



AGREEMENT WITH THE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
AS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

I, Robert H. Bahmer, of San Francisco, California, in accordance with the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-110), hereby assign to the United States of America for administration by the National Archives and Records Service all my rights, title, and interest, including any literary property rights that I may have in them, in the tape recording and transcript of the interviews with me conducted by Philip C. Brooks on behalf of the National Archives and Records Service at Washington, D.C., on September 10, 1972, and January 3 and May 8, 1973.

It is agreed that the tape (or sample portion thereof) and transcript will be available for study under the regulations prescribed by the Archivist of the United States as soon as the final form of the transcript has been deposited in the National archives, except that pages 19-21 of the third interview will not be available without my prior written permission until August 1, 1984. It is also agreed that only the National Archives and Records Service shall have the right to publish or authorize the publication of the interview in whole or in part, aside from quotation in the normal concept of "fair use", providing that I or my heirs, legal representatives or assigns retain the right to publish in other form the statements or facts set forth in the interviews.

Signed

Robert H. Bahmer

Date,

Aug 12 1974

Accepted

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

Sept. 30, 1974

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

ROBERT H. BAHMER

Former Archivist of the United States

Major Biographical Information:

Born, Gardena, North Dakota	1904
B.A. North Dakota State Teachers College	1928
M.A. University of Colorado	1929
Graduate student, Universities of California, Minnesota	1929-1932
Ph.D. University of Minnesota	1941
Instructor, North Dakota State Teachers College	1932
Instructor, Ironwood, Michigan, Junior College	1932-1934
Assistant to Congressman Frank E. Hook	1934-1936
Deputy Examiner, National Archives	1936-1938
Archivist, Division of Agriculture Department Archives	1938-1942
Detailed to Office of Records Management, Navy Department	1942
Chief, Division of Navy Department Archives	1942-1943
Records Management Branch, TAGO, War Department	1943-1948
Assistant Archivist of the United States	1948-1957
Deputy Archivist of the United States	1957-1966
Archivist of the United States	1966-1968
Retired	1968

National Archives and Records Service

Oral History Project

Interview with Robert H. Bahmer
Former Archivist of the United States
Interviewed at the National Archives

First Interview--September 19, 1972

Philip C. Brooks, Interviewer

BROOKS: Bob, how did you happen to come into the National Archives in the first place? Did you have personal associations or a special reason for interest in it that brought you here?

BAHMER: I suspect it is the former rather than the latter. My being in Washington just at the time when the National Archives Building was approaching completion was in itself a kind of a fluke. I had been teaching in a junior college in Ironwood, Michigan. I went there in 1932. In fact the college was just set up and I was the whole social science department. But the important thing is that the election of '34 came along and for the first time in the history of that particular congressional district the Democrat won, a fellow by the name of Frank Hook, whom I had never met, but my political feelings were pretty well known in the community. And one, oh about two weeks after election, I was very surprised right in the midst of a class to get a call from the secretary of the school board, whom I knew very well, asking me to come down and meet Frank Hook. And I couldn't figure out, as I said, what in the world he would want to meet me for because we had nothing in common. And I kept thinking of the worst. I thought, oh lord, he is going to try to get me to help him, you know, since he had never been to Washington and I was a teacher of government among other things at the college, to outline what he would run into when he came down here.

BROOKS: Had you been here before?

BAHMER: No. And I was surprised out of my wits when he started right off by asking me how I'd like to come down to Washington with him. Since he could offer a salary of \$3600 and I was getting the magnificent sum of \$1500 from the school board, and furthermore the completion of my dissertation at Minnesota made imperative some time here in Washington to work particularly at the Department of Agriculture library and the Library of Congress, so--

BROOKS: I shouldn't have to ask, but what was the subject of your dissertation?

BAHMER: I worked on the political and economic background of the Nonpartisan League, which was the precursor of the farmer labor party of Minnesota. It originated in North Dakota and that was the area I studied. So that is how I came down here. And now come the personal associations, because who should be here in Washington but my good friend Herman Kahn who had gone into the Park Service, and Ronnie Lee of Minneosta. We had all been there as graduate students together. And we used to get together, oh gcsh, you know, quite often. I came down at Christmastime of '34 and was here through '35 with Hook.

BROOKS: Were you here at that meeting at the Archives when Connor took the historians around during the annual meeting of the AHA?

BAHMER: No. But Herman and I and Ronnie Lee used to meet. And suddenly a new fellow came into the circle. He'd been down here filming, I think, some of the records of the National Recovery Administration. Ted Schellenberg was here. And he got an appointment to the staff, and used to talk about it. And the more we talked, the more Herman and I got interested in the situation here.

BROOKS: Did you know Ted before?

BAHMER: No. Jesse Douglas was another one of the Minnesota "gang," Ed Hummell who was with the Park Service, now retired. And there were several others--George Palmer who I think is up in the Philadelphia office, and another Minnesotan, Herb Kahler. We were all at Minnesota together. Charlie Gates was another one, but he was one that stuck to teaching. All of us, of course, had visions of going on to teach. But as you know, in '34, '35, and '36 there just wasn't any real possibility of an attractive teaching job.

So one time, I don't know, it was along in the winter, I guess, of '35 to '36 that Herman and I decided we'd put in our applications down here. And I remember having an interview with Tom Owen and Roscoe Hill. The offices were still in the Justice Department. They hadn't fully moved into the building then. During that period that preceded employment here at the National Archives I met several others of the staff. I think Dallas Irvine came into the picture some place. We used to get together on weekends, and so on. And finally one day a notice came saying that if I wanted to go to work, to report down at some date mutually satisfactory to both of us. And I came in on June 1, 1936. Herman preceded me. He left the Park Service about a week before. I remember Oliver Holmes and Neil Franklin and I were all sworn in down in the Archivist's office that day in a sort of a joint ceremony. And I was assigned as a deputy examiner on the preliminary survey.

BROOKS: I probably have told you one of my favorite memories is that right after you three people were sworn in I was assigned as a veteran of the staff to show you around the building.

BAHMER: Oh yes, now, I had forgotten that.

BROOKS: And Holmes proceeded to argue with Kimberly. We were delighted because nobody had had the gumption to argue with Kimberly.

BAHMER: Well, my interests of course lay in the field of agricultural history. But when I had indicated my preferences (I guess when we were asked to state them some place along the line, I'd made that clear) my first job was to complete the preliminary survey that Art Leavitt had been making of the Commerce Department. It wasn't much of a job because Art had finished all of the old accumulations in the attics and basements and left only the current offices. Herman and I were both assigned to complete them. We each took certain bureaus. I remember my first bureau was the Patent Office. You know they have umpteen-hundred examining divisions, breaking the whole field of invention down into separate fields. It was awfully embarrassing to me to drop into these offices, even though I had been announced and properly introduced at the top and I guess the office heads had all been warned. But they had nothing. It was kind of like this office with a half a file cabinet of material and copies of all the patents of interest to them.

Leavitt had been one of the first two, I think, assigned to what were called the custodial divisions.

BROOKS: He and Fred Shipman.

BAHMER: Yeah. Ultimately we finished that survey. I worked on Coast and Geodetic Survey and Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection, though I think the name had changed by that time and has gone through a number of changes since.

BROOKS: Did you find that the people in the agencies wondered what you were doing?

BAHMER: Yes. They couldn't figure out what we were doing, and were slightly annoyed at having to identify the materials they had. I remember how sternly Tom Owen laid the injunction on us to be sure to even get the material that was in desk drawers.

BROOKS: I think one of the real characteristics of the very first days was the job that the Archives had in establishing itself as a brand new agency in the middle of the New Deal, when there were emergency agencies all over town that were doing what people thought were really rush jobs.

BAHMER: I had a number of pleasant experiences. I remember running into a University of Minnesota professor that I knew in Foreign and Domestic Commerce. He was an economist that somehow or other I had gotten to know. I had taken no work from him. We had a wonderful chat. So on the whole the people were, I think, more pleasant than probably if I had been in their position I would have been. Herman and I in talking over our problems as we walked to Commerce and met there for lunch, made it as easy as possible on these people. And I am sure that everyone did. When the cusotidal divisions were set up fully, I was assigned, as you know, to Agriculture under Ted Schellenberg. Lew Darter was also assigned there. He had come in as a part of the Federal Records Survey, and I can't remember whether he was there right from the beginning or not. I think probably he was. And then we began to settle down to a bit more of what I had in mind as being work of an archivist in the National Archives.

BROOKS: You stayed in Agriculture Archives until you left for the Navy, did you not?

BAHMER: Yes. Until '42.

BROOKS: Did you know Buck before you came in?

BAHMER: Yes. As a matter of fact I went to the University of Minnesota to work under Buck. I was a graduate student at Colorado.

BROOKS: Under Willard?

BAHMER: Yes. I took all his seminars, and medieval history courses I had no particular interest in. But he was a grand man. I was very close to old Doc Willard. That is how I came to go to Berkeley.

BROOKS: You were there in 1930?

BAHMER: The summer of '30. Willard had lost his left leg and couldn't drive his automobile, so Mrs. Willard, who was a charming person, did all the driving. He had a summer teaching position at Berkeley.

BROOKS: That is when I met him, because I was there then.

BAHMER: He wanted his car out there and Mrs. Willard didn't want to drive it. In those days the roads were still pretty rough across Wyoming and Utah. So old Doc Willard cooked up a job for me. He had established at the University of Colorado something they called the University of Colorado Historical Collections. And he and I had gone out on a number of forays to mine companies that had long since gone defunct but their offices were intact and picked up batches of records of mining companies and comparable sorts of things. So I had had my finger in this collecting business there without any real purpose. But Willard thought it would be very advisable to have somebody go out to Bancroft Library and get permission from Bolton to go through all the manuscript material and get photostatic copies of the material that related to Colorado. So at the magnificent sum, I think, of \$125 a month for two months we went out there. I helped drive the car, and I had literally one of the most enjoyable summers in my life. I took a seminar from Bolton. He gave a summer seminar mostly to teachers that came in to go to summer school.

I was at Colorado when Willard and Goodykoontz got the idea of holding a conference on the history of the Trans-Mississippi West. And I was the complete quartermaster for that conference. There was nobody else around that summer. At any rate, to Colorado came all of the names in Western history, including Buck. And they all rounded up at Willard's house; I was living with the Willards at the time. So I got to meet them. And I talked with Buck a bit, told him of my interest. This was during my second year at Colorado and I was going to have to leave there because they didn't give work for the Ph.D. at that time. They only gave a Master's degree. And I told Buck I was going to apply for a teaching assistantship at Minnesota. So he said "fine." His field, as you know, was in agrarian history and it fit very nicely with me. Unfortunately he left the first year I was at Minnesota.

BROOKS: He went to Pennsylvania.

BAHMER: Yeah. And I wasn't too unhappy because he wanted to dictate to me exactly how I should do my dissertation, which was supposed to be done just like the Agrarian Crusade, that he wrote, and I had my own notions of what I wanted to do. So we had some testy sessions. As you know Buck was inclined to be pretty firm when he thought he was right, and he thought he was right in this case. So I transferred my work to Ernest Osgood at that point. But I knew Buck very well. And Ernest was quite willing to let me go my own merry way. I knew that Buck had come down here I think in late '35 or early '36.

BROOKS: He came in late '35.

BAHMER: He knew both Herman and me; we'd taken seminars from him at Minnesota.

BROOKS: This background is interesting because I think it is important in the history of this organization that nearly all the professional people that were hired were trained in historical research, and some had some experience in collecting records or working with records in their own research.

BAHMER: I worked for Buck over at the Minnesota Historical Society the first summer I was at Minnesota. I worked under Grace Lee Nute. I actually began the writing of the descriptions for their catalog. I remember working on the A's, the B's and so on. Grace didn't have much more of an idea than I did as to what we ought to put into these descriptions. I'd work and get a whole batch of them done and take them to her. I'd go through the boxes and figure out what were the items of interest and the coverage. So I had that little bit of experience, though to me it didn't count for much because I was just making money during the summer so I could survive. But it looked fairly good in application, I suppose.

BROOKS: I used to have arguments with Schellenberg (I had lots of arguments with Schellenberg) because for one thing he would like to say in his somewhat sardonic manner that all of us were frustrated historians, teachers of history that couldn't get jobs, and we just came to the Archives as any kind of job. I used to insist that a good many of us had a substantive interest in archives. True enough we couldn't get jobs teaching, but we did have a constructive interest in archives. I don't know that it matters very much, but he and I had some tall disagreements about that.

BAHMER: In part his statement was true, to the extent most of us had been looking forward to a career in teaching, but I'm sure that with most of us, as in my case, that there was a real deep and abiding interest in the sources. I think our generation, at least so far as I can interpret it, were all brought up on Langlois and Seignobos, and, by George, you went to the sources or you weren't writing history. That meant documentary sources and archives were quite prominent. Buck in his seminar which was on historical sources and historical methodology bore down on this in a great big way. So we more than, at least as far as I have observed them, the graduate students of the present time, stood in great respect to the archives and manuscript sources. My daughter who took her master's in history out in San Francisco State couldn't be less interested in sources. We get into some bitter arguments about this. There was a kind of a disdain for having to go into the grubby archives and manuscripts that shocked me, really.

BROOKS: Getting back to the Archives, I put down as a possible topic, "What was your concept of the duties of the National Archives and its relations with the agencies?" I think most of us pretty well agreed on that. It was the party line. Do you think the Archives carried them out well in the period before the war?

BAHMER: Well, I think they made a pretty good start. I think relations with the agencies improved considerably when the reorganization put more authority in the hands of the divisions and gave one individual responsibility for liaison on matters of mutual interest.

BROOKS: This is I think, as I have reviewed the story, perhaps the biggest single phase of the development of the Archives in that four or five years. The initial organization (and I am pretty sure now that was the work of Dorsey Hyde) had to be entirely changed and these functional centralized divisions abolished. This process was pretty well complete by 1940-41. And most of us on the working line agreed.

BAHMER: Yes. There is no question in my mind that the most important thing that happened organizationally in that period was to put into the hands of these records divisions the authority for all aspects of the relationship between Archives and the agency.

BROOKS: Beyond that would you make any comments on the relationships, the clarity of the definitions of duties, how well people worked together as to the major officials of the Archives?

BAHMER: Well, there was always friction as long as Dorsey Hyde was in command. Nobody that I knew had the slightest bit of respect for Hyde. I think they realized that he wasn't a man big enough for the job that he had.

BROOKS: Do you know how he got into it? I have never been able to find out.

BAHMER: I don't know. I have no knowledge of Hyde's background. This tumbled over into a great deal of almost pettiness in relationships with the front office. Harris came in for his share of criticism because he was a powerful man in terms of personnel, and so on. Very few of the professional archivists, as we began to think of ourselves, had any real respect for his ability in terms of selection or promotion and all the rest of the things that went into his job. This made for a good deal of friction and bickering and I suspect a loss of a good many man-hours taken up in plain getting together some place and bitching about the front offices.

BROOKS: I think you are right. Harris was primarily supposed to handle the administrative activities. He and Hyde came in at about the same time in December of '34. Connor depended a great deal on Harris in these matters of personnel. I've recently interviewed him. He was very much interested in the professional activities, and got into them more than you would a man in his position to normally, partly, I would guess, on account of his own predilection and partly because there was a somewhat of a vacuum there that Hyde just wasn't strong enough to handle it.

BAHMER: But gradually as the functions that had been assigned to separate front offices, not only reference, but classification, cataloging, accessioning, description, were put into the hands of the records divisions.

BROOKS: I seem to have a memory of a great deal of this bickering between the records divisions and the front offices, mostly this was a manifestation of the same thing, I think.

BAHMER: It all grew out of this situation. In the divisions we had nothing to do substantially. I mean it was a kind of a janitorial job.

BROOKS: The name "custodial divisions" was unfortunate in itself.

BAHMER: I don't know what Hyde had in mind for, if things had continued under the older organization, these custodial divisions.

BROOKS: I found a description of the functional organization and the functions that he did in the first week he was on duty before Harris actually entered about the first of December of '34. It may be six pages long, and there is one paragraph about the custodial divisions and they are practically that.

BAHMER: One of the first areas I think assigned to the custodial divisions was the disposal function . . .

BROOKS: The Special Examiner's Office was abolished in January of 1938.

BAHMER: Yes. That was about the time these custodial divisions were set up. And this of course accounted for much of the relationship between our Division of Agriculture Archives and the department, and it gave me an opportunity, since I was the second in the office on whom such work devolved, to meet with all of the people in the bureaus that had administrative responsibilities for records. I had a very happy time in '38, '39, '40, and '41. I guess there was about four years. The whole area of disposal was one that caused all of us a great deal of grief and I suppose led to thinking about the ways in which this whole job could be made a lot more sensible and effective.

And you were thinking about it I know because this was your area. Ted was thinking about it too. I remember we did a lot of investigating of the British system.

BROOKS: Leahy and I talked about that, and about scheduling, etc.

BAHMER: That's where Schellenberg got the idea of scheduling. I think it was probably Agriculture Archives that worked out the first schedule, so-called. I remember I started the work. Actually, though, the first schedule was produced by Lew Darter on the Forest Service. I started work even before Lew began the Forest Service, on the Bureau of Animal Industry. They had a slug of disposal lists every year from meat inspection stations and laboratories and so on, and a real wagon-load of forms that were used in all of these things. So, Schellenberg and I, quite mistakenly as it turned out, thought the best thing to do is to get a set of all these forms that were used all over, find out which offices and divisions within the bureau used them, and simply go around and discuss the problem with intelligent people that knew how these were used and what for. So that first schedule was worked out on the basis of the individual forms with no concern as to how they rounded up in files. And we had disposal dates of two years, three years, and so on, on literally hundreds of them. And I suppose as it turned out very often, we'd ticket one form for two years and another for three years and they were both filed in the same folder. We were that naïve about the other aspects of records administration that had to be taken into account before you could really begin. We began to sense this fairly early in the game but not early enough to correct that first schedule.

BROOKS: I talked with Neil Franklin not long ago, and we were both reminded of the perfectly god-awful procedures we had to go through. I don't know whether Hyde or who was responsible for these very elaborate, very detailed forms that we used to make out. My favorite example was a carbon copy of a dental inspection form of the Veteran's Administration, the thing couldn't possibly have had any value, yet you had to go through the same elaborate procedure. Then in the Special Examiner's office we made up a list of cards of forms in all the agencies. We could have been doing that from then until now and never have got it done, and never really tested the functions or the way things were filed, as you say.

BAHMER: I had made a pretty thorough study of the functions and activities of the bureaus so that I could talk somewhat intelligently to bureau people, but I was completely blind to the fact that all these things after they went through their process in the bureaus would go into a file someplace, and then we had to begin to look at that before we described the unit that we wanted to control. The Forest Service was another one. Irene Wright had been working

on the Forest Service and she was fed up to here with the kinds of procedures that had to be done, so she neglected these. Honest to goodness, there was a pile at least two feet high of Forest Service lists when the change in organization came and they were all assigned to us.

BROOKS: I did some agriculture in '36 I guess on the Bureau of Agriculture and Engineering. I found some of my father's stuff over there, when he was on the Agriculture Committee of the House. I think that is when I got to know Everett Edwards well.

BAHMER: That is when I got to know Edwards. Of course we had a common interest in agricultural history and I used to stop by his office quite frequently and waste a half hour or so just talking with him. He helped me a good deal in locating materials for my own private research that I was still doing. I didn't finish until 1940, I guess.

BROOKS: One of the earliest basic problems of this place, Bob, was to establish--I am not sure we have solved it yet, I am not very closely in touch--standards of value. Previous to the time of the Archives disposal lists were referred to the Library of Congress. They would simply draw a line at 1870 or sometime and say everything back of that ought to be saved. I think we all agree that that was no criterion of value, really. How do you think we did in developing standards of value?

BAHMER: I think that is the trickiest problem in the whole archives field. It is very difficult to establish general standards that are meaningful in terms of any specific situation. But I think over the years all of us began to discern that what you wanted to get at were those, in the first place, were those files that represented the program and policy decision making of the bureau or the agency. And all too often of course these were buried in the general files or the main central files of the bureau and in most cases we simply kept those in toto, being fully aware of the fact that there was all sorts of junk in those files that under a well ordered system wouldn't come to the Archives. I accessioned innumerable records from the Department of Agriculture knowing full well, as with the Animal Industry or any one of the bureaus that their central files--they all had central file systems--were full of valueless material. But how do you get it out? I used to go through these. They had them up in the attic of South Building, hotter than blazes in the summer time. And I would sit down and try to go through these things and it was quite impossible for me to arrive at any solution that would take this portion and leave that portion because in the filing of the material no thought had been given to that. So in the end rounded up taking all of them, and I suspect in large part many of those files are still here. I can remember one interesting little story. We'd moved in all of the old files of the Forest Service, including those of Pinchot's

time when the Service really got on the map, and brought them all in here and they were nicely in those steel trays that we had. One day Governor Pinchot came to the Archives, and Mr. Connor very naturally thought, we'll go around and see these old files of the Forest Service which the National Archives is happily preserving. Since I knew more about them than anybody else at that time, I was called on to go with Connor who pulled out a drawer here and a drawer there and they looked at the records, and I could see the question mark in Pinchot's mind, why in Heaven's name are you saving all of this, what to him was trivia. Now he had taken many of the important things when he left the Service and went to Yale. You can find them there, all the good studies and investigations in silviculture and this sort of thing. But he didn't realize that those Forest Service files represented a good bit more than he thought, particularly in administration and bureaucracy. Pinchot and his staff did a lot of things in the whole area of filing and records control, and so on, that were very interesting.

In the development of standards you have to go beyond, of course, the matter of where are the records that represent the main planning and programming decisions in a bureau because you run into those files that are voluminous, containing a lot of information and you don't quite know what to do with them. I was shocked, for instance, as an agricultural historian (this was quite early in the game) to learn that they threw away all the schedules for the agricultural census. You know in between the regular decennial censuses they used to, in the fifth year have an agriculture census, and it accumulated an enormous amount of information. I can remember the schedules for the 1925 census were all down in the basement. A great enormous clutter. And I was intensely interested in them because there were certain counties and certain areas that I wanted to check out. I had research plans to work in the things at one time, and lo and behold somebody in the end, this was before we were in the business in the Agriculture Division, decided not to keep them. I thought this was a terrible mistake. I don't know whether it was or not. I think the Bureau of Agricultural Economics had extracted much of the information and produced it in publications and so on, and probably the decision was right. But to me, wanting to work on certain areas of Bottineau County, North Dakota, it was entirely wrong because you can't get this kind of detailed information out of the general summaries that are produced, any more than you can get information on individuals out of the general summaries that Census produces on population schedules.

BROOKS: There were many different points of view then of course in this problem. The point of view of the reseracher would save a whole lot more stuff than the point of view of strictly of the administrator. In 1939 I read a paper at a Federal Records Conference on the problems of evaluation. And about three or four years later, maybe '43, Bauer read another paper on this

subject, in which he took off avowedly at mine. And during that consideration he developed the idea of comparing value against the cost of preservation. Even those things you couldn't measure very accurately. But this was the conflict really.

BAHMER: Yes. And this I suspect is a valid point of view. I don't know whether the National Archives should be expected to keep such voluminous files just for the use of a limited number of people like me who would probably use them. I felt somewhat the same way about the individual income tax returns. We had an added complication, with the privacy of those, that was there to some extent with the agriculture census. These individual records on persons, places, things, etc., are the toughest ones for the archivist to evaluate and I don't know whether we have arrived at any kind of standard for judging these. There has been a lot of talk you know in rather abstruse language about how much information in relation to how many people and so on, following pretty much the British philosophy on that. But when you approach those enormous collections of information like personnel records, you are baffled. I think we have arrived at a place where we can at least investigate the whole world of documentation and arrive at a better decision than we probably would have in the beginning. I am thinking for instance of an argument I got into one time with Dallas Irvine, I guess it must have been after I came back as Deputy or Assistant Archivist, on the blueprints of Veterans Administration hospital construction. They had a ton of them because there were a lot of hospitals built in the 1920's and by the 1950's they were just taking up room. Well, Irvine made a fairly persuasive case that these blueprints even though they were voluminous did represent the documentation on the breakthrough and development of new methods of hospital construction and all this and that and the other, which made a great deal of sense until you investigated the periodical literature, the architects' articles in their professional magazines. They were discussing and exploring and arguing about the very points that were implicit, if you studied at great pains, and time, the blueprints of veterans hospitals, so I overruled him. We didn't keep those because I felt that even though they weren't in the National Archives holdings there was documentation. And I think we all came to realize very early that the archivist who has to work in the disposal field has to be alert to finding out what there is in the way of information, not only in other archives of the federal government but other materials that, the chances are, are going to be permanently preserved in library holdings or some other institution's collections.

BROOKS: One comment on this question of value--you said a while ago you didn't know whether the Archives was obliged to keep material for the use of a very few scholars. The scholarly answer to that would be, that what they do reaches the general public. And I think that has to be a dimension of our

whole reference service, that we are really working not only for those few scholars but for the people that are going to read what they write. I felt that way at the Truman Library.

BAHMER: My inclination is to agree with that, and I think the only way you can soften the blow on how much space voluminous files occupy is to use some one or the other of the devices of reproduction--microreproduction. I think that even though that is costly, it still can be used and I think if we had had the agricultural census of 1925 on microfilm in half a cabinet, there wouldn't have been any question in anybody's mind about keeping it. It was that enormous bulk, thinking of how much space it took in this building. And I think that ought always to be kept in mind, that even though the use per cubic foot is going to be much less on some of these materials than on others, that is not necessarily a legitimate reason for discarding them. I don't know how good a job we did, despite the fact that we had many years of experience in appraisal work, say on the General Accounting Office records. I have always been a little bit uncertain in my mind as to whether we did justice to those.

BROOKS: Although that is one of the few cases where the Archives hired a team of consultants.

BAHMER: Yes, they hired those on my insistence. I talked Wayne into doing this because I just felt despite a fairly good report that was made by Lyle Holverstott. Somebody else worked with Lyle on that, but it was primarily Lyle's job. He did a major study. But I just kept feeling that this is such an enormous collection, there are so many facets to it. And I got Charlie Gates into the game, because I knew him from Minnesota. And then we had White--

BROOKS: Leonard White, and Bell Wiley.

BAHMER: This is how I first got to know Bell Wiley, on that study. And they were perplexed much more than perhaps they'd be willing to admit, generally. But Charlie used to tell me, because we got together--half of the nights he was here we'd get together--and he'd keep saying "you just can't get on top of this in the time that we have had despite the study" and so on. So they did what is kind of an unusual job, you know, a few suggestions and endorsing the study as it was made. Oh, I was conscious of such things as the records of expenditures at the Western forts, particularly Fort Laramie that was ten miles from where my folks and my brother were living. I used to go up to the old fort before the National Park Service took it over and it was just a bunch of ruins. We'd wander around and couldn't identify anything. And I used to wonder about the background of the thing. The Park Service

took it over and it did a magnificent job of reconstruction and repair and general development of the area. I got to thinking at the time of the General Accounting Office survey how valuable it would be to the Fort and the Park Service if they could get hold of all those materials that related to the Fort and if we didn't want them, to give them to the Park Service. And we went through that business. I tried to get a policy through that would let all the States' archivists know that we had these materials and we weren't going to be keeping them. And the General Accounting Office said under no consideration would we even consider that kind of thing. Well, they all went by the boards. It was just a damn shame, I think, that that material went. Even though it isn't important historically in any major sense, it is a part of the history of it.

BROOKS: I am sure that in the early days we justified the disposal of some junk in some other agencies on the ground that the General Accounting Office was keeping the disbursing officers' accounts way back to the beginning of the government. Then I think it was in 1947 they got all the GAO records from sixteen buildings in town and concentrated them down at Cameron. Maybe it was when Grover came back as Deputy, or maybe it was the first year he was Archivist, but I was in charge of the General Records Division, and he and I went down to Cameron and looked at this tremendous mass--it was the first time I had even seen that many records all in one place, and maybe it was for him too. We were just horrified. There is just no ideal solution to something like that.

BAHMER: No. With the time we had we probably did as good a job as we could, given all the limitations under which we worked. I think we have gradually evolved an approach to the appraisal of records with certain standards, if we want to call them that. But I am always leery of the use of standards in this connection, because they can be tricky as the dickens and have to be applied in each individual case tailored to that particular case, and all of the conditions that surrounded the creation and use of the particular records involved. But I think the work that you have done and stuff that you have written, and I think Schellenberg's pamphlet on disposition, even though it is a bit labored in certain respects--it wasn't an original think-piece on Ted's part. It was simply a pulling together of what we thought was valid in our experience and all the writing that had been done.

BROOKS: Some of what we have said has touched on the genesis of the records administration program, which is certainly one of the most important phases of the history of the Archives and one that I am particularly interested in. I wonder if you would agree with the general thesis--some of these thoughts we have talked about, the fact that we were appraising things on disposal lists by form number and they were not filed like that; and the frus-

trating experiences that we had in the Examiner's offices with those god-awful forms; led us to be thinking about how we could get on top of this. I remember many times talking with Ed Leahy about it. He and I had adjacent desks when we started working here. You had pretty much this experience, you and Ted, in Agriculture. And Agriculture, as I remember it, always had been a leader in accounting procedures, all kinds of administrative activities.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: My thought is that several people around here were more or less forced by their experience in the same channel, toward trying to figure out how we could get the agencies to file things in such a way that they would mean something on disposal lists, transfer lists, and so forth. In other words, the closer the relationship with the agencies and our endeavor to affect their record practices was, the better. This was not the unique contribution of any one of us, but we all just learned the hard way.

BAHMER: Yes. It dawned on some earlier than others. You people, you in particular, I think out of your experience as a Special Examiner led right from the first. We got to it eventually in Agriculture after making a few false starts.

BROOKS: And you had people like Lucas and Donaldson to work with. It meant a lot over in Agriculture.

BAHMER: Yes. They were a lot more practical about this business because they really understood what went on better than we did at the time. But by the time, '40-'41, it began to be pretty clear that if you were going to get the best out of it you had to pay some attention to the filing practices, the current practices in handling records in an agency. And I got alerted to Leahy's interest in this in the summer of '41. He was assigned--Buck had become Archivist--and one of the first things he did was set up a panel to produce a pamphlet on the care of records in an emergency. He assigned it to Ed Leahy, and Holdcamper and I were there. We sat someplace upstairs.

BROOKS: Up on the sixth floor.

BAHMER: Yes, and spent numerable hours talking about a lot of other things besides care of records in an emergency. But it was the first time that I had gotten to know Leahy well, and we discussed these problems of records activities in the agencies in very considerable length. He drew out from me all my experiences in developing schedules, and so on. And I remember telling him that I thought one of the most alert young fellows in the business was a guy by the name of Bill Muller.

BROOKS: Was Bill in Agriculture?

BAHMER: Yes. He was in the Secretary's file room, and I remember we took Bill out to lunch a couple of times. Some of these discussions with Ed pointed up more clearly to me, than I had seen before, the whole ramifications. And he told me, I hadn't known about it, that the Navy had this survey by the Booz, Allen, Hamilton, and Fry, and that there was going to be, he thought, an operation set up over there and he was working for it. He was par excellence a promoter. There was just no getting around that, the way he sparked. And all of his talk with me and meeting of Muller and so on, was because he was looking forward to that job over there. And it was out of that accidental kind of meeting and an opportunity for discussion that I got into this year at Navy in '42.

BROOKS: When did you leave, early '42?

BAHMER: Yes. In January 1942.

BROOKS: That was a pretty crucial period along there, because of, for a number of reasons, Connor left on September 15, 1941, I think Buck was the prime mover (I have reason to think so from having looked at some of the records) in the reorganization of the Archives, building up the records divisions. Connor had expressed some interest in this records administration business, and I remember being surprised a little bit that he and especially Buck took hold of this paper I read in 1940, which in essence said that we had better get with the agencies because what they do with the records affects everything that we do from then on. But in the fall of '41, one of the first things Buck did was to rescue me from the Division of Independent Agencies archives. That was terrible. And Buck had me write a special memorandum on records administration, which I did. Then in January 1942 we set up this records administration program that I had charge of. And immediately the records divisions started taking shots at me. I think not so much because of me, but because some people, like Lewinson, doubted the wisdom and the appropriateness of our getting into the agencies' business; and a lot of people didn't like Dr. Buck and were shooting at me because I was close to him. But anyway, my memory of that first period of time in records administration office was of a good deal of contention. We set up a staff of six or eight people in the first year. At that same time, then and soon after, the military--the Army and Navy--were setting up records programs, by necessity and on a much bigger scale. And not too long after that developed the idea of records centers. So I think all of these developments were somewhat concurrent, but necessarily the biggest developments took place in the military agencies. This brings me to one of the most important questions, which is, when did you become closely associated with Wayne Grover?

BAHMER: Very early in my career here in the Archives. There used to be a bunch of us get together to go out to lunch, which is where the first time I met Wayne; Schellenberg, Irvine, and Lewinson--the group varied from time to time--and I'd go along and Wayne would be there. We'd go up to the old Houston Hotel generally. Wasn't it the Houston that was torn down?

BROOKS: Yes. On E Street.

BAHMER: You were among the group. Well, I got to know Wayne. We hit it off almost from the beginning. Beginning I suppose in '37 we probably got together nine out of ten weekends. And that continued almost down to the time of Wayne's death, unless we were out of town or sick or something. We became very close. Our interests coincided so completely. Our ideas about most things, not all things, but most things were so identical that we just--well we were closer, as Wayne's brother has commented several times, we were closer, he and I, than he was to his brothers or certainly than I to my brother. So the association became a very personal one quite early. In 1938 we were both renting places to stay. We rented houses within half a block of one another in Virginia. From that point on the association was simply as close as it could be. We ended up, you know, at the end of the war building a cottage down at Long Beach on the Chesapeake and while the kids were small during the summer we used to spend four out of five weekends down there living together. All the families, the wives and the children and everything and everything else, just clicked. Our association was less close, I suppose, if possible on the official side than the personal. We used to have some pretty good slug-fests in terms of things that we ought to be doing in the Archives, but it never affected our relationship--we could, you know, get madder than the dickens at one another here in the office and go home and have a good time over the weekend with one another. We never had a real job sheet for me as Assistant Archivist or Deputy. Something had to be written because it had to go to the Civil Service Commission, but I mean it was all on a very free and informal basis on our part. He was a great and good friend to me.

BROOKS: In 1947 Ruth Henderson, who was then Personnel Officer, rode in our car pool with Neil Franklin, Thad Page and I guess Vernon Tate. Anyway, Ruth came down there one time worried as anything. She said that the Archivist, Dr. Buck, had asked her to write a publicity release about Wayne Grover, who was coming back to the Archives as Assistant Archivist. And she said "I can't say he started a CAF-1." And we said, "Ruth, why in the world can't you? He started from the ground up." And he did, I think he started as a guide or something.

BAHMER: Yeah. He was right at the very lowest rung of the ladder. I think his salary was \$1080 or something like that.

BROOKS: Then he became assistant deputy examiner, deputy examiner, and I believe when the Accessions Division was broken up he went to War Records and was there until he went to another agency. He went to the Council on National Defense, right?

BAHMER: He went to OSS.

BROOKS: Oh--in 1941 I guess, I think before the actual outbreak of war.

BAHMER: Yes. He had met a number of those people who were down here, academic types doing background research that came over to War Records.

BROOKS: He got to know Dr. Leland very well, and when Leland gave his second Presidential address to the Society of American Archivists in I think Hartford in 1941--it was largely about the work of the historians in World War I and what the historians might do in World War II--and Wayne did a lot of the work for him on that address. Leland acknowledged it in a footnote. I think it was through Leland that Wayne got over into that--

BAHMER: Over into OSS. Yes. I remember that very well.

BROOKS: But he had in the meantime become close to Col. Spaulding.

BAHMER: Well, he knew Spaulding and he was close to Irvine. Irvine had a little more weight then than he has now with what was the War Department at that time.

BROOKS: I can remember at the time Wayne talking with great respect of how much he had learned from Irvine and how valuable Irvine's divisional seminars were.

BAHMER: Yes. He had a great respect for Irvine in those early years, and still had in terms of Irvine's ability, which seemed a little hard at times to keep going down the track. But the job, you know, in the War Department was first given to Jesse Douglas. Jesse Douglas was commissioned a Captain to work with Spaulding in The Adjutant General's Office.

BROOKS: Spaulding started here. That is where I first met McCool.

BAHMER: Yeah. And it was because they were up here that it didn't click. And very frankly Jesse got encouraged to go the Historical Division, which

was being established. And they looked around for somebody else, and that is when Wayne got in the picture.

BROOKS: All this involves a very broad problem I think that has characterized this place and lots of other agencies--and universities too--and that is that it is very difficult to get a man who is good at research, at historical activities and also a good administrator, and we have both seen many examples of people who were good in research but when it came to managing people were just--

BAHMER: All too true. Well I had come back to the National Archives when Blake was drafted. That left the office Chief of the Navy Archives Division open. Buck called me up and asked me whether I'd be interested. Well, I was, for a very practical reason. You see, I was never on the Navy Department payroll. I still drew my check from the Archives. I was simply loaned. I was frozen at that salary in the National Archives. I was tempted any number of times to take a transfer because that could have gotten me two or three more grades. Well when this division job opened up it meant a promotion. I have forgot what the grades were, P-5 I think. So I decided to come back and was here and very happy until along May and June, 1943 and that is when Wayne decided to take a commission and go into The Adjutant General's Office. I knew what he was going to do and he started right in saying you've got to come over. And I said, "uh, uh, I served out my time with Navy, I don't want any more part of that rat-race," and I was determined I wasn't going over. I just hadn't been back long enough to learn my way around the Navy archives. But Wayne just wouldn't stop. He finally went to Buck, and I was ordered, you see, I didn't have any choice. I had to go. And I went only under the condition that I wouldn't go on loan. If I was going to go, I was going to get whatever benefit there was out of it. This was a wrench for The Adjutant General's office, which never treated their civilian help very well. And when I went over there as a P-6 I was the highest paid civilian in The Adjutant General's office. It made some of the old-timers around the place, that had been there for 30 years, a little bit uneasy about it.

BROOKS: Wayne developed a great admiration for The Adjutant General personally.

BAHMER: That was Witsell; and particularly for the man who was Witsell's right hand, chief of the management office, Col. Peixotto. He was a brilliant man and a tough cookie. But God, he was able to get things done that just almost seemed impossible, but he didn't last out the war. One day at the Pentagon he was going down the hall and just popped off just like that. He was under a tension.

BROOKS: Bob, we are talking primarily about the history of the National Archives, but because principal archives personnel are involved and because the experiences of the military agencies in the Archives were so closely intertwined in the records business, I would like to ask, what were your main duties when you were in the Navy with Ed?

BAHMER: I was taken over there primarily to work on the problem of the disposal of Navy records. And we scheduled records like mad all over the Department as fast as we could. But one thing that was added to this area of disposition was the records center, and we literally got forced into that. I hadn't been in Navy a month when one day an Admiral, Admiral Butler, who was the Chief Administrative Officer in Navy called up Leahy's office, and said we've got to do something about the records in this old brewery, that was in Virginia (where the Hot Shoppe is). He said Naval Supply has got to have that whole area within a certain time because we've got stock, paper stock, publications just by the carload coming in and this is the only available space. I remember going over there and it was just literally crammed with bales and bundles and filing cabinets that didn't have any labels on them. I spent a day or two and looked at it and said "Ed, I just can't be a party to dumping the whole works because I think there are some materials over there, like Chief of Naval Operations files, that is valuable." He said, "well, we have to get out of there." I said, "well, you've got to get some kind of space that we can go into and move that material out until we have a chance to see what gives." Then we began to hunt for space. I remember every morning I would pick up the paper, the first thing I would do was turn to the classified section to see if any space for rent was advertised. Finally we located a garage in Alexandria that was going out of business and the Navy rented it. We moved the records from the Brewery. From then on things just snowballed. Records were crowding all of the Navy offices--old records not useful to day-to-day operations. Everyone was happy to turn them over to Leahy's record center. Before I left Navy we acquired a loft building in Baltimore and moved a great many records to it.

BROOKS: You were saying, Bob, I believe, that your experience in the Navy in 1942 was largely with the central office units and you hadn't got to the field problem.

BAHMER: The problem in the Army was even more important at field installations than it was here at headquarters, so we had to give attention to a field program almost from the beginning. Even so, even realizing this, we didn't move fast enough to satisfy the brass up the line in The Adjutant General's office and the Army Service Forces of which The Adjutant General was a part. It took us some time. It took me a number of weeks just to get used to the Army way of doing things, how they handled directives, and what they did to

assemble a staff. McCool and Wayne and I were the whole staff when I went over, for the first few days, and though we had authority to hire people, a lot of people were unwilling to leave the Archives. I remember we tried our best to get Phil Bauer, and he just wouldn't leave under any conditions. We got Bob Ballantine and Sherrod East, and then by one of the strokes of what I always called the "Grover luck" he ran across a number of young fellows who were at The Adjutant General's school being trained as officer material down here at Fort Washington. I don't know how he learned of the possibility there, but at any rate we got all the records on these men and I think we probably hired eight, ten, or twelve maybe, and among them was Lieutenant Hugh Flick.

BROOKS: Is that how you got to know him?

BAHMER: Yes. He was a natural, you see, with his background in New York.

BROOKS: Hugh Flick had worked in his father's office, in the State Historian's office?

BAHMER: Yes. And he was State Archivist of New York at the time that he had been inducted. He was drafted way early before the war, and just on the day that he was being discharged from the draft came Pearl Harbor. So he never got out of uniform. He put in to go to Officer's Candidate School and that is where we picked him up.

We hired another boy, who was a ball of fire if I ever have seen one. We picked up Bob Robertson, who was one of the most able men that I have known. We looked at his background. He was vice president of, I have forgotten what it was, something like the Merchants Guarantee and Trust Company in New York, one of the big bankers. He was a young fellow, probably in his early thirties, a little older than most fellows drafted, but they were taking them at that age. He was a single man, had no interest in any frivolity on the outside whatsoever, and was a workhorse of the first water. He probably did more for our program in the first year than almost any one of us in terms of just getting work done. He worked every day, Sunday, Saturday.

BROOKS: I don't think I ever encountered him.

BAHMER: He never mixed much. And he was smart. He picked up everything we were doing right off. Well, we faced this problem of what do we do about all of these areas in the country, the posts, the Command headquarters and all the rest of it. And we finally decided, like it or not, we simply had to take the plunge. So we ordered each, I think there were ten Army commands,

as they called them at the time. We simply had the Adjutant General send an order to each commanding General in these areas that we were going to activate a records administration program, and they should select somebody at least at the level of captain that would be knowledgeable in these fields and send him in at such and such a date, like a month for indoctrination. So at due time ten boys showed up. They were, about 50-50, some very very good, and some of them weren't so good. We had a program all worked out.

Meantime we were busily working up a scheduling program. We had to turn this over to the Services--Transportation, Quartermaster, and so on, because we just couldn't assemble the staff. The War Department was just too big to handle, and I don't believe it was probably more than 50% effective in actual practical results. It looked much better on paper when you could report what was being done, and so on, than it turned out. And we simply got together a kit, presentation kit, and we went from one Service to the other, called all the people concerned together and I'd give a talk, Wayne would give a talk, and we would go on from there. We always had somebody that would monitor the program. And on the whole, because these Services were always headed by a military man, and when one man in authority spoke to another, the guy obeyed. Civilians were a little bit less cooperative. We had some rough times. You undoubtedly probably heard of some of our troubles with Mrs. Kilmartin in the Quartermaster Corps but even she came around, partly you see because we left the job to them and kind of told them how they could do it, and so on, and asked them to use our forms. But in some cases they just welcomed us with open arms. I remember Transportation was one where they just wanted us to stay with them for the rest of the war. I took several trips with one of the Transportation officers visiting all their places in the country. Engineers was another one that welcomed us; Ordinance. We had on the whole remarkable cooperation, I think. You see, The Adjutant General had a certain authority over records, although it had always been conceived as authority over personnel records, records of Army personnel. And to many of The Adjutant General's people this is what it amounted to, but it was broad enough to encompass our work.

BROOKS: The Ainsworth program was largely devoted to personnel records?

BAHMER: Yes. And to old Jesse Powell, who was the God in The Adjutant General's civilian area--there were no records except personnel records. "What are you bothering with all that other material for" he said, "that isn't anything The Adjutant General should be concerned with"--of course The Adjutant General was being put on the pan by the general staff of the Army and by Army Service Forces, old what was his name?

BROOKS: Somerville.

BAHMER: They travelled around and they'd see these things. There was a crusty old General one time that took me on a trip some place and rubbed my nose in a hundred different file cabinets. "What in the hell is that being kept for? Why can't we throw this away?" Well, I'd say General you know we've got to get it within the bounds of legality. "Legality, hell, we're fighting a war here and we need this space." And there was something about some old check books. I can't remember whose they were or where they were, but he just literally ate me out for a solid 30 or 40 minutes in the roughest kind of Army language that you ever heard. Well, this was the reason we had to get into this thing. So it started out in the area of disposition. But in the Army, as well as in the Navy, you can't stay out of the other areas. You are in the microfilming right off the bat. In the Army we got into more current records and file problems than in the Navy. Because the Adjutant General had responsibility for all of the forms relating to accounting for and managing the assignment, transfer, and all of the other things relating to personnel, there was an enormous bunch of materials. They were in the midst of trying to establish new systems to accommodate an Army that had grown from not too large to gargantuan size. And I remember the morning report which was a basic control form, was being re-designed. One copy of everybody's morning report came in to Headquarters. You can imagine, from each reporting unit--truckloads of mail bags a day came in. So these were heaped in rooms in the basement of the Pentagon, until everybody could see that by the end war, if it lasted a few years, the whole building would be taken up with them. So, why not microfilm them? Then they came trotting to us, because we knew a little bit about microfilming, but the form had been designed in such a way that made microfilming twice as difficult as it ought to be. They were filmed in the end. Dan Noll was in charge; we got him over there.

BROOKS: From the Archives? Where was he before that?

BAHMER: I think he had--I must confess, I don't know where he came from. But I remember the blood he sweat; how do you organize these morning reports to put them on film so they will be useful at all. All of the Army services offices had a very rigidly controlled Central Files, and I mean rigid. Everything went into that Central File. This just began to break down in the light of the size of the units, and Col. Peixotto called Wayne in and said you've got to do something about that Central File. It is just growing and growing and growing, there are a thousand or fifteen hundred cabinets, or whatever it was, and every day more is being poured in there. Isn't there some way we can do something about that. So, we got Nona Murray Lucke from the Archives.

BROOKS: She had been in my office here.

BAHMER: She was a pretty savvy gal. Well, we took a look at the Central Files and the material that was coming in to it, and out of this work came much of the impulse for the present form of current filing in the Army. Just one little incident, for instance, oh, what did we call them? "Where's Joe? letters"--literally thousands of letters that come to the War Department and were referred to The Adjutant General's Office, from anxious parents, "Where is my boy, he has been gone for six months, I haven't heard from him"--the kids wouldn't write--"well where is he." Well there was one whole unit with literally dozens of clerical people doing nothing but handling these letters. There were a couple of file drawers a day, I'm not kidding. Well, the first thing we did was lop them off from central files and set them up in their own file room, which sounds like such a simple thing that it wouldn't cause any grief, but the old heads of the Central File unit could see the straws in the wind and they didn't want any part of it, and old Jesse Powell would back these old timers. They were his people. We were a bunch of rank outsiders that didn't know from straight up. But we won because we had some leverage with Witsell, who was a very savvy man, and primarily Peixotto. So it went from one thing to another. We were clear up to our necks in current procedures. And it finally developed to a point where if there was any significant change Army-wide in record-keeping, such as in the Surgeon-General's Office in terms of health records, all those problems came to our unit and we would handle them. Unfortunately we called our facilities records depots rather than records centers. This was Army terminology, the Army understood it. We had nine of them established quicker than a wink. And they all had piles of old materials lying around. At least one thing it did was to bring all of this older material that was lying around post, camp, and station headquarters into one place, so that when you wanted to do something about it you could go there. I remember after we got lots of disposition authorities, we armed Bob Robertson with those authorities and he went around literally and visited everyone of these, and effected disposal of an enormous quantity of routine materials that had been accumulated.

BROOKS: The Army must still have had some pretty old records, because I remember when I had the War Records Office up here in 1950 and 1951 we accessioned I think at that time, or maybe we did a finding aid on, a whole batch of records of abandoned posts, camps, and stations.

BAHMER: Yes. We finally picked up and ordered in all those records. Yes, we found some very valuable material on the local level.

BROOKS: And I came across some other aspects of your work. One, as I remember it, when the military units went overseas they left their records at Savannah, and you set up a center there. That later moved to Kansas City.

BAHMER: What happened was early in the game somebody had identified to us that the ports of embarkation were just crying for some kind of help. Wayne went up to New York, looked at them, and came back and said these are all unit records. You see, when a unit was transferred overseas, they had to strip down to the very, very minimum, so they left behind all the records and all the recreational material and everything, so that you had everything from baseball bats and tennis rackets along with a big batch of records and publications and so on. They were all stored in storage areas. Well something had to be done. That is when Wayne and our Colonel, I have forgotten which one, I think it was Colonel Levy--at that time we had succession of colonels--finally went down to Savannah where there were a couple of great big cotton warehouses and rented them, and we set up the Organization Records Branch and ordered all the material in from all the ports of embarkation. And of course the Army had, in a sense, a records center, though they didn't call it that. It was a part of the Enlisted Personnel Branch, which handled everything relating to enlisted personnel. And they had all the records of enlisted personnel discharged from World War I and from the regular Army during the intervening period.

BROOKS: Where were they then?

BAHMER: They started out right over here across the Mall in old temporary E. You remember one of those old buildings?

BROOKS: Yes. They took it down in the last few years.

BAHMER: We moved it to High Point, North Carolina. We rented a furniture warehouse, 14 stories. We had to build an elevator on the outside of the building, a hoist, to get these things up there. And they ran there all during the war. It was at the close of the war when we had to get out of these separate places. Omaha was the civilian personnel center. It started out there, a centralization of all of the civilian personnel records.

BROOKS: I met with ^a ~~the~~ committee of the council of personnel administration for several years, and the people came in and told us about that army operation out there.

BAHMER: At the end of the war of course we had to do something about this. We investigated about a dozen or fifteen plants that the--arms manufacturing plants--and finally decided on St. Louis. So everything came into St. Louis, civilian personnel, army personnel, and organization records. We had set up a Contract Records Branch because there was always this problem on any contract, sizeable contract, there would be portions of the file here, there, in as many as 12 offices. When any question about that contract came up the

boys investigating wanted to get at all this material. They decided that centralization was such a good thing, so we did. And we had a Contract Records Branch. I was a bit uneasy about it. Oh for one reason, they had sort of pulled files out of legal and out of here and out of there and brought them together, sort of artificially in the end. And I don't know how well it worked out, really. I don't think there is one today. I think they abandoned it.

BROOKS: By 1947, I take it the heat of the work with the war records had pretty well cooled down, when Wayne came back here?

BAHMER: Yes. We were still having a lot of problems, but things were pretty much under control. That is, there were no big crises developing. We'd got settled down in St. Louis. That almost gave us a real turn. You could imagine--it was right at almost the height of demobilization. You see, the orders called for the records of men who were separated, to be sent promptly to St. Louis. At the same time we had a train-load of the old records of boys who had been previously discharged that came out there. We lost 60% of the personnel, all but a few of the top ones. We had to recruit a whole new staff. And one of the things that the discharge centers did was ask each man whether he had any physical health problems that might be a claim against the Army. And a great many of them did. And they went immediately to the Veterans Administration, which asks always for the Army record on the man. And of course we had a couple of million requests from VA dammed up there once. We just couldn't get to them. Dan Noll kind of saved our skin on that one.

BROOKS: Microfilm?

BAHMER: Ultimately microfilm, but we got hold of a couple of those machines the V-mail boys used--we couldn't send film to the VA--but we got hold of, the film to paper machines. We filmed the records, ran them off on V-mail. And Dan stood in great respect.

BROOKS: Did the Army then go into the same building that the Records Center is in in St. Louis now, on Page Boulevard?

BAHMER: We went into the Remington small arms plant, which was on Good-fellow Boulevard. There were 10 or 15 buildings that we occupied out there. It was enormous operation.

Second Interview - January 3, 1973 - - - - -

BROOKS: Bob, since we talked the first time I have had occasion to think more about the relations of the Archivist with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and have actually done an interview on that subject with George Elsey. I think the first of these various points at which I think, as I understand it, that the

Archivist had some contact with the Presidents. The first one that rings a bell with you particularly is the one about Dr. Buck, and you were going to tell me about Dr. Buck and you in 1947 when you were still in the Pentagon, right?

BAHMER: What I was about to say concerning my relationship with Buck during the war years was simply that one time, it may have been in '45, he called me up and came over to the Pentagon and had lunch with me. And much to my surprise he offered me the job of, I think they called it at the time, Management Officer here.

BROOKS: Irvine had it once and later Art Young had it.

BAHMER: Yes, I think Irvine was in the job at the time and I, gosh we were so involved in the things over at the Pentagon that I didn't really give it very much thought. In the first place I didn't know what the job meant here. You see I hadn't been current on all of the things going on in the National Archives during the war period. We heard here and there things, but I kind of felt the job was a false job in an institution of this kind. So that after a few days I called him up and told him that I had decided not to take it, and he got very angry with me figuring that I should have had more loyalty to the institution and all of that stuff. But that was my only contact with him during the war and Wayne and I were both surprised as could be when he offered Wayne the job as Deputy. Neither one of us knew that there was shuffling going on here in the background of those troubled periods. We knew nothing about that really. So Wayne came back in '47. The war had been over and things were beginning to quiet down and we were both looking forward to coming back as soon as things had stabilized to a point where we could leave the Pentagon show. And the only knowledge I had then of Buck's leaving is what Wayne knew of it in that year that he had served under Buck. And as I have said I don't think there was a resignation asked for. It was more or less an easing out, offering an opportunity for another job. Wayne never intimated that Buck was asked to leave. I don't think he was, but I recall Wayne's comments he made to me and to others. When Harry Truman called him over to put his benediction on Wayne's appointment, typical of Harry Truman. Wayne said that he kind of rared back in his chair and said, "Well, I'm just a farm boy from Missouri and I don't know a damned thing about Archives and you do, and I want you to take over that institution and don't get me into any trouble. It's yours." That was the end of it, in much more typical Truman fashion than I have indicated. And strangely enough there was practically no contact between Wayne and Truman of any importance during that period from '48 clear through to the end of . . . until you got to the period where Truman began to think about what he was going to do with his papers. And that's where Elsey and Dave Lloyd finally came into the picture.

BROOKS: I thought maybe if it's all right with you we'd save the Presidential Libraries stories for a little later, and treat the whole Presidential Libraries subject together.

BAHMER: OK.

BROOKS: But Elsey told me he did not think that Mr. Truman was directly involved or knew anything about the absorption of the Archives into GSA. In fact Jess Larson told me in an interview that he didn't know too much about that . . .

BAHMER: No . . .

BROOKS: . . . that he just took your word and Wayne's on that. He didn't know anything about the recommendation of the Leahy task force report.

BAHMER: It never was of a level you know that commanded the attention of the people that were really resolving the questions that the Hoover Commission had kicked up, and actually we had kind of deluded ourselves into thinking that the issue had been sort of laid aside. We kicked up a fuss after going through a long period of analysis of our own feelings and numerous meetings with the staff, getting the opinions of everybody as to whether we should go for or against the Leahy recommendation, particularly for the absorption of the Archives into a larger entity, and it was a considerable surprise on both Wayne's and my part that this Federal Property and Administrative Services Act included a provision concerning the National Archives. I had gone on leave for, oh I guess three or four weeks.

BROOKS: This would have been in May of '49.

BAHMER: And nothing had been heard by us up to that time as far as I know. At least we had no official word that they were considering on the Hill an inclusion of a provision in that Act that affected the National Archives. And when I got back in, I guess very early June or sometime in June, one of the first things Wayne told me was that he had been called up to a committee hearing in the Senate and they'd shown him this provision, essentially what was included in the Act finally. And as it turned out he said there wasn't a damned thing he could do except to go along with them. Now if you recall the initial provisions were very vague and broad and so on, simply that the functions of the National Archives, with certain exceptions of duties of the Archivist, were transferred to GSA, and that GSA would set up a program of records management, or words to that effect, and that was it. Wayne went on leave shortly after I came back and along the latter part of June I had to sign out a letter to the Senate committee going along with this whole business. But it

was a very hurried inclusion at the tail end of the consideration of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act that they threw the Archives in there. And I'm sure this probably was an indirect result of the Hoover Commission recommendations that a Federal records program be set up, coupled with the feeling that there were too damned many independent agencies and that they ought to be grouped and put under fewer heads.

BROOKS: Last fall I went over the files on this Act and as I remember the Leahy report of his task force was submitted in the winter of '48-'49, and he recommended that there be a records management bureau and that the Archives be a part of it. The overall Hoover Commission report going along more with the idea of reducing the number of independent agencies reporting directly to the President, made this general provision for the absorption of the Archives into GSA.

BAHMER: That's right.

BROOKS: And there must have been some push to get the Leahy report task force recommendations adopted. I remember hearing you and Wayne talk about it at the time, and the work you did with Holifield's committee to get that overturned. It was touch and go, wasn't it?

BAHMER: Yes. Very, very much so. Very much so. One of the interesting things occurred during that summer after all the issues that were raised in connection with the absorption of the National Archives into the General Services Administration. As you say Jess Larson pretty much took our word for things. He had a high regard for Wayne. We liked him. I think he was a fair minded man. He had some people on his staff, however, who were just damned near impossible to work with. One was a Management Officer by the name of Bill Cleary. Well, Cleary was hard-headed, hard-nosed--he was not stupid in any sense at all but they had a certain philosophy of how agencies ought to be run, set up and all the rest of it; all of which were disastrous so far as this institution was concerned. If it hadn't been for Jess Larson and Max Elliott, the General Counsel, we could have fared very, very badly because they were going to integrate us just like they integrated Supply and Buildings and all the rest of it. The first stumbling block, of course, was the fact that their philosophy called for all operations to be in the regions and management and direction to be in a central staff. Well, our principal operation was a central operation to begin with, but you see Bill Cleary would have put the National Archives in Region 3 in Washington as a regional operation, because it was an operation rather than a management job. So we had one dickens of a time. They set up any God's number of committees when finally when Buildings and Supply and the rest of the constituent agencies of GSA were brought together under Larson.

I had--Wayne being gone--I had the onerous task of putting practically all the top staff in the place on one or the other of these committees. Reserving for my self, I think I've forgotten what it was called but one of the top ones that determined general policy. And we used to, well we worked our tails off during that summer, because numerous papers had to be presented--arguments produced and presented in writing. Wayne got back in July sometime, and names became important--what we were going to call things--we knew we had to do something in the direction of the projected new program in records management. And yet we didn't want to lose the title of the National Archives, particularly when we kept it in the Central Office. And we were sitting there one day in his office considering every possible alternative that everybody had suggested and finally I think I mentioned that why couldn't this be called Records something--I don't know what I put with records--and the National Archives. And Wayne rared up and said, "that's perfectly OK but we'll reverse it, the National Archives and Records Service," because by this time it was determined, I think, that everybody was going to be a service agency in GSA. And we presented that and it went right on through and the name came out as it is. I think that was a lot more important than just a matter of semantics. I think it was damned important at that period to keep the "National Archives" symbolizing the institution as a part of the name of the Service. But we came out of it fairly well, all told, and this is all to the credit of Larson with a nod in the direction of Max Elliott, the General Counsel, who did a lot of things for us that were actually, I suppose, one would say against his philosophy of how GSA ought to be set up.

BROOKS: Well, as you indicated, the period of '47, '48 was a pretty hectic time around here. What would you say were the main problems in the Archives as you and Wayne saw them in '48, when you came back. Is that a fair question or is that too general?

BAHMER: No, that's a fair question. I suppose the principal and overriding problem was the development of this new program--Records Management--fitting it into the Archives or with the National Archives program, and learning to live with GSA and the Budget Bureau and the committees on the Hill. Both Wayne and I were, of course, inexperienced in dealing with the legislative committees and appropriations committees and had had no particular contact with the Budget Bureau. We did put through one budget as an independent agency and this was a very sobering and in a sense a frustrating experience. We were an agency with a budget of about 2 million dollars at that time--and we were given a real rough time at the Budget Bureau, not offensive in any way, but in the detail of questioning, the depth to which they could go. But on the whole that couldn't compare at all with the going over that we got from the House committee under Albert Thomas. Man alive, that first session on our first and only budget as an independent agency in Wayne's and my time was something that I'll never

forget. Thomas was a very intelligent person and one who did his homework on agencies. And he gave us a going over that I'll never forget. Being small, that is in terms of size measured by staff or money, we got a hearing that was as long as agencies that had a multibillion dollar budget before them. The first question he asked Wayne stands out in my mind as clear today as it did then. But he looked at our submission and the first office was the Office of the Archivist, with the Archivist and the Deputy and two girls and he said, "Dr. Grover, why do you need two people in secretarial help in that office?" He said, "Do you and your associate do an awful lot of letter writing, or what . . .?" Here was a job that I think paid probably \$4,000 or no more than that, a second job at that time, and what in the world could you say to that except that the workload, in our feeling, justified having the second job. But this set the tone for it. He questioned every item, not in general on programs and so on, but he went down and just literally gave us--now it doesn't read as badly, of course, it seemed to us to go at the time. But Thomas didn't have his knife out for the National Archives, never did, but I think one thing he wanted to do was sort of test Wayne's mettle to see how he would respond. Well, Wayne did a pretty good job. He didn't get flustered. I'm happy that I didn't have to do it. I'd probably would've thrown the whole thing up at that time if he'd approached me that way.

BROOKS: He came to the records center in Region 9 while I was there, and he also came to the Truman Library, and I was duly warned by Wayne that Thomas was a sharp guy and a tough guy. But he was very decent and very complimentary.

BAHMER: Oh, he had the highest opinion of the Truman Library. He was particularly struck by the maintenance, you know the place always has looked just spic and span. He just thought that that was the standard that we ought to shoot for in all Government agencies and he couldn't see why we couldn't get it elsewhere.

BROOKS: The only way they achieved it was that GSA threw out the 70 percent of whatever it was they were going to clean buildings. They just said they'd do the best they could for the Truman Library and they always did. Well, Wayne, this was one thing that I always thought Wayne was good at. He, as you say, was inexperienced perhaps when he first went up there, but in the maintenance of congressional relations, he always had a good standing on the Hill, didn't he?

BAHMER: Yes. There was something about Wayne that inspired confidence; that he wasn't B.S.ing and he wasn't trying to sell them a bill of goods, he wasn't trying to deceive them--he was thoroughly honest in his presentation.

BROOKS: And knew the details of this program.

BAHMER: And the one criticism that I have always had about, well, I shouldn't say always, because there were times when GSA would permit us to have direct relationships with important committees on the Hill and their staff and chairmen, but a good bit of the time we had men in charge of GSA who were simply not big enough to permit anybody else to participate in this function. And this was particularly true during the last stages of the game under Lawson Knott. He just didn't want anybody going to the Hill or having any contact with the Hill except through his congressional liaison forces. If they had permitted Wayne to, on his own, make his contacts and develop support we could've moved much further much faster. Now, Larson didn't put the brakes on and we spent much of what would be the fall, winter, and spring of '49 in working with Chet Holifield's staff in developing the Federal Records Act that came out in 1950.

BROOKS: I was going to ask you how that developed.

BAHMER: Well, we worked up the first draft of course and took it up to the Hill and worked out all of these relationships.

BROOKS: Most of it with Holifield's committee?

BAHMER: Yes. With Chet Holifield. And Chet Holifield himself participated in a great many of the sessions where we'd discuss particular points. Sometimes we had Max Elliott or one of his staff, along but most often we just did it alone. This was again partly because Larson had faith in Wayne that Wayne would come up with a piece of legislation that satisfactory to them. It was submitted through GSA and all that, but the contacts were made and developed and handled informally. Now, this couldn't have been done under somebody who was fearful of this kind of free-wheeling as Knott was. Knott required even if you got a call from a Senator's office or a Representative's office on a mundane thing, like they were inquiring about some constituent's request for information, you had to fill out a form and report it to GSA. And this was a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. But we worked months on that piece of legislation. It never seems in the end that the results shows how much effort went into it. But Thad Page and I and Ted Schellenberg at the time spent hours on it. First we had the question that they wanted all previous legislation repealed and put into one package. Well, first Wayne and I were pretty firm, that we weren't going to repeal the original National Archives Act. We wanted to leave this probably because of emotion rather than reason. But if any law was going to be repealed it would be the Records Disposal Act, which was of lesser importance than the basic organic Act of the National Archives. But the more we worked with that idea the more impossible it seemed to build everything that we wanted to put into the Act onto the Disposal Act. So in the end we had to discard the original National Archives Act and write the whole thing. And I would guess that on the whole the Act has stood up pretty well.

BROOKS: Yes, it was an extremely significant thing. Wayne gave a talk, I think, at Madison.

BAHMER: Madison, Wisconsin, didn't he?

BROOKS: Yeah, at the SAA meeting, and analyzed it very well. It had for the first time by statutory provision the requirement that an agency create meaningful records. I think there had been an Executive Order to that effect in 1946 or so.

BAHMER: Yeah, well this was the first time it was in a law. Schellenberg wrote the wording of that, the initial wording, which probably was revised here and there. You had to be careful there, you had to speak in general terms. You couldn't get down to specifics.

BROOKS: Thad Page said he remembered working on that Act with you.

BAHMER: Yes, he was practically full time for a number of months working on language of this part and the other part. We put into the Act, once we decided which direction we were going, we put into it everything that we felt would be desirable immediately or in the future. We reorganized the National Historical Publications Commission which you know hadn't done a thing and hadn't met. There was no program. And we decided that this was the time to try to bring it back to life. So the membership was reorganized somewhat. The duties were stated, essentially the same but I think a little bit broader and it laid the basis of course for the program that has come from that law, and from Truman's speech up at the Library of Congress which was the tip-off to what ought to be done.

BROOKS: Elsey has told me about that. He had to write that speech in a good deal of a hurry, but he said that he and Wayne had talked enough about it so he knew what Wayne was interested in, and what you guys wanted to accomplish.

BAHMER: Right.

BROOKS: And it certainly did work out well.

BAHMER: Oh yeah. It was the thing that kicked off the program.

BROOKS: On the Disposal Acts, there were four in a row that dealt with, well, the first one in '39 I think pretty much gave us the authority to act on disposal. And '40 was about microfilming. '43 was the main one. And I was very close to that because it was appropriate to the job I had then. And it was one of the things I remember most vividly working on with the committee

of Price, Page, Hamer, and others. The one in '45 gave us the authority to establish the general schedules. Do you have any particular thoughts on those Disposal Acts?

BAHMER: The only thing that I remember was when I was at the Navy, this would have been 1942.

BROOKS: Right. Leahy was involved in it.

BAHMER: Yeah, and we were pretty insistent, and I was convinced in my mind then that in order to cure at least some of the perplexing problems of disposal that there had to be a provision for continuing authority, and I remember Leahy and I were at the Budget Bureau with Keddy and others several times on this matter. I think the first drafts of the legislation that had come from the National Archives didn't provide for continuing authority. And we convinced, I think, Keddy and the others that this was necessary. And then by '43 I had come back to the National Archives. Remember Blake was drafted and I came back in December of '42 I think actually. And we had meeting after meeting you know on the language. I remember the definition of records. Do you remember how we went around and around?

BROOKS: I surely do. There's a word, the word "the" in there that I claim is my word. And in the file on that Act among the records of the National Archives there's a folder with all the memoranda. We circulated the drafts among all the Records Divisions and got their comments. I was the staff officer then for handling disposal, and was sort of a clearing point for all this stuff. It was interesting. And I think that definition was significant. It's been picked up by states and institutions all over the country and some all over the world.

BAHMER: It was well worth the time that was spent on hammering it out, because it has stood the test of time. Another thing that Wayne and I did in the Federal Records Act of '50, we got the Archivist's title in there. Because there was always a feeling amongst some of the old guard over GSA that this just didn't fit, "the Archivist of the United States." All the rest of these boys were commissioners of services and they didn't like it, and they couldn't see why we would object to having the title Commissioner. This was something that you couldn't explain to an outsider really. But we just had a feeling that if we'd slip the title Archivist of the United States into the Act it would give us another leg up on retaining his title. So we got it in. I think it was under the provision on transfer. And this was putting also into the hands of the Archivist of the United States rather than the Administrator of GSA the responsibility for the selection of records that came into the National Archives. And we had no flack from Larson on this. Of course he couldn't

have been less interested in what records were selected for preservation. But, oh I suppose if I went over it in detail I could remember a lot of things, and probably recall some things that I wish we had done differently, but on the whole I think the Act and its broad outlines has stood up fairly well-- it's been amended by the Presidential Libraries legislation that came along but that didn't weaken it any.

BROOKS: As I remember Larson's successor was Mansure and he didn't get very close to the problems.

BAHMER: No.

BROOKS: Bernie Boutin really dug in but he was friendly on the whole, wasn't he?

BAHMER: He was friendly in general, yes, and had a high respect, but he was very jealous also of his own position. He wanted to be recognized as the boss, and didn't want the Archivist of the United States to outshine the Administrator of GSA. It's been true with every Administrator, I think, (I don't know about the current one but I would suspect it's true) that they aren't around GSA very long before they recognize that the glamour part, if there is any glamour at all in GSA, comes from the National Archives and Records Service, and that NARS never presented them with a lot of tough interagency problems like PBS with its moving of offices here and there. There are always a million snarls there. Federal Supply with its problems of procurement and the federal stores and all the rest of it. NARS had a very peaceful existence with the agencies, enough so that on at least two occasions when new Administrators came in and got a fairly good grasp of what was going on they sent men over here to interview me particularly, wanting to know why is it that NARS can live so comfortably with all of the rest of the agencies of Government that they serve and help--just what is the genius, what do you do, why is this true? Because they wanted to feel that there was some magic we were performing over here that ought to be known to the rest of the agencies so that they could go and do likewise. Of course I hadn't given this really any thought on a comparison basis until the first time--I've forgotten who it was that came over--and, well, I couldn't, probably didn't get at the fundamentals of the problem to begin but . . . And I couldn't say well in the first place you have to have a staff that knows what it's doing. That wasn't quite kosher. But we did have an advantage that the other agencies didn't, in fact we weren't trying to take anything away from other agencies in any sense. Federal Supply faced the problem of every agency having its procurement office and being very jealous and so on. A few agencies had records programs but they were programs that had been developed generally by somebody from the National Archives Staff or under National Archives guidance. We had the

problem of developing programs in the agencies rather than trying to shape their program to fit a GSA mold. And this was a great advantage because in doing this we supplied much of the staff for the new programs. In doing this we developed a unity of purpose between the agencies and the National Archives rather than acting in such a way that there was a division of interest. Well one could go on and on but every Administrator in the end tried to capitalize on the status and programs of the National Archives because they were in a sense more glamorous than the rest of the GSA activity.

BROOKS: Well, in my own activity in this oral history project, as I told Bert, I was going to limit it to the period up to 1950 or '51 or '52, because after that I was out of Washington and I didn't know the situation that closely. But we did of course meet the various Administrators who came out to visit, or whom I saw in here. I well remember one of Boutin's Saturday sessions that went for hours and hours and he questioned us on everything we did. Elizabeth Drewry and I came in here all prepared with answers to questions, and he got off on the whole business of accessioning personal papers from individuals. He was just fascinated with it. We didn't talk about much of anything else. We had a lot of fun.

BAHMER: Bernie Boutin was the one Administrator who I think really sincerely tried to get into the National Archives and Records Service programs to a point where he began to understand them. Some of them he never did quite grasp and there was always a danger that he oversimplified, that he got so far and then felt that he could understand the whole program. But what are rough for those people to understand are some of the programs of the National Archives like finding aids. You see, this is hard for an outsider who hasn't butted his head against a finding aid program to understand, and it's a costly program. And the more Bernie got into these programs the more he began to question, just why this, why that, why the high cost if we put it on a unit basis. And it used to keep us going to try to keep our statistics in a way that wouldn't raise the terrible questions and show how much it was costing per page to produce finding aids.

BROOKS: Yeah, at one time they wanted to reduce all archives work to one kind of statistical unit.

BAHMER: Oh yeah.

BROOKS: Well to continue just one more entertaining thought on the Administrators, shortly after Kunzig was appointed he made a tour around, and I saw him at a luncheon out in Kansas City. He said that when he took over as Administrator he didn't know that the National Archives was part of GSA. And later on he was right up there capitalizing on the glamour . . .

BAHMER: Oh yes, indeed he was. Probably more than most of them.

BROOKS: Bob, I wanted to ask you two or three things on a sort of topical basis covering this whole period. One, in the beginning it's evident from the Connor papers and from what some other people have told me that people at the Budget Bureau and some of the people on the Hill would ask, "Well what do you want to keep all of those old records for anyway?" Wouldn't you say that there has been a change in that through the years.

BAHMER: Oh, yes.

BROOKS: A pretty drastic change.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: Most people, say by 1950 or so, pretty well accepted the concept.

BAHMER: Yes. There was only an isolated case or two, an instance where anyone questioned the keeping of the basic records of the nation. I think without being snide about it at all, I think Senator Allott of Colorado was one who always bemoaned the fact right up to the end of my time that we had to spend as much money as we did for all this.

BROOKS: I was about to say in the course of discussion some of these topics by problems rather than chronologically that one of the early problems, and it's always been a field of interest, is one you've already mentioned and that's the preparation of finding aids. You must have had some thoughts at various times about how this developed. Buck was a member of the original finding aids committee 1940. Price was chairman of it, but up in the files it looks to me as if Buck wrote most of the memos. Herbert Angel drafted some of them. Buck and Angel and three or four other people and I think there were two representatives of the Records Divisions. That committee existed in the year 1940 and drew up the basic plan for the record group concept, and for the preliminary inventories and so forth, which unless I'm basically mistaken has not been much changed since that time as a basic plan. There was a continuing committee on finding aids beginning in '41 that went on for some years and I'll have to talk to Oliver about that. But you must have come up against this problem a good many times and have some thoughts on it. Price was chairman and Buck was on it. Hamer was on it.

BAHMER: Somehow I had the feeling Phil Hamer was the chairman. But that blueprint I think got us off on the right foot. There were a few ways in which it didn't fit but certainly the record group concept was basic and I think it stood the test of time and experience. I think the preliminary inventories

were again a concept that has stood up. I think they got run into the ground a little bit but this was one of the first problems that appalled me when I came back to the National Archives after the war. There had been this terrifically large volume of records accessioned during the war until we faced, I don't know what it was in statistical terms, but an almost insuperable job of trying to get along with a finding aid program which meant ultimately you'd get full coverage of everything that you had in custody. And two things were happening all during the 50's and 60's. For one, our reference service was increasing, and demanding a larger and larger share of staff time, because the staff remained relatively stable which means you had more and more people in the reference service activity and fewer people to be devoted to the remaining functions. And finding aids being the easiest one, in a sense, to defer generally always came out on the short end of the stick. And a second thing I think was developing, though this may be disputed in part at any rate, but I think that because there was a desire on the part of so many of the staff for some outlet for their research instincts, and since the inventory was about the only place where they could exercise this in any permanent form, more and more time was devoted to the development of the inventories so that they took longer and longer and longer to produce. As the staff became better, more knowledgeable about the records and the provenance of the records there was a tendency to go further and further and further until it looked as if for time as if we were never going to get some of the larger inventories at all, because everybody could always see something else that needed to be done; and we were constantly getting further and further behind in looking at it from a management point of view. Either we had to have an enormous increase of staff devoted to the activity, or we had to do something pretty drastic.

This was the reason for the sudden introduction of a change in the inventories which didn't occur I think until maybe the middle '60's. We finally developed a theory of a descriptive inventory and a title inventory. In other words we approached the inventory problem in two stages: one where you'd simply identify the series without going into a great deal of elaboration, reserving the descriptive full treatment only on a priority basis, for those record groups that were more important. It was brought to a head when we faced the problem of having to move some records out of this building with the new records center coming in Suitland, and the vast volume just having no kind of inventory control at all. I know this jarred the sensibilities of a good number of the staff. They felt it was an abandonment of something pretty important. But I don't think it was. I mean everybody recognizes the importance of the full descriptive inventory, but there was a need for some kind of control by series and volume, and so on. I don't know how it's worked out or how completely it's been followed, but at any rate we got through a good hunk of it before I left in '68. There was a concept I think in the 1941 planning, something of a checklist that never was worked out very well.

BROOKS: I think we began on something like that even before. I noticed in the annual reports for 1939 the statement that the records divisions, or I guess they still called them "custodial divisions," were preparing reports on groups and subgroups included in the stack divisions even before the finding aid pattern had been drawn up. Some of the terms, such as "series" and "group" and all were pretty well adopted before that time.

BAHMER: We had begun to use them. But prior to the Committee report in '41 there was no clear-cut program laid out as to what. Everybody was just sort of fumbling around. Probably this was necessary because there weren't any real experience that you could rely on.

BROOKS: Well, there was a tendency in those years towards decentralization from the front offices to the stacks. That was a part of the reorganization that eliminated the Special Examiners and the Accessions Division, and the Reference Division, and so on and during that period the Records Divisions were insisting on everything being left pretty much up to them. Later the concept of the staff officers came in to control, well I should perhaps not use the word "control," but of having a staff officers who would oversee certain functions and assure a common pattern.

BAHMER: But I've often thought that if one had the leisure time to analyze it, he might find in our National Archives functioning that there is a great deal of almost repetitive activity in this whole area of description. We begin with an appraisal report on records that are coming in which identifies the records at greater or lesser length, depending on circumstances and time and whatnot. And then they're picked up on a registration sheet which pretty much is done from what the fellow can get out of the appraisal reports and a little digging.

BROOKS: For a long time that was about all you had to go on, that registration sheet. That was the only thing.

BAHMER: Yes, that's all we had and even that got into arrears at one time badly. But the registration didn't add a heck of a lot, to the knowledge that had been picked up initially by the archivist who examined the records and reported on their value in terms of transfer. But then you had a long gap between this basic little elementary information until years could go by before you added anything else and I've often thought that if we could've started off with maybe the checklist, I've forgotten how it was defined, maybe if before we went to a descriptive inventory we had some kind of an intermediate step there which gave some kind of control. Now, it's very simple to sit at a desk and talk about these. When you get into the stacks and have to begin to work with the materials there are all sorts of problems that come up. For instance I can remember in the military, particularly, you know that whole raft of

materials that came in hopelessly disorganized from posts, camps, and stations. Well you can't begin really to identify the series or give any kind of control until considerable amount of arrangement work has been done, so you can't say "all right, we'll just put them right through these steps and a hop, skip, and a jump and you've got your control."

BROOKS: I well remember dealing with that one record group of discontinued posts, camps, and stations while I was in charge of the War Records Office.

BAHMER: Yes. Well, I remember in writing, or rewriting, the Annual Report, I've forgotten, it was one of the first ones--that job generally fell to Betty Hamer and me when Betty was still here--getting the Annual Report out. Now I remember adding something to the Annual Report once about how we're going to tackle this finding aid program and get right on with it. And of course nothing changed at all in the next 5 years. There just wasn't any manpower. We seemed always to be faced with the same situation that we're facing today that there had to be an economy move so that to keep things down. I think Bert's done a hell of a swell job in getting increased appropriations for this place. Records Management, we fared pretty well on that because it was new. Actually the National Archives lived off the Records Center budget for a good many years.

BROOKS: That was something GSA could understand better cause it was a tie-in with Federal Supply and Public Buildings.

BAHMER: Yeah.

BROOKS: We felt this in the Regions very much.

BAHMER: And there was always enough money. You see you begin to talk in terms of several million dollars, and it was always possible to pull off a few to take care of some of the more pressing needs within the National Archives. But we drew on National Archives staff an awful lot, and the 50's was one terrible period in which to recruit staff. It was a time when the academic world was absorbing everybody that came along with an ounce of ability and it was very, very difficult for us to pick up young people, good people, with a solid background in graduate work. It's much easier today. The academic profession is absorbing very few of the graduates . . .

BROOKS: Right. That's always affected this place a good deal--our competitive position with the academic world.

BAHMER: And for a time Government salaries were lower. The salary scale now in Government is excellent. Gee, when I, just in the four years that I've been away, when I look at what a grade 11 or 12 or 13 is, it's almost unbelievable.

BROOKS: Bob, I said that I felt the finding aid program was very important in relations with the scholars. There's another perennial field of activity that is involved directly with the image, of the National Archives in the scholarly world which is something that Government people have not always understood. That's our whole concept of reference service. Now, quite early in the game, it seems to me, the main elements that went into the Archivist's Code that Grover worked out such as objectivity in reference service, not making interpretations but simply presenting what the records show, our giving prompt reference service and fair, to anybody for any purpose, were adopted fairly early. Do you think those things came from the precedent of other archives, or from individual experience? There wasn't much of that. Or how did we arrive at those things?

BAHMER: Oh yes. If you were to have asked me in a different way I'd have probably said well, they were practically all there right at the beginning. I think a part of it was the fact that it's just plain common sense in terms of an archivist's job. And I think most of the people of your generation and mine, having probably at one time looked toward an academic career, doing something by way of scholarship in the historical field, simply assumed that's the way it ought to be.

I don't think, for instance, that it came from any appreciation of what practice was in other institutions. I think leadership had something to do with it. I think Buck was probably responsible for some of it.

BROOKS: What I've talked about with other people, and what records I've looked at, lead me to the conclusion even more that I would have thought before, that Buck exercised a good deal more leadership in the early days than Hyde or Price or a lot of other people.

BAHMER: Oh yes. In terms of the basic qualities of the archival profession I think Buck had an enormous influence, much more than many of his detractors would like to admit. I don't think you can fault Buck when it comes to the aspects of scholarship in archives at all. I think he was right practically all of the time. He just didn't make friends and influence people when he acted. I always had a great respect for Buck as a professional man. I think he knew. Certainly there was no background of thought and study and comparison in Wayne's mind when he set the tone in his development of the Code and so on. I mean this was just implicit in the situation that this is the way it should be.

BROOKS: Wayne didn't sign that Code and I remember I wanted to refer to it in an article. I was going to say "Wayne C. Grover, The Archivist's Code," and so forth. You couldn't really do that. He talked with Karl Trever about it and got Karl to draw up a draft, but it was mainly Wayne's work.

BAHMER: Yes, Wayne spent a great deal of time on the wording of that. I think he had in mind, Phil, that, as I remember that period, he was to give a talk at the Archivists' meeting when we were at Williamsburg in 1954. In the end he abandoned that and all that was left of the effort was the Code. I'm not a hundred percent sure of that but from remarks that he made during that time this was going to be part of his presentation at one of the annual meetings.

BROOKS: How about our relationship with the scholarly world? When we began the scholars didn't quite know what to make of us. Roy Nichols of Pennsylvania gave a paper on "Alice in Wonderland." The scholars wondering what in the world they were going to do with all this mass of records, and what the archivists were going to do with it. And I think through the years we developed a good deal of respect as Archivists. But one prominent editor outside the Archives, who had always known the institution and who often came here in the very early days of the publication of papers of individuals, told me early in the 60's, at a dinner in Kansas City, that the National Archives reference service didn't have the character to it that it had had eight or ten years before. And I'm not sure but what a good many of the people in the scholarly world had the opinion that somehow there was less personal attention, maybe that a good many of the staff were less well trained themselves as researchers, and therefore didn't understand the researchers' problems so well. And I know you were concerned at one stage, much later than what I'm really dealing with, about the concept a lot of the scholarly world had that the archivist was a sort of second class citizen.

BAHMER: Yes. This was a point that bothered me greatly. And I think there was some truth to a slippage there. For one thing we'd absorbed an enormous volume of records that just took considerable time to be digested. The staff hadn't improved any in quality, I hesitate to use any denigrating statement, but I don't think there was the same caliber, let us say, during the 50's that there was earlier when you had a smaller staff and smaller holdings, and on the whole a better qualified staff. Damn it, there were a considerable number of very able people that went to work here during the 30's when the staff was assembled. When you had their abilities applied to the whole problem of reference, including meeting with the researcher and understanding his problems, and setting him right and guiding him to the right records, you got a pretty high quality.

BROOKS: We had 30 or 40 Ph.D's. Half of them weren't much good because they couldn't learn administration or the Government, but that varied with different people.

BAHMER: But they were some pretty damned capable people when it came to meeting other scholars. But when the problem of reference became large enough that these older hands, many of whom had moved off to higher positions where they didn't get into this kind of contact, you turned it over to lesser people. And given the problem we had in recruitment, you know, we just didn't get the cream of the crop by a damn sight during the 50's, so that there was undoubtedly some slippage. Now we did have certain individuals who were competent, and gained by experience, like Jane Smith and others who are still on the job. But even Jane couldn't begin to take care of everybody, so this had to be turned over always to somebody lesser in stature and ability. I would hope this is being corrected. I'm sure it is. I mean I'm sure that the recruitment in the last five years has improved, or at least gives the potential.

But I think there was another aspect of this problem of relationship with the scholarly world. I think we sort of turned our eyes inward as archivists on our own profession, and probably rightly so because we had to hammer out whatever principles there are or standards or procedures in the archivists' profession. This meant we paid little attention to our external relations except when somebody came in and had to be taken care of. I think there was a drawing away from the historians and I think we sort of elbowed the librarians out because we didn't feel librarians, you know, were quite up to snuff either in many respects.

BROOKS: There was a little professional jealousy in that, as I remember from the early days of the Society of American Archivists.

BAHMER: I always felt there was a drawing apart from the academicians particularly. I remember I tried to interest Wayne once shortly after we came back, and I think he asked me essentially the same question you've asked here. What are the things we ought to do in the National Archives that will increase our stature and make things better? And I said one of the things, Wayne, that I would do if I were in your spot would be to set up an advisory committee of primarily historians, but others. It was just my instinct and this was probably about '50 or '51 along in there, maybe or even earlier. My instinct was that we were simply not getting the support of the academic profession in all of the things that we wanted to do. And I felt that way right on down to the end when one of the last things I'd got Knott to approve was the establishment of the present Advisory Council. Wayne was leary of it. He didn't think much of advisory committees, he pointed to the early committee, that was intergovernmental, that hadn't ever amounted to a hill of beans. But my feeling was that we needed something that gave us an avenue into the, particularly the historical profession. More completely than we had. Wayne wouldn't go along with that and I think some of our problems would have been

eased considerably had we had a good active bunch. I think this present National Archives Advisory Council is well worth the effort and the men seem to be interested; there are probably a few who aren't, but the ones who are serving are genuinely interested, and becoming more and more familiar with what the whole thing is about, and I think have a great deal more respect. And this acts sort of like yeast that begins to grow. You get a dozen people in political science and history who are really interested in and knowledgeable about the National Archives and that's going to spread to colleagues all over the place.

BROOKS: I've always thought that the Truman Library Institute served somewhat this purpose . . .

BAHMER: Yeah, sure.

BROOKS: . . . and Wayne was one of the main organizers of that. It was one of the things I most enjoyed.

BAHMER: It has been the pioneer--extremely successful.

BROOKS: Now we talked about the difficulties over various periods in recruitment, part of which I think arise, with all due respect, from the Civil Service system. It's been difficult to describe the work of archivists in order to fit the Civil Service classifications. In 1951 or '52 I was on a committee along with Paul Lewinson, working on job classification standards for archivists, and it was just hell to work on them. Well, given the problem in recruitment and the varying situation in regard to the academic world, and so forth, one of the big things we've always had to contend with is the matter of training after the people got on the job. Either what I call "education" in what archives are and what they have been, or actual training on the job with the work to be done. How do you think that has gone and how well do you think it's been done?

BAHMER: Well, I think it's in much better condition today than it was say in 1950 by a long shot. We talked and talked for I don't know how many years about the need for some kind of training course for new employees and made a stab at an assignment, (I've forgotten to whom I know Ted Schellenberg had a hand in it one time), of what such a course should be and how was it going to be given and all of this. And never anything came out of it. Year after year went by and I finally got mad one time about it, and I finally went down and took a pad and told Schellenberg, I said, "Ted we're going to have a training course of some kind, I don't give a damn what it is, but we're going to start." And I said "now how many sessions should we have during the year?" And we decided on a number and I put the number down. I said, "now I'm gonna fill

in these, something for each one of these and that's the way it's going to start off." And we had a session on, you know, the background, the history, and so on, and then had various members of the staff come in and do their part of it, whatever seemed to be right. Well that's the way the training started. And Schellenberg, whose area it was, took it over and the next year it was quite a different thing, and finally has evolved over the years to the point where it is today. I think Frank Evans gives it today and it probably parallels in considerable part the kind of course that he gives at the American U. When Schellenberg left we had the problem of who was going to pick this up. He'd been handling the burden more and more himself, and I don't think in the end he was doing quite the job that needed to be done. Ted was a little authoritarian in his approach to things, and he used to jar these young people that came in by sort of laying down dicta that this, and this, and this or that had to be done, the way it's to be done, and that's it. And I've never felt, that the educational process ought to be something but run by fiat anyhow. But I remember Ernst telling me that one of the very bright young fellows that was pretty darn good in this matter of training was a young fellow up in Pennsylvania. So we deliberately hired Frank Evans, in 1963. He had no status, he had no position on the lists of Civil Service or so on, but Walt always knew how you could handle it. So we had some money from the Ford people for that film job that we took over so I hired him during the summer just on a contract, on that Ford money. Frank you know tends to not want to gamble too much on what the future is. He was very reluctant to take it not knowing, you know, in three months what the hell would happen. But I assured him, and I don't know what Walt did in the end, but he got status and has taken over the work unless they've changed it in the meantime, and I'm sure they haven't. But another thing that we did that I think was very important in terms of the training program in a sense was that we got the Civil Service to agree that the, that I think initially the grade five was a trainee grade and automatically if you were acceptable you would go right up to a seven. So that the seven became the basic grade. I think that is probably now seven to nine rather than five to seven. Phil Bauer did a whale of a good job in developing the set of standards that finally came out. He didn't do all of the work individually, but he sort of masterminded the thing. We picked up, you and Paul Lewinson's, that lay there and sort of developed a whole philosophy of training and development of archivists. I added one thing to it that I hope survives and that is the, a ladder for the advancement of professional archivists without their having to be transferred to the administrative management field.

BROOKS: Well that's another thing that always was a problem. The recognition of special competences and knowledges by giving people a better grade without making them supervise somebody. Because some of them just weren't cut out to be supervisors.

BAHMER: And we wasted a helluva lot of good talent, I think, by trying. You had to reward a man for his work and how could you do it, only by making him a branch chief or something up the line. And I think that if we could--as far as I'm concerned I would be perfectly willing to see an advancement to what we at that time called senior archives specialists, the kind of position that Irvine and Friis have, and have that be just as high as the corresponding management level. If it's grade 15, put him up to a 15 or 14 or whatever it happens to be, so that there's some incentive for him to improve, in his scholarly professional archivist ability rather than always having to look forward to moving into the management administrative end.

BROOKS: Yeah, I think that Friis' job is a good example of that and he has brought more professional respect to the Archives than almost anybody else in a given field. Bob, you were talking about training primarily as in-house training of the staff. We had for years before that what I sometimes call the education of archivists as against the training in, courses dealt with the background of Archives and development of functions and so forth. Particularly the divisional seminars. You perhaps remember in 1938, '39, and so forth, I remember Wayne Grover at that time talking about the great respect about Irvine and the seminars in War Records. I went up there once or twice.

BAHMER: I think that was probably one of the stellar things that Irvine did because he had a number of people there like Wayne and Elbert Huber and some others that really profited immensely by that, and it is a kind of thing that if we could do it today would be probably very profitable for all members of the staff. But it takes somebody up on top who has a full grasp of his field in the history of this particular area of activity, plus the records and problems that are involved. Now this takes experience for one thing and a fundamental education in that field. I've always felt, and I think probably to a certain extent it's possible today with an eased market, that it's kind of foolish to hire somebody with a Ph.D in diplomatic history and get him into the National Archives, and before he knows it because he is going to be promoted from one grade to another he rounds up over in Agriculture or Commerce or someplace you had to move him. You couldn't limit him to the narrow area. But I think that what we are doing, what we started to do at any rate, and I think it's continued for particular fields. I think young Gustafson in diplomatic archives, was selected because he had training in that field. Historical training and good graduate study.

BROOKS: He knew something about the Archives because he had done most of the research for his doctorate at our Truman Library. Well, you had a similar thing like that in Agriculture?

BAHMER: Yeah, it was much more limited because we had a very small staff. There were Darter and I and Schellenberg.

BROOKS: And then in the fall of '39, you remember, the Buck-Posner class started at American University but meeting here. And Posner did most of it, and did for twelve or fifteen years after that, I guess. And the internal training course has been very closely meshed with that, as you say. I think Frank Evans is doing both of them now.

BAHMER: And I think probably they are very parallel though I would hope Frank would bring it down to specifics in terms of the National Archives, its holdings and its problems.

BROOKS: Yeah. Because it's very hard to apply that more general training directly to the Civil Service system of promotion.

BAHMER: Yeah.

BROOKS: Now I remember at various times in the history of this place there's been talk about staff morale. I think it was one time early in . . . Okay, I was saying that Irvine said once that staff morale was like a woman's virtue, if she had to talk about it it was already lost. But this has been talked about at various times through the history of the institution. People particularly in the records divisions have felt that they didn't get adequate recognition and adequate opportunity. It may be that the physical condition of the building in recent years has something to do with it. But would you say this has always been a problem or is this something, a new development, or what?

BAHMER: Well, I think morale has been a problem almost continuously. I can't imagine any generation being more frustrated and having in a sense poor morale than our own back when we were struggling with Mr. Hyde and Mr. Harris on the problems here. But it was never a morale that, you know, said the hell with the National Archives. It was the frustration not being able to get on with the job. I think the morale problem that existed here in, sometimes in fairly acute form during the 1950's was engendered by a number of things, primarily of the slowness of promotions. We had no philosophy or program established then for promoting archivists as they became more competent as a result of experience or further education or anything. They had to wait until somebody in a grade higher than their's resigned, retired, or died or somehow opened up that spot. And movement was very slow. It was very slow because all of the people who came into the National Archives at our time, Phil, moved up into those better paying spots, and were often of the same age group as the ones that were directly below them and they

weren't about to move out. The first ones that went, you know, were Thad Page and Marcus Price. It's taken about a decade to clean most of us out and there are just one or two left around. Well this damned up things. There was no fluidity of staff, no movement upward. I think if we could have gotten on earlier to the concept of moving the archivists up, that the journeyman grade's going to be this and the senior grade's going to be that, and you get it by your mark of excellence in your work. It was money. We didn't have money to create all of the jobs that the institution could rightly claim, and grades were low. We had the unfortunate experience, as you know, having an individual with the Civil Service Commission who rode herd on our grade structure who was very unsympathetic to the National Archives, never felt that an archivist was doing anything more than any agency file clerk. Our grade structure was always low. I remember we fought the battle for our branch chiefs who were at the time I'm speaking of, grade eleven's--and I remember that it took us two solid years of intense pressure, and we had the support of GSA on this, to finally get an approval for a grade twelve. Well that meant that branch chiefs, and I'm speaking of fellows like Fishbein and Holverstott and a number of others of that group had been dammed up there at eleven for God knows how many years. Well there wasn't anyplace that they could go except to a division chief spot and they couldn't get up there until that division chief got out. But we finally got them a twelve. Well then they got into a twelve grade and it was the same cockeyed thing again. We had too many branch chiefs for one thing, I think. They got so that they devoted practically all their time to the routines in paper shuffling, of administration when most of them would have been better off just operating as good professional archivists. But the situation was so bad that I almost dreaded to see a vacancy come up. You'd think, well God now we'll get a chance to promote somebody, but the minute that vacancy occurred there were 10 people who wanted it and often it was, you know, comme ci, comme ca. There were perhaps five people who were really pretty good and were able and so on and only one of them is going to get it. And I can remember a time when we finally made a selection, that there was a very brilliant young fellow who was in Military Archives, who just up and quit because he felt he should have gotten the job rather than, I've forgotten who we put into it finally. This immobility, this lack of promotion of staff or recognition of their increased ability--after all if a man's been around for 10 years and been doing a good job and increasing his knowledge and comprehension of the work--if he can't be promoted he's bound to get just a little bit uneasy unless he's way up at the top and knows there's no other place he can go. So there was a real serious morale problem. I think it was tapering off, that is I think there was less dissatisfaction toward the end, at least of my period, than there was in the 50's there. I was quite concerned about the morale of people that you didn't feel normally would be discontented. I'm thinking of people like Mrs. Holdcamper. I remember how badly she felt because one time a promotion

was made and she felt she should have had it, and well, we could have given it to her and the other person would have felt just as badly about it. But as far as I'm concerned there was no conscious discrimination in terms of promotions or recognition.

BROOKS: Oh, I don't think I've ever heard it alleged that there was, but I have heard that several people were unhappy.

BAHMER: Oh, I suspect that you could even find instances, and I'm sure that we brought Bert Rhoads along much faster than anybody else. And for a helluva good reason. At least up to a certain point, he moved very rapidly, and I don't have any problem with that. And we were distressed at times with a lot of folderol that the Budget Bureau and GSA put in when they were trying to develop new concepts of budgeting and work measurement and management, and we went through some rough times in that area. I have infrequent contact now with the staff, but the contact that I do have makes me feel that there's less of this distress now than there was before. I just don't know whether that's true.

BROOKS: What I've heard about in recent years, I think, it's at a generally lower level than what we're talking about, and I know very little about it.

BAHMER: Well, we never did even though we had plans, we never did in my time develop a full range of job classifications for the non-professional staff. What do we call them, archives technicians now? We used to call them sub-professionals which was a bad term to use. Then we called them archives assistants.

BROOKS: Sometimes the sub-professionals were better than the professionals. That was true of Sarah Jackson.

BAHMER: Yes. And Pat Dowling was another one. Well, I think we took the term archives technician partly because it didn't carry the burden of being an understudy to somebody else.

Third interview, May 8, 1973:

BROOKS: Bob, one thing that has impressed me is that although at the time and shortly after, some people were very critical of Dr. Connor as the first Archivist, and now almost everybody agreed that he was a good one. Would you want to--this is one thing I noticed had not been covered in our first interview--would you want to say something about that?

BAHMER: Yes, I'd be glad to comment on that, Phil. I always had the highest regard for Connor, almost stood in awe of him in terms of scholarship and his qualifications for the job. I think he was a superb man, and had he had better backup in terms of a professional man, in place of Mr. Hyde and a good administrative officer in place of Mr. Harris, I think he would have been much more satisfied with his job, and probably would have stuck around. But that's pure guess work on my part. I'm sure that Connor was impatient with the amount of administrative detail that he had to handle and this probably was more particularly true because he was the first Archivist, when everything had to be organized from the ground up--procedures, staffing, and programming, and everything else. So that he was probably bothered more with the administrative side of it than later archivists who have come along and taken over a going organization. But I don't know of anyone really, in my time, during Dr. Connor's time, who spoke ill of him. I think he was a fine man. We always had the greatest respect for him.

BROOKS: I wonder if you'd agree that he had a good deal to do with the fact that there seemed and seems to be a good deal of his esprit de corps around here in the early days. Everybody was devoted to the objectives of the Archives, and you really didn't seem to have these problems of morale that people speak about in recent decades.

BAHMER: Well that's in large part, I think, due to Dr. Connor's leadership. The times he spoke to us, the senior staff at any rate, he impressed us with his desire to make this a really good professional organization. That is I suspect why all of us came here, because we thought we were going to get our teeth into a good professional job. And Connor's objectives in this respect were exactly those--the same as ours.

BROOKS: Bob, in reviewing the transcript of our first two interviews I noticed that at the end of the second interview, after discussing the establishment of the War Department Records Program, which you had worked with Grover on, you talked about the establishment of the centers at Savannah, and moving the personnel records to . . .

BAHMER: High Point, North Carolina.

BROOKS: High Point, and then to the center on Goodfellow Boulevard in St. Louis. Is there anything you want to say to wind up that story?

BAHMER: No, only that from the beginning it was hoped that sometime this huge complex of records activity in the Army could be properly housed in buildings or a building constructed for the purpose. We actually tried, Wayne and I, during the war. We drew up plans and got estimates for a building for War Department records. Of course it didn't get to first base because of all the commitments for construction in the military area. But those plans kept perkin' along and after Wayne and I had both left the Adjutant General's office and come back to the National Archives, they finally bore fruit. And under Ollon McCool's leadership, with the backing of the Adjutant General, and other staff men in what became the Defense Department, they finally appropriated funds and built the beautiful building that now GSA has, National Archives and Records Service has, on Page Boulevard where it is located, and moved all of the personnel records into it.

Before that time--before the building was completed--we had been in discussion with McCool and others about the ultimate future of that whole records center activity. I think it was pretty much agreed that in the end it would all be turned over to the National Archives for operation. The first unit that was transferred was the Civilian Personnel. I think not all of the Government agencies had gone on to the program of centralizing the records of their separated personnel. Army had, I think Navy had, I'm not sure. You're probably much better acquainted with that situation than I. But at any rate I think it was through working with the Civil Service Commission and others, that it was decided that this centralization of the files of separated personnel, civilian personnel, was a good thing. Once we put that into effect, of course, the existence of the Army civilian personnel records center was a big element and McCool was quite willing to let us take it over and add to it the records of the other agencies. So that we moved the civilian personnel out of the Goodfellow Boulevard area, one of the buildings that they occupied, and went down town into I think what was known as the Butler Building, and set up an operation there on several--oh gosh, it was a big building--several floors. And we were there until we got appropriated money to build a civilian personnel records center down on the old Marine hospital base near the river in St. Louis, and that's how you come to have two buildings in St. Louis. One for military personnel--separated military personnel, the other for separated civilian. Now when the military personnel records were moved to Page Boulevard, to the new building, this left the one big unit--the Organization Records Branch that

had been at Savannah and then moved to St. Louis. And that was moved to Kansas City and operated in an old warehouse building, I can't remember the name of that building.

BROOKS: It's always referred to as the "records center" and has been for years.

BAHMER: I do remember. They first went into the warehouse that the mail order firm Bellas Hess had.

BROOKS: Oh yes, I think it's the same building.

BAHMER: I think it probably is. At any rate, that accounted for the records that had been moved from the several locations to the Goodfellow Boulevard complex.

BROOKS: You spoke about the centralization of civilian personnel records of other agencies. In the late 40's I represented the Archives meeting with the Committee of the Council of Personnel Administration, which was responsible both for the "travelling personnel folder" as it was known, and also for the concept of centralization of civilian personnel records. I well remember a military officer from Omaha coming down and talking about the example of Army civilian personnel records, and how they were centralized. The Army and the Air Force which was in the war of course, parts of the Army, I think led the way in that. And I think this whole business about the centers is a vitally important part of the history of the Archives because, in the first place, the Army and the Navy were obliged to be the path finders in this field because they were the ones that had the big accumulations of records during the war. Secondly, because GSA, in NARS, eventually took over all these things. That gets up into the period of '49 and '50, the time the GSA centers were set up.

I wonder if we could switch over to a different topic. I took the liberty of looking at the personnel record card downstairs to see what positions different people have held, and I noticed that on July 1, 1949, which was about a year after you came back to the Archives from the War Department, you were shifted to an excepted appointment. I suppose the Archivist had always had an excepted appointment. Was there anything especially significant in that?

BAHMER: No, I'd actually forgotten that, Phil. I knew that at some time along I had been converted, and I think it was entirely on the basis of getting a grade raise for the position. I don't remember what the grades were at that time, whether we were still operating on the old P grades or whether

we'd gone into the present system. But at any rate, Wayne was insistent that the job should hold a higher grade than it did. We negotiated with the Civil Service Commission back and forth, and I suspect that this was part of the means of accomplishing that increase in grade.

BROOKS: Well, this was just about the time GSA was established, and I suppose the negotiation was independent of GSA. But, after that date the Archivist became an appointee of the Administrator of GSA rather than of the President directly. You said in the second interview, the relations of you and Wayne with GSA were on the whole, good during the first few years of GSA. How much real danger was there to the Archivist's job at the time of the change of administrations in 1953 and how much was done about it? I was out in California. I remember, vaguely, some correspondence about this.

BAHMER: Well we were very concerned here in the National Archives about the possibility of there being a change. Wayne very frankly felt that it might be in the cards. In the first place he was the son-in-law of Senator Thomas, which gave him something of a political tag, and had been appointed by Truman. So he felt there was a considerable likelihood of somebody wanting to make a change. Rumors spread that a number of people were interested in the job and had strong support. A Senator from Illinois--Dirksen, Senator Everett Dirksen . . .

BROOKS: He'd been interested in the Archives ever since it was set up. Thad Page brought that up.

BAHMER: He had, at least according to the rumors, said that he was going to see that a change would take place in the position of the Archivist. All in all we, as I've said, were disturbed enough so that we took action. Whether properly or not, I don't know, but we got in touch with the academic folks throughout the Nation and produced a real genuine storm of letters in support of Wayne, that came into the White House and to the Administrator's office in GSA.

BROOKS: That's the occasion on which I heard about it. I was brought in on that.

BAHMER: Our friend who edited the Territorial Papers, Dr. Carter, was probably more instrumental in stirring up this kind of support than anyone of the rest of us, because he had such a wide acquaintanceship with everybody in almost every important institution.

BROOKS: And they all admired him, I think.

BAHMER: Yes they did, they all had a great admiration and respect for Dr. Carter. And many of his former colleagues had gone on to presidencies of universities and other high positions in academic life, and it didn't take any time at all for Dr. Carter to get wheels in motion. The new Administrator that came in, appointed by President Eisenhower, Mr. Mansure, admitted to Wayne, he said, "I've never seen such a wealth of support from the entire academic community in my life." Of course he wasn't too well acquainted with academic life.

BROOKS: That's an understatement.

BAHMER: Yes. It impressed him and I think did some good, I think it did some good. Now there may have been other forces working, I don't know. Milton Eisenhower was in the picture you remember, with our friend who was Librarian of Congress, Luther Evans. Well, he didn't stay as Librarian, he was jockeyed into being Director of UNESCO, and I think largely because of Milton Eisenhower's interests. And Evans was aware of our problem here, and there may have been conversations, and so on, about the job and the professional nature of it. The fact that it had better not be put into the political line.

BROOKS: Evans supported Grover?

BAHMER: Oh yes.

BROOKS: And Milton Eisenhower didn't?

BAHMER: Well I don't know, you see I'm just guessing. Well at any rate it didn't take long after Mr. Mansure came in until he called Wayne over and talked with him and said, "Well I think the only thing to do is to keep you on the job." And that relieved us mightily because we hadn't been back here too many years. It was a very considerable relief that Mr. Mansure made that decision.

BROOKS: Bob, I've been told in this series of oral history interviews that there was some internal activity, within the Archives, supporting the idea of a change in the Archivist's job. Do you think that's true?

BAHMER: Well my suspicions are that it was true. I couldn't prove it, but I think our friend Dallas Irvine, who was close to Dirksen in a way, (I think his wife worked in Dirksen's office) was giving Dirksen all the ammunition he could to get him to move for a change here. Dallas was unhappy. He was unhappy with Wayne because he felt that Wayne was ungrateful, because Dallas had done a lot for Wayne in bringing him along in the early days.

BROOKS: Wayne said that to me.

BAHMER: And Wayne appreciated that, but he was a tough enough administrator and he just didn't feel that Irvine was doing the kind of a job that he ought to be doing. He at this time was up in Photographic Archives and there was constant bickering and fomenting of difficulties in one way or another. And Wayne finally decided that he was just going to have to take some action. He had hoped that Irvine would come back and take over War records, and be happy, and get back to where he was a specialist, and where his knowledge of the field was tops. But when he called Irvine in, Irvine was just literally broken up, he couldn't function if he were moved back there. His mind was dead set against it, any association with War records. Wayne just hung tight and said, "Well, you're just going to have to get used to it, because that's where you're going." Oh he--Irvine threatened to resign and all sorts of things and Wayne just held tough. Well this, of course, disturbed Irvine greatly and it happened just at this particular time, in terms of the election in '52, and the change of administration in '53. I suspect a part of what led Irvine to action, if he did act, was this rankling in his soul about Wayne's having moved him.

BROOKS: I was also told that Schellenberg was active in that.

BAHMER: He might have been. Ted was very unhappy for reasons that I've never been able to fathom because in my opinion we gave Ted Schellenberg more of a break than anybody else associated with this institution would have given him. He again was a prima donna who tended to sulk if he didn't get his way, and could kick up an awful lot of fuss and trouble. When he came back, I think he was at OPA during and after the war, and when he had finished up his job there he came back, sometime after Wayne became Archivist, and the question in our mind was what should we do. We fully realized what kind of a problem Ted could be. In the end, we both judged that Ted had a considerable amount of ability, a great deal of energy, and that we would be able to control him, to keep him on the track that we wanted the institution to go. So instead of putting him into a job operating a records division or records office, we brought him in as a staff man. I thought he was very happy and I think he was for a considerable time. When we set up the new organization, which included the Records Management office, and the National Archives as an operating entity with the head of it in a par with the head of Records Management, we put Schellenberg in charge of that. There was one little difference, however, in their titles, and I think this disturbed Schellenberg and ate at his soul over the years. He was called Director of Archival Management which I think implied rightly that Wayne didn't want him to have full authority over the archivists who were heads of the records divisions, because there was a great deal of animosity to put it very bluntly, between Schellenberg and some of the chiefs of the records offices or divisions, I don't remember what they were called at that time.

BROOKS: I think they were offices. You perhaps know that in 1950, shortly after this change, I came back from NSRB, you had something to do with that, and Wayne said to me, "Can you get along with Schellenberg?" And I said, "Well, if that's part of the job, I will." I think I probably got along better with him than most other chief archivists, though I really didn't like the idea.

BAHMER: Yes. But you know the relationship between Schellenberg and Irvine. It was always on a fairly friendly basis, but it didn't take more than a drop of a hat to set those two men at each other's throats. Paul Lewinson, for whom I have the greatest regard, Paul just couldn't abide Schellenberg. Now the others, Marcus Price, Page, and so on, were much more willing to go along and accept the situation as it was, but this title bothered Schellenberg. I knew he resented it and it kept clawing on him all the time. I remember particularly after he came back from Australia, where he went on a Fulbright--I've forgotten what year it was, do you remember when it was, early in the '50's or along in there?

BROOKS: It was early in the '50's, I don't remember exactly.

BAHMER: He got that job only because--well they wanted Wayne first, and Wayne of course couldn't accept it, and Wayne tried to talk me into accepting the thing. And gosh, with the family, you know kids in school, and all this, it just looked insuperable to me. So we decided, let's give Schellenberg a chance and he took it, and I think he did a fair job. But when he produced his book out of that experience, he had to put his title in you see as Director of Archival Management, and this just burned him up. He sat in my office one day for two hours arguing that he ought to be allowed to put himself down as Director of the National Archives. Because I think he'd been representing himself to our colleagues in Europe and elsewhere as that. When we refused to let him do that he just was wrathful, just absolutely wrathful, and became much more and more impossible to deal with. Though on the whole I could handle him pretty well, better than Wayne. Wayne would lose his temper with Ted, but I had had so long an association with Schellenberg, that I knew pretty well how to handle him. Then the final blow was, of course, when we took him out of that job and put him in as head of the Office of Records Appraisal, which gets along a little further than you're interested in here.

BROOKS: Well, as I told you, I think, Bert asked me to let anybody talk for the later years if he wanted to, or would.

BAHMER: And Ted left here with a very bad feeling in his soul about them and about us. I mean them--the staff of the National Archives. I think he had felt that his efforts weren't appreciated, but we appreciated what was good and we didn't appreciate what was not good.

BROOKS: I was close enough to know that and to feel really bothered that Ted was, I thought, unappreciative to you and Wayne. Phil Bauer talked to me on tape quite candidly about all this the other day.

Well, I wonder what you would say about the next topic that occurred to me, which has become in recent years, much more of a problem and much more of a big topic than it was before. That is the old problem of security classified and agency restricted records. Would my appraisal be correct that when the National Archives Act was put into effect, and for 15 years after that, we pretty much had to take the designation of the agency heads as to whether records were closed or not, until the Federal Records Act changed this to require that the Archivist had a chance to say something about it. In the meantime the security classified records really became a problem with World War II and after World War II, and in 1951 when Executive Order 10290 went into effect, there was it seemed at least some recognition of the need for getting stuff out of the security classification. But when I was in NSRB in 1948 I drafted a security records manual, and I think even in 1950 when I came back here in charge of War Records Office that the emphasis was pretty largely on protecting and keeping the classified stuff locked up. The big push for opening it up didn't come until some years later. Do you think that's a correct analysis and when did it become a problem, and why?

BAHMER: It's hard for me, thinking of that problem, to disassociate myself from our experience in the War Department. I got personally very involved in it right after the war when General Eisenhower came back and was made Chief of Staff. He had written his book, Crusade in Europe, and of course had spoken of things and events and actions, the story of which was all tied up in classified records. The reporters and the writers descended on the War Department in a great big way, demanding that--well if General Eisenhower can write about these things, why can't we write about them? And Ike, in all fairness, took their demands seriously.

BROOKS: He issued an order.

BAHMER: Yes, he did. And before he issued the order he set up a committee headed by G-2, Intelligence in the Army staff. Among others who were appointed to the committee was The Adjutant General, and I was The Adjutant General's alter ego on that committee because he figured we knew more about the problem than he did personally. So I went with Witsell to

all these meetings. Ike only participated in one or two of them, but he set the thing off. And he said he wanted a procedure set up that would protect what needed to be protected, but would permit the writers and the newspaper men access to the material that they should be entitled to, and it was about that broad. He also emphasized that things that were classified at one time didn't have to be classified forever. They could be declassified and something had to be done to bring this off. So this committee worked for a good many weeks going through all the possibilities. Navy was in on the activity too. I have a feeling this was before the Defense Department was set up, but I may be wrong.

BROOKS: The Defense Department was set up by the Unification Act in the fall of '47.

BAHMER: I think this was before then. At any rate, out of this years later came an amendment to 10501 in the end that said the head of an agency could permit under proper safeguards, and so on, access to classified records by nonmilitary or non-government personnel. A situation that never was wholly satisfactory. It was carried on even to the end of my day, and caused more problems than it solved, certainly. But for a time, with a considerable number of Army personnel on the scene, The Adjutant General set up an enormous declassification activity, and went through a considerable amount of fairly high-class material. It didn't make a dent in the problem of the volume of this material, because we were all under an injunction, you know, that in a sense was "when in doubt, classify." No one in his right mind wanted to be court-martialed or cashiered for having been too loose in classification, and everybody classified everything of importance. And we classified a lot of things that basically didn't deserve classification. Whenever we were planning a move, for instance, of records from High Point to St. Louis, even that late, this was confidential. Maybe there was some reason for it not being broadcast immediately, but it certainly had no necessary relationship to security. The rules were much looser at that time on classification, and things we would tend to say had some reason for having administrative privacy would get a confidential or restricted classification. In other words, there was a layer of administrative privacy in the classification of records, in addition to national security. They tried to get all of this out in the later executive orders on the subject. Well, this started me off on this whole business of classification, and I never fully got away from it at any time from that point on. All of the various crises that we had, such as the one concerning the Morgenthau diary, which was subpoenaed at one time by the Senate Committee, and was full of classified material. And I personally had to go through practically every page of that diary, and I personally declassified one whole devil of a lot of material that was administratively

restricted at the time, probably rightly, but which no longer after the passage of the years, deserved to be kept classified. But the trouble was they all had these stamps on them and you couldn't ignore these stamps, or you shouldn't ignore them in a well-ordered security system. Probably one of the biggest mistakes I ever made here came about entirely by accident in this field. I happened to be walking down the main corridor one day when Carl Lokke came out of the stacks and was walking along, and he had a paper in his hand, and I said, "What are you doing, Carl?" He said, "I'm taking this record down to get it reproduced as a man wants it immediately, so I'm going down to take care of it." I looked at it, it had a big stamp SECRET on the top of it. My being quite indoctrinated in the Army system, I said, "Well, gee, you got to get rid of that stamp don't you, before you reproduce it." "Oh no," he said, "we don't have to worry about that stamp." I said, "Well gosh, I don't know, maybe State Department's different than Army, but we wouldn't dare reproduce for public dissemination a document that still had the stamp on it. It's supposed to be declassified." "Gosh," he said, "I'll check up on it." Well we checked up on it and the State Department, much to our horror, when they investigated the whole thing, finally identified a half a dozen kinds of materials in the State Department files which they put a restriction on, which for all the years that the records had been here had been used freely with no problems whatsoever. We rounded up losing a couple of steps, going a couple of steps backward.

BROOKS: I always thought the State Department confused the issue, because they didn't make a clear distinction between security classification, defense classification, and State Department restrictions--policy restrictions. And I've had many go-rounds with Bill Franklin, who's at the State Department, about this. The latest executive order of Nixon, in '72, seems to me more or less to bring these two together at the State Department.

BAHMER: Well, Wayne and I both, because of that experience we had with all of this material in the Army, knew that there was going to be a problem. And of course there was in the military field already a problem. One of the little things that stuck in Wayne's craw was the fact that there were certain materials dating from the Civil War that were still restricted, no access could be permitted to those materials from Jeff Davis--his raincoat and spurs--they were articles rather than documents. And he was insistent that something should be done when the Federal Records Act of 1950 was being written that would give us a lever. So this was the origin of that provision in the law that says any records older than 50 years are declassified, or no restriction be put on them unless the Archivist agrees that it's necessary. This sort of started everybody thinking about the problem. But as researchers more and more turned their attention to World War II,

and ran up against the impossible administrative actions necessary to get clearance to get into classified materials, the pressures increased. I would probably say by the middle '50's we were facing a real problem of what to do about declassified records.

BROOKS: My favorite example of the early War Department stuff, was a package wrapped up in red tape, literally, when I was in Chief Archivist of the War Records Branch in 1950, and it was classified "secret." And I thought well, the archivists in charge are entitled to look at these things for administrative purposes, so I'd open up this package and see what this was. It was the official record of the court martial of Major Reno from the Battle of the Little Big Horn. And I found that the court reporter had not been able to keep with the trial, so everyday he pasted in a transcript from the Chicago Tribune--and it was classified.

I think one of the early experiences that the Archivist had with the problem of access to records was in connection with the Roosevelt Library. You've already mentioned the Morgenthau diary. The decision of the Surrogate court of New York after the Roosevelt will and the transferring of the papers to the Roosevelt Library took place shortly after Roosevelt died, I think a year or two; but I don't think the problem of much research use of the Library materials or the problem of access to materials really became active until after Grover became Archivist. Perhaps after Kahn went up there in '48. Roosevelt had set up a committee, you remember, of Hopkins and Grace Tully and Rosenman to decide which papers should be opened and which should not. Hopkins died and I think pretty much the committee leaned on Herman in all these decisions. Certainly the actual review of documents was done by the Library staff under Kahn.

BAHMER: Yes the committee meeting with Kahn and with Wayne drew up the general standards that would be followed in a review of the materials, stating in effect that except for the "excepted categories," all the material would be available for use. Now these categories that were to be excepted were largely thrashed out by Wayne and Herman, and approved by the committee. The actual work, of course, of screening, of reviewing the documents was done by the staff of the library. And I don't think the committee ever busied itself with any review of what had been done. One of the problems as I see it in retrospect was that there was no real provision for a re-review, for a continuing review. This is a, as you very well know from your experience in Independence, is a time-consuming and costly kind of operation.

BROOKS: We had to put that into effect just on our own after some years. But there was no planned program for re-review.

BAHMER: There wasn't at the Roosevelt Library, either. There was no program for a re-review, so the tendency was with a one-time job to let it rest, that it had been finished when actually it wasn't.

BROOKS: Wayne was probably aware of that, probably spoke to me about it when we started the Truman Library, I don't remember much about that.

BAHMER: But this looked to the opening of access to material largely to those materials that were closed for other than security classification, and it still left a larger portion of what we call the Map Room Papers, the World War II Message Center papers, and a great many others that were security classified by agencies, papers that originated in agencies, and were sent to the White House. It left them in this position of still being frozen. We tried on any number of occasions to get Defense people to go to the library and review these materials, because they were some of the most important materials in the point of view of the researchers that the library had. We didn't get anyplace. We did get somebody from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to go up one time and spend a few days, and he just literally threw up his hands and said it would take a crew of men a summer to work through all these materials, which actually in bulk were not so formidable. But it wasn't until the shake-up in the last half-dozen years that things began really going again.

BROOKS: Well, this was the first two or three years of the time that Wayne was Archivist, '48, '49, '50, and I think the first movements for a Truman Library started about 1950. There was a committee set up to raise funds for a library. It had to be superseded later because it didn't get very far. But I wonder if you remember it, when Wayne was first brought into that picture . . . You said one time in public that one of the accomplishments of Grover's career was that he made the decision for a system of presidential libraries.

BAHMER: Yes, that's true. Now the situation concerning Mr. Truman was a little bit peculiar in a sense, because his first decision was not to have a library, and he made provision for the turning over of his papers to the National Archives. Are you familiar with this?

BROOKS: I know only that . . .

BAHMER: He wrote a letter to the Administrator offering his papers to the National Archives.

BROOKS: Do you know when, approximately?

BAHMER: I can't date it, but the letter ought to be available.

BROOKS: I'll have to check that in the file up here. There is a case file on the Truman Library.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: I remember that one time, and this would have been after April '51 when I went over to the Diplomatic, Judicial and all those other things-- Records Office, Wayne told me that there was a possibility that the Truman papers might come to the Archives, and that we probably would put them in the Executive Branch, Bess Glenn's branch. Now George Elsey has since told me that he doesn't believe there was any serious possibility after 1950 that the Truman papers would go anywhere except out to Missouri.

BAHMER: It was more than a little bit serious. I think Harry was quite convinced that this was the best thing for him to do, but he didn't reckon with his colleagues and with the people in Independence and so on, and they finally convinced him that the thing to do was to have a library, and from that point on it moved. I can't remember again the exact date, but it was in one of the conversations that Wayne had with Lloyd or Elsey, or both of them, when they started talking about the legislation that would be necessary. Our first impulse was to take a look at the Roosevelt Library Act and see how it was set up, and so on. Wayne came back from one of those meetings and sat down and he said, you know, it's kind of ridiculous to look forward over the years every time a President leaves office to having a special act of Congress to provide for the establishment of a library. He said if we were really or seriously convinced that this library, presidential library concept, is valid, and want to promote it, why don't we think in terms of legislation that would, while it can't be mandatory, be a continuing invitation to future presidents to leave their papers to the Government housed in a special facility known as a presidential library? He broached that to Lloyd and immediately it was accepted, so we never did any really serious thinking about a special act for Truman, but we started right out thinking of an act that would set up what we have called the presidential library system. It wasn't an easy piece of legislation to put together. Lloyd spent an enormous amount of time and so did I and so did a great many members of the staff, Thad Page and others. Wayne had a lot of research done by way of background material to support the legislation. I did a little digging. I was particularly convinced, whether rightly or wrongly, that it would be a good thing if as many as these libraries as possible could somehow be associated with a university or institution of higher learning. I was insistent that something ought to go into the act that would make it possible to get this kind of partnership going. I looked up precedents in legislation to no end to see what kind of deals had been made. Agriculture for instance has a number of activities located on university campuses in Government buildings, and so on. Little by little the act took shape but it took much longer than we expected. Actually the act wasn't passed until '55, was it?

BROOKS: That's correct. Was this thinking about this act for all presidents started before or after Mr. Truman left office?

BAHMER: Oh it started before.

BROOKS: I've always thought that one reason it was passed in '55 was by that time you had a Republican president, and I don't know whether there was that early thinking about an Eisenhower Library, I think there was.

BAHMER: Oh yes, yes indeed.

BROOKS: So that you had bipartisan support for this legislation.

BAHMER: Yeah, I don't know whether the White House had begun to think of it that early but the people in Abilene certainly thought of it that early.

BROOKS: I don't doubt that.

BAHMER: Yes sir. The Senator out there, Darby and his crew, were on the ball right from the beginning. Yes indeed. And I think it was probably a good thing that it was passed with the endorsement of a Republican president.

BROOKS: Oh, I certainly do. This was one thing that always made me feel more secure in insisting upon the objectivity of research in that library, and the freedom of expression of the people who did research there. And this was always something that I felt needed to be defended, and I still think it does.

BAHMER: Well Dave Lloyd played a great big part in the formulation of the legislation and in working up material for its support. It was a damn shame that he didn't live longer to see it work out more fully.

BROOKS: He published an article in the American Archivist in April 1955 that was obviously based upon a long period of study before that. By that time of course he was Executive Director of the corporation that raised funds and built the building, and for five years after the library was dedicated the place was really run by a team--Lloyd, Grover, Tom Evans, and I would go see Mr. Truman, and that would be it.

BAHMER: We hadn't had, as we've had since, we didn't have during Truman's time the kind of close relationship on a day-to-day basis with White House operations. So that when Mr. Truman left office and his files were taken out to, I think they went to Kansas City first didn't they, in the county court building. We had to assign somebody to sort of be in charge, and I think that's when Lagerquist and--there were two.

BROOKS: First Ulasek, Hank Ulasek was to do the job.

BAHMER: Oh yes. I'd forgotten that.

BROOKS: And he did a survey of the material in the White House. I think because his wife didn't want to go he decided not to go, and Phil Lagerquist went out on less than two weeks' notice in September of 1953. Then Jim Fuchs went out in 1954, and the two of them kept the thing going until '57 when the library was set up.

BAHMER: We learned from that episode of the desirability of having a much closer liaison with the White House during the period of the presidents' incumbency of the office. Bob Bolton was sent over during Ike's time and served, and any number of people have served in that capacity since. I think there's more than one probably assigned to the White House at the present time.

BROOKS: When I came back there in the fall of '71 Nesbitt had 11 people working in his Office of Presidential Papers. But this separation, the lack of a daily contact with the White House still has its bearing on the Truman Library, because Mr. Truman's White House staff continued the separation after the Library was set up.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: There has been a very clear line at that door. In the Johnson Administration a team of five people from the White House visited the Truman and Eisenhower Libraries thinking about planning for the Johnson Library. I guess it was in 1968. Middleton was then working for Johnson. The comment of Dorothy Territo afterwards was that the thing that struck her the most strange about the visit to the Truman Library was this complete separation, whereas in the Johnson Administration everything was pretty chummy, they were all working together.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: Well, Mr. Truman retained in his possession the papers that constituted the "Conway file." It was the correspondence that was always filed separately by her. His will provided that it be passed to the library, but it hasn't done so yet. I think there's still some question about how that's going to be handled.

BAHMER: Yes.

BROOKS: And the historians are still debating as to what the value may be of that batch of papers. They're not really big in volume. They do have obviously some of the cream of the crop stuff. But in the meantime, much of the information in there certainly is known from other sources.

Well, I was going to ask if you wanted to say anything else about the views of the various presidents toward the library concept. We've said many times that if we had anybody in Mr. Truman's position who was inclined to dictate everything that went on, as some other presidents would have done, or was completely disinterested and didn't give current support to the library, that our lives would be much less happy in the Truman Library. He wasn't an academic person by training or by temperament but he supported the library, and we valued that very, very highly. I think the story would have been a bit different with some other men.

BAHMER: I'm sure it would. You were very fortunate to have a man like Harry Truman. Living as long as he did, having a man like him with the instincts that he had that were proper in terms of the library operation. Well it was surprising to us how every president from Truman on has taken the idea of a Presidential Library with the greatest enthusiasm. One of the things that worried us when we drew up the Presidential Library Act was that we wanted to be very sure that we didn't step on anybody's toes and make them angry. We were thinking particularly of the institution out at Stanford, the Hoover Institution, where Hoover's presidential papers were. And Wayne reiterated during a hearing, you know, that we had no idea of empire building. We weren't looking backward, and so on, and I guess he overdid it a little bit. Because this bill moved rapidly over to the Senate and McClellan's committee set up hearings on it. But before the hearings were held, one day Wayne was out and I got a call from Ritchie, Hoover's right-hand man. He said, I'm calling for former President Hoover who is very interested in this Presidential Library bill.

BROOKS: I remember that call.

BAHMER: My goodness, I thought, this is going to be bad; they're afraid that we're seeking out. So I immediately begin to talk. No, he said, the President is all in favor of this bill and is thinking very seriously about whether he should turn his Presidential papers over to the Government. But he seemed to have gotten from the hearings and discussion that went on, that there was a feeling that he wasn't to be included. I practically fell off my chair, I said, by no means, by no means, you can assure President Hoover that there was to be no discrimination against him and that we would be more than happy to entertain a request from him to take over his papers. I don't know whether by this time the idea of a West Branch library had

developed or not. You know that started out as a purely private adventure, that is, non-Government. But at any rate, they didn't let it rest with my assurances over the phone. McLellan wrote a specific letter to Wayne raising this very point that Mr. Hoover had been in touch with him about. And it wasn't too long after the passage of the bill, a matter of months or a year or so that the offer came. Behind that in part was Franklin Floete, our Administrator at the time, who was a very great admirer of and knew President Hoover. And he made this as kind of a first order of business to get a Hoover Library. Of course this created a lot of problems because they built that little cottage out there.

BROOKS: I think I was the first one from NARS to visit it, just by coincidence when it was being built. I said to Grover one time, "that's a pretty little building out there." He said, "yeah, it's pretty, and it's little."

BAHMER: They're just adding to it again now aren't they? It's shaping up into something. But every president--we were astonished how early the White House under Eisenhower became interested in a library. The Kennedy White House people almost from the day John Kennedy took office were interested in a library, and you know that during his three years he and Wayne discussed several times the idea of the library and Wayne went up to Boston one time with President Kennedy and looked over all the sites, and so on. There was never any question about Johnson's Library. The University of Texas got in there right at the beginning, and for all the years of Johnson's tenure, there was something going on in connection with the Library. Several things went on at the end that discouraged and disheartened me and probably led to my retirement a few months earlier than I might have otherwise decided. But I guess President Johnson left much of the planning to Lady Bird and her committee, on which Wayne was a member, and I attended committee meetings several times. There was nothing wrong with this except that it was hard to bring to the attention of this committee some of the more immediate problems that had to be looked at. They were always thinking in terms of after the library was in operation, really. Toward the end, when it was clear that this was going to be the termination of Mr. Johnson's presidency, they began to raise demands for things that were, in my judgment, were perfectly hopeless. I suppose in part because of the example set by the Kennedy filming project. He decided--the White House decided--that we should have a comparable filming project for the Johnson Library.

BROOKS: Microfilming of records in the agencies?

BAHMER: Microfilming of records in the agencies on matters that were of high enough importance that they deserved to be in the Johnson Library. The situation was quite different. John Kennedy's administration came to an end and there was sort of a demarcation line. In the Johnson administration everything was going on currently. Many things that you could say were important to be filmed were accumulating records everyday. It was impossible to set up a project. There wasn't the same incentive. After the assassination there was, of course, an emotional reaction, and everybody was willing to turn to and lend a hand. There wasn't the same reaction in 1968, and we couldn't get a single dime of money to do it. We had to steal people from here, there, and elsewhere, and agencies dragged their feet. We had to make a weekly report to the Administrator who forwarded it to the White House, and nothing that I could say to Mr. Knott would convince him that this job was just not one that ought to be undertaken. And I'm sure, I don't know how much filming was finally accomplished, but I'm perfectly sure that 90% of it probably was wasted money. I just couldn't see it. That combined with a number of other things, finally led me to say I've stayed past my time, I can't put this kind of energy into this thing.

BROOKS: All that was still going on in '68. I was here for three or four months, and I held that office for a while after Kahn retired and before Reed came, and Johnny Vlachos was running around worrying about that damn microfilm project. The same thing to a certain extent was true at Austin. It was true in the beginning at Independence. The architects in designing the building didn't take into account all the things that were told them, for example, about the respective locations of the Research Room and stacks. That's one of my pet peeves in both Independence and Austin.

Well, to go back a bit, at the time you became Archivist it seems to me that the questions that existed in '53 about the independent position of the Archivist, the professional nature of the Archivist's job, were much less severe.

BAHMER: Oh yes.

BROOKS: We rounded up some academic expressions of opinion in '66, I guess when you were appointed Archivist. Am I right that it wasn't as big a problem as it had been in '53?

BAHMER: Oh no, by no means, no.

BROOKS: And when you became Archivist you said that you then didn't expect to hold it very long.

BAHMER: No I didn't. My plans actually had called for my retirement much earlier than I did retire. I was going to retire at age 60 when I completed my 30th year of Government service. Figuring this would give me, at least some time in the future, to travel and do the other things that Vi and I have always wanted to do. I knew by this time that I was getting old and fallow. Wayne and I had been here since '47 or '48.

BROOKS: Eighteen years.

BAHMER: And though the pressures of the office aren't probably as large as some, there's a continuing pressure on the Archivist of the United States for any number of things.

BROOKS: And growing through the years into additional fields.

BAHMER: And very frankly we weren't happy with the Administrator. Mr. Knott is a very fine gentleman in some respects, but in my judgment he was a nit-picking Administrator who never saw the larger objectives but was always looking at the details and worrying about things that he shouldn't have occupied himself with at all. This was what led to Wayne's retirement. I don't think he would have retired at all had he had a sympathetic administrator who didn't insist on accounting for every minute of time away from the office or in the office.

BROOKS: He said at the time he retired that he always thought he was going to retire before he was 60. Was that just to cover up . . .

BAHMER: Yes. That was a way of speaking. Wayne enjoyed a good deal more, I must say, than I did the activities of the Office of the Archivist. But he was an independent soul that didn't like anybody breathing down his neck all the time, and this is what Mr. Knott insisted on. And particularly as plans for the Johnson Library developed and Wayne's fairly close association with Lady Bird in this activity, the situation between him and Mr. Knott became much less cordial, because Mr. Knott was very jealous of Wayne's entrée into the White House.

I remember, I don't know if it was the final one, but it was toward the end, that one time when Lady Bird and President Johnson were down at the ranch, on a Sunday Lady Bird called Wayne and said, "we've been talking about this and that problem relating to the Library, and would like to have you get on the President's plane (that went down everyday to the ranch) and come down tomorrow." And Wayne could do nothing but say "I surely will." He called me and told me, he said, "now I haven't been able to get hold of Knott, but you call him first thing in the morning, tomorrow morning, and tell him."

Which I did, and I've never gotten a more uncalled for bawling out in my life. I was perfectly innocent, I had nothing to do with it and he lit into me because I was Wayne's deputy, and "let me know," you know, "what is all this going on," "why can't I, why didn't they call me?" I said, I don't have any idea why they didn't call you. Then when Wayne got back he proceeded to eat Wayne out for the same reason. Which to me was very, very petty, it was extremely petty. And it was this pettiness that filled Wayne up to the neck, and which in the end, I just couldn't live with. I was always uneasy in that situation, and I'm sure that disturbed Wayne the same way. Oh, if I had been ten or fifteen years younger I might have been willing to do it, but I knew I was going to retire just as soon as I got my daughter through school. The reason I didn't retire when I was 60 was that I had figured that all the kids would be through college then, and they were except that Kay was a late comer in the field, and I had to stay on for a bit to take care of some of her expenses. But I can't say anything except that I thoroughly enjoyed, now looking backward, all of the associations and all of the activities, distressing as some of them were to us at the time in the National Archives. And I still have the highest regard for the institution.

BROOKS: I remember being at a conference of library directors at one time, and I guess it must have been '66, because there was some flurry about whether NARS should continue as a part of GSA or not.

BAHMER: Oh yes, that . . .

BROOKS: And Knott said he would be willing to talk to anybody about that, he thought anybody ought to consider that. But anybody that wanted to take NARS out of GSA had to have a mighty good reason, something like that. You could see he wasn't going to have any part in it.

BAHMER: Wayne raised that issue, you see, in his retirement, his resignation. I made no bones about it, I was 100% for it. I was very enthusiastic about it, and plotted with Wayne and a dozen other people very actively. Mr. Knott put me on the spot since the question was very active right at the time I was appointed. How I felt on it. I wasn't 100% truthful to him. I said if there was a place that NARS could go, National Archives particularly could go, that would assure it of a good existence I'd be all for it. Because I said, as I feel sure you must, that an institution of that kind is a little bit out of place in GSA, and he admitted it. But I probably was as much responsible as anybody else for putting some kinks in the movement because I just didn't think that the boys were quite fair about the way they handled some of the things, you know, and they were trying to engineer it through the American Historical Association--Julian Boyd particularly. Hell, I'd been with Boyd

to a dozen different meetings, but I didn't like the report that they drew up and circulated, which I was supposed to see before it was issued, and which I didn't. It just made me madder than hell. I replied to him. I don't know where that matter stands now, whether it's still an active issue or not, is it?

BROOKS: I doubt it. I haven't heard anything about it for some time. I was very much interested in all that, of course. Wayne was very thoughtful in that he called me out in the hall when I was back here in Washington a month before he retired, and said he was going to retire and there were certain people he thought ought to know it. At the same time he was starting this discussion of removing NARS from GSA. Then when the Boyd Committee report came along I was infuriated at what they said about presidential libraries, which went back in a way to some of Julian's unhappiness as a member of our Truman Library board.

BAHMER: That was entirely due to Julian. I didn't think they were honest. I just didn't think we ought to rest our case on dishonest activities. I don't think Julian has liked me very much ever since.

BROOKS: Well I think that despite the fact that we haven't given a complete and detailed narrative, and did not intend to and couldn't possibly do so, that you've brought out many things in these interviews that are important and would emphasize certain issues of the things that really deserved attention in the history of the Archives. I'm very grateful to you, and I'm sure that the Archives is grateful to you.

BAHMER: Thanks very much. If in reading over the transcripts there are any points where you think there ought to be an elaboration, I'd be happy to add it.

OBITUARIES

Robert H. Bahmer, 86, Dies; Former Archivist of U.S.

Robert H. Bahmer, 86, who was a government archivist for more than 30 years before retiring in 1968 as the archivist of the United States, died of renal failure March 14 at a nursing home in Las Vegas. He lived in Las Vegas.

The archivist's duties include the preservation of government records and records management, as well as the publication of the Federal Register. The archivist also helps to develop presidential libraries' programs and is chairman of the National Historical Publications Commission.

Mr. Bahmer began his government career with the National Archives in 1936. During World War II, he served for a time as the Navy Department's chief of archival services and later became deputy chief of the records management branch in the Army's adjutant general's office.

He also served with the Hoover Commission study on government organization before returning to the National Archives in 1948. He served as deputy to the U.S. archivist before being named the nation's fourth archivist in 1966.

He was a past president of the Society of American Archivists and had served as secretary general of the International Council on Archives. He also was a member of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission and the American Historical Association.

He was a recipient of the General Service Administration's Distinguished Service Award.

Mr. Bahmer, a former Chevy Chase resident who moved to Las Vegas about 1973, was a native of North Dakota. He was a graduate of North Dakota State Teacher's College, and received a master's degree from the University of Colorado and a doctorate in history from the University of Minnesota.

His first wife, Viva Bahmer, died in 1977. His marriage to Florence Bahmer ended in divorce.

Survivors include three children from his first marriage, Henry W. Bahmer of Marco Island, Fla., and Catherine B. Patchner and Clifford L. Bahmer, both of San Francisco.