

Transcript of National Archives Assembly Legacy Project Interview with Mr. John Taylor, conducted on February 3, 2006.

Interviewer: Dr. Timothy Nenninger

[Begin Tape 1, Side 1]

NENNINGER: Good afternoon. It is Friday afternoon, the third of February, 1986 [2006]. My name is Tim Nenninger, and it is my pleasure this afternoon to talk with John Taylor, an archivist with Modern Military Records about his career at the National Archives. We'll say in passing that yesterday was John's 85th birthday, which he celebrated out here at lunchtime with some of his friends, and a good time was had by all. John, we are going to start off with a few questions about who you are, where you grew up, where you went to school, and how your educational background prepared you for your career at the National Archives.

TAYLOR: I am a native of Arkansas; I went to school there. At eighteen, I went to the University of Arkansas, located in Fayetteville, Arkansas in the beautiful Ozarks. I had never been away from home before, but once I got to Fayetteville, unlike some of my classmates who went home every weekend, I had no interest in going back home until December for the holidays. I went home for the holidays in December, and after about five days I was ready to return to school. Incidentally, I always loved school, from grade one all the way through high school. My parents moved to California when I was still in school, and when I did finish school in 1944 I went to Los Angeles to live with my parents and decide what to do next. However, getting back to school; I had an interest in school, even in high school, I had an interest in economics, psychology, especially history. Those same interests carried over when I was at Fayetteville. I always had a lot of interest in the Far East. I took courses related to Far Eastern history as well as American history and world history. Also I took a lot of courses at Fayetteville in psychology, economics, and journalism. As a matter of fact, at 18 I thought I would be a journalist, but I changed my mind for various reasons. But the classes in journalism--I would work as a reporter on the school paper, something I have never forgotten. As a matter of fact, once I came to Washington some of those things I learned in journalism as a reporter helped me quite a bit, working at the National Archives. Once I arrived in Washington I immediately went to George Washington [University] downtown and started another degree, but after a few weeks of working at the Archives with one blind eye I decided that school and work simply would not work for me. So I never did go back to school. However, I did have some archival training shortly after I arrived, that I will be glad to talk about a bit later. But before I end this segment, do you have any more questions about education?

NENNINGER: When you came to Washington, you already had a position at the Archives? How did that work, exactly; going from school to the Archives?

TAYLOR: Good question. When I was still a student at Fayetteville, I passed a Civil Service examination that a lot of kids had taken, in 1943-1944. When I went to L.A. with my parents in 1944, I tried to decide what to do next. In the summer of 1945 the war with Japan was still going on, and in the mail I received a job offer from the National Archives. They found my name off of some list, but they did not know me from Adam. But I had to submit some papers, including references. The top reference was an old professor at Arkansas, named Fred Harrington, who had gone to school himself at Madison, Wisconsin. He was the head of the history department at Arkansas, a man at that time only about 31 years old. He was, for me, an excellent teacher. A lot of my classmates did not care for him, but I did. As a matter of fact, I liked Harrington so well that I audited his class, not for credit, but just to hear him speak. He had a unique ability to stand before a class and talk without notes for 45 minutes. At any rate, when I submitted these papers to the National Archives, I had his name at the top of the list for references. I learned later, after I arrived here, that they recognized the name as someone who had worked at the National Archives as a researcher. They knew him. So they immediately got in touch with Harrington; it was probably Harrington who me into the Archives!

NENNINGER: Great story. It sounds like the Archives recruited you rather than you applied to the Archives.

TAYLOR: As a matter of fact, Harrington, although an excellent teacher; his ambition was to become an administrator.

NENNINGER: He was the president of the University of Wisconsin when I was there in the late 1960s.

TAYLOR: I remember that. As a matter of fact, I kept in touch with Harrington until he died. But before he became the head of the school at Madison, an opening had occurred at Hawaii. You may not know this, Tim, but he applied for the job at Hawaii, was accepted, but in them meantime the job opened at Madison. So he did some quick legwork and got the job at Madison. He was there, by the way, during the Vietnam War.

NENNINGER: Oh, yeah.

TAYLOR: From the reports I got, he kept a very low profile, and probably steered the school in a fairly decent and safe course during those bad times at Madison.

NENNINGER: When you arrived at the Archives, for what part of the Archives did you originally work, and what kind of training, either on-the-job or course kind of training, did the Archives provide to new employees at that point?

TAYLOR: I'll take you up on training first. Only a few days had I been there when my supervisor said, "We have a man here in town, the famous German archivist who fled Germany in 1937 or 1938, and he gives a course in archives administration. You should take it." I replied to my supervisor, "Not this week. I want to work here for at least six

months before I take any courses.” And I’m glad I did. At the end of six months, or seven months, I did sign up for Dr. Posner’s course. Ernst Posner was his name. He was an excellent teacher. I learned a lot from him, but after working at the Archives for seven months I understood what he was talking about. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues took the course immediately, and much of it went over their heads.

NENNINGER: Was he teaching at American University at that time?

TAYLOR: He was associated with A.U., but his classes were held at Archives I.

NENNINGER: Oh, really?

TAYLOR: Also, when I first arrived, I was assigned to the War Records Office, which had been created some months before. The War Records Office was headed by Dr. Campbell, actually; he’s the one who hired me; after I got in the building and had the first interview with me. Ned Campbell. He was fairly young at the time, 31 or 32. But one of the first things he said to me was, “I hope you have good common sense.” He said, “Unfortunately over the last few months we have had young people come in here with good backgrounds but no common sense. I hope you have good common sense.” That is something I have never forgotten.

NENNINGER: I can just imagine Dr. Campbell saying that. He was the office head when I came to the Archives in 1970.

TAYLOR: He stressed that. He also said, “You’re from Arkansas, I want to explain Washington, D.C. to you.” He started to give me a short lecture on the relations between whites and blacks. And I stopped him and said, “Look, in the past I have worked as a checkout in a food store in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I also worked with all sorts of people; I worked for American Can in Los Angeles.” He said, “End of lecture.”

NENNINGER: So, was there on-the-job training for new archivists at that point, too?

TAYLOR: Only Posner.

NENNINGER: Just Posner?

TAYLOR: Posner, that’s it.

NENNINGER: Who were some of the other people who were in leadership positions at the Archives at this time? We’re talking about 1945, which is about ten years into the existence of the Archives, so I imagine some of the “founding fathers” were still around.

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. Remind me--I will answer in a moment, there is something else I wanted to tell you. I was lucky in many ways: number one, for reasons unknown to me, Dr. Campbell, and other branch chiefs and other people I had contact with, they were intrigued by the fact that I had never been east of the Mississippi. I explained that when I

came to Washington I took an airplane from the L.A. airport to St. Louis. Then after that I hopped on a train because I wanted to see east of the Mississippi. But for some reason they thought that was the brightest idea ever. They kept, over the years, they always reminded me, "Oh, yeah, I remember, you took a plane to St. Louis, then at St. Louis you--" They thought that was a marvelous idea. It's just good common sense, in my view! At any rate, I made a lot of points with my supervisor. Also, I was lucky in other ways; I never knew them, but before the war, two or three people from Arkansas had worked at the National Archives. They often referred--the supervisors, Campbell and others--they often referred to these Arkansas natives who had been there before the war. One of the people went to work for the War Production Board [WPB] during the war, and is responsible for the records we have here today. She saw--she was a female, whose name I have forgotten--she saw that we could not possibly keep everything, so she came up with a novel idea to make a selection of War Production Board documents. Then she came up with the idea of a card index. Today, the one-quarter-million cards in the WPB index, RG 179, is the product of her thinking when she was working for the agency during World War II. Now, getting back to those other questions that you had a moment ago, that got put on a back burner.

NENNINGER: Who were some of the other people in supervisory or leadership positions at the Archives in 1945?

TAYLOR: Right. The Archivist was only the second Archivist. The name will come to me in a moment.

NENNINGER: Buck?

TAYLOR: Buck, yeah. S. J. Buck. He had come from Minnesota; I'm not sure how he got the job, and if I knew in the past I've forgotten. The first Archivist, a man from North Carolina; some years later he wrote an article for the *American Archivist*. He said Roosevelt called him in one day and said, "I've been told that I have to appoint an Archivist." Roosevelt said to him, "He must be a good Democrat and a good historian. You are it!" [Laughs] That was the first Archivist.

NENNINGER: Connor.

TAYLOR: Connor. Then Buck was the second one. Buck remained there for a number of years, but I did not see much of Buck. I was told by my supervisors that Buck wanted to see everything--everything--he wanted everything to pass over his desk. Each paper that passed over he would put his initials in the corner of the page. Also, in the Archives when I first arrived was Dr. Irvine. I don't know what job he had before I arrived, but by the time I got there he had been sort of pushed aside, I believe, by the front office. I had quite a bit of contact with him some time later. My immediate supervisor was Dr. Campbell. Campbell was the one who interviewed me. Campbell was head of the division, but he had two branch chiefs. One headed the Navy branch, and one headed the Army branch. I was assigned to the Navy branch, under Dr. Locky, who had been there for a number of years. Locky liked me in the beginning, too, fortunately. As a matter of

fact, when I reported to work, after talking to Campbell and Locky, Locky gave me a desk in his own office. He explained to me, that they had been having problems getting records back from various agencies. Back in those days the Archives lent documents--a massive number of documents--to the agencies around town. A lot of Navy records, especially, went to the Navy. For a lot of agencies, they had a hard time getting them back. Locky said to me, "Your job is to get those documents back here."

NENNINGER: This was just at the end of the war, and a lot of agencies actually had people working in the Archives exploiting the records for wartime purposes.

TAYLOR: Well, the Navy hadn't had people there for many, many years. However--

NENNINGER: They had up until the 1970s--

TAYLOR: These were agencies, I am talking about, that would call us up on the phone, saying, "Please send this document over to us--"

NENNINGER: Just like the Records Centers today.

TAYLOR: But when I arrived, the lending system was in a mess. Locky had each archivist in his branch handle these documents that were lent out, and apparently the archivists were not doing a very good job in getting them back. So the first two days I was on the job, Locky personally, without any knowledge or any warning, he went to the desk in the stacks of each archivist. He took the little box that contained all the slips--

NENNINGER: Of what had been lent--

TAYLOR: That had been charged out. He transferred without any knowledge or any comment to these archivists, he picked up the boxes from each desk, and brought them to my desk. I immediately got on the phone and started calling these various agencies. Many times they had been out for over 90 days, they'll say, "Oh, but we still need them." I'd say, "That's OK, just send them back to me and I'll re-charge them." I did that for quite a while. By the way, I came in at what today is a GS-3. It was something else, but it was the equivalent of what is now a GS-3. Having been in Navy for a few months, my supervisor alerted me that there was a job opening in Army, or Military, branch, and I could have it if I wanted it. So I immediately went to Military.

NENNINGER: Who was the chief?

TAYLOR: The branch of that--Military, under Campbell, of course--the name escapes me. He, unlike Locky and Campbell, did not have a Ph.D. He had four years of college. He was an excellent, excellent administrator and a good archivist. He used to boast to me the number; he used to say, "I have packed more archives boxes than the whole building combined."

NENNINGER: What were your initial impressions of the National Archives after you joined it, coming out of school?

TAYLOR: Well, I had worked as a librarian, part-time, in school, so I knew something about library work. I had never been inside an archives before. I remember walking from the front door through the stacks to 8W, and what I noticed was the smell of the records. That was the first thing I noticed. After I had been there for a few days, or a few weeks I started to open the boxes, of course, to see what's inside all these boxes. I was fascinated, and I have been fascinated ever since. Also, in the first few days, I talked to a few people, and asked, "Why don't more people know about this place?" And I soon found out why. In those early days, for reasons unknown to me, the people in the Archives--up and down, in the supervisory jobs--they did not want the public to know about the National Archives. The attitude, almost, was, "We have these records, but by God, we don't want anyone to know about it." I encountered that many, many times. As a kid, I remember hearing old radio programs, programs sponsored by the Library of Congress, by the Smithsonian, but I never--I learned a bit about the Archives from Dr. Harrington. He, of course, has worked at Archives I, and as a matter of fact he told me that the Archives would be a good place to work. But other than that, as a matter of fact, back in those days we had department stores right across the street from Archives I. Those people in there didn't have a clue--

NENNINGER: What was in the building--

TAYLOR: --what was going on in that building. Some years after I had been there a top official went to a conference down in Texas. He came back and said, "No one knows anything about us!" So? Of course! They had a husband and wife who would come to the Archives from Tennessee, before I arrived. He had a top job there; his name escapes me now, but his wife, I learned, was one of his former students. Apparently he had fallen in love with his student, and married her, and for various reasons had to leave Tennessee. They both came to Archives, and she, too, worked at Archives. Her job was supposedly what Susan Cooper does today. But the Archives top management gave her no support. As a matter of fact they discouraged her from getting the news out about the National Archives.

NENNINGER: I have got a couple of--

TAYLOR: And she remained there for a number of years, but eventually she went to the Library of Congress, and became vice-president, or assistant librarian, for public affairs!

NENNINGER: You mentioned that so few people knew what the Archives was about, and you talked a little bit about some of your early jobs, which in my mind raise the question, did archivists then do multi-tasks, or were you more functionally organized like we are today, where there are separate reference units, projects units, and appraisal units? Or did you tend to do a little bit of all?

TAYLOR: When I first arrived, Reference was one of the top, top concerns of Dr. Campbell, and Dr. Locky, and also Dr. Elizabeth Greary.

NENNINGER: Was the clientele other government agencies, or the public, or--?

TAYLOR: Both. Dr. Locky was my supervisor, but Dr. Elizabeth Greary was in charge of Reference for both Army and Navy. I owe a lot to her. She did everything she could for me. We liked each other from day one, and I worked very closely with her. In those early days I heard very little about projects, which I am sure was going on, but--

NENNINGER: So it was mostly reference work from the very beginning?

TAYLOR: For me. As I say, each branch may have had people who worked on projects, but invariably I heard very little about it.

NENNINGER: Do you recollect how big, say, the Army branch was back then, so we get some sense of the scale of the agency?

TAYLOR: I simply don't recall the number of people in the Army branch, or even the Navy branch, including the secretaries; I don't recall.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

TAYLOR: --once I went to Army branch, I no longer worked with Navy records, no longer bugging Navy agencies and offices to return records. However, I did some of that in Army, because in those early days, the Army, especially the G-2 people in the Pentagon, were calling us two or three times a day for MID [Military Intelligence Division] documents. All classified, every time.

NENNINGER: So you had that main collection of interwar MID files--

TAYLOR: 1917 to 1941--

NENNINGER: --At that early date?

TAYLOR: They were in the building when I arrived.

NENNINGER: Wow.

TAYLOR: All classified. By the way, besides the Army, I worked with 19th-century records for a while. Beautiful handwriting, but it is hard for me to read.

NENNINGER: Right, it still is.

TAYLOR: But, 1945, 1946, 1947 was a time when a great many wartime records were coming in.

NENNINGER: Right.

TAYLOR: One of the first records that I worked with that came in, that I packed boxes of records and did reference on, was the Office of Civilian Defense. Also, in the early days I started to open boxes, especially intelligence documents. This is something I learned and something I have never forgotten, that I still tell people about it. These prewar war plans: Orange, for Japan; Black for Germany; and so forth. They always intrigued me. Also in Military Intelligence, I learned for the first time that in the 1920s, Japanese writers were constantly writing stories--all fiction, but still stories--about war with the U.S. In the 20s I doubt any American writers would write about a war with Japan, but there was a lot of that in Japan in the 1920s.

NENNINGER: Since this was right after the war, and you mentioned that there were a lot of records being retired to the Archives; but were staff members who had been in the service or doing other kinds of war work, were they returning to the Archives?

TAYLOR: Oh, no--

NENNINGER: Was there a big influx of old staff and new staff at the same time?

TAYLOR: Why, many of the staff who had been there before went to work for other agencies. One man, who had been there before the war and decided not to come back to the Archives, became the first archivist of the Ford archives; his name escapes me. And then the lady I mentioned earlier, from Arkansas, who had been there with the War Production Board during the war; she did not return to Archives. But she became an archivist for the World Bank after the war. When I went to work for Army, there was a change in the Military Branch, a change at the top at one point. A manager who worked for the Archives before the war came back, and became head of the Army Branch.

NENNINGER: You seem to have come to the Archives simply wanting a position and wanting to work in archives but with no particular inclination to work in military records, but you seem to have just fallen into that with your initial assignments. But even within that, over time you have come to be known as a real expert on certain bodies of records, particularly intelligence-related records. Can you explain a little bit of how you got into that and how it clearly has appealed to your devious instincts?

TAYLOR: Well, even before the intelligence records, in the beginning; the War Production Board records came in 1947, and the Nuremberg records came in 1948-49. For many years, I got a reputation in the building and also outside the building, as the lead archivist for both of those groups: the Nuremberg, and the War Production Board. But at the same time, I was working with other groups, too. I did a lot of work in RG

153, Army JAG [Judge Advocate General]. I packed a lot of records that came in and did a lot of reference on JAG records for a number of years. As a matter of fact, I think I worked with JAG records, one part of it, until Suitland opened in the 1960s--1959?

NENNINGER: No. I think it was the late 60s. The Army Departmental Records Branch at the Torpedo Factory [in Alexandria, Virginia] became the World War II Records Division in 1958. And they moved out of the Torpedo Factory in, I think, 1967 or 1968.

TAYLOR: Anyway, at the same time the records at the Torpedo Factory were moved to Suitland, a lot of records were moved from Archives I.

NENNINGER: Right.

TAYLOR: Including a lot of JAG records.

NENNINGER: Right. That was a lot later, though.

TAYLOR: On intelligence, of course, the Military Intelligence were there already, as I said. In 1946, only a few months after the war, we got our first 800 feet of OSS [Office of Strategic Services] records. The OSS had been abolished very abruptly by Truman in September or October of 1945. One part of the records went to the State Department. The State Department apparently had no interest, and they offered the material to us in the early part of 1946. And that included about 900,000 index cards. I started looking at these cards and reports almost immediately, and I found it fascinating, all that information. They were all classified. From 1946 until 1975, only government agencies could see this material. But in 1975, the Historical Office of the State Department--I had very good relations with the people there--the head of the History Office at State was a man named Taylor-Parks. He's probably some relation to me, who knows. He came from Tennessee, and some of my family came from Tennessee many years ago. Anyway, we hit it off, we talked on the phone a great deal. He called me up one day and said, "We're going to make a new change here in our policy. All that R&A [Research and Analysis Branch of the OSS] material that you have that is still classified. We are going to allow Americans to see that material once they get clearance from the State Department. I'm going to send you a letter of a clearance." So beginning in, not 1975, 1950, in 1950, he called me up and said we are going to make a change. And beginning in 1950 he sent many letters to me authorizing researchers to see the R&A material in RG 226 [Records of the OSS]. I had to collect all the notes a researcher had taken. Back in those days, I was of course older, a GS-4, GS-5, but the Archives put a car--I could just call downstairs for a car and driver to take me over to the State Department. I would give the notes to the State Department Historical Office, then return to the National Archives. I did that many, many times.

NENNINGER: These were the notes that the researchers took, and then State would send them to the researcher if they were cleared?

TAYLOR: Right.

NENNINGER: In the days long before Xerox machines and self-service copiers.

TAYLOR: Well, these were all classified--

NENNINGER: Well, right--

TAYLOR: Then, in 1975, the State Department Historical Office called me up and said, "We have no further interest in the R&A material, but the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] may have an interest.

NENNINGER: Right.

TAYLOR: So that summer, the CIA sent a team in to review all the documents. They did not review all the cards, that would be impossible. But they reviewed every single page of the documents, and held only about one percent. I know that with the one percent withheld, many times they provided us with a sanitized copy, with the names taken out of the first paragraph.

NENNINGER: Right.

TAYLOR: I also had good relations with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. There were a lot of FBI records in the R&A. For many years, FBI would have to review these documents for a researcher. I first had contact with the FBI in the late 40s. Two agents from the FBI came to see me almost every day, looking for Communists-- Communist Americans who had worked for the Soviets during World War II. They came in almost every day, so I developed a good relationship with the FBI. Anyway, at one point, the FBI reports in the R&A would have to be reviewed by the FBI. So I would gather up the notes of the researcher, agents would come over, and look at the documents in my office. A few days later I would get a letter back, signed by J. Edgar [Hoover, FBI Director] himself, saying these documents may be released.

NENNINGER: Right. There are a lot of FBI documents in the Military Intelligence Division files, too, that we treated--

TAYLOR: Similar--

NENNINGER: --in a similar way back in the early 70s. How did the researcher clientele change over the years, the early years that you were at the Archives? Or did it?

TAYLOR: --Oh, yes--

NENNINGER: In terms of the kinds of different kinds of researchers--?

TAYLOR: Not only the different kinds, but also the number increased a great deal. As a matter of fact, Dr. Posner warned the Archives many years ago, that we should plan

ahead. That you are going to have far more people than you expect, and you are going to need far more space than you now have. But much of that advice fell on deaf ears. I know that for many years in Archives I, I would see students from London, Paris, Stockholm; I would never see a local school student. Never, from A.U., George Washington, Georgetown, American, never. One student explained to me once, I have forgotten the school, it wasn't a school in Washington D.C., that the professors said to avoid the National Archives, because it is far too complicated and they have far too much records for you.

NENNINGER: [Laughs] He got that right, didn't he!

TAYLOR: --Even from as far away as Madison! Of course, in recent years, I see a lot of local students; it's far different from how it was downtown in the early days.

NENNINGER: What about the kinds of researchers? I mean, in the early days did you deal; today we seem to deal with not exactly genealogists, but people that are interested in family members who were in the military, or family members who served in the OSS, or situations like that, to a far greater degree, it seems to me, than when I even started.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes, that's true, that's correct. However, even in the early days I saw a lot of lawyers. Mainly in the early 40s.

NENNINGER: Really?

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. One reason for that was that during the war itself, the War Production Board did a lot of things that industry did not like. For example, the Board closed all gold mines in this country, and after the war the gold mine operators brought a lawsuit against the government. Some days I would have lawyers from both sides in my office looking at documents. In addition to the gold mines, patent cases involving automobile tires, or something like that. We had a wide variety of researchers in the 1940s.

NENNINGER: What were some of the challenges that you faced early in your career? Things that your education or experience didn't necessarily prepare you for, in terms of dealing with records, or dealing with researchers, or even dealing with supervisors?

TAYLOR: I cannot think of anything, I mean, I have always been a sort of laid-back guy. I like working under pressure, I don't worry about a thing. Some of the assignments I did not care for. I did try Projects once. To me, it was a lonely job, so I tried to avoid Projects. As a matter of fact, one supervisor said to me once, many, many years ago, "Taylor, the problem with you, is you want to do what you want to do." I plead guilty.

NENNINGER: [Laughs] Well, I think sometimes it's management's responsibility to match the job to the personality and talents of the individual, and I think clearly in your case, it's been a good match for your long career.

TAYLOR: I think it's been a good match. I do. And I've known many colleagues and friends who worked at Archives I, who love Projects, and love working in the stacks, with no interruptions, who never see people, never talk to people. They love it. Incidentally, speaking of stacks at Archives I, my supervisor told me shortly after I arrived, that a number of people came to Archives for an interview, hoping to work at Archives, but when they learned they had to work in the stacks, and have a desk in the stacks, they said, "No, thanks." I always had liked the stacks, by the way, I had a desk in the stacks for many, many years. Not immediately, I had a desk in the office of the chief for the first few months, but for many years--

NENNINGER: Not too many people who work in custodial units downtown had windows. Most of the desks were in the stacks.

TAYLOR: It never bothered me. I always liked the stacks. By the way, one thing that I wanted to tell you about, which sort of ties into your last question, is; many years ago, I have forgotten just when, Dr. Irvine, my supervisor, came up with the bright idea for me to do an internal disposal on RG 120 [Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I)]. The AEF [American Expeditionary Forces] records. Their idea was, "We don't need all these unit records." Their instructions were to save the historical documents. I would determine what were historical documents. But unit records, they were to be tossed out. Common sense told me that was a bad idea. Every three months, my immediate supervisor, or Dr. Irvine himself, would ask me what percentage have I done this quarter. I gave some figure; I had no idea what to toss of these records out. So I left it like that for 18 months, maybe even longer. I would go through the motions, but I had no intention of tossing out the RG 120 material. One reason they gave to me was that with all the personnel records in St. Louis, we don't need all this stuff. Of course, no one knew about the fire there in the 1970s. But that's something I am really proud of, that I did not throw out RG 120 material.

NENNINGER: Now we just send it to Lee's Summit [storage facility in Missouri]! Were there any major reorganizations of the structure of the Archives in the early period, in the 40s and 50s, to take into account the change from the war to peacetime and the influx of new records? Any organizational issues that you can remember that were important at that time?

TAYLOR: There were so many reorganizations, I cannot remember. The Archives is constantly being reorganized. One guy who worked in the Archives, who came in about 1947, '48, eventually became a branch chief. A man of very few words. He said to me once, "Oh, yes, the National Archives: built on shifting sands!" Because they reorganized us so much, constantly. Also, back in those days, they always moved records. When I arrived there, most of the Army records were on the east side of the building, but at some point they moved a lot of it to the west side. A few years later they moved some that had been on the west side for a long time to the east side. They were constantly moving records around the building.

NENNINGER: In terms of your own career, what do you see as some of the real highlights and turning points in your career at the Archives?

TAYLOR: Well, the first major turning point was when I transferred from Navy to Army. Because when I went to the Military Branch, Army Branch it was called then, they had not only Army records, but they had World War I emergency agencies, and I think beginning in 1947, World War II emergency agencies, like the War Production Board. Incidentally, that was a civilian agency, but when it came to Archives, for reasons unknown to me it was allocated to the Army Branch in 1947. As a matter of fact, I unpacked the boxes; I boxed much of that material. That was major. The Korean War also was very important for all of us, both Military and Civilian, because we had to adapt to many, many demands.

NENNINGER: During the Korean War?

TAYLOR: That's right. As a matter of fact, the Archives placed a revolt, practically, on the part of the staff, during the Korean War. When the Korean War started there were a lot of demands on a lot of agencies, all over town. Most agencies realized that, and either brought in new people, new staff, or because of workloads or other factors, various agencies started to upgrade, or increase the grades and pay of current employees. Not the Archives, at least not at the beginning. Then, although I was not part of it, because I had just got a promotion, but I remember that many of the staff really made it very clear to the people in the top offices, also to the Personnel Office, which I think consisted of only two people in those days, that something had to be done about the grade structure. And something was done. They did bow to that demand, I recall.

NENNINGER: This would have been like in the mid-1950s?

TAYLOR: Yes, the war started in 1950, right? It started pretty soon.

NENNINGER: That's interesting. We'll take a time-out. OK.

[End Tape 1, Side 2]

[Start Tape 2, Side 1]

NENNINGER: Are we back on? Why don't we talk a little bit about the relationship between the National Archives and other Federal agencies and how it's changed over the years, but also how you have developed relationships with different people in other agencies and how that's affected your work at the Archives over the years. I think in particular, a lot of your close contacts with people in agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency.

TAYLOR: Are we on?

NENNINGER: We're on.

TAYLOR: Even before CIA, as I mentioned a bit earlier, I had close contacts with State Department, with FBI, and one agency I did not mention; it was a agency that came on the scene a bit later, NSRB: the National Security Resources Board. It was another civilian agency, established in 1947, and in about 1953 its name had changed. It eventually evolved into what we know today as FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency]. But I worked very closely in the 1950s and early 60s with NSRB: the National Security Resources Board. They had responsibility for allocation of raw materials during the Korean War, labor, that sort of thing. Plus, they were also responsible for civil defense. I really did enjoy working with the records, with a guy down the hall, in the civilian agencies. But they were with the Military Branch for many years. Also I worked very closely with the staff members there. As a matter of fact, they had an office near the White House, and I visited them very often, and they would come to visit me at Archives. They developed their own indexes and their own filing schemes, as many agencies do, and it was such a variety of records and such a wide range of subjects, that it was a nice change from military records, per se, or even intelligence records.

NENNINGER: Talk a little bit about some of your dealings with the Central Intelligence Agency, particularly as it relates to access and reference issues on OSS records.

TAYLOR: As many of you know, the OSS was abolished in 1945, but the CIA was established in 1947, and many of the same people who worked for the Agency during the war continued to work in the CIA. Some time before, I guess it was the 1970s, Bill Casey, who had been in London for the OSS during the war--later, after the war, he went back to his law firm, and Wall Street, and held various other jobs in the government--he would come to see me fairly often, at Archives I. Although we had only about 800 feet of wartime Agency records, the R&A material. He would come in, and talk to me about these records and look at some of the card indexes, maybe look at a few documents. Then he'd jump up, look at his watch: "Brother Taylor, I have to be in London tomorrow morning. I've got to go." This was when he was still in the private sector. Then when Reagan was running, in 1980, right?

NENNINGER: Right.

TAYLOR: Reagan was running for President; he had a campaign manager who got in hot water. I forgot what he did, but he got some very bad press. So Reagan had to find someone in a hurry to head his campaign, so he called on Bill Casey. Bill Casey ran the campaign, and when Reagan was elected in 1980, Bill Casey said to the President, "The only job I really want is to be head of the CIA." Of course, Reagan immediately appointed him the head of the Agency. Even after he became the head of the Agency, Casey would call me up from time to time. Once or twice in the 1980s I went out to Langley and talked to CIA people about new records coming in here. And the next day I would talk to Casey on the phone and say, "I was in your building," and he'd boom, "Why didn't you come to see me?" Then, a bit later, Casey called me up one day, "I

want you to meet me at my home, after work.” I said OK. So I grabbed a cab, went up to Northwest Washington. He came in, a bit late; I got there before he did. He gave me a drink or two, then he turned to me and tossed a manuscript in my lap. He said, “I want you to help me edit this manuscript.” I said, “No way!” I said, “I am blind in one eye, and by five o’clock my good eye is shot. But I have the person who may be ideal for you.” I gave him the name of a friend of mine who had done research in the records at Archives when she was a student. And they hit it off, and they both came to Archives a number of times to do research. Casey even came in on Saturdays. But after he died--I also knew Mrs. Casey; I met her a couple of times, we had talked on the phone many times--I called her up and urged her to have the publisher hire this young lady, who had aided her husband in the editing of his book. The manuscript he had was in very bad shape, but they got the book out.

NENNINGER: This was about his wartime experience?

TAYLOR: Wartime experience, yes. And then, outside the Archives, I met--I belong to some group related to intelligence matters that met down in an office building in Washington, D.C., fairly often. There I met another head of CIA, Bill Colby. Bill Colby, a man I like very much. Very low-key. I would see him many times outside of the Archives, outside of the government; each time he come up to me and say, “John, I’m Bill Colby.” Also I knew Dick Hamms who was in OSS, and the head of CIA many years later. And also I knew another CIA guy, Turner, Admiral [Stansfield] Turner, I knew him quite well. He’s still living; he just published a new book a few months ago. He never came here. He called me up one day and said that he hoped to swing by to see me, but he never came. Admiral Turner had a young guy come in to do the research for him. His book also has been published recently.

NENNINGER: Who were some of the more well-known authors that you have worked with over the years as they were doing research on books and you were providing reference service to them?

TAYLOR: A great many people--

NENNINGER: Who were some of the ones who were challenges to work with?

TAYLOR: Well, some writers--David Kahn, of course; I worked with David in the 1960s. I’ve told you a story about him, and I can repeat it here. In the 1960s, David Kahn, a young journalist who worked for a newspaper in New York State--

NENNINGER: Newsday.

TAYLOR: Not yet. Newsday was later. I have forgotten the newspaper when I first met him. But he was doing research for a book about NSA [National Security Agency]. Back in those days, NSA did not want any publicity whatsoever. As a matter of fact, it was well known that NSA stood for “No Such Agency.” At any rate--this is the 1960s--NSA sent a memo to all stations around the world, including the Pentagon, that this guy,

David Kahn, was doing research about the agency and hoped to write a book--do no favors for this guy. Well, the message came from the Pentagon and was passed on to me by way of my supervisor. My supervisor and I decided that we would just continue to work with David. So, all we had at that time was the Military Intelligence records, but we thought...as far as we were concerned, we continued to work with David. More recently, of course, NSA thinks David is great; he's a member of the board out there at Fort Meade, he's invited to everything, they're going to have a building named for him. And recently, in the past 18 months, David asked NSA if they could find that memo, or cable, they sent around the world that said, "Don't work with this guy," but so far, NSA said they cannot find it.

NENNINGER: [Laughs]

TAYLOR: Iris Chang, a Chinese-American writer, is another one I worked with very closely. Three books, she did, before she committed suicide. A lot of British writers, I forget. I spent a lot of time over the years with a French writer, a French journalist, named Calvi, who did a book published in France, *The OSS in France*.

NENNINGER: When you are helping a researcher, what do you see as your role, in terms of providing advice and assistance to a researcher; particularly the kind of people you have just described, the more senior kinds of authors and researchers?

TAYLOR: For either one, either a student from Georgetown, or a student from Oxford, or a famous writer who has published a half-a-dozen books, I usually tell these people in the beginning, "The more I know about your project, the better I can help you." Many, many researchers, not the sort of people you're talking about now, but for many researchers who come here, it's like pulling teeth to find out exactly what are they looking for. They are sometimes reluctant to reveal everything, or think that two or three lines are all we need, but I often tell researchers that the more we know about your project, the better we can provide assistance.

NENNINGER: That's good advice. Describe how you feel about the records that you've worked with over the years. I mean, in terms of what you get out of working in the records and what you think the value of archival records, particularly the archival records that you have worked in over your career, are for the American public and the researcher public, which, particularly out here, at College Park, goes well beyond the American public?

TAYLOR: Some days and some weeks I see far more foreign researchers than I do Americans. But, will you rephrase that question?

NENNINGER: [Laughs] Do you think this is a congressional hearing or something?

TAYLOR: No, no--

NENNINGER: How do you feel about the records that you work in? I have heard you talk about this before, about the sort of joy you get out of working with the records personally, and I would like to hear a little bit about that, but also about the wider importance of these records in terms of the information that they contain and what this means for researchers and for an informed public.

TAYLOR: Almost every collection I have worked with--almost every collection--I consider to be important. Because the records contain so much information, that--and I have a very good memory, which helps in this business, by the way--but I consider almost everything I have worked with, every collection here, unique.

NENNINGER: Does this go back to the point you made earlier, about one of your supervisors saying that you only work in the stuff that you want to work in, so that you pick the important series?

TAYLOR: No, he was talking about the various--

NENNINGER: That was a joke, John--

TAYLOR: --about the various types of work that archivists may do. I might say to all of you, on camera; I never claimed to be an all-around archivist.

NENNINGER: Well, I am sure you fooled a lot of people in that regard, and you certainly have provided great reference service to lots of people over a long and productive career. Thinking back over that career, what are the biggest changes you have seen, both in terms of how the National Archives has changed, and how things outside the National Archives have changed, that have impacted the institution?

TAYLOR: That's hard to answer. I do want to say something else, about a new subject.

NENNINGER: OK.

TAYLOR: I want to get this in. We have talked a lot about the pre-World War II, we've talked about World War II, wartime agencies. We have talked about CIA. But I want to tell you that the wave of the future, in my view, is going to be the Cold War, the history of the Cold War. In recent months I have had researchers, not only from the U.S., but from Norway, Sweden, France, U.K., all interested in the Cold War. And some of these people are here for months on end. I am hoping that in the months and years ahead the National Archives will have adequate records available for these researchers who are writing books. As a matter of fact, one American told me a couple of days ago that he started a history of the Cold War and he may spend nine or ten years on it. So I am hoping that the records will be available here for all these people who have high hopes for writing about the Cold War.

NENNINGER: When you say that you hope the records will be available, there seems to be something implicit in that that maybe there won't be. What are your--

TAYLOR: As we all know, some of these records are either withheld now, or have been re-reviewed. Some have been reclassified. That may be a problem down the road a bit.

NENNINGER: I'm not sure it's all that far down the road. I think that much of the good of the declassification actions of the '80s and the '90s has certainly been overcome by things like the Kyl Amendment and other reclassification actions, as you put it, of the '90s and the 2000s, and I think it's unfortunate.

TAYLOR: Some staff members have made the statement to me, and I fully agree, that the National Archives has lost control of many of our records.

NENNINGER: Certainly in terms of declassification, we have lost control of a lot of the authority that we had fifteen or twenty years ago. Are there any other things that you would like to talk about that we haven't brought up yet?

TAYLOR: This is not too important, but I'd like to put it in. When I was downtown in Archives I, I had one huge advantage that I do not have out here. I worked until 7:00, I could go to the street, hail a cab, and be home in a few minutes. When I would come in on Saturday at Archives I, I could repeat the same procedure. But out here, it's a little different!

NENNINGER: Speaking of you and downtown, I think it was you who told me one time, and this sort of goes back to one of the earlier questions, when I asked about major organizational reorganizations. I think it was you who said, that for most of the time that you were downtown, you had the same desk in the same office in 13W and everybody just sort of reorganized around you and you just sat in the same place! And I know when I first came to the Archives in 1967 to do research I think you were sitting in pretty much the same spot where you were in the early 90s before we all moved out here!

TAYLOR: I was lucky to hold on to the same desk and the same spot for a long, long time.

NENNINGER: Well, we've gone for over an hour and a half now, and I think we have covered some really interesting ground and I have learned some new archival lore. I hope that the purpose of this interview is fulfilled by what we have done here today. I have enjoyed it. Do you want to have the last word, John? Thanks a lot.

[End Tape 2, Side 1]



Gift of Historical Materials of **Claudia Taylor Walsworth** 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, **Claudia Taylor Walsworth, niece of John Taylor** (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 of an oral history interview with the donor conducted on February 3, 2006, by Timothy Nenninger on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

Transcript of an oral history interview with the donor, conducted on February 3, 2006, by Timothy Nenninger on behalf of the National Archives Assembly 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.

8. The Archivist may, subject only to restrictions placed upon him by law or regulation, provide for the preservation, arrangement, repair and rehabilitation, duplication and

reproduction, description, exhibition, display, and servicing of the Materials as may be needed or appropriate.

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: Clavdia Taylor Walsworth
Donor

Date: 11-4-08

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: Allen W. Winters
Archivist of the United States

Date: 12/9/08