

**National Archives Researcher Forum—Washington, DC, Area
McGowan Theater, Archives I
Thursday, August 18, 2011**

Welcome

Susan Cummings, Acting Supervisor, Archival Operations, Washington, DC, welcomed everyone to this special August meeting of the Researcher Forum. While the group is usually on summer hiatus between June and September, this year the National Archives wanted to take this opportunity to introduce to the group NARA's new Research Services office, established on August 1 as part of NARA's transition to an even more customer-focused organization, and two senior leaders who are working to champion and improve the research experience: Jennifer Nelson and Debra Wall. The meeting expanded as well upon Rick Judson's preliminary presentation in June on the changes coming to the Warner Research Center at Archives I.

Introduction to Jennifer (Jen) Nelson

Susan Cummings introduced Jennifer Nelson, who currently holds two positions at NARA: Special Assistant to Chief Operating Officer (COO) Tom Mills, and Acting Executive for Research Services, to whom Susan reports. Research Services is the new office at NARA that manages archival and preservation-related functions for Federal records which were previously performed by components of the Office of Records Services—Washington, DC, and the Office of Regional Records Services. Its purpose is to provide a cohesive, collaborative national program for public access to NARA's accessioned records. Before assuming these roles, Jen served as Director of the Regional Archives program, so she is not new to leading the agency's archival programs. She has also directed NARA's Web Program. Jen has been a project manager and archivist and done processing and description, so she is very aware of the issues that staff come across as they work with the records and with you. She worked with researchers as well in her role as regional archives program director. Jen was a key player on NARA's transformation team. When Tom Mills talked previously with this group, he stated that the whole purpose of the transformation was to make NARA a much more customer-focused organization as well as a great place for staff to work—just two of the transformation pillars that Jennifer is championing for us.

Jen Nelson greeted the group by saying: I am going to keep this really short because we have a lot of great information to cover today. I know what it is like to be a researcher; I was a researcher in graduate school and am like many who come to NARA from school or from work in a research environment. I also know what it feels like to be a staff member working on the front lines. As a matter of fact, my first job at the National Archives was as a temporary student employee in the main research room at Archives I, working evenings and weekends, making sure that the pension files were cared for. I just want to assure you that, even though I have done a variety of things in the agency, I haven't forgotten what it feels like to want to walk into a space and feel welcome, to know what is going on, to have open communication with the people around you, to have the opportunity to work as closely as you wish with colleagues, and to find opportunities to share what you are doing with others, or not. So choice is what this is about. And I would just add that, in addition to supporting staff, my job is to make sure that we at NARA are working to give users that come not only to this building but to our 13 regional archives and Presidential libraries the best service that we can and that we help everyone to better understand our decisions and engage them in thinking about what's important to them in accessing records, in how we use our resources, and in how we treat records to enhance this access. We want to be partners with you. So you can look forward to our exploring and deciding together what kind of relationship we would like to have. We will have conversations where we brainstorm together, but not necessarily in this briefing format. I will want you to think about the issues that are important to you and how we can identify some problem-solving directions of mutual interest as we move forward. If you have

any thoughts or concerns about this process, feel free to contact me. You can reach me by e-mail at jennifer.nelson@nara.gov or by telephone at 301-837-2012. I look forward to working with you.

Introduction to Debra (Deb) Steidel Wall

Next Susan Cummings welcomed NARA's new Deputy Archivist, Deb Wall, to the meeting. Susan and Deb worked together previously in the agency's Policy and Planning office. Deb has held a number of leadership roles and led innovative programs during her tenure at the National Archives. For the past couple of years, she has worked in the Office of the Archivist, first as special assistant to the Archivist and then as Chief of Staff, looking out for the staff at the National Archives. We are excited to have one of our own in the role of Deputy Archivist. Deb began her work at NARA as an archivist, processing records, so she is a home-grown success story in many ways. She served for many years as Director of our Lifecycle Coordination staff and as Deputy Director of the Information Resources Policy and Project Division. She also played a groundbreaking role as first manager of NARA's Archival Research Catalogue (ARC), which has become our primary portal to NARA records on the Web. Deb was responsible, as well, for leading NARA's transformation team as it reconceptualized NARA's organizational structure and its six transformational pillars: A Great Place to Work, A Customer-Focused Organization, An Open NARA, One NARA, Out in Front, and An Agency of Leaders.

Deb Wall greeted the group and expressed pleasure with working at NARA for 20 years and having the opportunity to get to know many, if not all, of the group yet. She reiterated NARA's commitment to improving its services to the research community, three of which are evident in the changes being made to the Warner Research Center at Archives I: (1) an improved research experience; (2) keeping you informed; and (3) listening and responding to issues/comments/concerns that you have throughout the process.

Warner Research Center Update by Deb Wall

My presentation today has four basic parts. I will start by giving you an overview of the reconfigured space on the ground floor of the Warner Research Center at Archives I. I will then share floor plans and artist renderings of the reconfigured space. Next I will go through in detail what the construction sequence is, and finally we will have an opportunity to discuss the information presented. I've posted my presentation slides and script on the Researcher Forum web page so you won't need to take notes and can return to the information in the presentation as often as you like (see <http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-users-group/slides-presentation-8-18-11.pdf>). Please tell your colleagues it is there as well. You will have many opportunities to ask questions about the project as we move through the process.

Construction Scheduling: The projected start date of construction is September 26, with some preparatory work possibly starting as early as August 22. Most of that work won't be visible to you, but you might see people walking around with construction boots, which to me means construction has started. By the week of September 21 we will start to see staff moving into swing spaces. The goal is to complete this part of the project in 10 to 11 months. Now if any of you have renovated your kitchen, you know construction schedules change and slip; it would be surprising if that happens, but we will inform you of any changes to the schedule. We also intend to keep disruption to a minimum. Construction is going to be done at night, a full night's work starting at 7 p.m. Because the rooms are open until 9 some nights, workers will do less intensive/disruptive work during those two hours. We can't promise that there won't be any disruption, but we will try to keep it at a minimum. And we will keep in contact with you to ensure that it is kept to a minimum. When we get to the sequencing plan, you will see that we have tried to keep the high construction areas as far away from the researchers as possible. It's quite a process trying to plot all of this out.

All of our functions/services will continue during the remodeling period. Some things on the left may appear on the right; functions will move around but will continue with the least disruption and will not last long, perhaps half a day as necessary.

Plan D and Overview of the Research Spaces: Plan D is what came out of research services with John Martel, and that is the plan we are moving forward with. Many of you are familiar with it, but some are not so I will walk you through it. This layout is Plan D with a few slight tweaks. Once actual measurements were taken, a door had to be moved to the left or furniture placement had to change a bit so we could make code. But this is the plan that both staff and researchers came together and decided was the best of the options.

Let me orient you to the spaces here. The Research Commons is this area, which is currently called the ballroom. I like the name “Commons” because it reflects the function of the space. The library is basically where it is now. The Microfilm Research Room is up here. The Consultation/Finding Aids Room, here. Classroom, here. Support functions, basically staff space, is here connected to the Library. Staff space here connected to the Finding Aids Room. Restrooms are in the same place, and here are the locker rooms. The Pennsylvania Ave. lobby is here. And for those of you who can’t read floor-plans, here is an aerial view of the space, minus the support areas.

Now we are going to go room by room or chunk by chunk, and I’m going to give you a sense of how the space will be laid out and what it will potentially look like.

Research Commons. This space will be open and have the same hours it has now: Monday–Tuesday and Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Wednesday–Friday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m. The space might only be staffed 9 a.m.–5:00 p.m., but it will be open the hours that the complex is open. These are two big tables or computer table access hubs. The intent is to stagger work stations so you will have public access PCs (PAPCs) and open desk areas where you can plug in your computer and access the Internet. This is the initial researcher consultation desk, but there is some ongoing communication about the best placement of this desk or whether there should even be a desk. So that conversation is still going on, but for the purposes of the slides it was put here. That’s the volunteer station, where volunteers will be available to help researchers. This is the research and registration area with four stations and some desk area to work at and fill out papers. This is the vestibule, which will have double glass doors. It will be a significant improvement; it will keep down the noise and the cold blasts from the front doors. And this is where the new locker room will be. There will be three sizes of lockers: small, medium, and large, with a greater proportion of luggage lockers, which you all requested. And here is an artist’s rendering of what it might look like.

Library. Back to the overview slide. We will now take a look at the Library, which is in basically the same area as today. Some important information about hours: the Library will be open Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5p.m., but it will only be staffed from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. At other times, staff from the consultation area will be available to help people in the Library, but they may not be present in the space the whole time. The same resources we have in the library now will remain there, with one exception: NARA has purchased the Serial Set in electronic form so we will be moving out the paper version to gain additional space. We have room for 15 PAPCs. And this is where the library staff will be. Here is a rendition of what the space could look like.

Microfilm Research Room. Back to the overview slide. We will now go to the Microfilm Research Room. The hours of operation will be the same as they are now: Monday–Tuesday and Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Wednesday–Friday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m. There are 27 workstations, 18 are larger sized stations with room for a notepad or laptop. Of the 18, three are left-handed. And 9 are the smaller stations that we have now. There are 5 PAPCs. We will continue to use our current microfilm readers until new ones are available. As many of you know, there was a protest lodged against the contract we let, which is still with the GAO for resolution, so we are not able to say anything further about this. We also intend to order a DVD player viewer for the U.S. Colored Troop records. Because we recognize that, in this area, technology is changing very rapidly, we will continue to work with you on

requirements for the area. This is the emergency exit door, which is in a different location but leads to the same staff corridor that the current door leads to. And this is a rendering of what the space could look like.

Consultation/Finding Aids Room. Back to the overview slide. We will now go to the Consultation/Finding Aids Room. The hours of operation will be Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. There is room for 6 PAPCs. There is staff office space in the back that will be separated from the room by a glass wall. We have room for 3 teams of consultants; we plan always to have lead and back-up staff there. We will always be staffed, so help won't be too far away. This room is slightly smaller than it is now, but we think it is better designed for its purpose and will have a better flow. And currently we have those big chairs, which we will replace with smaller chairs that will work more appropriately in that space. And a rendering of what it might look like.

Classroom. Back to the overview slide. We now go to the Classroom, which used to be on the left side but is now on the right. The dimensions of this room are slightly smaller than the current room, but there are no pillars so you will have the same number of seats and a much better line of sight to the front of the room. I've included a photograph of one of NARA's conference rooms to give you an idea of what the wall treatments and molding will look like.

Overview of Construction Stages. We have completed our overview of the space and now move to an overview of the construction. It includes a preparatory stage, Phase 1, Phase 2A and Phase 2B.

Preparatory Stage. The prep stage is scheduled to start August 22 and won't be too visible to you. We will establish a staging space; create temporary Library offices (this is where the current Serial Set is, which we will use as the swing space to start). The Consultation/Finding Aids Room moves to its swing space, where the old pension files used to be. A temporary Cashier's Window will be constructed. And work in the restrooms begins, which are now on the visitor side of the building.

Phase 1. Phase 1 will begin on September 26, 2011, the official start of construction. Library offices move to the swing space. The Consultation/Finding Aids Room moves into its space. And then work begins on the new Consultation/Finding Aids Room, the Classroom, the glass entrances to the Library, and the Library offices. There will be a passageway through the work area for researchers and staff. The Locker Room will be temporarily reconfigured. We will still be using the old lockers, and the emergency exit door will be relocated. Restroom construction will continue.

Phases 2A and 2B. Then we go on to Phase 2, which is actually split into Phase 2A and Phase 2B because it is such a big and multi-part construction. In Phase 2A, which is scheduled to begin on January 23, 2012, the staging area gets reconfigured. The Consultation/Finding Aids room, Classroom, and Library offices move to their new space. The Library gets remodeled in four phases. You can see the different pieces of the room. And then the new Microfilm Research Room construction begins. A passage for researchers and staff is set up. The support space gets remodeled, which includes the locker room, restroom, staff office (i.e., Diane's office), and the corridor. And the earlier restroom construction continues.

In Phase 2B, scheduled to begin on May 21, 2012, staging gets reconfigured again. The Microfilm Research Room moves into its new space. The opening to G-37 is converted. The remaining portion of the Research Commons is remodeled. I should point out that we may not have all the furniture we need by the time construction ends, but we will exchange the new for old furniture as it comes in. The new entrance is established with a researcher/staff passageway, which includes the two double glass doors.

Concluding Comment. In my presentation, I have given you an overview of what the space will look like, what the sequence will be, and some of the high/key points of the schedule. I will conclude the formal part of this

presentation by reiterating two important points: First, we believe that the changes we have shown will result in a better use and flow of research space and become a more comfortable environment for both researchers and staff. And second, we are committed to an open process of keeping you informed and listening and responding to your concerns. This is one of the reasons Jennifer Nelson is here today, not just to be introduced to you but to let you know that she, as Acting Executive of Research Services, will lead this communication effort and ensure that it happens. I have known Jen since the day I walked in the door; we've worked together in several units, and I can tell you that she is dedicated, committed to open communication, which is good for both staff and researchers. She can be reached by e-mail at jennifer.nelson@nara.gov or by telephone at 301-837-2012.

We have plenty of time for questions and answers this afternoon, and there will be many other opportunities to address this topic. The information provided today has been posted on the **Researcher Forum web page** (<http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/researcher-users-group/slides-presentation-8-18-11.pdf>), along with a recording of the presentation. This information will also appear on the **NARAtions** blog (<http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/>) where you can add your questions or comments, and we will make sure your questions are answered.

Questions and Answers on Presentation

Q. Audience: My question has to do with the Serial Set; we are thrilled to have gotten an electronic Serial Set, which is one of the things that was a trade-off in this whole thing. When we originally inquired about this, we wanted to know what would happen to the books once the digitized ones were here. Can you tell us, first, what the plan is for the books? Then I will follow up.

A. Researcher Claire Bettag learned from NARA staff after the meeting that the books will be stored in closed stacks at Archives II. They will be available to researchers at College Park, or, if requested, can be sent from Archives II to Archives I for consultation the next day.

UPDATE: For additional information on this topic, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: If the set is being shipped to College Park, that means that we don't have access to the vast collection of maps that are in those books. The maps are a separate digitized series. As far as I know, we never heard any kind of discussion that we are going to get the digitized maps. I think there are as many as 30,000 maps, and they are fabulous maps. How can we get access to those?

A. Researcher Claire Bettag learned from NARA staff after the meeting that NARA does have access to the digitized maps as part of the electronic Serial Set subscription. Some trial searches were done, via the Advanced Search screen, and everything came up—in gorgeous color, digitized, and downloadable.

UPDATE: For additional information about the content and value of the Serial Set, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: So for practical concerns with the lockers, how many are we going to have access to compared to now? Some days usage is tight.

A. We have the specifics. There will be 139, which is reduced in number by half, but in a different proportion of sizes so more of the bigger ones will be available. Reviews and studies of usage indicate this should work, but if it doesn't, we will stay on top of that.

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Q. Audience: So during the sequence portion, which was great—the bathroom reconstruction, are there going to be other bathrooms made available to researchers? Sometimes it looked like the passageways were cut off.

A. There will be continued access to them.

Q. Audience: Just following up on the locker question: when there are events going on (where lots of carded researchers attend, not necessarily visitors), and we have reduced the number of lockers by half, what will happen if we come in to do research and there isn't a locker available?

A. I think we need to find out about those dates and the expected visitors and see if we have enough lockers. If not, we need to have a contingency plan for that. As an agency we are sensitive to knowing that you have a safe place for your items and to keeping our research rooms clean.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Jennifer Nelson comments: At the beginning of Deb's presentation, she talked about the desk configuration in the Research Commons area and mentioned the possibility that the desk might not be there. I just wanted to reiterate that, whatever the desk configuration may/may not be, it does not mean that staff will not be there for you to consult with and serve you. So saying that there might not be a desk does not mean there won't be people available.

Q. Audience: Speaking of that desk, is that where you would order military records, or is that somewhere else?

A. You would order military records in the microfilm room as you would now.

Q. Audience: So I guess some of the microfilm will have to be closed for research during the move, since there are so many films. Is there a plan, how long will the microfilm not be available to researchers?

A. Our intent is to make it as short as possible, possibly overnight or over the weekend. But in further discussion with staff after the meeting, it became apparent that closure might actually need to extend up to two weeks, based on NARA's experience in moving the Microfilm Research area after the major renovation of Archives I, to ensure that all aspects of the move are well managed.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: A question not only with the renovations taking place but, to be honest, there is not enough room on the second floor in the summer for researchers during DAR and NIGR meetings. I avoid coming to the Archives all of July because there is not enough seating space. I have seen times when we have come into the Microfilm Reading Room and there are not enough microfilm machines. And I see a real concern, I don't think the microfilm room is going to be big enough to meet the needs of everybody coming in. What is the contingency plan for when you have researchers and not enough room on the second floor?

A. For the microfilm room, we did a six-month analysis of usage. And we think we have more than enough room. If it comes down to a space issue, we might have to have a first-come, first-served list. But we think, based on trends, this is not going to happen. We haven't really addressed the second floor as part of this portion of the project. But we will be continuing this conversation, and that is one of the reasons Jennifer is here.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: I was wondering, since we are not getting new microfilm machines right away, are you guys going to fix the ones we have now? Some of them are not working properly.

A. The parts for the machines that we have in the microfilm room come from Israel, so it takes a while for us to get them repaired. In addition, we no longer have a contract for services, so we have to call them for service and try to do so quarterly. But since the parts come all the way from Israel it takes a while for the parts to come in and for the machines to be repaired.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: So will these machines be gone when the new research room opens, or should we order a bunch of parts and have a stockpile?

A. Yes, there will be a combination of machines, like the reader printers; we will just have to figure out what that combination will be. It wouldn't be a bad idea to get a stockpile of parts.

Q. Audience: I have a slightly different point of view. I have lived here for 20 years or so, but I just walked in and walked around the building. Last time I was here, I got out of an elevator and they said you need to go here; I went to a curved desk and asked "I guess I want to see the census of where my Grandfather lived." I was told to go over there. I had my first experience with a microfilm machine and it was very small and I knew that back there was this vast amount of information we couldn't get to. And I haven't seen how it is now, but after seeing this, I think I am going to have a wonderful time looking at it all, and I think it is great what you are doing here.

A. Well, thank you. Many of these meetings focus on the problems that we have, but I think we have been trying to make improvements and provide good service. Let us know what you think after this is all done.

Q. Audience: The desk that you were discussing that may or may not be there, will it function the same as the one where people walk in and don't know where they want to go? Or will it function as in the research room?

A. It's when you walk in and someone directs you to where you should go and what to do. It is that function.

Q. Audience: Is it correct to say that the current staff who work at the separate desks in microfilm will be merged together in one location in the new Microfilm Research Room?

A. Yes, those two staffing desks will be combined. Our staff works at both of those desks and the desk in the lobby. So in the future it could be a combination of the archivists and specialist.

Q. Audience: In the classroom, I know that the classroom currently has chairs around the wall, so if there are more than 20 people attending an event, they can be seated. Will the new classroom have more chairs, or is it limited to 20?

A. Many of the programming events do not necessarily require tables. So many of the tables could be put against the wall and make room for more seating; they are not fixed tables. Possibly 40 or 50 seats. And without the pillars in the room, there is even more visibility. We can get those specifics.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q. Audience: I know you couldn't comment on the contract that was contested. Is there a way to give public input?

A. It is with GAO and is a legal matter with no way to give input. It is out of our hands.

Q. Audience: Regarding the Research Commons area, where you have chairs: it would be nice to have workstations or terminals with digitized finding aids and an online request pull slip so that those of us who use the records often could go into the Commons area and go to a walkup terminal and check the finding aid and then give an online request, which would be a lot faster than going into the Finding Aids Room.

A. So there are a couple of levels to that answer. There will be PAPCs there, but what I think you are talking about is more digitized finding aids. We are working on that steadily, but you know how many finding aids we have. You also mentioned electronic pull slips, which we have people looking at and working on and which has to fit into procurement and is not a stand-alone system. We are in a process of figuring out what our new registration system will be, and when we do that, the pull slips function will be tied into the registration system so it knows who you are. It is in the plans, but it is a year, if not two, away.

Q. Audience: When the researchers come in the morning, is there any way we can use our cards to sign in instead of signing in using the book? The lobby area becomes very crowded.

A. We will look into that.

Q. Audience: What is the current square footage and what will it be when the remodeling is complete?

A. I don't know the overall square footage but yes, it is less than it is now. We'll get the exact numbers for you. However, I hope you will agree that our service to you should not be measured in square footage, but in the quality of the services we provide. And I do think the new space will have much improved flow and efficiency.

UPDATE: For additional information on this issue, please see our NARAtions blog post at <http://blogs.archives.gov/online-public-access/?p=6037>.

Q/A. Going back to the GAO questions, they have a listing of the regulations they operate under for bid protest. So you can go to their web site and find out how the system works.

Q. Audience: Did we wind up with enough space for all of the microfilm and the finding aids and the DPs that are currently in the Microfilm Reading Room?

A. Yes, we will have enough room for the microfilm we currently have as well as another 4,000 rolls. At least enough for the next 4 years. We also have room for the finding aids. So, yes, we have room for everything.

Next Meeting of the Researcher Forum

Susan Cummings asked the group: "Do you like being here in McGowan Theater or in the classroom? I just want to get your opinion." A researcher responded: "This room is large and wasted space, and it is troublesome to go outside and come around to this side."

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 16, at 1:00 p.m. in Room 105 at Archives I. There are two items on the agenda: (1) a brainstorming session on how you wish to move forward with the Researcher Forum, so please come prepared to share your ideas, and (2) a discussion with NARA's digitization partners: Sabrina Petersen and Echo King from Ancestry.com; Brian Hansen from Fold3 (formerly Footnote.com); and Emily Schultz from FamilySearch.org.

Jen Nelson will lead this and other forum meetings. She is committed to working with the research community. You can still bring questions and comments to Susan Cummings, Trevor Plante, Diane Dimkoff, or staff. If there is something that you are particularly concerned about, please bring it to Jen's attention. Thank you all for coming.