

**U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION**  
**Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview**  
**Subject: Dorothy Dougherty**  
**Interviewer: Angela Tudico**  
**May 22, 2025**

**Angela Tudico:** Today is Thursday, May 22nd, 2025, and I'm speaking with Dorothy Dougherty, Public Programs Division of the National Archives, and former Director of Public Programs at the National Archives at New York City. My name is Angela Tudico, and I used to be based out of the National Archives facility in the U.S. Custom House in New York City as well. I'm assisting the agency historian Jessie Kratz with this interview. We are documenting the history of the agency by preserving firsthand accounts of events. Hello, Dorothy. Thank you for joining me today.

**Dorothy Dougherty:** Hi, Angela. Thank you for having me.

**Angela:** To get started, can you please tell me a little bit about where you're from?

**Dorothy:** Yes. I grew up in Malverne, New York, out here on Long Island, where I currently live.

**Angela:** Awesome. And what were you hoping to do after school, undergrad or graduate school?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. Well, for school. I was always interested in history. So, I got a degree in history, and then I went on for my master's in history from Long Island University. I also got an Archives Certificate. I was working in the city as a resource coordinator slash documentalist for a consulting firm for many years but wanted to get into history full time. I did have a position on the weekends for many years at a living history museum and wanted to go back to museum and or archives anywhere that I could get my hands on history.

**Angela:** Oh. That's amazing. And so, what brought you to the National Archives?

**Dorothy:** When I was working in the city [NY] and finishing up my Archives Certificate, I needed to do an internship in archival management, and I chose to go down to DC because my brother lived in Bethesda at the time. I wanted to work, you know, somewhere maybe either the Archives, the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives called

me back. I was able to get an internship with Still Pictures [College Park, MD]. And so, I did, you know, a crazy whirlwind 30-day internship with Still Pictures. Nick Nathanson was my mentor, and he helped me work on the U.S. Information Agency photo collection from the 1950s and 1960s, which documented a lot of diplomats coming to America, coming to the U.S., sightseeing, and doing basic American things like going grocery shopping and things of that nature. So that was a great way to start. And while I was doing that internship, Nick had told me to apply, to continually look and apply if I wanted to come back to the DC area. Even though Still Pictures was in College Park, he knew I wanted to come back. So, he was like, keep your eye out. And you know, NARA would love to have you if you do so. So that's what I did.

**Angela:** Oh, I love that story. So how did you start working full time for NARA, or when did you start working full time for NARA?

**Dorothy:** So, I did my internship in 1997. I applied for positions as they came up. I was offered a position with the Carter Library as well as the Bush Library, but I did not want to go that far. So, I waited for another position. You know, they had blanket positions, and they could put you wherever the locations needed someone. So, I waited for the position that came at College Park, and I started March 2000, in the Life Cycle Coordination staff in the Policy and Communications Division. I was an archives specialist working on the migration of data from the National Archives Information Locator, formerly known as NAIL, into the new system that was developing called ARC, the Archival Research Catalog, which we now know as the National Archives Catalog. As you know, the descriptive tool for finding records in the National Archives.

**Angela:** Oh, wow, that's really cool. Dorothy, I didn't realize that.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. And I was hired by Deb Wall who was the supervisor of that group, and she eventually became the Deputy Archivist. And you know, she also became a great mentor, helping me along the way. She had created a really wonderful group in College Park. Our team was quite solid. So that sets the basis for, I think, my career at the Archives, you know, for the next 25 years.

**Angela:** I was going to say that's a great way to start your career at NARA, I think. And this leads to the next question. What were your first impressions of the agency and the Archives location in College Park?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. Well, coming from the business world in Manhattan, you know, I worked for a quick consulting firm, which was really fast paced. And I do remember at one point, Deb was like, Dorothy, slow down you know, you don't have to run into my office and tell me what you're doing. And she really was like, you know, this is what we need you to do. And this is what you'll do. And you'll learn it all at some point. So, it was a very different pace. But of course, it was also a very different environment. College Park was more or less brand new at the time. It opened in 1996 [1994], so it was still a new building. I mean, you'd walk down the halls, the light was pouring in. There's one whole wall of the building that's windows. It's a gorgeous facility. It smells really good in there, you know, like, everything smelt really good. And the stacks smelt really, really good. Really clean air. College Park was really a nice place. You could drive right up. We had the cafeteria. We had the gym. There were meeting rooms and the auditorium where NARA had meetings all the time. And you could go and learn from one division to the next was giving little presentations. The National Archives Assembly was extremely active in doing monthly programs. It was a really great place to be.

**Angela:** Wow, which sounds amazing. I love that. I was going to say the building was very new when you started, so that's really neat. Any other? Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. No. And I'll just say it was, I guess, because they were building out downtown at A1, the Archives in DC. I guess the Archivist [John Carlin] had his office—he mainly had his office at College Park. So, my division, Policy and Communications, was within the Archivist's overall office. So at the time, I recall people saying it was like headquarters, even though headquarters really was DC, so College Park, I think, temporarily became the headquarters office, and there was a lot of activity.

**Angela:** I was going to say, so you were right in the middle of everything at that time period. That sounds really exciting. Did you hold any other positions while you were in College Park?

**Dorothy:** No. No. I decided we were going to get married, my husband and I. So I decided I need to move back to New York. And so, I was in that office for four years there, and then I moved back to New York after I applied for a senior records analyst position on the records management side. So I moved back to New York for that position. And I had already [had] experience in records management at the state level, so that seemed like a good fit.

**Angela:** Okay. So yeah, that was going to be my next question—how did you end up coming to New York? Because College Park sounds really exciting in this time period, but that's a good reason to move.

**Dorothy:** I'm not gonna lie, I'm still sorry I left College Park. But, you know, I love my husband. Love my family. So yeah, it was good to move back to New York. The interesting thing is, I knew about the New York office, obviously, because I was a New Yorker and always asked about New York. I actually had written to them to do some research for my master's thesis. And when I was doing the work for the ARC catalog, I was designated as one of the lead trainers—I was on the video for the staff training. I offered to go to New York on one of my visits back to my family to do a presentation. And so, I actually had gone in and presented about the new catalog system to the entire staff. It was a great story because we plugged in the computer, or we thought we plugged in the computer, and the minute that the presentation was over and I said, any questions? The computer went off and I was like, well, I guess that's the end of the presentation. It was very funny. The staff were very welcoming when I met them the first go round. And when I got back to New York as an official staffer, as a records analyst, they were also welcoming again. Yeah. At that point, the Director had passed away, so I came into an office where the archival staff were working as hard as they always were, and John Celardo was the Acting Director at the time. I joined a team of two other people in the records management side, Karen Lucas and Stacy Byas.

**Angela:** That's great. What year was that? That you moved to New York to start your new position?

**Dorothy:** So, I moved to New York in February of 2004. And the interesting part about that was because I had done training with the ARC catalog, I was identified to be on the national training team for records management because they were revamping the entire training guidance for federal agencies. So, in addition to going out to agencies and doing site visits, I did some training, but then I was on that national training team, which was great because I got to meet a lot of, again, wonderful people in the records management side. And it was also interesting because they then were posting for the replacement for the [NY] Archives Director who had passed away, and I was approached to apply for that position. So, I did.

**Angela:** I would say, did you apply?

**Dorothy:** I did apply. You know, honestly, I didn't know if I really wanted to do that job, I mean, if I got it. Because I really enjoyed traveling and going out to site visits. But when they came back to me after my first interview the proposal was, we'd like to move you into a new position for outreach, essentially outreach at every level in the regions. And it was a new position the regions never had before. There was always someone in DC, there was Nancy

Malan in DC who worked with the regions for outreach, but this was going to be a position in the region specifically for the Northeast Region. So because I had obligations already with records management, I assisted and I was a part-time detail, and then I was fully detailed into that position eventually working with Boston, working closely with Boston, Philadelphia, of course, New York trying to identify ways to build outreach for the regional system. I went to conferences, I worked with regional directors, and that position went on for about two years before I was pulled strictly to New York and Boston. And it was an interesting thing because the regions at that time were exploring ways to really let people know they existed beyond genealogy and also beyond academic research. Regional directors started taking positions and converting them from archives techs or archives specialists to educators. So, this was the beginning of a great presence for public programs and educational outreach in the regional system of the National Archives.

**Angela:** Wow, I didn't realize. So, you were there for the very beginning of this program?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. I was the East Coast person, and Lisa Gezelter was the California/West Coast person. She was an archivist working out in California; eventually she left the agency, and they never filled that position. But then they started to bring in educators in other regions. So ideally you would have had a programs person maybe, and or an educator. Atlanta was the only other region that had a public programs person for a long time; her name was Mary Evelyn Tomlin. Unfortunately, she passed away, but she built up a team with the Director there. She did programs, and they had an educator as well. So, the idea was more education and outreach throughout the regional system. And I think this had a lot to do with the fact that the regional offices were in these warehouse buildings, you know, these really nondescript unwelcoming buildings that people weren't going to go to unless they had to do research there. So, the idea of the programs division was to help solve that.

**Angela:** That's so interesting. And prior to that time, there was no outreach or programing, or if there was archival staff [ran it]?

**Dorothy:** Prior to that time. I mean, I can really only speak to New York prior to that time. Yes. The archival staff did some outreach. I know John Celardo did outreach at Ellis Island. I know Mary Kinahan did some workshop development for genealogy, but it was in and around all their other work. And what I believe, what I was told, and I believe this to be the, you know, the case, the archival staff were so busy with reference. And to this day, you know, that hasn't changed. But they were also going to be so busy with describing the records because there

was this new system. This was one way to alleviate and really have someone focus on outreach that was necessary.

**Angela:** Oh, that makes so much sense now that you explain it. Yeah. Let's back up just a little bit, and then we'll circle back to building this program from scratch, which is fascinating. Can you tell me your impressions? Maybe when you visited for training and then full time, just of the National Archives at New York, at Varick Street, and just coming from College Park and what was it like? And the staff there and maybe what they were doing. I think that speaks to building this program out too.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. Yeah. You know, going to Varick Street for the first time coming from College Park, like this beautiful place in the archival world. Varick Street—no, it was a shock that NARA had a facility there because it was a nondescript building. We'd like to say nondescript because we're trying to be diplomatic. Right? But it was not a beautiful space. There was no sign at the front to tell you the Archives was in there, or that you could walk in as a member of the public. You only went into that building if you needed to get in for a reason, and you often had an appointment because it had all these other federal agencies. But I knew I had to go there for the training. So, I went through the security queue. And then walked down the green hallways with the green linoleum tile, the green walls into the space that was all green carpeting and green cubicles. And I love the color green, but it was not pretty. It was, you know, the staff were welcoming, but would I want to spend my days there? I don't know. It could use a paint job. Yeah? It definitely did not fit the caliber of what the National Archives wanted, which I think really sets the stage for why we eventually moved from Varick Street to somewhere else. And when we got to the U.S. Custom House at One Bowling Green, it was like a dream come true because that was a magnificent, fitting building for the National Archives.

**Angela:** That totally makes sense. I think by the time I got to Varick Street [in 2008], it had been somewhat renovated, the [archives] space. So, I don't think it looked the same, but even so, the building, etc. I think utilitarian was the word I often used. Yeah, all the offices were there. We're there. It was very handy. You could get what you needed, but it wasn't welcoming. Right.

**Dorothy:** I described the building one time when David Ferriero was visiting. We were showing off the Custom House years later, and I said, nondescript. He's like, come on, Dorothy, he goes, you have a federal immigration detention center in that building. That's what you have to start with. So, very funny. But yeah, when I moved into the program's position, Nancy Shader got the Director position, and jointly, we were like, we've got to make

this place look better. I mean we did get some money to paint some of the walls. I put up a photo exhibit. Nancy got money to rearrange the reference room space. And as I'm looking through my files, I found some great photos of what the space looked like before. But, you know, it was a massive cleanout of the microfilm room, reorganizing and getting more computers and just making a secure special projects room, as well as a secure reading room. Those were key points to have at that point before we moved somewhere else.

**Angela:** Yeah, that's how I met the space. So, it was very functional and honestly also easy to work at the reference desk with that [renovated] space. The changes you all made must have been—I can't imagine. I'd love to see the before photos because when I walked in the office it was nice. It was a very nice space.

**Dorothy:** We had, I mean, we had like six-foot-wide tables in the back that we eventually got rid of and we made them, you know, we were able to get some funding for small narrow tables for training. The room for presentations shared the kitchen space. So we had a big backdrop made for conferences that I used to take to conferences. But then we had a bigger one made for spaces that we used everywhere. And you'll see there are a number of staff photos, group photos in front of that banner, which was basically a partition to let people not see our kitchen.

**Angela:** Yeah. But I feel like you did a lot with what you had with that space.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. Well, yeah. And then you look out the windows, Angela, and you see the skyline, you see the Hudson River, and you're like, well, this is beautiful.

**Angela:** That's great. Can you talk about—sorry to keep backing up, but I just want to get all those first impressions. So how many staff worked at the office when you started? I know you said there were three of you all together on your side of the shop, but.

**Dorothy:** Yeah, on the records management side. So, then within a year or two, you had the Director. You had let's see: Nancy, John, Mary, Greg, Carol, Richie, Joan, Marty, myself, Stacy, Karen. So, there were a good amount of people there. Again, my impression was New York was so busy.

If I had a question, as I was trying to develop programs for the regions but also understand what the regions needed. I obviously had an interest in New York. So, I would go and stand by John and say, can you just answer this question? And people were very willing to help, but

they were very busy. But John, Mary, Greg, Carol always, and Joan always provided a wealth of information to get me started and to identify maybe collections of records that hadn't been used before or presented on so that I could start presenting. We did a whole thing on Custom House on Custom Service records, underutilized records. Richie helped me identify records for a Puerto Rico records presentation. And that eventually became the basis for one of the archivists getting interested in developing a full finding aid. You know we all assisted each other, and we all shared information that was very important. And I found that to be very easy to do in New York.

**Angela:** That's great. So, it was a very open and friendly environment.

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** That sounds great. Anything else about the day to day? Maybe what your typical day was like or a typical day for that office.

**Dorothy:** I mean in the very beginning, as the programs person, I was attending conferences, I was attending meetings. I was put on regional task teams, like the regional public programs team, the regional marketing team, the rebranding team because the regions needed a better brand. They had just updated their GIL (government information leaflet), but they then said we needed other things to market and help bridge the awareness of space. So, I developed these family history resource brochures. I was also presenting with the understanding that if I could demonstrate there was a public need in New York, we could get additional staff so that when we eventually moved to another location, I wouldn't be doing it on my own. So, I developed a genealogy series. I developed a hands-on archives student field trip, which eventually Chris Zarr took over and made into a tremendously better program because he was an educator. But I had planted these little bits and pieces that could be piloted to see what would work and then what would work, maybe somewhere else. I did a lot of outreach off site, worked with Federal Hall, the Park Service quite a bit, Ellis Island, went down to Fort Wadsworth and worked with the educators there. So, there were a lot of building partnerships in the city as well. I was part of this alliance for museums. I'm getting the name wrong. But it was basically museum staff who were invested in saving cultural heritage. And so, from that I did a program on Securing our National Treasures, which was a briefing that we did up at the New York Public Library for archival professionals and library and museum professionals. So, there were a lot of things that we, that I started that through the help of others, were able to start. But day to day it could be a presentation and then a bunch of meetings or it could be travel. There was a lot going on.



**Angela:** Yeah, it sounds like it. Well, it all makes sense because some of the things that I know, or some of my earliest memories are things that you started and things that carried on. One of my first memories of Varick Street was attending one of your Finding Family sessions on the census. I think Patrick, who was an archivist at the time, was like, why don't you go sit in on this? And it was a great way for me as a new staffer to learn about—

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** —the holdings and how to use them. So, you started the whole Finding Family thing, Dorothy, basically?

**Dorothy:** Yeah,

**Angela:** That's really cool.

**Dorothy:** That was a great program. And that was all based on, you know, our records. And so again, the research that the staff did and the records they shared with me, and then just trying to craft a narrative around them. When we didn't have necessarily full descriptions for things it was a good way to start. But also, I brought in folks from Ancestry and FamilySearch. We had Google come one time like there were, we had some one-offs with those; we also had genealogy groups. And by doing consistent presentations, we brought a lot of people into the office, which was great because genealogy increased our researchers. And so the days we had those programs, we would have [a] packed house of research.

**Angela:** I mean,, I was going to say I remember those being packed throughout the Varick and Custom House eras. And yeah, I feel like people love the Finding Family series.

**Dorothy:** Thank you. Well, when you came on, Angela, by that point, I think several of the older staff had left when I was first at Varrick. And then. Yeah, Patrick was there. Chris Gushman. Kevin DeVorse. Right. Was he there at that point?

**Angela:** He came a few years after I came. Yeah.

**Dorothy:** So, yeah. So, there was swapping out of staff. But I think the staff numbers continually diminished over the years, for sure. And when we got to the Custom House, it was much, much smaller.

**Angela:** Yes, I think, so when I arrived of the New Jersey or Bayonne crew, there was Carol. Joan and Greg were still there, but I never got to meet the others. Actually, they would come to visit. I never got to work with others, I should say. But it was, yeah, it was a great office, and I feel like we were so robustly staffed. That was the peak, maybe when I started or a year or two after as we prepped for the move to Custom House, because yeah, we just had, I don't think we ever had as much staffing as we had during those preceding years. Just core staff and then students and volunteers and then it just slowly drifted. I guess that's a good way to transition. Unless there's anything else you want to say about the Varick Street location, we can talk a little bit about the move to Custom House.

**Dorothy:** Yeah, and I'll just say the interesting thing is, so then by the time you came, so then you have Chris Zarr. I was able to justify needing someone else. And the goal was to have an educator, not just someone trained in archives and history, but someone who's in education and loves history. So, Chris Zarr came on board, and then you have Sara Davis, who came on board, and she was on the archival side. But you know she was interested in what Chris and I were doing. And she also had that exhibit background. She was like the perfect complement to the team, to the core team. And she filled the void that was going to be left by Carol because Carol helped me with all the exhibits. And Carol was my go-to person for, you know, she was so creative crafting certain designs and we found a case for the front, and she then would fill it. And so, she kept an exhibit going. So, like, there were, again, there were elements at Varick Street. And the whole idea was this buildup to the move. So, yeah, so getting to the move, we knew we were going to have to move. A lot of my days were also spent going out and looking at locations for the new National Archives in New York City.

When we moved out of Varick Street and, we knew we had to move because the building wasn't really up to par with what NARA needed. The stack environment really was the big issue because NARA had the new standards, and they were going to have to rebuild the stacks to meet those standards. And so, you had almost the entire floor of the building that would need to be rebuilt for the stacks, which the cost was going to be exorbitant. So, we knew that at some point when that standard had to be implemented by NARA, we had to move. So, I went to Brooklyn, I went to Metro Tech and looked there. We looked downtown. We looked at the World Trade Center site. You know, nothing really stood out except the Custom House was there and Federal Hall was there. So, for a brief period in 2006, the Federal Hall became a possible option. Because we did a naturalization ceremony there; we did a massive exhibit with the help of Lisa Royce, who was brought into New York and then went to DC as the head

of the museum exhibit department. She helped us create spaces. But Federal Hall was just never big enough for what we needed. And then Custom House became the best option.

**Angela:** I remember all the partnerships with Federal Hall. I didn't realize it was an option. That's so interesting. And One World Trade would have been—even when I moved in 2008, it was still being built. So you were exploring that as a possibility as it was being designed and built.

**Dorothy:** Yes, it was an option that was offered. And I think I mean, my ultimate philosophy was we know what was lost physically personally, by many people. We are still not sure all the records that were lost. And so, to me, it wasn't a place where you'd put a public research facility where you want to store records. Just because of the mindset, you know, New York—those were still the early years [after 9/11]. I dare say, the recovery still continues. You know what I mean? The mental recovery. So, in terms of a location that didn't have any negativity or any trauma associated with it. I mean, the Custom House was built on the land of the Lenape, but it was now home to the Museum of American Indian. So, it has become this beautiful space for people to go. And it's a free building. You can go in for free. So, and it's a destination right outside of Battery Park, so it seemed like a logical choice.

**Angela:** Definitely. And when you moved up to New York, were the conversations already happening about moving out of Varick Street, or did that start after you [arrived]?

**Dorothy:** I do recall when the programs position was offered to me as a detail, it was a discussion point that we may move, they may have to move. Nothing was, to my knowledge, nothing had been determined yet. It was an option. But I had been on a regional archives task force team that talked about a new mindset for the regional system. And that was the bulk of the records, because cities are expensive and rent is expensive, the bulk of the records might be somewhere else centrally located, but you could have these pop-up facilities like they call them, storefront boutiques for the regions where the public can come and understand what the archives is and what we offer. And so that's really what the Custom House became, a storefront boutique where we had some records, not all of them on site.

**Angela:** Right. And when you moved to or started at the New York office, the office had the entire 12th floor at Varick Street except the cafe. So you had almost 100,000ish or something like that, or maybe more cubic feet of records, but the whole floor, basically.

**Dorothy:** The whole floor. And I think the numbers were more like 165,000.

**Angela:** Wow. So, it was the whole floor.

**Dorothy:** From the office down around the front of the building and then down the other side, and then at the top of the one edge of the building, you had the NARA facility, and then you had the cafe. But the whole rest of that floor were stacks, and you could walk through the stacks like you'd walk down. And then there's a little narrow corridor. Were you there then?

**Angela:** No. So when I started—I want to say that move, or you would remember better than I—you were there, maybe a year or two after you started, they moved those records off site. So, by the time I got there, we had half of the floor.

**Dorothy:** Okay.

**Angela:** Which was still a huge stacks compared to what we ended up having at Custom House, but I can't imagine having the whole floor.

**Dorothy:** It was cool. It was really cool. And you know, they'd say, don't, don't go in there alone. You'll get lost. And it was true. And I was like; I'm not going in there alone. What, are you crazy? It's like, I don't know where the lights are. You'd have to like, you know, things weren't automatic. You had to kind of go and, like, feel for the light.

**Angela:** I know I remember being even on the Varick half when we did have it. Maybe they switched the lights at a certain point, but the lights would go out in the rows if you weren't active and you were up the ladder and. It was just kind of dark in there.

**Dorothy:** When I talked to John Celardo for his interview, he reminded me that the reason they found Varick Street, I mean, was a great building for records. It was a stable, strong building. They had the structure there to support the stacks. But he said, “You know, they had this fire suppression system put in. That was great. So that's worked for the stacks. Maybe not for the people so much.

**Angela:** Yeah. Oh, my goodness. Well, thank you for going back and describing that. I feel like it's just nice to get a sense of the space, and I feel like all that aside, too, there's no sign you don't know the National Archives is there, but you were able to draw such a huge crowd for all of your programming and things. Is there anything else you want to say about the

partnerships which you mentioned? Is there anything else you want to say about that reach and whatnot before we shift gears?

**Dorothy:** Yeah, I was just. You know, just obviously working with partners was key. And it's always going to be key because everyone can let everyone know. And the more people you work with, the more people know. We developed a newsletter that served New York for many years. So, there was a lot of good that started at Varick. But I think a lot of it, you know, other things started before Varick for the New York staff.

**Angela:** Oh, one last question. Just because I was curious. We always had a robust volunteer presence. And I feel like that maybe started at Varick with the German genealogical group.

**Dorothy:** Yes, it did start. Well, I think it started at Varick, and I think yeah, John and I didn't talk about this [in his interview], but from my recollection, he was approached by the German Genealogy Group and the Italian genealogy group. So, John Martino from the Italian Genealogical Group, who's since passed away, and Don Eckerle from the German Genealogy Group, who's also since passed away. They were both wonderful people who in their retirement said, you know, there's some good stuff out there, we want to share it. So, they started, they came in and offered their services, and John had just received the shipment of boxes. Do you remember the story from Dr. Ira Glazier, who created that series of books, *The Irish to the Americas*, *The Russians to the Americas*, *The Germans to the Americas*, that whole volume set? He worked as a statistician, but he then worked for the immigration center [Balch Institute]. And then he asked NARA, I guess NARA deaccessioned—this is back in the time when they microfilmed everything, and then they decided to get rid of the records. What I recall of the story is Dr. Glazier had these records for many years and was doing all this research, and these were again, deaccessioned from the Archives. We're talking about, maybe the early '70s or the '60s. And when he was done with his work, he called New York and said, do you want these back? And maybe it was Dr. Morris, the former director, and John Celardo.

But John told me this story, and it was we [NARA-NYC] will take them. So, they got all those records back and they were in every kind of box you can imagine. I have pictures of those as well. And they needed to be reboxed and rehoused. The German Genealogy Group, Italian Genealogical Group came in and did that project on the sixth floor of Varick Street. And they cataloged all of those records. And then after that, they said, what else you got? They did the, I think they did the criminal court cases, the cards. I think they reindexed the cards and created an inventory of those. And then they started on the naturalization records, and they created databases, which are on their website for free. They're not exclusive to either Italians or

German immigrants. It's everyone [every nationality] on those records. And then they shared those databases with NARA. And I think those databases are in an AAD [Access to Archival Databases], and maybe they're in the [National Archives] Catalog. I'm not sure, but those records came back, and that's how that partnership started. And then that grew. And when I got there, Carol Savo was in charge of the volunteers, and there was someone who was doing the crew list inventory, of which we have an extensive collection, which I'd love to see digitized. We could go on and on right, Angela?

Yeah, a very active volunteer group that then Chris Zarr took over and managed quite effectively for a long time.

**Angela:** Thanks for talking about that. I feel like they were such a big part of the office presence in Varick, but also in Custom House and just kind of paints that picture of the hustle and bustle. And also, in my mind, in tandem with your programing, really highlights what's in the holdings of the New York office and really starts to make them accessible in a new way for genealogists. I feel like I get the sense from Joan and Carol and Greg over the years, it was always a busy genealogy hub, very busy on microfilm before things were digitized. I feel like that's such a big part of the story.

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** Along with your Finding Family programs just to kind of make it [known].

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** The New York office, this is here. This is a resource.

**Dorothy:** Well, and you had Don Eckerle was the first volunteer nominated for an archivist award in the regions. He went down and got his award, I forget. Was it 2007 or 6 somewhere around there?

**Angela:** The only reason I know is when I was cleaning out my cube, I saved—remember the weekly bulletin? Or it was not weekly, it was monthly or bimonthly. It was the first one from when I started working, and he was in it to win his award. So, it was around fall 2008.

**Dorothy:** Oh 2008.

**Angela:** I was so glad I kept it because he was in there, and that was a huge deal, and it was very exciting.

**Dorothy:** Oh, yeah, and you know Don and his crew followed us to the Custom House and again, on their own dime, came in faithfully every week and did research. Art Sniffen also was a genealogist who came in and did presentations, and he and John [Celardo] had started a program at Ellis Island that I morphed into shorter pieces, a series of shorter presentations. So, we were at Ellis Island every month from spring into fall. And that eventually became like a game show, the *Family History Game Show*. That then we were doing quite consistently. So, there was a lot of outreach. The whole idea is we also wanted to let people know we're moving and we're here. So, when we move, you come to our new place. Ellis Island was great because they were always extremely supportive of it—the research at NARA—because it supported their efforts as a museum. And you know, we did document discovery sessions there years later. Federal Hall, same thing, and pop-up discovery sessions. So, there was a lot going on at Varick Street.

**Angela:** There was. I forgot about the game show. Dorothy, that was amazing. And yeah, I feel like that maybe you can spend another second talking about it. I know we have so much to get to, but I feel like that partnership with Ellis Island was so critical. And they always sent people to the office. But when we were at Custom House, my goodness, the people would come over [after visiting Ellis Island]. We were just right there. So yeah, if you want to talk, maybe just a second more.

**Dorothy:** Yeah, sure.

**Angela:** Before I switch that off.

**Dorothy:** I inherited that partnership from, again, John Celardo, who was part of a team to help rebuild the museum. Save Ellis Island, and he put me in touch with folks there. And then they built out their education department more from interpretation. They had educators. And knowing that NARA wanted to build out their programs, they worked very closely with us. And eventually, when Chris took over the education aspect of things he developed a series of programs around NARA records, which are other federal agency records, obviously, but archived. And we had a great partnership with Ellis for many, many years, and things changed a little when we got to the Custom House. But then things drastically changed when New York shut down in 2020 with the pandemic. But we'll get to that.

**Angela:** Yeah, we'll get to that. Thank you for just circling back to that. I just feel like some of these pieces are just so important. And you did so much good work. I want to make sure we get it all here. So, I guess now we're ready for Custom House. And this is the first question, but you've spoken about this a little. Were you involved in the move from Varick Street to the U.S. Custom House? Would you like to talk about that a little bit?

**Dorothy:** Yes. Obviously I was involved in the sense that we were building a really public facing space. So, my job as the programs and outreach person really catered to that. I was involved in every single GSA, General Services Administration meeting with the Archives and with our facilities team. Obviously worked really closely with Diane LeBlanc and Dave Powers, who were my supervisors at New York and who were the ones who had the vision for the program's development in the regions. And so I went to many, many, many planning meetings, you know, planning meetings talking about electrical wiring and walls and floor load and things, like things I never planned to think about. But, you know, were obviously important. And I think the takeaway from those meetings were the Custom House was this beautiful space, and the [National] Museum of the American Indian had the two, the main floor of the first floor and the second floor. So, NARA was offered the third and fourth floor, one floor for offices, one floor for public space. But the original idea was the third floor might have been better for the stacks because of the floor load capacity. We're going to move thousands of cubic feet to that building, we had to make sure it was solid. But after doing numerous reviews, the third floor became the public space. And going to that building all the time and looking around saying, how are people going to get here? How are they going to know we are here? What do we need to do? Which is the best space? You know, there were many options. There were options for just one part of the hallway, the option for the room at the front of the hallway, which became the Learning Center, wasn't originally on the table. They thought about putting us in the basement for outreach and education. Really by the determination of Dave Powers, who facilitated all of this and made it happen and found the best deal for us, we got the most beautiful spaces together. We had this beautiful room in the front of the hallway that became our Learning Center. We were able to build out a space for a Welcome Center that adjoined the reference room so that people would walk in, see some original documents, and then turn to the right, do research if they want, or just leave the little gallery area. And then the New York staff offices would be on the fourth floor. And then began the real meetings with the [National] Museum of the American Indian, who were receptive to us coming into the building, for sure, and became great partners with us, as well as GSA. Like, how do we make your space shine? How do we make people know you're here? What can we offer you in terms of expanding your footprint beyond what you're paying rent for, like putting up banners and things of that nature? So, I became part of all those planning meetings. And



then when we had money at the very last minute to get some money to design the Welcome Center and the Learning Center, but that was like literally last minute. We found some money to do a very modest build out for those spaces but it worked.

**Angela:** That's amazing. Yeah. Even I remember the Learning Center being a very late addition.

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** And that was for people who don't know, [it] overlooked One Bowling Green and the beginning of Broadway.

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Angela:** Looking towards Manhattan. So, it was a really great Learning Center space. And I feel like I've told newer staff that, and they didn't believe me, that initially we were going to have the public space on the fourth and not the third. And that entry to the National Archives on the third floor is such a beautiful entry, or was a beautiful entry, for the public. So, it's great you were able to do that.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. It was exciting too, you know for sure.

**Angela:** It sounds like GSA, everyone in the building was very excited. And were great partners for you.

**Dorothy:** Oh, yeah. I mean, they were so happy that the majority of the building, the tenancy would be full. I think it was almost 100% full with us there. And they were very supportive. Their Historic Preservation Department assisted us tremendously in creating wayfinding and banners that would enhance the integrity of the structure in the spaces, so, the banner was more or less clear. You could see the poles of the stairwell behind it. It didn't mask the beauty of the building.

**Angela:** That's amazing. I would say it explains a lot of the way-finding and wonderful things that you all were able to do with the spaces. So, you already knew about the move because you were involved from the get-go and scouting locations. But how did it go when that move from Varick to Custom House was made more public, even with the staff? But then with the larger public [audience].

**Dorothy:** Oh, yeah. That's a great question. Well, I guess, we understood we had a very active research base, and we understood we were raising awareness in the New York area about NARA, the Archives being there and available. So again, I think this was the brainchild of Diane LeBlanc. It was like we needed to have meetings. We can't do this in the dark. We need to tell the public. So, we had a series of meetings at the Custom House where senior leadership and some New York staff, including myself, were there answering questions. I think the biggest concern for people, you know, were the records are going offsite—are they still accessible? And, yes, they are still accessible. I think in terms of genealogists who were used to using microfilm readers and used to doing it one way, it was a big change from, you know, how do you do your research now? Because it's true. If you're doing research online, you're not scanning multiple pages necessarily. If there's no optical character recognition of the text in the document; the only way you can get at it is a good description. And that's all changing now. In the interim, it was painful, I think, but it was doable. It was just a new way of doing research. We still had a number of people come downtown to our facility to do their research. But the records being on site for folks, I mean, that's a—you guys will probably all talk about that in your oral history—but that policy had to change, you know, requesting documents, having them shipped back in. That was a big change, I think, for staff. You know, no one wants to see the records go somewhere far away. I still feel that way myself. And I wasn't working with the records every day like you all were. So, I think that was a big change for folks.

**Angela:** Yeah. That was. Because we had, I guess by the time I got there, maybe 40 to 50,000 cubic feet on that half of Varick that we had, and it was going down to something more like 7,000 cubic feet. And you remind me, I kind of forgot. For the researchers, we also had a lot more microfilm at Varick Street. And the thing we had and the difference in researching—in some ways when it's digitized, it's easier to search—but we could certify off of the microfilm for census and passenger arrivals. So that was one of the big changes for the genealogists. And I think [for] the public, it all goes back to that. We still had the naturalizations, and we could certify those. But that was a big thing. And see, I had even totally forgot. There were so many meetings though. You're right. Diane I remember having meetings at Varick Street even. She was just very much so engaging with that community.

**Dorothy:** Yeah.

**Angela:** And staff had concerns like you said.

**Dorothy:** Yeah, the staff had concerns. I remember talking to not just the volunteers, but to the staff and to the public and just kind of being out there listening and trying to figure out what their concerns were. I'll say this in terms of the microfilm, Sara Davis was in charge of that whole project, and NARA did a wonderful thing—obviously we didn't discard the microfilm. It went somewhere to libraries and institutions that needed it. When we identified what was not really being used, and there was a lot of microfilm there, we found out a lot of it wasn't really being used that frequently. And things were being scanned. It wasn't like we were not offering it. It was offered in a different way. So that's key. But then when we got rid of the actual microfilm, it went to good places that needed it. And that was important too.

**Angela:** I remember that. I feel like Sara worked on that for the better part of a year. And that was really involved. I just remember huge binders and finding homes for these. But you know what you're speaking to. It's so interesting. It's just archives are changing at the same time.

**Dorothy:** Yeah.

**Angela:** That we're moving from Varick to Custom House. Digitization is really becoming the thing, making records accessible online. And, you know, access can mean a lot of different things. So, it's those two things are happening in tandem. And I feel like staff and public, we're all processing it.

**Dorothy:** Right, right.

**Angela:** And then this big move is happening. And I guess just for people who don't know—I had a question about would we all be expected to move there? And we were. It wasn't very far. It was a couple subway stops away. So, it wasn't the difference between going from A1 to A2 in terms of changing your duty station. But did you have any concerns about the new location at all? I know mostly all exciting things, but any?

**Dorothy:** I mean, it added another half an hour onto my commute. But when I lived in Brooklyn, I had a really great commute. So, moving out of Brooklyn added more time to the commute. I think anyone who lives in the New York area understands you're lucky if your commute is under a certain amount of time.

**Angela:** Yeah.

**Dorothy:** I mean, that's what you get. You're going to have a commute no matter what.

**Angela:** Exactly. So, you felt good about the movie. You didn't have any concerns?

**Dorothy:** No. It was an extremely exciting time to be in the Archives and the idea of it's like winning the lottery. Like we got the building, this is a magnificent building, the Custom House. And we got it, and we got to work there. It's such a big building. I think when we got there, we realized it needed more people, for sure, to make it feel a little more vibrant, but what a brilliant building. So no, it was good. I mean, you know, I had to deal with the commute before.

**Angela:** I was going to say, well, you're a great person to ask because you saw the breadth of possibilities of other spaces that the move could have gone to. Jay Street-Metrotech in Brooklyn or wherever. So, of all the spaces, this was the one, and you were very excited about it.

**Dorothy:** And for the public, there were multiple subway lines. It was completely accessible to the public if they wanted to come there. Yes, it was at the tip of Manhattan. But you know.

**Angela:** Every train goes there. Buses, everything.

**Dorothy:** It's a natural fit. I mean, and we had all the records for the Custom House and the Custom Service, you know, the oldest agency. It was a fitting place for the Archives, for sure.

**Angela:** Definitely. Well, I'm glad you all were able to secure the space. And I'm sure you spoke with Sarah about this. But maybe this will speak to a little about the type of transition things you all did on the public program side. You all had an exhibit in the rotunda of the Custom House, *The World's Port*, things like that. But if you want to shift a little bit to what opening the Custom House was like. And the spaces.

**Dorothy:** Sure. Yeah. So, opening the Custom House was a very exciting October of 2013. I know, right? 2012?

**Angela:** 2012.

**Dorothy:** October 2012. And you know, the computers were still being connected in the research room, and we had this event with our Foundation that were helping us promote it. And, Angela, I just found those pictures of when Marvin Pinkert came with the Foundation,

like, two years prior to the building where we're all wearing the hard hats and walking around. And then there was a gala to raise awareness of the Foundation board members. And so we had another event, with not just the Foundation and their board, but with family and friends of the Archives. And David Ferriero was there. And he fully supported—he had come on as the Archivist [of the U.S.]—and he fully supported the New York office as a former Director for the New York Public Library. But he was there. There were speeches, and it was around the rotunda of the building on the second floor, where we were able to put this beautiful *World's Port* exhibit, which Sara and Chris worked really hard on, and Lisa Royce. We had a fabricator who came in and who helped us with the other spaces, helped us with this space and the exhibit. Ideally, the building only wanted it up for a short time around our opening, but the public loved it so much because it was all about the Custom Service, and it was all about maritime history in New York, in Lower New York, where the building is surrounded by the rivers. So, all of the records there reflected the history. And I mean, it was a beautiful exhibit. The building actually let us keep it up longer than we originally planned for. So that was up. That was a great way to draw people up to the third floor. We had our little NARA cart where we had our discovery sessions and had a staffer or a volunteer directing people up. So that was a great way to get people up. But when we had our opening, we expected to open the office the following week or so, and then Hurricane Sandy hit, and then Lower Manhattan was closed down for a while due to flooding not at the Custom House, but at other places and the subways. So, we lost momentum unfortunately, with public awareness. And we opened in February 2013.

**Angela:** Yeah, that was bad timing.

**Dorothy:** Bad timing. And for some reason or another we didn't get the funding to do more marketing. I did some media pieces, worked with local TV stations and newspapers to let them know we were there. But I don't know what happened, but we didn't seem to get the funding from the Foundation that we needed to do marketing in Lower Manhattan. There was a discussion about putting wraps in the subway, and even little signs in the subway, working with the city to place banners in front of space, working with Downtown Alliance to do marketing. But the funding wasn't there, so it became more of a word of mouth. And through the genealogy and education system and the research group that was in New York.

**Angela:** Yeah. And it's also just, it's a such a quiet time in New York for the opening. So, I remember that being a little quiet, too, after the big buildup. But I guess shifting gears then to think about those 10 to 12 years of Custom House. Eventually, though—it kind of ends up being a soft opening in February—but eventually there's such a robust public programs

presence, your footprint in the building does expand. There are things like Night at the Museum. But I don't want to lead this too much for you. I just want you to talk. Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Just successes and major accomplishments while at Custom House beyond that opening era?

**Dorothy:** Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Angela. When we got to the Custom House, all that external outreach kind of was directed to on-site programming, and we knew that was going to happen. Our staff still went out to conferences and did some presentations and did still work with Ellis Island, but our goal was to bring people in. So, there was this great gallery exhibit called *New York on the Record* that Sara Davis was in charge of, and she curated a rotation every year of originals as well as facsimiles to tell the story of certain records. But she always tied it to DC. So whatever DC was promoting, we were promoting in New York with a New York slant. So that gallery was constantly changing. We had field trips signed up, professional development signed up. We had our active genealogy series. We were doing other special events as possible. Starting in 2014, there was a push for an annual Night at the Museums in Lower Manhattan. I worked with the Downtown Culturals Group to promote Lower Manhattan institutions, of which there are many, and of which you usually have to pay. But at Night at the Museum that one night you get in for free, which we were always free. But it was a great way of bringing people downtown because people would go up to the Museum Mile by the Met and be up there for a museum night. This was the complement to that in Lower Manhattan. So that was a great opportunity to get funding again from the Foundation, bringing in historical characters, setting up pop-ups in the rotunda, having little demonstrations in the Custom House, in the Learning Center. We had Susan B Anthony, we had Matthew Henson, we had Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and Eleanor Roosevelt. We could go on and on, but we had a lot of people there. That again, we used our records to promote their story, but to promote that the Archives had all this, and it was for people of all ages. And then we'd set up genie programs. Where again, they were there all-day doing research.

So, there was a very active vibe going on at the Custom House. And in the meanwhile, GSA saying, expand your footprint. We'll let you. So, we got extra cases from I think it was Atlanta when they were getting rid of some cases. So, we had them shipped to New York, had them rewrapped with New York on it, put those in the hallway, and then I was able to secure funding for a reader rail that Sara Davis created all the content for. I was able to secure funding for an exhibit in the basement, which we rebranded as the Lower Level Gallery and worked in conjunction with the [National] Museum of American Indian to do this absolutely gorgeous treaty exhibit. The pillars were wrapped, and it was all the East Coast treaties that spoke to the partnership between DC NMAI [National Museum of the American Indian] and the

Archives, as well as New York NMAI and the Archives. Those were like the golden years. And the public could use those spaces which we were using for public events prior to their buildout. We did a genealogy event, a massive genealogy event in the basement. Trevor Plante came from DC. We had people from all over visiting and coming to some of these programs. But as the years went by, we were able to get the funding to really make it nice for them. I think one of the pivots or the highlights would be having the National Conversation in New York, the National Conversation on Women's Rights, in partnership with the [National] Museum of American Indian, we made that happen as a beautiful event. And that was really the brainchild of Maria Marable Bunch, who was my supervisor at one point. But I did the New York piece, and that was a great event. So, some really good things; Night at the Museum went on for six years until it was canceled in 2020 because of the pandemic.

**Angela:** So, we'll get to that very soon. A lot of things change. I remember I was going to ask about all those National Conversations which supported *Amending America*. Now the treaties exhibit, *Be It Remembered*, is that still in the lower level of the Custom House?

**Dorothy:** That's a great legacy for New York. And that's a great legacy of our partnership. I was able to secure the transition of that. Both the reader rail to [GSA] the building, *Be It Remembered* [the exhibit]—NMAI I took that over because they do exhibits. But we were also able to transition the Matthew Henson case and banner to GSA because Matthew Henson worked in the building, of course. And he's a great story of perseverance—sometimes not getting credit where credit is due. He's a great story. So, we like to remember him for that. And I think the building is looking to build out a piece on Matthew Henson again for the public to know.

**Angela:** I would say that's wonderful. I love the idea that some of the things you all worked on are still there. The reader rails, *Be It Remembered*, Mathew Henson, which you did a great blog post on him as well. I think, yeah, that's, you know, spoiler alert, the office closes for people reading this transcript, so we're jumping ahead. But I love the idea that a piece of that lives on there. That's really great. And I think you should be really proud of that. That's amazing.

**Dorothy:** Thank you.

**Angela:** I guess we've been talking about this a little bit, but do you want to talk about maybe the ways that the Archives, the New York Archives, changed over the time while you were there and or ways that your role changed? Before we get to the closure bit or anything else you want to say about the like you said, the golden years, or successes?

**Dorothy:** The golden years. Well, you know, my golden years are different from somebody else's golden years, right? So, it's like you said, you have to think about what's going on elsewhere and in and around. When I had the conversation with John Celardo, he was like, oh, it's all about genealogy. So, it was all hands-on deck for genealogy. But when I was coming to the Archives, it was all about digitizing and access online. So things changed for those reasons. And I think the Archives tried their best to meet the needs of the public, these changes had to happen to stay current with what's going on in the archival profession and in terms of research. I mean, things changed when we got the space because now school groups want to come in and actually tour our space and see what we have and learn, whereas you couldn't. I did have a few busloads come to Varick Street, but it was not the same experience. So, you know if you build it, they will come. They will come.

**Angela:** Yeah.

**Dorothy:** And they did.

**Angela:** I would say I think Custom House—they were, they were used to receiving school groups and visitors of that nature because of the size. And. Yeah, and even just things like evening programs where it was easier to do that there and that type of thing. Is there anything else you want to say? Again, to me it just seems like such, well, I'm hearing it through this oral history. You laid the groundwork and planted the seeds of Varick, and it was such a successful jump to Custom House. Is there anything else you want to say before we get to the pandemic and closure?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. I'll say as each head of the agency changes, there's always a new directive. I think when the transition came under David Ferriero and the regions, more or less stayed the same, but the transformation was very different for NARA. And all my supervisory lines changed and up the chain for everyone, and I think the plan for the regional system changed so dramatically but was kind of left on its own for a little too long because there was so much going on in Washington, and I understand it, and I get it. I think there are reasons why you need people to focus on certain things, because there's so much work to be done. But you can't have one person do it all with the same effort right? So if I didn't have Chris and Sarah, I would have been able to do, very limited amount compared to what the three of us did as our, what we like to say, our small but mighty team. We also couldn't have done it without the support of the archival side. The staff—you guys helped us out with so much. I mean, you and Sara did all the college outreach. So, yeah things changed. Things always will change. I think



it's important for maybe management to kind of keep coming back to say, what else do you need as you are changing? And that maybe could have helped us maybe navigate the pandemic better.

**Angela:** Yeah. I feel like we can talk about this too, if you want, but we don't have to. We just had a lot of staffing challenges and things over the years. I think like we had alluded to before, we were never as fully staffed as we were at Varick. And honestly, we needed the same or bigger staff for Custom House just because of the multiple floors and that type of thing. So there were definitely challenges, but I feel like also just to highlight the positive, I think one of the things that was great about our office is how much we did work together, like you just said, and collaborated and supported each other when we needed to and had the opportunity or the work allowed and that type of thing.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. And I just want to reiterate senior management was also, they were very supportive. But with the transformation, the regions were, I don't know that the transformation hit the regions the same way. Do you know what I mean? I mean, David Ferriero was very active in New York. He would come in, I'd see him sitting in the lobby and he'd be like, hey, Dorothy, and I was like, oh, my gosh, what are you doing here so early? But he would pop in. Deb Wall came, senior staff would come and visit, and they were interested. But again, there's so much to be done. I think, like you said, we just needed more staff because we were set up to be this beacon or this model, and you can't do it with limited staff, with limited funding for sure, or limited attention.

**Angela:** Yeah. So, I guess we'll just get to the closure part. So, do you want to talk about that a little bit and how you found out and just the impact?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. So, before we get to the closure, I mean, the pandemic hits.

**Angela:** Oh, yeah.

**Dorothy:** So, we're active. We're planning for a Night at the Museum. We're planning for all the spring programs and then the summer camp stuff, and then beyond. And all of this comes to a screeching halt in March [2020]. And luckily, our new supervisor, Nick Coddington [for Chris, Sara, and I] on the program's education exhibit side, he's like, we're going to pivot and we're going to do virtual outreach [for education and public programs]. So, we actually were as busy and sometimes busier doing virtual outreach. And so, Chris and Sara were dedicated strictly to education. I was still doing outreach in programs in a different way. I morphed some

education outreach into that. But I was able to pivot very well into that world. I mean, I missed the Custom House a lot, and I missed being there with, you know, you just miss it. The virtual aspect of things was a great way to solve a problem [of being closed due to COVID]. I did programs about the building, about the Daniel Chester French statues in front of the building with GSA and NMAI. I did programs that were commemorative anniversary historic events. I was able to help the Archives with their first virtual 4th of July program in DC, which I only had done support when I was down in DC, but I had never done a program for the 4th of July. I created this Virtual Road to the Declaration of Independence, which was great, again, using our historical character connections. And so, we were able to do things we had never thought to do. Again, the agency was able to pivot in that respect. And then I became part of this team that did the National Archives Comes Alive Young Learners program and rolled out numerous programs again for kids of all ages. We found people were watching from not just New York, but from DC, from Nebraska, from Alaska, from France, and so on.

People were connecting in ways that were just unimaginable before [the pandemic], and I think that sets the stage for the closure of New York, because on some level, you have your four, five staffers that are on the other side of the house—archives—and the three of us on public programs, education, exhibit, outreach. We're doing work virtually. Your guys are doing work virtually. You're on communications now, so you're really doing your work virtually. So, New York is closed, and I think people start thinking when David Ferriero retires and then Deb Wall retires, it becomes when, when [is] New York closing? Which again, was a terrible shame in terms of timing because the A250, I mean, New York, we have the earliest records. New York was the first capital. It would have been great to showcase stories from our space. We still can do it now, virtually and from afar. But it would have been really perfect. I think we were set up to succeed in the virtual environment, but when again, new leadership came in and it had to be on site only, that was a terrible loss. With, you know, not allowing us to continue reaching thousands of people, you know, the masses that we were reaching online coming back in. We had to build up that audience again, and people were not ready to come back in.

Some people were—some students and their teachers were, but the majority of people were not because they now had four years of doing all their research and public programs from the comfort of their own home. It's just like the movie theaters are having trouble getting people to come back into the theater. So, they're finding new ways to entice the public back in. And I think we were told to go in and open the Learning Center and sit there, but we did not have the funding to support marketing it. We did not have the funding to support big names to come in and bring awareness back that we were open. From our program side that wasn't going to work. And because the Archives were only just starting to open one day a week for

the public, that wasn't going to work for the public either. And your side fundamentally did not have enough staff. I think we all thought the office could close. I think we all thought of ways to extend the office and help before it closed. Maybe digitizing records, maybe doing more programming. Maybe bringing in our local partners. But there was obviously a decision to let the office go. So, it was let go.

**Angela:** Yeah. I feel like we always knew that was a possibility. Right? So maybe not surprising, but is there anything you would have done differently with the closure if you're open to speaking that?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. I mean, the one thing I'll just say is if we understood how quickly it was going to happen, I think we all could have pivoted again like we did in COVID. And again, the staff were passionate about their work. Love the records. I know it sounds crazy, but we all love the records. And we were supportive of each other as a team. I think we all would have done what was needed to be done if we knew what was happening, you know? As sad as the office is closing, we had created a great space. It was a great investment. I wish it could have lasted longer. It's a shame that more people didn't know about us, but I think the people that did know about us knew we were a gem, a hidden gem at that. And I guess I would say anyone who's looking for their histories and their records and for programs, you can get it all online. You can still email us. You can still look at our YouTube channel. It's all still there, so that will live on for sure. It's just I am grateful that I was able to be there at the beginning and there at the end to transition and take some of the final pictures of the empty spaces, as heartbreaking as it was to see those spaces, and then to see you, Angela, and the rest of the team come in again and be there every day working and cleaning up and saying, "Do you think our federal partners want this or this," offering stuff up to people so it wouldn't go to waste. I think that was really important.

**Angela:** I agree and I'm really, I have to say I'm really proud of all of us and how we wrapped up the time there and proud of what we did there. But I think kind of like always for our little team, we rose to the challenge, and you and Chris especially with getting us out of there on time.

**Dorothy:** Yes, yes.

**Angela:** Do you think NARA should still have a presence in New York?

**Dorothy:** I think NARA should have a presence in many places. What it is, I don't know. I don't know if it's, like, a special event here and there. I think NARA has to utilize their spaces better. You know, if they're going to do an event, do it around where a building is currently. It brings awareness. I think the public needs to understand more of what the archives is, what we have beyond our founding documents. I think they need to see their founding documents in person and go to DC and witness that in person. I think if they haven't held an original record of significance in their hand, whether it's in Mylar or in gloves. They're missing out because it is a thrill. And I think most people, once they understand the breadth of the records that we have from piracy cases in 1685 up to *Titanic* and to modern-day records that are all significant parts of our history. I think it's a shame that more people don't know about us.

**Angela:** I agree. On a related note, what do you wish people knew about the New York office? And I guess you could apply that question to now. Or, even though it's closed or looking back, what do you wish people knew about the office?

**Dorothy:** I mean, the office in general, I think the staff gave it their best shot and fought for the records and for the public as best they could. I hope they understand that their records, their New York history, their New Jersey history, the records that we held, the records of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that were part of the holdings of New York, are still in the Archives and accessible. Yeah. I hope they come and do research, whether it's in person, in our other facilities, or online.

**Angela:** That's great. I feel like we were also always a good little advertisement being there at Bowling Green for the rest of the field system, too, because we would get people who pass through from Ellis Island, and a lot of those people would be from all over the country. So yes, with you, I feel like always a fan of the field and go out to your closest location. I wanted to ask you this because you worked at both places. Is there anything you wish people knew about working in a field office, as opposed to Archives I or Archives II? I guess that's more [for] staff.

**Dorothy:** Yeah. I mean, the regions we're known as like generalists, like you had to know everything to generally do your job, and then you might be focused on something because you had an interest in it or were tasked with something. In College Park, the work was very focused, which is great. And focusing on something is great. It's harder to be a jack of all trades. I feel sometimes because, you can only do so much, and then you have to go to this side and do this, you know? But I enjoyed both. I really enjoyed both.

**Angela:** Oh. That's amazing, I love that. Is there a memory from your time at the New York Archives of which you're fond or something that sticks out to you?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. I have two memories that I am really fond of. One was when we started to do some of our student programs. There was a girl who came in. She had made a diorama of the National Archives in DC, and she said, I live here in New York, so I want to bring this in, and we put it in the lobby for a little while. We didn't, you know, obviously we couldn't accession it. It wasn't a federal record, but we showcased it for a while, and she made it because she had come for one of the field trips. And she had such a good time learning about the Archives. And to me that would have been me as a little kid. I'd be like, how can I make a model of it? You know, it's just it's so wonderful and pure. And I love the passion of it. So that was a great memory.

**Angela:** When was that? Dorothy? I'm sorry.

**Dorothy:** That might have been 2006. Like, that was early on when we were doing a lot of different things. We did a lot of congressional briefings and such. We also did a lot of open houses; I did an open house at Federal Hall, which was a lot of fun. Beautiful space again. But we made an open house for veterans. This is my best memory in the sense of the joy of people when they find out what you got. This one veteran came up to me at the end of the program, was so excited. We had done a series of films that we showed, a series of films. We had these little events, and these veterans were so excited because they had just come back from serving and they were, you know, they were in a bad place, and when we told them their records were going to eventually come to the National Archives and be accessible to them, that was a joy. But then just the fact that we had this program for them, I mean yeah, I still feel good about that program to this day.

**Angela:** Amazing. And that was at Varick Street or?

**Dorothy:** That was at Varick Street. And that might have been around 2006, 2007 again.

**Angela:** Oh, that's amazing.

**Dorothy:** Yeah.

**Angela:** Are there any other accomplishments from your time at NARA that you're most proud of?

**Dorothy:** Umm, boy. I mean, I'm proud of the work I did. I'm proud of the people I encountered and became friends with. You know, that's golden, right? To say you have friendships that last, I mean, I'm just grateful. I'm so grateful that NARA saw an opportunity with me, and then let me do the next thing, and then let me do the next thing, and then supported me along the way. And I mean, that support definitely came from my direct supervisors, of which I've had many, and they've all been wonderful. So, I'm just grateful for my overall experience.

**Angela:** That's wonderful. I'll say we're grateful too, and we're glad, and I feel very lucky to have worked with you and to join the office when I did. I kind of don't want to ask this one, but I will just in case. Is there anything you want to say? Just because our last days at Custom House were weird, but is there anything you want to say? Or not weird, but you know. Anything you want to say about your last day in physical space? The office?

**Dorothy:** Yeah, it was, it was sad. It was sad. You know, I was stunned, and yeah, maybe someday I'll get over it, you know? I'll try. I'm trying my best, but it's sad. It's sad. It was all right there. It was done. It was beautiful. And it only lasted for a short time, but. Yeah.

**Angela:** Yeah, it was weird to see it again as an empty space, I think. Right?

**Dorothy:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Angela:** Well, so we can end on a happier note, but I had to ask, I'm sorry. Is there anything else you would like to add to the interview? Any anecdotes, words of wisdom, anything parting that you'd like to leave us with today?

**Dorothy:** You know, words of wisdom. You know, talk to your colleagues, find out what they know, share, and work together. Because that's how I had a successful career. I mean, I have a lot of ideas. I wanted to do a lot, but a lot of my success, I worked at it, but I worked at it with the help of my colleagues.

I do want to share one quick story that Joan Young told me once when I first started in New York. And again, this kind of goes back to the wonder of what you can find in the archives. And this speaks to like, don't stop searching for an answer and asking questions. I would go to Joan and ask her questions. And as I was standing there one day, I said, can you tell me something that is like a great story you have? And she says, yeah, there was this man. He comes in and he says, I work in this building. I don't know what you people do here. What are

you doing here? I walk by your office every day to go to the cafe. And I said, today I'm going in and I'm going to ask the question. So, he comes in, he asks the question, and she goes, do you have five minutes? And he goes, yeah. She goes, okay. When did your family come to this country? And he gives her a date, and she goes, who was it? And he gives her his father's name. And she goes, what's his name? Where is he from? She asks him all these questions. She goes, all right, you give me five minutes. And he goes, okay. And she goes, don't leave, don't leave. Give me five minutes. I gotta go in the back. So, she, you know Joan, who she's like, don't leave. Don't leave on me. So she goes in the stacks, she comes back, she tells me, she says to the guy, is this your father? And she shows him a declaration of intention, which some of them have a photo on it because of the timeline. They took photos of the person wanting to become a citizen. The man breaks down and cries, and he she's like, so, is this your father? And he goes, oh my God, this is my father. And he starts crying, and she goes, "this is what we do here. This is what we do." And he's like, I can't thank you enough. And through his tears, he tells her his family was so poor when they came to this country that he never saw a photo. They never had photos of family members. He never saw a photo of his father that young. And he kept saying, my father was so young and healthy. He was such a good-looking young man. And she's like, let me make a copy for you. And now you can take this and go. And she told me that story. And to me that's the passion. That's the heartwarming story. That's what we're in it for. That's what NARA is all about. And why our work has been so important over the years. So, my words of wisdom: talk to people, ask questions, and don't lose that passion.

**Angela:** Well, I can't think of a better note to end on than that. That's a brilliant story, and I love it. It's been so wonderful both working with you over the years but talking with you today. So, I want to thank you so much for agreeing to do the interview and taking the time. I'm going to end the recording now if you hang on just a second. Thank you, Dorothy.

**Dorothy:** Thank you, Angela.