Transcript of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project Interview with Richard Wood, August 2005

Subject: Richard (Dick) E. Wood (WOOD)
Interviewer: William (Bill) C. Carpenter (CARPENTER)

CARPENTER: OK: I guess we can start? This is an interview for the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project. The subject is Richard E. Wood. The interviewer is William C. Carpenter. Today's date is August 24, 2005. The time is about thirteen minutes past noon. I've drawn up a bunch of questions that can serve as a rough outline for the conversation today. We'll go through those in order, and in between, if you have any other concerns, Dick, you can just go ahead and tell me, and there will be time at the back to cover anything that we didn't cover within the...

WOOD: OK. If you have any questions for me, just interrupt, and I'll answer them as best I can.

CARPENTER: OK. Try to forget that you're being taped, but it's difficult to do. The first question is, how did your graduate study lead to your work at the National Archives?

WOOD: Actually, it was probably more of a personal connection than academic. I went to graduate school with a friend and colleague at Florida State University who subsequently began to work at the National Archives before I did, in the Agricultural Branch. And I was staying with him as I was doing dissertation research. And I would do my research in the research room, and of course he would be at his job. One afternoon we were together, obviously, as I was staying at his place, and he said that there was a fellowship opening at the National Historic Publications Commission, which is now the National Historic Publications and Records Commission, and that maybe I'd better consider applying for it, but I'd better apply for it quick, because there was only about a week before it closed. So I did, and actually I was selected to work as an NHPC Fellow with the papers of Jefferson Davis at Rice University in Houston. And so that's how I really got connected with the National Archives; although I had done research there, I had not initially considered working here, because in those days the academic emphasis was on teaching, to get your doctoral degree, and then to go into teaching at the college or university level.

CARPENTER: Was this fellowship a limited-term fellowship?

WOOD: It was a one-year fellowship. I worked at Rice University on the Jeff Davis papers for a year.

CARPENTER: Alright. What brought you up here?

WOOD: I'm from this area. I was born and raised here. When the Davis project ended--it was not renewable--I just came back to visit friends and visit family and see what I could find in terms of employment. As it turned out, the Davis project needed a researcher here, so I had a joint appointment between the Jefferson Davis papers here as their researcher in Washington and also with the Ulysses S. Grant papers, which was based in Carbondale, Illinois, at Southern Illinois University. So I in fact worked for the two opposing sides in the Civil War at the same time that I was looking for a job. And subsequent to that I worked with the Woodrow Wilson papers, so I consider myself to be like the man on the flying trapeze, where you get to the extension and then you grab on to the next ring. Then when I applied at the Archives, and at that particular point it wasn't in terms of a particular job, then in 1977 I got an interview with the General Archives Division, with Dan Goggin [?], who was the director at that time, and he hired me. And so I began working in August of 1977 at Suitland in the General Archives Division.

CARPENTER: Had you been looking for an academic job?

WOOD: Not actively at the time, because I had not finished my dissertation.

CARPENTER: So that took precedence over anything else...

WOOD: Right. I was trying to finish that up. I got my degree, actually, in 1976; I had worked on it while I was at Rice. But the Ph.D. was then assumed to be, at least where I was working, to be a precursor to going out and looking for a job.

CARPENTER: The second part of these background and early career questions have to do with your Army experience. I know you were in the Army for a while, and a lot of the records that we deal with here at the National Archives are military records; did any of your Army experience contribute to your later career at the National Archives?

WOOD: Um, I think again that the Army experience is more personal. I came from a strict academic background, so I think for the first time in the military I learned that the world did not consist of college students and bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students. So I got a very, very broad experience by being in the Army. So in that particular respect, and I think, a lot of times, it enables you if you wish to understand the value of focusing on a particular thing. Because I have to say that I was not the world's most athletic person at the time, nor am I now, and a lot of people in the military had done a lot more difficult physical labor than I did, but they had done it without any kind of focusing. So if they didn't want to do it, they didn't do it--and that's not the way things worked in the Army. But I could get through that, because I knew that it was eight weeks of Basic, then whatever else comes forward, and that's the end of it. So it was kind of like an interesting thing in terms of learning to focus; you have to learn to get some perspective and get through what you've got to do.

CARPENTER: OK. Good. Most of this interview has to do with specific processes and changes in processes throughout your career at the National Archives. The first area we are going to talk about is accessioning. I know that for the last many years you have been

the head of the accessioning group or function within NWMD. The next question has to do with how has records accessioning changed since you started working at the National Archives, and what has driven those changes?

WOOD: I think the biggest change that has happened is that, at least in terms of the local area here--first of all, what is now Archives I (but was then just the main archives building), and then Suitland, and now Archives II--is that the accessioning process has been more regularized. The schedules do say that the records would be transferred, if they are permanent, to the National Archives in five year blocks when they are thirty years old--there is generally some time at which they are going to be transferred to the National Archives--but I think that was not really systematically followed for a long period of time, due to a number of reasons. I would imagine staffing, and the fact that many of the records that people used at that time were already in the archives. I think that with the implementation of yearly accession transfer, that has regularized the system a lot more than it had been initially. Also, with the higher profiles that we've had with agencies, we've been more apt to get more direct offers coming from the agencies than previously. I don't want to say that that is absolutely the fact, because I did not work a lot with direct offers in my earlier career, but it seems that with the higher profile and in particular with the annual transfers we have gotten more regular in the process.

CARPENTER: OK. And the annual transfers only started four or five years ago?

WOOD: Right. They did, but we still got transfers; I don't want to say that we got nothing, but it has raised the agencies', and in particular the agency records officers' sensitivity to the fact that these things happen every year now.

CARPENTER: What was the driving force behind implementing that yearly transfer/

WOOD: The driving force behind it was basically the fact that the records center was going to a reimbursable basis.

CARPENTER: Ah, right.

WOOD: That agencies were going to be charged for storing their records in a records center. For a long time the emphasis in the records center program as I remember it was the fact that they could get records out of their own agency space into low-cost space. The cost was not on their part, basically, it was on the Archives' part that ran the system. But with the reimbursable system implementation earlier in the century, at the turn of the century, they began to charge agencies for that service. And so, many agencies felt that they needed to transfer their records in order to avoid charges.

CARPENTER: So if they are permanent records, get them out of the records center, and don't pay for them.

WOOD: Right.

CARPENTER: What was your role in establishing, or developing, or formalizing, these accessioning procedures?

WOOD: I was involved with the Business Process Reengineering that set this up; I was also involved with what was called the WNRC End of the Century Project, which was to go through the material that was scheduled as permanent and to look at the records to see if they really were permanent. We found a large number of records that were mis-scheduled, that were simply not described properly, that when you took a look at them in the center itself you found they really were not what they said they were and that they should be rescheduled under something else. It goes, I think, in part in the sense that people would send records to the record center, and although they would remain under their legal control, it was kind of like an out-of-sight, out-of-mind kind of thing. Agencies were not interested in retiring, or accessioning, records, because they had no real incentive to. As long as they remained under their legal control, then were basically paying for the space out of our own budget, de facto, then they had no incentive to transfer.

CARPENTER: Has that kind of attitude gone away over the last several years?

WOOD: I think it has moderated considerably. It is really up to the agency now as to whether they want to pay the money to store their records. If they want to pay the money to store the records, then that's what they'll do. But budgets run so many things these days, that it takes a real incentive for them to keep the records there.

CARPENTER: What kind of relationships have you developed with agency records officers, and how valuable are those relationships?

WOOD: In my career I have had a number of agencies that I have worked with; the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is the most outstanding one I can remember and is the longest of the ones that I have had. But I have also developed some relationships based on teaching records disposition schedules when I was in the records appraisal branch. It is valuable to a certain point. You get to know your records officer, and in that case the personal aspect really does smooth the way. You can call on them to ask them questions; in some areas you can call on them if you need something, and the personal aspect makes it a little bit better in terms of getting what it is you need at the moment. And on the other hand, they do the same thing. There have been many cases in which I develop a [Standard Form] 258 for agency records officers, because I've done it, it's more convenient, I can do it and get it to them. That helps them; at least that's one example. In the end, though, I think you have to remember that when you are dealing with agency records officers, that they do not work for NARA, they work for the agency that pays them. So, you have to be careful, because they will not do anything that they consider to be a detriment, or that their agency doesn't want to do. So you can be very cooperative among small things, but if you want a major records collection transferred that they don't want to transfer, they won't do it.

CARPENTER: So there are limits to that relationship…

WOOD: There are limits to that relationship. But in general, I would say that 70 to 80 percent of the time it works pretty well.

CARPENTER: Can you give examples of relationships that are negative; where you have a bad working relationship with an agency?

WOOD: Yes. There are relationships where due to some sort of misunderstanding, or due to some sort of thing that happened long ago, they have a bad view of the National Archives.

CARPENTER: Can you think of any examples?

WOOD: Yes, I can. We had a records transfer of the Apollo 204 fire investigation, which included some photographs of the three men, the autopsy protocols, and things like that. NASA transferred them to us. We screened them very, very carefully, because there were personal privacy issues involved, and generally speaking you don't want that kind of information splashed over the newspaper pages for the public. But we did release to a researcher portions of photographs containing just the space suits themselves, not the people in them, and not the bodies, but just the space suits. The agency was very, very upset over that, but we had judged that to be pictures of equipment, and we could not restrict it under the Freedom of Information Act, under the restrictions there. Their attitude and their reasoning was that to see the space suits would be able to visualize the bodies. And so, that was a very, very sore point and it went all the way up, at the time, to the Acting Archivist.

CARPENTER: Did that affect future records transfers at all? Did they hold records back because of this?

WOOD: I'm not sure whether they deliberately held records back, but they were reluctant to transfer. They were reluctant to deal with us in the same way afterwards.

CARPENTER: What are the main challenges you have faced in records accessioning-- you have mentioned some of them--and have these challenges shifted? Are they any different now than they were ten or fifteen years ago?

WOOD: I think it is more work for us. We have to go out there and convince people that it is desirable for them to do what we would like them to do, which is to transfer their permanent records. That's been the emphasis in the past. Earlier in my career a lot of the emphasis was on citing the law. The law says, "You must do this," and often the response to that is, "Well, we'll have your lawyers talk to our lawyers about this," so it gets up into a legal battle which, we all know, can last for years and years without a great deal of resolution. But we have to work harder now. The reimbursable program has helped. A lot of the work that we have done in terms of providing records to the public; in the [Supreme Court Chief Justice] John Roberts confirmation, which has come in now,

has raised our profile to do things, and has in some cases raised our credibility with other agencies. But I wouldn't want to press that point too far.

CARPENTER: My other questions have to do with organizational changes. NWML, the scheduling and appraisal people, are now a separate division. Do you have much overlap with what they do, with accessioning? It seems to me that accessioning has a little more to do with that kind of work, rather than with processing and declassification. What are your views on that?

WOOD: Well, they are all part of one constant flow, that sounds like a kind of stereotypical response, but I think it really is. I think the relationship between records appraisal and actual accessioning is closer than it appears with the stovepipe-type infrastructure which often occurs. I think it would be good if people that worked in records appraisal would be more conversant with their colleagues on the accessioning side, or in the reference side. There is a mechanism for this, because we do get the SHU, the Stakeholder Unit formats, to comment on; but a lot of times, the personal side of this enables me to go over to an agency with a records appraiser and explain what it is that happens after the records come in to the National Archives. And that oftentimes helps to clear up come of the preconceptions, or stereotypes, or misunderstandings that they may have about what the National Archives is.

CARPENTER: And that's just from your own experience?

WOOD: From my own experience, right. It also helps that I worked for almost five years in records appraisal, so I've kind of seen life from both sides.

CARPENTER. OK. The next bunch of questions have to so with processing and description. How have this agency's priorities for records processing changed, and what has driven those changes?

WOOD: I think that the big change in processing has been the introduction of electronic finding aids, the Web, that kind of thing. Also, and again this is just my general opinion, we often see expectations for processing that are really not realistic, in a sense that people will say, "Well, these records were transferred from the agency just last week. Why aren't they available right now?" And people oftentimes don't realize just how much time it does take to process a collection.

CARPENTER: These are [other] agency personnel?

WOOD: These are sometimes agency personnel, but more often, particularly if the records are controversial, like the recent FBI "Official Confidential Files of J. Edgar Hoover," which are obviously very high-visibility records, people want to see them right away. That oftentimes weighs against the systematic processing in the way in which we like to do it, because if the volume is large, you have a larger problem as far as processing is concerned.

CARPENTER: Do you think the standard for processing at the National Archives will need to change? Do you think that the model of having a single archivist working on a large project where everything has to be reboxed and refoldered will have to be amended?

WOOD: I think that's going to have to be modified quite a bit. We just get so much material in that we really need to basically pick and choose what it is that we process. I would rather process everything if I could, but I can't. The estimate for the material that we brought in under the P2005 Project, which is the 2005 regular transfer of records from the WMRC, is about 21,000 cubic feet. We simply don't have the staff to process 21,000 cubic feet, so you have to make a cut someplace.

CARPENTER: Would you rather see 1000 feet of that processed very, very well, and the other 20,000 feet left on the stacks?

WOOD: It really depends on the interest that people exhibit in the records. All of the records that we bring in are permanent, but they are not all equally used. Nor do some people consider them to be equally valuable. So this is a kind of position that you have to negotiate from. In records appraisal I know that there are some areas when you are doing something where you know the records are permanent. You just know that they are; it is obvious that they are. Then on the other side there are records that are obviously not permanent. Then there's that big gray area in between. And it's the same thing with processing. There are records that we know need to be processed. And there are records that we know can sit on the shelf for quite some time very happily, unknown to processing. Then there is the large gray area, and the large gray area is where you have a good part of your controversy. I'm talking about controversy in the sense that, "I think this group of records needs to be processed," and another person will say, "Well, no, I think that *this* group of records should be processed."

CARPENTER: How is that controversy worked out? Is it worked out in conversations between Reference and Processing?

WOOD: Yes, that's what we are trying to do right now. We're trying to coordinate more closely with the reference units--the people who actually use the records--to find out which degree of processing is needed for which degree of records. If two researchers a year look at Record Group X, and fifty researchers a month look at Record Group Y, the chances are that Record Group Y is going be processed more than Record Group X. But that doesn't mean that the person who is pushing Record Group X doesn't have an opinion on the value of those records.

CARPENTER: To what extent does the security classification of those records determine the processing of those records?

WOOD: I think it is a characteristic that I've seen in research that researchers believe that the classified records are the more interesting. So there is an emphasis in getting classified material process, versus unclassified. Now that brings us up to the problems of

declassification, of withdrawals and reviews, but in general people would obviously prefer to have the secret files of the Department of the Navy processed, as opposed to the general correspondence of the Department of the Navy.

CARPENTER: My next question has to do with finding aids. How have finding aids at the National Archives changes, and how substantive have those changes been? Has it just been a matter of format, or has automation really changed the way in which we do what we do?

WOOD: I think it has primarily been a change in format. I know that some people would probably object to that statement, but I think that we still do finding aids in an electronic format in the same manner that we did on a typewriter. The format and the technology have changed in the sense that I can do a finding aid now at my desk when I am processing records as opposed to the days when I first started when you would do it on a typewriter, or you would send it up to the office clerical, presuming that you had an office clerical. The big change in technology as far as access to the public is concerned had been the Web. You can put this on the Web now, and you can get a lot more distribution for it. It is a lot more widely seen when it gets put up on the Web. Paper copies--I have a number of paper copies in my office. Some of them are very valuable, some of them have records in them that nobody's probably looked at for ten to twenty years. But on the Web that obviously is more available to people.

CARPENTER: Have you noticed that that has changed the research interest in the last few years.

WOOD: Oh, yes. Obviously when you get finding aids out and people look at them they are more likely to find records of interest to them than they would be. If you are in Utica, New York, you can look on the Web and see s finding aid for records at the National Archives, and you can decide to come in or not for it. In the days before the Internet you would obviously write in to the National Archives, and your request would be forwarded to an archivist who was knowledgeable about those records, and he may or may not give you a finding aid or give you access to a finding aid. They simply weren't as available as they are now on the Web.

CARPENTER: Have researchers' expectations increased? Do they think everything should be on the Web?

WOOD: Yes. One of the things that I see in outside contacts with people who are not familiar with the National Archives; if I go to meetings or something like that, or if I meet somebody casually and tell them that I work for the National Archives, the question is always, "Oh, do you have everything on computer yet? Is everything computerized?" I have to tell them, "No, we do not have everything computerized, we have billions and billions of pieces of paper. Nor do we have records on all Americans living and dead." You have to tell people that for genealogical matters or for other historical matters is that you have to touch the Federal Government in order to possibly have a record at the National Archives. It doesn't mean that just because you touched the Federal

Government that you do, but you have to do it in that way. That's why if I talk to people about genealogy, I'll say that this is a wonderful place for genealogy, but start in your local area first, talk to your living relatives, open your family Bible if you still have one, and find out who was born and who died. And also deal with your localities if you know where people lived, because that's where a lot of the material is. My experience with that, is that my grandfather was given his citizenship papers in 1905, I believe, and he got then through the District of Maryland. It was a federal district, but in those days you could be naturalized in a state court, too. So you may not have all your genealogical information at the National Archives. But the expectation is often that we have everything, and we don't.

CARPENTER: Do you do very much outreach like that?

WOOD: No, I don't, it's mostly...

CARPENTER: They need to change the tape...

CARPENTER: This is a continuation of the interview with Richard E. Wood, for the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project. We were talking about outreach and genealogy talks.

WOOD: Right. I don't talk specifically to people about genealogy; it is more or less as I meet them and they ask me, "What do you do?" "Well, I work for the National Archives." You also can spread the word to agencies, who oftentimes do not necessarily share the knowledge that not all records go to the National Archives. People tend to think that what they what they want is here. It may be here, or it may not be here.

CARPENTER: The next group of questions have to do with declassification. How involved have you been with the declassification side of processing.

WOOD: I think to my detriment I have not been involved that deeply. My work began in projects and records appraisal, and basically has continued in accessioning and projects. I know the general requirements of it, as a supervisor, but I have to say that I have never actually done it, in the sense that I have looked at documents and decided whether they were fit to be released or whether they needed continued protection. I think that has been a problem in general through the Archives, in the sense that there has been a pretty strict division of labor, partially caused by the organizational structure that was set up some time ago, where you had a declass processing area, and you had a declassification unit and a projects unit, and you a had a reference unit; and oftentimes the three would not meet at all, or only at certain points. So those points are like the tangents of a circle, where they would meet only one particular place, and the rest of us go off and do our own thing. I had very little direct working contact with the people at Suitland in the declassification division, but of course I knew them because we were all working in the same building. I knew what they were doing, but my work was not the same as theirs, so it was not the case that we were very well coordinated, at least in my opinion.

CARPENTER: How would you evaluate the integration of the delass and processing units? Was it successful; is there still a break in culture...?

WOOD: It's been a partial success. The partial success has been in terms of the people who have come in since there has been an amalgamation of initial processing and declassification, in the sense that they have started out with a clean slate. Obviously declassification review is not something that is ordinarily done in the outside world, so you have to come in and learn how to do that. Archival processing, on the other hand, you can learn at least how to do that in the various archives courses that are offered now throughout the country in various universities and colleges. But I think it has been that success in the sense that younger people, or people that are starting out their careers now, are more attuned to doing both at once, than what I consider to be the older generation, perhaps even my generation, where, "I am a project archivist," "I am a declass archivist," or "I am a reference archivist..."

CARPENTER: To what extent has there been resistance...?

WOOD: I think there has been some, resistance as far as that is concerned. [Pause] Projects people will say, "Well, I've got to finish this project;" it's between what you know how to do and what you need to learn to do. If you don't need to learn to do it, you don't do it, and you don't pay much attention to that part of the need. And obviously there is plenty of need to do processing. You could do processing for the rest of your career and never look at declass. On the other hand you could often do declass exclusively. But that is the old way.

CARPENTER: This has to do with administration. We have talked a little about this before. Describe the shifts in emphasis at the National Archives that occur when the Archivist of the United States changes. Has it been palpable? Have you been able to detect it immediately?

WOOD: I think the Archives, like any other bureaucratic organization, when the change from the top occurs, there may be continuity or there may be change. People wait to see what is going to happen. I know there was a controversy when John Carlin first came on board. This was a man who did not have a background in what people considered to be the traditional academic scholarly training that was typical of Archivists roughly from the beginning when the National Archives was established. But I know personally I supported it, because particularly in terms of ability to pursue one's interests on Capitol Hill, which is where all largesse flows from, that Carlin as an ex-governor and a more politically connected person would be able to do that better. I hope that my justification on that was at least partially fulfilled. Now we have another Archivist, Dr. Weinstein, who is basically from more in the mold of the older, scholarly people; but I have no idea, one presumes that he also is working the political side of the fence as all of these officials should. The jury is still out on that, but it is a change that occurs with every Archivist. Mr. Carlin's big emphasis was on electronic records. Now Dr. Wienstein has said that he wants to continue with that...

CARPENTER: There is no backing away now.

WOOD: Right.

CARPENTER: Would you recommend any changes in the organization of the National Archives? If you had to reorganize NW, what would you do?

WOOD: [Pause] NW, when the organization came about, was an attempt to bring the lifecycle of records into one organization. NWML for the records appraisal and scheduling part of it, NWMD for initial processing and declassification, this kind of thing. I would personally like to see more inter-divisional activity between the two. I'm not sure exactly how that is done; you can mandate that it will happen, but the mandate will not necessarily ensure that it will happen. I would just like to see more use within the divisions of the expertise that various people have developed in terms of areas in which they work.

CARPENTER: Would that involve more involvement by processing archivists in reference work, or...

WOOD: Yes, I think that it would. One of the things I thought that I noticed in my career was that records do not come to the public directly from an agency in Hollinger boxes with complete finding aids and folder lists. I mean, this has to be done by somebody, and people need to appreciate how much work that is. People need to appreciate when you are scheduling records how much work it is when you are trying to deal with an agency that wants to cooperate but doesn't understand what is involved in the schedule-writing process or in an appraisal-type environment. One of the things that I think has helped me was the fact that I worked in records appraisal, so I know the difficulties that are involved with that, and I have worked in projects, so I know the difficulties involved with that. I have even on occasion worked in reference, so I know the difficulties that are involved in that. It enables me to hopefully get a better perspective when I have a problem as to what needs to be done. You balance: these records are very important, but they are not going to some here soon. Or these records are very important, they have come here, but they are in such a mess that they need to be processed before the public can look at them. But they need to be processed in a reasonably expeditious way, because at the same time you have the public coming in to the reference branch, saying, "Well these records have been transferred," like I said, "last week. Why aren't they ready? Why can't I have them right now?"

CARPENTER: Has the demise of the CIDS [Career Intern Development System] program, in which newly hired archivists are farmed out to various functions for a period of time hindered interdepartmental communication? Or is the demise of the CIDS program a good thing?

WOOD: I always thought that the rotations of the CIDS program were one of the most valuable parts of it. As a manager, you don't like to have somebody that is assigned to

your unit that is going to be off on rotation for two of the three years in which they are developing, because obviously you need people to work in your particular area. But if you are going to do something like that you need to basically say that you are going to lose that individual for however long you are going to do it. But it is a short-term pain thing for a long-term gain, that is for the institution. But short-term it can be very disruptive for you to be supervising somebody whom you never see. I though the CIDS program was in some cases very, very academically oriented, with papers. I was in the CIDS program at the very...I think they called it CIDS then; but it certainly wasn't as formally set up as it later became. But I know that having a bachelor's, a master's, and a doctorate, hopefully I knew how to write. This is not always the case, but in most cases it is. So it seemed to me that a CIDS paper, quote-unquote, was somewhat unneeded, or certainly in my opinion not worth some of the costs that it had, which is that you have to sit down and write the paper. It was just like a long term paper; that's what many people thought it was. And that generated a great deal, I think, of resentment of the program itself. But as far as the rotations were concerned, I know on my own rotations, I was in projects, I went to records appraisal, which was an interesting and an eye-opening thing. It does depend, however, on the willingness and ability of the gaining unit, that is the host unit, to give the incoming person something of value to do.

CARPENTER: Not just busywork.

WOOD: Yes.

CARPENTER: Do you remember what your paper was on?

WOOD: I didn't have to do a paper, because at that time...

CARPENTER: Ah, excellent!

WOOD: By that time all of this had been hashed out. I do remember that there was a considerable amount of questioning on that. In the earlier days of my career, your archivists tended to be people from academia. Now you have people who are much more broadly rounded in things like information technology; you don't have to just be a historian or a political scientist to be an archivist anymore. Although certainly it helps.

CARPENTER: It does help. The last of the formal questions is, is there anything else you would like to talk about that we have not covered that might be of value for NARA staff to know?

WOOD: Oh, I think that as an archivist and as a supervisor I think we have come a long way, but that we still have a long way to go. Particularly in terms of; well, some people believe that the management is horrible around here, that we are a bunch of hard-noses. Things have gotten a lot better in terms of the last years as far as the working environment is concerned. The Family and Medical Leave Act, credit time, that kind of thing would have been unheard of, or was unheard of when I started.

CARPENTER: What was the work environment like?

WOOD: The work environment when I started was that everybody started work at the same time, and everybody quit at the same time. If you used sick leave it was because you were supposed to be sick, so in other words, if you were a new father or a new mother caring for your children, that didn't cut any ice. You sere supposed to just use annual leave. And I do remember the controversy over flex-time, when it first came in. One of the things that was considered when arguing against it, was that, oh, people will go on flex-time and they'll take Fridays and Mondays off, and we won't have any coverage, this kind of thing. I remember the study that they did when they worked on the pilot program was that the greatest absenteeism because of taking time off were the administrative units rather than the units that actually dealt with the public, so that kind of weakened their case...

CARPENTER: Ha, ha, right...

WOOD: But I think that things have gotten better in terms of that.

CARPENTER: How hard was it for you to transition to be a supervisor?

WOOD: It can be a difficult transition if you have a lot of problem staff, and a lot of problems that hit you at the same period of time. I was fortunate in that respect; I had a very good staff, and still, I think, have a very good staff. You can manage the problems pretty effectively. The biggest difference from being a regular, or non-supervisory archivist, or technician, or specialist, to becoming a supervisory person is that you find that you need a larger perspective, but you find that you are not necessarily privy to the power that you are supposed to have or are perceived to have as a supervisor. There are certain things that I know about as a supervisor that for one reason or another I cannot impart to my staff until the time is right. But then again, I can't have somebody come in and say, "I would like you to do this," or, "I would like to do this," and I would say, "That can't be done because I can't do it." I can't say that this can be done; it is something that goes above me, or something that I can't do because of regulations or something like that. So you find that you have a greater perspective, you have more sources of information, but you do not necessarily have more power. I cannot simply wave my hand and say, "This is going to be done or not going to be done."

CARPENTER: Any other advice for the person who is going to be taking over after you?

WOOD: I remember telling people when I was earlier in this job that I thought the greatest asset in the supervisory position that I was in was flexibility. I said flexibility even more than knowledge, because you can usually find somebody who has more knowledge in a particular area than you do; if I can't work on this computer in a certain way, I can ask somebody who knows how to do it and they can probably do it in five minutes, whereas it would take me 45 minutes of frustration for something I would probably never get done anyway. You need to be able to adapt to what comes down the pike in position like this. That's what I would say: flexibility.

CARPENTER: OK. Anything else?

WOOD: I don't have anything.

CARPENTER: I don't have anything else either. That concludes this interview. It is about four minutes past 1:00. The subject was Richard E. Wood, the interviewer was William C. Carpenter.

Interview Questions

This set of interview questions serves as a guide for oral history interviews conducted under the auspices of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project. The questions are general and suggest topics for discussion and inquiries. The interview itself follows the lead of the informant. Follow up questions respond to the informant's answers.

The following protocols for the oral history interviews will focus the oral histories to gather essential information in the following areas:

I. Education and Academic Background:
Education and academic background of NARA staff, including experiences in archival related work.

How did your education influence your decision to become an archivist?

II. Personal Background and Experiences/Identity Issues:
Social/political/situational backgrounds of NARA staff: different perceptions, experiences, and goals (as affected by gender, family influences, race, class, political milieu of the informant's career.

Process of identifying as a member of the archival community; inclusiveness of the archival community; tensions within the community.

How difficult was it to identify yourself as a member of the archival community at the National Archives?

What were some of the challenges that you faced?

III. Collections Knowledge:
The institutional and intellectual value of the records

Beginnings: Discuss your early experiences with the records.

Turning points: What were some of the major issues that you faced in your work with the records?

Contexts: relations with government agencies

Gift of Historical Materials
of
Richard E. Wood
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, Richard E. Wood (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):

   Video recordings (1 VHS and 1 Beta Master) of an oral history interview of Richard E. Wood, conducted on August 24, 2005, by William C. Carpenter on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

   Tape recording (1 cassette and 1 compact disc) and transcript of an oral history interview of Richard E. Wood, conducted on August 24, 2005, by William C. Carpenter on behalf of the National Archives Assembly Legacy Project.

   Completed biographical form and letter of invitation for an oral history interview of Richard E. Wood, conducted on August 24, 2005, by William C. Carpenter 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, 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 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: _____
                        Donor

Date:____/ /5/06_____

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:____1 15/06_____