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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
AS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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Signed Oliver W. Holmes

Date Nov. 30, 1974

Accepted:

Signed

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

Dec. 9, 1974

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

OLIVER W. HOLMES

July 10, 1973

Major biographical information:

Born, St. Paul, Minnesota	1902
B.A. Carleton College	1922
Graduate study, University of Minnesota and Columbia University; Ph.D., Columbia	1956
Instructor in History, University of Montana	1923-1924
Assistant American History Division; New York Public Library	1926-1927
Member Editorial Staff, Encyclopedia Britannica	1927-1929
Member Editorial Staff, Columbia University Press	1929-1934
Deputy Examiner, National Archives	1936-1938
Chief, Division of Interior Department Archives	1938-1942
Director of Research and Records Description	1942-1944
Program Adviser	1944-1948
Chief Archivist, Natural Resources Records Division	1948-1961

Executive Director, National Historical
Publications Commission

1961-1972

Retired

1972

Interviewed at the National Archives

Interviewer, Philip C. Brooks

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Oliver W. Holmes
Former Executive Director
National Historical Publications Commission
Washington, DC - July 10, 1973

BROOKS: Oliver, one of the things that appeals to me about talking with you is the fact that you are one of the people who first came into the Archives--it's been quite an interesting study, talking to those who made up the original staff and how they got here--because their characters and their special competences and interests certainly were important in forming the pattern of the Archives from the beginning. You probably were actively interested in the records of the Government as early as anybody. I thought perhaps you could begin by telling something about your background and your interest in Government records prior to establishment of the National Archives. I was very much interested in this letter of December 6, 1925, to Everett Edwards, that you sent me. You were then in Washington and using Government records--the Postmaster General's letterbooks.

HOLMES: Well I began work on my doctoral dissertation at Columbia University in the Spring of 1925, which was eleven years before I came to the Archives. That involved me more than I realized in Government records, particularly the records of the Postal Service. As you know, this was intended as a dissertation on the subject of stagecoach travel and the staging business in the United States, but as it turned out it was a history of stagecoaches and mail down to 1820.

I was fortunate, I think, in college in having two excellent teachers of history, and also one that was notable in biography, Ambrose Vernon, who later went to Dartmouth. My history teachers had written books and were good researchers. I also had several very good teachers in the history and theory of Government. So I had those two joint interests. This was at Carleton. And it was those teachers, the history ones particularly, that thought I should go to Columbia. Sometimes I think because of my interest in Western history I would have done better to have stayed in Minnesota or Wisconsin than to go to Columbia, but I did go to Minnesota for one Summer session. This was in 1924 at which I had Dr. Buck's course in the history of the frontier. Writing a paper for that course sent me to the Minnesota Historical Society where I met

Miss Grace Nute and was shown the work of the Society, and did my first research with original documents. I became a member of the Society in 1924, which is a long time ago, and have continued a member. But I went back to Columbia after having taught history one year at the University of Montana. I should say that that year out there stimulated my interest in the history of the frontier and the West, and I never have gotten away from that. But in Columbia they weren't so much interested in the West and the frontier, and Dixon Ryan Fox started me in his seminar on the history of the old road--its taverns, its stagecoaches, and so on. I found it interesting and it was decided in the Spring of 1925 that that would be the subject of my thesis.

I had been down here in Washington before 1925. I came down the first time in 1923 when the old market was on the site of the National Archives, and I can remember it vaguely. But my next trip down was in 1926 I think. This was the first trip down to see what the Post Office records had to say about stages and the carrying of the mail, legal contracts for such service, and so on. I was treated well over at the old Post Office Department as you know. I started going through the Postmaster General's letterbooks and the Contract Office papers; and I made a number of later trips down to continue my researches. The last one I think was in 1932 when to my horror I saw the Contract Office papers all stacked up mountain high in the central court of the old Post Office building. When I expressed my regrets I was told by the Chief Clerk or his assistant that they'd received congressional authority to destroy those records. I was very unhappy. They were disorganized, of course, in that pile. I pulled out a few that related to Indian attacks on stagecoach lines in the far West, when the contractors were explaining why they couldn't get the mail through on time or why there were failures. I could just see how much they would have been of value in the history of the frontier--getting the mail through to the mining camps, and so on.

BROOKS: They were thrown out?

HOLMES: They were thrown out.

BROOKS: I think at that time, since 1912, the lists of records that the agencies proposed to dispose of were submitted to the Library of Congress.

HOLMES: That's right.

BROOKS: And I found out during the days as Special Examiner that what the Library of Congress did was to tell them to keep everything before a certain date. In other words, they went on a basis of date, everything . . .

HOLMES: Oh really?

BROOKS: . . . before 1875 or something like that was historical. I thought then, and I still think, that that's absurd.

HOLMES: So far as I know the people from the Manuscript Division never went out to look at the records much, did they? Records samples may have been submitted to them, and of course one can always pick one's samples. Well, this of course interested me. On the trips down here I talked with Newton D. Mereness who showed me around, and on one occasion took me up to see the House records. I think he was still being paid by the Conference of Mid-West Historical Societies that had him selecting documents for them relating to the upper Mississippi Valley.

BROOKS: That was for the "Mereness Calendar."

HOLMES: The "Mereness Calendar," so-called. And I'd heard about this when I was out at the Minnesota Historical Society actually. Miss Nute was very much interested in it so I was glad to see Mereness here. It was also my first trip to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. And I was invited out to lunch by Tom Martin and by Roscoe Hill, who was still there then editing the Continental Congress papers, as I remember.

BROOKS: Jameson was already there as Chief. I forget what year he went there from the Carnegie.

HOLMES: Jameson was there. That was the time I met Jameson too, but I didn't go out to lunch with him, of course, just the assistants in the Division. I at that time had no thought of coming down here. The Archives was just approved about that time, the construction of it. I was busy in New York doing work--well I'd had experience as you know in the New York Public Library, in the American History room there, working under Victor Paltsits. Paltsits was another person who interested me much in Archives, theoretically, and probably introduced me when I came down here to Washington for some of my excursions. My salary at the public library was supplemented by writing articles for the Britannica, which had its American office for the first time in this country for the 13th edition. I did probably enough articles for them--several hundred--to make up about 200,000 words that were printed.

BROOKS: Didn't they pay by the word?

HOLMES: Yes they did. Two cents a word. I did 14 articles on 14 of the states. These articles were all sent around to somebody connected with the state who could review and approve them, and whose name was assigned to them.

BROOKS: Your name wasn't on them?

HOLMES: No, this was ghost writing, of course. Most of them went to Senators from those states. Some went to Governors. If the one to Minnesota was sent to the Governor, he sent it to Solon J. Buck of the Historical Society, and Buck's name finally appeared on it. All the articles were approved without question, except the one on Minnesota, and Dr. Buck--I've forgotten what changes he made--but he made some.

BROOKS: Were most of these states out in that part of the country? West of the Mississippi?

HOLMES: Yes, most of them. Although West Virginia was the first one that I did, but it has always seemed to me a kind of a frontier state, too.

The Assistant American Editor of the Britannica, became the editor of the Columbia University Press. When he went up to the Press he had in mind doing a one volume encyclopedia that any scholar could have on his desk. He thought that would bring in to the Press a constant income, and that it was needed, and so he got me up there and the last three years in New York I spent pretty much handling the American History and geography articles for the first edition of the Columbia Encyclopedia. I found this encyclopedia work fascinating. It gave you a sense of proportion, it gave you a sense of writing concisely, and it seemed to continue my education in all sorts of fields; and I probably would have stayed there and continued such work with various publishers--if it hadn't been that at the same time I was supposed to be writing my dissertation. This and a lot of other activities got in the way of finishing it up. One problem was that there seemed to be no end to the material. I kept coming down here to Washington, as I said, and when I heard about the Archives being set up I was much interested. I did come down to the American Historical Association meeting in Washington, in December, 1934. The building was finally up, and we came over to the building here and Dr. Connor spoke to us, and I was much interested in thinking, "Do I want to put in an application here?" But I heard him tell of all the applications--thousands of applications . . .

BROOKS: Thirty-thousand in the first few months.

HOLMES: . . . that they'd received. I thought, "Well, I don't want to drop another piece of paper in that mess." And so I didn't, I didn't apply. Then it was I think the fall of '35, after Dr. Buck had come here, and had become Director of Publications, that he wrote and asked me if I had applied for a position at the Archives. He said that there were so many that had applied that they were restricted to considering the applications before they went out and got anyone. So it would be to my advantage to apply. I supposed maybe he had me in mind for something in his office, which fitted in with what I'd been doing and would be very interesting I thought, so I did put in an application.

BROOKS: What seems to me true about the 30,000 applications was that if you were in that batch you had to have somebody responsible for pulling your name out of there, some backer. There were usually, for the professional staff, I think most of them were academic or professional backers that wrote to the Archivist and said such-and-such is a good man.

HOLMES: I don't remember whether I emphasized this interest to Fox or not, but I did to Paltsits, and I think Paltsits probably had some influence and may have written a letter. I've never known just how I got appointed. Sometime in the Spring, I've forgotten what month, I received a letter asking if I would come down here for an interview at my own expense. I did say I would and I came down--I did suppose that maybe it was the position Dr. Buck had. It turned out to be one in the Accessions Division, of course. The only person I talked to was Hyde. I'd known him by reputation because he was in New York City earlier, but I had never met him. I didn't talk to Buck that I remember at that time, but Buck must have had something to do with putting Hyde or Connor onto this name. They must have been going through them for persons to replace four of the original Deputy Examiners. There were the two who had become Records Division Chiefs, Shipman and Leavitt, and Dr. Hamer had become head of the new division of the library which was just set up, and was also head of Survey of Federal Archives Outside of Washington. So he was too busy to continue his work. Then Schellenberg had been drawn out to become Hamer's assistant in the SFA for a while, I don't know how long he stayed. There were four places anyway. Neil Franklin was up here the same day, and waiting in the outer room when I talked to Hyde.

BROOKS: As I've probably told you, I remember the day you came on duty because I was asked as a veteran of 11 months on the staff to show three new staff members around, three people who were joining the staff that day. One was Franklin, one was Holmes, and one was Bahmer.

HOLMES: One was Bahmer. We all came in on June 1st. Kahn had been here one week ahead of us. And I know in Kahn's case Buck wrote some sort of memo for him. He had been working for the Park Service, of course, but he was one of Buck's Minnesota graduate students, too.

BROOKS: I wondered how closely you were associated with those people.

HOLMES: Dr. Buck had said something about Kahn being a natural person to take Hamer's place for Interior Department records, and he would have been. I don't know just how I finally got the assignment rather than Herman first, but that is the way it worked out.

BROOKS: Herman told me in May of this year that the reason was that you came on the staff a week before he did, but the records show and my memory shows that he came a week before you did.

HOLMES: That's right. I was very happy to have that assignment. I should say, though, I probably have been going into these preliminary matters too long and I should move on to the days as Deputy Examiner.

BROOKS: I think this early business is very important because a good many people, especially the principal officials--the Director of Archival Service, and so forth--a good many of those people really didn't have any experience with government records, and a lot of the staff didn't. And the people that really did, that had worked in government records before, such as you and Fred Shipman were not too numerous. Who did the most of the survey of the Interior Department?

HOLMES: Well Phil Hamer had almost finished it. That started a whole year before I came.

BROOKS: He came in June of '35.

HOLMES: Yes. June of '35. Well that's about when the surveying started, and he started over there at once, and he had finished most of it. Of course I wasn't assigned to the Interior Department first. I don't know why. Maybe because Phil had nearly finished it, they just let it go for the time being. Instead I was assigned to help Willoughby with the Treasury

Department. Now that's because the Treasury Department had a tremendous quantity of records, more than Interior, and next to War I guess. War and Treasury were about the biggest. Of course, Irvine already had Grover I think helping him, and those two were lagging behind. So I was assigned to work with Willoughby. He had just started the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the income tax unit or division, and had written one of the biggest G-1 forms I think, I mean covering more records, in the survey of those income tax forms, about 40,000 cubic feet I expect you'll find. But he hadn't gone any further. I remember his taking me over there and showing me those vast areas down in the basement full of records.

BROOKS: Over there in the Internal Revenue Building . . .

HOLMES: He had other agencies--Treasury agencies--to do and he wanted to get to work on them, so he let me finish Internal Revenue. I started curiously enough with the Alcohol Tax Unit, and the thing I found out almost immediately was that they'd inherited the records of the Bureau of Prohibition. I surveyed those along with the survey of the Alcohol Tax records, and recommended most of them I know for transfer. At that time prohibition was a very, very big subject. We had just gotten away from it, and it had been a topic of much discussion for the 20's as you know, so it seemed that those records were historically important, and should be saved. They were later brought in, I don't know what's happened to them now. From 40 years point of view, it's an example I think of something that seemed very important at the time. It then seemed we might get another movement for prohibition, might have it over again. But now, I can't think of a subject that would have less interest for people. It just shows you that things go up and down.

I was practically all the rest of that year working in Treasury. Willoughby, I would say, was a very good person to work with and to teach me. He took me along on several of his own surveys, you know, and showed how you measured up the material and how you put the things down, and so forth. And he took me around to meet a number of Treasury people over in the Secretary's office. He took me in to meet Miss Chatfield who had just become the Treasury Archivist. I, of course, went to him with problems when I had them, and so forth, so it worked out very well.

After the Alcohol Tax unit there was the Miscellaneous Tax Unit, so-called, which had the estate tax records, for one major type. The estate tax had gone into existence in 1913 and the records had become pretty bulky and they were wondering what to do with them. So I, in connection with making the survey and deciding what to recommend for transfer, can remember picking a state like Montana and going into the records and seeing what there was there, what you could find for a county or a town, and it became a fascinating research problem. I felt that in annual income tax returns earnings go up and down, but if you wanted to see in what areas they were really making money the estate tax records, the way they were organized by states and areas, lent themselves especially to statistical analysis. I felt they were very, very valuable and finally brought some of those in. I think there have been lots of debates over them since. I don't know what's happened to the estate tax records now. But you can see a new Deputy Examiner getting confronted with some major problems right here, and of course Internal Revenue had a great many problems that related to the bulk of the papers. That's when you began to get into some of the outlying depositories too--the garages and places that they'd rented as overflow places.

BROOKS: How much did you see of Tom Owen?

HOLMES: Well you saw him nearly every day, "hello" and so forth, but then you went out on your survey and you didn't really talk to him much, unless there was some problem. Often when you went into the office you didn't bother him, you just talked to Olga Palmer, his secretary. We talked a great deal among each other up in our offices, the Deputy Examiners, I mean. The first place we were at was on 8th tier West I think. Of course, every once in a while the Special Examiners came up and talked to us or we went to see them, because we would run into problems of disposal of papers.

BROOKS: I thought it was a mistake to have those two offices separate. And the Special Examiners were sort of an after-thought. Dorsey Hyde went to the Library of Congress, I probably told you, and wrote a memorandum to the Archivist in December 1934 which was a pretty complete outline of the organization of the staff; and there was no provision there for handling so-called useless papers, although they were mentioned in the Archives Act.

HOLMES: Dorsey Hyde probably didn't realize what a problem it was going to be.

BROOKS: That's right. I think they realized the problem when the agencies started shooting lists at them. The first Special Examiners were hired the next July. One of the things that impressed me at the time was--it still does--was the tremendous complication of those forms that you used for the preliminary survey, and that we used for the disposal of "useless papers," because most of them actually were useless and were disposed of. And we filled out an extremely detailed form. Did you think the preliminary survey was well conceived and well conducted?

HOLMES: Well, I don't know. By the time I came there'd been changes. I'm sure they must have had to learn some things through experience during that first year. By the time I came there had been enough experience so that I felt all the Deputy Examiners were doing a very good job. You see I wasn't in very much on the conception--the beginning of it at all. The forms I thought had their problems--I can't remember any now particularly--I have a tendency to forget those. But, of course, the thing that was always troublesome and difficult--after you had gotten down all your measurements and then filled out the statements about condition of the records, and these matters were important because condition and bulk and so forth were elements that went into your final recommendation for transfer--was the question, are there any worthy of transfer to the National Archives?--and if so, which ones and the nature of the transfer: rush, or when convenient. Problems like that you see. Later on, of course, we went back to those forms and looked up all the rush things in order to try to get those taken in here first. I think that was a good idea, that there be some appraisal of that sort at the time of our survey. There was a place for comments on there too. And then you know when you got through with an office unit, like the Alcohol Tax Unit, you prepared a summary report. You may have had twenty G-1 forms, because you had a form for each depository whether it was a basement room or a room upstairs where they were working on the records actively, or in the attic. You might have twenty forms for a unit like Alcohol Tax. But when you got through you put them all together in a unit report for that agency. You listed the forms, you totaled the situation there, and at the end of that report there was always a list of the people involved, and who were the best to talk to about it, and how you'd been treated and that sort of thing. I don't know whether you've ever looked at those or not, but they're rather interesting.

BROOKS: Yes. I did one in Navy.

HOLMES: I'm often sorry that nobody ever, so far as I know, put together any final summary report on the whole preliminary survey. And it still could be done with considerable interest. It would be an historical thing now, but certainly if anybody is to write a history of the National Archives, there has to be a chapter on that survey. It would have some lessons to teach.

BROOKS: I'm quite sure it would. Well when did you go over and do some of this surveying at Interior, or what was your first activity in Interior?

HOLMES: Let me say first that I finished up other things in the Bureau of Internal Revenue, so that building was complete. There was the Board of Tax Appeals there which was more or less a court. There was also the Court of Customs and Patent Appeals housed over there, I did that. Then finishing up that I went over and did a few more things in Treasury--the Disbursing Office for one thing over at the Treasury Annex, I remember. But I didn't get involved with Interior surveying until pretty close to the end. Let's see, I came in in June, maybe in December, certainly by the Spring of 1937 I was involved. And I got involved first in part because of the records they wanted to transfer from over there. Interior had a number and Hamer had quite a number that he had marked "rush," and he would take me over there. I can remember trips--he'd take me over and show me these records--he'd already gotten letters you see from the department offering to transfer things. And I would make out the recommendation for transfer and then, when it was approved, prepare the "identification inventory."

BROOKS: These accession identification inventories were about the only finding aids that existed for a long time, right?

HOLMES: Yes. That's still true I think for some record groups.

But Phil introduced me over there and in the Spring of '37 I was being in a sense a Deputy Examiner for both Interior and Treasury--well, only in Treasury for the records that I had surveyed, but we were bringing over things from Internal Revenue. Then I was bringing over records from Interior too. I seemed to be the only one--well Herman Kahn went over with me once and also Gaston Litton who started in with Shipman at the State Department, and went over and helped me a little with the inventory of the Indian records. There were quite a few records from Interior coming over and they were kept first in Willoughby's unit, and then of course the Division of Interior Department Archives was organized

in January of '38. Willoughby was made acting Chief. He probably had around 6,000 cubic feet of records that I'd brought in before the Division got its own space because the stack areas were still not equipped up above his own. Then on June 1, just two years after I came here, I was made Chief, really, of the Division of Interior Department Archives. And that was probably because the areas upstairs, you know above Willoughby's, had become equipped and they were ready to move up into the offices there.

BROOKS: Was Kahn in your division?

HOLMES: Kahn came into the Division before the end of '38. I would say he came in about September as the--well he was still the Associate Archivist, and came over from the Accessions Division.

BROOKS: I would have thought in retrospect that he had been involved considerably in the preliminary survey of Interior. But he told me he did most of his preliminary survey work at Commerce.

HOLMES: He and Bob Bahmer more or less took over Commerce when Leavitt became a division Chief. And there was quite a bit of surveying left to do in Commerce, and quite a few records from there that they wanted to bring over too. So Kahn and Bahmer were pretty busy there. Then I should say that in the Spring of '38, before I was appointed Chief, or was it earlier, there were still a few things in Interior--outlying places that had never been surveyed. For one thing the eleemosynary institutions as we called them. Such as St. Elizabeth's hospital. And I remember going out and surveying that. Freedmen's Hospital was supposed to be surveyed but I never got around to surveying that, and Kahn did that after he came to the division. He finally decided that Howard University and Gallaudet College, which were once under Interior, were not supported sufficiently by the Federal Government. The Government paid less than 50% of their budget, and they had their own boards of trustees entirely outside of the Government, so they were no longer considered Government agencies to be surveyed. There were other decisions like that.

BROOKS: I have interviewed six or eight people, I guess, who were in the preliminary survey of the Accessions Division, and surprisingly they say very little about Tom Owen, and I just wonder if he was really much involved substantively, and why not. This is partly related to my general question of how much the first heads of units, the centralized functional divisions, really knew about the problems or how clear they conceived the objectives of the Archives.

HOLMES: Well there was a lot of talk about Tom of course among us Deputy Examiners.

BROOKS: That's what I've heard.

HOLMES: Tom couldn't spend his time talking to all of us. I think if I had been Tom I would have gone out occasionally with the Deputy Examiners to work with them, and see their problems. I can't remember his going along with me on any survey. I may have taken him but I just can't remember; it doesn't make an impression. And of course there was a lot of office work to do. He had to draft letters of introduction for all of us, they got signed by somebody else, Hyde I think, but he had to draft them; had to plan these things, had to read over our reports. I don't know whether he kept himself away from us deliberately or not. I can't tell you.

BROOKS: Well, my general feeling as a result of some background study and of talking to a lot of people is, that the people who first headed up the Archives, other than perhaps for instance, Connor, really didn't have a very clear concept of how it was going to work and what it was supposed to do. I think that was true of Dorsey Hyde, whose memo of December '34 really outlined the original organizational pattern with the functional divisions.

HOLMES: Well, you would have expected that. There are two interpretations of it. One, they should have done better. The other is it's amazing they did as well as they did in the situation.

BROOKS: That's a very fair comment. I think the one thing that nobody realized, none of us, was the size of the problem.

HOLMES: I don't see how anyone could have starting out. Really, it was the Deputy Examiners pretty much that were first aware of the dimensions of the problem and all its complexities.

BROOKS: The Special Examiners did sort of a hit or miss thing taking these lists from all agencies. That resulted in our going into a good many different agencies, and generally not specializing in one. I went with Shipman--because I knew Fred well before, and we thought the two interests should be both pretty much in common--I went around with him on his first survey of the Veterans Administration, and I had some Veteran's lists, big ones, with thousands of items on them. But as you say, the people who went out into the agencies, and particularly the

Deputy Examiners, because they were thinking about bringing things in, about the total records of an agency, really saw how big the problem was.

HOLMES: It was not only that we might have been sometimes, as Deputy Examiners, critical of the top people in the Archives. We were critical of a lot of others--take the cataloguers--what were they doing here in the building when all the records were out there.

BROOKS: That's a good question.

HOLMES: Well, they finally had us take some of the cataloguers over, you know, to make index surveys in the agencies. Did you ever know about that? I can remember taking Dorothy Hill as she was then, Dorothy Gersack now, and Dorothy Arbaugh over to Treasury and making index surveys. They did a very elaborate job, and the idea was to--especially if you were going to move in records--go over and make an index survey to see just what the agency's index covered and its extent, but there was nothing for them much to index here. They were cataloguing accession inventories, and that was stopped fairly early I think. And then the classifiers--well, what did they know about classification? Of course they went to work on the Food Administration records for example, and spent a lot of time on them, and I guess they couldn't help that, for it was their trial balloon where they were going to learn the problems of classifying records. But we were seeing all that there was to be done around Washington here. We were kind of unhappy about so many jobs being then assigned to these central tasks, you know, which you would seem to think should come later. Even the Reference Division . . .

BROOKS: There's a good deal in Hyde's original memo about the Accessions Division, and particularly the Cataloguing, Classification, and Reference Divisions. There are just a few lines about the 10 section Chiefs; they were thought of as "custodians" of the divisions, and not much more than that.

HOLMES: Well, you're coming up now to the time when we had 10 custodial divisions. Eventually there were about 16 divisions here if you took the special ones too.

BROOKS: Right.

HOLMES: Sometimes I'm kind of unhappy that we still don't have that many because I think the records of one major agency are extensive enough for a division. By trying to consolidate we've made it impossible for the administrators that are heads of those divisions holding the records of a number of larger agencies to be scholars. They can't get down and study the work of their subordinates, and so forth.

BROOKS: That's for sure. It sort of tantalizes you. You don't get to look at the actual records very much.

HOLMES: That's right.

BROOKS: It seems to me that one of the biggest developments, perhaps, of the next few years was changing over of the Archives staff from this centralized functional pattern that was originally set up to the emphasis on the records divisions, which resulted in our having 16 divisions. From my reading reports and various things, and talking to people, I'd say the major emphasis in the next four or five years perhaps, outside of the actual job of bringing in the records, was this business of reorganization, in which I think Buck was a prime mover. What do you particularly want to--think we should--add about that?

HOLMES: Well I wanted to say something about Herman Kahn being the second in charge over there for all the time I was Chief and, of course, taking over afterwards, which he did for some five years or so. Kahn contributed a great deal. He was the one, for example, that did the inventory on the records of the General Land Office, which was a big, big operation. I had finished the Indian Office records inventory after I became Chief. Herman Kahn went on and did the Land Office and others. Then one of the original staff members of the Division was Gaston Litton who became our main authority on Indian records until he left the Archives, I've forgotten just when, but before I left up there, and then I put his assistant, John Martin, in charge. You may remember John Martin. Both of them were very, very good in Indian records, and brought considerable credit to the Division I think and to the National Archives as a whole with the Western historians.

BROOKS: Litton at about the time that you left that Division, came to the Records Administration office that I had charge of. He became one of our field representatives.

HOLMES: Well, I'm sorry in a way that he left the Archives and left the Indian records picture, particularly. I still get Christmas cards from him, of course, and he signs them "Your Old Chickasaw Friend."

BROOKS: He got into the Latin American Library field very early and went down there two or three times, and has been there ever since.

HOLMES: Well, didn't he have some assignment in Guatemala or Panama?

BROOKS: He was at the University of Panama.

HOLMES: Well, I suppose this can change one's life, but certainly when he was here he was just interested in Indians. Then the first classifier who came over there was Chet Guthrie and he was assigned from the Classification Division to make what they called "set-ups" for the Indian records. I'd brought in all the old ones by this time, and the question was how are you going to set them up here preparing for an inventory? He got very much involved in Indian affairs. And did more or less an administrative history of the whole Indian office and the records, charts, and so on. Anyway, those were important people there.

BROOKS: I wanted to ask you--had you yourself worked with Indian office records before you came to the Archives?

HOLMES: Never. No, but I found them fascinating, and of course I was interested in Indian history and land history. One of the things that was interesting the Deputy Examiners and Dr. Buck and others at this time was the administrative history of Government agencies as you know. In fact, one of the jobs of the Deputy Examiners, assigned to them while they were still an Accessions Division, was to prepare administrative histories of agencies assigned to them. They were supposed to be contributing to a guide to the records of the Federal Government, not only to what's here in the Archives but what's still over in the agencies. Dr. Buck was supposed to be the editor, the one to prepare this guide for publication. And if you've been back through our reports as Deputy Examiners, after the Accessions Division was abolished, I think in our first reports as Records Divisions Chiefs, we were sending each month or, more likely, quarterly, to Buck a statement that we hadn't had time to do anything on the guide. Administrative history was thus another Archives problem, and it was discussed a great deal in Buck's seminar. As you know while he was still Director

of Publications he was so interested in administrative history that he talked a good deal about a dictionary of Federal administrative history. Hamer was interested, too, because the dictionary would include the field installations--anything that somebody might look up in connection with the Federal Government anytime in it's history. They had already been in touch with one of the foundations about the money for this. He conceived of it as a thing almost equivalent to the dictionary of American History. But we never got started with that except that Buck, and Leonard White out at Chicago, got much interested in it and they talked back and forth about it. I still think the whole question of administrative history is one thing we've done too little about in the National Archives. Of course, I don't know how much of a place it occupies in the new guide that's coming out. Am I talking too much?

BROOKS: No. What else? When you were Chief of the Interior Department Division, did you find, as the people in connection with the War and State Departments did, and others, some reluctance to transfer records to the Archives, or some difficulty in learning what the Archives was about?

HOLMES: There may have been some question at first, but actually space considerations soon took care of that situation, I think. Space considerations in connection with agencies of the New Deal for one thing; and then of course, when the War came, that meant a further push. The first big move--well the first moves from Interior were little batches of records that were in danger in basements where water came in, or attics or closets that they wanted to clean out--small batches. Those were taken over and I think helped to give them some confidence in us, but the biggest--the first big move--involving about 7,000 cubic feet of Bureau of Indian Affairs records, came because the space they occupied in the North Interior building was wanted for the Public Works Agency. Secretary of the Interior, Ickes, then was also Director of Public Works, and I can remember when what we would now call "management" people came down from Public Works and saw all this space, and there was nothing for it but that the Indian Office had to let go of its records, and there was no place that they could put them that they thought would be better than over here in the Archives. So we brought them in. It took some time to make a good, careful accession inventory. I remember one of those inventories was about 60 single-spaced pages, and there were others of 30 and 40, and so forth. We spent a good deal of time doing that. Then the Indian Office, when the records were moved, sent over for a while two of its people--Brent Morgan came over, he had been in charge of the old records, and another

man whose name I've forgotten came over temporarily. They taught us, you know, about the service on those records, and so forth, and the people over in the Bureau that would be needing them, and it was a good thing to do I think, a temporary thing like that. Later a man named Johnson came over with the land records and stayed probably 8 months or so. Now when the Bureau of Indian Affairs was moved into the new or South Interior building, they still couldn't get all their records in the wing that had been assigned to them, so they trimmed off more and sent them to us. They sent us still more when they moved to Chicago during the war. They just couldn't help themselves really. The Land Office--let's see, what was it--some other jobs Ickes got, the Petroleum Administration, he was head of that too. They had to have the wing that a lot of the old Land Office records were in. So we started moving those just about when I became Chief, and, as I said, Kahn did the inventory. So it was first New Deal agencies and then War agencies. Of course, the Land Office one was the biggest move we made. There were over 40,000 cubic feet of records that came in that move. Something like--well, well over 1,000 truckloads.

BROOKS: Some of them were maps, right?

HOLMES: Some of them were maps, yes.

BROOKS: Were they in the preliminary survey? Were they surveyed by people in the Maps Division or were they included in the preliminary survey generally? When was the separation?

HOLMES: The Deputy Examiners, the regular ones, surveyed maps along with other paper records. But they were directed to write a memorandum to Marcus Price for the use of Mr. Joerg, Chief of the Division of Maps and Charts, to let him know where the maps were and what they were, and I think he could send somebody over later if he wanted to, to look at them. Particularly if they were recommended for transfer somebody in the Maps Division went along with us in making an accession inventory.

BROOKS: Then at the time they were transferred they were assigned to the Division of Maps and Charts.

HOLMES: Yes. This procedure was a little different from that relating to photographs and motion pictures which had their special examiner from the first, you know. Haythorn for a while, and Cowling for a while, were in the Accessions Division dealing with motion pictures.

We would report things to them if they hadn't found out by themselves, but they did the surveys and made special G-8 forms on them.

BROOKS: But there was more likelihood of having photographs intermingled with the regular records than would be the case with motion pictures.

HOLMES: Yes.

BROOKS: I think the job of segregating the photographs took a long time after they got into the building.

HOLMES: When, after we got records into the building, we found batches of photographs with them, as we sometimes did, we reported those, too. We hadn't noticed them before, perhaps. They would come up from the Division of Photographic Archives and Research and decide whether they could or should be transferred. In many cases photographs are still in with paper records, I think. They would transfer them if they should be, and put in the record files slips of paper for cross-reference sheets to indicate they were transferred to the Photographic Division. That took time, and then you'd have to write out a report changing your footage, as a result of that, you know.

Before I left the Interior Division we did a lot of reviewing and editing of the Survey of Federal Archives Reports that Dr. Hamer's surveyors had made in Federal field offices outside of Washington. I can remember staying down here nights working on those. Some of my people like Litton and others got involved in going over those for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. As a result we probably edited around 25 of them or so. I suppose most of them got published. I'd have to check on that. But a few never got published because they never reached the form of final reports. This work was very, very interesting to me of course. It tied in with the Central records we had in custody, and gave one a picture of what the field records problem was. And they were always bringing that up over in the Interior Department--the Indian Office people especially--"What are you going to do about our field records. They're in bad condition here and there," or an agency was being closed or something, "can we bring these into Washington?" The question of what to do about field records became a very important one at this stage. I remember writing a memo to the Accessions Advisory Committee, which we had as you know, reporting on the Indian Office wanting to send in certain field records. Could I tell them that we will receive them? They said yes, and one of the first groups of field records that we brought in were records from the Leech Lake,

White Earth, and Consolidated Chippewa Agencies in northern Minnesota. Miss Nute had reported on bad conditions under which they were kept and said they'd been offered to the Minnesota Historical Society, but shouldn't they come down here? Well, I sent Herman Kahn out to look at them and we decided that they should come, so he prepared the shipment and so on, and they're down here. They were an awfully mixed-up bunch of records. We didn't get them straightened out for a while. Finally they were covered by Ed Hill's second inventory on field records of the Office of Indian Affairs.

BROOKS: I guess that Indian Affairs must have been among the more voluminous field records.

HOLMES: Yes, I would say so. Next probably to Land Office records. Now the Land Office had already to some extent settled its field problem, because in many cases as the last Land Office in the state was closed up, they arranged to turn the records over to the state. They had a precedent there that they were following. I don't know to what extent it's still being followed, I don't think there have been any states lately in which the last Land Office has closed its doors. But also with field records, of course, there was some desire on the part of the states to get those relating to Indian Affairs. The best example of what was done there, and it's logical I guess, was when the republics of the five civilized tribes were closed up in Oklahoma. In what was Indian territory the Oklahoma people got Congress to put through the Hastings Act which provided that their records could be turned over to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

BROOKS: After 1907? After it had become a state?

HOLMES: Yes, and so you had that example. And there were other states that wondered "what are we going to do about these field records?" And it became a thing that we talked about a good deal, and you remember we had this meeting down in Richmond in 1942 in which I gave a paper on the problem of Federal records in the states, and McCain also talked about it because usually when an emergency agency was closed up they ordered the records sent in so you had the records for the Mississippi Food Administration here in Washington--he knew that and wanted them down in Mississippi. Well he talked about field records in emergency agencies. Jesse Douglas talked about military records. The problem was different there because whenever a command was abolished or a fort closed, they sent them into Washington, you know. One of the big complications in the military records picture are all the field records they have.

BROOKS: Yeah. Bahmer talked about that in his interview.

HOLMES: Then the final speaker on that program was Richard Morris, of all people, up in New York. He was interested at this time, and his paper was entitled something about the need for regional depositories for Federal records. Of course under Hamer, he had handled the old Survey of Federal Archives in New York City, and he got much interested in archival problems at that time. You know the way the thing was finally settled, but it was one of the big questions of that period, what to do about all the field records.

BROOKS: The way it was finally settled was that some came in here. Eventually some went to our centers in the field.

HOLMES: Oh yes, now of course that's generally the thing. We've sent some back to the centers, actually. But also it came into the picture in State Department records when we got the State Department to ask all of its field jurisdictions to send in records from all over the world, so that was another big thing.

BROOKS: In the 1950's, when I had charge of the San Francisco center and annexes in Southern California and Hawaii, there were lots of Indian Office records already there and a good many more taken in from California, Arizona, and Nevada. Some of them were pretty old, and very important. And some of the staff of that center were interested, and still are, in the research possibilities of those records.

HOLMES: Oh, I'm sure. I don't know whether there are any other things over there when I was in Interior that you wish me to talk about. It was a fascinating period for me. So was the surveying of records when I was a Deputy Examiner. You know, I hadn't really expected to stay down here in Washington. I thought I would come down here for a few years and get some experience, write my dissertation, and probably go back up to New York. But you got involved, and if you were any good at all and had a natural flare for these things it was a challenge, a real challenge all the way through.

BROOKS: Well, we have remarked before that the various descriptions of records that were prepared in connection with the transfers--accessions, inventory, and so forth--were the only finding aids, and still are, for some record groups.

But while you were still in Interior Archives the Archivist appointed a committee on finding mediums, of which Price was the chairman, and Buck was one of the most active members, as was Hamer. In early 1940, and during that year, Mr. Joerg and Irvine were on there representing the records divisions. But they had a succession of meetings which are evidenced by the records in the file of that committee, upstairs, at which a lot of people appeared, including Posner, by the way I think he was quite influential. That was in the first year he was here.

HOLMES: I would say that Posner was also influential in his talks in the seminar that Buck had, too. He gave those sometimes.

BROOKS: Right. Well he appeared before that committee one time, in April of 1940. Then a great many people submitted memoranda to the committee about finding mediums. Not only division chiefs, because there is one up there from me, and I was far from a division chief then. You submitted a long one. They really went into that thing pretty thoroughly.

HOLMES: Well, I remember submitting one. I can't remember participating too much. I was called down there I think once for an oral session where they asked me a number of questions, but I don't remember what it was all about, really. I think I got into the picture only later when I went down to take over Buck's office. Of course Dr. Connor settled the thing before he retired by getting out the memo about reorganization. I was involved with the later Advisory Committee on Finding Mediums that was set up by that memorandum, and later on became its chairman. Price was first.

BROOKS: The memorandum you speak of is A-142, which is I think one of the more important single documents in the history of this place, that describes the concepts of record groups and subgroups. I tried to get people to tell me what questions I should ask in this project a year or two ago, and I got very few suggestions--I think because most of the people that are now around don't know much about the history of the place. But one question was--"why haven't there been more subgroups identified and dealt with?"

HOLMES: I can talk about subgroups if you wish right now.

BROOKS: All right, why don't you?

HOLMES: Of course the first problem was to get the record groups established and that was quite a problem. It was understood that should be done first before we took up the matter of subgroups. Only after record groups were established could we identify the subgroups within each record group. We started working on subgroups a little bit. Irvine started working on it. Irvine and I got into very extended discussions about what deserved to be called a subgroups, and so on. On the whole I think it could have been worked out, but it took more time, of course, more time than working out the record groups basically, and we somehow never found time to go ahead with it. I still think it should be done. Where an agency, for example, whose records we recognize as a record group today, inherited the records of a number of other agencies, as often happened when it was created, those records should be designated as subgroups, should be identified as such on paper, should be separately described in the inventories, and so on. I still think it's one of the lacks of the Archives. There are quite a few things we should do around here, and we've never found time to do them.

BROOKS: That's true. This memo, A-142, was issued in February of 1941. At about the same time there was sent to the Archivist something I found in the file, a confidential memorandum that I think a lot of people didn't know about for a long time, signed jointly by Buck and Price, recommending the dissolution of the Catalogue and Classification Division, and another memorandum listing in detail where the various members of these Divisions should be assigned. That was put into effect by Connor in, I think, March of '41. The same memo of February '41, as you said, provided for an Advisory Committee on Finding Mediums to continue this consideration. Price was the first chairman and you succeeded him. Then you took over the whole responsibility for this thing in January of '42 as Director of Research and Records Description.

In the meantime, there's one more event that I'd like to ask you about, Oliver, probably a digression. Do you remember anything particular about the resignation of Connor and the appointment of Buck as Archivist, or why those things took place.

HOLMES: No, I still don't know why Connor resigned, except I do think he felt he belonged in North Carolina. His interests and family affairs were down there, and he was much interested in the University, and I think--I don't know--that he'd become kind of fed up with problems in this place and thought it would be a simpler life down there, and a happier one.

BROOKS: I don't think there's any great mystery about it, really. The first thing I did in this project was to spend a week going through Connor's papers in North Carolina. The letters he wrote then and what other people have said about this, like Thad Page, make me feel as you said that he didn't like administrative work, particularly.

HOLMES: He couldn't be a scholar and be Archivist at the same time.

BROOKS: Right. He was very closely tied to North Carolina. His wife was not particularly well, and I think that's all pretty obvious.

HOLMES: He probably felt he had done his job, by that time. He'd come up here and got the place started, and he stayed until he finally worked out an organization that he thought was practical, and so forth, and now let somebody else take over.

BROOKS: But everyone to whom I have talked to in this project has spoken well of Connor.

HOLMES: My feeling about Connor is that he was a very good man. Of course one reason he was good was his fairly close and direct relationship to President Roosevelt.

BROOKS: They evidently had a very warm relationship.

HOLMES: They could talk to each other. I'm sure that Connor could talk to Roosevelt much better than Buck could. It was that Southern business, I don't know whether they actually played poker together or not.

BROOKS: They were good friends.

HOLMES: I think Connor deserves credit for a number of things that probably Buck or someone else couldn't have done. One of them is just deciding to fill in the center court of the Archives Building. If that hadn't been done, the Archives would never have been the institution it became. I guess he just went and persuaded Roosevelt that it was needed, and Roosevelt agreed, and they got Public Works Agency funds and did it.

BROOKS: And it was done then apparently long ahead of our needs. We were anticipating the need. Come the war and the need developed. Mr. Connor was very conscious of Congressional relations, and this

evidently had a background in his own experience with the North Carolina legislature. His father and Thad Page's father were in the legislature. One of the things I think Connor contributed around here was that he established good relations with the Congress at the beginning.

HOLMES: Well, he was a little bit in trouble there for a while you know, because there was criticism that the Archives was taking in a lot of useless papers down here, a lot of trash, and so forth. I think it's a good thing he got that court started when he did because it could have happened that because of that criticism later they might not have allowed it to be done.

BROOKS: There was always talk, especially on the part of one Congressman, Cochrane, about cheap storage space, like a records center. Of course, when the Pentagon was built the President and various other people said that after the war it could revert to a records depository. But on the whole Connor's external relations with the President, with the Congress, with the scholars, and so forth, were good, and he was good at handling people. There are many evidences, as many people have commented, that he was far better than Dr. Buck.

HOLMES: Yes. Now Dr. Buck was better I think when it came to historical research and the theoretical thinking about "archives." Maybe he was a good supplement to Connor--a good second person to have in the picture here. He didn't get along as well with Congress and of course he came at a very unhappy time when our staff was cut down because of the war. I can see how after seven years--both of them were Archivist for seven years weren't they? I can see how after seven years Buck thought he had his fill also.

BROOKS: Buck and I taught a course in historiography jointly over at American University one year--1938-'39. He certainly was deep in that field and I think he had a good understanding of what the Archives should do, and what its job was. He was good at the internal mission of the Archives. But a lot of people didn't get along too well with him. I did, usually. I was pretty well out of all of this finding medium business, and the record group concept, because after being over in Independent Agencies Archives with Flippin for a couple of years, one of the things that Buck said when he became Archivist was they would have to rescue me from that situation. He took me down to his office as a Special Assistant to work on plans for the records administration program. On January 1, 1942, I was put in charge of the records

administration program. Nobody knew then exactly what we were supposed to do, but I felt that we knew what we wanted to accomplish.

HOLMES: I know he got tremendously interested in that.

BROOKS: Yeah.

HOLMES: Sometimes I thought, well, he's getting off on a tangent here, but it was a pretty important thing, and for a while he couldn't talk about anything else.

BROOKS: It was a pretty uncharted and imaginative thing in some ways, and I think a good many people in the Archives quite honestly felt that all that was just not an archival function. That our job, really as the Archives Act says explicitly, was to take in historical records and provide reference service on them, and so forth. The authority for records administration was really derived rather vaguely. Well, one thing I do remember about the record group business is that you and I, while you were Director of Research and Records Description, and I was Assistant Director of Records Accessioning and Preservation, but in charge of the Records Administration program, worked together on a list of record group creating agencies. We then had the idea that we could assign people to work with the agencies, people from the Records Administration office or the records divisions, with some idea of whether or not they were going to produce record groups in time. Generally speaking, I don't think that effort succeeded, for the reason that the Government changed too fast, especially right then with the war coming on.

HOLMES: You were getting back to a function that would have been a logical one for the Deputy Examiners, had the Accessions Division continued, because we were getting into that matter all the time in our relations with the agencies at that stage. In some ways this could have been a function that would have justified the Accessions Division continuing, I think. But, anyway, that's past. We have somewhat the same function involved now in our Division of Appraisal work, and so forth.

BROOKS: Well, as Director of Research and Records Description I would guess that the job of identifying the record groups was not complete when you took over that job, and that job was really one of the biggest parts of your work there, right?

HOLMES: Well, certainly at first, yes. I had, when I was still Chief of Interior Department Archives, and all the other records division chiefs had in that year, decided on the record groups that they had, and prepared draft registration sheets for them, which were sent forward.

BROOKS: They had to be on one page.

HOLMES: Had to be on one page.

BROOKS: I thought that was a fine idea, and I still think so.

HOLMES: Yes. And those had accumulated down in Buck's office and had been reviewed. I don't know how much Buck did with them before he left that office, but they were still there, and it was one of my first jobs to go through those and decide which ones were acceptable. I could put those to one side, but on this one or that one there were questions as to whether they fitted the definition of a record group or whether the draft was clear--well, just the problems of describing them and describing records not in yet, and so forth. In some cases we'd pull out a part of a large record group that some agency had inherited and make a separate record group of it. So I had to go back and negotiate with the records division chiefs, and persuade them sometimes to do what I thought the situation demanded. Not knowing too much about the records sometimes we'd just talk it over. There would be changes. When I was finally satisfied I think I sent the whole group of draft registrations forward to Dr. Buck--with a memorandum which I should have read over before I came here, probably. I don't know where it is now but it recommended acceptance of these as the original record groups. Dr. Buck approved of them--I don't remember that we argued about any.

So that was the first list of record groups. Then the decision was that if there were to be cataloguing it would be done by record groups, but at a later stage. But most of us decided to just file the registrations alphabetically by the record group title, and that was sufficient cataloguing of record groups. Well we began making out these record group lists that come out periodically now with the changes. That was something that took a good deal of time and mental effort.

The other thing that had been started before I was moved down there by Dr. Buck--well, of course when I got down there the war had already come--it had come in December. But even before the war we were feeling that we might be drawn into it, you know, and we put in a good deal of time and study on records of the first world war. Even in drawing up records description documents we'd been told to emphasize records of agencies that might become important again in case we got in the war. We had a lot of those in the Archives Building, and Dr. Buck had dreamed up the idea of making a guide to those records of those agencies, and he started it. Actually, of course, it was approved by Dr. Connor in June before he left. Dr. Buck had started some people like Preston Edsall and Marion Rice working on it.

BROOKS: On World War I agencies?

HOLMES: Yes. And also the records divisions were supposed to send down reports that would go into this. The cataloguers--cataloguers and classifiers that had been assigned now to the records divisions began to turn their attention to doing work of this sort you know, in the records divisions. Well anyway, you probably remember this. Let's see now, Buck's memo says . . .

BROOKS: "Responsibility for continued planning and supervision has rested on Oliver W. Holmes, Director of Research and Records Description."

HOLMES: And Carl Lokke was still down there then, too. I don't remember that Angel--Angel almost as soon as Buck became Archivist became Assistant to the Archivist for a while.

BROOKS: Well for a few months he took over the job of Ernie Bryan, assistant to Thad Page, in handling publications and information, and he was largely more concerned with annual reports and circulars and leaflets than he was with this kind of thing, I think.

HOLMES: Yes, and pointing out these things, you know there was another thing we had started then, too, and that was the Reference Information Circulars. Although they really developed more after we got into war, and related to the areas in which our people were operating.

BROOKS: Were they done under the supervision of your office or Hamer's, who was Director of Reference Service then?

HOLMES: I don't remember. My office hadn't so much to do with it.

BROOKS: No I think they were mostly Hamer's. Now at some stage Elizabeth Drewry wrote an article.

HOLMES: Yes, she wrote a very important article on "Historical Units of Agencies of the First World War," published as a bulletin of the National Archives, which I think was one thing that brought Elizabeth into the limelight.

BROOKS: That was sometime before this, right?

HOLMES: That was before I took over as Director of Research and Records Description.

BROOKS: When she was in Division of Reference?

HOLMES: Yes, and while Buck was still Director of Publications. He evidently put it out. He followed it by planning the Handbook of Federal World War Agencies and Their Records, and I took over the responsibility as of January 1, 1942, for completing this. The articles were drafted largely by persons in the records divisions, and there is a list of them in front. You will see a lot of names there you'd recognize, but few are with the Archives today. Some left during the war and never returned. Carl Lokke and Marion Rice did most of the editorial work, coordinating the articles and supplementing them where necessary. I reviewed their work and I think I wrote the introduction. The whole thing was arranged alphabetically. Well that was the second thing in my first year in the office down there.

And of course the lists became the model of the two-volume guide that Dr. Hamer eventually did for World War II. At that time we talked about guides to other records, too, but we were losing people in the Archives that had knowledge of these records. Jobs were going down in number and being filled by people who weren't acquainted with the records; and war affairs were so important that we stayed with them and just sort of postponed all plans for any later guide at that stage.

BROOKS: The rush of wartime reference service and many other problems took precedence over many of them.

Oliver, one thing I would like to have you say a word about is, where was the main spade work on the finding aids done while you were Director of Research and Records Description, and perhaps you'd say something in connection with that about the degree to which the records divisions were cooperative. I ask this perhaps out of a certain bias of my own, because at that time my impression was that the records divisions generally were not too well disposed towards records administration or rather towards the Archivist. I wondered what was your experience in working with them.

HOLMES: Well Phil, you may have forgotten that the Archivist, before the reorganization took place by a memo of February 28, 1941, and I have the number here--A-142--directed that "hereafter all prescribed finding mediums shall be drafted by the personnel of the Custodial Divisions," to which the records had been allocated. Of course this preceded the big memo abolishing the cataloguing and classification divisions. Its intention was to put the responsibility back there with the divisions having actual responsibility for the records. However, when it came to publishing these inventories, responsibility for editing and perhaps revising or talking with the records divisions about anything that didn't seem quite right before you published, fell to the Director of Publications. I inherited that when I became Director of Research and Records Description. Well, as I said most of our earliest work was involved in getting the record groups set up. Then there were two things--one thing was to make use in the new finding medium program of the work of the Classification Division. All the work they'd been doing on the Food Administration, for example, and others. That pretty much fell to my office. The other thing was to get the records divisions to get busy as fast as possible and do inventories under the new scheme for war-related records that might be useful, now that the war had broken out, to parallel agencies created for World War II.

BROOKS: Those were in the format that we know as preliminary inventories?

HOLMES: Yes. Now if I can list the first five inventories that were published, they will illustrate this very quickly. Number one, Records of the War Industries Board. You know how important those records were, and we got that out as a first inventory. Of course the work was

done back in Irvine's division, and we cooperated on it and got it out. The second one described the records of the Council of National Defense, the same sort of thing. The third one covered the records of the Food Administration, and that was of course the result of all the work that Hill and his Classification Division had done on it, but our office had to take their work and put it together. It was a big, thick thing. Probably it was less important than the first two I've mentioned, but nevertheless the food problem was there also in World War II. The fourth one was the War Labor Policies Board, and I don't know who was responsible for that. Maybe you had something to do with it, or you may have worked on it. And the fifth one was the National War Labor Board of World War I. So you can see where the emphasis was coming down in my office in addition to work on this handbook of Federal World War I agencies.

BROOKS: Yes, I see the introduction to this Food Administration inventory says "primary responsibility for the work in its present form is assumed by the Director of Research and Records Description."

HOLMES: But actually we were turning in inventories--the records division chiefs were, and before I left Interior I had turned in a couple. I turned in one on the Fine Arts Commission records, and one I think on the Records of the Railroads Division that handled the early Western railroad surveys, which were in the records of the Secretary's office of the Interior Department. But those didn't get edited right away down in my place because we were emphasizing the war-related things.

Now, another important work that had begun under Dr. Buck's period there was that of the file microcopy business. As you know, that started under Buck. Buck and Tate were much interested and I think there was a memo that I wrote from the Interior Division on Indian records that we were being asked to reproduce over and over again, and I wanted to ask if we couldn't make a master negative and just . . .

BROOKS: Of the whole series, not just the documents that were being requested.

HOLMES: Of the whole series. Now this was the series of letterbooks of the Secretary of War relating to Indian affairs--there were six of them before the Bureau was set up. Then the letterbooks, six of them too, of the Superintendent of Indian Trade. There were other series too that I just hated to send down to be photographed all the time, if we

could get them done once and for all. So I wrote a memo, I've forgotten the number of it, but this would be about 1939, and ever after that there were discussions. Tate was much interested and I don't know whether Tate talked about this or not to you, but . . .

BROOKS: Yes he did. I asked him about it.

HOLMES: . . . but Buck was much interested in it. Then in 1940 a Committee on File Microcopies was set up to make recommendations. The division chiefs were asked to submit suggestions of those records that they were being asked to film over and over again, or that they thought for some reason should be put on the File Microcopy program and made available that way. Those suggestions would come down to Price and he would refer them to this Committee that had been set up on File Microcopies. Actually Buck was the first chairman of this Committee and Price, Tate, and Hamer were members, and, when Buck became Archivist, Hamer succeeded him as chairman. When Hamer became chairman and there was a vacancy I went on the Committee. Of course this was a Committee that I had a good deal to do with when I was Director of Research and Records Description because we had the general responsibility, although when a certain file microcopy was approved the work again was done in the divisions; but we supervised it and Preston Edsall did some of the first ones. Later on . . .

BROOKS: Was Edsall in your office then, or where was he assigned?

HOLMES: He was in my office for a little while. Seems to me that when--there may have been an interim--that when Edsall left, Masterson came in. I know I hired Masterson and his first work was with file microcopies here. He did the final review of all the records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian affairs that had the Cass letterbooks in them and so forth, and that was the first microfilm publication the Archives put out. The second one was the Oregon and Washington Indian Superintendencies, and I had suggested those. I had suggested eight or ten before I left Interior. Then when the war--well, that was one of the reasons--we thought we were going to have to stop this work when the war came on and then . . . Well, we got the idea, of course, as things began to look more serious that it might be a good thing for the really important records in the Archives, and presumably those were the ones which we were being called on for copies over and over, to get copies out around the country. Because right away in the early years of the war, you know, there was a feeling

that Washington might be an object of bombing sometime. So instead of cutting down on the file microcopy program we began to put more money into it, and got money from Congress for increasing the records on microfilm. And that led to surprising emphasis on more file microcopy work in the office and in the divisions, rather than regular inventory work.

BROOKS: Was that when the term was changed from file microcopy to microfilm publications?

HOLMES: That came I think three or four years later. Anyway, beginning the microfilm publication program was another big job of this office. I've always been glad that it really got started right. I don't know that there's much more to say about it unless you think of some questions about the work there--I was only down there two and a half years you know and then another reorganization . . .

BROOKS: In your relations to the records divisions you had to take the work that they had done and go back and ask them, and talk to them about changes that should be made . . .

HOLMES: Whether it was records groups or whether it was inventories or microfilm service--a very, very close relationship.

BROOKS: To your mind it was effective and reasonably cordial, or did it vary from division to division?

HOLMES: I can't remember any serious fights I had, Phil. I can remember arguments but they all seemed to get settled.

BROOKS: I probably had an over-emphasized impression of the contention, because as I say I was in charge of a program that people were taking pot shots at all the time, I think, some of them as I said just for the sake of taking pot shots, and some of them really felt that records administration wasn't part of the Archives job.

HOLMES: Now the records description program could have been a much more active program if it hadn't been that actually we were losing so many people in the records divisions, that not so much came through. In later days there was just nobody to do this sort of work in addition to reference work. I won't say nobody, but not enough people, and we were still having to move in tremendous quantities of records in those early years and arrange them on the shelves, and all of that, so you can

understand that the finding aid work, except for registrations of record groups, which had to be kept up to date, got neglected.

BROOKS: The annual reports, which were published while the Archives was an independent agency, are much more full than the reports of most agencies, I think, and they are very good on such things as the separation of personnel for the military, and so forth.

HOLMES: Then another thing that was starting then--remember Buck along with Pendleton Herring and the Social Science Research Council, were very insistent on putting a historian in each of the War agencies. What was it, what was the phrase?

BROOKS: "Capture and record."

HOLMES: "Capture and record." And a lot of our people who weren't eligible for military service themselves went over into war agencies, like Carl Lokke who went over into the Fuel Administration, and so forth. These were the people that would have been doing this sort of work, but now they were capturing and recording, and this is where records administration comes in too, a little bit.

BROOKS: Oh yes. I was for quite some time the Archives representative to go up to the Budget Bureau and meet with the agency historians. That's when I got to know Ken Hechler well. He was coordinating this business in the Budget Bureau right after the war, and is now a Congressman from West Virginia.

HOLMES: Dr. Buck was much interested in this.

BROOKS: Right. Well late in November of 1943 Dan Lacy was appointed Director of Operations. He had for a short time before that been Assistant to the Archivist, and before that assistant to Harris in charge of the Committee on the Conservation of Cultural Resources. That was November of '43, and you didn't become Program Adviser till July 1, 1944, according to the report. Did you work much with Lacy, did you have much connection with him?

HOLMES: Not a great deal. It was cordial but I don't think our work interlocked very much.

BROOKS: That was a very hectic period, and is very vivid in the memory of many people.

HOLMES: You would be the one that would remember that, of course, much more than I would.

BROOKS: I was assistant to Lacy for a while.

HOLMES: Could I mention something?

BROOKS: Anything.

HOLMES: Something else before my title changed now, and that is that work with Posner began down in the Office of Research and Records Description with respect to his making lists, you know, of foreign archival repositories in the different countries. It continued, and he worked closely with me and we reviewed his lists and all after I was Program Adviser.

BROOKS: And I think it was one of the things I read in your chronological file as Program Adviser. It said that Posner's services were made available by the American Council of Learned Societies.

HOLMES: That's right.

BROOKS: What was the connection there?

HOLMES: Leland was then in charge there so you can understand that. That's one reason Posner and Leland got very close to each other. I don't know who it was that persuaded the American Council of Learned Societies to make that money available. We couldn't pay Posner. He was not I think an American citizen then exactly. So we got money, I don't know how much he was paid anymore, but we got money through Leland's organization for this work. But he used our library facilities, and of course, one thing Dr. Buck had been doing in the early years, too, long before I came down to that office, was to have all those translations made from European periodicals. The library was really getting in the material then. Between our library and the Library of Congress, and Posner's knowledge, why he was the man to do this.

BROOKS: Posner made the comment to me within the last year or two that this business of translations from European archival journals was something that influenced Dr. Buck greatly, and he was much interested in it.

HOLMES: Oh yes. He felt that we really had to learn more from Europe than we had up to this time. Of course many of these problems were being debated in the European journals themselves.

BROOKS: In some connections, for instance the protection of archives, the European countries had war problems before we got into them.

HOLMES: Before we got into the war. Of course the war had begun in Europe in '39, so they were already concerned with the whole problem. Posner had written his article in the American Archivist that was very important on the "Effects of changes of sovereignty on archives," (read in 1941), and things like that you know, and about the war background.

BROOKS: Fred Shipman cited Ernst's later article on "Public records under military occupation" as leading to his going to Europe. And that same incident of Posner giving this talk at a luncheon group of archivists here in 1943 and Fred Shipman being influenced by it, and writing a memorandum to the President the next day, that same incident is recounted in your article of 1946 on the protection of records in wartime.

HOLMES: In that article of 1946 I think I list the different lists that Posner made. He started with Italy then he worked on other countries that we expected to invade--France, Austria, and Germany. But he also, of course, did interesting articles on the actual use of records in the German administration and in Italian administration. This was done for the benefit of our own archives people that were going over there, and to tell them how these records were kept and what they were used for.

BROOKS: Your point is now that that work, which I think was vitally important, started when you were still Director of Research and Records Description.

HOLMES: That's right.

BROOKS: Okay. Anything else special that we should put in the record about that period?

HOLMES: One thing I should say--all the time I was Director of Research and Records Description the library was under my charge. Trever was librarian. I suppose that he's talked a little about the early library days. Anyway he knew about them.

BROOKS: He did a great deal, and he's the only one that has said anything about it.

HOLMES: The library continued under my charge for a while while I was Program Adviser, and then later on it was put back under--I guess Hamer was Director of Records Control--as they called it. He'd taken over my responsibilities when the Office of Research and Records Description was abolished. He'd taken over my responsibilities for the library and for records description, you might say.

BROOKS: He then had records description and reference service insofar as there was a centralized job, right?

HOLMES: Yes.

BROOKS: What led to all that change, do you know?

HOLMES: I wish I could tell you. I don't quite understand why it took place yet. I tell you, the war things were becoming too big for Dr. Buck, for one thing, and he was much concerned about them.

BROOKS: He probably wanted you closer at hand.

HOLMES: And I think that he felt that Dr. Hamer could handle the other. Hamer had always been interested in records description when he was on the former Finding Aid Committee, and so forth. I don't-- I just really can't tell you what's behind that shift. Like many of my shifts, I don't understand them.

BROOKS: Well, I've thought primarily of your job as Program Adviser from July 1, 1944, until I guess Kahn went to Hyde Park in August of '48, which was when you went back to Interior. It was Natural Resources by then. I've always thought of your job as Program Adviser largely as dealing with the external relations of the Archives--with the records in countries where the war took place. Also, it's evident in your chronological files that you had a good deal to do with other archival agencies in this country, and other archival countries abroad. You handled a great deal of correspondence with them.

HOLMES: Well, let me read. I put this down here a few days ago. The Program Adviser was responsible, according to the memo, "for conducting external relations having to do with foreign, state, local, and private records, or archival establishments." And this I think occupied much of my time particularly since the war created so many more external relations.

BROOKS: It's very possible that it was too much for Buck to handle.

HOLMES: It's much the same sort of thing in a way that--well Rieger had for a while and Frank Evans now for the Archivist, except that there were special circumstances.

BROOKS: Yeah, with the war and all. Besides, you were more path-finding than they. I think you really did a lot more than they.

HOLMES: One of the things--I had gotten involved with Buck and Posner a good deal in teaching and the Summer Institute, too, by this time. One thing that I had to deal with were interns that came here. Foreign visitors of all sorts.

BROOKS: There's correspondence in the file that you drafted for the Archivist, or that you handled yourself, with India and Latin America, and other places about these interns.

HOLMES: Yes. Well India, Dr. Sen was over there, and Buck was impressed with him and he sent over Chakravarti, who was the first Indian archivist to come over here.

BROOKS: I saw both those names in the file.

HOLMES: And there was one boy from China that came that I was much impressed with. I've often wondered what happened to him when he went back there. I think his name was Chu, but I'm not sure. Then you know we did have at that time an Interdepartmental Committee on Cooperation with the American Republics over in the State Department. Raymond Zwemer was chairman of it if you ever knew him. I still see him once in a while.

BROOKS: I don't remember him.

HOLMES: Well he was chairman of it. I don't know who was responsible for working this out originally, but they provided us with funds to invite up an intern--we were eventually to have one from each of the Latin American Republics--to come up here and study from six months to a year in the National Archives. Hill may have had something to do with this, starting it, but I don't know that he did. Anyway, this continued over several years when I was Program Adviser. Trever of course became Assistant Program Adviser and would remember this, too. He was Assistant for quite a while and was very important. Well we had people like Carrera Stampa from Mexico.

BROOKS: I saw his name in the correspondence, and somebody from Brazil.

HOLMES: Yes there was a woman.

BROOKS: Where was Eyzaguirre from?

HOLMES: Eyzaguirre was from Chile and he became Archivist there. Dr. Ella Dunbar Templé from Peru, Ana Rueda from Colombia, Carlos Quesada from Argentina, Mario López from Cuba. López came up here primarily to study lamination under Kimberly and went back to Cuba and did a lot of important early lamination while Llaverías was still head of the Archives. He did it not only for their records but for their newspapers.

BROOKS: There was quite a lot of correspondence with Llaverías and I guess it's mainly about that.

HOLMES: Probably so. Of course I was down there in '47 and that was my first and only trip to Cuba, and Llaverías was very, very friendly.

BROOKS: Oh yes. Lacy and I went down to a conference of an archives committee of the Pan American Institute in 1950, and Llaverías was very cordial and very much the host of the whole business.

HOLMES: Then, let's see, no that was later that I went to Puerto Rico, much later, about ten years later. Well, the girl from Brazil was Inez Correia d'Araujo, and she was more interested in records administration. She may have gotten involved with you.

BROOKS: Yeah, there was one of the people from Brazil that we used to have lunch with and I've forgotten who else was involved, somebody else from here, but I remember talking Spanish to this girl and her talking English to us. Maybe I was trying to learn Portuguese--at one time I was studying Portuguese--but all Brazilians with any culture speak Spanish too.

HOLMES: Well, then of course I still had Posner's work, which we were supervising.

BROOKS: He continued his teaching all this time didn't he?

HOLMES: Yes. There was a Summer Institute and there was the yearly Winter course.

BROOKS: Now the American University Winter course at that time served the purpose as well of a training course for people on the Archives staff.

HOLMES: For people in the Archives and a little bit from other agencies, too.

BROOKS: Later there were separate courses--even in the 50's, maybe after I went West. There were training courses in the Archives separate from the American University courses, is that right?

HOLMES: No, not separate. This was Posner's course if you're talking about the evening course for which they gave credit.

BROOKS: Yeah. The History and Administration of Archives.

HOLMES: Yes. I taught that a few years after he retired, of course, and then Schellenberg took it over.

BROOKS: Posner retired I believe in 1961.

HOLMES: Well, of course there was another interesting thing that was started down there when I was Program Adviser that has nothing directly to do with the war. It seems like most of these things were war or foreign activities. We started down there the Open Conference on Administration as it was called. I don't know whether you remember that.

BROOKS: Very clearly. It was later changed to a "seminar conference," and I have somewhere the date when that change took place. I think that thing ran over three or four years did it not?

HOLMES: Yes.

BROOKS: I thought it was very good.

HOLMES: I think Trever was pretty much secretary of it, but that was sort of the establishment in which we talked about a lot of our problems with everybody being involved. I don't know that we do enough of that around here these days. Buck sometimes, I thought, had too many committees and too many meetings.

BROOKS: They have an Administrative Conference now that I think involves 50 people or something, an Archivist's conference. I don't know how often or whether it meets at regular intervals or not.

HOLMES: I think there are files of the minutes of the open and seminar conferences still around somewhere but I haven't looked at them recently.

BROOKS: I had a complete file of minutes, and I sent them to Angel shortly before I left Independence. What he did with them I don't know, but presumably they're around here. He was then Deputy Archivist.

HOLMES: Another assignment that I had then, I don't know whether it was because I was Program Adviser or not, but maybe it seemed logical, although it was something entirely new to me, was that in 1946 in August they established a Civil Service Committee of Special Examiners for Archivists. I was made chairman of that. We went over and reviewed papers of a lot of the people that were coming back from the service that wanted to come into the Archives, including some that had gone out from here and were coming back. I've forgotten the details of that, but it seemed an awfully important activity at the time.

BROOKS: Well I think it was partly because I've always thought that one of the perennial problems of this agency has been selecting qualified people, and that varies, of course, according to the market for trained people, academic people. Another has been achieving some sort of meeting between the professional qualifications of these people and the Civil Service standards for job descriptions.

HOLMES: At this time Dr. Buck was much interested in standardizing the job descriptions. I don't know just when that began. I'd have to look it up, but it tied into this to some extent.

BROOKS: The Civil Service Commission always had to have some sort of job descriptions that were supposed to go back to a set of standards, but for a long time there were not standards written for the Archivist series. In 1950 I remember Lewinson and I were on a Committee with a woman from the Civil Service Commission to revise the standards and we didn't finish the job. Phil Bauer I think later did it, so Bahmer tells me.

HOLMES: Yes, I remember that, and I think it grew a little bit out of this work, but I don't know.

BROOKS: Yes, I think it undoubtedly did, but I'm not sure that's a problem they ever solved.

HOLMES: Those were things that were going on in that office quite aside from the protection of records in foreign areas that began to take so much of my time. I think we can depend pretty well on my article for that story.

BROOKS: I gathered from the file that that did take a predominant portion of your time. There were a great many letters to Sargent Child who was in London, working for the Army, right?

HOLMES: Well no, his big job was over in Germany with the U.S. Control Commission.

BROOKS: Apparently one of your main problems, at least in '46, '47, was recruiting people to go over there and work with him.

HOLMES: Of course this was 1945, '46, and '47. Now you're talking about the control period. But previously I had had responsibility for sending people over as archivists with the U.S. Army. You know the first one, almost, was Bill McCain, with the American forces moving up in Italy.

BROOKS: Was he there before Fred Shipman went over?

HOLMES: No. Fred Shipman went over first to make the arrangements for archivists there. I can remember Fred and I talking about this thing and I was with Fred the night before he left, and wished him well, and it seemed a very, very important thing.

BROOKS: It was.

HOLMES: He worked that out. I think McCain was already over there, but we got McCain in the archives picture and I felt lucky about that, but then we had also to get somebody in the picture in England with the D-Day forces going in soon, and I looked over all the people that were already in the military service then at that time so that we might get in a War Department order assigning them to certain armies. We selected a few but their commanders refused to let them go or something, so as a result--one of my feelings of failure was we had nobody with the D-Day

forces--and they went all through northern France and got almost over to the Battle of the Bulge before we finally got some people in there. One of them was Asa Thornton, if you remember him.

BROOKS: I've forgotten in which division he had been here, but I remember him.

HOLMES: He was down with Lewinson, I think.

BROOKS: But he didn't come back to the Archives, did he?

HOLMES: No, he got sick over there after maybe--partly a little bit from exposure during the movements following the Battle of the Bulge. Anyway, he had to leave.

BROOKS: I think that activity is very well dealt with up to '46.

HOLMES: But then in '46 I guess I was the one responsible for getting Sargent Child over there. But you know, curiously enough at first, I tried to get Schellenberg. Schellenberg was ready to go but they wouldn't clear his appointment.

BROOKS: Yes, that was in the files.

HOLMES: It was?

BROOKS: It was mentioned in a letter, at least that he might go.

HOLMES: So we got "Sardi" Child over there, and then after Sardi came home, later in the occupation period, Lester Born took over. He was in charge of the big records center over there that was set up, and all this story, I think Lester deals with it himself in a later article in the American Archivist, "Ministerial Collecting Center Near Kassel, Germany," Amer. Archivist 13 (1950) 237-258. I don't know the story intimately on that. In the meantime, of course, Ken Munden too had already gotten into the picture in Italy, and he went up to SHAEF later. There were others--Lester Breitenbach, who just retired the other day from the Photographic Division in the Library of Congress after about 20 years. Also Paul Vanderbilt. Then as you know I was carrying on for other areas. I was responsible for pulling Kimberly out of Australia to go to the Philippines when we finally reconquered the Philippines, and the Philippines was another case in which we failed before, and finally came in there only to do

what we could do to protect the records. Grover went to the Philippines, too, upon my recommendation.

BROOKS: On his job in the War Department?

HOLMES: Yes. Actually Jess Douglas went too. Then, of course, in Japan, I'm sure Collas Harris mentioned that I had him tied in with the civil government over there. At least I thought I was influential in his assignment. All this was very, very important work and it took a lot of my time and thought, and I think other things kind of were neglected but I felt it was very much worthwhile.

BROOKS: It really represented this agency being in the position of world leadership.

HOLMES: Then the whole experience, of course made us think a good deal about the post-war situation. Archivists have got to get together on these problems more, we've got to have plans worked out, and so on. So, instead of my being involved in relationships to individual countries and things, as this thing started out, we began to feel more and more that we had to get the thing internationally organized. It began, I think, when you got the United Nations thinking in those terms, and so there were three projects then that I felt were very important. One was getting an archives established in the United Nations, itself, to take over the old records of the League of Nations in the first place and then get somebody to service those and handle the records of the new agency. I forget who I first thought of for that but it didn't work out, so we got Bob Claus to take over as you know.

BROOKS: Was he sent there on your recommendation?

HOLMES: Yes. The second one was when UNESCO was established. There had to be an archives program in UNESCO. That was where Herbert Brayer began getting into the picture and took a part, and Buck, of course.

BROOKS: What was Brayer doing then? I've forgotten.

HOLMES: Well he was still Archivist of Colorado, but he'd been over in England looking at the records of British industrialists--they related to cattle ranching, things like that. He was interested in international activities. He was one of these breezy fellows that came in and talked and made a good impression. I don't know whatever happened to him.

BROOKS: I always thought he meant to make a good impression. He was interested in international archival problems, but he was also very much interested in Brayer, I think.

HOLMES: Oh yes. Then the third thing of course was to set up an international organization of archivists themselves that could hold meetings periodically and get together and discuss these problems. We thought that UNESCO was the organization through which that could be done. It was UNESCO which in 1948, my last year as Program Adviser, I guess, financed a meeting in Paris. Buck and Graswinckel and Jenkinson, and about eight or nine people got together and discussed and actually established this organization. They made plans for the first meeting in Paris in 1950.

BROOKS: Was Buck the only one from this country, in 1948?

HOLMES: I thought Brayer was there, too.

BROOKS: Maybe so.

HOLMES: Now there were two things of course that preceded this. One was all the work I had done under Buck's supervision, drafting letters to go around to archivists all over the world, and spending time of course looking up the various archives and their status, and deciding whom to send the letters to. I should have looked over that file. I suppose it exists, but there must have been 30 or 40 to whom we sent letters outlining our ideas of what such an organization should do, then asking their response to certain questions of organization, and so forth. Now those letters came back, and out of it all, of course, we drafted what we thought would be a constitution.

BROOKS: You wrote the constitution didn't you?

HOLMES: I drafted the constitution.

BROOKS: I remember that.

HOLMES: I would like to some day go back and do an article on how the International Council was established--or maybe these three activities to follow up the one I did on protection of records in war areas, you know, because I think that was the next most important achievement in that post. Brayer had been sent over to UNESCO and sort of got the thing ready for the meeting over there, so that he and I together sort of worked on the thing. Fortunately the meeting was

a success and they didn't make more than one significant change in the draft of the constitution.

BROOKS: You were at the 1950 meeting, weren't you?

HOLMES: Yes. Of course Buck wasn't here then, but I appreciated Grover's permitting me to go over there.

BROOKS: He was interested, I think.

HOLMES: Yes. Miss Norton and I were the two people representing the Society of American Archivists, and we were so designated, but Grover paid my way over, thank goodness.

BROOKS: The Archives did, yes. Because the Society surely didn't have the money.

HOLMES: But I had nothing to do with the '48 meeting except to prepare for it.

BROOKS: One thing, and I probably wasn't clear on it at the time--and I'm certainly not now--is the UNESCO relationship. The second of these projects that you mentioned--the first being UN, the second something in UNESCO, and then the ICA. Well UNESCO sponsors the ICA, doesn't it?

HOLMES: It does in a sense.

BROOKS: But there was some second activity in UNESCO?

HOLMES: Well UNESCO has a division of Libraries and Archives and Documentation, and I'm not sure just how it's been reorganized since it was originally set up, but it had this thing on archives almost from the beginning. Actually, Brayer was the first Secretary General in UNESCO. I don't know how long he stayed. I think Luther Evans got rid of him when he got over there as Director General, and maybe before that. But Brayer was the first head of the Archives program, the thing that Kecskeméti is now, you know. And Born followed Brayer, and then Kecskeméti. I don't think Brayer stayed there more than four or five months, then he went back out to Colorado. It's a very strange thing thinking about these things--what's become of him, whether he's still alive or not. He got involved in book publishing in Chicago for a while.

I haven't really taken time to go back into those things enough, but I think that's probably all that's worth saying right now about the Program Adviser. It was something that brought me close to Buck. I always knew his shortcomings I think as well as anybody, but I had a good deal of respect for his mind, and he was very fair to me and I think he had confidence in me. That helped.

BROOKS: One thing I would ask about in connection with your role as Program Adviser is our relations with different organizations in this country. The National Archives, of course, had always been close to the Society of American Archivists. I interviewed H. G. Jones partly about how the attitude was sometimes evident among state archivists that the National Archives hogged the show. And we pretty well agreed, H. G. and I, as that the National Archives had a lot more people, a lot bigger organization, and bigger problems, and it also had resources, it almost inevitably had to be the leader.

Oliver, you were saying in connection with the Society of American Archivists, that you were chairman of the Committee on International Relations for five years. Do you want to say anymore about that or about the relationship of the National Archives to the Society in general.

HOLMES: I don't remember which years they were--Fred Shipman was the first chairman, I think, and I succeeded him. Lester Born succeeded me as chairman although I still remained a member of the Committee for a good many years, I would say until the mid '50's when Schellenberg took over. I think that anyone who wants to know what we were doing in those years can find my reports printed in the American Archivist. It is kind of interesting--you were asking me about our relationship to the states and other organizations--that even though the Program Adviser was, according to the memorandum establishing the office, responsible for conducting external relations--having to do with states, local, and private records of archival establishments, that the foreign problems after the war took over to such an extent that I guess I can't remember really doing very much in other areas.

BROOKS: There is evidence in the files that they were referred to you from time to time. Inquiries about lamination, or this or that.

HOLMES: I answered letters for the Archivist. I can remember doing that. Sometimes when archivists from states or from private business came here I talked with them. There was much interest in those days in business archives, too, and actually I spent a lot of time different times--probably not official time--talking with Leahy about business archives and his operations, and things of that sort. It sort of ended up in 1953, even though this was long after I was Program Adviser, in my giving a paper out at the Detroit meeting, which was published in 1954, on reflections on business archives at that time.

BROOKS: Unfortunately, that's one of the few meetings I missed. That is a revival or continuation of an interest on your part that you'd had ever since before you came to the Archives.

HOLMES: That's right. My first article on business archives was published in the first volume of The American Archivist.

Well, there were times when I felt I'd done my main job in the Program Adviser's office, and when Dr. Buck decided to leave the National Archives I felt that I wanted to get back to my old division where I'd found so many, many interesting records, and perhaps spend the rest of my life working there and maybe doing something with those records in an historical way. I think all archivists that are worthy of their name feel that they want to work with the records that they've had in their custody that deserve working with.

BROOKS: That's a perennial problem, because the more responsible positions you get the less time you have to work with the records.

HOLMES: Yes. I knew of course that I probably wasn't going any further in the front office and I'd better get back there if I was going to do it. Dr. Buck had called me in, when he decided to bring Grover back here in 1947 as Assistant Archivist and explained to me why he was asking Grover to take that position--that Records Management or Records Administration had come to be such a big thing that he felt this was not his field and he needed somebody who had worked in this field during the war to take over in that area, and he had confidence in Grover, and I think it was deserved. So Grover was taking over in an area there where the Archivist needed help, just like I was helping him as Archives Adviser in another area. I can understand the reasons why Buck felt that Grover should succeed him. He wanted to feel that somebody good would, and he felt that Grover's

appointment wouldn't be any problem and it would be a good one. Of course it was natural when Grover took over that he would bring Bob Bahmer in to be his assistant. I just felt, well this is the time for me to go back where I always wanted to be. I've had enough of the front office. So that was the way it worked.

BROOKS: Do you know what led to Buck's resignation or why he did move?

HOLMES: No, except that Buck, too, was fed up with administrative work. He was essentially a scholar. Maybe he wanted to go up to the Library of Congress in the Manuscript Division for the same reason I wanted to go back to my records. I think he felt that he could avoid having all these Congressional problems that he had, for one thing.

BROOKS: Some people have suggested to me that his problems with the Congress contributed to his decision to leave.

HOLMES: I don't remember the budget situation just at that time, but he was very unhappy about it for one thing.

BROOKS: There's some suggestion that he had difficulties with the President, for which I have found no support at all.

HOLMES: Well he certainly never had the same relationship with Presidents that Connor had.

BROOKS: Connor or Rhoads. But I think Buck said at the time and probably honestly that his main motivation was just what you say-- his desire to go from administrative work to scholarly.

HOLMES: Buck was no politician, of course. He hated having to play that role. He wanted to be a scholar and I think he realized increasingly that the Archivist of the United States was going to be mainly an administrator and a politician. There are those who say this is so, there'll never again be a scholar Archivist in a way that the first two Archivists were. I've heard that told to me by several respectable historians.

BROOKS: Well there's something to it because certainly one of the problems--I wonder what you'd say about one of the favorite subjects around here for some time--has been our staff morale. It is said to have seriously been degraded in the last 15 or 20 years, and there are a number of reasons for that. It seems to me that one contributing

reason is the fact that the place has got so big. That it's a big organization and people that work back in the stacks, for example, can't have the same relations . . .

HOLMES: You don't have the direct relationship with many people anymore. And you don't understand what's going on in their minds as background for certain decisions. You don't have a chance to say yourself what you think they ought to be. Back in Buck's day or Connor's day, we could somehow, although we didn't completely, get together more and discuss these problems.

BROOKS: We had other things like the Open Conference and the Seminar Conference. Grover tried at various times to meet that objective and Bert Rhoads is now, with things like this the Archivist's Conference and with the Archives Newsletter.

Well, about the time Grover came back, a lot of things went on--at the time Buck left Grover was appointed, and Bahmer came back not long after. Kahn went to Hyde Park in the summer of 1948, and I guess it was because that vacancy was created that your going back to Natural Resources had that timing.

HOLMES: Yes. Interior and Agriculture records had been brought together when Kahn was up there, and the resulting Division of Natural Resources represented a very basic interest of mine--all the records there interested me and I thought it was a good place to be. I remember Grover was seemingly glad that I wanted to go back there, too. He wanted a good man back there. He thought it was important. I said that--well I don't know how the matter arose--I said that now that we've consolidated former separate records divisions in a number of instances, there aren't so many anymore, and you've got a man that you trust in charge of each one. I hope that we can work directly under the Archivist and that there'll be no one in between. It's like you have a commander-in-chief and you have the generals of the armies in the field, and they should be able to talk to the commander-in-chief and obey his orders. When you start getting people in between you get into trouble. Grover promised me that he understood that as a military thing and he thought the divisions should be directly under the Archivist, and he promised me that they would be. Of course it was a little bit later, as he was finding a place for Schellenberg, that things changed, and that bothered me a great deal, although I got plenty of compensation in the other things up there.

BROOKS: I may have told you that this same problem has been discussed by several other people, particularly Bahmer, who referred to the fact that Grover had intended to have the records divisions--I've forgotten exactly what they were called at the time--report directly to the Archivist, and it was for that reason they named Schellenberg "Director of Archival Management" instead of "Director of the National Archives." Schellenberg took this to heart very much and he wanted to sign his name when his book was published, the first book, on "Archival Management," as "Director of the National Archives." Bahmer said they spent two hours in his office one time arguing why he couldn't do that, and they wouldn't let him do that because they weren't just going to let Ted be in that position of supervising all the records divisions.

HOLMES: I think we've probably said what we should have. Sometime I could say much more about the Grover period, but I think we've covered what I felt was important in those early years--and somebody else, a lot of younger people, can get into the story of the Grover period.

BROOKS: Does the same thing go--same comment go--for the absorption into GSA?

HOLMES: I don't know much about that. You've already got about all the story I know from Bahmer. Of course you also have my article to go on. I don't think I can add much to it right now. I can talk about my feelings about our whole relationship with GSA since, but I'd rather not get into that.

BROOKS: Well, I think that is well treated in your article on "The National Archives at a Turn of the Road." Bob I think did one about "The National Archives at the end of 20 years." It was very good.

HOLMES: I still think there's an awful lot to be learned by going back through the American Archivist.

BROOKS: I think so too.

HOLMES: If you don't want to stop there you can go into the annual and quarterly reports. Boy, the way we used to spend time writing those. I don't know how much they do anymore.

BROOKS: I don't know, but I know I had the job for Buck one time--I guess maybe when I was Assistant to the Archivist, back in the early 40's, of rounding up the quarterly reports and seeing that all you guys got them in. That got me into a lot of arguments, I tell you.

HOLMES: Mine were always late.

On the subject of private records, which we were discussing a while ago, back in Buck's day there was a general agreement as you may remember, between Luther Evans at the Library of Congress and Dr. Buck, that the Library of Congress would take care of records of private origin and that official records should--even those that the Library of Congress had received--should come here. This was the time when some very important records--official records--that the Library of Congress had had charge of, were turned over to the National Archives. That agreement was something that I thought we should continue to respect, that the National Archives had plenty to do in taking care of official records. There were at times some private records so closely related to official records that there was some argument for taking them into the Archives. Dr. Buck relented and said that any records of private origin--of that sort--which he permitted to come in because of their close relationship to records here, could be brought in, but they should nevertheless be kept entirely distinct from official records. We felt it important they should be assigned to and cared for by the Library, and I think I was still in charge of the Library then because I remember bringing in records from the Brookings Institution of the study of the Indian problem back there in the 20's or 30's. There was about a cabinet and a half of them, created by this committee that published a report, but these were their records. Then there was a person who for the American Council of Learned Societies had been making a study of WPA Projects. I've forgotten his name, but his study was also published and they wanted to turn his files over to us. Well, they were closely enough related and so were accepted, but those also at that time went to the Library. I think there have been quite a few records of private origin accepted quite apart from those of the Polar Archives Division, which I've sort of opposed on principle. Some are military, I know, and of course right in record group 64 we've been taking in records of people associated with the Archives. I'm glad to see them in a way because they're so closely related to this institution. They complement the official records, but it makes you wonder. Are Posner's records, would mine if I gave them to be considered, be part of record group 64? No, they're part of a special record group that's been established now for private records. Hasn't there been one for private archives?

BROOKS: I'm not sure about that.

HOLMES: It's a debatable thing, and I was very much against it to begin with.

BROOKS: The Grover papers are still, as far as I know, in the custody of Mike Simmons in the security section. I guess because they were restricted as to access.

HOLMES: Oh, were they restricted?

BROOKS: Yeah, I had to get Estie's permission to look at some of the Grover papers. But he became gradually converted. Of course he had experience with private papers. I've become so thoroughly converted myself to the idea that Presidential Libraries are handling private papers, that I instinctively want to correct everybody that talks about "private records" and says those are "private papers," rather than "records." Which is in a sense a quibble. But I think Grover became very much interested: I know he became very much interested in the acquisition of papers by the Libraries, the Presidential Libraries.

HOLMES: Well that in itself became a little bone of contention of course between us and the Library of Congress.

BROOKS: Considerably so. Between us and many other institutions.

HOLMES: But because we allowed that, and I think quite properly, there might have been more to be said for our not competing with the Library of Congress in private papers, otherwise, than in the Presidential Libraries.

BROOKS: I don't know what they plan to do about it. Well this whole problem of private papers is a big subject in itself, and I'm not familiar with the way it's been handled in recent years in the National Archives proper.

Oliver, your comments are of great interest and cover almost invariably subjects of extreme importance to the development of the National Archives. Your interview is a really valuable addition to the Oral History Project, and I thank you.