't run into people.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** And it's so huge that you have very little chance of running into people. So it's a different feel. And in this building, Jim McGronigle, who was the head of administration, decided he didn't like the tables being moved around in the snack bar. So he had them bolted to the floor. He got booths and that cut down on the, you know, the kind of camaraderie thing that was going on down there.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** So anyway.

**Susan:** Strange thing to do.

**Cindi:** Yeah. Some people are weird.

**Susan:** You got that right. Well I think, you know, a lot of the criticism about, you know, the employees or people at work here have, is that there is the stovepiping has always been an issue, and communication, and it just seems to get worse. It's never resolved.

**Cindi:** No.

**Susan:** And I don't know if there is a way to do it when we're physically separated, but that's no longer supposed to be an issue with social media, right?

**Cindi:** Yeah, right. Um, I guess my problem with the way things evolved, and I'm as guilty as anybody of hitting the forward button and, you know, we used to have, and they used to make us have, branch meetings, where people had to sit down together and, you know, see the faces of the other people in the unit and find out what they did. And at the end of my career, I was as guilty as anybody of relying almost entirely on electronic transmission.

We were the big branch. You know, we had all those people, 70-some-odd employees, and it was just kind of overwhelming to try to get them all in one place at one time other than for the Christmas party.

**Susan:** Right.

**Cindi:** You know, so, but you lose something in doing it that way. And I'm trying really hard now that I'm no longer working and I'm retired, I'm trying really hard to call people, because it is so easy to email, and it is so, you know. But it's, you lose something.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** So I'm trying really hard to stay in touch with some people and have lunch with them. And I'm trying really hard to remember to call instead of just emailing. But you know, I'm as guilty as anybody.

**Susan:** Well it's hard, it's difficult.

**Cindi:** But communication is always going to be an issue. Which does, in fact, bring me to something I was thinking about. And that's management at the National Archives. We, we draw our managers, or drew our managers, it may be different now, we drew them from the professional staff. And that's a good and a bad thing, because the good thing is that they have an idea of what the people who work for them do for a living. They have some sense. But the bad thing is that they may be people who also want to do it themselves.

**Susan:** Oh, yeah.

**Cindi:** So we've had a lot of that kind of thing. So I developed my own management theory over time working at the National Archives, and I decided that the only job a manager actually had was to make sure that nobody got in the way of the people who were trying to do the work. And that proved to be very successful with the staff, but not with the renovation team, because we had to live through a renovation in this building, which was dangerous and disruptive and

debilitating and demoralizing. And I spent the entire four years trying desperately to make sure that nobody got in the way of the people who had the work to do.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** You know, and that really was draining on me, and I think it was draining on everybody, but just that constant battle to make sure that nobody got hurt, you know, to make sure that when they broke a sprinkler head that they would call somebody, not just stand there and watch the water pour down on the boxes of records, you know, because we had that happen.

**Susan:** Yep.

**Cindi:** I mean, it just, that really was the only job. And it turned out I may have been the only person who thought that, because everybody else was out there trying to make peace and I wasn't trying to make peace. I was trying to make--do business, you know, in an impossible environment.

So I'm not sure about management at the National Archives, but they need to get their heads on straight, because, you know, it's just, they need a management development program like CIDS that allows people time to think through how to communicate with their staff, because half of it is listening and the other half is understanding what you're hearing. And you have to come into a conversation with somebody else's perspective. Otherwise, you don't get it. You, you know what you thought you heard, but it may not be the same thing that they meant to say. And that's a, that's a skill that's learned. You don't just, you're not born knowing that. But we don't teach it.

And how to, how to use the authority that you have, and when to use the authority that you have, and when to let go. I mean, that's one of the hardest lessons, I think, for most of the folks that I worked with at the National Archives that were managers that were not great managers was that they didn't know when to let go. There was one story about an assistant branch chief who gave a trainee an assignment, and the trainee went in the stacks, and there were Post-it notes on the ends of all the rows telling, now, go--turn right here, turn left here. It was bizarre

in the extreme. I mean, if the woman wanted to give the person the location, just give the person the location.

You know, this, that, this row, this compartment, this shelf, you know, you could do that. But she didn't, she went in there and put little little arrows, you know, that's just absurd.

**Susan:** Yeah. You need to develop a certain resiliency to work here anyway, that it doesn't encourage. (Laughter)

**Cindi:** No, no. You got to be fast on your feet. You got researchers beating you up over here, you got managers beating you over there. You have to be quick. And if somebody is putting up little notes telling you, you're not going to, you know.

But I, I, I have to say the 31 years I've spent here were good years. I, I love this place. I love what we do. Loved, love what we did, what I did. I love what you do. And I, I honestly and truthfully believe that most of the people who work here are here for the same purpose, which gives you such a feeling of pride, you know, when you do a good job.

That, and I always loved reference, because it had that psychic pay thing, you know. Of course, I never, I never understood why it was you work really, really hard for somebody and they just, "Oh, OK, fine." And then you would do like nothing for somebody, and they would be, "My God! This is what I've been looking for my whole life."

**Susan:** I had an email from somebody, he wanted to know if we had deck logs for a Navy vessel. And I said, "Yeah, we have those, and we have them for these dates." And he wrote me back all in capital letters, "Hot Dog, exclamation point." I just laughed at my desk. I thought, that's great, you know? I never had that response before.

**Cindi:** Hot dog! No, I've got, I have a folder of fan mail.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Cindi:** From my early days. And I kept things, you know, people would write just reams, three pages of “Oh, you have just made my day, and “oh my golly.” And then you would work really, really hard finding something for somebody in a complex body of material. And they would look at it and go, “Oh yeah, OK.”

**Susan:** That's not what I wanted. (laughs)

**Cindi:** “You haven't even looked at it, how do you know, it's not what you wanted?”

**Susan:** That's true. It has its ... but it all balances out in the end, right.

**Cindi:** Yeah that's right. In the end, in the final analysis, it all comes home.

**Susan:** Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about.

**Cindi:** OK, so we now know where NARS makes me tingle came from.

**Susan:** Yes.

**Cindi:** And we know about Mary Walton Livingston, yes. Is there anything else from my my dim past? (Laughs)

**Susan:** I think there's a lot in the in here that has come to light. Perhaps you don't realize yet.  
(Both laugh)

**Cindi:** OK.

**Susan:** Well, thank you, Cindi.

**Cindi:** All right. Thank you, Susan.

[END RECORDING]



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I, Cynthia G Fox, do hereby give to the National Archives History Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted on May 10, 2012.

I authorize the National Archives History Office to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the historical objectives of their oral history program.

In making this gift I voluntarily convey ownership of the recording and transcripts to the public domain.

Daria Labinsky  
Agent of Receiving Organization

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February 3, 2021  
Date





Photo taken during a vault tour ca. 2008-09 (didn't have exact date\*). Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice is viewing the exchange copy of the Alaska purchase agreement in Russian (she started to translate it for us). -- Cindi Fox

\*tour date was August 10, 2007