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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
AS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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Signed Anne E. Kahn

Date December 19, 1975

Accepted:

Signed James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date Dec. 30, 1975

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with HERMAN KAHN
Former Director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library
Assistant Archivist for Civil Archives, National Archives
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries

Major Biographical Information:

Born, Rochester, New York	1907
B.A. University of Minnesota	1928
M.A. University of Minnesota	1930
Asst. Prof. of History, Nebraska State Teachers College	1931-1933
Grad. Student, Minnesota, 1929-31; Harvard University	1933-1934
Associate Historian and Acting Division Chief, National Park Service	1934-1936
Deputy Examiner, National Archives	1936-1942
Chief, Division of Interior Department Archives	1942-1947
Also Acting Chief, Division of Agriculture Department Archives	1944-1947
Director, Natural Resources Records Office	1947-1948
Director, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library	1948-1961
Special Assistant to the Archivist	1961
Assistant Archivist for Civil Archives	1962-1964
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries	1964-1968
Retired	1968
Associate Librarian for Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University	1968-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with HERMAN KAHN
New York City, May 20, 1973
Interviewer, Philip C. Brooks

KAHN: I will talk first about my few contacts with the subject of archives before I got into the National Archives, because I think they have a certain small importance. I came to Washington in the summer of 1934 as an historian in the Historical Division of the National Park Service, where I was an assistant to Verne Chatelain who was then Chief of the Historical Division of the National Park Service. I had previously served for three months as an historian at the Morristown National Historical Park where my superior was Vernon Setser, who later also became an official of the National Archives. My original detail to Washington, from Morristown, was supposed to be about ten days but as it turned out I remained in the Washington office of the National Park Service for over two years and in the City of Washington for 14 years. I had had up to that time the normal experience of an undergraduate and graduate who had worked in American history and had little or no direct contact with archival or manuscript subjects, except that for the period I was at Morristown, Setser had set me to work preparing a calendar of the manuscripts in the Ford House in Morristown, New Jersey.

BROOKS: What was your research field in graduate work at Minnesota?

KAHN: At Minnesota I should say that my chief graduate adviser was Solon Justus Buck, and this was to become an important factor for me at the Archives. I did my master's thesis at Minnesota under Buck, and it amazes me now to remember that this was on the subject of the land system of colonial New York, on which I did a great deal of work, and about which I learned a great deal. But my introduction to research techniques, research methods, and the use of research materials in American history was by Solon Justus Buck. The other man to whom I owe a great deal was the head of the department, Lester B. Shippee, whose field was American diplomatic history. I had work also from George Stephenson, Ernest Osgood, Guy Stanton Ford, and Lawrence Steefel, and many others. I want to return to my experience in the National Park Service, in which I think there are two or three things relating to archival matters that are worth mentioning because I think they are very little known. In the spring of--well sometime during the year 1935 there appeared in our office in the Historical Division

of the Park Service, a man who introduced himself as Luther Evans, and whom I came to know quite well in the course of the next few months. My contact with Evans was in a sense my first introduction to archival work. Luther Evans told me the story of how he happened to be there. He had been an instructor of political science at Princeton and not too happy in that work, but he had as a student in one of his undergraduate courses, the son of Herbert Bayard Swope. Herbert Bayard Swope was a good friend of Harry Hopkins; they had known each other in New York. Evans had heard of CWA and FERA projects having to do with historical records in various ways and had conceived this idea of a WPA project using unemployed scholars, historians, and political scientists to make a thorough listing and description of historical records throughout the country.

BROOKS: He thought this was very much his idea.

KAHN: I never knew to what extent he had gotten it from others or conceived of it himself. But he was the first, I think, to form it into an ambitious program covering the entire country, rather than a series of individual local projects, sponsored by local people. At that time it was necessary in order to get a WPA program started to have as a sponsor an agency of the Federal Government. Evans had come to town with a letter to Harry Hopkins from Swope and he had an interview with Hopkins, but he had been told to go out and get himself a sponsor. He had visited the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress where he had spoken to Tom Martin and had not received a very enthusiastic reception. Are you familiar with this story?

BROOKS: No, but I knew Tom Martin.

KAHN: The Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, in short, had grave doubts about the feasibility of such a program. Luther then had gone over to see someone in the Smithsonian Institution, I don't know who, but also had failed to get sponsorship by the Smithsonian Institution. I don't know who suggested to him that he come to Verne Chatelain's office, but Chatelain had been in contact with Binkley (Robert C.) from Western Reserve. And also Chatelain had been in close contact with Waldo Leland, who was at the American Council of Learned Societies. It may be either Binkley or Leland who steered Luther Evans to Chatelain. At any rate Chatelain received Evans warmly and agreed to have the Historical Division of the National Park Service, rather strangely, sponsor the WPA program and turned Luther Evans over to me for assistance, to give him assistance

in working out his project. We gave Luther Evans a desk in the very crowded quarters of the Historical Division. Remember, I was brand new in Government then myself and a young man 27 or 28 years old, but I sat down and for several weeks worked with such time as I could give. It was frequently very late into the night until two or three in the morning, with Luther Evans and me working up a proposal for what came to be known as the Historical Records Survey. And I remember that we finally came up with a series of figures on which we based a request for eleven million dollars for the first year of this program. Then it was submitted on the regular WPA forms, and I went so far as to go around with Luther looking for quarters for office space for the national headquarters of this program. Then for a while I didn't see anything of Luther, but one day several weeks later he came in to tell me that the program had been authorized and approved, but the request for funds had been pared from eleven million to two million dollars, which was the initial allocation of WPA funds for the historical records program. And later of course he developed the Survey of Federal Archives Program, too. At that point our ways separated. Although I saw Luther from time to time later, I had no official connection with the Historical Records Survey or the Survey of Federal Archives. However . . .

BROOKS: Before we get too far away from that, the Survey of Federal Archives had its headquarters in our building, but the HRS did not, right?

KAHN: Right.

BROOKS: Where were they?

KAHN: Well they moved around, but they started out in a building on K Street whose name I don't remember. It was on 15th between I and K Streets, something like that. This was one of the buildings Luther and I had looked at when we were looking for offices, but they then moved around, and I don't know where they went. I want to say that from that day to this whenever I encounter Luther Evans, he never fails to remind me that it was he and I who got the Historical Records Survey started and how grateful he has always been for the reception that he was given by Verne Chatelain and by the assistance that I'd given him in helping him to get his program off the ground.

BROOKS: I think very few people know all that now. I certainly didn't.

KAHN: Yes, I'm sure they don't. But if you ask Luther, the moment he sees me he always launches into this story about how I helped him when all other doors to Washington had been closed.

There is one other story that I ought to tell. I, of course, met many people in this period when I was working for the National Park Service who later went to the National Archives, among them Ted Schellenberg, who also had come to Washington as a representative of the Joint Committee on Materials for Research, hoping to get something started about micro-filming. But that had--I don't remember the details--but that had flopped. At any rate, Schellenberg came to the National Park Service looking for a job, also at the suggestion of Binkley, and was given a job, and he worked in the Historical Division of the National Park Service doing research in the Library of Congress on some of the historic sites until he got his appointment in the National Archives.

One day, this too must have been late in 1934 or early in 1935, when I knew very little about archival matters, Chatelain came in and said to me that an archives bill had been passed, and a National Archives was going to be established. He had been talking to Secretary Ickes about it and they both felt that the National Archives ought to be administered by the Interior Department. He wanted me to be thinking about this because he had been asked to submit a memorandum to Mr. Ickes for Mr. Ickes to send on to the White House, arguing that the National Archives ought to be in the Interior Department. As I recall it, a day or two later he brought into the office and gave to me a file, a rather thick file, from the White House files, on the National Archives--its background and history. Attached to this file was a transmittal note signed by Louis Howe saying to Ickes, "Here is that great big file on the National Archives, and if you choke on it I suppose that will make you an artichoke." And then Chatelain said to me, "Here is the file on the National Archives and its history and what other people have written about it." I cannot remember now what was in it except that it was mostly Public Buildings stuff about the design. But Chatelain said to me, "Write something to prove that the National Archives ought to be under the Historical Branch of the National Park Service." So I sat down and wrote something--and remember always that I knew nothing about archives--but the general theory, the line of argument which I took after discussing the matter with Chatelain, was that the Interior Department was--you see Ickes was trying at that time to get its name changed to the Department of Conservation, and he was taking a very aggressive line that the Interior Department was the Department that was to be devoted to the conservation of the Nation's resources, and that the

archives were a part of the nation's resources. Cultural resources to be sure, but still a part of the nation's resources, and that therefore the National Archives ought to be administered by the Department of the Interior and the natural place in the Interior Department out of which it should be run was the Historical Division of the National Park Service, which was the Interior Department Agency that had cognizance of historical matters. This argument reminds me now of the argument that was later used by the Hoover Commission in putting the National Archives in GSA, when it was argued that after all archives are just one form of property, and therefore it ought to be put in the agency that administers the Government's property, namely GSA. At any rate that memorandum was signed by Mr. Chatelain, went up to Mr. Ickes, and was presumably sent by Ickes over to the White House, but we never heard anything more of it. I should say from time to time, since that time, I have tried to find that file.

BROOKS: I wondered where the file was.

KAHN: I looked in the Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the Papers of Louis Howe, and in the Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, and I have never been able to find it. I don't know what's happened to it. It may be in the files of the National Archives where I have never looked for it, or it may be that it's in the part of the files of the Secretary of the Interior which came to the National Archives after I had left the Archives. But I someday maybe will take a look again for that file just as a matter of personal interest.

BROOKS: I have relied for background information for this project pretty largely, for the period before the appointment of Dr. Connor, on Victor Gondos' dissertation, which Posner and Holmes and all speak well of. I think it's a good job. I don't remember his referring to such a file. I may be mistaken, but I don't remember.

KAHN: Well, in all likelihood he has not. I'm quite sure that this file is not now among the papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt at Hyde Park. So it could be that it is in Public Buildings, or it could be that it's in the files of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior or in the personal papers of Harold Ickes in LC. If it isn't there in any of those places, I have no idea where it is and it must be put down as lost, but I'm sure I saw it--you know this is a thing that impressed me very much at the time--particularly that little memo from Howe, and I haven't invented that story. Now I was then working in the National Park Service and I should say that Chatelain, for

reasons I won't go into here, was not getting along well with Harold Ickes and got into a real row in 1936 and resigned. I don't think he felt at the time that his resignation would be accepted but it was, and our Historical Division was in a state of great confusion. I found that Park Service work, although I apparently could do it well, wasn't really greatly to my liking. Meanwhile my very close friend, Robert Bahmer, had come to Washington as a secretary to Congressman Frank Hook of Michigan. We both were aware of the opening of the National Archives and both decided that we would rather work for the National Archives than do what we were doing, that is Bob felt he would rather work for the Archives than continue with Frank Hook, I felt I would rather work for the Archives than continue in the National Park Service. Meanwhile other people that we knew had been appointed to positions at the Archives, and Solon Buck, whom of course I knew well, had come to Washington and had sometime--I think in 1935--been given an appointment in the National Archives.

BROOKS: He was appointed, I think, by the President in July but he wasn't confirmed until sometime after that. He and Page didn't come down until they were confirmed. Harris and Hyde came down as acting in December of 1934.

KAHN: At any rate, sometime late in 1935 or early in 1936, I filled out an application form about the same time as Bob Bahmer did for a position in the National Archives. I was interviewed I think by Collas Harris and Dorsey Hyde, and then I waited, and waited, and waited. I was told that it was necessary, I think I was told that it was necessary to get some kind of political clearance.

BROOKS: You're probably right. I think everybody was.

KAHN: This was difficult for me because my Congressman at that time was not a Democrat. I did get a letter from Bob's Congressman, Frank Hook, but that was not my own district. What I had to do, as I recall it, was to get a letter from the Chairman of the Democratic County Committee. In Minnesota at that time of course the Farmer Labor Party was the party in office. Floyd Olson was Governor, and it was not easy getting Democratic clearance. I've forgotten now how I did this, but I did get some letters and they were apparently satisfactory, and finally I received notice of my appointment. As I recall it it was in June of 1936 that I went to the Archives. An interesting thing--I was at this time unmarried and living out on the corner of Reno Road and 34th Street. The first Monday morning that I was to report to Tom Owen I as usual was a little late, and I was

arrested for speeding down 34th Street because I thought I would be late, and I had my driver's license revoked for two weeks on the morning of the first day that I was due to appear at the Archives. At any rate, I came and reported to Tom Owen and Collas Harris, explaining why I was late, and I was made a Deputy Examiner.

BROOKS: According to the record that was May 25, the last week of May, about a week before Bahmer and Holmes and Franklin.

KAHN: No. I think you'll find that, as I later was to learn, Oliver Holmes came in five days before I did. Maybe Bob came in, Bob did come in a little later. Because when Oliver was made at Chief of the Interior Department Archives I was told the reason is that he's your senior because he took the oath five days before you did, which seemed silly to me. I was quite willing to recognize Oliver's superior knowledge and that he had earned the position without resorting to this silly reason that was given to me. He deserved it far more than I did.

BROOKS: I'm not disposed to argue the point, but the book says you came May 25 and he came June 1. Bahmer told me that you came first. You see I was assigned as a veteran of the staff to show those three guys around on the first of June--Holmes, Bahmer, and Franklin.

KAHN: Well, OK. I thought Oliver came in five days before I did. You say I came in five days before he did.

BROOKS: Right.

KAHN: OK. Well at any rate, I was assigned as a Deputy Examiner in the Commerce Department. Arthur Leavitt who had theretofore been the Deputy Examiner for the Commerce Department had just been made Chief of Commerce Department Archives, but he had not completed the preliminary surveys in the Commerce Department. It was my job to complete the preliminary survey, and I did that, surveying such bureaus as the Census Bureau, the most important one; Bureau of Fisheries; National Bureau of Standards; and so on. You suggested that in connection with that I make some comment about the importance of the preliminary survey.

I recall the cards on which the results of the preliminary survey were recorded. I thought it was, even at that time, young and innocent as I was in this area, I thought it was a very strange form because the least space on this entire double page form (it was used on both sides) and it was a

rather large, stiff piece of paper, and down at the very bottom of the second page you were given one line, after all this other information that was requested, you were given one line to say whether you thought these records had any research value, and if so, why. I thought this was really giving the least space to the most important matter. Does your memory confirm that?

BROOKS: Well I didn't work in Preliminary Survey. We had a similar form. It was terribly complicated for the Special Examiners to survey useless papers, as they were then called, and the form asked for all sorts of silly things. Thad Page told me that Connor at one time called on him to go over the Preliminary Survey forms, the one you used, and see if he couldn't revise it. Thad said he did, but he thought probably the Deputy Examiners were mad at him for doing it, because he didn't have any business to do that, he didn't know anything about Archives, so he had no reason to do that. It was a terrible thing.

KAHN: Well I expect Dorsey Hyde and Collas Harris together devised the Preliminary Survey form. This brings me to another point. My immediate superior was Tom Owen, but we also had some dealings with Collas Harris and even fewer with Dorsey Hyde. But the thing that struck me at the time was how little any of these men knew, this is not their fault, about the general subject with which we were supposed to be dealing, that is the records of the Federal Government. Dorsey Hyde instructed us all to read Hilary Jenkinson, which I did, and it seemed to me that all Dorsey Hyde knew about Archives and all that Collas Harris knew about Archives, came from their reading of Hilary Jenkinson.

BROOKS: Much of which wasn't applicable.

KAHN: Much of which had not the slightest relationship to the situation with respect to Archives in this country. I think that the chief importance actually of the Preliminary Survey was that it gave the men who were later to become officials of the Archives some actual contact with Federal records. They came to know, as historians usually do not know, what the nature of Federal records really is, what the problems are involved in their maintenance, organization, and use. And of course another very important purpose served by the Preliminary Survey was that it served to make other Government agencies at least aware of the existence of an agency known as the National Archives, which had an interest in their records, and which was telling them in very muted ways, that eventually their noncurrent records of permanent value were going to go to the Archives

and also that hereafter they couldn't destroy anything without going through the National Archives.

BROOKS: I can remember some of them remained very puzzled.

KAHN: The most searing memory that I have of the Preliminary Survey results from an experience I had in the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau records, everyone realized, were archivally important, and I finished up Arthur Leavitt's survey there. In the course of my survey I went to the Division of, I've forgotten what it was called, Research and Statistics, or something of that sort, talked to the then Chief--I don't remember his name--he was a very intelligent person, told him a little about the Archives and its interest in the records of the Census Bureau, in which he was much interested. Following our conference he took me to see the Director of the Census Bureau. I cannot now remember the name of this gentleman who was an elderly Southern gentleman and was obviously a long-time career employee of the Census Bureau who had eventually become Commissioner--or Director, I can't remember his name. At any rate, we had a long and friendly talk, the point of which was as with every other bureau in the whole of Washington at that time, the point of his conversation with me was to tell me that of course the Archives is a fine thing, we are all in favor of it, it was much needed, but it would never be possible to put the records of the Census Bureau in the Archives because that was a special case. You're familiar with that story in every bureau that we went into in Washington. He told me about the thing that is still plaguing us--the confidentiality of the records of the Census Bureau since the Census of 1880, and the special facilities that were needed to use its records, and the special knowledge that was needed, and that no one else would be able to understand them except employees of the Census office, and so on and so on. I made the mistake of making a--I thought that this was an important conversation--memorandum of this conversation and sent it on to Tom Owen who sent it on to Dorsey Hyde. Then I was summoned into Hyde's presence, a really unprecedented thing, because actually we saw very little of Dorsey Hyde. He proceeded to give me a very severe bawling out. This was a rather strange experience for me, I had worked all my life but I wasn't accustomed to getting treatment of this kind from my employers. The basis of his complaint was--well I think in the first place that he thought that I had gone above myself in holding a discussion at such a high level with the Director or Commissioner of the Census Bureau.

BROOKS: He was very conscious of that sort of thing.

KAHN: Discussions at that level should be held by higher people than I was in the National Archives at that time. His second point was that I had committed the National Archives, he felt, to not ever being able to take the records of the Census Bureau by having this conference with the Director. I tried to explain to Mr. Hyde that I had really just sat and listened while I had all this explained to me about the special and peculiar nature of Census Bureau records, and why they would never be able to come to the Archives. I had made no comment on this and in fact had simply said that I would report this conversation. Hyde's reaction to that statement was that by not saying anything you tacitly agreed to it, that the Archives would never take the records. At any rate, I left that conference much chastened and this was my first lesson in Government tactics, that sometimes it's best not to report conversations if you think they might not be well received by your superiors.

At any rate, after a while the Preliminary Survey of Commerce was completed. Meanwhile, Arthur Leavitt was functioning as Chief of Commerce and I was assigned to Arthur Leavitt as his Deputy or Assistant in the Division of Commerce Department Archives. You recall this was when they were called Custodial Divisions. I should say that while I was still a Deputy Examiner for the Commerce Department, the first group of records that I brought into the National Archives, which must have been in the fall of 1936, or perhaps early in 1937, was the older correspondence and other records of the Bureau of Fisheries. This was a very interesting experience for me. I learned about all the problems that go into organizing and planning a rather extensive move of some very interesting records. I brought them into Arthur Leavitt's stacks, where he was very proud of having them; he thought they looked very nice on his shelves. I may have brought in one or two other small groups of records from Commerce, I don't now recall it. Then I was assigned to Arthur Leavitt where I worked for him for perhaps six months. I liked Arthur Leavitt, but I was not very happy working for him or with Commerce Department problems for reasons that needn't concern us here, it's simply that our personalities were quite unlike. Arthur was slow, deliberate, and careful, and I was apt to like to do things a little more quickly than he liked to have them done.

BROOKS: He believed in a very regular, traditional concept of procedure.

KAHN: Right.

BROOKS: Nothing was archival unless it was 20 years old, and so forth. He is a very fine person in a lot of ways.

KAHN: I liked him but I realized we would never work well together. For instance, if I came in to have a brief conversation with him about some Commerce Department problem he would bring out his notebook and take notes on what I was telling him, and if I came to discuss the same problem with him the following day he would say, "Wait just a minute." And he would take out his notebook and refresh his memory from the notes that he had made of our conversation the preceding day, which is very thorough and in some ways admirable, and certainly archivally a good practice, but I've always been of the sort that likes to get things done quickly and this made me rather impatient.

At any rate--I've always been grateful to Marcus Price for this--one day Marcus Price called me into his office and said, and I don't know how this word had reached him, although I must have been talking with my friends about it. He said, "I hear you're not very happy working in Commerce Department Archives." I said, "Well I'm not really greatly unhappy, it's simply that Arthur Leavitt and I are not the same kind of people, and I'd rather perhaps work somewhere else." He said, "That's fine because we have established an Interior Department Archives, as you know, and Oliver Holmes has been made Chief, how would you like to work for Oliver Holmes?" I said, "That would suit me down to my toes."

BROOKS: Did you know Holmes well before that?

KAHN: Oh yes. We had worked together as Deputy Examiners. While I was working on Commerce, he was working on Interior. We had frequently discussed the problems of Preliminary Survey and National Archives problems in general, and I had developed a great respect for Oliver Holmes and had also learned a great deal from him about archival matters about which he knew far more than I--far more than I--which I was quite willing to admit. It was one of the reasons that I was glad to be assigned to Interior. At any rate, his office was then up on 13-E. I went up to 13-E, isn't it 13-E?

BROOKS: It is.

KAHN: Yes, and was given the first office to the right and worked for Oliver Holmes as his first assistant from, it must have been 1938 to the time when he, after Buck became Archivist, and made Oliver what was it--in charge of finding aids.

BROOKS: Director of Research and Records Description.

KAHN: Research and Records Description.

BROOKS: That was the reorganization of January 1, 1942.

KAHN: Following which Buck made me Chief of Interior Department Archives.

BROOKS: May I say something about the "custodial divisions" before you get any further. That term was used in a memo that Hyde wrote when he was the only staff officer. The week before Harris came on, Hyde wrote a memorandum based largely on a visit to the Library of Congress, which recommended practically the exact pattern of organization when it was first set up. He had about six lines about the Custodial Divisions, and I think he thought of them as that and very little more.

KAHN: Well that brings us to a question that I want to point out. The whole administrative history of the National Archives has been the history of the swing of the pendulum between what you might call vertical organization and horizontal organization, and as you know the Archives started out with a purely horizontal organization which really let the custodial divisions have no functions except what Ted Schellenberg and Paul Lewinson began calling janitorial functions. They were to keep the stacks clean and see that the records were dusted. I think that we began to realize the error of that kind of organization very quickly, but the people in charge were then confronted with the really very difficult problem of how were they going to dismantle such huge divisions as the Classification Division, the Cataloging Division, the Accessioning Division. You see the accessioning was done under the Accessioning Division, presumably finding aids were being done under Cataloging and Classification, and reference was to be done by the Reference Division, of which Phil Hamer had been made Chief, which really left the so-called custodial divisions not very much in the way of archival functions.

BROOKS: Hamer succeeded Nelson Vance Russell who was very insistent upon his authority.

KAHN: That's right.

BROOKS: He was the first of that whole group to resign.

KAHN: I can remember that Nelson Vance Russell, as soon as we got records in to the custodial divisions would send employees of the Reference Division over to the agency from which those records had come to ask for information about the records, and also to tell them, "Well now if you want anything from the Archives call the Reference Division." This was of course a very bitter thing for people in the Custodial Divisions who were even being deprived of their relationship with the people with whom they had worked in the agencies, in learning about the records, and so on. And I can remember, you see when I became Chief of Interior, the Chief of the Custodial Divisions could not sign reference letters, they were sent down to Mr. Hamer to sign. Mr. Hamer had Mr. Setser as his assistant, a man for whom I had worked for a few months when I was in the Park Service. At that time reference work became very heavy. I didn't mind having Hamer sign the letters but there were the inevitable delays because Setser would read the letter first and call up with questions about matters that he inevitably knew little about, and if Hamer was on leave the letters wouldn't get signed, and so on.

I want to say only one thing about this, I want to repeat that in those years that I worked as Oliver Holmes' assistant, I continued to learn from him a great deal. It was a real education working for Oliver both in matters of the history of the Interior Department of which he knew a great deal, and in archival matters.

My single most educational experience as an archivist came with the transfer of the records of the General Land Office to the National Archives. That record group that was one of the largest and one of the most important that ever came into the Archives, and I learned a great deal from this whole transaction both in methods of dealing with originating agencies, with their attitudes toward their records, with their inability to generalize about their records and understand their archival value as distinguished from their administrative value--that is their research value--and the fact that there was nobody in the agency who understood the records of the agency as a whole, but only clerks who knew about the records maintained in their particular division.

There is something else that I want to point out and emphasize here because I think that we frequently forget it. The records of the General Land Office came to the National Archives not because the officials of that agency were persuaded that they ought to come to the National Archives because that's where they belonged. As a matter of fact, the records of

the General Land Office were at that time in the brand new Interior Department building, the building that had just been opened in 1937, three years before--four years before, where special quarters had been deliberately built into the building to maintain the records of the General Land Office.

BROOKS: The West end of the main floor. I remember going down there for some reason.

KAHN: That's right. The records of the General Land Office, like many other records at that time, came to the National Archives not because we had persuaded Government agencies that they ought to transfer their records, but because of the space pressures brought about by the oncoming war and by the war itself. Prior to the war crisis and the space pressures engendered by the war crisis, the Archives as you recall had very little success in persuading any of the agencies to transfer important records to the Archives. As I recall it the largest record groups were those of the Food Administration and of the Veterans Administration, which were the only two large and important groups--such things as Fisheries and others would come in, but actually it's my recollection that after we had a few initial transfers of records which a few agencies had been wanting to get rid of for a long time, the transfer of records to the Archives slowed down, and there was no real flow, no steady flow of big and important record groups into the National Archives until the war broke out. As a matter of fact, I can remember Fred Shipman's frustration, and he probably told you all about this, in the case of the State Department, which as I recall told him that it, too, would never send its records to the Archives. Shipman finally asked Connor to speak to the President about it, and the President had to tell . . .

BROOKS: He did get into that. That was a major battle and Shipman says that really broke the camel's back.

KAHN: Well again it was, I think it was, the war. And what I've often wondered is, what would have happened to the National Archives had the war not come. How long would it have taken us to fill that building? After the outbreak of the war it was filled in five or six years. How long would it have taken us to fill that building with really important records had there been no war? How long would it have taken us to overcome the resistance of the agencies to the transfer of their records? I don't suppose there's any particular use to speculate on such questions, but my guess is that we would have continued to diddle around with such record groups as

the Food Administration and the--what was the other one?--the World War I Information Agency--the Committee on Public Information. This is, it was records of World War I temporary agencies that were largely coming in to the National Archives up to that time, and we, as you recall, spent an enormous amount of time and money on such record groups as the Food Administration, which later--you know I have what I call Kahn's law which is that good records, which is the opposite of Gresham's law, good records drive bad records out of circulation. First you take in the bad records and after a while, when you begin to get the better ones, you begin to get rid of the less valuable ones. That's what happened, as you recall, with the Food Administration. We originally took in the records of 48 state food administrations and later got rid of many of those states, after having classified them. As you know--when was it that Solon Buck became Archivist of the United States?

BROOKS: September 1941.

KAHN: September 1941 and he remained until 1948.

BROOKS: June of 1948.

KAHN: It's always been my feeling that it was those years, the years in which Solon Buck was Archivist of the United States, that the real foundations of the work of the National Archives were laid, and that we have a tendency to minimize Solon Buck or to speak belittlingly of him because he had a personality which didn't warm up many people. But his intellectual contributions can hardly be overestimated.

BROOKS: Several people have made very much that same point, that we all had personality difficulties with Buck, but respected his intellectual achievements or abilities, and later his accomplishments.

KAHN: Right.

BROOKS: Could you say anything or would you say anything about Connor as an Archivist or about the reasons for Connor leaving?

KAHN: Well I have to say that my own relationships with Connor were practically non-existent. I don't suppose that in the years that Connor was Archivist I spoke to him more than two or three times. My impression was that he was ill, that he was flabbergasted at what he had gotten himself into, that he had no real understanding of what Government records problems

were, and that for those reasons he had left the management of the Archives in the hands of Dorsey Hyde and Collas Harris, with Buck trying to get into it also, and that things were not going well. Although I liked them both personally, I had no confidence in the ability of either Dorsey Hyde or Collas Harris to make the National Archives into a great institution.

BROOKS: This all has a bearing on a question I've had in mind increasingly as to whether the original primary officials of the National Archives thought of it as an information center. I think this was Hyde's concentration and this was Hyde's experience. Whether or not they had any realization of the problem they were getting into as to what to do with all these masses of records.

KAHN: I really think that Hyde and--well, if you talked to Hyde at all about professional problems he was, as you say, constantly referring to his experience as a statistician at the Packard Motor Company; and saying that the way to get information and make it useful was to compile it statistically. He certainly had no knowledge of historical research, and certainly neither did Collas Harris. I don't know, I didn't ever really run into any formulated ideas about the National Archives as an information center, I only knew they were trying to go along from day to day without any long-range plan or program for the National Archives or any real understanding of what Government records problems were.

We knew, for instance, certainly from the beginning, in the custodial divisions, that they had made a dreadful error in filling that building with that impossible steel equipment, the "bread boxes" as we used to call them, which were an albatross, a millstone around our necks. They were just about as poorly designed to serve the purpose they were supposed to serve as any equipment could possibly be. It was my feeling that men who would make as fundamental an error as that, an error which the Archives is--you know frequently, as you've discovered in a long lifetime of Government service, as have I, the errors of your predecessors are sometimes irremediable.

BROOKS: You're stuck with them.

KAHN: There are some things that you can do about them, and some things you can't. This was one of those almost irremediable errors.

BROOKS: That steel was evidently planned by the architects, Simon and the other architects, but evidently the decision to use it, to order it, was made after the Archives staff got on board. I think that because Hyde really didn't know much about the kind of work we were getting into, there was sort of a vacuum there, and that perhaps Harris got into professional activity more than he might have otherwise on that account.

KAHN: I think that there was a strong tendency on Harris' part to feel that he was needed and wanted and could be helpful on the professional side, but there was also, if I may say so, his natural aggressiveness and ambition, and his desire to get into all aspects of the archival work.

BROOKS: And he did.

KAHN: Yes. I should say that I got along well with Collas Harris, I never had any problems with him, and except for this one incident that I mentioned with Dorsey Hyde, I got along well with him. Of course I should say that I was an exception to most people in that Buck never displayed anything but warmth and good feeling toward me and I got along well with Buck. I had gotten along well with him when I was his graduate student, although many graduate students felt that Buck--well he had the same reputation in the University of Minnesota History Department among graduate schools as he later developed as Archivist of the United States.

BROOKS: Bahmer evidently was not too happy with him as a graduate supervisor.

KAHN: He had impossibly high perfectionist standards and at the same time he was a nit-picker and a comma chaser, and a man who was intolerant of and wouldn't allow dissent or difference of opinion. But I understood him and I got along well with him and I did respect his intellect and his intellectual abilities. Although Buck was responsible for many things at the National Archives, I think that maybe I ought to make a little list of the things that I think that he did were most important. One of them was the first and perhaps the greatest contribution--I think Buck was really the intellectual, the sole progenitor of the record group system as we now know it in this country, and as it has been installed and developed at the National Archives, and imitated since then by practically every archival institution in this country. It was a truly seminal idea, a basic idea, an idea that has made it possible to cope with the records of the Federal Government, and one that we owe, in its present form, largely to Solon Buck.

BROOKS: I think that's right.

KAHN: Another great contribution was his definition of Federal records as embodied in the Disposal Act of 1943. I had occasion to point out yesterday to a group that I was meeting with that until 1950 there was nothing that required, no over-all requirement on the part of the agencies to create Government records, but that in 1943 there had been passed an act defining what records are after they have come into existence, and making it illegal to destroy them although there was no requirement that they be created, it did become illegal to destroy them without going through certain procedures.

At any rate, the Disposal Act, which is still the governing statute in that field, and the definition of records which has become the standard definition of records, and which has been imitated in many other pieces of state legislation--I shouldn't say imitated, I mean used--was largely Buck's language, although he called on all of us. I think particularly it was his concept that anything is a record that contains informational data that is useful, but that extra copies not needed in the conduct of the business of the agency--I've forgotten the language--are not records. We were at that time engaged, as you recall, in authorizing disposal of the tenth extra copy which had not been ever used for anything since it was put in the file cabinet. At any rate, the Disposal Act was Buck's idea and Buck's contribution. Of course the whole future records administration program had its seed in the Disposal Act, and I think the whole idea of records scheduling had its seeds in the Disposal Act.

BROOKS: May I say something about this? I think you're right that Buck brought those things together. Last year I went through the files on the Disposal Act. There was a committee that drew up the actual wording of the Act with Thad Page, Marcus Price, Phil Hamer, and myself, among others. It was part of my job that every time the drafts were circulated, they'd come back to me and I'd put them together and they all went out to all the records divisions for comment and so forth. I've always thought now, it didn't really appear in the record clearly, that the provision about records that contained informational value was Hamer's contribution, primarily.

KAHN: Oh? I didn't know that.

BROOKS: I don't think I could prove that by record. I think the idea of disposal schedules that was brought together in that act, had been previously talked about and advocated and so forth, particularly by the Special Examiners who were naturally conscious of disposal, and by Schellenberg and Bahmer who had been talking about this very early. Now one of the first things Buck did as Archivist was to detail me to his office--he said "we have to get you out from under Flippin"--to work up a memorandum on the program for records administration, and I was put in charge of that program in January of '42. Certainly Buck gave the opportunity.

KAHN: Buck had begun to talk about what later became the records administration program. Buck again had the foresight, the vision if you will, to see that there could be no true archival program which didn't get back into the agencies at the point where records were being created. He saw immediately that the whole business of what is still called "weeding" records, after they had come into the Archives, was an impossibility. In order to forestall that the Archives had to take an interest and even gain a firm voice in the filing systems that were created in the agencies at the time the records were being created, in order to make future weeding unnecessary, in order to segregate at the point of origination, records that would have no permanent value. All those things were very clear in Buck's mind before he ever became Archivist of the United States, which I think is a great credit and a great contribution.

BROOKS: When he first came on duty in August of 1935 he visited the various divisions--and we were in a special category because the Special Examiners reported directly to Hyde and we saw Dr. Connor--but Buck was introduced, and I found a note recently saying he had asked in his first conversation, "Do you have anything like schedules of continuing authority, to avoid repetitive review of the same old thing?" Now some of these things were not entirely his own initial ideas, but he recognized them and brought them together. But that point he raised when he first came to the Archives.

KAHN: Well, as I say I didn't know that, but it bears out what I say and it shows his grasp of the important theoretical aspects of records use, records management, and of archival management. Buck certainly had his peculiarities as an administrator which I don't think it's necessary to go into now. He did, however, for instance, set up inside of the National Archives a records system which was the most--the dossier system--the details of which were worked out as you know by Dallas Irvine, which was the most sophisticated records system that I suppose any Government agency has ever had. Had it been possible to continue, you know theoretically it was

an admirable system, and in this it shows up some of Buck's weaknesses, but as a practical system it required so much management, so much policing, so much caretaking, that it broke down as a practical matter.

BROOKS: In the 50's, the early 50's.

KAHN: But theoretically it was a perfect record-keeping system.

BROOKS: For something like that Disposal Act it's wonderful for a guy doing research.

KAHN: That's right.

BROOKS: You can go get all the records on one thing together.

KAHN: That's right. It worked very well when it was followed up on and carefully carried out. Now I said to you when we were discussing this that I thought the war period was the period in which the foundations of the modern National Archives system were laid, and that perhaps the importance of that period was not understood because many of the men who later became so important in the National Archives were away from the National Archives during the war period. Namely Grover, Bahmer, East, Angel, Ev Alldredge, Ed Leahy, all that group who had started out in the Archives were not there during the war period.

Let me say a few words about the war period. You know I said the war was important in that it forced the agencies to transfer important records to the Archives. It was also important in that it gave a new emphasis throughout the Government to the importance of record keeping, and because they suddenly became aware of the importance of record keeping, there was a demand, a great market for men who had had some experience, any experience in records matters. So, as you know, there occurred a great outflowing of Archives personnel to other Government agencies during the war. Viewed in perspective, this was an extremely important thing for the National Archives because it filtered into all of the Government agencies men who had some archival training, men who had some knowledge of the existence of the National Archives. I don't have to tell you about this. Schellenberg went to OPA and Hank Edmunds to the War Production Board, and Grover and Bahmer to the War Department, and Leahy's whole group over to the Navy, and so on. So that the war gave the National Archives a foothold through its representatives throughout the Government, which proved to be extremely important in its later relations with Government agencies,

and which was again a development that would have taken several generations to occur had it not been for the war. The war proved a great hot house in forcing those developments that we all hoped for to take place within five years. That is, in the transfer of records and in their knowledge of and relationships with the Archives, which would have taken at least 25 years and possibly longer had it not been for the war.

You spoke of the war period as a period of frequent reorganizations in the Archives, and you know I haven't had a chance to refresh my memory from contact with the records. I'm aware of course of the reorganizations, but we always remember best the things that we ourselves were involved with. The reorganization that I'm familiar with is the one that I feel perhaps--it is natural that one feels one's own importance is greater than perhaps it was--but I do feel that it's true that an action that I took forced a reorganization in the Archives in 1946. Let me tell you about that, Phil, because I don't think you or many other people are familiar with it.

I was Chief of the Interior Department Archives beginning from I think early in 1942. In 1943 Schellenberg went to OPA, I think it was in 1943, as Chief of its records program. I was asked by Buck, through Lacy, maybe it was in 1944, I'm not sure, it was either in '43 or '44, to take on the job of not only the Chief of the Interior Department Archives but as Acting Chief of Agriculture Department Archives. When I talked to Dan Lacy about this, and I should say that I think too that Dan Lacy--and I'll talk about this later--had a very great influence on the Archives in the period that he was there. I told Dan that I'd be willing to assume this job for one year but I didn't think it was fair or reasonable for me to take on this double task for longer than a year, and that I hoped something would be done to settle that situation. I didn't want to act as a double chief for long because being Chief of Agriculture as well as Interior was a great additional burden. It meant writing two quarterly reports instead of one quarterly report, and it meant writing two annual reports instead of one annual report, and it meant having to supervise Kulsrud and Pinkett, and so on, who were good men but nevertheless there was extra work involved. I learned, however, a good deal about Agriculture in the period that I was acting Chief. At any rate, a year went by and despite what I had said to Dan Lacy the situation continued and I was still acting Chief of Agriculture as well as permanent Chief of Interior, so one day I went to see Dan and said "what about this," or "when are you going to relieve me of Agriculture Archives? I don't want to continue doing this indefinitely without some compensation--either in the form of grade or something else." He put me off, he said, "Well I'm sorry I haven't had a chance to think

about it, but I'll see what I can do." Again nothing happened. So in a few months I went to him again and it was the same sort of story, I was put off again. So I said, "Well, Dan, I think you ought to consolidate those divisions. This has been going on now for almost two years." I was made particularly angry at this time by the fact that Nelson Blake had gone off to the Navy Department, and the moment that Nelson Blake went off and Ned Campbell came back to War Department, Navy and War were combined into, I don't know, Military Records.

BROOKS: War records.

KAHN: War records. I think that Campbell's grade was raised from a P-five to a P-six whereas I continued at the same grade, being the Chief of Interior and Chief of Agriculture with no combination, with no consolidation. I got quite angry about this and decided without saying anything more to Lacy than I had already done--I decided that was useless--I decided I would appeal my grade to the Civil Service Commission. At that time classifications were far more directly under Civil Service than they now are. I worked up a statement to whatever unit it was, I've forgotten now what it was, I learned how to go through the Civil Service machinery, and I pointed out I had been on this detail--what amounted to a detail now--for a couple of years and had been given all these extra burdens, extra work, extra and broader responsibilities with no change in grade and so on. I was of course a close friend of Paul Lewinson's at the time and I told him what I was planning, and he said, "Well if you're going to appeal your grade, I'm going to appeal mine too." Did Paul tell you about this?

BROOKS: Very briefly.

KAHN: So Paul, who had none of this justification that I had, in the sense that he wasn't acting as--but he just thought we were under-classified, that all the division chiefs were under-classified, on the grounds that--he said--you see Paul used the fact that the Custodial Division Chiefs were originally set up as fives when they had, as he said, no more than janitorial functions. Then these reorganizations had given them responsibility for reference and for records management, and for finding aids, and so on, but their grades still remained at five. So Paul used that as his justification for his appeal.

BROOKS: Was he not at the time in charge of Post Office Commerce in addition to Labor?

KAHN: I don't think so. Arthur Leavitt still had Commerce. Arthur Leavitt still had Commerce and who was that man from--who was in charge of Post Office--I've forgotten.

BROOKS: Well, Frank McAlistler was, first.

KAHN: Frank McAlistler.

BROOKS: In addition to Justice. And when Frank went to the Navy Thad Page was given charge of Post Office in addition to the other things he had.

KAHN: But Paul did not have Post Office at the time, nor Commerce I'm sure. At any rate, we submitted--I can remember dropping this batch of papers into the mailbox, over to the Civil Service Commission. Paul went ahead with his and after a while we got word that our appeal had been approved, and that the Civil Service Commission had ordered Solon Buck to make us both sixes. This came as a thunder clap to both Lacy and Buck. I can remember Lacy calling me down and saying, "Well Steve said to me "I never thought Herman Kahn would do anything like this!" I hadn't told him. The point is that the Archives had been told now that not only I and Paul, but all division chiefs would have to be sixes because all the rest could appeal their classification on the same grounds as I and Paul had. You remember there was at that time practically one division chief for each agency of Government.

BROOKS: There had been 16 divisions at one time.

KAHN: That's right. Buck and Lacy simply for financial reasons couldn't see suddenly giving all those people sixes who had been fives, so what my reclassification appeal finally resulted in was the absolute necessity for the Archivist to combine a lot of these records divisions into larger records branches with fewer division chiefs. You know what happened in my case was that Agricultural and Interior were combined into what was called the Natural Resources Records Office in 1946.

BROOKS: Yes. Effective January 1 of 1947, according to the report.

KAHN: Oh. '47. OK.

BROOKS: And the annual report says, "All possible levels of supervision intervening between the Archivist and the immediate performance of operations were eliminated." At that same time they abolished my job as Records

Appraisal Officer, and so forth. "In the interest of economy as well as of efficiency, the 13 records divisions were consolidated as six records offices."

KAHN: That's right. This is the annual report you're reading from?

BROOKS: Yes.

KAHN: Well I haven't read the annual report but that is what took place. Thirteen were reduced to six, and as I say, it is my feeling that that reorganization was forced on the Archivist by the success of my appealing my grade.

BROOKS: Annual reports always necessarily have to justify what's done. But this sentence starts out, "In the interest of economy as well as efficiency..."

KAHN: Well after that took place, I was fairly content with my situation in the National Archives, although from time to time I asked myself why I hadn't gone out and gotten myself a job during the war. At one point I was offered a job in the Foreign Economic Administration by a friend of mine who was over there named Paul Johnstone, a Minnesota Ph.D., who had come to Washington and worked in Agriculture and then was in FEA. I might have gone to FEA had they not suddenly had one of these freezes. Then I got my reclassification in the Archives and I didn't make the change.

Let's say something about the relationships of the custodial divisions and the general administrative organization. Again this goes back to Solon Buck who had read a great deal about theory and practice of administration, and was sold on the notion of a rigid division between line and staff officers.

BROOKS: I wondered, did we ever really achieve this rigid division?

KAHN: Well remember he appointed a management officer.

BROOKS: Right.

KAHN: And Oliver's job as officer in charge of . . .

BROOKS: Program Adviser.

KAHN: Program Adviser, and so on.

BROOKS: I was Records Appraisal Officer.

KAHN: You were Records Appraisal Officer.

BROOKS: Hamer was Records Control Officer. That word "Control" is bad.

KAHN: I'd forgotten that. At any rate, then Buck established this weekly conference. The weekly conference . . .

BROOKS: Records Division chiefs.

KAHN: No, which consisted of his staff officers and to which the records division chiefs were to elect one chief to act as their representative, and they elected me. How long this went on I don't know, but I used to attend the weekly conferences. One bitter thing with the records division chiefs, they thought rightly that they were the heart of the National Archives, and here they were allowed only one voice at Buck's weekly meeting, which was attended by all of the staff officers but not the line officers. At one point when the job of Management Officer became vacant, Lacy offered me the job of Management Officer and I turned it down. It was simply because I felt that if I have any talents at all, as I have always felt to this day, it is in line operations not in staff operations. I've forgotten when this was-- whether Irvine left the job of Management Officer and Young succeeded him. I think it was before he offered it to Art Young he offered it to me.

BROOKS: At one time he offered it to Bahmer, back before Irvine took it. Bahmer turned it down. He didn't think it was a valid job.

KAHN: That's the way I felt about it. At any rate, it seemed to me that it was inevitable that a vertical organization for the National Archives with all functions under the records branches was inevitable because they had something in their hands. They had something tangible to deal with.

Of course a few people, Paul and Ted Schellenberg, while he was still there, were constantly grumbling about things. I'm not being disloyal to a friend when I say this. I think it's simply a fact that was never--well neither Paul Lewinson or Ted Schellenberg at that time had any very large collection of important records to deal with, so they weren't very busy on their jobs. This gave them a lot of time. The most dangerous thing in Government is to have able men who don't have enough to do, and this was the case with both Schellenberg and Lewinson, and so the fact that they didn't have a great deal

to do because their departments weren't sending them very many groups of active records, gave them a lot of time to sit around and feel abused. On the other hand, in Interior Department Archives, we were just overwhelmed with very active records, of great research importance and administrative importance, like those of the Land Office and Indian Office and the Office of the Secretary, and so on. So I didn't have a great deal of time to sit around and worry about whether Hamer or Irvine or somebody was impinging on what was my proper duty. I had plenty to do anyway. The chief thing that I was annoyed about was that when Buck brought Stu Portner from War Department Records with Rifkind as his aid, and with Irvine and to an extent Dan Lacy, as their intellectual mentor. Were you there at that time, do you recall when we were told to divide all our work into segments, prepare this elaborate set of work segments forms?

BROOKS: Yes I certainly was. We had to keep the time down to 15 minutes. I blame the Budget Bureau for that.

KAHN: No. This was in connection with a reduction in force which we were told was going to be necessary.

BROOKS: It was about 1946.

KAHN: Yes, and in connection with this reduction in force, we were going to have to decide, or the Archivist was going to have to decide which of our activities had the lowest priority. In order to decide which had the lowest priority, we had to divide all our work into segments on sheets of various colors, and how many people were spent on it, and how many dollars, and how many hours. It was an enormous job which I did faithfully and then I discovered that nobody else took it seriously. You know we spent months of time on this and nothing came of it. This was the sort of thing that was constantly going on toward the end of that period when Portner and Rifkind were in charge down on what they called the Main floor.

BROOKS: I thought that Lacy was mostly responsible for Portner and Rifkind, for bringing them in.

KAHN: I'm afraid you're right.

BROOKS: In fact I looked on them as a group.

KAHN: Yes. I think in the end--I don't think there was ever any of the personal feeling against Lacy that developed in some quarters against Portner and Rifkind. Of course this in the end was to prove disastrous to Solon Buck--the amount of authority that he gave to Portner and Rifkind. My own relations with Lacy were always good, and I thought that Dan Lacy, if there is a moment to continue this, his greatest contribution to the National Archives was not the administrative management but his emphasis on "intellectual mastery," as he called it, of the records.

BROOKS: Did the records division chiefs work together to oppose the "front offices"?

KAHN: I don't believe that on the part of the records division chiefs this was conspiratorial. I think the idea of a conspiracy existed more in the mind of Solon Buck and Lacy because they felt like they were punching a pillow, and they weren't getting results. But this was not due to any organized resistance. I think that it was rather that they were asking the impossible of many of the records division chiefs, particularly in the records management line. I remember Buck saying--implying this--one time when he spoke of the failure of his records management dreams to get off the ground. He said, "I know, I know what's going on. There's more than one way to sabotage a program," he said. Those were his very words.

BROOKS: I wonder when that was.

KAHN: Oh that was well along, maybe 1946 or '47. It was just before he sent Forrest Holdcamper out to San Francisco.

BROOKS: We sent Forrest a little earlier than that--1942 or 1943, I think . . .

KAHN: Was it?

BROOKS: Yes. Because he was in my office. Probably I felt much the same way you said Buck and Lacy did, and also I tended to look on the records division chiefs as more of a group than they were because they were the combined opposition of what we were trying to do. So it seemed.

KAHN: My feeling about that was--you see Buck and Lacy were urging us--for instance, I was never successful in persuading the Interior Department to install a records management officer. This in the face of the fact that Buck and Lacy were constantly saying the National Archives has to get these agencies to appoint records officers, not only in Washington but in the field, and get records management programs going. And they felt that if that didn't happen, their program was being sabotaged. But I knew that I had gone as far as I could in the Interior Department, as long as--what was his name?--Clarence Dotson--was Chief Clerk in the Interior Department. His job included responsibility for records, and he felt that any such proposal was a threat to his functions in his position. Finally I went to see the budget officer of Interior and he told me this, that as long as Dotson was there we couldn't hope to get a records management officer in Interior, and besides the autonomy of the bureaus in Interior was so great that the Chief Clerk and the budget officer had very little authority over them. So I felt I had gone as far as I could go. But Buck and Lacy continued to press for this, and when there were no results and somewhat the same situation in other agencies, they felt their program was being sabotaged. Well, I felt that persuasion was a very weak weapon to give us in dealing with the powerful vested interests in the Department who didn't see the need of, and wanted to have no truck with, a records management program. I think that this was the basis of the feeling that the records division chiefs were offering a united front. It was simply that they were in many cases asking us to do more than we could do, or that we had the staff to do, or the authority to do, or the power to do.

BROOKS: Portner and Rifkind--Portner I think was in charge of the records administration programs by that time. I ceased being such in the Summer of '44 when I became Records Appraisal Officer. Schellenberg had been a little while before that. Portner I think was in charge of records administration. And Lewinson told me that at one time they issued instructions to the records divisions that they shouldn't conduct any business with the agencies without going through Portner's office. I didn't know that.

KAHN: I don't remember that. I think Paul's confused there. That didn't come until after GSA and the setting up of the Records Management Division. Of course Paul Lewinson's and Phil Bauer's relationship with Portner and Rifkind was at the point where they were barely on speaking terms. That was a situation that I never got into. So it might be a little different there. But I certainly don't recall anything of that sort.

BROOKS: Well, to move along chronologically, in 1947 there was an amendment to the appropriations act that said that nobody with a War Service appointment, who had come to work with a War Service appointment was to be continued on the staff. And this evidently was a means of getting out of the Archives Lacy, Portner, and Rifkind. And Guy Lee.

KAHN: And, as you know, Frances Bourne. There were a whole lot of people who suffered from this. Well let's go into that a little bit. I knew very little about it except that I did know that there was some kind of a secret anonymous force at work that was opposing Portner, Rifkind, and Ernst Posner up on the Hill. In the minds of whoever it was who was doing this, Ernst Posner, Portner, and Rifkind represented alien influences inside the National Archives. And we gradually became aware that there was a group inside the Archives that was making charges against the Archivist. Then an extraordinary thing happened. Solon Buck one day called his entire staff together--that is all the division chiefs, staff officers, and I'm sure if you were there you recall this--and said that he had received a communication from a former staff member of the Archives, who was sitting in a restaurant and overheard a luncheon conversation--I think I better not mention names--of a group of people who had deliberately formed a conspiracy to have Buck ousted. It went into the greatest detail as to how exactly they were going to further this conspiracy and carry it through to the end, for the purpose of having Buck ousted. Buck called us together to tell us that he knew about this. At this meeting he mentioned the names of those who this anonymous informant had told him were involved. As I said, I better not mention names. One or two of the people in this cabal were present at this meeting. Buck said that he wanted them to know that he was aware of this, he would resist it, and he was under no illusions as to what was going on. Well, this to me was a rather flabbergasting performance. I would not have handled it in the way that Buck did. But there was this conspiracy of these people. The activity was going on. And finally, as you know, it was successful.

BROOKS: I've seen recently a copy of that anonymous memorandum in the possession of a former staff member.

KAHN: Oh really?

BROOKS: Some of the names have been mentioned on the tape.

KAHN: Oh.

BROOKS: Well, I think I'm correct in saying that the Posner thing went off somewhat separately into an inquisition by Senator McKellar in which he got into talking about the steel containers, and a lot of stuff. That's been discussed a bit on the tape. The other part of this, as to Portner, Rifkind, and Lacy went off somewhat separately. I was shown recently a copy of Archiviews, the staff magazine, that said originally it was believed that seven or nine people would be affected by this rider, but when it finally went into effect it only took in four. And my understanding of it is that Frances Bourne was one of the ones that finally was not affected or ousted from the staff.

KAHN: Oh yes she was. She had to leave. You remember she got a job with the Budget Bureau working with Helen Chatfield.

BROOKS: Then she went to International Monetary Fund.

KAHN: No, she went to State. It was Marie Charlotte Stark who went to the IMF. But, no Frances did have to leave and she was terribly bitter about it. Guy Lee had to leave.

BROOKS: Yes. I've talked with Guy recently.

KAHN: And now I remember asking Portner about the hearings and how they went, and those were the hearings before the Subcommittee on Independent Appropriations which was the Committee that attached the rider to the NA appropriation act. As far as I could see, Portner had not had the vaguest inkling of what was up. He thought he was a friend of the Clerk of the Committee, he thought the hearings had gone well. When he saw the printed report, it was a shattering experience for him. He called me in to tell me. Portner did not regard me as unfriendly to him. In fact, later he told me one time that of all the people in the National Archives, I was the only one who expressed any sympathy or gave any evidence of support. I can remember what consternation there was. I remember that Dan Lacy, who had recently remarried you know, you remember Hope . . .

BROOKS: Hope Campbell.

KAHN: Yes. She came down--she was in the office at the time. There was a great to do, a great wringing of hands. I was not on the inside of things, I didn't really know what was going on. But it was an example of a completely unpredictable turn of events that can happen in Washington. How somebody who's on top today is out tomorrow. And also how intrigue

and subterranean groups of this kind--which have connection on the Hill--can sometimes carry the day, can have their way. I should say that none of this would have been possible, and none successful, had Buck not been so utterly blind and incapable of recognizing what the limitations of other people are, what can be done inside of an organization and what cannot be done. Buck had his ideas about how the Archives ought to be organized, and if things didn't go the way he wanted them to go he thought it was because people were resisting, and sabotaging his program. He didn't realize that you couldn't change things overnight, that there were vested interests in the Archives that couldn't be made to do things differently overnight, and he just kept butting his head against a stone wall until finally he was out. I don't want to say anymore about it than that, except that it was a case of a very able man being destroyed or laid low by a tragic flaw in his own character or in his own ability, which he was simply incapable of realizing.

BROOKS: May I ask if you think that all this agitation that led to the Portner, Rifkind, Lacy thing--did that have a direct effect on Buck's departure from the Archives? In other words, why did Buck leave?

KAHN: Well, I think that Buck--after these people had all left--Lacy, Portner, and Rifkind--suddenly realized, this late realization came, that he had no political talents, that there were grave limitations on his administrative ability, and it was then that he called on Wayne Grover and asked him if he would take the job. What was he then?

BROOKS: He was Assistant Archivist for about a year.

KAHN: Assistant Archivist. But by this time Buck must have realized that his own authority had been so gravely compromised by what had happened that the staff would never have the respect for him that they previously had, and that his ability to carry out what he wanted to do would be crippled. By this time Luther Evans had become Librarian of Congress, and it so happened that there was the job of Chief of the Manuscripts Division open, which is a very important position, and a position that I think had the same income or close to the same income that Buck had as the Archivist of the United States.

BROOKS: It probably does. It's a very distinguished position.

KAHN: Yes. So Buck, having been offered that job by Luther Evans, thought it sensible to get out, and take that job. This of course--this whole experience, although Buck never talked with me about it--must have been a shattering one for him too. It brought everything crashing down around his ears. It showed that everything that he had tried to do had been of no avail. Primarily that he had been utterly blind in picking men. His choice of Dallas Irvine as a key staff officer for years in the National Archives, was an example of Buck's utter blindness in what the abilities of men are and what their limitations are. I have great respect for Dallas Irvine, but he can be used for certain things and cannot be used for other things. You know that as well as I. Buck's bringing in a man talented as he was and brilliant as he was, as young and inexperienced as Dan Lacy was at that time, and putting him over a lot of Archives veterans-- it would have been wiser for Buck to bring Dan Lacy at a lower level and bring him up, rather than bring him in from the outside and put him over the whole staff at the first. And similarly with Portner and Rifkind.

Well all these things are indications of Buck's weaknesses. I've been talking about his strengths, he had grave weaknesses too. He must have suddenly realized that he had these weaknesses and thought it would be better to spend his remaining career in a place where he wouldn't be an object of pity, as he would be in the National Archives.

BROOKS: I had worked closely with him for very nearly 10 years, but I never got to the kind of relations where he talked to me about these things either. I think few people in the Archives itself actually did.

But let's move along, Herman, because I think it's important to get to your service at Hyde Park. Buck left at the end of May in 1948--Grover came in about a week--and you were appointed to be Director of the Roosevelt Library in August.

KAHN: Well let's go into that a little bit. I had no idea at this time of-- had no idea of leaving the National Archives organization, but Shipman had announced his resignation just about the same time that Wayne Grover came into the Archives as Assistant Archivist.

BROOKS: Grover came in the Summer of '47, and Shipman--he actually resigned in the Spring of '48--but this was forecast.

KAHN: As I recall it they circularized a memorandum saying anybody on the staff of the National Archives who wanted to apply for the job of Director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library should make known his intentions or apply, or something like that. Well even then I didn't think seriously of it. But one night talking to Ann at home I said, you know, "Shipman has resigned or is going to resign and they circularized a memorandum saying that anybody interested ought to apply." She said, "Well why don't you apply?" I said, "Well I haven't dreamed of it. I'm not particularly interested in going up to Hyde Park." She said, "You go ahead and apply; I'd like to go to Hyde Park, if we can, I'd like to get out of Washington." Well, at that time Buck was on a long leave of absence, a long vacation of some sort, so instead of putting anything in writing, I went down to see Wayne. As you know I had known Wayne Grover ever since 1935. My relations with him--I had been a good friend for a while--I was still a friend, but not by any means any longer a close friend. I didn't consider him really a friend, more of an acquaintance. But I went in to see Wayne and said, "You know I think I might be interested in this job at Hyde Park." He said, and I'm sure this was an evasion--because you remember by this time Buck had left complete authority in Wayne's hands, and Wayne had carried out a drastic reorganization of the Archives, including firing Art Young as Management Officer and various other things. I can't remember the details of the reorganization, but it was another very drastic... I remember he fired Art young, and Art Young wired Buck wherever he was and Buck refused to even send a communication of any kind. At any rate, Wayne then said to me, "Well you know this won't be my decision about the new Director of the Roosevelt Library, this will be Buck's decision when he comes back. But I'll let him know that you're interested, or may be better yet, you tell him you are interested." As I say this was a lengthy vacation, and by the time he got--not long after he got back--Buck called us in and announced that he was resigning and going to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. I recall that in my way I made some remark at that meeting. You see, we had constantly been joking about the fact that there were a lot of archival materials in the Manuscript Division. And I said to Buck in the course of this meeting, "Well as soon as you get up there I'm going to be calling on you for some of these things we had been talking about." At any rate, so it was no longer Buck's decision, it was Wayne's decision. This, remember, was in the spring and summer of 1948 when everybody thought that the Democrats were going out. At any rate, Wayne came in as Assistant Archivist in 1947 and then there was a long period before he was made Archivist. Not a long period but a period of several months. Above all, he was determined not to make the political mistakes that Buck had made. As a matter of fact, what you had here in

this change from Buck to Grover was a shift from a man who had been completely blind to political considerations to a man who I think was at the other end of the spectrum--almost too sensitive.

BROOKS: Very astute.

KAHN: Very astute and almost too sensitive to political considerations. And he thought, rightly or wrongly, that in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library he had an extremely hot political potato. Because he, like everyone else, was convinced that Truman was going to be out, and I don't remember whether Dewey had as yet been nominated, but whoever was the Republican nominee was going to be in, and that this was going to be a great political detriment to the Archives, even having a Roosevelt Library in its organization chart. Particularly about the appointment of a Director, Wayne was just as nervous as a hen. So it went on and on and on--he made no decision. I don't remember when it was I first talked to him about it, but finally--and you know I think the fact of the matter was I had no idea who else said they were interested in the job. I don't know that anybody else said they were interested in the job.

BROOKS: I guess I know of one. I did talk to Wayne myself about possibly going up there. But I was also talking to Shipman about going to the National Security Resources Board, because this was just after the Civil Service Classification Division survey, which had not affected me very well. And Wayne, this was in his period of uncertainty, asked me to hold my decision about the NSRB until he made up his decision about Hyde Park.

KAHN: This is the first time I've heard of that. Did anybody else express interest?

BROOKS: I have no idea. That doesn't necessarily mean that I was a serious contender, but simply he was uncertain what he was going to do.

KAHN: I'm sure you were. At any rate, at some point Wayne told me he was going to recommend me for this, but now a security investigation was necessary. This wasn't necessarily a loyalty investigation, but you know, trustworthiness. A full field investigation by the FBI and so on. So then months and months went by and I didn't know . . . I should say that Truman's loyalty program had just been put into effect while Buck was still Archivist, and you remember the first loyalty program provided for a separate loyalty board in each agency.

BROOKS: I think Buck was very much afraid of all that business.

KAHN: And Buck appointed me to the National Archives Loyalty Board. It was I and Marcus Price, and Ruth Henderson who were the National Archives Loyalty Board. I thought, well my gosh, if I'm on the National Archives Loyalty Board I ought to be able to pass a loyalty test. At any rate, this--Wayne told me that there was going to be this full field investigation, and I heard nothing, and I heard nothing, and I heard nothing, and I thought, well I wish I had never gotten into this. Because we were at that moment engaged--we were buying a house out in Tauxmont, Virginia. The house was halfway up at this time. This was one of the reasons that I hadn't wanted to go to Hyde Park. The house had been begun and it was going up at this very time. Eventually we had to--the contractor rebought it from us. Finally Wayne called me in one day and said I passed the loyalty security investigation, my appointment had been approved, I was to go to Hyde Park, and I would hear from Mrs. Roosevelt. I was living out in Rockville at this time, and three days later I did get a wire. The girl at the Western Union office in Rockville called me, trembling. Her voice was shaking, "Is this Herman Kahn?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well there's a telegram here for you from Mrs. Roosevelt." Well what it was was an invitation--the idea was I think that I was supposed to be--the final thing was I was supposed to, you know, pass muster with Mrs. Roosevelt, and she was inviting me to come up there for dinner. I went up there for dinner and had dinner with her and some of her guests. Well, at any rate, I finally went to Hyde Park in August of 1948. I can remember the shock and dismay with which the announcement of my appointment was greeted by my friends in the Archives, because everybody in one voice said, "Are you mad, are you crazy? You know that Dewey is in, and the first thing he's going to do is close that place up or else investigate it to death, or cut off the appropriations; you're just signing your own death warrant." Well I said, "That may be, but I think no matter what happens I'll always be able to find a job, and I've made up my mind and I'm not going to change now. Besides, I had developed something of an interest in it. So I went up and looked for a house, I talked a little to Fred Shipman and Fred Shipman showed me around and so on.

BROOKS: He'd never found satisfactory housing.

KAHN: Yes. And I should say that one of the things that I found when I got up there was that Fred had never been happy in Hyde Park as a place to live, and he had delayed moving up there for a long time when he was first appointed. Mrs. Shipman didn't like it. He was away from Hyde Park for

several years during the war on this special assignment that he had. And when I came up there he was commuting back and forth to Washington on weekends. He told me many things about living in Hyde Park that didn't make me feel very cheerful about it. At any rate, there I was. I don't know, there are so many things that one could go into about this job, I hardly know how to approach it.

Let me say a few things generally about what I found there at Hyde Park. I would say that I found quite a demoralized institution when I came there. In the first place, you recall, it was not only Fred Shipman who had resigned, but Ed Nixon had resigned at the same time--that is, the top man and the second man had both resigned simultaneously. Martin Claussen had been in charge and he was fairly new there. He had gone up there just about a year before, and if I'm not mistaken I think that Martin Claussen had aspired to becoming Director of the Library.

BROOKS: He probably had.

KAHN: And was quite disappointed at not being appointed. Now, let me say something else that I had forgotten. At the time that Wayne appointed me he also said in the next breath, to my shock, "You know Ed Nixon has asked to go back to the Library, and I've reappointed him Assistant Director."

BROOKS: Oh yes, he came down to NSRB and he was unhappy there.

KAHN: That's right, and it is my personal feeling, that once having quit a job you should never announce to the world that I'm sorry, I've made a mistake, and I want to go back. But that was Ed Nixon's position; and Wayne felt, mistakenly, as I later learned, that Ed Nixon was very close to Mrs. Roosevelt--that she had great confidence in him, and that it would be a good stroke to reappoint him. Actually, Ed had never been on close terms with Mrs. Roosevelt. This is nothing against him--he's just naturally a withdrawn person who keeps his nose to the grindstone and does his own work, but takes very little interest in administrative matters or in relationships with others. Ed has many solid virtues and is a good scholar, but the reason he had left the Library was that because in Fred Shipman's frequent lengthy absences, Ed had found it necessary to take on administrative duties which were intensely distasteful to him, and he wanted nothing to do with them. Then he got down to Washington--I don't know what the story was down there--but he decided he wanted to go back to Hyde Park.

BROOKS: Just a wild mess of emergency agencies that he didn't fit into at all.

KAHN: Yes, well, so here I found myself with my assistant chosen for me, appointed for me, I having had no voice in it whatever. I barely knew Ed Nixon--I got to know him very well later. He was coming back to the Library under these very peculiar circumstances, having just had less than a year before--six months before--a series of farewell parties and gifts, and all the rest of it, and now returning to an institution also where it was no secret that Martin Claussen and Ed Nixon had not gotten along well together. Here I was coming as a new Director to a job that I believe Martin had hoped to have, with my assistant a man who had been there before and whom Martin Claussen hadn't gotten along with. Well, I'll say no more about the Martin Claussen aspect of it--he began looking for another job at once and within a year found one and went back to Washington.

The situation at Hyde Park was extremely confused. For one thing the relationship with the National Park Service was a strange one. But I was very fortunate in that--well, you see in 1946, under a new arrangement, the management of the building and grounds of the Library had been taken away from Public Buildings and given to the National Park Service, at that time it took over the Roosevelt home at Hyde Park. It so happened, and this was pure coincidence, that the National Park Service superintendent whom I found in charge there, and with whom I had to have close relations, was George Palmer, who was an old college chum of mine. We had been together in graduate school and we were good friends, knew each other, liked each other, so that was a stroke of good fortune. George was able to introduce me to a lot of people, to tell me a lot about the place, and that was a big help.

As for the Library itself, I found it in a state that I can describe only as demoralization. Shipman's long continued absences--the fact that he was commuting between Hyde Park and Washington over the weekends--the sudden departure of both Shipman and Nixon and now this sudden reappearance of Nixon and the fact that the staff of the Library had been chosen in peculiar ways, some of them because of their relationship to the Roosevelt family, and so on. The whole thing--and then the unresolved difficulties about the status of the President's papers. Also, the unresolved questions about the relationship of the Roosevelt Library to the Archives. All these presented enormous difficulties.

I should say I discovered one thing at once that I found amusing. When the Congress passed the joint resolution setting up the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Collas Harris had been put to work on devising the-- well, let us say a table of organization and what the relationship of the Director of the Library to the Archivist was going to be. He had concocted this peculiar theory which he apparently sold both Shipman and Connor on, which was that the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library was not a field establishment of the National Archives, but it was an independent agency of which the Archivist of the United States was the head. That is, the Archivist of the United States was the head of a kind of a dual monarchy. As Archivist of the United States he was in charge of the National Archives, but he also had another independent agency under him, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

This was revealed in the letterheads that Collas Harris had printed-- both for the Archivist and for the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. He had an enormous quantity of stationery printed out for Connor on which the letterhead was "Archivist of the United States", not "National Archives". Then down underneath on the left-hand side was "Franklin D. Roosevelt Library". The theory was that Connor was going to use that letterhead when he wrote letters in his capacity as head of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, but he was going to use the National Archives letterhead when he wrote letters in his capacity as head of the National Archives. Similarly he had a letterhead printed up for the Library on which National Archives didn't appear at all. It was "Franklin D. Roosevelt Library" at the top, then down on one side--"Archivist of the United States, Robert D. W. Connor", and then on the other side, "Fred Shipman, Director". I came to know this partly because when I got up there I was asked what we could do with all this stationery. In true Collas Harris fashion he'd had reams and reams and reams of it printed. And several years later Faye Geeslin showed me this closet full of stationery which had never been used since Connor left, which said "Archivist of the United States". I said, "Well if I were you, I'd just cut that up in scratch paper." Which we did.

Another reason I know that this was Collas Harris' theory was that I was shown at one point, or I found in the files, the organization chart that he had prepared for the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, which showed that the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library was to have a complete set of its own facilitating and support services. That is the Director was going to have his own supply officer, he was going to do all his own purchasing, his own personnel officer, his own payroll officer. In other words, all of the support and facilitating services in the National Archives were to be

duplicated in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. The result of this plan was that Collas Harris' first table of organization for the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library showed a staff of between 35 and 40 people necessary. Whereas, actually, when I came there, I think there were about 10 or 12 people, including everybody.

BROOKS: I can easily see this contributing to the fact that Shipman and Dr. Buck never got along. I think they hadn't even before that. But Fred talked very firmly to me about Dr. Buck.

KAHN: Well, Buck didn't like or trust Fred Shipman. Why, I don't know. This produced a complicating factor for me--Buck had issued an order to the mail room in the National Archives that every single communication from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, regardless of to whom it was addressed in the National Archives, was to be sent to him; he would open it. That is even a requisition for pencils or anything of that sort, so that every single communication that Shipman sent to the Archives went to Buck, and Buck was constantly nit-picking. When I got there, this rule was still in effect, and the mail room was still sending every single communication to Wayne. And Wayne, in his own way, was just as worried about the Library as Buck was. Wayne was still terribly sensitive about the Library and terribly worried that the Library was going to get him into trouble with the Republican majorities on the Hill. So he would ask questions about small things. When I got up there, the Library had no vehicle, had no car of its own. I was doing an awful lot of driving around in my own car for Library purposes, and Wayne resisted for a long time the idea that we should have a vehicle of our own. He said, "I don't want you joy-riding around in Government automobiles," and so on. Wayne refused to have National Archives pay my moving expenses to move to Hyde Park. It was simply that he was afraid that somebody might ask a question. Remember that the National Archives was still an independent agency. It had very little experience with this business of a field establishment, and Wayne was afraid of making a mistake. Well at any rate, I found this rather sad state of affairs when I got there, and the staff not knowing what to expect.

On the question of the papers, I think one of the reasons that Shipman and Buck had gotten so sharply out of tune with one another is this--that Buck, with his logical mind, had never really been persuaded that the papers of the President were personal papers, that they were his private property, that they were not official records. You see the White House had been sending a part of the White House files up to Hyde Park beginning during the war. And there was a considerable quantity of the "Official files."

Buck had said to Shipman, Buck told me at one time, "As long as I'm Archivist of the United States they're not going to just put a padlock on those. That Library is there to be used." And he had ordered Shipman, before there had been any screening of the files or any work by the Rosenman Committee, or anything, to open the papers. And Shipman had opened them. So that research had been done in certain parts of the Roosevelt papers before any of the machinery for processing them could have taken place. You know, I could mention--I know at least one book, published by a scholar, in that period, in which, for instance, an FBI investigative report, which was in the files, was cited in a footnote. Of course, this shows you how we worry about things that there is really no cause to worry about. There is a lot of material from this report published in a book and an FBI investigative report cited in a footnote, and to the best of my knowledge nobody's ever noticed.

BROOKS: That's one question I was going to ask you, how much research had been done there before you got there?

KAHN: Not a great deal, but there had been some.

BROOKS: Frank Freidel had been using the papers, had he not?

KAHN: He had begun just before I got there, not very long before, but just before I got there. At any rate, the big question--Wayne too felt that it was a necessary thing for the health of the Roosevelt Library that the papers be opened quickly, that there couldn't be any long delays, we couldn't give the impression that we were hiding anything. I would say Wayne's great contribution to the theory of the use of presidential papers was his insistence from the beginning that it was the papers that had to be screened, not the researchers. As you know, the orthodox procedure in the matter of the research use of the papers of contemporary men was for the donor or some committee or something like that, to approve the use or to pick and choose among applicants and say you may use and you may not use, and if you have been given permission to use you have to submit your manuscript, and so on. Wayne's political sensitivity told him from the very beginning that for the Roosevelt Library this would not be feasible--that there could be no picking and choosing among the applicants provided they were literate, competent scholars. What would have to be done, however, was (in as much as the papers obviously contained large amounts of material that it was not proper, perhaps even legal, to make available at this time) the papers would have to be screened, one by one. He and I sat down with Judge Rosenman and Grace Tully, the two surviving members of the Roosevelt

Committee. I don't want to go into all the vast details about the status of the Roosevelt papers, because as you know, Roosevelt had made no provision in his will giving the papers to the Government or the Library, and there was no instrument of gift. Fred Shipman had suffered through this long and difficult period in which this issue had to be ironed out in the court.

BROOKS: The Surrogate Court's decision had been given before you got there, right?

KAHN: That's right. The preceding year the Surrogate's Court, in Dutchess County, had decided that although there was no document that Roosevelt had ever signed giving his papers to the Government, he had constructively willed them because he had many times publicly announced his intention that he was going to give them, he had encouraged the construction of a Library, and he had sent his papers up to this Library during the course of his life, so undoubtedly that was his intention. But as far as the screening of them was concerned, all there was was this memorandum, written in 1943 or 1944 appointing this committee of Hopkins, Rosenman, and Grace Tully. And you know there was one very short period of about a month when Hopkins was very, very sick--this was back about 1940, maybe '41, he was not expected to live--when Hopkins was Director of the Roosevelt Library. Before Shipman's appointment, and they thought it would be kind of a place for him to go until his death; there was a period then when it was seriously expected that he was going to die. He was of course mortally ill. He went out to the Mayo Clinic several times.

At any rate, on the basis largely of Judge Rosenman's wise advice, we set about screening the papers and trying to set up standards as to what was proper to make available for use.

This is such a big subject, Phil, I don't think we can go into it. I think that the thing we discovered right away was that the big problem was not the question of what it was proper for people to see about Roosevelt, or the things that Roosevelt had written. The great problems were with the letters that other people had written to Roosevelt. And that it was our responsibility to protect people who had said foolish things, who had said indiscreet things, who had said unwise things to the President, who had made remarks about others, and so on. We soon found that--well there was little bad that could be thought or said about Roosevelt that hadn't been thought or said already. And except for security classification, which is entirely a different problem, there was only a small problem with the

President's own writing. The real problem was with the material that he had received from others.

BROOKS: I remember you said something like that in an interview at the time of the opening of the majority of the papers in 1950, and you said that part of the job was to protect these people against their own indiscretions. Am I right that this was about the first time that anybody had done this kind of screening anywhere?

KAHN: That's right. I could find no precedents. I could find no instances where this kind of a job had ever been done before. I soon found that in making decisions about what to open, and what to keep under seal, it wasn't a question of kind but of degree. In many, many cases there'd be a small risk of damage or embarrassment or humiliation to somebody if a paper was opened. But on the other hand, if you were going to eliminate every possible risk, very little would be opened. And we wanted to open a vast mass of papers in order to make the Library a viable institution. So in this question of what ought to be opened, in every single decision you made, it was not a question of whether there was any risk involved in this at all, of damaging somebody, but how much risk is there. What are the percentages of risk involved here? I soon found that asking other people's advice on this was small help. As you know I've been involved with the papers of many of the Presidents and their families since that, and it's been a very interesting thing from the Roosevelts on down to the present President, I suppose. In principle they are all in favor of opening everything. You know, they say, "I have no secrets, I have nothing to hide," but when you show them a particular thing and say "Well, what about this," then, even if there is a very small risk involved they say, "Oh, not that." So I quickly learned that if I asked Wayne Grover or asked Judge Rosenman for advice, they were for closing far more than I thought it was wise to close, and we would wind up with very little material opened if I took their advice. I thought it was better to take some risks. As a matter of fact, Wayne constantly pulled back from decisions on these questions. He said, "Well, you know, I don't want to get into this, you make your own decisions, keep me out of it, it's too hot a subject," and so on.

BROOKS: You almost have to see a whole group of papers together in order to make intelligent decisions. You can't do it on one paper. Well, you can see why I have a special interest in all this, because many of these problems had already been dealt with before I got into the Presidential Library enterprise. Now at about the same time that these decisions were being made and worked out Grover read a paper in 1950 at the American Historical

Association meeting about access to World War II records, in which he evoked the principle of opening things as far as you possibly could for scholars. Also about the same time came the Federal Records Act, that he had a great deal to do with, which had a good deal to do with this.

KAHN: Yes. Now let me say that we did have a second and third round of conferences with Rosenman. And Rosenman's great contribution to this subject, and he very wisely required us to go back and close some things that had been opened, was his insistence on the importance of the confidentiality of advisory letters and memoranda written to the President by his immediate circle of advisers. This gets into the question of executive privilege which is now such a hot subject. But Rosenman, as a presidential adviser, said that if a President were to have the benefit of full, honest, uninhibited, frank, reports and recommendations from his immediate advisers, they would have to be certain that what they were writing to the President today would not be available to scholars or the press tomorrow, or next year, or even five years from now; because it was perfectly inevitable that they would have been revealed as mistaken sometimes, or even foolish sometimes--nobody likes to have himself shown up in public as mistaken or foolish. So that if they knew these things were going to be opened shortly they would start writing what Dean Acheson later called "waffle papers." Instead of frank, honest, incisive opinions, they would write these "on the one hand, and on the other hand" kind of memoranda in which they took no position. So the President wouldn't be getting what he needed, which was honest advice. So Rosenman insisted that whatever else was done, if there were memoranda on controversial matters from the men around the President, those, at least for the period that these men were in public life would have to be closed. Although much of that was not controversial when we opened it, much was of that nature and it was closed. I don't know whether you have read the full Leopold Committee report.

BROOKS: Every word.

KAHN: In which some of these matters were lightly gone over. At any rate, we had a big ceremony in 1950 at the time of the opening of the Roosevelt papers, to which a lot of people--historians and others, and reporters--were invited. I should say that one other important thing came up at this time. When it was announced that the papers were going to be opened, and reporters were going to be invited, I got an invitation from the New York Times to write an article for the Times Sunday Magazine, about the Roosevelt papers as seen by an insider. I should say there was a precedent for this,

because before Lincoln's papers were opened in 1947, David Mearns had been working for years on the Lincoln papers. And the New York Times had asked Dave Mearns to write an article for the Sunday Magazine, which he had done, and was paid for it. I got this request from the New York Times and they wanted--the idea was that this would be published approximately at the same time as the papers were opened, but I, having spent this time screening the papers, I would be able to use my special privileged advance knowledge of, you know, quotable quotes and interesting things. I talked to Wayne about this and I said that despite the fact that there was this honorable precedent in the case of Dave Mearns and the Lincoln papers--remember they had just been opened in 1947--that I thought there would be a certain element of impropriety in my using this special privilege of early access that I had had to the Roosevelt papers, to sell an article to the New York Times Magazine on the basis of this special knowledge that I had, using what I knew for the purposes of personal publicity as well as money. Wayne agreed with me and we hammered out a principle which I think is still followed in the Presidential Libraries: that although it's perfectly all right for members of the staff to publish material based on their research in the papers, they should never use their access to materials closed to others for the purpose of writing things--or even give the impression that they had used their access to materials closed to others for the purpose of writing articles for publication or giving interviews.

BROOKS: I certainly understood that as Director of a Library, and I hope it's generally understood still. It should be.

KAHN: Now you mentioned the Federal Records Act. I, of course, was interested in Truman's papers, and I kept asking Wayne and Bob what was going to happen to Truman's papers. The first word I had on this was that Mr. Truman thought his papers ought to go into the National Archives and for that reason--this was at the time the Federal Records Act was being written--they were writing into the Federal Records Act language that authorizes the Archivist of the United States to take into the National Archives personal papers as well as the papers of the President. That language is still there. Well this was quite a blow to me. I thought it was a mistake. I had by this time realized that the papers of the President could not be handled in the same way as Governmental records are, but I had plenty of other things to worry about and I said nothing.

But the next thing I knew Dave Lloyd was up at Hyde Park talking to me about Presidential Libraries and papers of the Presidents. Then I heard that Mr. Truman had changed his mind and that he wanted a Library in

Independence where things would be done just as they had been done at Hyde Park, which was quite a compliment, and I felt that in a sense this vindicated our work. Of course I felt that the chief vindication was that-- and I continue to feel this all along--that even though some people may complain that we were too conservative in our screening, still, with maybe one or two small exceptions, there have been no complaints by anybody that someone was damaged or hurt or embarrassed or humiliated by any papers opened at Hyde Park. And had that occurred, had there been even one case of the kind of complaint that recently appeared on the front page of the New York Times--when, as in my estimation, some of the oral histories at the LBJ Library were opened too soon, and some of the people interviewed said "You know had I known this was going to be made available to reporters, I never would have said what I did" and so on--had that kind of incident occurred back at Hyde Park when the papers were first opened in 1950, I think it would have ruined the future prospects of Presidential Libraries. Because what President or what person would have put his papers in a library if they thought, "Well, I'm just going to be making enemies by putting my papers in a Presidential Library." I think at that point it was far more important for us to make certain that the Presidents of the United States and their Cabinet ministers and their associates were not frightened off of the Presidential Library idea through premature disclosure of minor or major embarrassing matters.

BROOKS: Your mention of what Mr. Truman intended to do with his papers interests me. In 1950 a local group in Independence started raising funds for a Library. They probably had in mind the example of Hyde Park. But at one time Grover talked to me about where in the Archives specifically we'd put the Truman papers. This must have been after, April 1951, when I went from being Chief Archivist of War Records over to Diplomatic, Judicial, etc., because it would have been in the Executive Branch section of that latter office. But George Elsey recently told me in an interview that Mr. Truman never had anything else in mind than to send them out there. Any possibility of sending them to the Archives he thought was non-existent.

KAHN: Wayne had a way of taking some little hint or word and just blowing it up into something enormous if it came from the White House. He may have misinterpreted something that someone in the White House said to him. But I was definitely told at one point that Truman had decided to put his papers in the National Archives. Now, as I say, this may have been a misinterpretation on Wayne's part.

I think it's impossible for me to go into, or for you to go into, all the many thorny, really hair-raising questions that arose out of this business of making a President's papers available for research five years after he was out of the White House. All the questions that arose when the State Department was ordered by the new Republican majority in the Senate to publish the papers of the World War II Conferences, and a third of those were among the Roosevelt and Hopkins papers at Hyde Park. All the many other questions that came up and which became particularly worrisome when there was after Eisenhower came in a majority of the other party in control of both houses.

There is one question that caused more difficulty than any other, and which continues to be an unresolved question, and which nobody in Government or out of it wants to face up to. That of course is the question of security classified materials in private hands. Not only among the President's papers, but in other people's papers. This was a problem of which--I must say not even Wayne Grover, and certainly not I was aware of the far-reaching difficulties that were involved in this. I certainly was not aware of it when I went to Hyde Park, but it eventually caused me my greatest single difficulty, and caused Wayne his greatest single difficulty. This was the Morgenthau diary imbroglio.

The instrument of gift for the Morgenthau papers and diary had been drafted but not signed when I went to Hyde Park. One of the first things I had to do was to work out the consummation of the instrument of gift for the Morgenthau diary and papers. They were already there physically, but the instrument hadn't been signed. Morgenthau had a very able lawyer--a woman named Harriet Pilpel. She was with the Morris Ernst firm, and I spent a good many hours with Harriet Pilpel working out the final details, but I wasn't aware that the Morgenthau diary was full of security classified material. I wasn't aware of the extent nor of what the implications of this were. Of course there was at that time no Executive Order 10501. As far as access to the diary in those days (it's been changed since then) it was simply to be on the written authorization of Henry Morgenthau, with no consideration of what the implications were for the Archives or the Library, of the large quantity of security classified materials in the diary. In the years between 1948 and 1954, on Morgenthau's written authorization, a considerable number of people were allowed to use the diary. There was Herbert Feis, Bill Langer, Everett Gleason, Arthur Schlesinger, Jeanette Nichols, etc. It never occurred to me . . .

BROOKS: Langer and Gleason were working for the State Department?

KAHN: No, they were working for themselves on their own book. It never occurred to me that in addition to getting an authorization from Henry Morgenthau, I should say to these people, "Where's your security clearance?" Nobody had ever explained any of this to me. In fact, the people in the Archives had never clearly thought it out, because they had not had, up to that time, any experience with the question of security-classified materials in private papers. Later, when the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee got interested in the question of subversives in the Treasury Department, and sent their own representatives up to Hyde Park to look into the Morgenthau papers, they received the written authorization of Henry Morgenthau to use his diaries. But later, a representative of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, a gentleman named Jonathan Mitchell, raised with the GSA Security Officer, a gentleman by the name of Baron Shifflette, the question of how it was that there were these security-classified materials in the Morgenthau diary and people had been allowed to use them. "Well-known radicals" like Arthur Schlesinger who had no security clearance and how come Kahn was allowing these people. . . Of course this question was raised with me. I said, "All I know is that the instrument of gift says that it shall be made available on the written authorization of Henry Morgenthau." Well, as you know, this caused enormous problems. The diaries were subpoenaed by the Senate Internal Security Committee, and I had to go down and testify before the Committee. The subpoena in the end was withdrawn but the entire diary was shipped down to Washington. I won't try to go into all the details of this really horrendous story, but one result of the Morgenthau diary incident was that the instruments of gift of papers of the Presidents and of other gifts of private papers to Presidential Libraries since that time, have contained a waiver or an exclusion of security classified material. When they do contain the provision that use certain things has to have the donor's authorization--there's always an exclusion of security classified material which reads "providing that this is not in conflict with pertinent laws, executive orders, etc., bearing on the use of security classified materials." Well there was nothing like that in the instrument of gift for the Morgenthau diary nor, indeed, on the Roosevelt papers. It was a problem of not foreseeing it, and it's still--I might say that it's an unresolved problem for people today in non-Government institutions who receive gifts of private papers which contain large blocks of security classified material, and the donor says "there's no need to put any restrictions on these; anyone may use them." If they contain quantities of material that is classified, this is a problem.

The story of my life, since 1948, has been constantly being on the receiving end of this question: "You don't really believe that we can go on peppering the country with these little Presidential Libraries do you? It's the most ridiculous idea in the world that the papers of the Presidents should be

scattered around. How can people do research in contemporary history if they have to travel around from one part of the country to another?"

BROOKS: It seems to me I've heard that question.

KAHN: You've heard that question, too, I'm sure. And I developed a set reply to a question that is asked that frequently. My reply to it is that I am always amazed that people have fastened on papers of the Presidents, in order to raise that objection, because they don't raise that objection to any other kind of papers. Scholars working in the field of labor history take for granted the fact that they are going to have to go to New York, and to Washington, and to Duke University, and to Madison, and to the Pacific Coast because the records of labor history are scattered, and they assume that it's quite right for them to be scattered. I say further that I believe in the virtues of small institutions. I believe with Brandeis that bigness is a curse, and I think that bigness is a curse in libraries and archives as well as in corporations and industries. And that one of the reasons for the success of the Presidential Library has been the gratitude of scholars that they feel that they're getting some individual attention in the Presidential Libraries, and it is possible to give them that individual attention because those institutions are small. Whereas in enormous institutions, like the New York Public Library or Harvard, or Yale, or the Library of Congress, or the National Archives, by reason of the very circumstances you have to give them a kind of assembly line treatment in which the individual and his special needs are lost. And he always leaves those institutions--he frequently leaves the Library of Congress and the National Archives--wondering if he has seen everything that he really should have seen, because he's never had a chance to talk to the people who knew exactly what he was trying to do, or even knew what they had. The holdings in the Archives and the Library of Congress have now become so vast as to defy control, and to defy mastery of their intellectual content, "to use Lacy's phrase, by the staff." So that the Presidential Libraries have this enormous advantage in their smallness.

BROOKS: I concur in that.

KAHN: On the other hand, and I also always point out, the ease of duplication--microfilming and electrostatic copying--now has to a very considerable extent erased the handicap involved in having institutions scattered. And even so, it is also true, somewhat to my surprise, that not a very large percentage of scholars in contemporary history are working on subjects that overlap from one administration to another. I would think that--in fact we once made a study

of the percentage of people working at the Roosevelt Library who also found it necessary for their subject to work at the Truman Library, and it was a surprisingly small percentage. So that this isn't as big a disadvantage as one might assume. There is one development that I did not foresee. One must remember that this sudden growth of the Presidential Library system was a very sudden thing indeed. As late as the end of the second Truman administration there was still only one Presidential Library, the Roosevelt Library, and today, less than 20 years later, we have six Presidential Libraries, and presumably are about to have a seventh. Which is I think a remarkable phenomenon. And I often think, despite all this criticism, we must have been doing something right. This is I guess throwing bouquets at each other, Phil--you and I must have been doing something right.

Well, at any rate, the one thing that I did not foresee was--let me put it this way--my ideal of a Presidential Library is a small, quiet, rather modest institution serving primarily as a research institution. And the Roosevelt Library as it originally was, without the doubling of its size, that recently took place, suited my fancy entirely. Except, of course, that it's true that it outgrew the physical facilities available. What I did not foresee was that Presidential Libraries would become involved with Presidential egos. And that each successive President would feel it necessary to insist that the Library--there are some exceptions which I'll mention in a minute--that the Library built for him, or that the friends of each successive President--let me put it that way, and that's really true--would insist that the Library built for their President had to be bigger and better than any of the preceding libraries. This has been a harmful thing, I think, to the concept of Presidential Libraries.

In large measure, this is the outgrowth of the notion that--also a harmful notion--that Congress must never be asked to appropriate money to construct a Presidential Library. That in turn is the outgrowth of a notion that a President who asks Congress for funds to construct a Presidential Library is asking Congress to appropriate funds to construct a memorial to himself. The notion that the Libraries are memorials to the President, is as you know, largely erroneous. But in any case. . . Now I should say that it is not true of the Eisenhower Library--of President and Mrs. Eisenhower, but it is true of their friends. They felt that they had to have a very large building. Then it's been true certainly of the Kennedys and certainly of the Johnsons, that each one of them felt that this must be the biggest and best of all Presidential Libraries. Obviously this is a tendency that cannot continue because if it is allowed to continue, it may gravely endanger the whole concept of Presidential Libraries by subjecting them to ridicule and by giving some

validity to the charge that this man is constructing a memorial to himself. Which was certainly never Roosevelt's idea. Of that I am as certain as can be. It was not his notion to have the Library serve as a memorial to himself. It was simply his desire to have all the materials that he had collected in his lifetime together in one place where he could make use of them, and where his friends and neighbors in that area could see them. I do think that it would be advisable if some technique could be worked out whereby the planning of each Presidential Library could be taken out of the hands of the friends of the President, or even the President's own family, and made a continuing function of the Government. So that there wouldn't be this pressure each time a new Presidential Library must go up, to say well this has to be the biggest and best of all of them. I can say that I was in on the planning, simultaneously, of both the Kennedy and Johnson Libraries. I was intimately involved in the planning of both of them, and was under this competitive pressure all the time, and it was not a healthy thing for either of those institutions. Of course there were the special circumstances of President Kennedy's death which made the Library in a sense a memorial because the State of Massachusetts agreed to give the site for the Library, as a substitute for the State memorial to Kennedy, which gave it more of the element of a memorial than some of the others. But I do feel that this is an unforeseen weakness that has developed in the Presidential Library system, which in the end could constitute a great danger to it.

BROOKS: Yes, I think so. I don't think it was really Mr. Truman's own idea that the Library should be a memorial to him. But I do think it was the idea of some people around him.

KAHN: Well, I think that the--fundamentally--the idea of having the Library in a place where it would be close to the area that the President considered his home is a sound one, although I will admit that the only Presidential Library about which I've heard people complain--about the difficulty of getting to it and working in it--is the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. And there may be some validity in that. Although it seems to me that with the ease of communications now that that validity is growing smaller with each passing year.

BROOKS: I think people just have the idea that that little place out in the middle of Kansas in a little town is remote. I've certainly heard the same thing about that one.

KAHN: I will say this also, that in 1948 when I first went to Hyde Park in August--everybody of course in August assumed that Dewey was in-- and Dewey's home was in Pawling, New York, also in Dutchess County, less than 20 miles from Hyde Park. At that time people were saying, "Well you know this can't continue, you can't have two Presidential Libraries within twenty miles of each other, that would be utterly ridiculous." And I don't know what would have happened. I have no idea what would have happened had Dewey been elected, whether we would have had one Presidential Library at Hyde Park and one at Pawling; although I don't know why not. I don't know what would have been wrong with it.

BROOKS: Maybe Dewey would have put his at Ann Arbor. He was a prominent alumnus of the University of Michigan.

KAHN: Well, that's all I can say now.