



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

I, Guy A. Lee, of Bethesda, Maryland, in accordance with the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-110), hereby assign to the United States for administration by the National Archives and Records Service all my rights, title, and interest, including any literary property rights that I may have in them, in the tape recording and transcript of the interview with me conducted by Philip C. Brooks on behalf of the National Archives and Records Service at Alexandria, Virginia, on March 14, 1973.

It is agreed that the tape (or sample portion thereof), and transcript will be available under the regulations prescribed by the Archivist of the United States as soon as the final form of the transcript has been deposited in the National Archives. It is also agreed that only the National Archives and Records Service shall have the right to publish or authorize the publication of the interview in whole or in part, aside from quotation in the normal concept of "fair use," providing that I or my heirs, legal representatives or assigns retain the right to publish in other form the statements or facts set forth in the interviews.

Signed Guy A. Lee  
Date Feb. 26, 1974

Accepted:

Signed James B. Rhoads  
Archivist of the United States

Date March 13, 1974

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with  
GUY A. LEE

Principal Biographical Information:

Born, New Haven, Indiana	1909
A. B. Wabash College	1932
M. A., Ph. D. Harvard University	1934, 1938
Fellow, Brookings Institution	1936-1937
Instructor, Assistant Professor, Clark University	1937-1942
Editorial Assistant, Division of Information and Publications, National Archives	1942
Archivist, Division of Reference	1942-1943
Assistant Chief, Division of Agriculture Department Archives	1943-1944
Assistant to the Records Control Officer	1944-1946
Assistant Records Control Officer	1946
Historian, Historical Division, Department of the Army	1947-1948
Chief, Reference and Research Section, National Security Resources Board	1948-1950
Historian, Office of High Commissioner for Germany, Department of State	1950-1954
Assistant Director, UNESCO Relations Staff, Department of State; Assistant Secretary, United States National Commission for UNESCO	1954-1959
First Political Officer, U. S. Embassy, Jakarta	1959-1960
American Consul, Medan, Sumatra	1960-1961
Director, Office of Near East and South Asian Regional Affairs, Department of State	1962-1966
American Consul General, Izmir, Turkey	1966-1969
Retired	December 31, 1969

National Archives and Records Service

Oral History Project

Interview with Guy A. Lee

BROOKS: Now, as I've told you at various times, Guy, I think it's important to learn what brought people into the Archives and what their background was that might involve special competences or experiences, or prejudices or interests, that would affect their work in the Archives. Would you talk about that sort of thing?

LEE: Well, my first contact with the Archives was probably when I was a graduate student. I attended the American Historical Association meeting in Washington. I think it was 1932, possibly 1933 or 1934 and the building was being built and as an attendant at the meetings I went over and had a tour with other historians.

BROOKS: You were then a graduate student?

LEE: At Harvard University. And then I was in Washington at the Brookings Institution in 1936-7.

BROOKS: As a researcher?

LEE: No, I was there on a fellowship completing a Ph.D. dissertation.

BROOKS: What was the subject of the dissertation, Guy?

LEE: One of those esoteric subjects, the history of the Chicago Grain Elevator Industry. Then before leaving Washington--you will recall that was in the Depression years--I needed to establish some sort of a job and I went to the Archives to talk with people about the possibility of employment there. I remember interviewing someone, I think probably it was Roscoe Hill, at the time, and I actually filed an application for employment. Two things impressed me about the visit to the Archives at that time. One was the barn-like nature of the physical plant. I went into a huge room without partitions and with a high ceiling. Big boxes of old World War I records were stacked around, and so at the time I was impressed with the potential for administrative and plain physical problems. The other thing was that I was advised to get a political endorsement if I wanted to get a job. Well then I went to teaching for five years, and after five years returned to Washington in 1942.

BROOKS: May I ask, did the political endorsement involve any problems? It's my impression that that was a pretty routine thing.

LEE: I got the impression that almost everyone was advised to do that.

BROOKS: Right.

LEE: What its significance was I don't know. I had problems with it, but that was on the personal side rather than connected with the Archives.

BROOKS: It was pretty routine that they asked everybody to get a clearance. And I think generally there were not many appointments made primarily because of politics on the professional side. On the administrative side there probably were more.

LEE: My only problem was in my initial efforts to get an endorsement, not knowing the political ropes, I managed to get an endorsement from the wrong faction in the Democratic Party, and I had to go back and get another endorsement. I had no trouble with it except it took a little extra time. Well then I came down to Washington in 1942 and entered the employment of the Archives.

BROOKS: Having been where between '34 and '42?

LEE: From '37 to '42 I was at Clark University teaching American history. And in the meantime I had maintained, as a young professional in the history field an interest in the Archives, and had followed it somewhat and knew a number of people who were working there. So I started work in August 1942 in Ernest Bryan's office. I've forgotten what the name of it was. Office of Information or Information and Publications, something of that sort.

BROOKS: He was in Thad Page's office and his function was primarily information.

LEE: Yes, and I don't remember my title. I know that for the few months I was there I did editorial work and exhibit work.

BROOKS: I have so far talked to very few people that knew anything about the exhibits work. I will get Betty Hamer, and Karl Trever, but neither of them I think was involved in the very early stages.

LEE: My impression was that those were the very early stages. Now that exhibit hall was there from the first, so there must have been exhibits much earlier than that. But I do know that when I came they apparently had no one who was taking responsibility for it and who had any professional competence or any special interest in it. And I was somewhat astounded when I was informed that in a few days I was expected to put an exhibit in the Constitution Avenue lobby.

BROOKS: A documentary exhibit?

LEE: Documentary exhibit. At the time I knew very little about exhibits and very little about the Archives, and I've forgotten how the subject was arrived at, but evidently I was asked to consult around among people in the Archives about proper subjects, and we hit upon Latin America. And by cooperation of various people, I suppose yourself among others, I got together a series of documents, somebody else in the office and I got carts, went around to the stacks, collected the documents and put in an exhibit. We worked up the appropriate labels for the various documents.

BROOKS: I don't remember for sure who really had charge of exhibits before that. I suppose it was under Thad Page's guidance.

LEE: Well, I think that was the only exhibit I actually organized for him because I was with the office only a few months.

BROOKS: Did you work on publications?

LEE: Yes. I did editing and writing on a number of things that were being prepared. I don't remember just what they were. I remember that Lester Cappon was preparing some sort of a paper relating to archives wherein the Archives had an interest, and I worked on his paper. I think it had to do with Federal archives in general and perhaps the development of the National Archives. And then I believe, didn't the Archives get out a series of little leaflets about accessions and resources?

BROOKS: At one time there was an accessions journal and then during the War it published a series called Reference Information Circulars, that had to do with information on specific subjects.

LEE: Yes, Well I remember a great deal about that but I don't remember exactly what I edited during these few months. I was there only a few months, and then Phil Hamer asked me if I'd like to come up to his office and work with the reference and records description work.

BROOKS: He was then head of the Reference Division, wasn't he?

LEE: Yes. He had the centralized oversight of all the Research Room activity and of all the correspondence. And Elizabeth Drewry was his deputy. I guess I was the third person in the office, and I sat at a desk and saw all the researchers who came in in person and interviewed them and, if they were routine, simply issued them a card and sent them down to the search room.

BROOKS: Were you up in the central search room or up on the third floor?

LEE: No, I was on the second floor and adjacent to Hamer's office. And I was in the search room only in emergencies. That is, if all of a sudden they couldn't find anybody to take charge of the search room I would go down for a few hours, also occasionally in the evening.

BROOKS: By the time you worked in that activity Vernon Setser had gone, had he not?

LEE: Yes. I believe I took Vernon Setser's place.

BROOKS: And Edna Vosper?

LEE: Edna Vosper was in charge of the search room itself, and she died a little while later. Besides serving as a receptionist for the people who came in in person and assisting them, I helped to review the correspondence, and acted as a liaison in cases of researches that were of a project nature, where the subject matter was scholarly or where it was an important Government activity. Another function was assisting Phil Hamer and Elizabeth Drewry in the administration of the research activity and the development of policy.

BROOKS: Neil Franklin was not in that division at that time, right?

LEE: No. He was there later.

BROOKS: Well, a little later I would like to talk in general about the nature of reference service and the researchers that came in but, let's continue for a while a narrative of your own activity.

LEE: Well, I served in that position I would guess for about 2 years. I don't remember the exact length of time. And then Ted Schellenberg asked me if I would like to replace Lewis Darter.

BROOKS: Darter went to Navy.

LEE: Lewis Darter who went to Navy, and so I went up to Agriculture archives as Ted's deputy. I was attracted to that particular position because my graduate interests had been in Agricultural history, and I had a long-time interest in the Agriculture Department. I knew Everett Edwards who was a long-time historian in the Department of Agriculture, and I thought that if I were going to stay with the National Archives I needed some experience in the acquisition end and the administrative end of the records business. So I went up there and worked with Schellenberg in all phases of the work of Agriculture Archives for about a year.

BROOKS: Was Schellenberg somebody that you had known?

LEE: No, I never knew him before coming to the Archives. He had a related professional interest but I had come entirely independently and did not know him before coming to the Archives. And then came, as I recall, a period of reorganization.

BROOKS: They were always having those.

LEE: Yes, that's right. They were frequent. And Phil Hamer became the Records Control Officer, I believe that was the title.

BROOKS: Right. I think that was the reorganization that took effect in 1944 after Lacy became Director of Operations. And Hamer was Director of Records Control.

LEE: I went back with Hamer then in his new capacity, where he served as the staff officer for both the reference work and the records analysis and description work. During that period I suppose my function might be described as a combination of supervision, inspection, editing, and policy formulations.

BROOKS: Supervision and the inspection of work done in the Records Divisions.

LEE: Yes. The actual operational task of reference or of preparing analyses of the records was expected to be done in the divisions. But the standards and the procedures were formulated presumably in Mr. Hamer's office, and then the review of the product and the assignment of funds and the justification of funds, that sort of thing, took place in Mr. Hamer's office.

BROOKS: Did that impress you as a good organizational pattern or functional pattern?

LEE: Yes. In anything of this sort, as you well know, it's hard to separate what you thought at that time and what may be your conclusions 25 years later. But I thought it was a good pattern. It seems to me that in an organization of that size and sort you need a degree of uniformity and some point at which standards and procedures are set, particularly where you have a high degree of interrelationship as you do in archival material.

BROOKS: Did you encounter opposition to this business in the records divisions?

LEE: Yes I did. I encountered quite a bit of, not opposition, but a certain amount of reluctance and a certain degree of what you call foot dragging. But I don't recall very much of actual friction. It was a matter of, perhaps to some extent, a matter of inadequate resources, where the people in the stacks had too many things to do and the pressures of the time, during the War, were primarily on accession and physical maintenance.

BROOKS: Then on war-time reference to Government agencies that worked directly with the records divisions.

LEE: So that there was both a real excuse and a built-in excuse for not doing some of the things that our office might have thought should be done.

BROOKS: One of my own most strongest memories from that period is that there was always controversy between the "front offices" and the records divisions. In the initial organization pattern at the Archives the divisions were called custodial divisions and they didn't have much function other than

that. And in the reorganization of 1940 the centralized Divisions of Cataloging and Classification, and so forth were abolished and much more emphasis was put on this principle of having the operating work done in the records divisions. They were always very jealous of that. At the same time Hamer became Director of Records Control, I became Records Appraisal Officer and had final authority for actions on accessions and disposal. And the records divisions just thought this wasn't necessary, particularly Schellenberg and Paul Lewinson and two or three others. I remember one time Campbell told me he wasn't going to review all those accession and disposal jobs when it was obvious I was going to review them over again after him. But I wondered if that characteristic was evident in other activities besides disposal and accessioning, as you remembered it.

LEE: Yes, it was evident, and of course I've had lots of subsequent experience in administrative patterns where there is the choice or the question of centralizing or autonomy of field units or subordinate units, and the conflict always exists. I think one could say that it may have been a bit more accentuated at times in the Archives than in some other organizations.

BROOKS: Did you see much of Lacy or Dr. Buck, or feel much effect of their way of operating?

LEE: No, I would say I didn't have intimate contact with them. I saw them from time to time. I would consult them on aspects of some particular project, but my contact in terms of consultation and supervision was pretty much with Phil Hamer, and then out in to the stacks with the people I might have to deal with. And it was only rarely that I went independently to Dan Lacy, or the Archivist.

BROOKS: Well I think it's evident from my own memories, and from what various other people have said, that this constant ruckus between the front offices and the records divisions was exacerbated a bit by the fact that Lacy was feeling his oats as a power, and Dr. Buck had a great tendency to lecture people and sometimes irritated them.

LEE: Well, the Archives had a number of very strong individuals and a great many of them had academic backgrounds and perhaps not a lot of experience in organizational and administrative work. The organization was new, and perhaps the fact that it started out in a period when politics was highly important was a factor, and there were a lot of political

considerations. Even though there might not have been an appeal to politics, there was always that potential there.

BROOKS: At one time there were over 30 Ph.D.'s on the staff, in the early years, and I always felt that a lot of them were not very effective because of the fact, just as you said, that they did not have experience in administration or in the Government. Well, was it while you were in Hamer's office that you said you were quite conscious of the Reference Information Circulars?

LEE: Yes. In addition to this staff work of developing policy and standards and reviewing, the office did a lot of final editing of publications, and the ongoing repetitive sort of thing were these Reference Information Circulars. Of course there were the checklists and the inventories, and it was, I think one might say, during that period that the pattern was established. I don't know whether it was maintained after that in the same way, but there was a period when there was quite an acceleration in the issuances, inventories and checklists. Most of those were prepared in the record holding custodial divisions, but a great deal of reorganization and editing occurred in Hamer's office.

BROOKS: Were most of them in any particular field? Were there some fields in which there was more activity than others, Guy?

LEE: Well, as might be expected, I think if you looked at the subject matter, the thing that would stand out was the way in which the subject matter was related to the War. It might be on the disposal of surplus property, or contract negotiations, or rationing, or labor practices, or administration of industrial priorities, and that sort of thing. Even in those areas where the subject matter might not appear to be related to the War, there was a relationship. For instance, I spent some time with Leonard White from the University of Chicago working on records relating to Federal-state relationships. Federal-state relationships is a subject of interest in any period, but at that time it grew out of the war related activities. I'm not sure that a Reference Information Circular was prepared on that subject, but I do remember that I prepared a paper, I think, of perhaps a hundred pages in length. Well, in an investigation of that kind, whether it was a Reference Information Circular or some special project of this sort, the usual procedure was for the Records Control Office, myself or someone else, to go into the custodial divisions and confer with the people there, or several of them, and then on the basis of the preliminary information to prepare an inquiry that

went from the Records Control Office to the custodial divisions, --a written inquiry stating the purpose of the inquiry and the nature of the information requested. It might be extensive or superficial depending upon the evaluation of the inquiry itself. Then the custodial divisions would prepare some sort of a written response back to the Records Control Office, and it was our function to take these responses, to analyze them, and to make a synthesis of the information that would be useful for the purpose.

BROOKS: The subjects of most of the Reference Information Circulars are given in the Annual Reports. That's the kind of thing that there is information in writing that one can get, and I think it's important for us to get comments and explanations as to why things were done, rather than trying to do a narrative.

LEE: I think one should be conscious of the fact that there were a number of inquiries that were perhaps of equal magnitude but did not result in Reference Information Circulars. For instance, the Government at one time became very much interested in the question of the patent rights of war contractors. The Justice Department sent over a team of lawyers who combed the files of various departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, the military files, the Department of the Interior, and the Bureau of Standards to determine the practices of the various departments and the legal rights of individuals as opposed to the Government, or of contractors as opposed to the Government in patents. I don't know how much Government time was spent on that but the Justice Department spent a lot of man-hours working on it, though as far as I know no Circular was ever issued. Somewhere in the Justice Department there would be a report on that.

BROOKS: Do you remember any particular other fields of interest or publications that you worked on?

LEE: Well, it was during that period that what I suppose was the first full-fledged National Archives Guide was prepared.

BROOKS: It was published in 1948, but it took a long time to get it out.

LEE: Maybe that's called the second Guide.

BROOKS: The first one, the "little guide," is in the third Annual Report about '37 or '38.

LEE: Well, would it be correct to call this the first independent volume on the National Archives? It was during that period that it was planned and actually executed, except for just the final wrap up. I left the Archives in '47, and, as far as I know, it wasn't out.

BROOKS: Were you in this position in Hamer's office until you left the Archives?

LEE: Yes, I was there until August of '47, and I was under Phil Hamer, the senior person preparing the National Archives Guide. Actually, the writing, again, was a cooperative process with the custodial divisions doing the initial work, and with Marion Rice, Virginia Massey, and myself doing most, I should say all, of the final writing and editing, except as Mr. Hamer himself reviewed it. So that was a considerable project and took a great deal of time. Then another major project was the planning and initiation of a war records project in '46 and '47, and I actually worked very closely with Dr. Hamer in planning it and in writing the requirements for the early stages. After it was planned Christopher Crittenden was hired to come and manage it, and I remained as Hamer's deputy to carry on the regular work, but 10 people or so were assigned to the project.

BROOKS: I remember when Crittenden came up. He was a friend of mine whom I worked with in the Society of American Archivists, and I think he found the work in the National Archives somewhat more confining than the work he'd been doing in North Carolina. He had less independence.

LEE: I worked very closely with him. He was right there in the office, and I think he was somewhat surprised by the nature of what he was getting into, and so we conferred often. He confessed his frustration and surprise. Well, those are two of the large scale projects. I was interested too in the Historical Publications Commission which in the earlier part of that period was practically non-existent. It existed on paper but little more than that, and I contributed my memos occasionally to try to instill some life into it, but it didn't really get going until after I had left the Archives.

BROOKS: What did you have in mind then as the proposed activities of the NHPC? They had voted before the War to publish records relating to the Ratification of the Constitution and the First Congress of the United States and then it went moribund.

LEE: I didn't have any crystalized program. I felt that there was such a wealth of material and so many things that were of importance to society that needed publication, and I wanted them to get started and to develop some criteria and some values, some standards, budgets and personnel. I had made various proposals. Every once in a while I would run across documents in the Archives that I felt deserved wider distribution, and I felt that there should be a more extensive publications program. Not necessarily the Publications Commission. For instance, at one time I discovered a history of the early Budget Office. You remember it began in 1921, and at one time in the late 20's or early 30's somebody had prepared a rather extensive history of that, and it was a sufficiently important volume that professional visitors from Germany and Japan acquired copies of it. It was never published. But these administrative specialists coming to the United States to study organization and administration found it valuable.

BROOKS: I'm constantly reminded, during this project, by various people of the important role of Phil Hamer. I gather that it's largely due to his continued pressure that the work was finally brought to the point of getting at the registration and identification of record groups in 1944, although it had been outlined as a program to be followed by the Committee on Finding Mediums in 1940, of which Hamer was a prominent member.

LEE: Yes, well that's true. I think very little had been done on it in a concrete way of setting it down in writing and achieving a standard production until 1943 or 1944. Most of the work of issuing these one or two sheet descriptions was during the period after he became Records Control Officer.

BROOKS: Well, now the work that was done by Crittenden was just sort of a separate project but under Hamer's direction. Was it that project on which Brooks Phillips worked and Masterson and various others?

LEE: No, I don't think they worked on the war records project. They were in editorial work and I've forgotten just what it was they were editing. But theirs was an editorial task. I can just name some of these papers here that maybe would identify some of the work. Here's a draft of a memo I prepared on search room service.

BROOKS: When was that?

LEE: 1945.

BROOKS: On the central research room?

LEE: Yes, search room service, and it is a review of the procedures that were in effect at the time and my suggestions for change or improvement. Here's "Cooperation of Legislation Reference Service with the National Archives," and I attempted to establish an improved liaison.

BROOKS: Reference service at the Library of Congress?

LEE: That was the Library of Congress.

BROOKS: Was that ever made very effective?

LEE: Well yes it was fairly effective. I don't know that we did a whole lot together, but I went over there and identified myself and the Archives work and found out what they were interested in so that we could exchange ideas when we had mutual interest. And here's a memo I prepared in '43 on Finding Aids. I haven't reviewed it greatly. I'm not sure just what all is included in it. And here's one in '43, "War Program of the National Archives." Another is "Survey of National Archives Reference Mail, December 1-15, 1944." Here is a paper, "Allocation Lists." I'm not quite sure what that was.

BROOKS: I am. It was allocating departments to divisions. Who would have the responsibility for doing what to whom.

LEE: Here's a long memo I prepared on the relations to the National Archives to social science research in 1944. "Development of Reference Information Circulars." Here's a draft of an example of the Reference Information Circulars. "Materials in the National Archives available for the statistical analysis of economic problems." "The Federal service of Coordination, a Brief Outline of its History, Organization, and Operations." Now that is a discussion of that document that set forth the history of the Bureau of the Budget, and what I thought it was, and why it should be published. Here's a discussion of personnel files of liquidated Federal agencies. Here's a draft of an idea that I tried to push, never with much success, "A Congressional review of executive action by systematic use of noncurrent records." It was part of my feeling throughout the period that society was not making adequate use of its own experience, as it might through the records, --through the Archives. At the same time, I felt that

there was a weakness in Congress, that Congress, as distinct from the Executive branch and the Judicial branch, was not exercising its function with sufficient strength or sufficient information, and my general idea was that an audit of programs be established, a regular audit or program comparable to the fiscal audit done by the General Accounting Office. And I set forth that idea in a rather long memo in 1944. As far as I know it never resulted in anything except that at one point Thad Page offered me a job in Legislative Archives.

BROOKS: Were you involved in the Open Conference on Administration? It was a series of meetings that Dr. Buck, I think, was chiefly responsible for which met for 2 or 3 years and dealt with various functions and activities of the Archives. Holmes was in charge of it. It was later called the "Seminar Conference on Administration." It didn't involve much administration but it had a great deal to do with substantive problems in the Archives.

LEE: Yes, I attended a number of them. It was in the Conference Room of the Archives.

BROOKS: Would you say that this fits into the subject of staff training and the staff understanding of the functions of the Archives? Would you say that the staff as a whole was enthusiastic at that time about the job of the National Archives? Did the staff as a whole have a good concept of what the function of the Archives was?

LEE: Well, I was relatively young and immature. I really don't know. My impression at the time was that the morale was not particularly good and that there were many competent people there, many very well informed people, but that there was a lack of uniformity or of consistency of purpose. It seemed to me that the training program had not progressed very far when I was there. I did attend a number of Ernst Posner's lectures, and there were conferences from time to time, but it seemed to me that there was a great deal of division and rivalry and suspicion within the Archives and within each of the custodial divisions, or perhaps I should say that several of the custodial divisions had what many people regarded as a rather parochial point of view. My own perception of it may be somewhat distorted, because most of the time I was in a "front office" and attempting to help develop some degree of uniformity and some higher degree of integrated program. But I think one could say that there were several very strong-minded individuals who persisted in pursuing their particular line of activity and their particular ideas. This was also at a time when, from outside, there was a

great deal of pressure on the agency because of the size of the task to be done in terms of acquiring and disposing of records and providing advice to the Government. There seemed never to be enough money to do all the things that the Archives expected to do, or wanted to do. I cooperated in work on the budget formulation process each year, I think, that I was there, and there was always a fight. I shouldn't say a fight, but a struggle between the various units, not only as to what would be the total for the various units but as to what functions would be allocated money.

BROOKS: We had a representative of the Budget Bureau who was our examiner during the war who took sort of a parental view toward the Archives, to my mind. At the time he got into individual functions of individual offices more than was proper for a person in his position. But you're right, there certainly were all those complexities. Well, did you feel that the Archives ever really solved the problems (1) of how to select people with the proper academic training, or determining and agreeing with the Civil Service Commission as to what the proper academic training was, and (2) of how to train them as to the function of the Archives after they got there.

LEE: No I don't really. The institution was so young when I was there it hadn't really, I think, developed any special doctrines or procedures when it came to hiring and training people.

BROOKS: Well, they always had to produce and agree with the Civil Service Commission on job descriptions that involved what people were supposed to do.

LEE: Of course during the period when I was there the Civil Service standard was waived, as everybody came in during that period under a "War service appointment" and was not given tenure. The introduction of a regular Civil Service selection process with tenure for such people was only about 1946 or '7, after the war.

BROOKS: Were people who had originally come in under the war service appointment were then transferred over to regular Civil Service appointments?

LEE: Yes. I myself obtained regular Civil Service status. I think it was '47, I've forgotten the exact time.

BROOKS: Before you left the Archives.

LEE: Yes. I don't remember when it was made effective, but I filled out all the papers and submitted them before leaving the Archives.

BROOKS: Well, the functions of the National Archives were apparently pretty clearly agreed on when the agency was set up. I'm developing through this project the idea that, more than I realized before, initially the officials of the Archives did not consider it to be the job of the Archives to deal with the records problem of the Government as a whole. It was primarily an archival point of view in that they were primarily dealing with the records of permanent value. I remember Arthur Leavitt in the very early years saying that we shouldn't call things "archives" until they were about 20 years old, until they had matured a bit. Being in the Special Examiners Office in the very beginning a number of us including Ed Leahy who was later active in records administration, were immediately involved in this problem of what to do with the great mass of stuff that wasn't going to come into the Archives, with the total records problem. I think many of the difficulties the Archives has had, and many of the problems it's dealt with through the years, have revolved around that definition of its purpose. Some of the people who were opposed to the records administration program when it was set up (I was put in charge of it in January of '42), just didn't feel that that was a proper job of the Archives. But somebody had to deal with it. The agencies started sending disposal lists to the Archives as soon as it was set up, and this had to become a part of the function. The more traditional archival functions dealt with accessioning and arrangement and description, reference and to some extent publication. Did you have any particular thoughts about the records administration, as we called it then?

LEE: No. I suppose I was one of those who recognized it as a necessity and personally had no special interest in it. And I suppose I disliked the idea that during the War and afterwards the problem of simply dealing with the mass succeeded pretty much in pushing to one side the possibilities of in-depth analysis of the records themselves, use of the records.

BROOKS: Yes. This has come out in other interviews, that one reason that more progress was not made on finding aids in the divisions, for example, was primarily because so much attention had to be given to current records administration, records management problems in the agencies. And to the reference requests of the Government agencies for current administrative needs.

LEE: I've felt since, I suppose even since before I went with the Archives, that these records are saved for purposes, and that the selection of them and preservation of them and the way in which they are handled should be related to the purpose, and should be done in such a way as to achieve the purpose. I had the feeling then, and still have the feeling, that the Government as the agency of society has never really caught up with or done as much as it should do to make the experience available. I think the responsibility for this deficiency goes far beyond the Archives, of course. One of my constant worries and interests was the share of the academic world in it, and at that time, and as you know later, I had this feeling that a great deal could be accomplished through more communication between the academic world and the Archives. I know a great deal has been done in that field since the days when I was there.

BROOKS: Just a question I wanted to ask you about the nature and the changes that took place in reference service. I think it was about beginning of the war that Dr. Buck issued a statement on the war-time activities and functions and responsibilities of the Archives. The general opinion was that reference service as other functions, finding aids and so forth, reference service to the scholarly world would have to be deferred during the war in favor of reference service to Government agencies.

LEE: Yes, that was very much so.

BROOKS: And this was almost inevitably true. Was it your experience, say when you were in the Reference Division or in Agriculture Archives, that academic inquiries and reference service to the academic world were seriously curtailed during the War? And then how long did it take after that for the service to the academic world to develop again, or to develop? It hadn't developed very far, I think, before the War.

LEE: Well, I don't recall any considerable number of instances where there were academic inquiries, and we then simply told the inquirers that we didn't have time for them. I think probably the inquiries were reduced to a trickle anyway because of the nature of the interests in the academic world. A good share of the people were diverted to war-time activities themselves. And we did write letters giving slight amounts of information and declaring our inability to give any more. I think the situation just compelled the emphasis on war-related activities.

BROOKS: Well for instance, when you were in the Division of Reference, the predominance of reference service was to Government agencies, right?

LEE: To Government agencies or to individuals who had some Government-related purpose, such as contractors. Or, well for instance, there was a steady stream of people who were attempting to validate their previous experience, including birth. They'd come in and say to me I'm told I must prove my birth. I'm here but the war contractor won't believe that I was born. I've got to find the census record or pension record or something to show that I was born and that I worked for a certain agency at such and such a time. I think that the restriction or the deficiency was not so much in terms of turning people away; but in my view the Government had an obligation to make known the opportunities and to move toward the type of academic inquiry or the type of research that would make these records useful, or rather would make the experience available. It did seem to me that the Archives and the Congressmen who appropriated the money and the Budget Bureau and so on were slow in recognizing that and recognizing the time that would be involved to do it.

BROOKS: I think what I'm getting at really was the fact that close relations were not established as we thought should be with the academic world. Was that due in part to the fact that the academic world didn't know and understand, or hadn't had too much experience with the Archives up until the late 40's?

LEE: Oh yes. This is just a personal opinion, but I think that the academic world was slower than the Government. It was woefully out of touch with the realities in terms of the resources that were available and the sort of thing that might be interesting or valuable to work on. Of course it's difficult to question somebody's values; if a scholar chooses to work on the Venezuela Crisis, and to assign Ph.D. dissertations on that indefinitely generation after generation, that's his right. But it seemed to me that he was doing a disservice to his students and to society in general by not broadening the nature of his inquiry. And the Government records, the Government experience, offered enormous opportunities. In other words, the scholar, I thought had not caught up with the change in modern society and the role that Government was playing. I felt that this deficiency was in part his fault, but in part it was the fault of the Government for not making the correction part of its function.

BROOKS: And one direct application of that was that the scholarly world in general didn't know enough about what was available in the Archives as resources. Right?

LEE: That's right.

BROOKS: And this would be the fault of us for not telling the scholars and to the scholars for not catching up. I think the situation is somewhat better in that direction now. But at least I felt strongly the same way.

LEE: In my papers here I have a draft of a memo I prepared in which I advocated a rather elaborate scheme of fellowships or apprenticeships. The Archives constantly ran up against this limitation of funds for preparing finding aids, and there were all these opportunities for preparing finding aids, and as a means of accelerating this my proposal was that the Archives set up a hundred fellowships.

BROOKS: A hundred?

LEE: Oh, I've forgotten how many I proposed. Wherein able young graduate students would be recruited to come to the Archives as employees, but they would be directed to prepare finding aids of certain records wherein they had an interest. Out of this preparation of finding aids, the assumption would be, they'd prepare a Ph.D. dissertation, as there'd be a conscious correlation between their Ph.D. interests and the preparation of these finding aids. I had in mind multiple purposes, but the main was, as far as I was concerned, reducing the distance between the people who were interested in research and the problems of society and the resources that were available. The by-products, of course, would have been preparation of finding aids and the administration and servicing of the records.

BROOKS: Did you work with or know well at all Oliver Holmes at that time?

LEE: I knew him fairly well.

BROOKS: He was always quite interested in this kind of thing and I remember perhaps in years later he was at some time or other quite interested in development of fellowships.

LEE: I knew him fairly well. Unfortunately there was always this bit of a distance between the senior people at the Archives--shifting from time to time--but Holmes always seemed at that period to be in a little bit of a rivalry with Hamer. I thought that they were, at other times, very friendly and worked together very well. And so I saw him, I knew him, I had no problem with him, but not very direct continuing dealings with him.

BROOKS: That's interesting. I worked closely with both of them. We were all three assistants to Lacy, the Director of Operations, and we were assistant directors or something comparable. Were any of the people that were later to become prominent researchers in the Archives active during the period you were there? People like Butterfield and Cappon and Julian Boyd and so forth. Do you remember any particular favorite researchers or people you dealt with?

LEE: No. I dealt with lots of people but I don't remember anybody who kept coming back.

BROOKS: Some of them are mentioned in the Annual Reports. I think the Archives was very eager to emphasize in the Annual Reports the important work it was doing in this reference field. Most of those people who later became very active as researchers and very close to the Archives did come after the war mostly, and some of them may have come through the presidential libraries. Freidel and Schlesinger and others were mostly involved in the Roosevelt Library at first, and later some came through the Truman Library the same way. This has always been a close relationship and I tried to make it as close as it could be. Well, tell us a little bit about Congressman Taber.

LEE: The Archives, I gather, got caught up in the politics of the New Deal as many agencies did, and I was most immediately involved at the time of the, I think it was the 80th Congress.

BROOKS: I've heard of that.

LEE: That was Republican during the Democratic administration, and I don't know whether the troubles stemmed from the fight of factions in Congress or within the New Deal or whether it arose out of something in the Archives itself. But in any case, in the budget battles, when the appropriation bill was being formulated, early in 1947, a proviso was written into the appropriation bill which, in effect, legislated seven or eight persons out of their jobs in the Archives. While it was worded in general terms--categories of people--it was very carefully worded to include certain people, including myself. Then it was reworded when very forceful protests were made on the part of these individuals, so that it at the end included only four persons. It was changed from to include P4, up to P5, as I remember, and then ultimately the Appropriation Act was passed to legislate these four people out of jobs.

BROOKS: What was the approximate wording in the appropriation? How was that done? Archiviews, which was the journal of the National Archives Association, the employee association, in July 1947 in a story relative to the Independent Agency's appropriation, including \$1,000,256 recommended for the National Archives. The total appropriation now for the National Archives and Records Service is something over \$31 million, and what part of that National Archives proper is I don't know. This mentions the almost unprecedented rider attached to the appropriations bill which prohibited the payment of salaries out of the 1948 appropriation to any person in the P4 or CAF11 grade, or above, who were originally appointed in the National Archives through a war service appointment. This rider, Archiviews said, would have forced seven employees to accept demotions or to be separated from the agency. When the bill came to the House floor for a vote two amendments were adopted. One of these protected war service appointees in the P4 grade by raising the base grade affected to P5. And the other amendment excepted presently employed veterans of either World War or members of the Army reserves. These changes reduced the number of employees discriminated against from seven to four. Am I correct that one of those people was also Dan Lacy?

LEE: Yes, I think the four were Dan Lacy, Portner, Rifkind and myself. Now I've been told by numerous people that it wasn't the purpose of the formulators of this to get rid of me. I'm not sure whether that's true. I could conjure up rationale to indicate that they may have been at least very happy to get rid of me too. But in any case, there was dissatisfaction with Buck, the Archivist, and with Portner and with Lacy and I assumed that the primary objective of whoever was doing it was to embarrass, or worse, those people.

BROOKS: Was it when you left the Archives, Guy, that you went to the Office of the Chief of Military History?

LEE: Yes, that's right. I left the Archives in the summer of 1947 and went directly to the Historical Division of the Department of the Army where I worked with Mark Watson in preparing a volume on George Marshall's activities early in the war, or actually before the war, preparatory to the war.

BROOKS: Watson was a journalist.

LEE: Yes. Mark Watson was a senior correspondent in the military field for the Baltimore Sun. He had worked around the Pentagon for years, and was a friend of practically all the senior military people engaged in war-time activities. And he had agreed to write that part of the history relating to Marshall, but he had so many other activities that he couldn't get around to it, and furthermore, as he got into it he recognized that though he knew a great deal about it, writing history as a professional historian was something different from journalism, and so the Historical Division hired me to be, in effect, his research assistant. He immediately went off to China, and I continued to do research and writing for the year 1947-8, and in '48 Phil Brooks invited me to join the staff of the National Security Resources Board.

BROOKS: And at the same time was able to provide civil service status for you, which you didn't have in the Army, right?

LEE: That's right. The work in the Department of the Army was not Civil Service.

BROOKS: Was Kent Roberts Greenfield in charge of OCMH then?

LEE: Yes, that's right.

BROOKS: And you worked directly under him?

LEE: Well, through Mark Watson.

BROOKS: Was Pogue in there then?

LEE: Yes, Pogue was in a neighboring office.

BROOKS: What was he working on? The Supreme Command?

LEE: Yes, Eisenhower command. And of course I learned a great deal about military records at the time. I worked in the file rooms, mostly. And then I spent 2 years with you in the National Security Resources Board. After that went with the Department of State and continued with the Department of State until I retired.

BROOKS: One of our friends said that the 2 years on the National Security Resources Board was just 2 years lost out of his life, completely useless. I didn't feel that, did you?

LEE: No, I didn't feel it was 2 years lost. I would rather have gone to the State Department directly, but I think it was interesting work.

BROOKS: Well, it was an interesting experience. I can't say that anything very constructive came out of it. I don't think anything very constructive came out of NSRB as a whole. Well, was it during the time you were in the Army or working for the Army or for NSRB that you got on the Committee on Historian and the Government of the AHA?

LEE: When I came with NSRB, as you recall, you assigned me to, in effect, assist the specialists of this essentially planning organization to gain effective research and planning access to records, or to archival and record resources that they might need in working on manpower problems, or industrial priority problems, or foreign petroleum resources, and so on. In doing that I had to gain some further systematic knowledge of the records and other resources that were available. As I did so, I became increasingly aware of the fact that planning on the basis of great volumes of raw records was a rather impossible task, and that even though I might refer these specialists to the War Production Board records or the OPA records or some other, they had no way, within a few months, of converting that material and that experience into something that would actually be useful in developing emergency plans for the future. The problem was much more complicated and required a great deal more time. I felt that the effective thing we might do would be to develop better liaison or contact between people who were being trained and people who were doing this type of research in academic circles, and the resources of the Government. So I developed a theory and an objective and then wrote a proposal that we organize a seminar or a program at the American Historical Association meeting to try to point out to historians generally the problem and the opportunities for more effective liaison between historians generally and the resources available in the Government. It was my feeling that the National Securities Resources Board could do this legitimately, as part of its function, and so, with your approval, I arranged the program and a session was held, I think, at the 1948 or 1949 Historical Association Meeting. Parallel with the preparation of the meeting we also worked to prepare a presentation in the business meeting, so that the upshot of it was the appointment of a special committee of the American Historical Association on historian--Government relationships. And the chairman of the committee was Read.

BROOKS: Conyers Read.

LEE: Conyers Read, of the University of Pennsylvania. He helped acquire a rather small budget from one of the foundations and the committee met a number of times during the next year or two, but I had to discontinue my activity on it when I went to Germany in 1950. My intention in developing the committee had been to provide the committee with a rather broad agenda that included all the problems of the relationship, such as the description of records, what they meant, the problems of access to the records, the questions of financial support, the questions of fellowships, the exchange of persons between Government and the academic world, and the professional field of history. The committee went through various modifications, and I believe some form of it is still in existence. I've lost track of it.

BROOKS: Yes, I succeeded you on the committee, and it was an extremely experience that lasted from 1950 until the winter of '52 - '53, when I was transferred to California. Bob Greenfield and I used to ride up every month to Philadelphia together, and that was worth the effort alone. The committee did follow the broad objectives that you had in mind, but my interest, and I think most of the committee's attention, was devoted to this matter of freedom of access.

LEE: Yes, freedom of access and classification or declassification of records became quite an important thread of the committee's work.

BROOKS: About 1952 the committee prepared a report which I think Greenfield put together with assistance from Gordon Craig.

LEE: Yes, he was one of the original members of the committee.

BROOKS: . . . and some of the others. Craig has been a professor at Stanford for many years. The committee report and its recommendations in which I was rather heavily involved actually came to nothing because, (and I think this was well recognized at this time), because of a feud that was at that time going on between Conyers Read and Guy Staunton Ford, who was Executive Secretary of the Association. But it was an interesting experience and I'm sure that a number of the people on the committee gained from that experience, including at various times Dexter Perkins, Constance McLaughlin Green, and a number of other very interesting people. And of course Dick Humphrey who was assistant, or chief protégé, of Conyers Read, was Secretary of the Committee and

was very active in all that business. There is now a joint committee of the AHA and the Organization of American Historians, and last year they added a representative of the Society of American Archivists. And it's devoted primarily to the same objectives. The new newsletter of the Archives has a statement about a big activity which has taken place within the last year. The Archives got over a million dollar appropriation for this specific job of declassifying records of World War II, and I think it says that as a result of that activity 30 million documents have been declassified already. Thirty million pages of World War II records. The Army has also stepped up its operation, and Sherrod East is working practically full-time over there so that as of now a great deal of World War II stuff will be declassified. It's rather late, I think you'd agree, for World War II but finally it will be done.

LEE: I have retained a number of papers relating to the origin in the early meetings of that committee and it's my intention, in the back of my mind, sometime to write a synthesized account of the early history of it.

BROOKS: I have quite detailed records of the activity of that committee for the time I was on it between '50 and '53. They are among some papers of mine that are being deposited at the Truman Library. Well, is there anything else you think you should put in the record about the National Archives?

LEE: No, I think not.

BROOKS: I think that much of this is not only valuable as adding to the narrative, but also stimulating as discussing the problems and the objectives, and some of the shortcomings and accomplishments, of the Archives--which after all is what I'm trying to get at. I thank you very much.