

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
TRANSCRIPT OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES HISTORY OFFICE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Subject: Peggy Adams

Interviewer: Jessie Kratz

January 29, 2018

Conducted at the National Archives Building, Washington, DC

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MS. JESSIE KRATZ: All right. Well, let me get the metadata started for this. My name is Jessie Kratz. I am the Historian of the National Archives and today I'm interviewing Margaret "Peggy" Adams in the Washington Room of the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. Today is Monday, January 29, 2018. And Peggy, thank you for joining me today. We are just going to start by talking about your career and your education before you came to the National Archives. Could you talk a little bit about that?

MS. PEGGY ADAMS: Okay. Well, I'm just thinking. You said January 29. I believe that's my anniversary date of coming to NARA in 1987.

MS. KRATZ: Wow.

MS. ADAMS: Yes. There was a snowstorm and so I started later than I was supposed to, but I think it was January 29th. If not, just right around there. And that was '87, so that would be 31 years ago, right?

MS. KRATZ: Yes, 31 years ago.

MS. ADAMS: 31 years ago I came to NARA.]Now before that, well before that, I had done a master's degree in history at the University of Wisconsin (UW) and taught world history for a year at a small college outside of Chicago, Rosary—it was then Rosary College. It's now Dominican University. Then I got married and moved back to Madison and had to find a job. I interviewed for a variety of things and ended up being hired as the founding data librarian/archivist for the UW Social Science Data and Program Library Service, DPLS. DPLS was established in 1966 by the University of Wisconsin as both an archives and a library for the social science machine-readable data that were being generated by faculty and students at the University of Wisconsin so it could be preserved and reused. [DPLS was also created to serve as the campus repository for the data that the university acquired as a benefit of its membership in the national Inter-University Consortium for Political Research (ICPR, now the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, ICPSR), and of its membership in the International Survey Library Association of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. DPLS was positioned within the UW College of Letters and Science, funded by the UW Graduate School and the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) and reported to a faculty board of directors. Gerry Ham, then head of the Wisconsin State Historical Society and a highly-respected archivist and historian, served on this board, as did History Professor Jerome Clubb, who was one of the pioneers of quantitative history.]

So, I sort of fell into the full area of data archives. Just lucky because I was hired [to be the founding data archivist] because I had had graduate work at Wisconsin and knew the research process. That's kind of what I was told. [DPLS was a unique organization;] there weren't these kinds of organizations anywhere else. And that was in 1966. [The DPLS holdings were primarily stored on computer-readable punch cards, with a small proportion of the data files stored on computer magnetic tape.]

So, I was there for three years and then my husband, Tom, had a Fulbright and we went to France [for a year. Before we left, DPLS sponsored, with support from the UW and the National Science Foundation, a national Workshop on the Management of a Data and Program Library. While we were in France, I edited the proceedings from the workshop. When we] came back I did some part-time work associated with DPLS. But then we moved on to Kansas and we had small children, and I wasn't [professionally] employed for about six years, although I did some part-time teaching in there, some secondary teaching and some college. [I also took a few graduate courses in Political Science.]

And then we moved to Kentucky, and I had a position in what was called Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Kentucky where I managed an online numeric database system on the state's economy; [I also edited a quarterly journal and participated in] a variety of related research activities. And that took me to the end of the 80s.

So, I had done all of that [before coming to the National Archives]. In the course of the work at Kentucky—and I was just talking with Nancy Melley, [now Director of Technology Initiatives at NHPRC] about this. I was a consultant on a NHPRC-funded electronic records project for the State of Kentucky, basically hired because of the work I was doing at the university, and I was familiar [with the commonwealth's computerized records]. So, I did [that project] as part of my job at the University of Kentucky and then we moved to the DC area after I had gotten the position with the National Archives and my husband got a position at NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities]. So, we were both in the same place at the same time, which we hadn't been because of the history of the job market at that point.

MS. KRATZ: What made you apply for the job at NARA?

MS. ADAMS: Well, what made me apply really was Lew Bellardo had originally been in charge of the electronic records project at Kentucky and I talked with him shortly before he was leaving Kentucky for a position he took in Georgia and it seemed to me at the time that the position he was taking in Georgia was taking him away from electronic records and so I asked him something to that effect and he told me no, "I turned down a position at the National Archives in the machine-readable project, the machine-readable branch." And so, ding-ding, my husband and I were looking to be able to move to the same place, to the same city and have professional jobs. Obviously, data work is a fairly small little universe and when Lew mentioned the National Archives was looking to rebuild their machine-readable branch, it seemed an obvious thing for me to contact them. And I had some contacts from my days in Wisconsin at the Census Bureau and I called that person and talked with her for some time, and she then got in touch with somebody at NARA. And I got called and the rest in history.

MS. KRATZ: Okay. And that was in 1987 you started?

MS. ADAMS: I started in 1987 but all of those conversations took place in 1986.

MS. KRATZ: And then what was your impression of the National Archives when you came here?

MS. ADAMS: Well, I had an interview with Trudy Peterson [then head of the Office of the National Archives], and Bill Cunliffe [then director of the Special Archives Division], in Trudy's office which had a nice big Wang computer [terminal]. They sold me on being part of the rebuilding of the machine-readable branch. When I arrived and was assigned to my office on the 21st floor, or 21st stack level, I had a wooden desk that didn't have any drawers and I was given an old upright typewriter as my

personal piece of equipment. I was coming from Kentucky, right? So [think of] all of your stereotypes, but I had had my own PC for several years. There was an IBM plant in Kentucky, and they made sure the university was well supplied. And to be given a manual typewriter as my personal piece of equipment to help rebuild the machine-readable records program was quite a shock. And what I got introduced to was how under-resourced the National Archives really was. And that comes out in the articles of some of my colleagues in the 30 years book¹: how under-resourced NARA was. And so that was a major shock.

MS. KRATZ: So, what was your first order of business then if you're sitting there with a typewriter trying to—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] I wrote a memo. [Laughing]

MS. KRATZ: What did your memo say?

MS. ADAMS: Something to the effect that I don't believe this.

MS. KRATZ: Give me a computer [laughing].

MS. ADAMS: I don't believe that I'm expected to help rebuild the machine-readable records program and have as my personal equipment a manual typewriter. There was a dial up computer [terminal]. It was a DECwriter, which accessed the [mainframe] computer at the NIH which the staff commonly used. [The NIH computer center was then a data center for several federal agencies.] Then there was also a Wang system [terminal], like I had seen in Trudy's office. I therefore had been blindsided to the fact that this [equipment was only] in a few offices including in the machine-readable records branch. There was one [NCR terminal] and it was only used there, well, it was primarily used there, for accounting purposes for the Trust Fund's system for handling reproductions of records and the cost recovery for that.

So effectively the staff did not have equipment and the staff at that point, as part of the rebuilding, was being trained in using this DECwriter to communicate with the NIH computer and was learning to do some forms of programming that were then sort of the default processes at the NIH Computing Center, which [the branch] was using for our data services. [All of this was reminiscent of my 1960s experiences at DPLS, but this was 1987, at the U.S. National Archives.]

MS. KRATZ: And who were your colleagues when you first started at the machine-readable branch?

MS. ADAMS: The head of the branch at that point was Edie Hedlin. And Tom Brown was down in an office that was off of Trudy Peterson's—he was on her staff. And I had actually known him through other professional activities from when I was in Kentucky. In fact, it was he who my contact at Census called when I was looking for a job. So, he was a colleague, but he was not in the machine-readable branch at that time.

Others [archivists] in the machine-readable branch then were Ross Cameron (who has just recently retired), Mario Lopez-Gomez, Don Harrison, Bruce Ambacher, Chauncey Jessup, Mike Meier, Fynnette Eaton, and Nancy McGovern had just been brought in from other offices. What Edie was doing generally was trying to build up the staff by getting people detailed from other places. I was an outside hire but most of the others were building up from inside.

¹ *Thirty Years of Electronic Records*. Edited by Bruce I. Ambacher. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003.

MS. KRATZ: And in those very early years, what was a typical day like?

MS. ADAMS: Well, very shortly after I came on—well Mario Lopez-Gomez (who left the Archives about '89 or '90 and went to Justice) was very much involved in the reference program. [He was handling its technical aspects.] And shortly after I came on, I got assigned, basically, to manage the [rest of the] reference program. So, my work started trying to get a handle on what the holdings of the branch were at that point, how the National Archives was making those records available, and how it was making known that it had those records.

MS. KRATZ: And what were the electronic records in—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Well, the records that were in most demand and that to some extent still are, are the casualty records from Vietnam and Korea. So, I found myself, after having been at the University of Wisconsin during the Vietnam War and active in the anti-war movement, coming to the National Archives 20 years later and dealing with reference questions from veterans about that war. Initially I found that quite a shock because if the people that I had worked with in the anti-war movement had been more successful, those guys would never have been there. And it occurred to me not long into the whole thing, when you hear the stories and all the rest of that, that well, the least I could do is provide service to them. And that really drove that reference program for a very long time: the casualty records from the Vietnam and Korean Wars, which came to the National Archives in the early 1980s.

And then other [digital] records that were here at that time were records from the Securities and Exchange Commission and from the former Civil Aeronautics Board. Well, I'd have to look at the list now to remember when that was what. But the Vietnam collection was very definitely [dominant] and it was also the most unique kind of thing. It was a collection that, or a series of records, that none of the academic data services had. That wasn't the kind of data they had. And so not only was I not familiar with it but it was the only place in the country you could get those records. And for the Vietnam and Korean casualty records, the reference service was to provide as much record-level response as possible. But for all of the other [machine-readable] holdings, copies of [complete data] files [on magnetic tape] were made available.

MS. KRATZ: Can you walk through the process that a researcher would go through to access the Vietnam records?

MS. ADAMS: It would be a veteran calling and saying I need—among other things—I need to document that I was exposed to a stressing event and the buddies that I served with died. Can I have their casualty records? So, we would be working with them to try and pinpoint sufficient information to try and get down—

MS. KRATZ: [Interposing] And you would actually go find—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Right.

MS. KRATZ: They couldn't access the—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] They couldn't directly access. We had full printouts of those records and one practice that the Department of Defense had started even before they transferred the records to the

National Archives, was to create state lists of casualties which are extracts from the whole database which organized casualties by their state of home of record. Those were very much in demand for memorializing purposes. In addition to the individual veterans who were seeking records of buddies in order to document their post-traumatic or their stressing event, you had all of the people trying to memorialize. And that was also during the period where there was a lot of emphasis on the people who were at that point still considered to be missing or prisoners, well, not prisoners of war but missing in action—which really were the people whose bodies had never been recovered.

MS. KRATZ: Can you talk about as time progressed and your career with the archives, the kinds of things you were involved in and how your career changed?

MS. ADAMS: Well, let me just get back to the Vietnam casualties just very briefly.

MS. KRATZ: Okay.

MS. ADAMS: [The casualty records dominated, yet] the collection was continually growing, and the big goal was to make known the existence of these files. But in the course of that, I had only been here a couple of years when one day I got a call from a veteran who said he had been at the wall [the Vietnam Veterans Memorial] the night before talking to the ranger, and he said to me “I lost my legs but not my life and the ranger said you could help me.” So, I started going through [the printouts of] the casualty records and it was at that point that we were becoming aware of the fact that there were a lot of errors in the data, especially in the data from the Army. [The Army casualty records covered both wounded and deceased and were worldwide in scope. The DOD casualty records, in contrast, were records, from all the military services, of the deceased, missing, or prisoners of war from the defined Southeast Asian combat area.] The folks who built the Wall had used as many sources as they could find for information to honor casualties [from the Southeast Asian combat area.] Since there were errors in the data, they picked up errors in some of the names that they put on the Wall. [As I recall], it turns out there were 13 people whose names were on the Wall who were in fact living and this gentleman was one of them. And so we worked with him to find that his record [of his nonfatal casualty] was erroneously coded in the Army database [as fatal] and that’s how his name got up on the Wall. But we were able to find that and also provide sufficient information that that was corrected in [subsequent transfers] in the databases by the creating agencies.

So, news of that kind of support clearly traveled among veterans’ organizations and there was a fair amount of publicity about that particular incident and we then started getting a lot of requests, like from a veterans’ group someplace in Chicago. [One of their members came to NARA several times] with all kinds of information. He had been asked by his veterans' group, [and sometimes funded by them], to come down to DC and see what he could find out about all the different people that all of these people had served with.

So, it [our reference services] sort of morphed that way. Among the other Vietnam era records are the records of all the air sorties. And so among other things we were in contact with a reporter, a CBS reporter, who was doing a story on the unknown soldier from Vietnam. And we were able to work with him not only to find—he had enough information about somebody he thought was the unknown. And we were able to find that gentleman's casualty record that conformed to what the family had known. But [using a volunteer- developed prototype system for searching records], we were able to find the air sortie record which then convinced the military that he was no longer unknown, that they had identified this person. So that was working with the media.

So, it [the early 1990s reference program] was Vietnam driven but took on many ramifications. At the same time the holdings themselves were growing substantially, I mean, because every agency in the federal government had data that undergirds their systems and those were beginning to be transferred to NARA. So we were expanding in terms of getting on top of—we had something that we called the Title List of Holdings of these files that we kept maintaining and made available. [It replaced an earlier data catalog.] We did it through the NIH computer, so once BitNet, [a computer network] came about we were able to make it available through BitNet, [subsequently using the communication tool] FTP. So, we were putting a lot of emphasis into description as well as in service to the extent—I mean, but limiting the individualized service to the Vietnam [and Korean] casualty records because you could never—

MS. KRATZ: [Interposing] Do it for all agencies.

MS. ADAMS: No, I mean, there's just no staff to do that.

MS. KRATZ: Right. And about how big was the staff?

MS. ADAMS: Well, when I started out, I was doing that work and there was, I said Mario Lopez-Gomez who was handling all of the reproductions of records and all the sort of building the databases and helped us increase the Title List and so forth. And then we had a technician and then we hired another technician not too long later. And then gradually a professional. But it never was more than three or four people. And even now [2018] the reference staff, electronic records, is only, I would say five or six people. But a lot more material is available online now.

MS. KRATZ: Right.

MS. ADAMS: But like with anything technological, you evolve and you provide new services and those new services generate demand for even more services. So, but still very understaffed. And it was an era when machine-readable records, or electronic records as they became, as their next identity, for all intents and purposes still meant digital data. The whole business of all of the office automation records and email, and all the rest of that didn't come until later.

MS. KRATZ: Yeah. So, I was going to ask, how did the advent of the Internet change your work processes or was it something that came like much later? Because agencies weren't transferring their emails until—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] I don't understand that.

MS. KRATZ: Yeah, exactly.

MS. ADAMS: I mean, I am removed from the program for the last five years, [so my comments don't reflect recent developments]. But the focus on email of course came with the White House email. I would say it was a slower evolution, when it, I mean, we had BitNet before we had the Internet and BitNet was just in universities and government agencies. But that provided a mechanism for people to get information and having FTP, file transfer protocol, meant that people could download like the Title List and so forth.

So, at each stage, technology enhanced the services that could be provided, and we tried to keep up as much as we could, or that resources, etc. [allowed]. But we had a presence on the "web" in a sense before the push of the Internet.

MS. KRATZ: In like the early 90s?

MS. ADAMS: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Right. And unfortunately, [beginning in 1993], the PROFS² case ate up most of NARA's resources for electronic records, handling the demands of that litigation. So, although the branch, by then it was the Center for Electronic Records, had developed a computerized capability to validate the data files that agencies were transferring, which created metadata which, the intent from the very beginning was that that metadata could be used to make records available and assist researchers. Because of the PROFS case, all development on that ceased until the PROFS case was basically done with and so we had a long period — and that's covered in the 30 years book. We were doing what we could to continue, I mean, the reference program was pretty isolated from the PROFS case—

MS. KRATZ: [Interposing] Okay, I was wondering if you were involved at all.

MS. ADAMS: No, not directly, no. And Ken Thibodeau, [the Center director], was very prescient in doing that so that the [archival electronic records] program could at least still survive. I mean it was certainly being taxed very heavily to have so much of its resources handling that case. But what we could do didn't involve a sort of building on what had gone before with the intention of it affecting reference and access until the late 1990s, which is when NARA was finally in a position to let the contract that led to the development of the Access to Archival Databases.

MS. KRATZ: The AAD.

MS. ADAMS: Which is still up.

MS. KRATZ: I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the development of the AAD and your role in that.

MS. ADAMS: Well, I was very directly involved in that. We worked with contractors, using the metadata that is produced as a result of processing to then develop a capability for a selection of the holdings, those which really lend themselves to individual record level access to be available for search and retrieval on an individual record level. So those would be records that identify specific persons, places, institutions. A large proportion of the holdings which are research files that agencies produce are not appropriate for record level access. So AAD only deals with files that are appropriate for record level access and we use the metadata from the processing to then have the metadata that could be displayed as the codes and values for the data that is record level accessible, and that's where AAD shines. And I'd like to see it get some expansion.

MS. KRATZ: For those who are listening who don't really know about AAD, could you kind of describe a

² A lawsuit (*Armstrong v. Executive Office of the President*, 1 F.3d 1274 [DC Cir 1993]) filed by Scott Armstrong, American Historical Association, the American Library Association, the Center for National Security, and others, relating to access to and the disposition of email records. The case takes its name from the IBM PROFS (Professional Office System) email system used in the White House.

little bit about what kind of researcher would use that?

MS. ADAMS: Well, now the holdings of AAD have not only casualty records but the [immigrant] passenger lists that are computerized and donated to the National Archives in electronic form. There are World War II records of Army enlistees which the Army had digitized, I mean, not digitized, had created on punched cards during the war and then those were migrated to tape. So, the World War II enlistees, there's about nine million of those records. There are similar records for all the internees of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps where the WRA had also captured that information on punched cards originally which were later migrated to tape.

So those are the kinds of records that have individual personal meaning to people. If you sort of think of researchers as those who are seeking information from records and people who are seeking information to create new knowledge, the folks who are looking for information from individual records are the kinds of folks who would best use AAD, whereas those who are looking to analyze data get copies. Now, they get copies [of files] through downloading them. But for the longest time, and continuing to this day, [software-independent copies of files] could be made available on removable media on a cost recovery basis. And that, although people who were unfamiliar with the phenomenon find that a very backward way of providing access to records, is the type of access that analysts want. The fact that they can now download the whole file is obviously better than having to get it on removable media. But they're still looking for the whole file, so they have the whole file [of records] to analyze. Whereas people who are looking for information from that one record want to use something like AAD to retrieve it. And it's [AAD] on the Archives' website going in through the research page and so forth and there are a whole bunch of different categories of records. I just named some of the obvious ones.

MS. KRATZ: So, were you in the same unit the entire time you were here?

MS. ADAMS: Yes, I was. The unit itself changed to many different identities but yes. That's what I came to the Archives to do. That's what, I mean, I had had this opportunity that was really very unique and, you know, my work with the University of Wisconsin and then at Kentucky doesn't fit any kind of real career path nor, even now, is there really training for that kind of career path. So, I very deliberately was coming to the National Archives to be a part of what was then called the machine-readable branch and which now is the electronic records division.

MS. KRATZ: Yeah. So, did the Archives offer additional training opportunities for you?

MS. ADAMS: Well, yes. I took a bunch of courses at NIH, well, so it was NIH, I mean the government sponsored them. But that's primarily what I did. And then of course from time to time there would be a variety of management courses and that kind of thing. [I also had immersed myself in archival literature when I was working on that NHPRC-sponsored project for the Kentucky State Archives. I also had opportunities throughout my career for the kind of training that comes from participating in professional associations and meetings, and NARA was very supportive in this regard. I published a number of articles and also taught some workshops, and you always learn a lot through that kind of activity. And, I had an opportunity for a several month detail at OMB, which was highly informative].

MS. KRATZ: And did the change in the Archivist and Acting Archivist and the new Archivist change your work at all? Did they implement any changes or ask you to make changes or did you basically have a constant mission the entire time and didn't really deviate—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Me personally?

MS. KRATZ: Well, I guess you personally and then also the machine-readable/electronic records programs.

MS. ADAMS: I think that mission has stayed pretty much the same. Has it been understood by the rest of the agency? Not always. And any time you have new people who have no previous experience with [data], then you've got a big learning curve for them to have an understanding of how this [digital data records] fits into the rest of NARA. Given that the digital universe now represents to such a large extent office automation and social media and all the rest of that, that's very known to people because it's something that they've had experience. So, the challenge always is you—people's understanding of what electronic records are depends upon where in their lifetime they first started interacting with them. So, the challenge [for the electronic records] staff always is to meet people wherever that is and then try to bring them forward to an understanding of how this kind of documentary material, primary source material, fits into a traditional archives.

In many countries, especially in Europe, the way research is funded in those nations leads to the creation of national data services or national data archives in a way that is different in the United States. Or, the centralization of statistical production in many countries does not exist in the United States. We have a very disaggregated statistical system where you've got many, many different agencies.

MS. KRATZ: And they're not—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] And it's not one central place. So that diffusion means that there's also not one obvious federal agency other than the Archives, which does have a government-wide responsibility, to be the host for that kind of service. So, it's very—I mean, as the 30 years [book] shows, in Meyer Fishbein's work and others at the time and since, using the computer or before, basic machines, was an expansion of the way in which primary source documentation is created. So, the Archives is responsible for all primary source documentation that has long-term value that the government produces, [including digital data]. But it's still always kind of a stepchild.

MS. KRATZ: Yes. [Laughing] Well, I do want to go back to the beginning when you mentioned you didn't have a computer. When did you get your first computer?

MS. ADAMS: I couldn't put a date on that. There was a point at which—and the [electronic records] reference staff moved down to the 18th tier. I mean, obviously it's not—

MS. KRATZ: [Interposing] Yeah, where you [were] originally?

MS. ADAMS: On the 20th or 21st tier, I'm not sure. The machine-readable branch was on 20 and then there were a few people who had offices up on 21; that's just a stack entry. And then there was a biggish room on 18 which was opened up for the reference staff of machine-readable. And I know we were in there when we got the PCs but I couldn't tell you for sure when we moved down there. But we moved out to College Park in the 1990s, let's see. Clinton was elected in...?

MS. KRATZ: '92.

MS. ADAMS: 1992. So, the PROFS case began in—so he became President in '93 and that's when all hell

broke loose in 1993. So, my guess is it must have been 1994 that the machine-readable branch, by then the Center for Electronic Records, moved to College Park. Before that there had also been expansion when Ken Thibodeau came on as director of the Center. His office was down on the 5th or 6th tier, someplace else.

MS. KRATZ: And it doesn't exist probably.

MS. ADAMS: No. I'm sure none of this exists anymore. But all of this was better than the stories I always heard from the folks who were—see Trudy Peterson's article in the 30 years book—when they were down on 14th Street in some offices on 14th Street when 14th Street was not where anybody wanted to be.

MS. KRATZ: So, then you moved to College Park in 1994.

MS. ADAMS: And so it was sometime before that that we got computers. Probably at least two years before that so it—but I mean it was a goodly while, I mean, we got pretty adept at using the Wang and there was also the NCR machine for the Trust Fund. and Wang to do a little bit of word-processing. And then the DECwriter interactive terminal, typing terminals. That's what we used for interaction with NIH and the maintenance of the Title List such as it was that we had then.

MS. KRATZ: So, when you moved to College Park, were you provided new equipment?

MS. ADAMS: Yes.

MS. KRATZ: And how did things change with that move?

MS. ADAMS: I don't think a whole lot (as we continued to use BitNet and were already using office automation). But, you know, you forget an awful lot. It's like with any kind of pain [laughing], you forget it. I mean, compared to the facility, the kind of physical environment, it was really nice being downtown but the physical environment was really lacking. And those of us on the 18th tier actually had nice digs. So many of our colleagues in the then-expanded Center for Electronic Records, were in space that was just unbelievable. So, it was very positive change that way.

MS. KRATZ: And you were all brought together into one office space?

MS. ADAMS: One—yes, yes, one large office space. Well, two large office spaces but they were just across the corridor from each other.

MS. KRATZ: Were they on the sixth floor?

MS. ADAMS: Fifth. And then at some point we also moved down to the fourth floor.

MS. KRATZ: Okay. And then you continued to work in reference.

MS. ADAMS: Right.

MS. KRATZ: While you were—well, I guess your whole career?

MS. ADAMS: Right. And after Tom Brown retired as the head of the Archival Services branch of the Center, I took his responsibilities and eventually was hired into that position. So, for the last six years or so of my career, I was managing the Archival Services program more generally, but up until that point I was doing the reference part of it [although I also had other responsibilities like the review of records schedules and appraisals].

MS. KRATZ: And did you—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] I [had been] assistant branch chief [since shortly before we moved to College Park] and my primary responsibility was the reference program until I became the chief of archival services.

MS. KRATZ: And how did you enjoy that, being the branch chief?

MS. ADAMS: Well, it was just a lot more work, with, you know, that kind of thing is always an opportunity to try out things that you thought about for some time. But I had worked very closely with Tom for about a decade so it was not that much of a change really. Except that I had a larger workload.

MS. KRATZ: What other sorts of projects did you work on?

MS. ADAMS: I mean, all the various developments to make known the holdings, which as I said started out as the Title List and then that graduated, morphed into, I mean, when the staff started putting things [descriptive records] into the Archival Research Catalog. But that didn't occur until the early 2000s. So, all that time we were developing our own ways of getting in touch with researchers and informing them—writing informal reference papers, focusing on things about which we were getting a fair demand. So, trying to capture something in a brief leaflet. Not a formal RIP but just a casual two pager or so.

And then AAD was a full other range and then what we started doing was—and I did not do a lot of this work myself but I directed it—[some very talented staff did it]—the work to making the records available online for download. And that's a whole additional process of getting the documentation so that it can be in shape to be scanned, so that it can be downloaded, because you can't use the data without the documentation. And most of the documentation that we received, at least up until the era of the internet, was all print on paper. So that all had to be—

MS. KRATZ: I can imagine. That's a lot of paper.

MS. ADAMS: Right. Getting it scanned so that it can be downloaded. And we were involved. I mean, obviously we were involved in the planning and implementation of the original ERA [Electronic Records Archive], but since there was a separate program for that, our division, although we had a fair amount of input, had its regular work to do and, you know, our reference demand was continually growing. What we were doing [in lieu of online access] was moving from providing the removable media on which we provided copies of files —analytical researchers wanted copies of files. Initially we were providing copies on tape and then as the various kinds of tape, the densities of those tapes increased and so we had to keep up with the changes in the media, then making files available on diskettes, then making them available on CD-ROM, so I mean, there was a lot of evolution and all that's before we made records available online. It's all very evolutionary really.

MS. KRATZ: Yes.

MS. ADAMS: But it was more than a full-time job.

MS. KRATZ: Oh, sure. Yes, the new media comes out. It's almost like, awe, another one. So, can you talk about some of the awards you received for your work?

MS. ADAMS: I've been fortunate to receive some recognition both from the Society of American Archivists, being named a Fellow, and from IASSIST, the International Association of Social Science Information Service and Technology, which has sort of been my home professional organization since, well, it didn't exist when I was in Wisconsin, but since I was in Kentucky. And so that's a small organization. IASSIST named me a, what do they call it, a lifetime achievement award or something like that. You could look up [their website, www.iassistdata.org]. It's an organization of people like ourselves whose primary job is to identify, preserve, and make available social science data. Most of the National Archives' holdings in electronic form are archival records which can be used for social science research. [Other awards included Fynnette Eaton's] guest-edited issue of *The American Archivist* in which I had an article on the history of punch card [records] and how they are the predecessor to electronic records. Tom Brown had an article, Linda Henry had an article, Bruce Ambacher had an article. I mean many of the people had authorship in the—

MS. KRATZ: [Interposing] the 30 years book

MS. ADAMS: 30 years book. And that *American Archivist* issue received an award.

MS. KRATZ: I know you said you do reference but are there certain aspects of reference you really enjoy doing?

MS. ADAMS: Oh, I mean, it's always fun to work with people who think they have found something that nobody else has found. Sometimes that's true. Sometimes NARA will have preserved some record for a very long time that no researcher has really ever exploited and for a researcher to find those records is always very exciting, as is helping them do that. But I would say helping the guy who said, "I lost my legs but not my life," helping the media find and identify the unknown soldier, those are real high points. But having the rest of the world understand that the United States is committed to preserving its digital data has always been a high point too. So, all my opportunities to participate in various professional associations were... I could carry that message.

MS. KRATZ: Can you talk about some of the challenges that you faced while here?

MS. ADAMS: Well, yes, the major challenge I would say is the stepchild role. The fact that because the first electronic records were only data. And most people don't grow up knowing anything about data like you do about words or other documents. They don't grow up analyzing data and the numerical quality or the quantitative quality of data makes data kind of off-putting to a lot of people. And it's not something that many people think of as a primary source that they should use.

I have an old friend, a historian whom I used to badger because he wasn't exploiting data sources for his subject and he would say to me, well, you make it easy to use and then I'll use it. Well, I guess, I mean, the Archives certainly has a role to play in making its holdings as accessible as possible but learning how to analyze data I think goes beyond that. So, for that kind of user, the development of AAD seemed an

answer.

The other kind of thing that you come to realize is that the documentation that accompanies data files, which is essential for the use of the data files is also primary source documentation in and of itself. As an example, and I have this in an article, the Army kept very extensive records of casualties during the Korean War. Among the things that they coded [for each casualty], was country of casualty, another was cause of casualty. I think there were a couple of different kinds of cause of casualty codes. In the place of casualty, there were codes for almost, and you can look at it, I don't remember exactly, but for many East Asian countries. Obviously, no [casualty record has any country code] except Korea. But whoever put that documentation together at the outset of the Korean War apparently thought that there might be [other countries where casualties would occur]. So that's some of the mentalities view that you don't [anticipate]—I don't know if it's documented anywhere else. The cause of casualty codes, and there were many different kinds: they included chemical warfare, and they included gas, they included something else like that. None of those codes show up in any of the records. But again, somebody thought that they had to prepare for that.

Likewise, and this you would find I'm sure also in census records of the period, you had race for the Army casualties. Coded Caucasian and Negroid and Malayan and something else. But then you had Puerto Rican-Negro and Puerto Rican-White. So, you begin to get a glimpse of the mentality of the time documented sufficiently to say hey, the Army had these—and in the case of the race, people are coded all those various races. Things [like] that are very different as we've evolved, our understanding has evolved. So, the electronic records need to be understood in their totality not just the digital bits and bytes but everything that goes with them and the programs from which they came. And that's where I think there's a lot of work to be done in educating everybody.

The other kind of thing you learn is the way in which our society—there has been tremendous evolution in the concepts of privacy and confidentiality. There's been change in the law and regulations but there's also been a personal change. That has happened very significantly now with social media. But social media is just the current stage of a long evolution. So, it used to be that the military used the social security number as the military ID. And that meant that people who were deceased and whose records were therefore very open, their socials were available too, because that was their serial number.

Well, for the longest period of time, that was not a problem. But then as various governmental programs of various kinds came to use those numbers, then the deceased person's privacy was no longer obscured, yet parts of their records may affect the living and you need to think of that. So, I think a consciousness—and there I think technology has played a very real role because getting at individual records like people expect to do from digital records, was a fairly remote activity prior to the computerization of information. And so there's just been this evolution.

Another area where we've evolved is for the longest time we worked hard to apply the concepts, the regulations, the everything else that evolved during an analog era to the digital as part of the discussion of it being, the digital being accepted as primary documentation. But there's a downside to that. And that is, we wouldn't necessarily come to all the same decisions if we were starting afresh.

So, you see, I mean, all of the discussions now about the abuses of social media certainly highlight [all of these issues] and we're still working off of mentalities and consciousness, regulations, law, you know, everything that was developed for an analog era. Does it all apply? I think that's still to be determined.

So those are the kinds of things you learn [i.e. challenges you face] in the course of doing this kind of work.

MS. KRATZ: Right. And can you talk a little bit about your decision to leave the Archives?

MS. ADAMS: Oh, I was getting on [laughing]. I worked until I was 70. So, I think that was time for me to move on. New people could do it and I needed to just step back.

MS. KRATZ: And that was in 2013?

MS. ADAMS: Yes.

MS. KRATZ: Do you miss it?

MS. ADAMS: I don't miss the commute.

MS. KRATZ: Where did you live?

MS. ADAMS: I live in DC, upper northwest.

MS. KRATZ: Oh, yeah.

MS. ADAMS: I don't miss the commute and I think the day-to-day grind after a while, [one] just gets tired. It was time to move on. I did not want to do contract work in this field partially because I think the government should employ more people directly. But of course, I miss it. I mean, it's been a part of my [professional] life always. And I try to keep up online with as much as I can in terms of evolution, things that are important in SAA and I've done some writing and I did edit a volume of articles for IASSIST after I retired. I have an article that theoretically was supposed to be out some time ago that I was asked to do a year or so ago.

MS. KRATZ: So, you're still active?

MS. ADAMS: Still a little bit, yeah. And I do other volunteer work.

MS. KRATZ: Okay. Well, I know I said it would be an hour and we're about 10 minutes over but I was wondering, is there anything else you want to share?

MS. ADAMS: No, not really. You know, I keep talking about the stepchild. When I "retired" for the first time in the early 1970s because we had children and we moved someplace else, I really thought we were at the cusp where digital data, as we call it now, would be mainstreamed [in libraries and archives]. You wouldn't have to, I mean [make the case for accessioning and preserving them]—they would just be a part, accepted as a primary source resource just like all other primary resources.

After all, I had trained as an historian and primary source documentation is the key to that. When I came back to professional data work at the end of the 1970s, I found that libraries had computerized their catalogs. There had been an adaptation to technology but data (electronic records and/or digital data) were still not mainstreamed. Even as we talk about the era of big data, I don't believe that the electronic records program here is yet really mainstreamed. And so I used to say I was going to work until I was 85

or we win. And the "we win" was that we were going to get to that point. Well, I was disappointed in the 1970s and I guess, you know, after a certain point I think a lot has been accomplished and there's a very, very important volume of electronic records that have been preserved and are available and will live. I would like to see them more understood and I would like to see the [dedicated] people who work with them more resourced. But the National Archives' pie keeps getting cut up into many, many pieces so there's a constant competition for resources, and then of course the National Archives has got to deal with the universe of federal government records, [and tremendous pressures to digitize its analog holdings].

MS. KRATZ: Right. But we're all moving towards electronic—I mean, eventually that's the business we'll be in.

MS. ADAMS: Yes, but what kind of electronic business are you going to be in?

MS. KRATZ: Can you see, I mean, you worked here, do you think the Archives is—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] You see, my soft spot is still with the data, right?

MS. KRATZ: Yes.

MS. ADAMS: Okay. Will the Archives as a whole really—I mean, do the research reference staff here in this building as well as the ones at Archives II think of digital data as a primary source when they're working with people? They do if they know about a particular file or they know—I mean, I think there's a fair amount of use of resources that are on AAD. But, does primary source documentation to them incorporate that kind of resource? I mean, it's not unlike, you probably would find some people challenged by thinking of photographs, still photos, digital photos now. Well, the historical record is very word based. Data is not word based. So yes, I think we're going electronic and I think [digital] data are going to continue to be created because that's what runs agencies.

MS. KRATZ: And that's what's really—I mean, I think the data, because you can study and you can find trends and you can point out things that are wrong—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Right. Yeah.

MS. KRATZ: Especially since the agencies don't talk to each other, we really need to keep that information.

MS. ADAMS: Right.

MS. KRATZ: And make it available.

MS. ADAMS: Right, and make it available and preserve—well, have to identify first what's valuable and then, I mean, for the longest time, and I don't know what the policy is right now, but for the longest time the policy of the National Archives was only to accept digital data that was in a software independent format. Now I know that's gone by the by but the logic behind that was that it was through having software-independent records that you could preserve them long term and retain the ability to use those records with whatever software and hardware gets developed down the road because we know this is never going to end. And it's never going to be the case that something happens out there

that's going to solve the problem and you're not going to have to keep migrating or whatever it is we're now doing. I think an understanding of technological innovation says that that's not going to happen. So, I would just like to see us move a little bit more to, you know, integration of mentalities about the value of digital data as a primary source.

MS. KRATZ: Well, thank you so much—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Well, you're welcome.

MS. KRATZ: —for sharing with me. This was great.

MS. ADAMS: But, I mean, it was an exciting opportunity to have a chance to work on [and talk about] this, all those years and from the punch card era to the online.

MS. KRATZ: Yeah. That's quite a change when you think about punch cards to, I mean, you probably, I probably, couldn't even envision the internet. I don't know, it must have been a huge technological advancement while working with these electronic records, having this created and—

MS. ADAMS: [Interposing] Oh, yeah, it was marvelous. I mean, you know, you could see how technology was going to take us down the road. The advantage I had by starting with punch cards is I also could visualize what it is to store bits and bytes and so I had a mental picture. So, I'm not unlike what I'm critiquing here, saying that people are only going to go with what they understand, I mean, so I could understand how information was being stored and so when we migrated to tape, it was still organized the same way but I could understand it in a way that somebody who didn't have that opportunity had to learn it differently.

MS. KRATZ: Right. That's great. Thank you so much.

MS. ADAMS: Well, you're welcome. It's always fun to talk about what you do.

[END RECORDING]

[Revised and embellished by Margaret O. Adams, August 2023]