

RG NAA - LEGACY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT Page 1
THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2007

INTERVIEWEE: ROSE GABEL, SECRETARY, NWCTF

INTERVIEWER: BARBARA O'NEIL BRETT, ARCHIVIST, NWMD

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INTRODUCTION BY BARBARA O'NEIL BRETT:

Today is June 14, 2007. This is Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist, at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, who is going to interview for the NARA Assembly Legacy Project, Ms. Rose Gabel, Secretary for FOIA (NWCTF) here at Archives 2 in College Park, MD.

Ms. Gabel has been a Federal employee for a total of almost 42 years, the great majority of which was spent here at the National Archives in either Washington, DC or here in College Park, MD.

MRS. BRETT: Hi Rose. Thank you for coming today for your interview for the NARA Assembly Legacy Project. I have just a few questions to ask you and this will be part of the official records of the National Archives here in College Park, MD. The first question I have to ask you is: Why did you decide to work for the Federal Government in DC and leave your home state of PA? How was DC different from your hometown in PA?

MS. GABEL: I left home to come to work in DC, because when my senior high school class came down here, I loved this city and I thought it would be a great place to live. I wanted to work for the Federal government because they could not fire you and that is why I came to DC.

MRS. BRETT: Describe your first job with the Federal Government.
What agency did you work for and what were your duties?
Did you enjoy this position?

MS. GABEL: The very first job I had in DC I was a clerk typist. Back in the 1960's, in those days, they came around to the high schools and recruited you. Well, I had been in Business School so that's how I got recruited. They just hired extra girls and when they had a vacancy, one of the girls just went in there.

MRS. BRETT: Was that like a Secretarial Pool?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: Was that at GSA Headquarters?

MS. GABEL: Yes. That was at GSA Headquarters. My first job was in employee relations in Personnel at GSA. I enjoyed that job. It was really nice.

MRS. BRETT: How long were you in that job for Rose?

MS. GABEL: Four and half years.

MRS. BRETT: That's a long time. Is that the position you had before you came to the National Archives?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: You joined NARA in 1970?

MS. GABEL: That's right. January 1970.

MRS. BRETT: Which office did you report to at NARA, Rose?

MS. GABEL: I worked in what in those days was educational programs. I was in the Public Affairs Office.

MRS. BRETT: You were doing secretarial duties for them?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: What was your first job like with NARA's Declassification Division under Alan Thompson?

MS. GABEL: That was an interesting job because I got in on the ground floor when Mr. Thompson was setting up the place. We did not even have office space at the time. I got to set up the files, set up everything. We hired the people. It was just great being in on the ground floor.

MRS. BRETT: That sounds like an exciting job. How did your job duties as a Secretary change over time?

MS. GABEL: Let's see. For one, telephones rang on the Secretary's desk and the Secretary answered all the phones for the staff. We in Declassification had four phone lines and then you had a phone hold button and that was great. You could put people on hold and answer the other lines or tell someone there is a call for them. Now-a-days, everybody has a phone on their desk and their own phone number.

MRS. BRETT: Right. Now in this conference room we have some high tech phones that have moved along since we started Federal service.

MS. GABEL: Oh yes, speaker phones.

MRS. BRETT: Yes, speaker phones so now staff off-site can listen in on a headquarters meeting. If you call a NARA field office, you can have that field person an active participant in the meeting.

MS. GABEL: There were no speaker phones in the 1960's.

MRS. BRETT: That's quite a change. Having the computer has changed your work too from the typewriter to the computer.

MS. GABEL: Yes. When I came in we had typewriters and no copier machines. If you wanted to make multiple copies, you used carbon paper. You could only make so many copies with carbon papers or you could not read them. So we used to send out memorandums to all the Regional Administrators and the Office Heads and I had to type the memorandum three times till I got enough copies to send them out.

MRS. BRETT: That was before word processing so you typed every stroke from scratch.

MS. GABEL: Yes. That's right. Every secretary had some white chalk in her desk and that was in case you made a mistake and erased a little too hard. You chalked it over and rubbed it down with your finger. You could type letters over it and nobody knew.

MRS. BRETT: That's a good tip. Wite-out was very helpful when it came on the market.

MS. GABEL: There was no wite-out in those days. When correcting fluid such as wite-out came out, that was great!

MRS. BRETT: What a time saver!

MS. GABEL: Yes. It was just great. You did not have to erase anymore.

MRS. BRETT: I remember the IBM selective typewriter that had the correction feature. You would back up and it would lift the typo right off the paper. Those were great those IBM selectives.

MS. GABEL: They were something wonderful.

MRS. BRETT: How would you describe the atmosphere at the National Archives? How has it changed over the past 42 years? Did NARA start out more like a family atmosphere and then become more business like?

MS. GABEL: The atmosphere, I can only speak of the downtown Archives 1 building. I was never at Suitland, MD. Downtown was like a family. I worked on the West Side. As you say, they (the staff) were just like family. You knew all about them. You went on break together. You shared your problems and your joys. You went to all the Christmas parties. Out at Archives 2 in College Park, MD, the friendliness is gone. It is not a friendly building.

MRS. BRETT: Is that because Archives 2 is a very large building with more staff and more contractors than at Archives 1 in DC? Do you think the mix is different than it was in the old days?

MS. GABEL: I am not sure what it is. I think Archives 2 is a big building and that has something to do with it – it being a big building. You don't see many people in the hall and downtown you always saw people in the hall.

MRS. BRETT: I think what made a big difference too was in the old days when you had to take a message to someone, you usually walked down the hall to see them. You delivered the mail yourself and picked up something going back to your office. Now with e-mails you never see the person. It's just a computer communicating with another computer so you loose that personal touch.

MS. GABEL: One thing I remember about being downtown at Archives 1 were the elevators.

MRS. BRETT: Oh, those old wood elevators at Archives 1.

MS. GABEL: The elevators were terrible.

MRS. BRETT: Yes. They were always getting stuck between floors.

MS. GABEL: They never came on time but when you were late, when you stayed at coffee break too long, you could say the elevator did not come or the elevator got stuck and your boss did not know any better because the elevators always got stuck.

MRS. BRETT: That is an excuse that you cannot use here at Archives 2 since we have new elevators.

MS. GABEL: Right. That's true.

MRS. BRETT: Of all the changes you have seen over 42 years such as this new building and all the reorganizations, was there any one that stuck your mind as possibly one of the better ones? Perhaps, NARA's independence from GSA? Do you think that was a good move for NARA to break away from GSA when we did and to become independent?

MS. GABEL: Yes. I so think that was a good idea. GSA was holding us down, reminding us all the time that they were in charge and that we were not in charge. That was a big move.

MRS. BRETT: Yes. I felt, when NARA was under GSA, that the emphasis by GSA was on buildings and not records so we had two different focuses as to what the agency mission was.

MS. GABEL: Right.

MRS. BRETT: In your 40 years at NARA, who would you rate as your best supervisor and why?

MS. GABEL: I would rate Alan Thompson as my best supervisor. He was great to work for. He shared his knowledge with you and he taught me all about working with classified records and security. He was great.

MRS. BRETT: You stay in touch with him now.

MS. GABEL: Yes, I do.

MRS. BRETT: Mr. Thompson is living in NC at this time.

MS. GABEL: That's right.

MRS. BRETT: Were there any significant challenges that you faced with your career? Did you find it difficult to get used to the new technology? Was that a big change in your career, the computer, or did it not seem so much of a hurdle?

MS. GABEL: Yes, computers were a hurdle. I was used to typewriters. Now that I have been using the computer for a good while, it's no challenge anymore. What was a challenge was that the secretaries had to do everything and they would change the forms.

MRS. BRETT: Like with travel regulations?

MS. GABEL: Yes. You were always the last to know and you ended up having to do it.

MRS. BRETT: That would be very frustrating.

MS. GABEL: Yes, it was.

MRS. BRETT: Do you prefer working in FOIA over Declassification?

MS. GABEL: They both have their pluses and minuses. One reason I am in FOIA now is because I wanted to work with the JFK assassination records. They are part of FOIA's office. Declassification I liked. I was in there a long time. It was challenging.

MRS. BRETT: Now, of course, Declassification (NWMD) has expanded to include the FOIA staff. We are sort of mixed together anyway since fiscal year 2007.

MRS. BRETT: I would like to say for the record that you have been outstanding in doing NWMD's time and attendance for the past five months. We appreciate that Rose because we haven't had a Secretary in Declass since Christmas 2006 so you were like a New Year's gift to us and we appreciate it.

MS. GABEL: Thank you.

MRS. BRETT: What changes would you like to see at the secretarial series at the National Archives? Are there any particular changes you'd like to see?

MS. GABEL: There are changes I would like to see. Generally speaking, secretarial positions have to be a certain number of grades below their boss. That's not going to change unless OPM changes. I'd like to see more upward mobility of Secretaries. If you happened to be a Secretary for upper management, you got moved to another higher graded non-secretarial position. If you are a middle or lower graded Secretary, you do not get these opportunities to advance. If you want to get a promotion, you have to leave.

MRS. BRETT: So that would be a positive change then, to look after all the Secretaries no matter what grade level they are.

MS. GABEL: Right. Offer them (Secretaries) upward mobility and not just to Archives Technicians.

MRS. BRETT: The upward mobility for Secretaries would keep the knowledge here at the Archives. I know in our office (NWMD) we go through Secretaries every couple of years because they leave for an upward mobility opportunity.

MS. GABEL: I brought this up years ago when I was looking for a promotion and they said: "Be a technician." and I said: "Sure, I can be in the same grade (GS-7) that I am now."

MRS. BRETT: You wanted an Archives Specialist position rather than an Archives Technician – something with a future.

MS. GABEL: Right.

MRS. BRETT: After 42 years of working for the Federal government, what will you miss most of all when you retire on August 3, 2007?

MS. GABEL: I will miss the people.. Despite what I said earlier, they are a great bunch of people here – loyal and just nice to be with – and I will miss the people.

MRS. BRETT: I'll know they will miss you too, Rose. What will you miss least of all of your duties when you retire?

MS. GABEL: Time and attendance. I have done time and attendance for 42 years.

MRS. BRETT: That's a long time.

MS. GABEL: Yes, it is.

MRS. BRETT: You'll be glad to leave it behind.

MS. GABEL: I will be glad to leave it behind. I know all the rules and regulations backwards and forward but what makes time and attendance

so hard is you have to be right all the time because you are dealing with people's money.

MRS. BRETT: Rose, is there anything else you would like to add?

MS. GABEL: Yes. I remember when I first came to work at GSA and we did not have copier machines. I was down at GSA in the late 1960's when we got copier machines. My goodness! We could not believe it! They were big machines then and the operator had to be specially trained. GSA had a room where the copier machine sat in the middle of the room. There was a lady in there and all she did was pick up the handle, put a paper in, put it down. Put another paper in, put it down, and so forth. We were not allowed to operate the copier machines. It was years before we were allowed to operate the copier machine. Then, it was grudgingly that they let us use it.

MRS. BRETT: That was quite a change.

MS. GABEL: Yes. You felt so important when you took something up to be copied. You did not have to have them mimeographed.

MRS. BRETT: That's right. Mimeographing was messy with purple ink and those big rollers to crank.

MS. GABEL: You could just have them photocopied. I remember. I don't know if you remember, Barbara, but I remember coming to work by bus.

MRS. BRETT: I remember the bus before there was a subway in the Washington, DC area. I took the bus to work at the National Archives in DC from Arlington, VA.

MS. GABEL: The bus companies were Overall-Chalk in DC and AB and W in Virginia before the subway and Metro Bus. The two bus companies in DC and VA did not talk to each other. You could get a little reduced fare if you were going from one bus company to the other. Both companies in rush hour, they had their old buses out. The buses must have been from the 1950's.

They had hard seats. They were not air conditioned, windows opened about so much, and they rattled and they groaned.

MRS. BRETT: You were wondering if they were going to make it home or to the office.

MS. GABEL: Yes. You did. They stuffed them full to the gills.

MRS. BRETT: No transfers from one to another bus company?

MS. GABEL: You could transfer but you had to pay an additional fee.

MRS. BRETT: I remember when I first came here to the National Archives (NARA) on February 3, 1975, when I first met you. You were my first Secretary when I came here to NARA in Washington, DC from the Defense Supply Agency (DCASR) in Boston. I remember going out at lunch time and they were digging the subway. We could not wait for the subway to open because it would be right across the street from the National Archives. That was an exciting event when the subway was coming. Lots of changes.

MS. GABEL: One of the things I also remember about the old building (Archives I in DC) was people took coffee breaks then. You were not allowed to have coffee or drinks in the stack areas because of the records, so you had to go to the Snack Bar in the basement. When I first came to work for Mr. Thompson, we shared office space with other staff and they invited me down to coffee breaks with them. So I went and continued to do so the whole time I worked at Archives 1. I met my good friend, Eddie Reese, there. We had break together for years. (Eddie Reese retired and passed away in the 1990's.)

MRS. BRETT: Wasn't Sandy Smith part of that group?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: Was Vickie part of the group?

MS. GABEL: No.

MS. GABEL: It was great listening to those older employees telling tales of what it was like when they were young and working for the Federal government. I also remember downtown (Archives 1) one year when we did not have a fire drill because the building was so full of fire code violations. They didn't bother.

MRS. BRETT: They did not want the fire department to come thru and see the fire code violations. Hopefully, the violations have all been addressed with the recent (circa 1998-2005) renovations to Archives 1 in DC.

MS. GABEL: One time we had a fire drill. We always found out in advance that they were having it. It was a secret but we always found out. Eddie Reese and I would go down to the Snack Bar in the basement and have our coffee. We would sit way back in the Snack Bar. Lo and Behold, the fire drill would come and Eddie and I would not leave the Snack Bar. We would stay and drink our coffee.

MRS. BRETT: No one noticed that you had not left the building because you were sitting in the back of the Snack Bar?

MS. GABEL: Right.

MRS. BRETT: That doesn't work out here at Archives 2. Does it Rose?

MS. GABEL: No.

MRS. BRETT: We just had a fire drill last Friday (June 8, 2007) and you had to vacate the building.

MS. GABEL: At Archives 1, you had to set security in the stacks. Generally, you had 3 stacks that you looked after. Until you got all the security on in the stacks, generally, you did not make it out of the building.

MRS. BRETT: So those staff never had to go down all those stairs at Archives I during a fire drill.

MS. GABEL: That's right.

MRS. BRETT: They were saved from that trip down the stairs.

MRS. BRETT: Do you remember 9/11 (Terrorist Attack of September 11, 2001)? Were you at work on that day? That Tuesday?

MS. GABEL: Yes. On 9/11/01, I was working here at Archives 2 in the FOIA Office. One of the men in the office, his wife called, and he wasn't at his desk. She called again very soon after and he was at his desk. He turned on his computer and told us what was happening. We went and watched on his computer as it was happening.

MRS. BRETT: So you saw the two planes in New York city hit the buildings, the World Trade Center Towers?

MS. GABEL: Yes. We had a TV in the FOIA office and Herb Milton-Rawlings knew where the rabbit ears (antenna) were. Herb got the rabbit ears and we sat in the FOIA conference room (Room 6350) and watched the whole thing on TV.

MRS. BRETT: Until you got the release from the Archivist?

MS. GABEL: Yes and staff wandered in and out. Yes, I remember that. We were not sure how we were going to get home. We heard the buses were not running. I think that they were running but we were told the buses were not running. A girl stopped at the bus stop (R3 Bus Stop at Archives 2 in College Park, MD) and asked if anyone was going down to the District (Washington, DC). So she took me along and dropped me off at Eastern Market (in DC) and then I went home (to Arlington, VA) on the subway with no problem.

MRS. BRETT: That was good. On 9/11/2001, I was at work downtown at the main Archives in Washington, DC and we could see the smoke from the Pentagon (where one of the planes had hit). We were waiting for Archives 2 to give us the release to vacate the city (DC) because we were under enemy attack. It took us a real long time to get the release from Archives 2. I remember seeing the FBI employees released, Department of Justice employees released, Federal Trade Commission employees released and still we at Archives 1 were at our posts because we had not received the word from Archives 2. Then, we finally were released around 10:30a.m. over one hour after the first plane hit. As you said, there were no buses running. We were told by DC Police, who were on every corner, not to go down into the subway. The police thought there may be bombs planted in the subway. So I waited four hours on the corner of 7th and Constitution Ave. NW for my husband, Charles Brett, to drive from Archives 2 in MD to Archives 1 in DC to our home in Arlington, VA. That was some day. A day we won't forget.

MRS. BRETT: The other day that I remember is the Oklahoma City bombing of the Federal Building in April 1995. That was something too.

MS. GABEL: What you don't remember, probably, were the riots back in the 1960's.

MRS. BRETT: Were you here in DC in 1968 during the riots after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated?

MS. GABEL: I worked at GSA during the riots. I still remember seeing the smoke over the city (DC).

MRS. BRETT: As buildings were being burnt and businesses were being trashed?

MS. GABEL: You could just see the smoke over the city.

MRS. BRETT: The Federal Government stayed open then?

MS. GABEL: No. We were released early in the afternoon. I went to Virginia for the weekend because I was helping a friend move. When I came back Sunday night to DC, there was a curfew. It was about 6:00p.m. and the curfew had gone into effect at 5:00p.m. There were National Guard soldiers posted all over the place. I was walking home. The only way to get home (was by walking). I was stopped twice (by the National Guard) and asked where I was going.

MRS. BRETT: So you were walking home to your apartment on Massachusetts Ave. NW in DC and the National Guard pulled you over and asked what your business was (in DC)?

MS. GABEL: Yes. It was so strange being in a curfew. You were not allowed to go out of the building (apartment building) for anything.

MRS. BRETT: You could not go to the store to pick up a loaf of bread?

MS. GABEL: No. You were not allowed on the street.

MRS. BRETT: Total shutdown?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: How long did that curfew last? A couple of days?

MS. GABEL: A few days.

MRS. BRETT: That was after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968?

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: You certainly have seen a lot of History there Rose.

MS. GABEL: Yes.

MRS. BRETT: Are you going to stay in this area after you retire (on August 3, 2007)?

MS. GABEL: I plan to.

MRS. BRETT: It was a pleasure interviewing you Rose. Thank you for all your insights. Thanks for being a friend these past 30 years.

MS. GABEL: Thank you.

MRS. BRETT: I will transcribe this interview and I will let you review it. We can edit it. It will be part of the National Archives Assembly Record Group, NAA.

MS. GABEL: Fine.

MRS. BRETT: I am glad that you are a part of the permanent records of NARA. Thank you very much.

MS. GABEL: Thank you.

MRS. BRETT: This concludes the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project June 14, 2007 interview of Rose M. Gabel, Secretary, NWCTF (Special Access and FOIA Licon) by Assembly member, Barbara O'Neil Brett Archivist, NWMD (Initial Processing and Declassification Division). This interview will be transcribed by Barbara O'Neil Brett and added to the records of Record Group NAA of the National Archives Assembly.

June 14, 2007 Interview Notes

Transcribed by: Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist, NARA-NWMD
For NARA Assembly Legacy Project
Record Group NAA

Gift of Historical Materials of Rose Gabel, Secretary, NARA NWCTF
To The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

1. 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, Rose Gabel, (hereinafter referred to as the Donor), hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America, for eventual deposit in the National Archives of the United States (hereinafter referred to as the National Archives), the following historical materials (hereinafter referred to as the Materials):

Recording (media) of an oral history interview with Rose Gabel conducted on June 14, 2007 by Barbara O'Neil Brett, Archivist, NARA NWMD, on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

Transcript of an oral history interview of Rose Gabel, conducted on June 14, 2007 by Barbara O'Neil Brett on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

Letter from National Archives Assembly Legacy Project Lead Patrice Brown to Rose Gabel, date May 1, 2007, inviting Rose Gabel to participate in an oral history interview for the Assembly's Legacy Project.

2. Because the Materials were generated in connection with the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project—an oral history project designed to capture the institutional memory of retiring NARA staff—the Donor stipulates that the Materials be accessioned into the National Archives and allocated to the donated historical materials collection of the National Archives Assembly. This collection is designated as NAA and is entitled, Records of the National Archives Assembly.

3. The Donor warrants that, immediately prior to the execution of the deed of gift, s/he possessed title to, and all rights and interests in, the Materials free and clear of all liens, claims, charges, and encumbrances..

4. The Donor hereby gives and assigns to the United States of America all copyright which s/he has in the Materials.

5. Title to the Materials shall pass to the United States of America upon their delivery to the Archivist of the United States or the Archivist's delegate (hereinafter referred to as the Archivist).

6. Following delivery, the Materials shall be maintained by NARA at a location to be determined by the Archivist in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and provided that at any time after delivery, the Donor shall be permitted freely to examine any of the Materials during the regular working hours of the depository in which they are preserved.

7. It is the Donor's wish that the Materials in their entirety be made available for research as soon as possible following their deposit in the National Archives.

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9. The Archivist may enter into agreements for the temporary deposit of the Materials in any depository administered by NARA.

10. In the event that the Donor may from time to time hereafter give, donate, and convey to the United States of America additional historical materials, title to such additional historical materials shall pass to the United States of America upon their delivery to the Archivist, and all of the foregoing provisions of this instrument of gift shall be applicable to such additional historical materials. An appendix shall be prepared and attached hereto that references this deed of gift and that describes the additional historical materials being donated and delivered. Each such appendix shall be properly executed by being signed and dated by the Donor and the Archivist.

Signed: Rose M. Shabel
Donor

Date: July 6, 2007

Pursuant to the authority of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, the foregoing gift of historical materials is determined to be in the public interest and is accepted on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein.

Signed: _____
Archivist of the United States

Date: _____