



NATIONAL ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

Leroy Harvey

December 10, 1984

at his home in

Silver Spring, Maryland

Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross (National Archives Employee)

Summary abstract prepared by Geraldine Ludwig (National Archives Volunteer)

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Leroy Harvey. Silver Spring, Maryland. December 10, 1984. Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross.

From 1957 until 1983, when he retired, Harvey worked at first the records center in Alexandria, Virginia, and then the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. During these years his job titles included those of Archives Assistant and Archives Technician.

In the interview Harvey discussed his background prior to his joining the National Archives and Records Administration (NARS) in 1957. That background included graduation from Dunbar High School, Washington's outstanding all-black high school of the period, and service during World War II in the all-black 761st Tank Battalion.

Harvey told of the division of records center holdings in the Washington area between those in Alexandria and those in Franconia, Virginia. He related his impressions upon first seeing the newly built records center in Suitland. He described reference and accessioning practices. Also, he spoke about race and employment practices at NARS during his years with the agency.

The interview, more than an hour in length, was conducted at Harvey's home in Silver Spring. **The sound quality of the tape is good.**

Abstract of interview with Leroy Harvey at his home in Silver Spring, Maryland, December 10, 1984.

Interviewer: Rodney A. Ross

Tape length: Both sides of one 60-minute tape and 15 minutes worth of one side of a second 60-minute tape.

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

INTRODUCTORY COMMENT BY INTERVIEWER: This tape begins a series of interviews to document the history and workings of the National Archives and Records Service (NARS), primarily for the years 1949 - March 1985. This was the period in which the Archives was a part of the General Services Administration.

This first tape will focus on the Washington National Records Center, its antecedents, its early beginnings, what it is, how it operates and what service it provides both to government agencies and to custodial units of the National Archives. A secondary focus will be on the life and career of Leroy Harvey. An added use for this tape will be for the study for the 20th century of the black community of Washington, D.C., of which Mr. Harvey is a member.

QUESTION: Background?

ANSWER: Leroy Harvey was born on December 24, 1914, at Columbia Hospital in Washington. Both of his parents were Washingtonians. His father died when he was young and he didn't remember much about him. His grandmother raised him in Southwest Washington where he remained until he was 35 years old.

QUESTION: What were some of the neighborhoods you lived in from the time of your birth until you entered the work force? Was all your time in Southwest?

ANSWER: Harvey remained in Southwest until 1951. He started with the National Archives in 1957.

QUESTION: What schools did you attend?

ANSWER: Harvey went to the old Bell elementary school, which no longer exists. He graduated from Dunbar High School in 1932. He never went to college.

QUESTION: Wasn't Dunbar the elite black school in Washington?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: At one time Dunbar produced a number of very illustrious Americans. Were there any that were in your class?

ANSWER: Harvey named several in classes ahead or behind his including Robert C. Weaver.

QUESTION: A friend of the interviewer, David Bruce, was the great grandson of Blanche K. Bruce and the grandson of the Bruce who was superintendent of public education in the District. Was that name familiar to Harvey?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: Were all the schools you attended racially segregated?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: What jobs did you have prior to joining the National Archives in 1957?

ANSWER: When Harvey first started in the government, he started with the Treasury Department. He stayed with Treasury until he went into military service.

QUESTION: What were you doing at Treasury?

ANSWER: When Harvey first went with Treasury, he drove what they called the "special" delivery mail truck from one embassy to the other. From there he went to printing and distribution until he went into the military service in 1943, having been drafted in 1941.

QUESTION: What action did you see?

ANSWER: Harvey was in the 761st Tank Battalion, a segregated unit. The battalion went to England and stayed there until the Normandy invasion. From there he went to France and then to Germany and then returned to the United States.

QUESTION: What were some of the battles you were in?

ANSWER: Harvey mentioned that was going back a long ways. He remembered about twelve different battles, associated with Eisenhower's branch. There were three black tank battalions: 761st, 784th and the third went to Italy. Most of the time Harvey's battalion was with Eisenhower, who himself was a former tank commander.

QUESTION: What position did you hold?

ANSWER: Harvey answered that at the time he took a machine gun. He had gone to school for that.

QUESTION: Where did you go to school?

ANSWER: Harvey went to a school in the service in England where he learned to shoot.

QUESTION: Was it an integrated school?

ANSWER: Yes. Although the troops were segregated, the training was mixed.

QUESTION: Was it an American school in England?

ANSWER: It was taught by the English. You went in for a couple of weeks, learned how to dismantle and mantle a machine gun and whatever.

QUESTION: You were in Germany when the time of the surrender?

ANSWER: Harvey came home in December 1945.

QUESTION: Were you immediately mustered out of the service?

ANSWER: Harvey re-enlisted. He was supposed to go back to Germany, but he was sent down to South Carolina. He stayed there until he was discharged. (After he came home from Europe, he had been hospitalized for an operation.) He was discharged in February 1947. His time hadn't expired, but his grandmother and his mother were disabled and he was their only support. The Red Cross got him an early discharge.

QUESTION: What did you do from 1947 until 1957 when you joined the National Archives?

ANSWER: Harvey came back to his job and they put him with GSA, except that GSA wasn't actually established until 1949. At the time Harvey's job was still under the Treasury Department. He worked for the furniture repair shop and became foreman over the laborers in that department. In 1949 the unit became a part of the General Services Administration. After that the shop was disbanded because Congress said that anything that could be done on the outside shouldn't be done by the government. The shop had repaired furniture, typewriters, adding machines, desks and chairs. Harvey was in charge of the close-down which occurred in May 1957. From there he went to work for the records center in Alexandria, Virginia.

QUESTION: There was a records center in Franconia and a records center in the old naval torpedo factory in Alexandria. What was the difference between the two?

ANSWER: In Alexandria all records were divided: the Navy had one building; the Army had another building; civilian records were in the building where Harvey worked. These were buildings called #1, #2 and #10. The other part of housing for civilian records was in Franconia, because there wasn't enough space for civilian records in Alexandria. At that time the space in Franconia was shared with the Marine Corps. Employees used to travel from one place to another when something had to be done.

QUESTION: Was Franconia already established in 1957?

ANSWER: Yes. At one time the Methodist Church had been there. There were two buildings. The National Security Agency had part of the location before they moved to Ft. Meade. The Marines were in the part where the records center was. Eventually the records from Alexandria and Franconia were combined in the records center in Suitland.

QUESTION: How did the three buildings in Alexandria compare in size with the building in Suitland?

ANSWER: You can figure for yourself, since all those records went into the Suitland building. Also, records came from a building on Lawrence Avenue in Northeast Washington in what was the old Sears warehouse building. Most of the records there belonged to the Federal Housing Administration. The location was off Montana Avenue back by the railroad tracks.

QUESTION: For the Alexandria facility, did it function as the Suitland building presently does? Was there a reference branch and a separate accession and disposal branch?

ANSWER: Yes, you had them. You had people operating out of all the buildings. You had a chief in one building, somebody in charge at the other building. Instead of having one you had three. Except for Lawrence Ave. for which somebody went over to take care of. Franconia had a boss and Alexandria had one. Mr. Williams was Harvey's first boss. He was over all the buildings in a general sense. Edward Flatigo (sp?) was like the reference chief. Harvey remarked that there had been many changes. Disposal was a separate thing. Accessions were a separate thing. Louis Tangeray (sp?) had something to do with accessioning. Reference was separate.

QUESTION: As far as the racial situation at the National Archives and the chance for blacks to have equal opportunity for jobs, at what part in your career with the Federal Government would you say that equal opportunity became a reality as opposed to a false promise?

ANSWER: Harvey remarked that he didn't think it ever became a reality. He had a feeling that somewhere along the line with government there was always a way to eliminate or get away from a particular thing. Criteria would change. When Harvey came in, job experience was key. After blacks got experience, education became key. At one time the records center had more black college students than white college students. Walter E. Fauntroy (the future Congressional Delegate) worked at the records center. He pulled records.

QUESTION: What does pulling records mean?

ANSWER: When you work in accessioning and you get requests, you service the requests for the agency. You take a ladder and the request and you go out and pull the document.

REMARK: The shelves at Suitland are 14 shelves high. Also, boxes are double shelved.

QUESTION: Was it that way when you were there?

ANSWER: Harvey noted that the only change was that there was now metal rather than wooden shelving. There were IBM boxes on the 14th shelf which weighed about 40 or 50 pounds. Harvey spoke of lifting heavy boxes, including those with Bureau of Old Age and Survivors Insurance cards and Navy pay cards with the latter in oversized boxes weighing 50 to 60 pounds.

QUESTION: Was the Washington National Records Center built as a records center or was it a converted warehouse?

ANSWER: That was built new. Spiro Angew had something to do with the contract when he was governor of Maryland. The building opened in late 1966. Harvey moved into it in 1967. The concrete floor was cracking from the weight. Initially the place was empty, without stacks. The records were being transferred by Kane movers. Kane people did the shelving, with Archives people only supervising the shelving. That was a big mistake, observed Harvey. A lot of errors in shelving were subsequently discovered. A lot of the records did not have names or numbers; movers unfamiliar with that sort of thing just didn't know what they were doing.

REMARK: Some old General Land Office records that the interviewer was appraising initially numbered several thousand boxes. Numbers 1 - 1000 were used over and over again. It became complicated.

ANSWER: Harvey asked if the interviewer worked with the Bureau of Land Management records and then remarked that that was the way the records came in. Harvey added that a lot of people in the agencies didn't know too much about putting records in. NARS used to do a lot of work for the agency. The records center used to dispatch people to agencies to advise them on how to put their records in boxes and ship them to the records center.

ANSWER (Cont.): Harvey himself worked for three months in the administrative building of the Post Office. He dealt with records which when they arrived at the records center should have been put immediately into the security area. Harvey and someone working with him boxed the materials there at the Post Office building.

QUESTION: When the Washington National Records Center first opened, was part of the building used for the overflow of permanently valuable records from the National Archives building?

ANSWER: Stack 3 held both records center records and holdings of the National Archives. The other stacks were given in later years to the Archives, like stacks 4 and 5. A Mr. Avery was in charge of Archives records in stack 3. The records center finally had to give the Archives more room, so that the Archives now has stack 6 and part of stack 7.

COMMENT BY INTERVIEWER: The records center at Suitland is divided into stack areas. There are two floors. On the basement level there are stacks 1 through 10, with five on each side of a major aisle. Stacks 11 through 20 are on the top level.

QUESTION: Were there security vaults that were initially established?

ANSWER: Security vaults were established in stacks 1, 2 and 3. That's the way it still is.

QUESTION: When did you retire?

ANSWER: March 1983.

QUESTION: Would you describe briefly each of the positions you held at Suitland?

ANSWER: When Harvey transferred to the Archives, he was assistant labor foreman. From there they needed people . . . [end of side 1].

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

ANSWER (Cont.): At that time there used to be calls for volunteers. Harvey had never worked in pulling records, but he thought he'd be able to do it. He was asked to go up and pull passports, so he went up and helped pull passports. From that time on whenever there was an overflow of requests Mr. Williams would send someone to come down and ask Harvey and another fellow to work. Then Harvey worked with McCusker. Harvey was taken from his old job, without a change of status, and put up with Charlie McCusker in the security area because Harvey had a security clearance. Harvey worked with Murray Thompson and Charlie McCusker in reference.

At that point Harvey asked that his status be changed to that of Archives Assistant. Harvey went down to the GSA personnel headquarters at 7th and D Streets, SW, where he obtained the change. His position then became one within the Clerical Administrative Forces (CAF). Later that was changed to a GS equivalent position (GS-5, GS-7 or whatever).

ANSWER (Cont.): Harvey discussed the classification of laborers, and mentioned that most labor work at the records center is now performed by intermittents.

Harvey thus became an Archives Assistant. Later that was changed to Archives Technician.

Harvey worked for Everett O. Alldredge for a year. Alldredge was in records management.

QUESTION: What was the nature of your relationship with Ev Alldredge?

ANSWER: The fellow who was working with Alldredge was a GS-9; he was leaving. Harvey was selected to take his place. Harvey went over to the Archives building and worked assembling training kits. Harvey went with Alldredge to various agencies. Harvey set up the visual aids Alldredge used for training classes. Also, Harvey passed out class materials. All of this took place in the early 1960's.

QUESTION: Was Herb Angel still in that office?

ANSWER: Angel was working at the Archives.

QUESTION: What kind of training materials were used?

ANSWER: The materials dealt with different filing systems. Mr. Kelly (sp?) had something to do with machines.

COMMENT: The Archives currently gives classes on files maintenance and on records disposition.

ANSWER: Harvey remarked that for the earlier period those, too, were covered. The Archives must have had six or seven instructors for such things as files, disposals and postal matters.

Harvey worked also with George Scaboo when he first came to the records center. Scaboo was working near the back platform on something having to do with changes in function.

QUESTION: What can you say about both Ev Alldredge and George Scaboo?

ANSWER: Harvey didn't have much problem with people in those positions. He handled a lot of Alldredge's private things. Harvey explained his reticence in answering the question by saying he didn't believe in saying anything derogatory about a person who was no longer there. He added that if you have anything to say, you should say it while you can talk to the person. Harvey supposed that might be the reason why he never got any further than he did, because he always was outspoken.

QUESTION: You had a reputation as a straight-arrow person who believed in certain standards. Was there any truth to the story you once took out a knife and threatened that if a particular worker didn't straighten up you'd carve him up?

ANSWER: Harvey knew about the basis for the story, but said it didn't happen that way. At that time Roland Wilson was in charge of military reference and Jack Bumgardner was in charge of civilian reference. Wilson was Harvey's boss because Harvey worked with Navy records. Wilson asked Harvey if he'd work with the person in question. Harvey talked with the fellow and today they're the best of friends. Harvey went on to discuss his own philosophy regarding work: he did his job, he did it well, he had leave, he was never late, and he always left when he was supposed to.

QUESTION: Are you familiar with another story about your dealing with a different fellow who had tried to steal from the blind food concessionaire?

ANSWER: Harvey elaborated on the basis for that story.

QUESTION: What is an "intermittent"?

ANSWER: Intermittents were persons in a kind of labor pool. They were paid by the hour. They were called to work when the records center needed them.

QUESTION: What percentage of employees were intermittents?

ANSWER: Harvey responded that now most of the employees who come in to do the labor work are intermittents. In prior times most of the employees who pulled records were government employees who had rating or status. Some are going to school. They have permits allowing them to work for a certain period.

QUESTION: We were talking about your various jobs at Suitland. Have we got up to your work with the Accession and Disposal Branch?

ANSWER: Harvey worked in accessioning first, then in reference and finally in what is now called Accession and Disposal. At one time disposal was a separate operation.

QUESTION: What's the meaning of "reference" to the records center?

ANSWER: Harvey responded that it meant servicing requests from other government agencies for records of those agencies being held at the records center.

QUESTION: Do whole boxes or folders get sent back to the requesting agency, or will records center personnel tell agencies what information is in the records in question?

ANSWER: Harvey stated that records center personnel simply pull the records requested. The agency would on the "Optional Form 11" give the accession number, the box number and the records center location (which the records center had previously given the agency). Agencies would send the request in. Agencies used to have the option of phoning in requests, but this is no longer normally accepted.

The requests come in and they're sorted by stacks. They are given then to the various supervisors who service them. The records in question are then taken to the mailroom where they are put in boxes. Some agencies even come in to pick up their records.

QUESTION: What kind of time-frame would that be from the time a telephone request came in to the time the mailroom would send out the box in question?

ANSWER: When Harvey first started, there were ^{4 or 5} girls in the office who just took requests over the phone. The agencies called in as many requests as they wanted. Agencies called in all of the requests, rather than sending in the requests in writing.

QUESTION: How long did it take to service the requests?

ANSWER: The request supposedly would be serviced in 24 hours, unless it was an emergency in which case it would receive immediate attention. Congressional requests, which Harvey worked on, would receive immediate attention. If a Congressional request came in at 11:00 o'clock, it had to be ready by 12:00 o'clock.

Records center personnel had to learn the various ways of filing used by the Congressional offices.

QUESTION: These were the curtesy storage kinds of things whereby Congressmen and Senators would send in their records?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: These weren't committee records, were they?

ANSWER: No. Some of the Congressmen would be requesting their records on a daily basis. Harvey added that that had been cut out, too.

QUESTION: What does "accession" mean?

ANSWER: Harvey explained that "accession" in the records center is simply saying a group of records have a designated number given by the records center in order that the records center can identify what's what. Accessioning is bringing in the records. The records don't belong to the records center; they belong to the agency. The records center serves as custodian of those records for the agency. Accessioning the records is having them boxed and putting them on the shelves. The records center gives the accession a number.

QUESTION: The accession number has three component parts. What's the first part?

ANSWER: Although Harvey said the first part of the fiscal year, Ross mentioned that at present that would be the second part (with the first part being the record group number). After the fiscal year would come the number of accessions the records center had serviced for that fiscal year.

In the exchange which followed it was pointed out that only with the NARS-5 computer system did the records center make the record group number the first component of the accession number.

The older records start out with the fiscal year for their accession number. The fiscal year used to begin in July. An older record number might begin 68A for something from July in FY 1968.

The records center used to keep a book. Accessioning was a separate unit. The agency would call the records center girl and the girl would give them a number and note the amount of boxes that might come in. The records center would send

them the empty boxes, or at one time records center personnel would go over to the agency with the boxes and box the records themselves. Harvey worked at the Post Office, at HEW and at Census. He was despatched to those places. He'd drive directly to the agency rather than to the records center. He'd sometimes be at a place for two or three months. Harvey worked on Capitol Hill in Senator Jackson's office for a month and a half.

QUESTION: Did the records center have a lot of people doing what you did?

ANSWER: They had a few selected people.

QUESTION: The Archives presently uses the NARS-5 computer system to keep track of the records center holdings. Do you remember about when that system began?

ANSWER: About 1975.

QUESTION: Does this system make a major difference in keeping track of records?

ANSWER: Harvey thought the computer was only as good as the person putting in the information, just a little faster. The information still had to be accurate going in. He recognized it as a faster system with the information going to St. Louis which would dispatch printouts back to the records centers. Harvey used to put the printouts in a book.

Harvey noted that it was a good system because there were so many records at the records center. One could divide things by stacks and send them back to the supervisors. At one time the supervisors didn't have anything. Nobody had anything; they had to depend entirely upon the office for information.

QUESTION: When you worked with Accession and Disposal did you work with all the record groups?

ANSWER: Accessions was initially a different operation that Harvey worked with. When he came up to Accession and Disposal, he worked with the Navy and military records.

QUESTION: ^{Do} When Navy records from ships, hospitals, etc. go to the nearest records center, or do they all go to Suitland?

ANSWER: Most of the records should be dispatched to the nearest records center. Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, used to have a lot of Navy records. When they closed Mechanicsburg, all the records were sent to the records center. After Harvey's retirement he had had to go back to help find records. Mechanicsburg had had records from the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Harvey had also worked with civilian records. Harvey had been put to work on Navy records. When Harvey went "upstairs" to work in Accession and Disposal for Jack Saunders' predecessor, Jack Bungardner, he was put with Navy records. Harvey had worked with John Hatcher on Army records.

The Army records with which Harvey worked were in stack 1. On Harvey's retirement, Hatcher sent him a letter of commendation concerning all the records Harvey had saved.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

COMMENT: The commendation from John Henry Hatcher, dated 11 March 1983, reads as follows:

Department of the Army. Leroy Harvey is officially commended for extraordinary service rendered the United States Army from 1972 to 1983 in establishing intellectual control over its retired records. Working closely with army records managers he assisted with the inventory of more than 1,000,000 cubic feet of army records stored in Federal records centers. As a result 156,000 feet of permanently valuable material were offered the National Archives and an additional 20,000 feet were scheduled. By so doing Mr. Harvey has earned the gratitude of the United States Army and has reflected great credit upon himself and the Federal Civil Service.

Harvey also received a pin.

QUESTION: How did you help facilitate the movement of records from the records center to the National Archives?

ANSWER: The commendation letter referred to actions taken on records in stack 1 relating to the wars in Korea or Vietnam. Harvey and the people with whom he worked would take the manual and screen the records. They'd look at the disposal citations [i.e. disposition citations] and would refer the decision concerning records of questionable status to the Archives. Those records they'd set aside temporarily until decisions had been made. Others of unquestioned status they'd box for the Archives.

QUESTION: You mentioned a manual. Do all Federal agencies have the same manual for disposition and retention for their records?

ANSWER: Harvey replied that each agency's manual was set up by the Archives [i.e. approved by the Archives] and dispatched to the agency records officers. The records officers were supposed to adhere to that manual. Harvey added that no person could throw away records except Congress.

DISCUSSION: Each agency had its own manual, but for all the Archives had to approve the particular schedules.

QUESTION: In the 1970's who were some of your co-workers, what were their backgrounds and what were their areas of speciality?

ANSWER: Betty Midkiff (sp?) worked mostly with Army records. She came out of military records when they were at Alexandria.

Malcolm Hull (sp?) worked with civilian records.

Aubrey Peed came from the General Accounting Office. When his unit was terminated at GAO, people in his unit were assigned to the records center at Alexandria. Peed, however, came from Franconia, rather than Alexandria.

Courtney Brooks also came from there.

Bob Proctor came with the Navy records. He stayed with the Navy until the records were housed in Suitland.

Even though people were combined in GSA, they remained with their respective records until all were combined in Suitland.

QUESTION: In the Accession and Disposal branch in the late 1970's appraisal archivists began joining the staff. They were younger and had higher grades than the technicians and supposedly had different responsibilities. How well did you and your fellow workers accept the change?

ANSWER: Harvey stated that he had been in the government long enough to understand most things. He remembered when the title Archives Assistant was dropped. He knew there was a purpose. Rewriting of position descriptions would lay the groundwork for changes. Once the new position descriptions were in place, there wasn't much one could do.

People from the Archives were sent over for training. Harvey had some of them in the stacks whom he trained. They came down to get the know-how.

John Davenport was one. He had a degree. He had the ability to learn about records.

Harvey then expounded about the difference between having an education and having intelligence.

QUESTION: During the NARS budget difficulties and RLFs of the early 1980's were intermittents let go, too?

ANSWER: Somehow or other things were changed so that the records center wasn't affected too much.

COMMENT: The interviewer thought there had been firings and for the Accession and Disposal branch it was only because of the presence of Harvey and Aubrey Peed that the branch was able to carry out its mission.

ANSWER: Harvey said the records center sent the people in that branch downstairs to work. He added that this action took place in an earlier period. These people included: Lucile Joppey, William Creech, Sr., Brook (?) Lanum (?), Jim Wright (who went to the Presidential Libraries office), Paul Nicholas (who retired), ? Quander, and Luther Kiah. These people were sent down to the declassification project. Another person sent was James Duncan, who like some of the others is now dead.

By the time Reagan came into office, the Accession and Disposal branch didn't have many of the old-timers to lose. The only people left upstairs of that group were Harvey, Quander and Kiah and the latter two retired. Proctor, too, retired. Such people could have stayed because they had seniority, but they didn't want to bump anybody.

QUESTION: Would you like to add anything for this taped interview?

ANSWER: Harvey stated that he had enjoyed his life. He mentioned that he would be seventy years old on his birthday. He bowled, swam and played tennis in the summer when he could. He just came out of a bout with cancer, but he felt fine. He had married late in life, but in February 1985 he and his wife would celebrate their 36th anniversary. He concluded in talking about medical insurance and financial topics.