

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
TRANSCRIPT OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES HISTORY OFFICE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Subject: Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler

Interviewer: Jessie Kratz

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Jessie Kratz: Today's Monday, June 27, 2016, and we are in the conservation lab conference room in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. My name is Jessie Kratz and I'm the Historian of the National Archives. Today I'll be interviewing Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler. Mary Lynn, can you please spell your name and give your title at the National Archives?

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler: It's M-A-R-Y middle name: L-Y-N-N last name: R-I-T-Z-E-N-T-H-A-L-E-R. And I'm the chief of the conservation lab at the National Archives.

Jessie: Ok, well, first, congratulations on your retirement next week.

Mary Lynn: Thank you.

Jessie: I'm so happy to be able to get this in before you left. We're going to start with some general questions and we'll ease into your National Archives career. But first can you give me a little brief bio—where were you born, where did you go to school?

Mary Lynn: Ok, I grew up in Michigan, near Detroit, and I went to Michigan State University, Wayne State University and at Wayne State, I got a degree in Library Science as well as a specialty in Archives Administration. I moved to Chicago and worked in the manuscript department at the University of Illinois at Chicago, which is where I really got my interest in conservation and bookbinding. I studied for over 12 years with a local well-known binder, Bill Anthony, who came to Chicago from Ireland and studied with him for quite a long time.

And then I went to the Society of American Archivists, where I ran a couple of NEH-funded programs, one on conservation of archival materials. And the next project was on caring for photographic materials. So, that included workshops and doing site visits and assessments and developing a couple of manuals that were published. And then I came to the National Archives.

Jessie: Can you explain how you got your job at the National Archives?

Mary Lynn: Well, there was an opening of the lab and given the work that I had been doing for a number of years and my focus on book conservation and the training that I had done, it seemed like a natural and like a wonderful place to come. I contacted all the people who were currently working in the lab and in preservation, Ken Harris and Norvell Jones. I was interviewed by Norvell at an American Institute for Conservation meeting that I think was in L.A. and we really hit it off. And then I came to Washington for my interview and here I was for a long time.

Jessie: And this was 1985.

Mary Lynn: I started in January of 1985. Right. That was Reagan's second term and there was a lot of concern about job freezes. And so I was basically brought in and signed in and sworn in and spent a week here and then went back to Chicago for about a month so I could pack and make arrangements to move.

Jessie: You started right around the time that the National Archives was gaining independence from GSA. What was the atmosphere like around here?

Mary Lynn: I think it was an exciting time and people were really happy. And I wasn't here for all of the years of people working towards it. But it certainly was a wonderful thing. And to have an agency that was independent and focused on the mission and goals of the archives and not part of another organization that had many other responsibilities, I think people were excited. Bob Warner was the Archivist and it just was a pretty exciting time.

I still like to see that one photograph out of the steps on the Constitution Avenue side of the staff, the massive numbers of people representing freedom.

Jessie: Were you in that photo?

Mary Lynn: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jessie: What was your job like when you first began at the National Archives?

Mary Lynn: My job was as a senior conservator, so I did some treatment on paper-based materials as well as bond records. But since I had done so much training through the SAA job, I also began to establish a lot of basic training programs for archival staff and technicians in terms of records handling. We started to get into a more formal approach to holding's

maintenance. So, developing that part of the program and doing training all became part of what was going on.

Jessie: And how has your job changed over the years? I guess you've been here over thirty years, so yes, I'm sure it's changed quite a bit.

Mary Lynn: After being hired as a senior conservator, I was promoted to supervisory conservator and then in 2002 I was promoted to chief of conservation. So, over the years my responsibilities got progressively greater and I certainly gained more knowledge and experience. As you know, working here is a lifetime of learning just in terms of the records and the people and the programs. So, a lot of things you kind of had to learn as he went because it hadn't been done before. I came to the Archives also at a time when the conservation lab was really expanding. Norvell was the second conservator that had been hired. The very first one was a man named Timothy Vitale. So, I was amongst the very few conservators that were brought on and then that just expanded over the years. So the lab was growing, the preservation program was growing, and everybody was really excited. It was a great place to be.

Jessie: And you were here during the move to College Park and you yourself moved. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like working downtown versus working in College Park?

Mary Lynn: Well, I can talk a bit about the move prep and the fact that the lab was very actively involved in so many things that related to the move.

There had been a lot of records that had been probably overlooked in terms of their housing needs just because, you know, there were so many things and some of them were really challenging big or, you know, unusual shapes. So, one of the big focuses of the lab for several years was to do what we call "move prep." We worked very closely with the archival units and with the records relocation team that was, I think, led by Maida Loescher. And staff were basically working through the stacks, doing location registers, and identifying records that needed to come to the lab for custom housing. We also worked closely with the design team, the people who would be developing new lab spaces for College Park, and also helping to come up with the requirements for archival storage in the new building in terms of environmental conditions, shelving, and materials. And so there was a lot going on.

Jessie: And so when did you yourself move out to College Park?

Mary Lynn: I think I moved in early 1994 or could have been late 1993.

Jessie: You touched on this a little bit but how has the role of technology played in your job as a conservator?

Mary Lynn: Well, when I first came to the Archives, we had a secretary and the secretary was a very nice man named David Grigg and he would type up on the one lab typewriter [laughter] all of the treatment proposals and documentation. And then that changed. And we finally had one computer in the lab and we would take turns on it. But then when we went to College Park, the world was really different. I mean, the whole approach in terms of every staff member really having the ability to use a computer and communicate that way, I think changed things a lot.

Jessie: You talked a little bit this morning in [your interview](#) about the Charters of Freedom Project, and I want to talk about that in more detail. If you can talk a little bit about how it originated, I know it was in the works before you came, but then how it started and then your involvement and then we will go on from there?

Mary Lynn: For as long as I have been at the Archives the conservation lab was involved in caring for the Charters of Freedom. And when I arrived, all of the documents were in the NBS [National Bureau of Standards] encasements and had been since the early 1950s. They were housed in the Mosler Vault. And, you know, the mechanism for that required that the documents move daily up and down from the floor of the vault up to the display area. And that was one of the concerns about that glass and the design of those NBS encasements, because the glass was able to move a little bit on the surface of the document. I think the glass was there to help keep the parchment flat, which it doesn't really want to be. But given especially with the Declaration and any movement across the surface impact it would have on the ink, any flakes or abrasion that would take place. And the other thing that began to be observed was there was some evidence of glass deterioration and that was of greatest concern because the glass was in direct contact with the parchment. So that, I think, was one of the things that began to get some ideas going in terms of a change, a new design, you know, just based on the field has changed. We know more about display techniques, encasements, materials, and kind of the interface of all of those. So, I think a lot of things really came together nicely in terms of the renovation that was going to be going on, and the work in the Rotunda.

Another issue at that time was thinking about ADA requirements for people looking at the Charters. Back then people had to climb steps. They were not low enough that people in wheelchairs could just come up in and look. So, there are a lot of factors, I think, that came together in all of that.

Jessie: Can you talk about the actual conservation process? You mentioned today earlier that you did the Declaration last. What did you do first and how did you go about that?

Mary Lynn: OK. We were lucky to have access to colleagues at what was then NIST, the National Institute for Standards and Technology, and it was kind of kismet that their predecessor organization, National Bureau of Standards, had developed the very first encasements for us. They had partnered with Libbey-Owens-Ford, and Libbey-Owens-Ford provided the glass for the encasements and one of the technicians from Libbey-Owens-Ford helped to seal those encasements. It was basically lead ribbon that was soldered and held the elements together.

So, we had the advantage of having a mock-up encasement that had been fabricated at that time. So, that was the one we practiced on in terms of opening that. It did not contain one of the Charters documents, so the fear level was, you know, like it wasn't there. [Laughter] And we just got to test some techniques. So, we had different kinds of knives and tools that we were able to use. The lead is really soft, so that was easy to work through. But then at the corners, there was a lot more solder. And so working through the solder was a little bit more physically difficult. And then once you had the two pieces separated the top and the bottom, then to delayer and to remove the frame and to remove the glass that was sitting directly on the parchment.

So, by the time we did the first of the Charters documents, which was the transmittal page, we had a little bit of experience and then we progressively just learned more as we went through the various seven encasements and did the Declaration last.

Jessie: Ok, and then did you do the conservation work on the documents?

Mary Lynn: Yes.

Jessie: How much time did it take and what did that entail?

Mary Lynn: The project, we think of it as running from 1998-2003, and the 1998 date is kind of the very early deliberations and thinking about design criteria and all of those related issues. I don't think anything came off exhibit until 2001. So, we actually had a really compressed time with the documents off exhibit to do everything that had to be done. So, it included opening the encasements. We did those sequentially, we wanted to get something completely done so that the documents would not be out in the air for any longer than necessary.

So, we started with the documents that were not on exhibit and the transmittal page was not ever exhibited except for one time, I think, in the last few years when it was a featured document. But it does not have a history of display.

And we went to, I'm trying to think, it was page one probably page 1 and 4 [of the Constitution] and the Bill of Rights that were in the Rotunda and the Declaration. So we had access to pages two and three. So we started with those. And as we removed one of the parchments from the encasement, we did a whole lot of examination and documentation, and developed treatment proposals that were approved up through Michael Kurtz, who at that point, was our office head. And then proceeded with the treatment. We had worked closely with an advisory committee, the Preservation Advisory Committee for the National Archives that does not exist anymore. And experts from NIST to really develop the requirements for what the conditions would be inside of the encasement in terms of temperature, relative humidity, and what the ambient moisture inside of the encasements would be. So, we knew that we needed to work in a space where the conditions in the space would begin to acclimate the parchment to the conditions that they would ultimately be sealed under. So, we worked in a vault that had been really carefully renovated to achieve those conditions.

Jessie: And you mentioned in the interview this morning that that Declaration had been handled and stored in a lot of places are not ideal. And the Constitution looks pretty good.

Mary Lynn: It looks amazing. Yeah, that really does.

Jessie: Thank you little about the history of the Constitution, but also the Bill of Rights which doesn't look quite as good as the Constitution. And can you talk about any knowledge you have about the history of that document and why it's not quite as crisp as the Constitution?

Mary Lynn: Yeah, I don't know when the Bill of Rights came to NARA

Jessie: 1938.

Mary Lynn: Yeah. OK, OK. And who had it before then?

Jessie: The State Department. I think it was in a bound volume.

Mary Lynn: OK, so it's probably one of those really big GPO bindings.

Jessie: Yeah.

Mary Lynn: So, it was really protected, probably not accessed and handled. The skin of the Bill of Rights doesn't seem like the very best quality and there is some modeling on the surface that you can see kind of little, not spatters, but little orangey areas. We don't know what that is; we were never able to figure that out. But I think the quality of the skin is probably not as good.

The Constitution looks really great. It was, you know, in the custody of the Department of State, transferred, I think that it was in 1921, to the Library of Congress. So, the Constitution and Declaration were both exhibited at the library. And I think the conditions of the library really led them to start talking to NBS about doing something, just because of the really major changes in our age that would happen kind of seasonally. That had a big impact on the Declaration and the tear in the upper right corner. There were insects that were feeding on the Constitution. Luckily, the insects didn't get to the Declaration. But, you know, some of the bad things that happened were really under the care of the Library of Congress, so we always have to be kind of careful of not maligning one of our sister institutions.

But, you know, then they started the discussions to figure out what they could do to improve conditions and started those conversations before World War II. And then the war interrupted everything and the documents were removed to Fort Knox. And there had been an examination by a conservator, George Stout, at the library before they went to Fort Knox. And then while they were in residence there, the Declaration was treated and they repaired that corner that had torn because of the skin and the changing RH. And then they were encased after the war.

Jessie: Yeah, I saw that the Declaration was on display at the Jefferson Memorial during the anniversary. Was that outside?

[Laughter]

Mary Lynn: Yes, I think it was.

Jessie: And that was before they were sealed.

Mary Lynn: Yeah, yeah.

Jessie: I can't imagine that.

Mary Lynn: I mean, things have changed so much in terms of people's understanding.

Jessie: Yeah, I know it's hard to speculate, but could you speculate how long these documents could last? I know you said earlier they'll be in this case for 100 years and I'm sure new technology will come along.

Mary Lynn: Theoretically, I mean, and that's kind of extrapolating the numbers that were achieved when the seal was made. I think the seal could last many, many decades. You know, things keep changing in terms of knowledge and new technology. We do look at the documents and the encasements quarterly, so we observe any changes that are taking place, any shifting. The other thing that's going on is we have been working with a man who had been involved at NIST, Charles Tilford, who I think he's a physicist, but he's retired now. But he also worked with the Library of Congress on their encasements and has developed technology to create an oxygen sensor so we can use a probe and figure out what the interior conditions of the encasement are. So, we're just getting started on that and we'll start with the transmittal page. And so I think readings over time will help to determine whether or not there needs to be some kind of intervention.

Jessie: And you said the entire Rotunda was renovated. So did you have a role in the renovation and the restoration of the Faulkner murals?

Mary Lynn: Kitty Nicholson was the lead, the contact for the firm that did the conservation. Olin Conservation did that treatment.

Jessie: I've been trying to bug her.

Mary Lynn: I will give you her home email address so you can reach her. But we have a lot of documentation on that project. And that was also a pretty amazing project. There are lots of photographs, slides, actually, but even taking the murals off of the walls was just an amazing feat given their size. And so, you know, the AI renovation team helped to get that contract going. But Kitty was the conservation liaison and they really worked closely with her.

Jessie: Yeah, I'll try to contact her again,

Mary Lynn: Yeah, that would be cool.

Jessie: Not Charters related but can you tell me about the work you did in Baghdad with the Iraqi Jewish Archives and how that came about?

Mary Lynn: OK, when the headquarters for the secret place was bombed, people went in and found different rooms that had a lot of different materials that have been gathered together, including a space that had been devoted to collections of Iraqi Jewish material. And that population went back for hundreds of years. Doris Hamburg, who is director of preservation, received a call from the White House basically asking for advice: “Yeah, we have this stuff, the building was bombed, water came in, and we now have things that are wet and they're moldy, and what do we do?” So, that started a conversation. And I think they turned to the Archives partly because of our experience in working with records that had been damaged in emergencies.

It worked out that Doris and I went to Baghdad under the auspices of the Department of Defense. We spent three days in Baghdad proper looking at the materials, and developing a report. I think that was in June of 2003. And then later that summer the materials came to the U.S. under military transport. They went first to Fort Worth, Texas, where they were vacuum freeze dried, because at this point it was really hard for them to keep things frozen in Baghdad because of power problems and everything else. But they did the best they could.

So, the materials were frozen, sent to the U.S., freeze dried in Fort Worth, Texas, and then transported up to College Park, where they still are. But we've gone through the entire preservation project. There was an effort to try to find out whether or not the items could have been treated locally in Iraq, in terms of the conservators or labs. But things were in such chaos at that point that it wasn't really feasible. So that evolved into the project. And if you haven't interviewed Doris, she could be a good person to get a lot of insights into that.

Jessie: We talked a little about these special projects you worked on. But can you describe what a typical day in the conservation lab is, if there even is one?

Mary Lynn: A typical day? You know, it's been a long time since I have worked at the bench. So, I mean, my typical day is very different.

Jessie: Yeah. Or maybe your typical day when you first started? So, like your typical when you started compared to now? Or how things have changed there since you started there 30 years ago?

Mary Lynn: OK, I think my typical day when I first arrived was probably a mix of things—getting involved in some of the administrative projects that were underway. We began to work on developing specifications, good specifications for archives boxes and folders. But I would also be working on treating documents either because they were going to be used by researchers or

exhibited. So, doing examinations of photography and treatment and, you know, whatever was needed. But, over time as my responsibilities changed and I had more supervisory responsibilities, I got further and further from the bench, so to speak, but was involved in developing systems and approaches and strategies for the work we did for getting ready to move to College Park. All of the move prep work, and training staff. We had a group of people not only working at Archives I, but at Suitland to do the prep work.

And that's what we did a lot of shrink-wrapped in both buildings since we didn't have the resources to box all of the volumes that were just loose in the stacks. So, supported research projects. There is a research and testing lab that did a project to determine the long-term impact of enclosing materials within that shrink film. So, my fingers were in a lot of things and it made it more interesting. So that's good. And, all along working with really fabulous people, I feel that I grew up at the Archives in a way. Professionally, I grew up working in a really collaborative, great environment. So, that was nice. And I'm sure it helped me a lot as I moved along and did more things.

Jessie: Well, your tenure spanned several Archivists. Can you talk a little bit if things have changed for you under them? If you had a favorite or about the various transformations you've been through.

Mary Lynn: Yeah, there have been a lot of different Archivists. I remember some key things, I guess, about different Archivists. I remember Bob Warner was always very enthusiastic about the work of the Archives. And I think he made a point of coming around and just interacting with staff, including staff in the labs. So, that was always a pleasure. He seemed really interested in the work that was going on. I'm sure not just the conservation work, but the archival work as well. Since I grew up in Michigan and he was from Michigan, there was also this little kind of kismet thing going on, I'm sure as well.

Frank Burke was just an Acting Archivist. He wasn't an official Archivist, but I remember him as just really being an amazing presence and being a great spokesperson for the National Archives. And again, just interested in everything that was going on.

I remember John Carlin because he was the Archivist under whom we went to Baghdad and I guess he had to sign off on that [laughter], and he was also very supportive with the Charters project. And, one of the nice things about David Ferriero is that he has a long history of being actively involved and interested in conservation. So, it always makes you feel good when the person at the top of the agency is supportive and interested.

Jessie: Can you talk about any particular challenges you have faced over the course of your career?

Mary Lynn: Hmm. Oh, gosh. I mean, we all have our ups and downs. I'm not really thinking of any great negative challenges. I feel like I've always been given a lot of support and a lot of opportunities. The staff has been great. I'm really going to miss the place and the people and the records.

Jessie: I was going to ask what you were going to miss most? Sounds like all of it.

Mary Lynn: Well, there's another aspect for me, and that's I met my husband at the National Archives.

Jessie: I was going to ask that because you're one of the many Archives couples!

Mary Lynn: And it's always kind of confusing when you don't share the same last name because people just don't know how you're connected. I would say one of the good things is that Greg Bradsher, my husband, and I have never actually worked too closely together. And I think that's probably a good thing.

Jessie: And did you meet him here?

Mary Lynn: Yes. Yeah.

Jessie: How did that happen? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Mary Lynn: You know, it's hard to remember...oh, he was editing a book on managing archives. And he came and talked to Norvell Jones and me about writing a chapter on preservation and conservation. So, that was when I first knew that he existed and began to kind of interact with him a bit on that book project. So, the rest is history.

Jessie: And you say he's not retiring?

Mary Lynn: No, he doesn't have any plans to retire.

Jessie: You talked a little bit about some challenges that you went through. What do you think your biggest success would be here?

Mary Lynn: Oh, gosh. I would say kind of a capstone in terms of my career is the ability to work on the Charters project. I mean, that's pretty amazing. Not that many conservators get to work on such fabulous documents. And the team of people that worked on that. I mean, I learned a lot. I was given a lot of trust, and that's always a pleasure to do so.

Jessie: And do you think that you will have a career post Archives?

Mary Lynn: I have so many things I'm interested in. I do a lot of dog rescue work and we have three dogs at home, so that could expand. That's one thing. I love to write. I like writing. And so I've got some projects that I might start to think about a little bit. There's always the possibility that I could do some private conservation work, but for a little while I want to just kind of figure things out and lie low and see what happens next.

Jessie: OK, you did mention that you worked for the SAA. I just want to ask a little bit about your relationship with SAA and your work with them. Did you continue to work with them after you joined the National Archives?

Mary Lynn: Yeah, well, when I came to the Archives, I had completed my tenure as director of two NEH funded projects, and each of those had a book as part of the product that was completed. So, since I came to the Archives and I had authored those publications, I was given permission on my own time to do the revisions. So, the conservation book has gone through three and the managing photo collections has gone through a couple of revisions. So, at this point those projects are done. And I don't think that I will continue doing anything for SAA. But that was nice, too.

Jessie: And can you talk a little bit about the publications that you have?

Mary Lynn: The two books are probably the biggest things. One is *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*, I'm muddling up the titles. You have my resume.

Jessie: I do. Do you want to consult it?

Mary Lynn: What does it say? All these names kind of run together?

Jessie: Yeah, I can imagine. *Preserving archives and Manuscripts*.

Mary Lynn: Yes, that was the first book, the first NEH project, and I was the solo author for that. And that was revised in 1993, I think. And then in 2006? Maybe 2010? Something like that.

Yeah. And then the photo book, the first set of co-authors that I worked with Gerry Munoff and Margery Long, and then it was basically redone with Diane Vogt-o'connor and some other authors.

Jessie: And were you able to work on those publications alongside your official duties at the Archives?

Mary Lynn: No, I did them as a separate project. So, I had to go through the process of getting permission to do that outside work. And I don't know how I did it because it was crazy. You know, tight deadlines and a busy job. So, it was hard.

Jessie: You mentioned that you don't work on the bench any longer. Do you miss handling documents?

Mary Lynn: I do. But, you know, I'm still involved in discussing approaches and projects. And we're doing a lot to continue to support exhibition programs and loans, and also the great expansion of digitization initiatives. So, we're always thinking about new ways of doing things in ways that are efficient and fit for purpose, and are good for the records. So there's a lot of collaboration that covers those kinds of topics.

Jessie: As you know, the digitization effort is part of the strategic plan. A big focus for us. Do you think that Conservation is going to have a bigger role in having to digitize everything? How do you see Conservation's role in that?

Mary Lynn: Well, I think the role that we have been playing for a number of years is a good one. We are involved with the archival staff in reviewing the records to think about what their format is and the condition, whether or not they need any treatment to get them safely to the camera, whether or not there's information or text that's obscured. So, we're involved in doing the initial assessment. Sometimes with a partner project, if there's a lot of work that needs to be done, the Archives has gone the route of asking the partner to provide funding, whether it's for archival prep staff or conservation staff, just to kind of help support the projects. We do training of the camera operators. We do treatment of records that need to be stabilized before they can be safely imaged. So I think that will continue. I think there's support for that. And the end product is records that complete information can be revealed and shared. So that's important. And if you want to talk to somebody about this, Amy Lubick is the person.

Jessie: The National Archives in College Park is the main conservation base for an entire National Archives. Do you see the Archives getting more conservators around the country?

Mary Lynn: There is a preservation lab in St. Louis that's managed by Marta O'Neill and they work on a lot of the burn files that they are still kind of reassembling and trying to deal with that data.

There was a conservation lab for a number of years in San Bruno, and that was our first kind of regional lab. It lasted for, I don't know, I can't remember, 5-10 years, probably. The staff was part of Conservation. And we had people work in DC for us before they went out to the field archives. And they did treatment for not only the San Bruno repository, but other West Coast archives. So, you know, I would say there's a possibility that something like that could happen. It's expensive, of course, to staff and build a lab.

So, I don't know whether that model would ever be continued. We do bring records in from the regional archives and the presidential libraries for treatment and for preparing for exhibition. There could be more of that.

Jessie: You have a sort of a more unique career at the Archives as you stayed in one unit your entire career.

Mary Lynn: Right.

Jessie: Were you untouched during the various reorganizations that came with every Archivist, or were you basically thrown into a different unit? I know I'm asking you to reach very far back into your memory, since 1985. But can you talk a little bit about how things have changed with regard to the various transformations you've been through?

Mary Lynn: You know, the lab pretty much stayed the same. I mean, I think our reporting maybe changed over the years, but we were always part of—at least while I was here—part of what was a major holdings unit, NN, NW, R, so as the archival side of those offices changed, I think our relationships probably changed a little bit with the archival units in terms of what they were part of and, you know, who they were evolving with.

So, I don't know that they ultimately had that big of a change or impact on us other than there are big, big shifts in terms of different times when overall priorities are altered for everybody and that affects what you're doing. So, I would say getting ready for the move was probably one of the big, big changes. We essentially stopped doing treatment for a couple of years to prepare records. Probably another big game changer is the emphasis on digitization and the fact that that's a really big driver and just juggling resources, making sure that you can meet

those goals, get things to the camera in the timetable that they need. Meet exhibit and loan goals, meet the needs of people who come on site to work in the research rooms, and support processing. So, there are a lot of streams to work with.

Jessie: You mentioned that the Conservation staff has grown over the years that you've been here. Do you feel like the staff is adequately staffed now or do you think that we can devote more resources?

Mary Lynn: I think given the size of our holdings and some of the goals, there certainly could be more staff. We have been getting a lot of support in the last few years, so that's really great. We have two new conservators coming on in the summer. Actually, next week is the first one.

Jessie: Just in time!

Mary Lynn: Really! But, you know, there's always more that could be done. And we get pulled in a lot of other directions in terms of doing training, and tons and tons of tours, and things that make the Archives show well, which we want to do. But, you know, they are a drain from people working at the bench and working with records. We also do a lot of custom housing for units across NARA. So, dealing with archival stuff all over what they're boxing needs are and shipping out boxes, box blanks that are made.

Jessie: Well, I know you want to catch the shuttle, so I'm just going to ask if there's anything you want to add before we wrap up?

Mary Lynn: I think it's really fabulous that you're doing this oral history project. And I hope that you get a lot of my buddies that have really also played key roles in the work that the Archives has done over the years. There's no other place like it. It's pretty amazing. When I first came to the Archives my mom was so excited. So, that's kind of a nice little link to my past.

Jessie: Well, you have lived history. You were, as we mentioned this morning, the last person to touch the Declaration.

Mary Lynn: Well, Kitty Nicholson and I, I don't know, you know, we didn't time it, but the two of us were the last two people to actually handle it. So, yeah. And before that it had been the 1940s, 1942.

Jessie: Pretty exciting.

Mary Lynn: Yes, it is an honor.

Jessie: Probably the crowning moment. Yes, it's always impressive to be at the National Archives and be able to say, oh, I've touched a Jefferson message. Right?

Mary Lynn: Well, you have touched some amazing things—all of the imaging that you were doing in the legislative vault. That made a really big difference. And you also have special insights into digitizing, and the time it takes and all of that.

Jessie: I am very aware.

Mary Lynn: Yeah. Yeah. Is that going on still?

Jessie: I believe so. I'm not there anymore so I don't really know.

Mary Lynn: Yeah, I hope so.

Jessie: Yeah, I hope so too. I know that they are short-staffed.

Mary Lynn: Yeah.

Jessie: I don't know what time it is. Oh, you still have a few minutes but we can just wrap up.

Mary Lynn: OK. OK. Well, if you think of anything else that you want to ask I will be around, or you can go through Greg, and you've got my home email.

Jessie: Yeah. Great! Thank you so much.

Mary Lynn: Yeah. Thank you, Jessie.

Jessie: I can't wait to see the piece that's coming out on [Prologue](#) about the Declaration.

Mary Lynn: Yeah, something else to finish.

[END RECORDING]

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