

April 16, 2009

Subject:

Interview with Fynnette L. Eaton, retired Change Management Officer for the Electronic Records Archives Program (ERA)

Date of Interview: July 22, 2008

Interviewer: John

Transcribed by: Carolina Palacios

Interviewer:

1) How does someone with a degree in British History find their way to the National Archives?

Eaton:

I don't know if it was fate or what, but I was finishing up getting my Master's degree in British History (16th century English history), when a friend who was working part time at the National Archives explained that they loved to hire graduate students to work in the reference rooms as an intermitten. I applied; loved it. This was in the 1970's when history degrees were as they mean today almost nothing, and they wanted history. So I became determined to get a job; it wasn't that easy though. Back then they had a quota system where they brought people from all over the country. Because I lived in the Washington D.C area, there was no way I could get hired, I could work part time, but I could not be hired by the National Archives full time, even though people were very interested in hiring me. So I took what was then an exam for basically the clerk level and I was scored well. The Archives of American Art seeing that I had experience working in archives was very interested in hiring me. I got in effect my tenure by going to the Archives of American Art, but because that was Art History, and I had never had Art History I wanted to get back to the National Archives. So I talked to people, met people, and that's how I discovered that they actually valued history and was determined to get into the National Archives.

Interviewer:

2) Shortly after that there was a training being offered that you must have heard about that got you to get over here?

Eaton:

No, it was a case that (...) I could only go so far at the Archives of American Art because I was not an Art History major. I assumed that I needed that, and I wanted to go back to the National Archives. I had met a couple of people. My husband was working at the National Archives and suggested that I talk to Marie Allen

and she put me in touch with Trudy Peterson with the office of Presidential Libraries. They were interested, so I was hired as a technician.

(...) The one funny story about that is Dan Reed was the assistant archivist for the Office of Presidential Libraries and the legend is that he let the staff do the hiring, but if there was blonde, he wanted to interview them. So of course, I was interviewed by Dan Reed. These are types of stories you don't think you see here. I was hired and I came on as a technician. They were developing the SIDS program at that point, so when it became open, I applied for it. I was interested in it, not for the training but so I could get a promotion. Because being a technician you can only go so far, but getting to the SIDS I would become an archivist and you would have a 7,9,11. I was one of the first three to get into the SIDS program and I'm sure part was because I did have a master's degree. They were (...) looking for the best qualified and even though I think SIDS was to help people grow, they were also looking for people who they knew would succeed, but I did get into it and stayed with the Office of Presidential Libraries for many years, until 1984.

Interviewer:

3) Its an interesting program the SIDS program

Eaton:

It was a very good program. I really liked it, (...) one of the issues (...) I think for people working at the National Archives whenever anyone comes to me, and says "well, should I work for the National Archives?" I immediately ask, "What are the types of things you are interested in? Do you want a wide range of things or do you want to become a specialist?" By going into the National Archives you will become a specialist. You will become very narrowly focused. It's wonderful work, but you do not have the range of things. I use the example when I was with the Archives of American Art. I was a technician but I did everything. I brought the things in, I did accessioning, [we] did reference, and we actually even helped with some of the microfilming. I was involved in all aspects. When you come to the Archives you don't have those ranges of things and so the SIDS program at least gave the opportunity to see the variety of programs. Because you did an appraisal, you did some description, and you did reference, so you saw the variety of things. In fact, I did one of my rotations with what was then the machine readable branch and I liked it a lot. When I needed to find a home many years later, when that opportunity came up I jumped at it because I thought it be kind of fun because I had that exposure before.

Interviewer:

4) So you started with Presidential Libraries

Eaton:

Stayed with Presidential Libraries for a number of years (...) it was a good program, I enjoyed it. I worked for the support staff. (...) Actually it was kind of fun because I did a variety of things. Back then when the materials

were packed up on January 20th, and taken to wherever they were going, they kept the audiovisual materials up here, because the news media always still wanted some of the photographs. I remember how many times I had to try to find the rabbit (the attack rabbit for Carter) because I was responsible for the Carter material. When Carter materials went down, they kept the AV stuff up here, so I was responsible for that material, mostly the photographs, but also the video that we got. (...) We also would get materials that needed to be shipped to one of the libraries when someone died and they had promised that they would give the materials to the libraries. I was also responsible for pomp things and sending them up. I also worked with the White House gift unit. I learned to wrap up and categorize all of the gifts both domestic and foreign official gifts from the Carter administration. It was a variety of things, lots of fun, did that.

Then in 1984 my husband had an opportunity to teach (...) received a full bright and he was going to Florence, to teach at the University of Florence. I asked for a 6 month leave of absence that they were very generous letting me do. My SIDS paper, that's the one thing that I sure people don't miss are the SIDS papers we had to do. I did a study of what was the history of dealing with the Republican and Democratic National Committee papers. That was something that the libraries were interested in because it showed the political role that the presidents played. That was another function I was the interlocker, or the mediator, or the liaison for those two committees and bringing in their materials and trying to determine where they should go. If there is a twenty year gap, (...) which presidents should go say for the Republicans from Hoover up until Eisenhower, does Eisenhower represent the Republican Party? Or where should those things go? So I did a study on that. I went to Italy and tried to do a study of what was happening to the various political party papers over there. It was interesting; I learned a little bit but didn't do much with it, but it was still nice.

Interviewer:

5) You were here at the agency at two very important points in our history, its independence from GSA as well as the formation of the Assembly.

Eaton:

Yes, which are very much connected, in fact, I remember the Saturday in which we all came down to meet to talk about it. My husband was one of the first board members and in fact because we were one of the few families who lived in DC we served as the repository where all the tax records came in [registered agent] for many years until they found another way to do it. The assembly was a key group for the National Archives in part because it sought to include everyone. It was inclusive; it wanted everyone to feel it was a part of this very important organization. It played a key role. It was very interesting to see how people emerged to speak out on our behalf. I think of Mike McReynolds appearing in front of Congress talking about what needed to be done. I think it helped galvanize the staff to see what an importance we could play in both the National Archives and Archives as well. It was a remarkable time in that respect; unfortunately, I was gone when the final bill was

passed because I was on my leave of absence but I came back to seeing that NARA was going to be independent. It was absolutely wonderful.

Interviewer:

6) After being with the agency for seven years, you made your third move in the agency, joining the staff of the Machine Readable branch, where your professional reputation was established. What was your thinking about joining this division? What pushed you in that direction?

Eaton:

It was actually, what is the term that I want to use? (When you throw something into water to save someone) [Life preserver] it was saving me. One of the lessons that I learned, and I hope everyone will learn from my mistakes and not have to go through it. Never work for something that was created by one leader and that leader leaves because then you are left there to play all about. I briefly worked for the documentation standard staff which was something that Warner was very interested in. Patty Erenson was the director of it. It was trying to help what are the things we need to capture so we document what public officials do. It was laudable but once Warner left no one was really much interested in (...) so I was lent to Charles Dollar for a while and I did my first research on email. Yes I have been using email since 1986 because we were very interested. At that point the National Archives was using data point for the leaders (the officers) to communicate and most of them were not doing a really good job dealing with it, but I did a survey found out how people were using it and how they were not using it. Most of the officers would not touch it with a ten foot pole, because it was typing so it was the secretaries entering the information who were monitoring it. And so the seat change that happened in the last twenty years is quite remarkable. But I was with Charles Dollar doing this, and I really did not know what was going to happen to me. Etty Handlin had then been put in Charge of the Machine readable branch, because it was one of the areas that were very much hurt by the riff that took place. (...) She asked if I could be interested and she brought on a couple other people as well. I jumped at the opportunity because I even enjoyed playing with computers with machines so I was very interested. So I joined the staff, little realizing that I would stay with them from then on. It's a case of what I have always done is if there is an opportunity I look at the short term. I have never been a long term planner that is my husband; I just try to take advantage of what is offered and see what I can do with it.

Interviewer:

7) So over time the Machine readable branch sort of evolved into the center for Electronic Records.

Eaton:

Evolving? I think there was a lot of planning involved. There was recognition that there needed to be something, so much more was being created electronically. I think Tweedy Peterson at the point was the deputy archivist. She recognized that something needed to be done with that, she actually asked Etty. Etty was the one

that started working on, what needs to be created, how we do this. They very much had someone very specific in mind. They wanted Ken to take it up, to come back from NIH and create this center. They put things in place and Ken came over from NIH and it took off. It was quite remarkable change from what we were when we were the machine readable branch to the Center for Electronic records. It was an exciting time to be.

Interviewer:

8) Talk for a moment, there is an impression, a reputation about Electronic Records at NARA that is not necessarily perceived as well in the archival community. Sort of we have been doing this a long time, but nobody really seems to think we are doing it the right way. Talk for a minute about that.

Eaton:

There is a lack of recognition, there is no question. I know that there are several of us who have spoken out profusely about all the things we have done. In part I think it's because most people really don't want to deal with electronic records so they really have not thought about it. So in many ways what we were doing in the 90's it was a small courtier of people who were aware and were impressed but it was not the archival profession that was paying attention to us. Unfortunately what really grab people's attention are lawsuits. So we had the lawsuit, all we got was negative. It was always the negative things about that (Bross case). I think that's a large reason why there hasn't been that much positive. But John, also how many people within the national archives are really comfortable with electronic records. How many people outside of the center really cared how the center was doing? In part it's because most people really are not comfortable with electronic records. I am almost going to put on my change management hat at this point. If it's something they don't understand and in part it's because it's very hard to explain. I think one of the incredibly valuable things that Ken Tabied has done is to try to explain it clear enough so people understand. I think one of the positive things about ERA is they're finally trying to make it understandable; look we got to deal with something we got to do it now. ERA does not have all the answers but at least it's trying to come up with an answer and talk about it in a way that people understand. I also think that because everyone now has digital cameras everyone has all these photographs that they are going to want to keep, that people are going to start caring. I think there will be more appreciation for what we have done. But I think in many ways because we were the leaders in the early stages we will be looked upon. Boy, they really did ground breaking work but I don't think most people were really comfortable with us. That's a really long explanation.

9) Take a few moments, you sort touched upon; Discuss your career in the various different positions you held at the Center for Electronic Records over that eleven year period.

Eaton:

When I first came on, I was one of the Archivists. (...) I have had three great supervisors, Doug Thurman when I was with the Presidential Libraries. Doug was so customer focused anything the customer wanted you did, so I mean that was a really good experience to have. Even though if it was difficult, “nope we are here to serve them, we need to do what ever it is that we can legally do.” Don’t break any laws or anything else like that, but we should do everything we can to help. With Eddy, she was great in that she wanted people to grab things and just do things (...). She was never very good with financials, doing the budget. I am always afraid when someone gives me them, oh my, “how can I possibly do it”, but then I take a deep breath and I do it. She gave me all sorts of opportunities to extend what I knew and to do new things and so I became an assistant branch chief. Then Ken created the two branches for technical services. In many ways I don’t have that much of a technical background, but when I came to the machine readable I just started reading, doing as much as I could, so I became the technical services branch chief. Loved that, I loved working with staff, I had a fabulous staff.

We had the Bross case. Ken loved throwing more challenges by us. I think before he came we might have had 600 maybe a 1000 data sets. By the time mid 1990’s, he said, “we are going to bring 10,000- 20,000, how you going to deal with it.” So he is always giving us challenges, making us extend ourselves and was very exciting to be. Unfortunately, the Bross case ruined it for me. (We) The Center for Electronic Records had nothing to do with the decisions, (the policies) of how the Iran Contra tapes should be handled. It was the leadership that decided made the decisions, but we were the ones that had to carry out the judge’s decisions. Best lesson learned, never make a judge angry. If you ever make angry, he won’t believe another word you say. Because of that, we literally spend millions of dollars having to prove we had saved everything we possibly could save from the backup tapes. Making duplicate copies of the backup tapes, this then had to be processed, before anyone could even look at anything that was on the tapes. So the Bross case brought all the innovations to a complete halt. We spend all of our money dealing with whatever the judge demanded we had to do and so the growth we had experienced all those years, came to a complete halt. I know that one of the other questions is why did I leave, because the Bross case ruined the division. Those are my years.

Interviewer:

10) You were technical services branch chief, when the Archives moved from I to II. Talk a little bit about the logistics of moving an Archive from one building to another.

Eaton:

The nice thing for us is that we had tapes. It wasn’t nearly what the paper people or anybody else had. We had a fairly contained amount of materials. We had to make sure that they were treated properly, that we needed a refrigerated truck. So we had to get control over our materials. We had two copies of all the tapes, so we had to move one set of tapes from Suitland out to Pickett Street. We had a sense of getting some of that straightened out. Fortunately we didn’t have prosa at that point so it was everything we could deal with, and we didn’t have

classified. To me it didn't seem that difficult; the more of the issue was getting the staff, because so many of the staff lived in Virginia. I think that getting them comfortable with having the commute, I think that was more of the challenge. I don't think we lost anyone. I know that other divisions other parts of NARA did lose some people. I think people came, but that was the major negative for most of us.

The nice thing, I remember when I arrived at what is in the Machine Readable Branch there was one computer for 14 people to do all work. One computer we're dealing with electronic records and one computer. So the nice thing when we came out to Archives II is everyone had their own computer, so that was one of the selling points. The good thing that NARA did is they trained all of us on how to use the system and the software, which was also very well done. So those things were well done. I think showing the staff, letting the staff have some say in how their work space would be designed all of that helped the staff. Although you need to ask the staff as well, I mean I am speaking from my perspective I am not sure, but I had not heard that many complaints. (...), in fact people were happy too because we had horrible space in Archives I.

Interviewer:

11) So you already commented that in 97, you left NARA for the Smithsonian and you say primarily because of the Bross case.

Eaton:

The other reason why I left is because I was given the opportunity to try to establish an electronic records program at the Smithsonian. A third lesson learned: you can not establish an electronic records program with one person. You need a lot more money and personnel to do that because unfortunately I also was responsible for other staffs, preservation and things like that, and so I could devote maybe 25% of my time. It was a good experience, in many ways it was the best thing that happened to me as far as giving me an understanding of what agencies are dealing with. (...)

The one thing I have concerns about for people who work at the National Archives is they become so NARA centric. They don't realize how much they need to understand what people in the agencies are dealing with. For the agencies, they have a lot of things they have to cope with and sending those things that are permanent to the National Archives is just one small thing. I don't think there is an appreciation of much is involved and how much guidance is needed. At least there wasn't, I think there's been a lot more since I have come back here. I think what MWML has been doing working with the agencies is a lot more, but I think a lot of the NARA staff don't have that appreciation. At least that was my experience when I first came back in 2002 and 2003.

12)

Interviewer:

You've told people, including an archivist who had been working for a while when he was joining the National Archives staff, and I've heard other people mention that you are sort of an expert on "The NARA Way" would you comment about it? What you feel "The NARA Way" is?

Eaton:

(...)I was a Change Management Officer for the Electronic Records Archives, what my role was to make sure that when they built the system that it was built so that staff would want to use it. So I had to be sure that the staff felt that it was involved, but I also needed to understand how the staff felt about things. We held a lot of [I can't remember what the term was that we used] had several focus groups, where I brought in staff just to get a sense "what is important to you", "what do you think NARA brings," and to get a sense of (...) how they viewed themselves, how they viewed the work at NARA. I think that ERA has to address that so that they're feeling comfortable, so it will be something that they want to use. What was very clear came out all the times, NARA staffs are extremely proud of the National Archives. They feel empowered to do their work. They feel that they are the experts. Where as, where I had been before there was a sense of I need to work with others so I can get my work done. At NARA, I know exactly what I need to do, and I am going to get it done. There is less of the need of sharing information. There is an ownership that for ERA posed a challenge because with ERA is more sharing the information so the work can move more quickly amongst people. So that was one the challenges I saw that how do we keep the ownership because they are so proud and do so a good job, but yet at the same time share the information because information is power.

Interviewer

13) So, you came back to NARA.

Eaton:

I came back because Ken asked me to come back. I had really enjoyed working with Ken Tabido. He pushed me in a variety of ways and I felt I grew tremendously under his mentorship. ERA was taking off, they've done the research, they've begin to get some founding, and he was establishing a program office. He felt he needed someone with the archival knowledge, someone who the NARA staff felt they could interact with. (...) I knew a lot of the people because I had been here at the National Archives for so long; he wanted me to come back so I would work with the NARA staff, to see if we could ensure that whatever was built would meet their needs and they would want to use it. So I did come back. I had been at the Smithsonian and felt I had done pretty much all that I could do. (...) I like working with people, in a way I find it surprising because I am borderline introvert, but I like seeing people accomplish things. That's where I am at my happiest, when I see a group of people and they get something done that to me is wonderful. So it seemed to a really good mix. So I came to be the "Center of the storm" as we started trying to build ERA.

Interviewer

14) Is ERA gonna work?

Eaton:

It is working. It's slowly working, the infrastructure is build. There is a lot more work that has to be done. It is going to take time, there is no question but yes it's gonna work. This is one of the problems; this is one of the challenges for the National Archives. NARA staff has seen over the years so many failures. Anytime there is any type of glitch, it's gonna fail again. That was one of the things we identified that was going to be a challenge for us. We had to have some initial successes; otherwise we'd be totally dismissed. It's going to be like "what was the descriptive system that took forever and never got off? (...) NARA staffs have a very long memory and they just point to all the failures. I am assuming that even though ERA is now alive, there is only a little bit of functionality so I am sure most staffers "Hey it is not working" see we told you it was not gonna work. I imagine that is what is going on in the corridors. One of the other parts of NARA culture is there is a wonderful, wonderful network [water cooler backdoor] so I'm sure that is what is going on. The good thing is I know that ERA has involved a lot of the NARA staff. So I am hoping that as it becomes more successful that the NARA staff that have seen it and have been a part from the beginning will start saying "well you know it's really working." So I hope that's what eventually will happen because it's only by word of mouth that the system will be successful in the long run.

Interviewer:

15) Let's switch gears for a moment and talk about your professional involvement.

Eaton:

Yes, I saw that question and I was thinking that has been as important to me as the National Archives. It's in part because when you are at the National Archives you're doing a very narrow job. Just being exposed to what all the other people are doing, from different types of repositories, different types of organizations, you need that professional experience to really get an appreciation of what Archives is and that has really been the main stay for me all these years. When my division, when the documentation standard staff was disappearing, when I had no home, when I had nothing, I channeled a lot of my activities into both MARAC and ASA; I was able to find some sense of accomplishment there even if I couldn't find it here at the National Archives. It's always served as a backup when I needed it. It's been fabulous.

Interviewer:

16) Let's talk about the Assembly. What have you done for the Assembly?

Eaton:

I have been a member, I was on the steering committee and I think the committee that I was dealing was technology, way back. (...) I was actually secretary and I followed Sharon Tibido who kept incredible minutes so I always felt that I did a lousy job. Being a secretary that convinced me I never want to do that again, I hated that one. But the assembly has always been a key (...) and that was a way for me just to connect with the NARA staff. Because again when you're your job it's a very small focus and even when you have a cohort of friends that you've had, that's still very small. By being with the Assembly you get to meet everyone and it broadens your horizons if you will.

Interview:

17) We are fortunate in this area to have two fairly good professional organizations. We have the Mid Atlantic Regional Archives Conference as well as our national organization The Society of American Archivists. You say that you sort of have channeled your energies into those because of your NARA focus here. (...) As you say, they have been very important to you. How do you see your involvement in those two organizations complimenting what you've done here?

Eaton:

For MARAC, [an organization for which you served as chair] two funny stories as far as serving as chair. Number one, I get this call from Jeff, saying, we need to have someone run against (...) it was this wonderful person from Virginia Technology University who decided he wanted to run a second time (Lucious). He was trying to break their tradition and they needed someone to run. I said, "Oh sure I'll run". I had never ever expected that I was going to win chair so I was incredibly aghast to learn that I had won as chair. The other thing was that I was chair while the Archivist of the United States was John Carlin, and he had just come on. I always felt that I was in a very difficult position because at that point I was with the Center for Electronic Records; I was the focus of all his unhappiness because he was the recipient of the law suit. I was always very nervous any time I had to be anywhere near John Carlin but because I was the chair of MARAC and he was the plenary speaker several times, it was like "I don't want to be here".

MARAC it was really good because we were dealing with the mundane issues that an organization has to deal with. Just the running, having the steering committee, all of the things it was almost like managing an organization and most of us don't get that opportunity being here at the National Archives. Learning the skills of how to manage a meeting, there's a thought. Learning those things, learning how to work with people to get them to do things when it's not their job but you still want them to do. All those types of things I learned and just exposure to all the great within the MARAC organization. There's no word for it in many ways.

ASA those more policies, that was more of a policy thing and gave me an appreciation of what seems very straight forward when I'm at the National Archives, becomes very cloudy when you're dealing with a national organization. It gave me an appreciation of how in most cases the answers are not as simple as you'd like them to be. I was outraged when ASA came out and said NARA was not doing a very good job with the Bross case. I felt that we were being under cut. I was thankful, I came on council about three years later and I kept that in the back of mind when ever I was looking at something. Hearing what other people said of why they would say things made me realize that it wasn't a straight forward of why they had done it. It was multifaceted; there were a lot of reasons for it. It still didn't make it right, it still didn't make it good but I had a better appreciation of why things happen as they do.

Interviewer:

18) Do you feel that the National Archives' relationship with the professional organizations is appropriate? Do you think that there is enough of a connection? Do you think the National Archives has the proper role; do they support the professional organizations of the area?

Eaton:

Tom Brown (...) one of things I loved, every year when the directory of members of ASA came out, Tom would go through to see how many people from the Presidential Libraries were there, usually maybe 2 out of 3 maybe out of 100 and he would also look at the National Archives. At least up until I was here in 2006, I would say no the National Archives has not. There has not been an encouragement. There have been very few active members that participated in ASA. Part of the problem is I think for other organizations particularly for archivists from say Universities; I don't think for local and state archives, we have to pay for membership. Unless we are given a paper, we have to pay to go. NARA is not very supportive and it can be costly. (...) I think it needs to be broader because if more people were there, they'd get a better idea of what NARA does. There are very few members of NARA going, giving talks. Sometimes it will be one of the divisions, but he goes gives a talk and then he's gone. He is not participating in the section meetings, he's not participating in the roundtables, and he's not participating in committees. They're not hearing what NARA's concerns are. When you have Archivist of the United States, give a talk, yeah that's fine and good, but it has to be when they are working in the mist of things. When everyone is working with you it's when things get conveyed. The emphasis is not there. I understand that there is some interest in doing more, and perhaps and I don't know I have been gone for a couple of years. Perhaps there's more, but no, NARA really has not had a major role.

What's funny is the reverse happened when I first came on to the National Archives. I guess maybe when I became an archivist; the American Archivist the editor was Virginia Purdy who was a NARA staff member. I was eligible for one of the sections of the news notes. There was a lot of NARA staff involvement in the American Archivist. It was at that point that there was this rise up saying there is too much of NARA involvement in ASA. We need to have other people, so there was a backlash. NARA stepped away and so it was

taken away. It's almost like there's been too much of a backlash and we need to play more of a role. What's said is how many people have been on the council, how many people have served in leadership roles in ASA. That's a telling statistic and I think that needs to change, from my perspective.

Interviewer:

19) You are frequently called upon to speak on any variety of issues, wide variety of knowledge. If you were planning a panel, or session, or roundtable, and someone said, "We need to get Fynnette,"- what would you expect that session to be about?

Eaton:

Two issues: Electronic Records or Change Management. People don't really know what change management is they begin to get a sense of maybe we should be aware of it. I have been asked a few times. I think all of us actually deal with it, but I think it's useful to hear it elaborate on and talked about so you can have a sense of "oh I am going to have to deal with this and this what's going to happen. This is not bad, this is a normal thing and so you can actually start dealing with things better. So those are the two. Actually three, Electronic Records more especially ERA. Last year while I was in Rome they were having a conference up at the World Library of the Netherlands. They were looking for someone to talk about ERA got a call so I went up and talked. I guess three topics would be and I don't know how long ERA will continue, but Electronic Records and Change Management.

Interviewer:

You are speaking in the fall on professional Archivists?

Eaton:

That is true, that is not one I would normally think about that I would do but I guess it makes sense. But how often do people talk about that. There needs to be more of that absolutely, but it's not really recognized. Actually you have that panel here at the National Archives. I know there have been times in the past where I think one of the Assembly groups has asked that someone come in and talk. But I think rather than having it from the outside in, it's almost NARA has to have this recognition. The problem is who has that responsibility here. Maybe talking to NH personnel, maybe that would be place to start.

Interviewer:

20) We'll wrap up with some more broad questions. Speaking as someone who has been with the agency, left the agency, returned, retired, and then came back a third time- You sort of have been touching upon this throughout the interview, but what are the biggest challenges that you feel facing the National Archives today?

Eaton:

I am going to go on a different direction. I think the biggest challenges now are policy issues, looking at what's going, looking at the hearings. The whole issue privacy, declassification, reclassification, the whole thing with the White House, there is the Presidential Records Act. How do we deal with? How do we help agencies and the White House in managing the records as they are created? It is not a good solution at this point.

The Presidential Records Act tells us what we can do once the records come in as of January 20th. There is very little we can do, we really can not tell the White House what they need to do. Congress can try, but I somehow don't think it's going to work. So I don't know, and those are the challenges. As well there is the challenge of what do we do in HPRC with the papers of the founding fathers and all that. (...) In many ways and this has always been true I think for the National Archives there might have been a couple of times when we were ahead of the game. I think possibly in dealing with the first passage of the Privacy Act. I think Trudy Peterson and O'Neil did a good job at saying "This is how we want to deal with it." We had that window of opportunity when we were able to define what the issues were and how we should try to deal with it. I think first with the Nixon lawsuit and the Bross case we have been in reactive mode. We really have not been able to take the high ground and control the situation and I don't see that happening any time soon. We're always being reactive. Even the digitization, I mean we are reacting to what everyone has come to expect. I think we're trying to do it in a logical way, but all these things seem to be driven.

ERA is one of the few cases were I think we were lucky enough to say "We know what the problems are; we need to do the research." In some ways we've been able to find some of that, unfortunately founding became an issue I think that's what held us back. If we can ways were we can define it and say this is what needs to be done rather than being reactive. Then I think we'd be in better shape. I think to give the Archivist credit, I think they did a very good job, when they discovered the agreements that they had and he said "That's got to stop". I think they did a phenomenal job with that. That was an opportunity we took; we need to try to find more of those. Those are the big issues.

Small issues: I think NARA has to be more active professionally. I think it needs to be more active with the variety of professional organizations. It helps the staff grows. I mean it's an easy way for people to learn more, just being exposed to what other people are doing seeing that there are other ways to do things. There is the NARA way, it's because NARA is so large we have so much. But that does not mean it's the only way. I think being exposed to new ideas in the larger archival community is a great thing. I think there needs to be more encouragement with that.

Interviewer:

21) You have certainly had a variety of positions and responsibilities within NARA. What would you say were the most significant turning points in your career?

Eaton:

In a way it's a funny but also very sad story. My husband had a full bright to teach at the University of Naples in 1993. He'd been overseas and I was going to join him, and we were going to take a vacation. I was going to come back. I went over, being the foolish, very dedicated person. This was the beginning of the Bross case. I call in to see what's going. That's when the judge had issued the letter to Trudy saying "You got to do some work, otherwise we are going to find you and there's the possibility of jail. We had to cut our vacation and I had to come back. That's when we had people up on the 21st floor making duplicate copies. In many ways that was the most significant because that basically destroyed what we had built. So in many ways I look back to that as the saddest day. What would be the other? I guess when I was made fellow of the Society of the American Archivists. To me that was just incredible. (...) It was because of the work that did at NARA that I got the fellow (...) and to have that recognition it was [a well deserved honor].

Interviewer:

22) How do you see NARA's reputation with other federal agencies? How have changes within those agencies impacted your work? What could NARA be doing differently?

Eaton:

(...)When I went to the Smithsonian so this back in 1997-98, how do we deal with email? The Smithsonian's station archive is supposed to provide providings to all the various bureaus, the museums and stuff. How are we supposed to deal with email? Looking at what NARA was producing, there was nothing that was useful. There really wasn't anything concrete. There was no, "this is what you do need to do, to do this" in a lot of cases what NARA was issuing was something that was at the high level, but there was nothing concrete that you could actually apply. That was my experience in 1997-98. I think they are doing a lot more of that. They have a tool kit that provides all sorts of examples of things that you can do at this point. So they have answered it in that way. They have all sorts of guidance that they've come up with, very specific guidance for dealing with Electronic Records. So I think NARA has done a lot of that. I think some of the people at the top have a better appreciation of what an agency is supposed to deal with.

Back in 97-98 I think most agencies were very frustrated. Well the National Archives all they do is talk about printed records. That's maybe 1% of what I had to deal with. I need to deal with, how I deal with my CIO's in dealing with Electronic Records? Give me some guidance? How do I talk to them? How do I get involved with defining what are the record keeping requirements? So that when they bring in a system, when they purchase something that is has the things so that I would be able to pull out what I need for the permanent electronic records. That's what I recall, that there was very little concrete that the agencies could use at the point. What I

saw When I came back there's a real emphasis on reaching out to agencies. They had the bridge meetings; they are always talking to the agencies. I think there has been a vast improvement as far as that goes. That's my perspective. I don't know, I guess you need to talk to some agencies folks.

Interviewer:

23) I guess there is a perception at least on some agencies. They don't necessarily want to give up their records because they may perceive that we are not doing the right things with them.

Eaton:

I never dealt with; I never had that problem, even when I was with the center for Electronic Records. What we were asking for, it was nice, it wasn't paper, we could ask for a copy of it. We almost ensured the continuation of this information in case your systems failed; you could always come back and get another copy. So I wasn't dealing with agencies, so that is not something that I ran into. I don't know, perhaps that's an issue. I'm surprised that's an issue because we as archivists, that's what we care about more than anything else. And from my experience being at the Presidential Libraries, hey we had both parties. We were always very careful, we were always none partisan. You could not be partisan and work for the National Archives. That's a new concept for me John, I wasn't aware.

Interviewer:

24) If you wanted to pick one thing that you feel the agency does right and really well, what would you say that is?

Eaton:

It treats its staff extremely well. Having been in a couple of other places, (...) it really is staff centric. They really care about what the staff is doing, how the staff is doing, and how they can help the staff to move forward. Look at ERA; they brought in someone to make sure that the staff is kept aware of what is going on. (...) The whole purpose of being the Change Management Officer is I wanted to ensure that when the staffs were trained, they were trained to succeed. We were not building the system so they would fail, they would succeed. I think that's how NARA views everything. They do things so that that NARA staff is successful. That to me is the best thing that NARA does.

The second best thing, are the Public Vaults. (...) I was on council when they opened that up. It was astounding the reaction of the council members. This is what we need to make people understand what Archives is. That is a phenomenal way of showing what Archives is. They do many other things, but those are the two big ones.



National Archives and Records Administration

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**Gift of Historical Materials
of
Fynnette L. Eaton
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, **Fynnette L. Eaton** (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):
 - a. Video recordings (2 DVDs) of an oral history interview of **Fynnette L. Eaton**, conducted on **July 22, 2008**, by **John LeGloahec** on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.
 - b. Transcript of the interview of **Fynnette L. Eaton**, conducted on **July 22, 2008**, by **John LeGloahec**. Transcript prepared by **Carolina Palacios** and reviewed by the Donor.
 - c. Additional paper materials, including CV from the interviewee and correspondence regarding the interview.
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, **she** 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 **she** 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.

