



NATIONAL ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

Page Putnam Miller

January 7, 1986

at

American Historical Association Building

Washington, D.C.

Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross (National Archives employee)

Basic summary abstract prepared by Donnie Eichhorst (National Archives volunteer)

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Page Putnam Miller. Washington, D.C. January 7, 1985. Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross.

Since 1980 Miller has been director of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History (NCC), an advocacy group supported by thirty-five organizations.

In her interview Miller discussed the activities of the NCC, concentrating on matters relating to the battle for National Archives independence. She recounted her role in coordinating various endeavors and in seeking legislative cosponsors for the independence bill.

She explained the roles played by Ed Gleiman, John Parisi, Steve Daniels, John Duncan, Bob Brink, Gerald Carmen, Stan Falk, Richard Hewlett, Marion Morris, Ira Shapiro and Mary Ann Chaffee. Also she told of the Archives persons with whom she had contact: Bob Warner, George Scaboo, Claudine Weiher, Jim Megronigle, Trudy Peterson, Dick Jacobs, Frank Burke, Jill Merrill and especially Bob Brookhart.

In addition, Miller gave her views as to why legislators such as Sen. Roth, Sen. Stevens and Rep. Kindness took the positions they did.

The interview, approximately 80 minutes in length on two cassettes, was conducted in Miller's office in the American Historical Association headquarters. The two parties in the taped conversation can be readily heard.

Abstract of interview with Page Putnam Miller in Washington, D.C., on January 7, 1985.

Interviewer: Rodney A. Ross

Tape length: Two 60-minute cassettes (both sides of only one cassette)

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

QUESTION: Background prior to becoming director of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History?

ANSWER: Page Putnam Miller was born in 1940 in Columbia, South Carolina. In high school she participated in both legislative forums as well as debate competitions. She won the award for outstanding debater in South Carolina. In these debates she learned to focus on key issues and not get side-tracked.

Miller attended Mary Baldwin College, a small Presbyterian liberal arts college. She worked a year and then went to Yale Divinity School. There she met Dick Miller. The two of them were married after a year; she never completed work for a degree in divinity.

After her son was born Miller decided to do graduate work in history. She completed her Ph.D. in American history at the University of Maryland in 1979.

After teaching part-time Miller began looking for a full-time job. She had developed organizational skills as a volunteer serving on regional and national boards as a minister's wife. She was a member of the National Board of Churchwomen United, which was involved in citizen-action legislative programs.

The National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History (NCC) also depends on volunteer efforts, since Miller is the only paid staff member.

Jim Gilbert, Miller's dissertation adviser, suggested she apply for an educational fellowship. During those interviews she met Mack Thompson, executive director for the American Historical Association (AHA). Thompson offered her the position of NCC director in 1980.

The committee's work at that time focused on the employment crisis for historians and on the transfer of historical skills to jobs in the public arena.

In 1981 Mack Thompson retired and Sam Gammon became executive director for the AHA.

That was the time of sharp Reagan budget cuts: the 20% RIF for the National Archives, the proposed 50% RIF for the National Endowment for the Humanities. It became important for the historical profession to get involved with the legislative process.

The by-laws of the NCC were changed in the summer of 1982 to reflect this changed interest. At about this time the Society of American Archivists was brought into the NCC coalition. 35 historical and archival organizations currently support the NCC.

Miller mentioned the book What Color Is Your Parachute? and told how she was able to shape her job to her own interests.

In 1982 there was some concern at the thought of scholars becoming involved with legislation, but Sam Gammon supported the idea as did a number of people on the council. Also, early victories were helpful. By December 1982 the new by-laws were approved. The first boost came with legislation to establish a historical office for the House of Representatives.

QUESTION: In terms of commitment of resources how did lobbying for National Archives independence fit in with your overall responsibilities in the last two or three years?

ANSWER: Over 50%. Although Miller monitors ten to twelve legislative issues, the central ongoing issue was that of the National Archives. Whereas other issues had constituency groups which took the lead in various questions, there was no central office pulling together concerns relating to the National Archives. The NCC policy-making board felt this question was where their greatest impact could be felt.

QUESTION: Where would the central nerve-spot be in coordinating the independence efforts?

ANSWER: Probably Miller's office. Congressional offices had many other pressing pieces of legislation to divert their staffs.

Under Gerald Carmen at GSA the staff at the National Archives was not allowed to participate openly on Archives independence matters. It was a touchy situation. There was strong interest from Rep. Glenn English's subcommittee, but there was a lack of communication between the House, the Senate, the Reagan administration and GSA. The NCC was therefore able to serve as a broker of information.

Once Carmen left GSA, the Archives staff members accelerated their activities. Thus you have to look at the independence issue in different stages.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Charlene Bickford?

ANSWER: Charlene Bickford was a member of the Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage. Her group battled against budget cuts involving the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Bickford's activities predated those of Miller. Bickford had a grass-roots constituency built from state advisory boards for the NHPRC and other documentary editing programs. The National Archives issue greatly affected NHPRC, so Bickford and Miller became joint partners in many ways.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Ira Shapiro?

ANSWER: Pete Daniel wrote the first independence bill, which was introduced by Sen. Morgan. When Sen. Morgan was defeated in his re-election bid and Pete lost his staff job, Daniel turned to Ira Shapiro to carry on the Archives independence fight.

Shapiro worked for Sen. Eagleton. Shapiro may have done slight revisions for the bill Sen. Morgan had introduced. Sen. Eagleton introduced this bill in 1981. Shapiro became the key staff person working on the bill on the Senate side in 1981, 1982, 1983 and into the spring of 1984, at which time Shapiro left to join the Mondale campaign.

Miller discussed examples of what Shapiro had done.

Shapiro's secretary was the keeper of the bill cosponsor list in the Senate; Miller kept running tabs on which Senators became cosponsors.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Marion Morris?

ANSWER: Marion Morris was Sen. Mathias' legislative assistant. She worked closely with Shapiro.

When it comes to action on the floor of the Senate, a single Senator can put a "hold" on a bill so that the bill is not voted on. Morris singlehandedly dealt with this matter in tracking down the source of "holds" and in helping to negotiate solutions.

When Shapiro left to join the Mondale campaign, Morris became the key staff member on the Archives independence question in the Senate.

Miller characterized Morris' role in very positive terms.

Sen. Mathias was a Republican; he could do certain things which Sen. Eagleton as a Democrat could not.

QUESTION: Why did Sen. Roth vote against the majority committee report?

ANSWER: An aide to Sen. Roth had told Miller that Sen. Roth really was not opposed to the Archives independence bill. For political reasons, however, he did not want to appear to be supporting independence for two new agencies. Supposedly he felt that the Archives bill would be able to pass without his support.

Although Sen. Roth did not support the Archives independence bill, he did not strongly oppose it. Had Sen. Roth wanted to do so, he could have blocked the bill in any number of ways.

He supported the Archives independence bill to the extent that he allowed hearings to begin. Also, he allowed the report to come out and he signed off on the measure to bring it to the floor for a vote.

QUESTION: What was the reason for Sen. Ted Stevens' opposition?

ANSWER: Miller indicated she wasn't sure. Three Senators voted against the bill; possibly Sen. William L. Armstrong was the third. The measure would normally have come under Sen. Stevens' subcommittee. Ira Shapiro prevailed upon him to allow the full committee to take up the measure. As with Sen. Roth, Sen. Stevens' opposition was not intense.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Ed Gleiman?

ANSWER: Gleiman has been Rep. Glenn English's legislative assistant. He probably has a better grasp of Archives matters than any other Hill staff member. On various issues he's often been a source of information. His commitment to an independent National Archives goes far back. Rep. Jack Brooks wanted the Archives independence bill to come through his own subcommittee rather than Rep. English's subcommittee. Gleiman then had the position to tutor Rep. Brooks' staff on the issue.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

The House version of the independence bill largely reflected Gleiman's concerns, especially regarding authority for the Archivist.

QUESTION: Identification of players. John Parisi?

ANSWER: Parisi served as Rep. Tom Kindness' legislative assistant. For part of the period in question Parisi served as legislative assistant for Rep. Frank Horton, the ranking Republican on Government Operations. Parisi wasn't able to help the independence movement when he was working for Rep. Kindness, but when he was detailed to Rep. Horton, he was able to be extremely supportive.

QUESTION: What was the basis for Rep. Kindness' opposition?

ANSWER: Miller was unsure. Rep. Kindness made the analogy that Congress would be like a permissive parent to allow an adolescent (i.e., the National Archives) independence before the adolescent had had a chance to demonstrate it could act responsibly. He felt independence should come more gradually.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Steve Daniels, besides being the husband of Maygene Daniels?

ANSWER: Miller didn't know Daniels well. John Duncan had had responsibilities as Rep. Frank Horton's legislative aide, but then in the summer of 1984 Duncan took a job with Sen. Roth's staff. Duncan was the key aide on the House Republican side with whom Miller worked. By the time Daniels had taken on some of Duncan's responsibilities on Archives matter Miller was no longer involved in the same kind of things for which she had worked with Duncan.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Bob Brink?

ANSWER: Bob Brink was an important person, since he was the staff member for Rep. Jack Brooks on the Archives independence issue, although another staff member more had Rep. Brooks' ear. It was Brink who coordinated the House hearings. It was Brink who was the contact person concerning cosponsorship. Brink and Charlene Bickford had had a political relationship in Virginia.

QUESTION: Was it by accident that the Senate rather than the House played the key role in getting the independence legislation moving?

ANSWER: No. Real support for records of government came from Sen. Mathias and Sen. Eagleton. Nonetheless, for the conference report Rep. Brooks, too, played a key role.

QUESTION: Which National Archives officials were most closely active in the independence issue?

ANSWER: It was important that Miller be knowledgeable about what was really going on at the National Archives. Bob Warner very early let his key people, such as Claudine Weiher and Jim Megronigle, know it was OK for them to give her information. This happened early in 1982.

The Archives staff could not talk freely to members of Congress. Miller was able to take on that role.

There was a team of people at the Archives working on the independence issue, including George Scaboo and Trudy Peterson. Two key people with whom Miller was in contact were Dick Jacobs and Bob Brookhart, especially the latter. Frank Burke, too, played a key role.

QUESTION: You spoke of strategy sessions. What were these?

ANSWER: At various times Frank Burke would hold brown-bag lunches at the NHPRC office for interested people. After Gerald Carmen left, some of these strategy sessions took place at the National Archives building.

QUESTION: Who were the different GSA people involved, and what roles positively and negatively did they play?

ANSWER: The role of Gerald Carmen is important. With his support of the Smithsonian study he actually helped the independence issue. Miller discussed what was valuable about the Smithsonian study. She took the attitude that for many of the issues raised the only real answer was independence for the National Archives.

Carmen also helped the independence issue by appointing unqualified people to top Archives positions, without consulting Bob Warner. The Washington Post reported on this development; Miller used the article to good advantage.

When Carmen left for Geneva in February 1984, Ray Kline became Acting Administrator. Kline long had been sympathetic to the National Archives; he didn't mount any real opposition to the independence movement.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Stan Falk?

ANSWER: On April 12, 1983, at the annual meeting of the Society for History in the Federal Government Miller spoke with Falk, who had just retired. He offered his help in visiting legislative assistants in search of Congressional cosponsors for the independence bill. Miller and Falk went together to Hill offices one day a week. Falk's background as a military historian proved helpful. In Senator Goldwater's office, for instance, Falk was able to talk with the legislative assistant about military records.

QUESTION: Did the two of you work on the House side, too?

ANSWER: Yes. Also, Miller indicated she's become reinvolved in Archives matters since she's now visiting Senate offices on the matter of the confirmation of a new Archivist.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Richard G. Hewlett?

ANSWER: Hewlett chaired the Archives independence committee for the Society for History in the Federal Government. He was chief historian for the Department of Energy. He now works for History Associates, a historical consulting firm. He wrote letters to key members of the House and Senate.

QUESTION: Step-by-step from Sen. Morgan's 1980 introduction of an independence bill to President Reagan's signing of S. 905 in October 1984, what were the key events in the achievement of independence for the National Archives?

ANSWER: The key events are just the major hurdles for any piece of legislation.

For a bill to come to the floor you have to have a hearing. The majority of that committee must report it out affirmatively. Then the bill must get to the floor and be voted on. The same thing has to happen in both houses. Then differences between the two bills must be reconciled. Regarding Archives independence, every one of these steps took pressure and nudging for them to happen.

Even though Ira Shapiro supported independence, he'd sometimes get side-tracked by other issues. Thus even Hill friends of independence required prodding.

Given the fact the bill was not considered a priority item by most members of Congress, Miller viewed her work as one of educating people. She recounted her activities in obtaining cosponsors. In the Senate Sen. Roth brought the bill to the floor for a vote because it had 50 cosponsors.

In the summer and in September and October Miller and her friends felt themselves to be in a time squeeze. The fact there were so many cosponsors was crucial.

After the Conference Report was written and the measure went to the Budget Committee, it was a good thing that the Budget Committee reported there would be no additional funds needed.

Another Archives person Miller wanted to mention was Jill Merrill. Merrill had many press contacts with whom Miller spoke.

For the past several years the Washington Post on July 4th had editorials on Archives independence. Things such as these were very important. All the various roles were important.

QUESTION: How did it happen that Joe Wright came to write the Reagan administration's position on this issue?

ANSWER: The letter was an OMB statement.

QUESTION: Why did the Reagan administration give its okay to the passage of this legislation?

ANSWER: Miller suggested OMB had problems with GSA.

QUESTION: Identification of players. Mary Ann Chaffee?

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

ANSWER: Chaffee worked for OMB on issues relating to the National Archives and GSA. She felt there were strong arguments in favor of independence. She felt the best argument for National Archives independence was that it would remove the Archives from the political environment of GSA. Her only concern was that the National Archives would be a small agency and would be unable to maintain adequate funding.

Consequently the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) adopted as a major concern for 1985 adequate appropriations for the National Archives.

OMB had the perspective that allowed them to appreciate some of these concerns.

QUESTION: Did any other Reagan administration officials play a role?

ANSWER: Ed Meese at the end of the episode. Also, Republican Senators like Strom Thurmond and Mark Hatfield prodded OMB for the right letters.

Then, too, there was support from some of the presidential libraries.

QUESTION: You wrote a November 1984 article for "Perspectives" and talked of the need for effective lobbying activities. Do you have copied of your briefing sheets in your files?

ANSWER: The primary briefing sheet was really refined over the campaign. We asked supporters to help improve the fact sheet; a number of people gave pointers, like keeping it to pages.

The format for the fact sheet was as follows: statement of the issue; phone number to call for cosponsorship; background material; five or six key points for independence; statement concerning the current status in the legislative process. Also, there was a current list of cosponsors, which legislative assistants always looked to first.

After a while it was decided to put the fact sheet on NCC stationery, which showed the thirty-five supporting organizations beginning with the American Historical Association.

One key question which kept being asked was how much the legislation would cost. To answer this point Miller, with the help of people like Claudine Weiher, developed a one-page fact sheet on the subject.

Also, Miller carried with her xeroxes of articles and editorials from the Washington Post, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the New York Times, the San Francisco Examiner, etc. to give to legislative assistants to make their job easier.

QUESTION: American Historical Association records eventually go to the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress . . .

ANSWER: True, but the NCC isn't a part of the AHA. Miller indicated that she didn't know what she'd be doing with her files, especially since she was still using them.

The House bill had 70-odd cosponsors, but cosponsorship wasn't as important there as it was in the Senate. The reason was that Rep. Brooks was sympathetic to the issue as soon as he realized there was support for the matter in the House. But after the hearing Rep. Brooks told Archives supporters that he didn't want to spend time on the matter unless the cosponsors in the House let him know there really was support for the bill. Thus cosponsorship in the House was important, too. The fact that Bob Brink learned that a couple of Congressmen a week were signing on as cosponsors served as a subtle reminder that the legislation was important.

QUESTION: On which occasions did you feel the need to marshall the forces for grass-roots letter-writing campaigns?

ANSWER: One time was when the bill had many cosponsors, but it had not yet been brought to the floor. There was some letter-writing targeted to a particular state to get a cosponsor from that state.

Some of the letter-writing campaigns were earlier, in 1981 and 1982, dealing with the RIF and dealing with NHPRC funding.

Phone calls were important, etc. The NCC built a file of people who had influence in different offices. One example was AHA president, Arthur Link, who had taught Bill Bradley at Princeton, calling up Bradley and asking him to sign-on as a cosponsor.

QUESTION: Would you have done anything differently?

ANSWER: I don't think so. One rewarding thing for Miller was the forging of the alliance of historians and archivists. The Society of American Archivists and Ann Morgan Campbell, as well as NASARA, the organization of state archivists, were helpful and supportive.

Miller saw her role as: keeping people informed, working on cosponsors, and facilitating the work of staff members.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

Page Patson Miller

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I,

Page Patson Miller of Silver Spring, Maryland  
(name) (city and state)

do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of a personal interview conducted on January 7, 1985 at the ARA headquarters in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the National Archives. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The tape recording shall be available to all researchers upon its being accessioned by the National Archives.
- (2) The transcript shall be available to those researchers who have access to the tape recording, as soon as the National Archives' processing schedule allows sufficient time for transcript preparation.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the National Archives to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives.

Page Patson Miller  
Donor

Richard M. Vane  
Archivist of the United States

Jan 7, 1985  
Date

Jan 16, 1985  
Date