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MR. BRIAN KNOWLES: I am Brian Knowles. I am acting as an oral historian for the National Archives and Records Administration. Today's date is 20 June 2014.

I am conducting Oral History Interview at Archives I, in Washington, D.C. with Mr. David Kepley. He was an archivist, a branch chief of several departments and has recently retired from the National Archives. And I know you're a Ph.D., so—

DR. DAVID KEPLEY: [Interposing] That's right.

MR. KNOWLES: Dr. Kepley or?

DR. KEPLEY: Sure. Sure. That's fine.

MR. KNOWLES: Doctor, okay.

DR. KEPLEY: That's fine.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. If you would just begin by telling me your dates of service for the National Archives.

DR. KEPLEY: I began working for the National Archives in 1976 and I retired the last day of 2012, December 31, 2012. I've been retired for about a year and a half now.

I began working for the Archives in 1976, as I say. My career goal at that point, and this is kind of as an interesting demographic comment, was, in the 1970s, there were a number of people like me who got advanced degrees in history. I got a Ph.D. in American history, but turned to the National Archives. The reason why I describe it as a demographic phenomenon is those of us who were baby boomers who were coming out with our PhDs were all seeking jobs in academia and there just weren't jobs there. So we're all searching around for what else we can do. We continued to try more, you know, harder to get into jobs in academia and they just weren't there to be had. The demographic problem was, as this huge bulk of baby boomers came into college in the 60s and 70s, colleges expanded to meet that demand, but then the people who came right behind us, there weren't as many of them, so there weren't as many jobs. So there's a contraction of the market there.

So we didn't quite know what to do with ourselves. A number of us came to work here at the National Archives. I did my graduate work at the University of Maryland and a couple of my buddies said, "Well, geez, you ought to look at the Archives. I mean, at least you can get a summer internship kind of a thing or like a student internship." So that's how I got my first job here in '76. I was a student intern, as many people here at the Archives are right now, while they're going to undergraduate school or graduate school, they start as students. In fact, both of my sons were students working here at the National

Archives, the same kind of a deal. That's what I did. I only worked, I don't know, 20 hours a week or something like that, while I was teaching part-time at Maryland and finishing up my degree work and trying to find a job. A number of us finally decided that the Archives is a pretty good gig—this is very much in keeping with what we were trained to do. It advances the larger cause of trying to honor and push forward the ideals of history in American society. So, whoa, this isn't so bad and you get paid a good paycheck and a number of us came and worked here at NARA.

There's a number of people that you could interview that are in that same boat. You'll see a preponderance of people with higher degrees from my age demographic because of that issue. And the previous generation of leaders really did not have those advanced degrees because people of that generation could get academic jobs if that's what they wanted to do.

So there's the first observation—there's a bunch of us who did come in with those advanced degrees and making this a kind of a, well, a fallback position. But I found it was very rewarding. I found that I was advancing the larger cause of history, and I was delighted to be working here at the National Archives. I worked here for about 35 years. While I was searching to find a job, I worked in several other U.S. government history offices. I worked for the Labor Department as a historian for a couple of months. I worked for the National Parks Services as an interpretative person for a couple of summers between classes. I worked for the Forest Service history section for five or six months trying to catch on permanently, until finally, my first permanent job at NARA was at the Philadelphia Regional Archives.

That opens another whole set of questions. Regional Archives, what's that all about? What happened was, the main building, the one we're sitting in right now was the National Archives. It was all housed in this one building. Then the obvious thing happens; we outgrew the building. The spillover effect went to a building we had in Suitland, which was in the late 1960s'. Also out of necessity, we expanded then into the many Federal Record Centers. The Record Centers have been around since the 1950s, but out of necessity, we outgrew this building so we had to put stuff some place.

They started inventing these Regional Archives. The idea was—well, at the regional level, those records created by the regions were permanent and housed there. The usual way it would work was they were living in their temporary storage and they were in one section of the Records Center. You could just move them across the hall into the Archival section. That's sort of the birth of the Regional Archives System.

It was not terribly well thought out or planned. As a brand new, almost PhD at that point, I'm out at the Philadelphia Regional Archives. The thing you have to remember is, these Regional Archives, some of them were located in nice buildings. Philadelphia was in a miserable building is the best way I could put it. It was the old Atwater Camera factory. Atwater Kent was an old industrialist who didn't believe in labor unions and when the Wagner Act of the 1930s required that they unionize, he closed the plant. Somehow, the Federal Government got this piece of property and most of the building was the IRS. They had a huge filing, you know, auditing tax returns and all that. We had another part of the building, like another whole floor for record storage. The building was built in the 1930s and I got there in the 1970s. I was there for about a year and a half. The facility was pretty bad and it was not terribly well located.

Here's to me what's interesting about the Regional Archives—what kind of a public did they in fact serve? Who were our customers? The answer is, well, from when I got there in 1979, the "Roots"

phenomenon had hit in the late '70s. Everybody in America, it seemed, wanted to know their roots. Everybody started wanting to know their genealogy.

The one thing that we had in these Regional Archives that was extremely helpful, in that regard, were the census records. We had immigration records. People were very much interested in those kinds of records and those records were all on microfilm. The originals were here in the main National Archives Building, but sets of the microfilm were deposited in each of the Regional Archives around the country. Those kind of became local magnets. People would come and see us and we had a very active program in loaning out the microfilm rolls to people in local libraries in our area. I was in Philadelphia Regional Archives and we served Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. If you were in Pittsburgh, you didn't have to ride all the way to Philadelphia. You could get your local library to borrow that roll of microfilm. There was an extremely active inter-library loan program for people to borrow this stuff. I would say 98% of our researchers were researchers looking at our microfilm collections. Okay, so we had all this hard copy stuff, but almost nobody looked at that, with the exception of the ships passenger arrival lists because those are genealogically oriented records.

I spent most of my time processing records, in other words, doing descriptions of records. We didn't do much in the way of exhibits because there was no space for that. It was mostly descriptions. I probably did 95% of my work describing new accessions and moving them over from the Record Center. Occasionally we would have a researcher. I used to say to people that we would average about one researcher a month looking at our hard copy holdings—one a month. The rest were all looking at microfilm stuff, which is fine. I think that's probably true of most of the Regional Archives at that time. They were microfilm research centers. That's what they did.

Later in my career, when I was in administration, in the late 80s into the early 90s, we did a study of the Regional Archives for the Archivist. The Archivist of the United States put together a group of people to try to study the Regional Archives. This was Don Wilson. I was on that group. We took a look at why did the Regional Archives come into being? What's going on here? What's the level of research they're doing? What's this? What's that? The idea was, should the National Archives expand this program? Should it redirect the program? Where should we be going with that program? That's where I pretty much confirmed my impressions from being in one regional archives that the entire collection of them did relatively little research work in original records but lots and lots of microfilm research. At that point the decision had been. The Archivist decided to expand those Regional Archives and put more staff into them, give them more of a public presence, have them reach out to their congressional delegations or to local, regional libraries, and other archives, you know, the state archives and that kind of thing, to give NARA a larger nationwide presence.

One can argue about the wisdom of that. Do you need that many Regional Archives, especially given the low research volume? Especially in our own time, it really comes into question, because all of those microfilm resources have now been digitized. So is there a reason to have them? If so, do you have them as a storefront kind of an operation downtown, which is expensive space. Alternatively, do you have them out in the suburbs? It's less expensive space, but there's still an awful lot of it. Should you reduce the numbers of them because not too many people are using the physical records? There are many questions surrounding those, especially when you get into fiscally difficult times, which we're in right now and we seem to always be in. Let's face it; where can you save money at the National Archives? Well, we only spend money on renting space, okay, and people. But of that, renting space is by far the

greatest amount. So if you could take, say the Regional Archives, reduce the number of them and put them in bigger facilities, would that help us? Maybe yes, maybe no.

We just closed or are about to close the Regional Archives in Alaska. It is probably a wise idea. We have some Regional Archives in downtown areas where the space is extremely expensive. I remember when we did this study in the early 90s, for the cost for the Regional Archives in New York. Because it was in downtown Manhattan, it was greater than the next three Regional Archives put together, in terms of the rental costs. Does that make sense? Do we get a decent return on our investment? I have to say I don't think so, but okay. We wrestled with those kinds of issues then and I think we are still kind of wrestling with now.

My time at the Regional Archives in Philadelphia, for me personally, was good because I really got to understand how to describe records. I learned that basic, fundamental building block of what it means to be an archivist. That is critical. Not so much on reference, but lots on that particular one.

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] How were you instructed to do the descriptions?

DR. KEPLEY: Oh, good question. As a brand new archivist, what kind of education did I get? The Regional Archives generally did not train people very well. They sort of said, "Here's your job, and maybe your boss would kind to work with you." Because I worked down here as a student intern, I knew that brand new archivists went through a rigorous training program. I said, "geez, that's what I need, so I can be really good at what I'm trying to do here." I asked and the answer was, "no, we can't send you down to that training program."

There is a training program which is offered to members of the public, which I think might be useful to me. I persuaded people to send me down to that program. It's called the National Archives Institute. The Institute has been going on for probably 40 or 50 years. You'd have to ask folks who have been involved in that. Its mission is to bring together archivists from around the country, almost none of which are National Archives people, generally. It is almost all people from somewhere else to teach them the art and craft of being an archivist. I came down here for two weeks and got my training in basic archives management kinds of things and that was my basic training. Had I been hired centrally, I would have had the advantage of having rotational assignments in different units, which would have helped me learn more about the art and craft of being an archivist. You go back to Philadelphia and it was, no, we're not doing that. I felt like this isn't too cool. Regional Archives, what one of the problems is, they are been a backwater. They've been always trying to fight to be brought on an even par with folks in downtown D.C. I did eventually get a job down here in Washington. I felt there was better career advancement here. It turns out I was right.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, you were in Philadelphia from 1977 to '79.

DR. KEPLEY: That's right.

MR. KNOWLES: And then you came here to work at the Legislative Archives Division?

DR. KEPLEY: That's right. I had worked in Legislative as a student intern. I worked there actually three different points in my career. The first time I was there as a student intern and I did reference work. The second time I came on board I was a full-fledged archivist and worked there for, I think, about four years. There, I really learned an awful lot about reference. Reference was my basic role, working with

researchers, which I found really very exciting and enjoyable. I think I enjoyed teaching most in my graduate work. When you're in graduate school, either you like publication or you like teaching or hopefully you like both. I liked the teaching part of it. What I liked about being a reference archivist was that it allowed me to exercise that teaching dimension of my personality I suppose. I guess I'm more of a people person. I really enjoyed working with a researcher who would come in and say, "I'm trying to figure out everything which relates into what." Then I would talk with the person about their project, and we would work together to develop a research strategy. I would bring down records for this person to look at and that sort of thing. That was a lot of fun for me. I found that personally very rewarding. It was fun seeing, when their books came out many years later, an acknowledgment that I had done some great work to help them out. That, you know, that is always fun to see that you are advancing the cause of scholarship two or three millimeters. You are moving the needle in the right direction, right. I enjoyed that a lot.

I also got a chance while I was there to work on some other stuff with respect to legislative records. Legislative records has a very interesting history. The National Archives and Records Administration is unique among the national archives of the world in that we have the records of all three branches of the Federal Government here. None of the other national archives have that. Most of them have just the records of one branch of their Federal Government, usually the executive branch. We have executive branch records here. We have records of the Supreme Court and District and Appeals Courts. We also have the records of the United States Congress here. That is unusual and it's a unique relationship that we have with them. When it comes to Federal records, they come to the National Archives. Legal custody is transferred to the National Archives and that is what accession into the National Archives means.

When it comes to legislative records, they are deposited with the National Archives but ownership is still retained by Congress. The legal relationship, therefore, is very different. What does that mean? That means, for example, the laws that apply to access to Federal records derive from the Freedom of Information Act. When it comes to records of Congress, Congress has certain resolutions or rules of the House or Senate to which we must refer for access.

When I was there, the rules on access were antiquated. For example, records of the House of Representatives were closed for 50 years. It did not matter what they were about. If you wanted to see records, even from the First Congress, even on the most inconsequential thing, you had to get permission from the Clerk of the House. This was all pro forma, but you have a researcher sitting in front of you and you say, "well, I'd like to show you this, but I can't show you until you get permission from that guy up there." Then, you place a phone call and it had to be in writing. You had to jump through a bunch of hoops. Did anybody ever say "no" in answers? They always said yes. It was an arcane, silly procedure especially when you had scholars who were here. DC is an expensive city to stay in and now you are wasting their time with these hoops you had to make them jump through.

When we finally became the Center for Legislative Archives, Mike McReynolds and I pushed against one of these rules of access. Can't we make them more streamlined? Can't we try to take these silly hoops out of the way? Eventually, this is when I was Chief of Reference, we did get the House to change its procedures. It modernized its rules. People no longer had to ask permission first. The same was true with the Senate. We worked with the Senate Historical Office and they are a great bunch of people to

work with. We got them to modernize their rules of access and that was very satisfying to see that happen.

In one case, in the late 1970s, we got records of the Senate Watergate Committee. When they came over that was really a hot button set of materials. Normally, they would have been closed for 50 years, no matter how mundane the stuff was. We were able to get the Senate to consider some rules of access to these materials that mirrored the Freedom of Information Act. This was a first step at trying to get the Senate and the House to apply more modern concepts of access to their materials. Were we completely successful? No, but again, we moved the needle forward in the direction of trying to open things up more and to try to get our researchers into those things on a more timely basis. I would argue a more rational basis, more in keeping with sort of the Freedom of Information Act.

The other thing that we had done at time seems like a tiny thing now, but, again why don't we microfilm some of these materials? That was the cutting-edge technology at the time. Now we digitize, but at the time, we wanted to microfilm, probably the most popular records of the House, the records of the Southern Claims Commission. This was a commission set up after the Civil War to review the claims of people in the South who lost property as a result of the Civil War. You know, the Union Army marched through and took away all their cows or whatever, and they are turning to the United States government saying here is a bill for 20 cows. Then the question became, did you lose the property, number one? Number two; were you loyal to the Union? These people had to submit affidavits on this. Because it related to people's claims, genealogists today find these extremely rich and extremely interesting because they have all these affidavits and they are describing their personal situations. Moreover, they are describing the depredations of the Union Army and all this really cool stuff.

We tried to get the House of Representatives to agree, saying it would really help our researchers if we could microfilm these records, actually microfiche these records and allow people to look at them anywhere they wanted to. Well, you have to have permission for each one of these. We tried to say, "Couldn't we let that rule go for this body of records? We are wasting a lot of your time and our time." They eventually agreed to do that. So we microfiched those and we sent copies of the microfiche to whoever wanted to buy them and out to our Regional Archives for the research room. Again, was that an earthquake? No, but it moves the needle in the right direction. I think we felt very proud of the fact that we got those records in the hands of more researchers. People really liked that. I think we all felt pretty good about that and the Watergate thing.

The other thing we did during that period was look into the earliest records of the United States Senate and started working on that. There is a wonderful publication that predates the congressional record, called American State Papers. It was an attempt by the early government of the United States to publish its most important state papers, many of which were congressional, some of which were executive branch, such as letters from the President to the Congress. Why not the originals of those and other ancillary materials? Because the American State Papers covered, I think, the first 16 Congresses, which gets you past the War of 1812 or something like that. We launched a project to microfilm all of those records. I didn't see it through to its end. One of my protégés, the one I was working with, she did see it through to the end and that was pretty cool that we got all of those records on microfilm. Again, it helps our research community do their jobs a little bit better and try to make things work a little bit better for everybody.

MR. KNOWLES: Do you remember her name, the—

DR. KEPLEY: [Interposing] Yes. Mary Rephlo. Mary is a wonderful person. She was on Senator Danforth's staff and as he was leaving office, we were able to hire her down here. She is still working for us and she is another good person you might want to talk to. She was with the Modern Archives Institute. I said I was a student on that and she managed it for 20 years maybe. She was instrumental in that.

One other final point on Legislative Archives. It began back in the late 1940's when their materials first came to us and had a fairly powerful presence here with a lot of close connections with political figures on the Hill. I think the Archives tried to use it to its advantage, but herein lies a bit of a problem. The folks who ran the Legislative Archives could sometimes use that political leverage for their own ends, which can be a problem. Whom are you working for? Are you working for those guys or are you working for us, you know? Then some of the more powerful figures retired or died. That was well before my time. Then Legislative Archives became kind of a stepchild to some executive branch agency branch here within NARA. When I got here, it was the Legislative, Judicial, and Fiscal Branch. Next, it was Legislative and Natural Resources Branch. Then, it was Legislative and Diplomatic Branch. We were always stuck in with some other unit and we kept trying to make the argument that you really ought to have us as a separate unit and elevate our status to give us a little better relationship with the Hill. It might help the Archives out. Eventually that was done during my third time I was with Legislative. We set up the Center for Legislative Archives, and the idea there was to elevate the Center, to make it more prestigious, to get better relationships with the Hill, but to maintain that balance.

I think Mike McReynolds and I understood we worked for the National Archives and promoted our interests, but tried to work closely with the Hill to try to keep that balance. I have not worked there since the early 90s. I think there was a different emphasis that came in after me. Mike Gillette came in and kind of fashioned that group as more like a Presidential Library, which has its pluses and minuses. I was not working there then, so I cannot comment too much on that but you might want to talk with those folks about how it changed over time. I wanted to talk to you about those things with respect to Legislative. Did you have any other ones that you wanted to ask me?

MR. KNOWLES: No. You covered that very well. That was, archivist in Legislative Archives Division, '79 to '83. Then you went on to an archivist in the Program Analysis Branch, '83 to '85.

DR. KEPLEY: Yes. Let's talk about that. That was in policy and administration, a very different kind of a job. I was an archivist there by title, but not really, for all practical purposes, I was more like a program analyst. We would do things like go into certain units and work with them to see if their procedures were efficient, effective, and efficient. We did a number of different studies with units. The Federal Register was one. Our microfilm sales unit here was another one. I worked with probably the most controversial program there was. We brought in an outside vendor, a contractor, Management Analysis Incorporated to work on how to make the whole art and craft of archives more efficient. At the time, work processes very idiosyncratic. Each archivist did it his or her own way and each technician pulled and re-filed records his or her own way. As we moved into the 70s and the 80s, the constant refrain that we in the National Archives and throughout government had to work with is, do more with less. It was constant cutting back of government.

You had to be thinking about how could we use the resources we had; mostly we're talking about personnel resources, much more effectively? To give you an example, when I worked in Legislative, we had this wonderful filing system for which any letter we wrote to a researcher we would file a little card on whatever the topic was that might be something that was interesting to somebody else. The card

would refer you to the reading file and you would pull out that letter. When I would look at letters written in the '50s and the '60s, somebody would write in and say, "What do you have on the Battle of Little Bighorn," or something like that. We would write these letters that would go on for a page and a half with detailed references. When the next guy wrote in asking what we had on the Battle of Little Bighorn we could reproduce that letter and tell them to take a look at this.

What it also speaks to is the time we had to devote to a letter. It probably took that researcher, that archivist, maybe a whole day to write up a letter back to that person. Were we providing good customer service? Well, yeah. The researcher benefited from that. Obviously, we had the luxury to be able to do that. As you get into the '80s and the '90s, we were getting slammed here and the byword of government, starting with the post-Watergate period well up into our own time is, do more with less—cutting back government, denigrating government services. It hit the Archives. It hit all aspects of the Federal Government. We had to start looking at what we can do more effectively. We had to start cutting back on how much research service we did give to people. We had to start saying that when you get a letter you must answer the letter in, I think, an hour or two. If the person asked you 20 questions, you would say I'm going to answer your questions, serially. I'm going to give you an answer to the first several questions. Then I have to move through the rest of my list of letters and I'll come back to your letter and answer several more. That one person can't dominate your whole week and you're giving good customer service to as many people as you possibly could.

We had industrial engineers, that's Management Analysis Incorporated, come in and look at our work processes. They looked at how we managed the whole process of giving service to our customers, both in-person service, pulling records for them, or corresponding with people through the mail, through email eventually, and that sort of thing. Then trying to figure out, well, about much time did we spend? We found the numbers were wildly different. Or, how much time did we spend to pull records for different requests? Again, the numbers were all over the place. For certain kinds of research or certain kinds of questions we get thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of requests, for example, for military pension records there is a certain procedure you do. You look it up in a register. You go from the register to the units, military service records. You pull the veteran's record, you make a copy, and you mail it off to them. For those we developed certain standards for how many minutes it should take you to do this kind of thing. Therefore, they would batch the work by that type of record. For example, all military service records would be one. Immigration, naturalization records would be another kind.

You'd say an average person should be able to do, I'll just make up a number, about 20 of these a day and the person would be expected to do that. This makes sense on some levels. It is an efficiency kind of a thing. On a cultural level, this was a difficult thing for the National Archives because we're sort of, especially on the side of the archives that I dealt with, the historic record side, we see ourselves as a cultural institution. We are kind of like an adjunct to a university, you know. Universities see themselves as being something that you cannot turn us into a factory. You can't turn us into a widget factory. No, this is about culture. It is about art and those are the cultural values that we value. This really went against the grain. Most of the archivists really did not like to do it. It was difficult for me to have to try to sell this program. Portions of it stuck, particularly in the rote kinds of areas where we're pulling by rote, like the one I just mentioned. In the other areas, it didn't really catch on and probably just as well. It did compel us to rethink how we were giving service out and to reduce and try to systematize the work that we did, but that was a difficult thing to work on.

The other thing I worked on in the Program Analysis Branch was the transition from the National Archives and Records Service to the National Archives and Records Administration. Independence. I was on the periphery of that, but once independence hit and we were an independent agency, our unit was in charge of trying to develop procedures for the National Archives. Up to that point, GSA developed all of our major procedures. We inherited their procedures. The first thing we did was make the argument to GSA that if we are going to have to do all these services that you were doing for us we are going to need slots to go hire some people to help us do personnel and procurement, and all those kind of general services kinds of things.

What GSA did was say they'll give us "x" number of slots. I forget what it was. They sent over some people to fill those slots. Now, do you think they sent their best and their brightest? I see you are laughing and so I think you got the idea. They sent the worst people they had. Oh, it was terrible. They had some people whom if GSA had had any integrity they would have fired them years ago. But, of course, instead they dumped them on us. Eventually those people either retired or left. They did not stick around for too long and various strategies were developed to try to move them along.

We had to develop the basic procedures for running the National Archives. My unit had to particularly; I had to get smart in procurement of all things. Geez, I did not know anything about that. I'm an historian for God's sake. I went out and took a bunch of classes in procurement. Government procurement is a highly procedure-driven activity. I mean, you can get in trouble so fast on it. My unit developed the basic procedures for how NARA would buy stuff. I had to get smart in all that. I even had a warrant to issue contracts up to a certain dollar threshold. Our theory at the time was an archivist could learn to do just about anything. Well, I guess I'm the proof of that, huh. Procurement stuff, give me a break. I learned that stuff. I didn't particularly like it, but it gave me an appreciation for that. Throughout the rest of my whole career, I was really smart on procurement stuff. When people would say, "Oh, you'll never get that done because you got to fill out these pieces of paper for procurement." I would tell them to give me the piece of paper. I can fill it out. No big deal. They are looking at me like, "really?" I said, "Well, yeah, my unit wrote the first procurement handbook for NARA, so I kind of know that stuff."

We also worked on Archives II. That was also in that unit. One of my people, Michelle Pacifico, worked closely with Adrienne Thomas, and the whole planning for Archives II. When this building that we are sitting in here, Archives I, was state of the art for the 1930s. Now we are talking about the 1980s and 1990s and we have learned a lot about how to build buildings in between time. The way I would describe Archives II is that it was our lessons learned. If this is the way, this is what we like and do not like about Archives I. Here is our chance to do it right, so to speak, not that we did it wrong here, but this is how I'd do it better at Archives II.

In Archives I, since we outgrew the space, we had people who were working and their office was in the stacks. My first office was in the stacks. You are surrounded by documents. You are not near too many humans and you are not allowed to take anything to eat or drink in there. You couldn't have your morning cup of coffee in there or a snack or any of that sort of stuff. The air conditioning here was considered state of the art in the 1930s, but by the 1980s, it's not so great. There were portions of the stacks where it's just freezing no matter what time of the year. You have wind blowing in your face. They had to retrofit this building, I think in the 1950s, for water, so that we could extinguish any kind of fires. You are walking through the stacks, and I'm a guy of about six foot one, okay. Those water pipes, they had to put them some place. I think I still have a permanent crease in my forehead from smacking into

those pipes. You come around the corner and wha-boom. One of your questions Brian was what was it like to work here. That was what it was like to work here. You had to know that you don't go flying around a corner too fast or else you might get clocked.

I worked with a guy who started working in the late 1940s, so he was there, not quite at the beginning, but pretty close. He would tell me one of the essential pieces of equipment for early archives was to always have an incandescent bulb in the pocket of your stack coat, because in those days incandescent lights were used in the stacks. By the time I got there, they were fluorescent lights. An incandescent light puts out light a certain kind of bandwidth, but there are dead spots in between. Inevitably, the records you are looking for are in that dead spot or the light bulb was burned out. You'd always have a spare bulb in your pocket and take out the burned out light bulb, put a new one in, so you could see what you were doing. You know, quite, quite incredible.

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Who was that gentleman?

DR. KEPLEY: George Perros, P-E-R-R-O-S. George Perros was a Greek immigrant, worked in Legislative Archives, remarkable mind, and remembered stuff about the records, just a classic kind of a stack person. He had been there for a long, long time. He had some interesting stories about what it was like, being present at the creation kind of thing. That was cool to learn about.

When we built Archives II, we said people would never work in the stacks again. It is kind of a, from a human being standpoint, not too cool working in the stacks. I mean, you would come in here in the morning in the wintertime, and it was dark. You leave in the evening, and it was dark. You never see daylight. At Archives II, you had offices where you had access to either direct sunlight or ambient light, which was very, very nice. You had an atrium in Archives II which would give you access to natural light. It was much more human friendly. The other thing that here is we have a few elevators, but, if one breaks down you are suddenly moving records from the stacks to the research room. If one elevator breaks down that really puts a crimp in your day. At Archives II, there are a lot of elevators. These are examples of things, well, we are not going to make that mistake again.

When I got here, we had a really crummy snack bar. Oh, my goodness. Just dreadful. There was no real practical place for people to have lunch. They would have to go out of the building. At Archives II, they have a nice cafeteria, a nice menu with a selection of items to have. Here, the research room is very nice, very ornate, very beautiful, but not terribly practical from some standpoints. In Archives II, we have a whole cylinder of research rooms, six of them, depending on the record type you are researching and lots of access to natural light. You are looking out to the woods, which is really quite beautiful. So that's the way we tried to kind of think about how to make it nicer for people and, of course, secure for the records. The records were always not subject to sunlight or anything and in air-conditioned controlled stacks. We do that well here and we did that well in Archives II as well. I would say the focus was on making it more human friendly.

The next major assignment I had was Chief of the Research Rooms of Archives II, for about a year or so. I had been in administration. We were among the first people to move to Archives II, and that was interesting, because we were the pioneers. The whole place was empty. It was a break-in period—they are still doing punch list items. I remember we had computers, and the way computers were networked was for something like word processing. It was provided to you from the network, but if the network went down there was nothing to do. Your computer was dead. We all wanted the computer people to

load copies, I think we were using WordPerfect at the time and we asked them to load WordPerfect on my PC. Why? Because if the network goes down I can still keep working. They thought that was the craziest idea, but eventually they did it. When they had to do any kind of updates to the software program they had to literally go around and touch every PC. You could imagine how incredibly time intensive that was.

Then I moved to Branch Chief of the Research Rooms, which is how we were first organized in Archives II. We had to invent everything from scratch. How we manage researchers. How we manage staff. The whole process had to be invented and that was kind of fun. It had its frustrations but it was kind of fun trying to figure that out. The way it was initially conceived was there would be this reference branch—my branch—that would manage all the interactions between NARA and the researchers. That was how it was going to work. Not with the individual custodial units and the units had always run their own research rooms. They really resented this. They did not like this idea at all. We had to try to manage this relationship between researchers coming in and the folks in the custodial units who were pulling the records and trying to make that work well.

I think at the end of the day the experiment in doing it that way did not work particularly well. I think they were better off running their own research rooms, which is what they eventually did too. Eventually, still pictures ran its own research room. When we ran it, it did not work because they knew all the questions to ask. Same with motion pictures. Same with cartographic and same with textual. I tried to manage that whole thing for about a year and the good thing was just trying to get everything to mesh and to try to get researchers to move through the way we thought it would work. Of course, it did not work that way in the real world and then we tried to make that work out better. That was a fun assignment. I enjoyed that a lot.

My next assignment was one of my most fun here at the National Archives, which was when I was a Branch Chief of Motion Picture, Sound, and Video. We have a fantastic collection of motion picture, sound, and video materials. Itis just a wonderful, wonderful set of stuff. I had a really good time working on that. When I first went in, the branch was in a real difficult spot. There were a lot of personnel upheavals, a lot of EEO complaints, and suits. It was a real train wreck.

At the outset, I was just trying to get folks to treat each other nicely, play well together, and that sort of thing. Then we also had to integrate the old downtown unit, the Archives I unit that went to Archives II. We had another unit that worked out at Pickett Street in northern Virginia and they came to Archives II. We had two units that had physically been apart for probably 10 or 15 years now working in the same space together. It was getting them to play nice together. It was a great experience in team building and trying to get people to think beyond what I want and then what do we need to be focused on, which is what do our customers want? That was what should be driving us. That was the mission and if you are not supporting the mission, then you need to change the way you're doing it because you're not supporting the mission. Getting them to think that different way was my biggest challenge through that.

Also, there was an active set of researchers who were professional researchers. This is probably the only time I've ever dealt with professional researchers. In Legislative, you'd get someone who comes in, they'd work with you for a few weeks, boom, they go and you never see them again. With motion pictures researchers, you had a group of professional researchers who were there as many days in the week as I was there. They were there all the time. They are always under contract with some documentary filmmaker or whatever, putting together the next project. It's a group of people who are

very intelligent and very demanding. For them, this is money. This is dollars and cents. This is their living. I had to figure out a way to work with my staff, work with the professional researchers, and get them to kind of all move in the same direction.

It was not that everything they want, we're going to give them. It was not that everything that our staff wants, we're going to give them. We've got to kind of move together here. I started setting up meetings, I think we did it quarterly, in which it was an open meeting and I'm going to tell you what kind of things we're thinking of doing. I'm going to solicit your thoughts on it. Then I want you to tell me what's bothering you. If, in the meantime, you're upset about something let me know so we can talk it through. I was just trying to improve that whole communications dynamic, which was pretty much absent.

They were treated mostly like the enemy. And they're our customers. We really ought to be working together. We can't give them everything they want, but we can probably work towards helping them out and helping us out.

The biggest problem they had was, well, they'd say, "I placed an order for something today, and they don't get it for 12 weeks." Well, 12 weeks in the commercial sector is like 12 million years. They're in a tight deadline and they are asking if there was anything, we could do to speed that up. The answer was that we actually figured out a way to do that. We sent all of our orders for reproductions down to our own lab, but our own lab couldn't keep up with the production cycle. There just weren't enough of them. It gets back to that issue we talked about a little while ago, which is government is continually contracting. That means when you lose people, you don't get to replace them. Okay. In our labs, it's contracting. Yet our demand for stuff goes up.

In government that never matches. In the private sector, you can match that up. You can say, "we've got to hire three more people because look at the demand. And here's all the money coming in that supports that." In the government sector it's a disconnect. Your demand can go up, your demand curve can go up, but Congress isn't seeing the demand curve, they're just seeing the bigger picture or some picture in which they feel like government in general has to go down. The fact that you guys are going up, well, you just have to organize yourself a little better. That's the reality of the situation. So, what do you do? We turned to the private sector. Basically, we said, "you know what; let's get our labs out of this business." Frankly, they're not cutting it and it's not their fault. It's not. They're good people. They're hard working people. There's not enough of them. Why do we have a film lab at the National Archives? Is it to meet the demands of our researchers? Well, actually, it's to copy things that are in danger of going out of existence forever. That's their job, preservation, not reference work.

The reference work was like a teenager. It's eating you out of house and home. They're taking over all the resources and you are not doing your primary mission, their primary mission, which is to copy this stuff. Solution to the problem: why don't we turn to the private sector? There are about four or five labs in the DC area within an easy car ride that could do exactly the same work, and they can do it for a fee. Okay. Here was the proposal: let's tell National Archives labs that they are out of this business. Boy, they were really not happy about this. We're taking that business away from you and we're going to put it out to the private sector. We put out bids to four or five of these different companies and they had their own price schedules. And we turned to our customers and said, "Here's the deal. Here is how we're going to do it from now on. If you want to place an order, place an order, not with us, place an order with them, Lab ABC. How do we know what they're going to charge? Look at their price list. What if they

change? Then go to another one. We've got four vendors. If you don't like the price of one, go to another one. It's market driven."

They placed their order with the lab. The lab then places the order with us. The order is, could you please pull these five rolls of film? Boom. We pull the film, we send it to the lab, lab makes the copies, gives it to the researcher, comes back to National Archives, and we re-file it. Turnaround time goes from 12 weeks to under two weeks. Then it's, "well, who's going to pay for this?" "Who's going to pay for it?" The guys who are asking for it. They've got money. They're working for these filmmakers. Guys like Ken Burns. Money solves so many problems. It's wonderful. That's what they did and they loved it. They absolutely loved this. We would send our originals here, they made the copies, and we brought them back. We broke the whole earlier dynamic.

You may recall in the early years of the Clinton administration they developed a number of initiatives that related to making government more responsive to people, more responsive to customers. They got us government folks much more customer oriented. I think it was a good thing. One of the things that they developed to try to encourage government people to do this was the Hammer Award. I don't know if you ever heard of that. I forgot—I'll think of the name of why they named it the Hammer Award. But, you could say, "hey, here's this project we've done and we think it deserves being recognized." We turned in this particular process I just described and we got a Hammer Award. This was from the Vice President's Office of Reinventing Government, or whatever they called themselves. We all got a little piece of paper saying we got a Hammer Award. Oh, and a little lapel pin that had a hammer on it. That was pretty cool. That was kind of fun. But, I think—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] That was 1996?

DR. KEPLEY: I think so. Yeah. We got the Hammer Award but I think I was very pleased to see that we could think of a way around a pressing customer service problem. And I think it, again, moved the needle in the right direction. It made us more responsive to our customers. Did they get everything they wanted? No. Instead of beating us up for being so slow, they beat up the labs. That's where it should be. They are the ones making the copies, not us. It didn't take much time for us to pull something. That whole process worked really well and we were really, really pleased with that.

Then we got the labs to focus on this vast body of materials that was in danger of being lost. That's their job; you're a preservation lab. And we start sending stuff to them. Now 100% of their time or some high number percentage of their time is devoted to preservation, which is a much, you know, really why we've got them there in the first place. That was very satisfying. Towards the end of my term there, we held a conference here, Association of Moving Image Archives. It's kind of like the SAA for moving image archives. We had the national conference here at Washington and we showcased Archives II. We showcased our collections. Our folks were the ones who were on the program committee and did all that. So that was a lot of fun, too. And it was very satisfying to have people coming here and being able to show off Archives II and show off our collections and that sort of thing.

We had some really wonderful materials there. We've got a lot of military footage, combat footage, from World War I, World War II, Vietnam, which is very moving and interesting stuff. We had the Zapruder film of Kennedy being killed. The Challenger tapes of these poor people exploding in mid-air and all of that. So we had a lot of really, as I say, really interesting stuff. To me that was a really fun assignment because of what we had and how we were able to kind of change the culture there of how

the unit operated and our relationship with our research communities. That was that job. Then my next job was—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Well, hold on for a second, just before we move on. I just want to go back and put the dates on some of the positions that you had handled. Let's see here, Chief of Legislative Archives Division Branch, Archives Division Reference Branch, excuse me, is 1985 to '88.

DR. KEPLEY: Yes.

MR. KNOWLES: Chief of Program Analysis Branch, '88 to '93. And Chief of the User Services Branch, '93 to '94. And, as far as User Services Branch, is that Reference Services? What—

DR. KEPLEY: [Interposing] Yeah. That's what I mentioned. We were running the entire research complex—of all the research rooms. As I said, in retrospect did that really work? Well, you had to get something started, but I think they were better off running their own branches. That was, that whole conversation about getting that whole research room complex up and running, starting it from scratch, that's what that was all about.

MR. KNOWLES: And I'll ask you about the reorganizations a little bit later.

DR. KEPLEY: Oh, okay. Sure.

MR. KNOWLES: I'll ask you about that then. Then next was the Chief of Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Branch—1994 to '97.

DR. KEPLEY: Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: And now to Electronic Records Archives Transition Officer, '97 to 2012.

DR. KEPLEY: To 2012.

MR. KNOWLES: That's a mouthful for a title.

DR. KEPLEY: Yeah. Too long. I moved from being Chief of Motion Pictures, Sound, and Video to working for the office head for, let's see, we called it Office of Records Services-Washington, DC (NW) at the time. Today we call it Research Services. But basically, that's whom I worked for. My job was for Michael Kurtz, through all of it, except for the last year or so. My job was to try to be his guy to try to figure out how we can use technology to provide services to our customers more effectively in research services and the former NW. Okay, so what does that mean? It means interviewing people at the unit level. Interviewing the major division directors and talking to them about parts of their processes that we could automate. Would it make sense to automate them, and why? We gradually, you know, no, we shouldn't do that. Well, maybe we could do that. So we'd get a lot of conversations going. It is basically doing an assessment.

First, an inventory of all the little systems we were using. Then trying to get them to sit back for just a second and say how could we automate some of these? Or, could we take five of them and turn them into one? How can we make our own internal processes better? And our own processes, the interface between us and our researchers more effective? How do we do that? So we got them to think about those kinds of things and so, like, what? What happened? Well, okay.

As a result of that interviewing process and brainstorming process, we talked. One of the first ones we got was we worked with the Exhibits Unit. Jim Zeender was the guy I worked with, and he was trying to figure out how he can get a system that helps him keep track of the documents that they use. So that you understand their process, they borrow documents from the custodial units and they use them in their own exhibits here. Sometimes they just borrow them for a short period, and then they return them to the units. They also borrow documents from the units and they lend them to units, to organizations outside of NARA, like the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress because they're having a new exhibit on whatever.

Managing that entire process, I mean, we're not talking about three documents, we're talking about hundreds of documents, you know. And they're not talking about ordinary documents. They're usually talking about pretty important documents. So you really want to keep track of this in a very rigorous kind of way. They came to us and he says, "well, you know, there's some automated systems out there, commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products that you can buy that will actually help you manage that process." So I said, "Okay." Our office, my unit, worked with Jim's unit to try to assess the COTS products, figure out which ones of them had the highest percentage of requirements that met his requirements, and eventually we ended up buying one of them. It's called ReDiscovery and I think they're still using it to this day.

What it does for them is you go and you get a document and now you scan it. Now you scan it and then you associate it with whatever project you got. Now you got a scanned image inside in ReDiscovery and you can track its process. You can use that for lots of different purposes within their unit. For example, they're going to do an exhibit catalog. Boom, you got a copy of the document right there. You're going to use it for, geez, the volunteers could use that. Oh, yeah, make a copy off of that and use it for the next school group that comes in. It had a lot of things going for it and it also had a module, which allowed them to track where that document went. The original went from the custodial unit to their vault to the Smithsonian. There are usually restrictions on how long it can be there, like, it can only be shown for two months or whatever, and then it comes from the Smithsonian and back to the unit. So it tracks that process to make sure we're bulletproof. That we know exactly where everything is. That's, I mean, that was a huge, well, I think it was a big success for him. He was very pleased with it.

The other one that we did, which has even wider ramifications, was the National Archives, back in the late 90s, developed something we now call ARC, the Archival Research Catalog. The catalog was to replace our various systems that dealt with descriptions of records. I say various systems because each generation developed its own style for doing description. And so you had layers of these things over time. There was no standardized way of doing it. Each generation almost had its own standard and everybody wrote to that standard. Then the next generation came in, and no, no, that's not right. So then they do it a different way, but we don't go back and redo the older ones. You've got various different ones and then none of them are online. The Archival Research Catalog's goal was to put it all online and to make it searchable, you know, keyword searchable. Stuff that you guys, you know, it's so obvious to you, but less obvious to folks at the time. The strength of that approach was it answered the question, "what have you got?" You know, what do you have on "x?" Then it'll pull together everything you have on "x." Okay.

The only weakness of the approach was the thing they didn't take on was, "gee, you've got this. Great. Where is it?" In other words—where is its exact stack location? Because now I'm here in Washington, I

want to see the blasted thing. Or, I want a copy of it. So one of the archives staff has to go find it. Same problem. Where is it? What is it? Where? Those two questions were instead of being married up, which they should have been done from the beginning, but then you make a hard job ten times harder. I kind of understand why they took on the first part, which was very difficult by itself, and pulled it away from the second part, which was difficult too, managing where it is.

Well, when we did the move of archives from Archives I and from Suitland out to Archives II, they had to develop a database to track all that. It was called the Master Location Register, the MLR. It was absolutely essential for archivists to use to find stuff. Okay. It didn't answer the question, "oh, what have you got on "x?'" It answered the question, "where is it?" You know, it's like you could look it up and find out, oh, it's in Stack 5, whatever, row, whatever. That was an absolutely crucial database.

It was on an older software platform by the 2000s and so many of the branch chiefs and division directors thought perhaps we should take the MLR and we should make it somewhat more expansive. Let's solve a number of problems here. Let's not only solve the problem of where is it? But let's also solve the preservation question of what kind of condition is it in? Have we done work on that one before? Because we don't want to have to go back and do it again. Oh, is it checked out to the Research Room and checked back in again? It's that same problem we talked about earlier with respect to exhibit items. Can't we get something that tells us a bigger picture about the physical holdings themselves? Okay. And so what that grew into was the Holdings Management System, HMS, which people are using right now. Lots of bumps and grinds along the way.

None of these software programs worked perfectly out of the box. This one certainly didn't, but it has grown into something now where it's an absolutely crucial part of their daily life. When an accession comes in you have to make an entry into the Holdings Management System so it knows where it is. It's supposed to be the comprehensive inventory of all of NARA's holdings. Now if you think about that, that's a pretty staggering thought, but that's what it's supposed to be. I mean if you're in Archives, what are we supposed to do? At the very least we have to be responsible for the stuff we have. Oh, what stuff do you have? Oh, you don't know. That's not a good question; that's not a good answer. You have to say we know exactly what we have, and here's where it is.

I mean, it's a property accountability system, if you want to think of it that way, but it's intellectual assets. But they're on physical pieces of paper or film or whatever they are. You have to be able to know where that stuff is and be accountable for every last piece of it. You can't say, "Oh, well, it's missing." That's not a good answer. "No, where is it?" "It's in the lab." Good answer. "It's at the Research Room." Good answer. "It's with Suzy Q. She's the researcher." That's a good answer. "It's now back in the stacks." Oh, that's a good answer too. You have to know where everything is, all the time. And that's the goal of the Holdings Management System. Not all of it has been built out to this date; at least I don't think so. But the basic parts of it, and we're not talking about just Archives I, we're talking about Archives I, Archives II, every Regional Archives, is in HMS. I forgot how many millions of cubic feet of stuff. That's a lot of stuff. So they ported a lot of the old National Location Register information into it, a lot of work to try to match that up. And then they've also barcoded each shelf. Glink, glink, glink, glink, down the row.

So then the idea being able to associate a box with a location. Boxes are barcoded. Locations are barcoded. You associate box with location. Boom, boom. Now is that completely done? No. Because there's a lot of boxes. So there's going to be plan in place to try to eventually have all new accessions

barcoded. Then old accessions, as you touch them or as on some systematic basis, you get around to, you know, barcoding all the boxes.

The grand scheme here being, if you get a barcode scanner, you can just go, like they do in the stores. You scan the box, you scan the location, and it associates it. Boom, boom, boom. Now if I'm going to take it off the shelf, click. And if I'm going to go take it to the Research Room, click. It associates that it's now no longer on the shelf, it's in the Research Room. Perfect. When it comes back, you reverse the process, or it goes to a lab, or to Jim Zeender for an exhibit you know where everything is. Then the golden moment would be, geez, wouldn't it be great if you found it through your discovery tool, ARC, which answers the questions, "What do you got on the Civil War?" And it gives you a gazillion hits. Then you say, "Oh, I want to see that one on the Battle of Antietam." Now you can link over to the HMS system and find where it is and the process is complete. Researcher finds it, hands it to the Archives, generates a pull slip, staff pulls it, gets it to the research room, and it's all seamlessly connected. That's sort of the grand vision.

I think they're kind of, I don't know, 60% done with that. I don't what the percentage is, but that's where we should be moving towards is integrating these systems, which were built at different times by different folks. I'm not being critical here, it's just the way things go. This is the great challenge for the Archives, is to integrate these systems, which individually have their strengths, but to be so much more powerful if they're pulled together. That to me was the vision that I kept trying to push to my bosses before I left—you've got to get pushing these things together. That was the HMS System which was being used now and I think to great effect.

ERA, the Electronic Records Archives. It is probably the biggest software project the National Archives has ever undertaken by orders of magnitude. I mean in terms of dollar value. Hugely expensive. Hugely complex. It's launched now. It's being used now. It's got some strengths to it. It's got some significant challenges to it. Absolutely no question. What drove ERA at the very beginning, the guy who probably was there at the very beginning, who pushed it most effectively, was Ken Thibodeau. Ken formulated the vision around the fact that we're all starting to use computers a lot now.

We're generating government records in electronic form. How will we manage those electronic records in the future? We've got a really good grasp on how we manage hard copy materials, paper and film, and all that. We've developed really good methods for doing that. We don't always do them real well, but we've got our hands around a lot of that. How do we deal with electronic records, especially given that the nature of the industry is such that they're always changing software and hardware? How do we keep up with that? How do we get out ahead of that curve and how do we maintain the archival materials that are there in perpetuity? That's the huge challenge.

Ken was able to push that forward. He was able to push that in front of the Archivist and the senior archival managers. They all agreed that's the vision, that's where we've got to go. Miracle of miracles they were able to sell Congress on giving us a lot of money to try to solve the problem. Now comes the next part of the problem. I was there on the source evaluation team that evaluated the contractors who were applying to get this monster contract, monster for us anyway. I learned procurement. I was on the team. It was a team of probably 20 or 30 people. They had us sequestered over at CACI, an information technology company. Their headquarters is right across from Fort McNair, I think, in Arlington, Virginia. They sequestered us there for two or three months and we read these gigantic proposals from these vendors. They're telephone book-size proposals telling the names of their people, their proposals for

solving your technical problem and all of this. We would come back with questions. It was a long, long process.

The way the process ultimately worked was we hired two firms to work with us for a year to develop the concept of ERA. Then at the end that year, we would pick one of those two firms as being the winner. We picked Lockheed Martin and Harris Corporation and we worked with the two of them together for a year. I'm off the source selection team because we had made our selection. I worked for Michael Kurtz, the office head for Research Services, my job is to represent the interests of my office with the contractors, and with the ERA team here who work for IT services.

I'm the lead guy for my unit, for my office. Then I have guys working with me who are working for the textual people, the still pictures, the promotion, all those folks, they're all kind of reporting to me. I managed an IPT, Interdisciplinary Product Team, from these units to try to represent their interests effectively in front of the contractors and our own ERA team. That was my job for about ten years working with them, developing our requirements. The next major task we had was to figure out our business rules. This took me back to the period when I worked in program analysis, which everybody does differently. When you automate services, you have to start to regularize things because computers have a lot of trouble with that. They're really good at having things done in a predictable way. That's the way computers work. There can be some variation, but you have to get your processes, and define them. We asked people, "How do you do your job, Brian?" Well, "I do this, this, this, this, and this." "Oh." Then you ask the next guy who does the same thing and he does it very differently. Therefore, you have to say, "No, guys, you got to have a standard way of doing this."

Then we have to develop business rules around that activity. The activity might be pulling records. "How do you do that?" "We'll we get the reference service slip." "Then what do we do?" "We take this copy and we go there. You have to go down and pull the records. Then you take it to research room." You have to get that all figured out. Because then you're turning to the programmers and saying, "Here's how we do our job. Automate it." If you don't know your rules, and with each rule there has to be some rules, it's a true, false. We do it. We don't do it. It's a yes, no question. For other ones, it could be A, B, C, or D. Computer guys can deal with this kind of stuff. The third one might be something like, Yes, no, it might be A, B, C, D, or might be something else. They say, "Well, we sometimes do it, and we sometimes don't. You can't do that. You can't automate, no, no, no, no, no."

This is a huge cultural issue for the National Archives. Guys like me have to go to our people and work with them and say, "this is your chance to actually think about what you do and ask the question: do you even need to do that?" You're doing it that way and we could automate that, but why are you doing that? That's a hard question. Human beings don't really like that question. You're making me make a decision on that. This is like herding cats. You have to kind of get out the cowboys and get them to herd the cats. It's trying to get them to move in the same direction and try to say, well, "How should we do that?" "Well, that's not the way we do it." "Well, I know that. But could we think of a different way?" That's a very challenging question when you ask that to people. People don't like that because then it's almost implies they've been doing something dumb all their lives. That's not the way it's meant, but that's how people can take it.

You have to kind of craft ways to try to get people to think imaginatively about how they do their jobs. How do you do accessioning? How do we appraise records? Eventually as ERA grew, it started with, well how are we handling electronic records? Then we said, "Well, let's just think about this. The process for

dealing with electronic records is really not that different fundamentally from dealing with any other kind of record." Let's see what we do. We appraise them pretty much the same. We say certain ones are permanent; it's the same. We accession them at the appropriate time. That's the same. The paperwork to this is identical and we take them into the National Archives. That's the same. The way you do it's different. Electronic will be different from paper, would be different than audio tapes. The physical format now starts to make a difference, and storing them is definitely different. The paper you put on a shelf. We have figure how to store the electronic.

It's really towards the end of it, when we actually get that it's different. All those steps at the beginning, from appraisal through accession is identical. If you have to do it for electronic, why don't you apply the same processes to all of them? Talk about an earth moving moment. Oh, my God. We're going to do it for everything. Everybody said- "Well, yeah, we should do that. We should automate all of our appraisal processes." Let's use this, an opportunity to automate all of that, to get the entire life cycle of permanent records taken care of. When you appraise, we say something like what, 3-5% of our records are permanent. The rest are temporary. To get to the word temporary, you still have to appraise it. We're talking about scheduling for all records that come to NARA, even to the Record Centers, even the temporary ones. You can see how this little germ of an idea has now expanded to the entire life cycle of all federal records, and is in something called the Electronic Records Archives.

People kept telling me- "You have the wrong title for this. It really should be something like, not the Electronic Records Archives, but it ought to be the National Archives, because it's the whole thing. We sold it based on electronic records. We couldn't sell the Congress on that, I guess, but we could sell Electronic Records Archives. We had this branding problem, which I think still exists to this day. Most of the records it's going to touch aren't even electronic. They're hard copy.

We begin with developing business rules for each of these processes. We work with our subject matter experts and to do whatever it takes to get their business rules out. Once their business rules are done, they have to get it down to an extraordinary level of detail. For one sub-process, it might be several pages single-spaced of steps you have to go through and what the conditions are. Whether it's a yes, no, or whether it's an A, B, C. You have to write all that down because you can't just tell the computer programmer- "Oh, automate appraisal." He doesn't know what appraisal even means. He's not an archivist. He's a computer programmer. We got those business rules done. We worked with the contractor.

Now comes the sort of the sadder part of the story, which was, for reasons that I still don't quite fully understand, our dealings with our contractor were not terribly satisfactory. You should probably talk to the folks who worked in the ERA contract shop as to why that did work, worked, or didn't work so great. The initial product we got out of ERA after a year of working with Lockheed Martin was inadequate. It's the nicest thing I can say. It was a disaster is probably the more accurate thing to say. ERA was designed to do the whole life cycle of records for NARA. When we appraise records, that's a relationship we have between the agencies and us. Now the agencies are going to play in that little swimming pool and the agencies are the ones who transfer the records to us in accessioning. It's not just for NARA. It's for the whole Federal government. Success is widely amplified, and so is disaster. When you start saying to the government- "You know what, I know we deal with you and the way we deal with you guys right now is with these forms, but we're replacing the forms with these electronic systems." The screams could be heard from miles away.

Some of them were more tech savvy and would say, "Well, that's cool. You're going to automate those forms. I don't have to type them anymore. Wow. That's fabulous." Others, of course- "I like typing those forms." We had to talk with them and we had a group of those folks come in and say- "Alright, so how do you use these forms? How can we best accommodate your needs when we automate that?"

We work with OMB. And OMB was one of our greatest champions because to them, our argument was, if we automate those forms, it will take them less time, effort, and money. It'll make the whole process more efficient. They're thinking they're not going to have to spend as much money in those different agencies, because we're all going to do this electronically through this wonderful product called the ERA.

You would have thought we'd asked them to go to war or something. It was really, really a big deal for people. That those kinds of culture changes are the hardest things humans have to deal with. By the soft stuff, the softer side of management is actually the harder side. The hard side of management, which is the numbers and the dollars and all that, it's actually in some ways easier. Harder to do, but easier. When you're dealing with the people side of it, it's much more nuanced and complicated because trying to bring them into a common way of doing things without making them feel too regimented, and still feeling like we're valuing what they do as an archivist is hard.

Then we suddenly found out, "Well, we've been using this form for all these years, but if a box is missing we just write a little note on the side of the other box and that's it." That's your way of keeping track of things? You get all this kind of irregular stuff going on. I said, "Well, then how do you keep track of it? "Well, we just stick it in the file cabinet." There are file cabinets the size of this room that are just exploding with materials, and if you ever had to trace this stuff back, you'd be really challenged to do that. This is what I would pose to archivists, "At the very core of what an archive is, if we don't do anything else, we have to be accountable for the stuff we've got and we have to preserve it." If you don't know what you got, you're failing in that portion of the mission. This will help us solve that question or address that question.

We worked with Lockheed Martin and it did not work first year. Very, very poor results. We had told the agencies, we're going to field this to all the agencies. Then we push that date back because we aren't doing so great. We had to push the next date back a little bit. We had to work really hard with Lockheed Martin. They had to dismiss most of their team and bring in new players. It was pretty ugly. We had a lot of skull sessions with them, "We told you what we wanted. Here are the business rules we gave you and you didn't build it to the business rules."

They would put out a build and our people would review the build. They would say, "Oh, it's not working here. It's working okay there." You're trying to meet certain dates because you're telling the agencies that they have to use these forms by a certain date. If you can't make the forms work by that date, it makes things extremely challenging. At the end of the day, we now have an appraisal portion of it. It's out there. Agencies are using it. They're no longer using hard copy forms. That date came and went. They participated in the testing. They participated in lots of information sessions and all that.

The second piece of it is accessioning. All accessioning, hard copy, whatever, has to come through that. Your accessioning form comes in through here. Now the stuff comes in and the way we keep track of this is with HMS. To let our researchers know about it (HMS is used by staff internally) we have to make an ARC entry so the researchers can know about it. You start to see what's happening here. This system feeds data. ERA feeds data to HMS, which has to feed data to ARC. Instead of three systems, they really

ought to be three systems that are integrated so the data can seamlessly move from your ERA system and we'll attach the accessioning information over here to your HMS system. Staff write up a series description, and that gets pushed to your ARC system. Then your researchers should now be able to say, "Eh, I want to see that box." They fill out a research services slip online and then we pull it, which speaks to the HMS system, which allows you to pull it. It accounts that Suzy Q has it in the Research Room, turns it in three days later, it goes back to the shelf, and then we all know about it. That's how the whole system should work.

The problem is we built all three separately on different platforms. It's expensive. If we'd have been really smart, we would have tried to build one system that would do all these things, but we didn't have the money. We said, "Well, let's just do ARC. Let's just really get our hands around all of our descriptions and put them all in this thing called ARC. We did do that and we're still feeding ARC. Now we've got these other systems which need to start to speak to one another and that's the convergence factor. That is a big challenge, to achieve convergence. We're starting to go from hundreds of little systems that people use on their desktops and we'd like to move away from that model to several big systems that we all feed into and we all access. I spoke to the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and to my boss about that. That's huge.

You asked about digitization. I worked some on digitization we set up some guidelines. Mike Hamilton worked on that. You might want to talk to him as well as Doris Hamburg. Now the question is, "Hey, NARA ought to be providing its content to more people online. How do we do it?" Back in the 1930's the cutting edge technology was microfilm. We went into it huge, big time but we don't do microfilm anymore. No one actually likes to look at microfilm. It's somewhat tough on the eyes. Especially, when you can look at it in the comfort of your own home on your PC.

Our problem with digitization is the vast scope of the National Archives. We have something in our most recent strategic plan that we're going to digitize everything. Holy smokes. That's a lot of stuff. We have to figure it out, prioritize this, determine what's the most requested, the most demanded records, and start figuring out processes for getting these records digitized. The other piece of this that people forget about, and my wife can talk to you more about this because she does it really well, is we can't find this stuff because it's images of documents. It's not a Word document which you could do full text searching on. These are handwritten documents by Andrew Jackson. It's an image. We can't do full text search of it. At least we can't so far, in today's technology. What you need to find that image is you need metadata about it. You need information about the information, so a researcher can say, "That letter was done from Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun in 1816." Ah, and it has to do with the Seminole War in Florida.

How do you develop the metadata? Right now, humans have to do it and that's labor intensive. When we say, "Digitize things," it's not as simple as taking a document and putting it on a scanner. Someone has to read it and put it in the metadata, so then the research world can find it. That's the hard part and the labor-intensive part. The other piece that people don't realize is many of those documents are not in great shape. Putting them through a scanner isn't going to work. You have to go through it slowly and you have to do some kind of preservation actions on them to preserve them at some level. Where are we going to put all that stuff anyway? The Electronic Records Archives.

These things are electronic records. We're developing this giant server or series of servers to store this stuff. We should just be able to put it in ERA and let people find it as if they're looking for any other kind

of electronic record because it's an electronic record. That's kind of how we're thinking about doing that. Again, convergence. We've got a group working on digitization, but they don't seem to be working on the connections with these other pieces here, pulling things together, and making the whole thing work seamlessly for the benefit of our customers.

MR. KNOWLES: Was there any idea of how significant, as far as the information size, megabyte, gigabyte, terabyte? I even had to look up what was bigger than the gigabyte and, or excuse me, the terabyte, and it's a petabyte.

DR. KEPLEY: Petabyte. Right. It's petabytes—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] And they're now over the petabyte range, so…

DR. KEPLEY: [Interposing] Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: Was there any idea that this system or system of systems would approach this size? Did anyone—

DR. KEPLEY: [Interposing] We did—

MR. KNOWLES: —foresee that?

DR. KEPLEY: Yes. There's a lot of information that was developed by the ERA team in making the argument to OMB and Congress about how much stuff we are talking about. You're right, we're into the multi-terabyte, multi-petabyte stages and I think they were even talking about yottabytes, which, I think is next and a huge volume. How do you store that? How do you store it securely? I'm not a computer science guy, but there was a lot of work done and many studies into how much storage would be needed.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

DR. KEPLEY: Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow. Overall, how would you describe the success of ERA? Up to what you can remember?

DR. KEPLEY: Well, as I say, at the beginning, it was not a success at all. It was pretty much in failure mode until they brought in another team. It's been launched to the entire Federal government. As far as I know, the entire Federal government is using it and we're not using paper anymore. Are they all happy? Nobody's ever happy but I think people are adjusting to it. How is it working within NARA? Are people using it? Yes. It is the system of record for our accessions and our appraisals. Can it be better? When it comes to these electronic systems, they can always be better. There will be a constant need of fixing things. Is it a success? I think it is doing its basic core mission. It has been completed, has been laid out, and now they have to populate it. They have to keep using it and they have to keep revising it.

MR. KNOWLES: So who are some of the people who've helped you with your career at the Archives?

DR. KEPLEY: That's a great question. I was fortunate to have a number of really good bosses throughout my career that taught me an awful lot about archives, as well as dealing with people. I would name Ken Harris who was one of my bosses way back when we were the Legislative and Diplomatic Branch. An excellent, a great guy, but a really good person who could think about projects and help me figure out

project plans. For example, we were trying to figure out after we received some money from Congress to preserve the early records of Congress. I think, $400,000 or something like that. He says, "Well, we go to the project line. I said, "What's that?" He says, "Here's how you do it." He shows me the math and shows me a nice pattern. I built on that model that he gave me the rest of my career doing project plans. Now, it's no big deal. Nevertheless, he taught me that and he was a very thoughtful guy. He went on to work for the Library of Congress for many years in preservation. He was terrific.

Mike McReynolds and I worked together in Legislative Archives when we were the Center for Legislative Archives. He was the Center Director and I was the Branch Chief for Reference. He had a lot of good front office experience that helped me deal with folks on the Hill as well as people in our own front office.

Probably the most important influence for me was Michael Kurtz. Michael and I worked together when I was in the Program Analysis Branch, and again when I was ERA Transition Officer. I probably worked with him for probably 15 years. He was a strategic thinker, a guy who could carry things through. He can articulate the vision and he can carry the vision through. I have a lot of respect for Michael. Those were key influences in my career.

MR. KNOWLES: Have any major events affected your role or your perception of the Archives, anything—

DR. KEPLEY: [Interposing] External to NARA kind of events?

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

DR. KEPLEY: Yes. The one that probably impacted me were when I first started in Philadelphia was the "Roots" phenomenon. Suddenly everybody is a genealogist. I forgot the statistics at the time. But, our number of researchers back in 1975 were ten or something silly like that. Then it's like 300. It exploded through the roof and I didn't know anything about genealogy or how those records worked. I had to learn about all that, which was kind of cool. Then they had me going out to local genie clubs and so forth to teach how you search for your roots. You do this, you look this up, and they had slide shows. I'd show them slide shows. That was great fun.

The other one that was a big deal when I first started was Watergate. Watergate was gigantic in the late 1970s and we got the records. Where I wanted to work, at the very beginning, was at the Nixon Project- Whoa, that's so cool. We seized the records of the President. Wow. Except I couldn't get in because everybody wanted to do it. We thought, "There's going to be so many smoking pistols in there and guns and everything. This is going to be so neat." Then they were closed for a generation. If you'd have gone there, you'd have been in this deep, dark cellar and never been able to come out. Because, no, you couldn't talk about what you were doing.

I did work with the Senate Watergate Committee records. That was a major event, which then had a huge impact on my career. We had to deal with these really hot records. That was pretty cool. The other big one would be the general transition of the government and indeed the entire world to information technology. That was the stimulus behind the Electronic Records Archives. Instead of a single event like 9/11, that was a gradual thing that builds and builds and builds, but finally is now the natural order of things.

MR. KNOWLES: How do you view the Archives transition under the various archivists of the U.S. or have you noticed a change?

DR. KEPLEY: Well, for the earliest ones, I was at such a low level I hardly had any inkling of the impact. I started under Bert Rhoads. I'm a beginning archivist, what do I know what he's doing? I had no notion of that. Warner got us independence. I met the man a few times and he seemed like a wonderful guy, but I had almost no personal contacts with him. With Don Wilson, his focus was on Regional Archives and trying to expand that program. There was some wisdom in that, but there was lack of wisdom in the way he went about it. I think he left us with a legacy that was not as good as it could have been. Then John Carlin was able to get us an awful lot of money and that helped us during the Clinton Administration. I did not have much interaction with Weinstein. I had some with David Ferriero. He continued the push towards toward ERA, which is good. Again, I didn't have a whole lot dealing with folks at that level, my dealings with folks at the level below that. I was just an archivist.

MR. KNOWLES: What organizations have influenced your career, SAA or any of the other?

DR. KEPLEY: Oh, outside organizations?

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

DR. KEPLEY: I was a member of SAA at the very beginning but it became difficult to stick with that just because the problem with being active in these associations was NARA, unless you can get on the program, generally did not support people going to the conventions. They're almost always out of the city, so that's a significant personal commitment of funds to do that. Once you start having a family, a mortgage, it's hard to, so I didn't do that as much as I would have liked to. I enjoyed it early on when I didn't have some of those commitments and my wife and I were on a double income and no kids. Once we started having children, I didn't have time to do that. SAA did not have much of an influence on me. MARAC somewhat more, because it's local and you could get to those places more easily.

MR. KNOWLES: Have you had any work with the Archives Assembly?

DR. KEPLEY: Yes.

MR. KNOWLES: Had any relation with them?

DR. KEPLEY: Yes. I was there when the Assembly first was formed in the late 1970's. I was there for some of those discussions. It is a wonderful organization. It is what we should have been doing, all along, an organization of professionals and paraprofessionals sharing their insights. I very much believe in what they do and how they've done it. I think it's terrific.

MR. KNOWLES: Now your wife still works here?

DR. KEPLEY: No. She retired two weeks ago.

MR. KNOWLES: Oh, that's right. Two weeks ago, that's right. So, at one point your children and your wife and yourself all worked at the Archive. Can you explain how that worked?

DR. KEPLEY: Sure. My wife and I met here at the Archives. You'll have to talk to her about her background and so forth. She worked at the Kennedy Library. In those days if you wanted to become an archivist, the Office of Presidential Libraries hired all their archivists centrally here in Washington and

then they disbursed them to the libraries. They trained them all here for a year or something like that did training in rotations and then they assigned them out to the various libraries. She started at the Kennedy Library, moved down here to be a professional archivist, finished her training program, and then we met and we got married so she's been stuck down here ever since.

She and I have been working at the Archives. In fact, that's another interesting cultural side of the National Archives is there are a number of people who met here at the Archives and got married. I think it's just a function of, you know, we're doing all this graduate school stuff and we didn't have time to be thinking about spouses and all that. By the time, this is your first job and we start meeting people who are somewhat like-minded, I guess. It was funny when we got married, at our little party that our Branch Chief and she gave me a single-spaced two-page list of all those people they called the Orange Blossom Express. It was a list of people who met at the Archives and got married. "Archives Couples," that's what we were called. That was kind of funny.

As my kids grew up, we had this program where we have student interns. In the summertime, you would hire students who were in college. When my kids came home for the summer, they both worked at the National Archives. One of them worked in Legislative, where I first started out. My other son, Patrick, worked pulling records, I think. Yes. He worked in record pulls. They did that for three or four summers during college. Patrick, later, applied for a job and got a job here after he graduated from college. He is still here. We've moved on, but he's still here.

MR. KNOWLES: What does he do today?

DR. KEPLEY: He works for the Exhibits Branch. That system I talked to you about a while ago, Rediscovery, in which they're recording all of these things, I helped develop the program or at least get it purchased and all that. He now uses that. He's the guy that has to scan those documents in, keep track of everything, and make sure that everything works out okay.

MR. KNOWLES: And what did your other son wind up doing?

DR. KEPLEY: He's now an MBA. Finished an MBA program at the University of Washington, Seattle and he got a job with Amazon now. It is a very different career line.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. And looking back from your career to what you know of NARA today, what do you think NARA could be doing differently, better or worse, just differently?

DR. KEPLEY: Well, I think one of the greatest challenges it has right now is staff morale. When we look at these employee surveys, they're very poor. We should be doing a much better job of figuring out why people are so dissatisfied and developing better ways, we could make things better for staff here. This should be a place that's an exciting place to work that really motivates people. Whenever I've met people from other agencies, I've always felt like NARA people are far more excited about the mission of their agency than a lot of other agency people. We have a very clear mission: preserve and make available the permanently valuable records of the Federal government. That's our mission and we live, eat, and breathe that. When I meet people from other agencies, it's like, "Yeah, it's a job." Well, many of us don't feel like this is a job. This is important. This is important to the republic, my goodness.

I think that's genuine and think that's a strength that our current leadership should be building on and it's not. It's so sad to see people who are really dissatisfied, just because of the way decisions are made and the way they're communicated and so forth. To me, that's a source of great sadness to see that.

Other things that I'd like to see us do, like I talked to you about a minute ago, is in the IT world we should be looking for opportunities for convergence. How do we pull all of these things together so that they talk together better and it makes things far more efficient for our customers? I think there's so much we could be doing with digitization. It seems to me it's being done so sporadically or haphazardly. There doesn't seem to be a plan behind it and there doesn't seem to be an established procedure behind it, because this is absolutely the way of the future. I think we're kind of dropping the ball.

Areas that I think we've done really well at, when I look back at the whole sweep of my career, is public programs. When I first started here, public programs were really downplayed. By public programs, I mean having speakers come in, having a symposium, having school groups come in, and have a place where you can show them stuff. The Exhibit Hall area was the rotunda with the documents of freedom. Then there was a wall behind it, which was made it into an exhibit area. In the early years of my career, I regret that my colleagues kept looking on that as fluff. "What are we doing that for?" Again, we went through this whole business about constricting budgets. That's why we're here. It's a part of our mission is to help people appreciate the stuff that we hold in perpetuity. You have to think past today and you're inspiring some little kid who might go on to be President or something.

I thought Marvin did a fabulous job of taking the exhibit space we had and when we renovated this building, expanding the exhibit space and taking it to the next level. Wow. All of the interactives and all the displays to try to excite people's interest in history. Yes. That's why we're here. To bring speakers in and to have them talk about their books, and to talk about controversial topics is what we should be doing. I said earlier, culturally, we're kind of like a university. That's the part where we are. I've always admired the folks that do that and I always think they've done a good job. I really like seeing how far it's come.

I'd love to see it continue and perhaps even do more. We've done traveling exhibits with facsimiles of great documents. There was a lot of stuff that we do, back at the very beginning that was almost looked down upon as kind of dumb, or why are we bothering to do that? I think it was very short-sighted. And we are trying to promote our name out there. I remember the earliest archivists would say, "Success depends on how infrequently your name is mentioned." The thought was, well, if you're mentioned, it's only going to be for the bad. But why couldn't it be for the good. It was a very different mindset.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, a last question would be or is, has it been hard letting go, the duties, responsibilities, or have you transitioned into retirement pretty easily?

DR. KEPLEY: I don't know about pretty easily. It was hard to leave here. It was very hard. Part of it is, I believe in the mission of the National Archives. I do. I met my wife here. My kids worked here. I was trained as an historian and I wanted to go into an academic profession. I worked here and it was sort of a fallback position, but then it became a passion for me. I have a passion for the mission of the National Archives, absolutely. By the way, while I was working here I worked part-time as a history professor at Northern Virginia Community College.

As I was coming to the end of my career, I went back to those guys and said, "Would it be okay if I came back?" And they said, "Sure, come on back." That's what I'm doing. Two weeks, a week after I left here, I was teaching a class at Northern Virginia Community College, a history class, of course. I'm a history professor. When I'm asked who am I and what am I doing now? I say, "Well I worked for the National Archives for 35 years and two years in other government organizations, so 37 years overall for the Federal government, but I'm a history professor. I've always felt like I'm kind of like both. I'm proud of both of those experiences.

My wife and I, now that's she's retired, have done some traveling. We'll be doing some more of that and just enjoying ourselves. It was difficult to transition at first, but once I jumped into the teaching that helped me. I could do something that I loved. I had never taught the class before so I had to work really hard to get ready for it, to get ready for all the questions and all that kind of stuff. Yeah. It was fun.

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Any other topics you'd like to talk about?

DR. KEPLEY: I don't think so. I think I've done it. Do you guys have any other questions?

MR. KNOWLES: No.

DR. KEPLEY: You sure?

MR. KNOWLES: All right. Well, thank you for your time today, sir.

DR. KEPLEY: You bet. Thanks, Brian.

[END RECORDING]

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