NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with PAUL LEWINSON

Former Director, Industrial Records Division

Biographical Information Pertinent to the Interview

Born, New York City	1900
B. Litt, Columbia University	1922
London School of Economics Academic Diploma in Sociology	1923-25
Ph.D., Robert Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government	1927
Instructor, Ohio State University	1927-29
Research Fellow, Social Science Research Council	1929-31
Honors Examiner in History and Political Science, Swarthmore College	1931, 1933-37
Assistant Professor, Swarthmore College	1931-32
Historical Research	1932-33
In charge, Papers of William H. Taft, in Library of Congress	1933-35
National Archives, Deputy Examiner	1935
Acting Chief, Division of Labor Department Archives	1938
Chief, Division of Labor Department Archives	1938
Director, Industrial Records Division	1947
Retired	1960

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with PAUL LEWINSON

Former Director, Industrial Records Division

Interviewed at Alexandria, Virginia

May 18, 1973

Philip C. Brooks, Interviewer

BROOKS: Paul, I would like to go over with you some of the topics of which I sent you a list, but mainly to have you talk about the things which you think are the most important and with emphasis on these topics as you think they justify it. It's always a good way to start a conversation to ask what led a person to the Archives and what special competence and interest he brought to it. Here again we have the printed record to a point.

LEWINSON: Pretty much up to the point as I remember.

BROOKS: This is the famous Archives register of 1937 which gave the ladies' ages and therefore was a controversial pulication. Last year I went down to Chapel Hill and spent several days and went through the papers of Dr. Connor and there was a letter from Dr. Jameson recommending Paul Lewinson, I take it, on the basis largely of your service in the Manuscript Division.

LEWINSON: I was not employed by the Manuscript Division.

BROOKS: I wondered; this says you were in charge of the Taft papers.

LEWINSON: I was in charge of the Taft papers for the Taft family. At that time the Taft papers had not been turned over formally to the Library; they were on deposit there. The family had given Henry Pringle the job of writing the official biography, which I think I should say is not just an official biography by any manner of means. The family gave him an absolutely free hand and he hewed to the line, and it was for the Taft family that I was working.

BROOKS: In the Manuscript Division?

LEWINSON: In the Manuscript Division. I had a cubicle there in the old building. I met Dr. Jameson, I think probably through my father-in-law, Abraham Flexner.

BROOKS: Jameson in these letters said that Dr. Flexner had been a student of his at John Hopkins way back when.

LEWINSON: And, of course, with that introduction, Dr. Jameson and I would greet each other when we met each other there, and I think we were at his house several times on P Street or Q Street right off

Rock Creek Park. We met his daughter over there once, a very attractive person who somehow disappeared from sight after that.

BROOKS: Incidentally, I was in the Manuscript Division, not working for the Library, but for a special fund that Dr. Jameson had to work on: the Writings on American History. I worked with Grace Griffin and I was around there at the same time in 1933 to '35. He used to scare the daylights out of me. A great big, tall, impressive guy.

LEWINSON: He was a very impressive person.

BROOKS: A very pleasant one.

LEWINSON: Yes, he wasn't so much stern, I thought, as courteously correct and as soon as you sensed that you got a great feeling of warmth from him.

BROOKS: I met him under good auspices as you did. I was close to Samuel Flagg Bemis, who had worked for Dr. Jameson for a number of years, and introduced me to him. Did you have a special interest in the Archives that made you come down there?

LEWINSON: No. My case is a classical case of what brought people to the National Archives when it was established, the period when it was established. After I had finished my book, Race, Class, and Party, and as a result of my acquaintanceship with Professor Robert C. Brooks, a political scientist at Swarthmore College, who was the Chairman of my Social Science Research Council Committee, I had a year of Swarthmore College filling in for two people who were on leave of absence, one in the Political Science Department and one in the History Department. When that year was up, I was without a job--this was in 1932. Jean, through her connections in Washington via the Brookings Institution and all our Brookings friends and so forth, many of whom graduated into Government jobs, as was the intention of Robert Brookings in founding the school, got herself a job with the Children's Bureau. We had no choice but to come back to Washington because that was the only job in the family. In saying that we had no choice I don't mean we had any reluctance about it at all. Both of us were very fond of Washington because it was a beautiful and interesting place to be as it was even before the New Deal brought down all the people that it did: scientists, social scientists, activists, people at the labor union headquarters, who made it a very interesting place as well as a very beautiful place at that time. It was at that time maligned as a provincial town, in which society consisted only of politicians on the one hand and cookie-pushing diplomats on the other. There was a lot more to Washington than that, although not as much as later, but there was lots more there to attract people of the sort who went to graduate school and in the social sciences, history, or the hard sciences so-called. The Brookings experience was such a wonderful experience that many of the people that we knew there had stayed behind in Washington, it was really like coming back home. There was no reluctance there. After I had been in Washington for some months devoting myself at the Library of Congress to going through the Benjamin F. Butler papers--he had fascinated me when I was working on the Civil War and Reconstruction periods--not only for his military exploits but for his investigations into limitations-of-hours laws in Massachusetts, and his interest in radical reconstruction. I thought he

was a very fascinating character of whom there was no biography except a very poor popular one at that time, so I started working on that, but that of course, was without recompense. This was a speculation on the possibility of finding a publisher if I ever finished it. The same was true of the book that I actually did finish and get published, and everything looked so black in the academic field that the combination of poor prospects as far ahead as one could see and the attractions of Washington made me wonder whether I could find something to do in Washington. Having historical/political science training at that time, political philosophy rather than practical politics, did not give me a very good background in an environment in which the demand was for people in economics, sociology, education, and so on. When after six, seven months or so, Frederick Manning, who was head of the History Department at Swarthmore (where I had served as a substitute for a sabbatical-leave person, as I said) told me about the Pringle-Taft biography project and said that the family wanted someone to help Pringle out by going over the papers and getting them into some sort of arrangement, and providing Pringle with some sort of critical guidance as to what he might skip, where the best material lay. Was I interested in the job on a half-time basis? I of course said yes; considered myself lucky, and was lucky. After about a year and a half of that, having taken somebody else too to help the job along and to speed it up, another unfortunate of academic background caught by the depression like myself, it began to dawn on me that the Archives building was going up and I found working with the Taft papers an interesting job and I said to myself, in so many words, pointing out the hole in the ground at 7th and Pennsylvania, "This is where I want to go." So I started a job-hunting campaign, and when the Archives staff was first appointed I began to lay lines to get a job there. That, I think, is the practical story of how I got into it.

BROOKS: Part of the reason for my question was not only to find out about your background, but because occasionally I argued with some of our colleagues on the staff who said that the people in the National Archives were a bunch of frustrated historians anyway with no interest in the objectives of the place--an entirely negative attitude. This bothered me because I had a certain amount of research experience in archives before, and there are a good many people that had experience in working with papers and had some relish for that kind of business. And there were a good many.

LEWINSON: I think that that was a rather unfair way to put it. There was very little in the United States at that time that would make anyone think of working in an archival establishment. The State historical societies and the State Archives (of which there were already some) whether rightly or wrongly carried a certain stigma among professional or trained historians, even young ones. I was at that time (my age can be calculated by reference to the century) I was 32 in 1932, there was a certain stigma of amateurism and antiquarianism in the derogatory sense of the work about that kind of thing that kept people away from it. Many people have gone into professions or into lines of business under much worse psychological auspices and the historians and social scientists who saw a chance in the Archives when their conventional career seemed indefinitely closed to them, believed that this would be a good and interesting and useful place to work. As a matter of

fact (if I can anticipate a little bit--it won't upset the tape recorder) I used to wrangle at a later date with Phil Bauer who definitely felt he had in his own estimation lost caste by going from history and the academic world into the Archives where he was much bothered by an administrative/ bureaucratic ambience, which would have bothered him in the academic world too, and where he felt he could not in any way be creative on his own but was simply the servant of other creators. I at first used to keep trying to encourage him by saying to him that this is real honest-to-god useful work that somebody has to do, as in everything else only good people with devotion and adaptability could do it well, and he had nothing to be ashamed of. Later on I grew rather impatient with his attitude, answering more sharply that it was to some extent what you made of it although there were in the early days considerable limitations on your making anything of it creatively. Nevertheless, there it was and it was a perfectly honest living. Were he and I geniuses that we were entitled to feel indignant because we did not have more than a perfectly honest living?

BROOKS: He is one of the people I used to argue with, he and Schellenberg, on this point. This whole consideration has a bearing on the relationship that Kahn used for the title of his presidential address to the Society of American Archivists, "The Archivist and the Scholar." Somebody said his title should have been "The Archivist and Other Scholars." In that address, which I think was as late as 1970, he said no child ever looked up to his father and said, "Daddy, when I grow up I want to be an archivist." As I remember Ernst Posner wasn't present and when I later told him about that he said to me, well, no small child ever looked up to his father and said, "Daddy, when I grow up I want to be a nuclear physicist," and I think the point is well taken.

LEWINSON: A reply could be made to your opening from another angle: that no child ever looked up to his father and said, "When I grow up I want to be a shady real-estate dealer." And the young people of college age of the past few years have been giving some emphasis to that point of view.

BROOKS: Well, let me get back to you. Your first enterprise in the Archives was working on the Preliminary Survey, right?

LEWINSON: Yes.

BROOKS: And you started right away in the Labor Department?

LEWINSON: Yes.

BROOKS: Was this on account of a particular interest that you had in the Labor Department?

LEWINSON: My recollection is, Phil, that somebody, and I don't remember who, asked me--I think Labor, Interior, and Agriculture were still uncovered--and I may not be accurate in that, but there were several major agencies that were not yet covered by a deputy examiner--somebody asked me whether I had any choice and I chose Labor because I had some connections there. I knew people,

a lot of Brookings people in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. I'd met others through Jean and, you know, the circles widen out from a nucleus. Also it seemed like a Government agency with a great deal of contemporary interest--especially then--an agency of growing importance that had come late--later than anything similar in most Western-civilization countries where there had been Ministries of Labor or Labor and other things much earlier. An I just thought that was a good place for me to start.

BROOKS: It has occurred to me in the course of doing this job that the original assignment of deputy examiners to agencies was extremely important, and sometimes it was not particularly based on background--it was a matter of chance. Now Shipman came directly from the State Department: there were a few others that had some direct connection like that.

LEWINSON: And Herman Kahn had been in the Park Service, that gave him connections. I might perhaps say, in further defense of my choice, that at Ohio State University, where we had been before all this, and where Jean was an instructor in economics and I in the history department, one of our colleagues out there tells us a story about hearing from a student out there that is really striking: "Miss Flexner [she was a Lucy Stone Leaguer], Miss Flexner's economics course is a lot of history, and Dr. Lewinson's history course is a lot of economics."

BROOKS: What did you think of the way the Preliminary Survey was conducted: Was it a well-conducted enterprise?

LEWINSON: On the whole I would say it was a well-conducted enterprise, yes. But, of course, we get now into a critical area of National Archives history. You know, of course, the famous story--I don't know whether I should waste tape repeating it--you can tell me . . .

BROOKS: Maybe I don't.

LEWINSON: . . . of Willoughby, Schellenberg, and me, and perhaps Leavitt, I don't remember, finding in the course of our survey work in Agriculture, Commerce, Treasury, and Labor, that we were all confronted with the subject of statistical records and the apparatus that went with them at that time--the punch card, the summary tabulation, the intermediate tabulations, and so on. We thought it would be a useful thing--do you know this story?

BROOKS: Apparently not.

LEWINSON: That it would be a useful thing to put together our own thoughts on the subject based on what we had gathered from observation in our respective departments, which were the principle statistics gathering agencies of the Government--i.e., the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, all the Agricultural statistical bureaus, and the Treasury Department with Income Tax, Customs, and so on. That would enable us, in addition to survey work--the filling out of those elegant cardboard sheets that Tom Owen was so proud of--to deal with what seemed to us important: what special archival problems are raised by this mass of punch cards, tabulation sheets, and other documentation that went into the statistical work of the Government? So we did do that, and

the four of us wrote a fairly lengthy essay on the subject, not trying to settle it or anything, but saying these are the problems, these are the considerations on the one hand and on the other; here is the bulk, the variety of publication and use, but on the other hand there are the possibilities of unused results. And we were sternly rebuked by Mr. Hyde for having wasted our time on this when we could have been out counting filing cabinets. This is something that the four of us--Schellenberg in Heaven now--I'm sure have never forgotten. It still angers me. Now, in these early days there was no encouragement to do anything except fill in forms according to the prescriptions. This, I think, had something of a lasting effect on the National Archives. People were detoured from doing anything that was not formally prescribed, that was not itself measurable and weighable, and that could be construed as being a presumption on the part of juniors into fields that should be reserved for the higher-ups.

BROOKS: You know at the same time Ed Leahy, Neil Franklin, and I were working as special examiners on this program. Neil and I were talking the other day about one time when we used to have meetings and go over our reports. You used to work with us one time because I remember your saying, "Throw 'em out, throw 'em out." Hyde said, "Well, if we both stick to certain ways on certain kinds of items three times in a row, we ought to go the opposite way on the fourth so we won't be setting a precedent." And we all thought we were trying as hard as we could to set precedents, to arrive at some point of view on certain kinds of records. This kind of thing was very frustrating and we remembered it.

LEWINSON: That's interesting, that's an incident that I don't know. It's a fact that today, and I inquire about this from my boys at the Archives every now and then, that even today there is no Archives policy on what to do with punch cards.

BROOKS: Yes, we always battled with that one.

LEWINSON: And it is true that it would have helped the profession and the institution, as you have indicated, to have some thought devoted to policy--not prescriptions, but methods and standards. I have a feeling (you must ask somebody who is now functioning at the Archives whether there's anything to this) that because no approximation of a procedure that would be useful in thinking about and deciding upon what to do with these old-fashioned statistical records was arrived at, they are now having quite a struggle with machine-readables, for which there might have been some methodological suggestions had the punch-card and tabulation sheet problem been worked out before. And again, I'm not thinking of having established, out of our genius, a mechanical means, the four of us who were involved in this, by which you could run records through a machine and on one side would come out retainable and the other side disposable. I'm thinking only in terms of the things that you take into account in appraising this type of record, that type of record, the other type of record; accessioning policy, or if you prefer to call it disposition policy and procedure, in that sense still does not exist in the profession.

BROOKS: Of course this is something I feel keenly about.

LEWINSON: I feel very keenly about it.

BROOKS: At different times part of my job was supposed to be to draw up standards of records disposal. (I saw this in one of the annual reports the other day) and I never figured out--I don't think anybody has ever figued out--how to define them in the way of very precise standards.

LEWINSON: No, it can't be done. But you just have to have, for the instruction of people who are coming up, and to whom you will leave the job, some indication based on experience and thought as to how you go about it--and how you go about it in your head, not how you go about applying a template of some sort.

BROOKS: You remember one time I wrote an article about what records should be preserved and Philip Bauer wrote a response to it, of which I've forgotten the title--this was around the middle 40's--in which he advocated a policy that was generally the way a prospective value of a certain kind of record, or whatever use may come along, was to be measured against the cost of preserving them.

LEWINSON: Oh yes, both of those pieces were then published as information circulars. Those are two landmarks in the literature.

BROOKS: They illustrate what a difficult problem we have before us. In the summer of '37, Paul--the Society of American Archivists was fairly new and I was Secretary--I was fairly active in cooking up the program of the first annual meeting, which was held in Washington in June of '37. I don't remember how certain people got onto that program, but I do remember that we hoped that we could get people from different fields to come and give their idea of the value of certain types of records.

LEWINSON: Fields, academic disciplines, fields outside of the Archives, yes.

BROOKS: The problem immediately developed that they had no idea what we were confronted with in this mass of records. But one of those people was Morris Copeland who talked about statistical records. I wondered if he was a friend of yours.

LEWINSON: We knew him. I don't recall being involved in that event, no.

BROOKS: It was quite an interesting paper. It didn't result--and it couldn't result--in our saying, well, always keep this kind of thing and always dispose of that kind of thing. That simply wasn't in the cards.

LEWINSON: This makes me go off on another tangent, if you permit tangents in this procedure, and that is another feeling that came to me very early in my National Archives career, if I may use the word. That was the very sharp split for the first few years, two, three, four years, perhaps, between the Archives establishment and the Archives--how can I say it without being invidious to anyone--well, between the staff and the line, that's the conventional nomenclature. I've discussed this with people who were

interested in administration generally. The Archives was a new type of agency for the Federal government, and not very well based on any local experience that had preceded it. There were, therefore, not a great many people who had any practical experience in archivy as such. Some had worked with records, to be sure--Leland and Jameson and the people who did the European source-material surveys.

BROOKS: Much of the European experience really wasn't applicable.

LEWINSON: It wasn't. It was a somewhat different type of activity they were undertaking. There were very few people who had had line experience working with records--and staff experience, perhaps even fewer. But when the Archives was established, because it was a spanking new organization, it was equipped first--quite naturally, no malice in this whatsoever--with a staff, and later with a line to whcih you and I belonged in the early days. The split between those two groups, as illustrated by this statistics thing that I spoke of before, was really a great handicap to the National Archives in the early stage of its development. It meant (again as the statistical thing illustrated, but not that alone) discouraging the line from being much more than clerical workers. That had a permanent effect and also created discontent. At that time it didn't cause much turnover, becuse there was no place to turn over into. But I think some of the turnover in the Archives later on had its roots in a hangover of this atmosphere. I have a feeling, also, that on the part of some of the members of the staff, as distinct from the line, there was perhaps unconscious--perhaps in some cases conscious--jealousy and fear of the line. Because these obviously were the people who were going out and messing around in the objects and artifacts that were our concern while they "administered." I remember once asking Walter Shepard when--after leaving Brookings--he became dean of the college at Ohio State, "What does a dean do?" You might ask the same question about what do staff officers do. They were cut off from reality. We had our noses buried in reality, and that scared them. There was a long hangover from that in National Archives history, I think.

BROOKS: You know I've read all the annual reports while the Archives was independent, while those reports amounted to anything, and I've looked at a certain number of the records of the Archives and some of the Buck papers and Hyde papers in the Library of Congress. I can't help feeling--and I don't mean to be critical of people who can't defend themselves now--that outside of Connor the staff people really didn't understand what the Archives was about or what it was intended to do, or what its problems were.

LEWINSON: Or even what it could do.

BROOKS: Hyde was apparently hired with the idea that we were going to develop an information center. That was his kind of experience. He was with the Municipal Reference Library in New York, and the information center at the Packard Motor Company, and the National Chamber of Commerce. I don't think that he had any concept, and perhaps there's no way he could have had, of what we were going to run into when we went out in the agencies and got into these masses of records. Price was a lawyer down in Florida who wanted

a job. Page was very good for Congressional relations but I've interviewed him, and he never made any pretense of knowing what the Archives was about.

LEWINSON: He made no pretenses, that was something that could always be said for him.

BROOKS: Hyde, in the first of December 1934, wrote a memorandum on the organization of the staff, in which he listed the Divisions of Cataloging, Classification, and so forth very much as they were in the Library of Congress and as they were first set up in the National Archives. He had about five lines in that memo which referred to the Custodial Divisions. Very little was said about what they were to do, but he looked on them just as custodial divisions. And this jibes with what you say about not expecting any results of individual interest or creativity to come out of them. Fred Shipman emphasized very greatly the fact that the divisions were not originally given any responsibility--in fact they were prevented from having any responsibility--for reference service in the records in their custody.

LEWINSON: And for description and arrangement, also.

BROOKS: Right. One result of all that was that in the course of four or five years the whole initial setup of the functional divisions and the staff offices that were originally set up had to be changed. This committee on finding aids--finding mediums, which I mentioned to you in a letter--was set up in 1940 to concern itself with the best types of finding mediums or the best concept.

LEWINSON: I'd forgotten being a member of it, but when you recalled it to me when you wrote I do remember sitting in, I think mostly in Buck's office.

BROOKS: The original committee was set up in 1940 and reported in January of '41. Price was chairman, but according to the record Buck drafted most of the memos. You were on an advisory committee on finding mediums that was set up after that initial committee reported in '41. At the same time that the committee reported in January of '41 on the program of finding mediums, which is by and large pretty much what it is now, the committee wrote a confidential memo signed jointly by Price and Buck, to Connor, recommending the Classification and Cataloging Divisions be abolished to carry out the memo.

LEWINSON: Oh, that I never knew.

BROOKS: I didn't either until I started looking into the records of the Committee. And Buck wrote the memo. That was in January and in April the Classification and Cataloging Divisions were abolished and their staffs disseminated among the divisions; except for a coordinating unit which included Ester Chapin, Almon Wright, and Carl Lokke and lasted for over a year or so. Well, in essence then the only constructive thing Hyde ever did was to write that memo on organization, and the whole thing had to be undone in the course of four or five years. As far as I can see Price's

role was pretty much to keep things going, a mediator. I was put in charge of a records-administration program by Buck, and I had the direct responsibility, although I was the assistant director under Price. Before we get to that let me ask you if you want to say anything about Connor as an archivist. Was he a good person to head up the Archives in its first stage?

LEWINSON: Well, a now deceased friend of ours who was visiting Sweetbriar College (she was an economist, a labor economist) was asked by one of the members of the staff of the College what kind of work she did. She gave some account of what she did. The reply came back from her vis-a-vis, "I see that you are statistical; I am romantic." Now I take for myself the label of a romantic. My impressions of Connor are purely intuitive ones because this ties up with what we have been saying. One of the unfortunate things about the original administrative setup was that from the line, a small group of staff people. Therefore, necessarily my impressions of Connor must be impressions, but they are very strong impressions of a very courteous, earnest, sympathetic, and intelligent person, whom insofar as I could feel that I was working for him, it was a pleasure to work for and who I regret did not make himself more felt among us "operating" people--what we have been calling "line," as contrasted to "staff." The Archives, I think, might have gotten off to a better start--

BROOKS: Oh I think so.

LEWINSON: --If he had not been so isolated. Because he was such a attractive personality and attractive not in the sense in which, you know, the professor is popular who kids the students along, and is not very strict about standards, but attractive because of his strength--the strength that you felt in him.

BROOKS: I think we missed a portion after we changed the tape, so I'd like to have you say it again. You were speaking about the political endorsements that were called for and I remarked that I thought most of those that the professional staff had were pretty perfunctory, because most of us were recommended by some professional person that Connor respected. You were going to say something about the politically-oriented people that did come on the staff and the significance of that.

LEWINSON: Yes, there was an admixture of people whose political qualifications, shall we say, outweighed their professional qualifications or interests in the matter, and they were something of a dead weight.

BROOKS: You were also saying that the fact that the Archives was set up in the middle of the Depression enabled it to employ people who otherwise would have gone into teaching jobs, but this was an advantage.

LEWINSON: That was always cited as being a piece of good fortune for the Archives and I think it was. Not necessarily because of the individuals involved, but because this was more or less a select group of people for an institution of this sort.

BROOKS: Well, some of the original employment of politically-oriented people came--I judge from reading the correspondence of Connor--from his feeling that Congressional relations were highly important, especially to a new institution. He had some experience with the North Carolina legislature. And this, for example, was why Thad Page was one of the first people hired from a Senator's office.

LEWINSON: That turned out to be a very good choice, I've always felt, in every respect; I've always had an enormous respect and affection for that man.

BROOKS: He was very candid, as you implied a while ago. One of the first things he said when I interviewed him was that one of his first jobs at the Archives was when he was assigned by the Archivist to take the form that was used in the Preliminary Survey and go through it and see if he couldn't simplify it. He said he didn't know a damn thing about that form or about Archives or making a Preliminary Survey, but Connor asked him to do that and he did. He thought that some of the Deputy Examiners resented his doing that and they had good reason to because he didn't know what it was about.

LEWINSON: I didn't know he was mixed up in that.

BROOKS: Nor did I. But probably what he did was good, because he's clear-headed.

LEWINSON: I have clear recollection of--without being able to be specific--I have a clear recollection of his acting in minor crises in a courageous and honorable fashion.

BROOKS: I agree fully and I knew him very, very well.

LEWINSON: He was an asset in that respect, certainly. I remember, for example, the occasion when Herman Kahn and I determined that it was time for us to protest our (I think at that time) P-4 or P-3 classification as heads of divisions. This was in view of the fact under the Lacy regime that there were many rumors going about of a pending reorganization in which people like Herman and myself might be frozen into something that we couldn't advance from, because we were at the moment underclassified. We just, not jointly of course, each separately--you can't make joint appeals of this sort--appealed to the Civil Service Commission for a reclassification, and eventually got it. This was more or less the beginning of the upgrading of the divisions. Herman and I, in talking the thing over, thought after we had sent in our separate appeals to the Commission (and letting the front office know, of course, according to protocol), that we ought to let the other division chiefs know about this. Because if he and I were reclassified upward before the reorganization took place--whatever form it might take--that might protect us from having been sidetracked into some dead end. That might protect us from such a consequence, but it might work to the disadvantage of the other division chiefs. So we called an informal meeting in my office

and explained to the other division chiefs what we had done. We simply told the bare facts and said we think that you should know about this because what happens in our case may adversely or otherwise affect you and you should be in a position to take whatever action you wish, having the facts before you. But I recollect--I don't know whether anybody else did anything or not--what I recollect, however, is that I had hardly gotten further than the first sentence of this when Page, who was there as the division chief of Legislative Archives, got up and said in a very friendly way, not in a disapproving way, he said, "I think it would be better if I were not present at this." And I know exactly what he was doing--he was in an awkward position between keeping confidence with us and breaking it with his staff superiors because he was also the Administrative Secretary, or vice versa, and he wasn't going to be caught in that situation. I'm sure he never said a word about the fact that such a meeting had been called. On that I would stake my soul.

BROOKS: It's a typical example of the kind of discretion and honor of his character.

LEWINSON: Yes, an honorable gentleman.

BROOKS: Paul, to get onto sort of a chronological approach because we cannot possibly cover every step chronologically--were there problems in the first accessions from the Labor Department? Did you run into resistance in the transfer of records as was the case in State, War, and Navy?

LEWINSON: No.

BROOKS: Is there anything else that you think should be said about accessions and the results of the Preliminary Survey?

LEWINSON: Well, you single out the Labor Department here in asking whether there were any difficulties about accessions. Actually there were no accessions from the Labor Department until much later in the game. You might as easily have asked the question, and it would have produced very different results, with respect to NRA, which folded in the middle of all this, but had been surveyed, of course, but it was still within that period. There again we had no difficulty because they were folding. They were glad to be relieved in a reasonably orderly fashion.

BROOKS: Did you do that survey?

LEWINSON: Oh yes. We later held the records. The NRA job was a very good job, I think. I don't think it accessioned excessively and I don't think it lost anything of great value. As a matter of fact, I would like to go on the record, since I have been rather on the critical side here, as saying that just as I was always disappointed with Phil Bauer and his attitude towards archivy as being simply the position of a servant or butler to other more honorific occupations, that in later years, especially after the New Deal liquidation and the World War II effort of

the National Archives, in an unsympathetic congressional atmosphere, not an agency with any sex appeal, having no lobby, having all the difficulties to meet that we did have to meet during the first years. We did an enormous job that everybody connected with can affort to be proud of. The disadvantages were: a century and a half of neglect of the records, no sex appeal, an atmosphere in the United States not terribly conducive to spending money for this kind of organization, the rather bad history of the National Archives in its early days as a morale-building organization acquiring an esprit de corps, the Depression and its tendency to make appropriations less liberal than they otherwise would have been, the drain on personnel that would have been available to the National Archives that was instead absorbed in the social sciences particularly by the New Deal agencies, and then the period of preparation for World War II and World War II itself. When you take that list of adverse conditions under which the Archives began its functioning from 1934 to--what shall we say--'45, '46, '47, what the National Archives accomplished is really staggering. I once said this to Ernst Posner, and he agreed with me.

BROOKS: It's true.

LEWINSON: The liquidation of the records of the New Deal agencies was an enormous job and it was well done. On World War II, the "putting to bed" of records of War agencies was an astronomically sized job and it was pretty well done--very well done. Lots of special finding aids were prepared and our reputation for service was high.

BROOKS: I think that perhaps the biggest thing that's often overlooked is that from the very beginning the Archives concentrated on good reference service to the agencies and to the public, and kept up our standards.

LEWINSON: Well there's been a period--more or less after my departure from the National Archives--in which I get the impression, at least, of dissatisfaction in the academic clientele. But I don't know whether that's warranted or not. At any rate, it would be a new phenomenon because the academic world did not flock to the National Archives until after the war to any considerable degree. And still does not as much as it should.

BROOKS: Let's get back if we may to the beginning of Dr. Buck's regime as Archivist. I would like your reactions, either now or later, on him as an archivist.

LEWINSON: Well, when he succeeded I think a general sigh of relief went over the place, because it had been feared of course that some deserving Democrat would be appointed to the job, and the place would suffer as a result. But he turned out to be something of a trying character. There was a lot of growling about him after that, after he was appointed. I shared the feeling that he was a rather poor judge of people, for example, in his acquiescence in the antics of Portner and Rifkind. I somewhat

raised my eyebrows about Lacy and although there are people who generally agreed with me, my generation of archivists seems to feel that Lacy wasn't too bad a character, although a little bit on the adventurous side.

BROOKS: I would say quite so. How much lasting effect do you think all that Lacy episode left on the Archives?

LEWINSON: Well, that I don't know. It strikes me as possible that it may have prolonged the period during which this bad division, this mutual distrust of staff and line continued. I say that strikes me as being a possible consequence. I wouldn't like to state that without a lot of evidence that you can't get because it's in people's minds and not on the record. And, of course, the fact is that it took the Archives somewhat longer to shake down to a fairly permanent organizational form. There was a period of confusion there when all these reorganization plans were being secretly discussed.

BROOKS: The Annual Reports say every once in a while that the organization plan of such and such was continued or was carried forward or was completed or something.

LEWINSON: It hasn't stayed put since I left either. Apparently five years is the average life of any organizational form for the National Archives.

BROOKS: In the forties it was about two or three years. As you know I was all mixed up in that because I got different assignments. I was frequently being moved around. One of the first things that Buck did was to ask me to come down to his office on detail to write a report on records administration because I'd made some noise about it in articles. Leahy was interested too. It appeared that the Archivist needed to have some role in the guidance of what we called the early phases of the life history of records because it had so much influence on the body of records that resulted. I was put in charge in January of 1942 of the Records Administration program. This difference between staff and line, as you refer to it, was to me a very personal thing because of the position I was in. I felt that all the Division Chiefs were opposed to everything Dr. Buck did that they didn't like, because they were not all in sympathy with Dr. Buck. They opposed the records administration program generally. I dveloped a sort of defensive complex, althout I suspect the Records Division Chiefs were not as united as I might have thought. I do remember your telling me that the Division Chiefs didn't have any ill-will toward me personally but were trying to get rid of my job. Some of the other boys said things a little more bitter than that. I remember Kahn said, "Somebody around here has to be the Devil's Advocate."

LEWINSON: I've expressed myself on this a while ago. It seemed to me that the job of dealing with records as subject-matter, or records considered as originating in a more or less related group of agencies or a large agency, should mean a total problem of dealing with it, that to divide the functions or records management or records administration on the one hand, as we understood the term, and all the other functions was just as illogical as

the old business of an accessioning division, a description division, catalogue division, research division, and reference division. I still maintain the view as a matter of theory. You must, as I'm sure you will, discount what I say because I have now as I did then an interest in this--a bureaucratic interest if you will. Nevertheless that is my feeling.

BROOKS: Well, the initial mistake as I saw it, as soon as I got well acquainted with the situation, was in setting up the special examiner's office separate from the accessions division and separating accessions and disposal. They are part of the same thing.

LEWINSON: Yes, that is going back to Plato and Aristotle on this topic.

BROOKS: Well, as I told you, in Hyde's initial memo on organization of the staff the problem of disposal of records just was not foreseen. So, when the lists started coming in from the agency an office of special examiners was set up to handle it.

LEWINSON: Well, it was a natural reaction, Phil, let's be as generous as we can. It's a natural reaction when a crisis of this sort arises to say "What can we do about this?"--the same way the records management administration thing came along. A further point on the latter setup is this, as an expression of my philosophy--not as God's truth: When records management got into the business of forms control, forms design, etc., that seemed to me to be entirely outside of Archives policy and something on which a competent core of technical people already existed--the management people, some associated, some not, with the Bureau of the Budget.

BROOKS: Well, my feeling at the time I was in charge of the Records Administration Program and you were pretty categorically opposed to it--you remember I had a file expert in the office to advise agencies on setting up file schemes. She was a capable gal and was later bought out by the Army. Somebody by the name of Lewinson wrote a memorandum commenting upon this concept titled: Wobbleblack versus Pendaflex. I still have a copy of it, I enjoyed it very much.

LEWINSON: Yes, I remember. I remember the title--I would remember that title.

BROOKS: My feeling was that you actually felt that what we were doing was not part of the archivist's job. Some of the other people that opposed it opposed it more for organizational reasons, or because they were opposed to the Archivist's image.

LEWINSON: That may be, I wouldn't know. I can speak only for myself.

BROOKS: Well, under the Lacy regime I was made Records Appraisal Officer and had final authority for accession and disposal jobs. It was during the war that we started talking about the staff and line in more or less a military sense. That was probably brought in there by Irvine. Lacy was interested in that and I was supposed to be a staff officer. It never seemed to me that we really achieved a valid distinction between

staff and line. What I was doing as Records Appraisal Officer in taking final action on these jobs was a line operating activity, and the same thing in other functions.

LEWINSON: These distinctions are pretty apt to be blurred in process anyway.

BROOKS: That's for sure and they certainly were. Subsequently, I went to Buck to be assistant to the Archivist, and Schellenberg took over Records Administration Program for a few months. I don't know yet how I would characterize his point of view toward it. Then later Portner took it over.

LEWINSON: Gosh, I didn't know there was a Schellenberg interlude in there. I'd forgotten.

BROOKS: It was for a short time. But under Lacy, Portner was put in charge.

LEWINSON: Was that because Schellenberg had gone to OPA?

BROOKS: Then Portner was put in charge, yes.

LEWINSON: Yes. That makes chronological sense.

BROOKS: I hope that the conflict of the records administration office going out directly to agencies . . . there wasn't as much conflict in the early part of the records administration program as when Portner had it, and the boys really were on the make to build up that office.

LEWINSON: We were put in a very peculiar position in this respect specifically. We were supposed to know what was doing in the agencies and what records were being produced that might be of interest to us one way or the other later on when they came up for a decision. But at the same time we were instructed during the early part of this episode to have no contact with the agencies except through the records administration office.

BROOKS: Except through that office?

LEWINSON: Yes. Now I do not know whether that was put in writing or just orally but it was surely put strongly enough. It was practically a criminal offense to discuss records from the point of view of accessioning them or disposing of them vis-a-vis agencies except through Portner's outfit. Portner or no Portner that would have been frustrating and ridiculous.

BROOKS: I don't think I knew it, and certainly I wouldn't agree with it. In fact much later when the merger with GSA was about to take place, I talked one time on a panel of the Interagency Records Administration Conference emphasizing my view that anything that came between the archivist (namely the records division people) and the agencies was bad, and that the merger with GSA was going to separate the records administration

activities into an entirely separate staff and was going generally to put a big unit between the archivist and the producers of records.

LEWINSON: If you have the opportunity perhaps you would find it worthwhile to see whether the actual records of the National Archives throw any light and leading on how formal this bar on intercourse between the divisions and the agencies except through Records Management was. How formal it was. I'm quite positive that this was made very clear to us. You might check with Herman Kahn whether he recollects anything of that sort, although he may have already been gone by that time.

BROOKS: No, he was still there. He was there until 1948.

LEWINSON: Yes.

BROOKS: Well, Portner left to go to Food and Agriculture or something.

LEWINSON: Wait a minute, did he go to Food and Agriculture or did he go to World Health, or did he go from one to the other? He's now with World Health Organization, or he was the last I heard.

BROOKS: He went from one to the other. All of them--Lacy, Portner, and Rifkind--were separated in '47 as the result of a rider to an appropriation bill.

LEWINSON: Separated from the National Archives?

BROOKS: Yes.

LEWINSON: I remember that period very well.

BROOKS: There is some indication--people have remarked in various interviews--that at that time some of the same group of people that were or were not responsible for getting that rider put into effect, were working with people on the Hill, opposing Dr. Buck and making life uncomfortable for him. This whole development was leading toward his resignation or retirement as Archivist. Do you know about that?

LEWINSON: No.

BROOKS: I didn't know a great deal about it at the time. In fact, it seems I must have been rather naive.

LEWINSON: I felt that the rider, and all the attacks coming from the Hill, were making things difficult for Buck. Although he and I were on equable terms, I have some feeling that he was not diplomatic enough to come out on top in the struggle against Congress.

BROOKS: No, he wasn't very diplomatic--that's for sure. His relations with the Congress were never quite what they ought to have been--partly for that reason. He left in '48 and went to the Library of Congress, and Wayne was appointed Archivist and confirmed in a week or less. Wayne had been back from the Army as Assistant Archivist for just about a year. So,

Wayne became Archivist in the summer of '48, and brought Bahmer over from the Army as Assistant Archivist. Almost immediately after that, one of the first things Grover did was to send Herman Kahn to Hyde Park. Would you say there was any great perceptual change in the administration of the Archives? Or the character of the place?

LEWINSON: Yes. You know life is complicated--not to be disposed of simply. I thought it was a great thing for Wayne to become Archivist of the U.S. And I think that was the general feeling around the place, at least among people who had been there long enough to know the newcomers--the second and third generations bureaucratically speaking. It was a wonderful thing that this man who had come in at the bottom had worked his way up to the top because he would really know what was involved. It was a recognition of that kind of career which was very promising. Also, I always felt that Wayne was a wonderful guy. I have very specific special reasons for thinking so. The atmosphere around the place, as I recollect it, was very bright. But subsequently to that I learned, mostly from my own subordinates, that they felt themselves isolated in a different sense from the Archivist of the United States than you or I were from Connor in this very early period that we spoke of much earlier this afternoon. I remember one of my subordinates telling me after I'd retired (you know I have lunch with the boys every now and then) that whatever Buck's faults were, if you did a good finding aid, or had an article published, or a letter came in from a searcher saying, "I was astonished and pleased," etc., etc., when that happened during the Buck regime, there would always be a chit from Buck direct to the person down the line saying I think this is fine, this is a good job, a commendable effort, or whatever was appropriate. But you never got anything like that from Wayne. Now, I never felt that way about Wayne, not because he constantly belabored me with chits of commendation, but because when I felt that I needed to see him about anything there was never any difficulty about getting to see him. I always felt in his presence that he was not framing his rebuttal while I was speaking but that he was attentively listening to what I was saying and taking it in. A discussion between us might end by him saying, "No, you do it my way, not your way," but it was always on the basis of a genuine attempt and a successful attempt on his part to understand what it was that I was driving at and to disagree because that was his privilege and he saw problems differently. I always felt that he had this very, very rare power of being able to listen.

BROOKS: That was my experience very definitely with him always. And I'm a little surprised about what you said earlier about people down the line not getting enough personal attention.

LEWINSON: That's hear-say. I am not saying that on my own responsibility. He was a little bit remote because he was a very shy individual. He was not "hail fellow, well met" at all.

BROOKS: Sometimes you'd talk to him and he'd sit and think for a long time. You'd just have to sit and wait while he thought.

LEWINSON: But he was thinking--he wasn't just . . .

BROOKS: But he was thinking constructively--right. He was shy--that's why at first I don't think he was a very good public speaker. I had a good many occasions to see him in that guise and he certainly improved through the years, and he was conscious of that. A lot of people didn't realize that he was essentially a shy person. I think that's right.

Well, he came in '48 and the next year the General Services business came up. There was very little time for any major developments or reorganization either after Lacy left, or before Dr. Buck left, or after Grover came in before the GSA episode came along. Do you have any particular reactions or comments?

LEWINSON: I don't know anybody who wasn't dismayed except for people who said in spite of their dismay (mostly, as I recall it), "Well, it will make it easier to get appropriations, our budget may not be looked at as much in detail and as closely as before." As I remember, Bob Bahmer took that view up to the end.

BROOKS: Well, a good many of us did . . .

LEWINSON: . . . hoped for the best . . .

BROOKS: I think you are right that most of us were dismayed but there was an advantage in fiscal matters. Later, when I got into this job of running the Library, the GSA people were always very good to me. My relations were very good. But basically I doubt that anybody really felt that we belonged in GSA. Bahmer, later when he was Archivist, was purposely put on the spot by the Administrator. He pretty much had to go along with it.

Well, you stayed with the Labor Department Division after it became the Industrial Records Office and had a half-a-dozen other things added to it in the middle forties as I remember it.

LEWINSON: Well, I think in the big reorganization . . .

BROOKS: Which one?

LEWINSON: Well, the big reorganization that Wayne made. Didn't he achieve one reorganization that went . . .

BROOKS: I guess maybe he did.

LEWINSON: Well, maybe not. On this my memory should be clear, but it isn't. It was at the time when this business and this dispute over our job classifications was finally settled. Then came a reorganization . . .

BROOKS: That was in '47, I think, under Lacy.

LEWINSON: Yes. Then it was in '47 that Commerce was added to Labor, and as a result of that, much to my sorrow, Leavitt after a while quit. He felt that he had been put down in the process. And of course, in the

meantime the old Labor Archives Division had acquired the NRA Records, the War Labor Board Records of WW I and so on. From that point on it became, more or less by degrees, the economic center of the Archives except for Interior, Agriculture, Treasury, which were exceptions--but it was a sensible division anyway.

BROOKS: But that Division remained until the Civil Archives Division was set up and Herman was the first head of that and Bauer was made head of it later.

LEWINSON: That was after I left.

BROOKS: You left in 1960, right?

LEWINSON: Yes, in 1960.

BROOKS: Well, what have I missed?

LEWINSON: I don't think you've missed anything.

BROOKS: Is there anything you particularly wanted to say?

LEWINSON: I just hope I haven't wasted a lot of your time.

BROOKS: Well, I am sure I haven't. I just want to be sure, because I think this is all very interesting--there are copies of the Annual Report relating to the reorganizations.

LEWINSON: Well, the last word that I should like to leave on the tape is to repeat what I said to you when we were about halfway through, Phil. And that is considering the disadvantages under which the Archives had to labor, from the time it was founded in 1934 when the legislation was passed until after WW II (until '47), what it has accomplished is an enormous accomplishment. It's a pity that it couldn't have been greater, but of course people will always say that when they look back on bygone times. It's an enormous accomplishment.

BROOKS: It's a dirty trick to ask you a question after you've said what you want to be your final word, but people worry now and then and have worried recently about staff morale. And I'm reminded about the comment Irvine made one time when he and I were both downstairs as assistants to Buck, "Morale is like a woman's virtue--if you have to talk about it, it's already gone." Do you have any specific reactions to this? You started in the background of it.

LEWINSON: Well, old animosities have simmered down, I should think, and people have buckled down to work and the place is functioning as well as any bureaucracy functions. It's been very difficult for any administration of the Archives to do anything to encourage what we may, if you'll excuse the word, call creativity. The longer you don't do it the harder it becomes to do because you attract the kind of people to whom it isn't

attractive to begin with. But all of this kind of discussion presupposes that there is a technique for high morale, and establishing conditions favorable to what I shall continue to call creativity. I don't believe there is any such technique, I believe it is a question of leadership personality.

BROOKS: There has always been a problem between the same division pretty much that you first referred to as between staff and line, that the bulk of the staff were not in positions of authority, and felt remote from the top command. I don't think this is unique to the Archives, but there has always been a certain amount of a problem. I have a feeling that--I wonder if you agree--in the early days, you know, even though there were problems of this sort a great deal was accomplished. There was a certain amount of esprit de corps that arose from the newness of the job, the small size of the establishment was extremely important, and to use a very hackneyed word, the challenge of the job. Whereas now, I think a good deal of the problem may have risen from the size of the staff. It's just too big. And from the fact that the job isn't new anymore. It's hard to maintain that kind of enthusiasm.

LEWINSON: Well, the size of the place, I think is very important because I'm a firm believer in, what is it Brandeis called it, "the curse of bigness." That I think is the principal cause. But, I don't know, where do you go from there?

BROOKS: The current effort at achieving better communications is a big part of it, I think. But I don't know, and neither of us any longer has responsibility for it.

LEWINSON: The newness of it, I think, the fact that the newness hasn't worn off is something that need not be as deleterious as at first blush it would seem because there are so many unsolved problems for which new solutions really are required. I think the leadership might be able to capitalize on that.

BROOKS: Well, it has to a certain extent in connection with the new problems in records administration, later records management . . .

LEWINSON: Well, there are still problems, as we were saying way back at the beginning, of setting up some basic policies that still after all this time haven't been set up yet. Let's pool all this stuff together . . .

BROOKS: In the archives divisions much of the newness has gone, I think.

LEWINSON: But there are a lot of problems that, while old in terms of the calendar are new in terms that they haven't moved over the years and they could still be attacked. But size is a curse, no doubt about that. Efforts are being made; for example, I think, that the Archives' three-times-a-year journal Prologue is a very good periodical. It does give members of the staff a chance . . .

BROOKS: Did you see the new Archives News Letter?

LEWINSON: No.

BROOKS: There are about two issues out so far of the News Letter. I'm not sure what the distribution is. One of the subjects, it occurs to me, which we haven't talked about on which you might have thoughts is the whole business of training. Do you think that the Archives has pretty well solved or gone along towards solving the problem of training?

LEWINSON: No, I don't think anybody has solved the problem of training anywhere. Not in archivy, not in schools of journalism, where my first degree came from, not in medicine, not in the public schools even. That's a never-ending problem. We are far from solving that in any walk of life. To get on to that subject would lead us into general sociology. I should have to make some kind of a crack like "You can't expect training and education to be anything but a reflection of the society in which it takes place."

BROOKS: I think that covers the topics we talked about, Paul, and thank you very much for a most interesting interview.

AGREEMENT WITH THE

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

AS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

I, Paul Lewinson, of Arlington, Virginia, in accordance with the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-110), hereby assign to the United States for administration by the National Archives and Records Service all my rights, title, and interest, including any literary property rights that I may have in them, in the tape recording and transcript of the interview with me conducted by Philip C. Brooks on behalf of the National Archives and Records Service at Alexandria, Virginia, on May 18, 1973.

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

Signed Paul Lewinson

Date Mar 2: 1981

Accepted:

Signed Robert M. Warner
Archivist of the United States

Date March 6, 1981