

NATIONAL ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

Robert H. Bahmer

November 6, 1985

at

The National Archives
Washington, D.C.

Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross (National Archives Employee)

Basic Summary abstract prepared by Geraldine Ludwig
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Robert H. Bahmer. Washington, D.C. November 6, 1985.
Interviewed by Rodney A. Ross.

Bahmer was Archivist of the United States from 1966 to 1968.

Bahmer first joined the staff of the National Archives, as a Deputy Examiner, in 1936 and remained in that position until 1938. From 1938 to 1942 he worked as an archivist in the division of Agriculture Department Archives under Theodore Schellenberg. In 1942 he was detailed to the Navy Department's Office of Records Management under Emmett Leahy. He then returned to the National Archives to succeed Nelson Blake as chief of the Division of Navy Department Archives.

In 1943 Bahmer left the National Archives for the War Department where he worked with his friend Wayne Grover in the records Management Branch of the Adjutant General's Office. Like Grover, he returned to the National Archives in 1948. From 1948 to 1957 Bahmer's title was Assistant Archivist of the United States. From 1957 to 1966 it was Deputy Archivist of the United States. When Grover retired as Archivist in 1966, Bahmer succeeded him in that office. *He retired from the National Archives in 1968.*

Bahmer's November 6, 1985 interview should be viewed as a complement to interviews conducted with him by Philip C. Brooks in 1972 and 1973 for the National Archives Oral History Project. Those earlier interviews concentrated on pre-1953 events. Transcripts for those interviews have been accessioned by the National Archives and are among NNF's holdings for Record Group 64.

The present interview covered such areas as Bahmer's chief accomplishments as Archivist, the nature of his relationship with Wayne Grover, and the reasons for the two men selecting James B. Rhoads as Bahmer's successor. Also covered are the General Services Administration's relationship with the National Archives, the growth and development of both the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and Presidential Libraries, the careers and interests of Emmett Leahy and of Theodore Schellenberg, lamination and microfilm preservation activities at the National Archives, and relations between the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists.

The interview, approximately an hour in length, was conducted in Room 106 in the National Archives Building.

The audio quality of the taped recording is good.

Abstract of interview with Robert H. Bahmer in Washington, D.C., on November 6, 1985.

Interviewer: Rodney A. Ross

Tape length: two-thirds of one 90-minute cassette
(all of side 1 and a third of side 2)

SIDE 1

QUESTION: In Guardian of Heritage Trudy Peterson refers to you as a kind of John XXIII. Could you speak on how your "reign" differed from that of your predecessor and successor?

ANSWER: Bahmer replied that he could speak better to how his administration differed from that of his predecessor Wayne Grover, his very good friend under whom he served for sixteen or seventeen years as assistant and deputy. Bahmer felt that ever since he and Grover came back from the Pentagon after World War II that the National Archives needed a closer relationship with the historical and other professions. Historians were in large part responsible for the National Archives which finally came to fruition in 1935. ~~Historians at the National Archives~~ ^{Archivists} formed their own society and drew away from the historians. ^{The National Archives} never had any contact with ~~them~~ ^{historians} except for casual contact with the executive officer of the American Historical Association. Bahmer always felt the National Archives was alone in the world in the bureaucracy in Washington; it didn't have...

Bahmer and Grover hadn't been ^{long back} at the National Archives before the Archives was put under the General Services Administration (GSA). The Hoover Commission had come along and made its recommendation for the establishment of a General Services Administration. Grover woke up one morning and was called up to the Senate Committee on Government Operations. They said they were going to put the National Archives under GSA. Grover and Bahmer hadn't paid any attention to General Services - The Federal Property and Administrative Service Act was what it was called.

This was a clear indication to Bahmer that the Archives had no one to help it out. Grover wrote a letter saying that he didn't think it was a good thing. Bahmer got back from vacation and Grover told him what had happened. Bahmer wrote another letter to someone, perhaps to Senator McClellan.

Grover was always leery. He said if you were going to establish an advisory commission, pretty soon the commission would try to start running the whole works; he just didn't want any part of it. So the Archives never had any liaison, any supporters, out in the hinterland. We were just sitting

here, a little institution with no particular appeal to anybody. After Grover left, one of the things Bahmer did was get approval to establish a National Archives Advisory Committee. This was a liaison with the academic world.

The second thing was that Bahmer got approval for the establishment of Prologue. Neither one of those came to fruition until after Bahmer left, but Bahmer got approval for them.

One day while Grover was Archivist he came into Bahmer's office and said he was resigning. For twenty-five years Grover and Bahmer were the closest of personal friends, as well as officially compatible. Grover also said he was going to recommend in a letter to the President that the Archives ought to be divorced from GSA. This was the first movement for independence. Bahmer went along with the idea. Grover went to Lawson B. Knott, Jr. and showed him the letter and told him exactly why he was resigning and recommended that he appoint Bahmer as Archivist. As Administrator Knott had the authority to appoint the Archivist.

The movement for independence came along. Bahmer met with Julian Boyd and Wayne and Oliver Holmes and Ernst Posner up at the Cosmos Club. Bahmer was a part of the plotting. Bahmer got mad at these "bozos", because when they built their case and came up with their report, they just weren't honest. They said things in that report that were just absolutely false. All of it reflected on Grover because he had been Archivist for seventeen years, during the years that they were saying that various things had "gone to hell", and it was all due to GSA. It just wasn't true. Bahmer told Grover this. Bahmer got mad and wrote a rebuttal to the thing. Everybody now says that Bahmer killed the independence movement.

The Budget Bureau wouldn't approve the independence of the Archives. Bahmer didn't mind that they were blaming him, because if the Archives was to get independence by lying, Bahmer didn't want it. At any rate, this left a sour taste in most people's mind.

Bahmer put a larger amount of emphasis on the Archival activities as opposed to records management than had Grover.

Bahmer retired, finally, because he couldn't to along with Lyndon Johnson regarding the Johnson Presidential Library. Bahmer had been meeting with Lady Bird Johnson every week for months. Finally Johnson said he wanted to have what the Archives had done for the Kennedy Library - a big oral history program. Knott called Bahmer over and said that's what the President had asked. Bahmer inquired about the resources, but was told he'd have to absorb the costs. Bahmer refused. He had been absorbing things for two years. Everything that had come along had to be absorbed. That meant that we had pared down in the National Archives, and had taken all of the best people out of the Archives, and put them into Presidential Libraries, or some of the other programs. Bahmer held if the President wanted that, then he ought to be able to find fifty or sixty thousand dollars.

You can't set up an oral history program and a microfilm program like we had for the Kennedy Library, which is even more expensive, without such funds. Knott said he would go back and see if he could get funds for this. There were no funds. Bahmer said the administration should get someone else, since he wasn't going to steal money away from the Archives.

Early in the game, back in the early days of GSA when we were building records management, and records centers, we stole it the other way. We put a lot of money that we got for records centers, perhaps a quarter of a million dollars, and put it over in the National Archives, which was fine. Grover and Bahmer bolstered up the staff which had been cut literally to nothing during World War II, when there wasn't really much going on here at the Archives in terms of archival work.

Frank Burke ^{had} mentioned the comparison to John XXIII. Bahmer didn't know what that could mean except that Bahmer put more emphasis on certain things. The scholarly Archivists always resented the effort that Grover and Bahmer put into building up records management from the ground: records centers and everything. The old hands resented the fact that we didn't put all records management centers under them as heads of divisions in the Archives. It just wouldn't have worked. We didn't even give it a thought. But there was always that resentment partly because we were writing our own ticket in this new field. We could get better grades money-wise. These guys were going along as GS 9's and GS 11's and we could get GS 12's and GS 13's. What they didn't realize was that it took about three years before we were able to raise the grade for comparable work in the National Archives.

Bahmer thought the Archives staff might have felt he was more inclined than Grover to favor the Archives as opposed to records management, which wasn't really true, but records management in 1965 had established itself and no longer needed priorities in so many ways as it did back in 1950, 1951 or 1952.

QUESTION: Peterson's article was about someone opening a window to a fresh breath of change.

ANSWER: Bahmer questioned this since he indicated he probably had more to do with things at the National Archives all during the seventeen years that he was Grover's deputy, than Grover did.

QUESTION: Could you speak to that point. Was Grover, with his father-in-law on the Hill, a liaison to Congress?

ANSWER: No, that was one of the big disappointments of going under GSA. The National Archives went under GSA, and from that point on, the Archives didn't have any direct contact up on the Hill. Contact had to go through GSA. This was very bad. That's one of the big things for independence. Now, the Archivist of the United States can deal with these committees on his own. He doesn't have to go to a congressional liaison in GSA who doesn't know how to present the Archives' case up on the Hill.

We did have a liaison, but it always had to be under cover - not official. You would get a telephone call under GSA, in my time, from a Congressional office, and the first thing you did after it was over was to write out a slip and say I got a call from Congressman So and So about such and such and send it over to GSA. GSA guarded two things: liaison with congressional offices and liaison with the White House. You don't step over those barriers.

Grover's father-in-law, Senator Thomas, had died shortly after Grover's appointment. It really was no benefit to Grover in dealing with Congress. The only time it ever became a matter of some moment was in '52 when Eisenhower was elected. It was pretty evident that Grover and Bahmer were Democrats. The question was, after Ike was elected, were they going to clean house, including the Archivist of The United States and his principal assistant. The same thing that Bert Rhoads went through and the same thing that Robert Warner went through.

Bahmer came down to Washington in 1932 working for a Michigan congressman. Bahmer knew his way around. He had made a study in his graduate work of certain things that gave him some liaison with the two Senators from North Dakota. Bahmer had written his dissertation on the North Dakota farmers' movement. Both of these Senators had been largely involved in it. Bahmer had interviewed them time and again. They were both Republican, so Bahmer went up to the hill to find out whether there was any real movements stirring to replace the Archivist of the United States. Senator William Langer was on the committee that passed on such appointments. Back when Grover was appointed, he was appointed by the President. Bahmer, Rhoads and Warner were appointed by the Administrator.

The Archives had a good relationship with Jack Brooks, chairman of the Government Operations Committee. Before he became chairman of the full committee he was chairman of a subcommittee that handled among other things, Archives business. We got to know Jack Brooks very well. He was very kind to us, particularly during the days when we had legislation like the Presidential Libraries Act and the expansion of the National Historical Publications Commission, particularly when we went up and asked for a grant program. When we wrote the Federal Records Act in 1950, we

reconstituted the National Historical Publications Commission but all it could do was encourage. It didn't have any money to parcel out to get anybody to go into the publication of papers. And there were no records grants. That was even after my time, that it became the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

QUESTION: Supposedly the NHPRC dates from Truman getting the first volume of the Jefferson papers. Was that true?

ANSWER: That's not quite true. The NHPRC was there before, but it didn't have any wherewithal to do anything. Bahmer was up at that meeting at the Library of Congress and was there when the first volume of the Jefferson papers was presented. The Archives used that as a springboard. The Archives wrote a piece of legislation that authorized the Archives to receive money and take gifts from outside sources and authorized a million or two million dollars or something of appropriated funds that could be parceled out to appropriate projects that were approved by the Commission. That came three or four years after the Archives got the legislation through. We got a big grant from the Ford Foundation - four or five million. We supported the big five projects. That thing has gone on and on and on. It's one of the biggest publication projects - publication of historical sources - in the world, in any country.

QUESTION: Let me change the subject and speak of Bert Rhoads. At one point, presumably when Rhoads was working for Al Leisinger, he was tapped to change jobs and thereafter the job changes came about fairly frequently. At what point -- was it Wayne Grover, or was it you who decided that he should be your successor?

ANSWER: It was both of them. Grover and Bahmer hardly ever took any action that they didn't discuss with one another. Grover and Bahmer were so close personally and they got to know one another so well, that they could have acted because they knew what the other guy would think. They discussed not only Bert Rhoads, but a number of people around here. Grover and Bahmer knew that new appointments would have to be made. Bert Rhoads was one, Frosty Williams was another, Dick Jacobs was another. There were four or five other people. Grover and Bahmer gave them opportunities. They moved them around. Maybe we played favorites, but we looked over the crop pretty carefully in the late 1950's and the 1960's and Rhoads was one that they felt had all the desirable qualities that he could furnish leadership for the Archives. We moved him around. We sent Jacobs and Williams to management schools so that they could move on. Jacobs is still around. Bahmer indicated he didn't know the circumstances under which Williams left the Archives.

QUESTION: Where does Walter Robertson, Jr., fit in?

ANSWER: Robertson was just about as close to Grover and Bahmer as Grover and Bahmer were close together. When Grover and Bahmer came back here in 1948, the Archives was in a shambles. Solon Buck had really been forced out. He had gone to the Library of Congress.

QUESTION: I had heard it said that Dan Lacy was responsible for getting Wayne Grover appointed as Buck's assistant or deputy.

ANSWER: He was. Bahmer had been offered the job. Back in 1930 he had gone to the University of Minnesota to work under Buck. Bahmer didn't like him, particularly. He was a martinet. He was a good scholar, but he was a poor administrator. Bahmer didn't want to work that closely with him. Grover and Bahmer were working together over at the Pentagon. Grover came back and Buck's days were numbered. He had hired Lacy and Rifkin and Portner and Buck got into such turmoil with the Bureau of the Budget and with Congress. (Bahmer wasn't at the Archives during the war years and didn't pay very close attention to what was going on.) Somehow or other Congress wrote that budget appropriation bill that nobody who'd worked for WPA prior to a certain date could be paid out of this appropriation. That cut Lacy and Portner and Rifkin right out.

QUESTION: People who had received wartime positions above a certain grade

ANSWER: Bahmer didn't remember how it was, because he didn't pay any attention to it. Buck got a bum rap because they accused him of harboring a Nazi, called Ernst Posner, a Jew who fled Germany. Bahmer didn't know all of this at the time, because he was busy over at the Pentagon. But at any rate, that cleaned that group out, so that when Grover came back here, in something less than a year, Buck moved out. Buck was the one who recommended to the President that he appoint Grover. At this time Grover's father-in-law, Senator Thomas, meant something to Grover because Truman knew Senator Thomas and he knew that everything was right on the political end. Waldo Leland went along with Buck's recommendation. There are letters somewhere on this. That's how Grover came to be Archivist. Buck came to the conclusion that, and Bahmer doesn't think he was entirely right, you didn't need a scholar to be Archivist. What you needed was someone who could administer a program. Buck said, looking ahead, that the Archivist should be somebody who knew records management because that was the drumbeat --- all for records management. Take care of the sources and you won't have any trouble in the Archives, afterward, when they come to you. Grover fit that bill 100%. Grover and Bahmer put on a program in the War Department that really clicked and Grover deserved all the credit in the world for that.

QUESTION: Was there any chance that Emmett Leahy might have ever been appointed Archivist?

ANSWER: Bahmer didn't think so. Bahmer worked for Leahy for a year, beginning around Christmas 1941. Bahmer drew his paycheck from the Archives but worked on detail with Emmett Leahy in the Navy. Bahmer and Leahy had got to know one another when Buck got interested about September 1941 in having a pamphlet on the care of records in a national emergency. Buck detailed three people: Emmett Leahy, Bahmer and Forrest Holdcamper. Bahmer wrote most of the thing because Leahy wasn't a guy to work. He was a promoter and an organizer and very good at that. If you wanted a thing promoted, Leahy was the man to do it. But at any rate Bahmer got to know Leahy while they were doing this project. About this time the Booz-(?) -Allen-Hamilton management team finished a study of Navy. Among other things they said, was that you ought to get somebody in here to ride herd on the records. The Navy had records in the halls and everywhere else one could see. The Navy set up what they were going to call a coordinator of Records.

Leahy was always looking for a main chance. He was a Special Examiner. Bahmer then explained what Deputy Examiners did and what Special Examiners did. Special Examiners were supposed to decide whether old records could be destroyed. Government bureaucrats weren't supposed to throw away any old records any place in the Government except with the approval of a Joint Committee on the Disposition of Executive Papers in Congress. The bureaucrats had to get the Archivist's approval to do that. These Special Examiners were supposed to do that. Leahy was one of them. Phil Brooks was one. There were half a dozen of them. They never knew what they were supposed to be doing. They didn't know agency records and they'd get ^{requests from} every office. You never saw so much paperwork in your whole life! So all the Special Examiners, when they found out what they were doing, wanted to get out of it as soon as they could, including Leahy. This was a beautiful opportunity. So he got the job over at Navy.

Bahmer and Leahy had worked well together. Bahmer didn't want to go to Navy. Bahmer didn't know anything in particular about the Navy at all, no more than anybody does, but Buck was Archivist, and one can't turn down the Armed Forces and so on, so Bahmer said he'd go over and at least help get things started. Bahmer was there a year and enjoyed it. He learned a lot that year. Then Nelson Blake, head of Navy Archives was drafted. This left that job open. Buck called Bahmer and asked if Bahmer would like to come back and be Chief of the Naval Records Division. Bahmer agreed. He got back to the Archives in December 1942. Bahmer hadn't been back very long when...

INTERRUPTION: Frank Burke entered the room and introduced Artel Ricks. A discussion followed, none of which was recorded.

ANSWER: We were discussing our interest in Bert Rhoads. We did move him around and we did it deliberately because we figured he was going to move up. We didn't know exactly where, in managing the institution. When Grover wrote his letter saying he was going to resign, he recommended Bahmer as Archivist and Bert Rhoads as Bahmer's deputy. We agreed on that.

QUESTION: Did you agree on how many years Rhoads would serve as Deputy Archivist?

ANSWER: No, because Bahmer didn't know how many years he was going to stay on. Bahmer was a couple of years older than Grover. Bahmer had a couple of kids in college, and he didn't want to retire yet.

QUESTION: Did you ever feel odd that you became Grover's deputy?

ANSWER: Bahmer answered in the negative and then went on to describe in some detail how very close he and Grover had been. At the time Bahmer was chief of the records division at the Pentagon, but he had felt sooner or later he'd return to the Archives. Bahmer noted that he and Grover were as compatible as two people could be. They worked together. They built a cabin on the Chesapeake and would go down on weekends with their families. There was never any thought of envy or competition.

QUESTION: Was it you or Bert Rhoads who really was in charge in the 1966-1968 period?

ANSWER: Bahmer was in charge. Bahmer called Rhoads and told him that Rhoads would be deputy for a few years. If all went well, Rhoads would become Archivist. In a sense the two men shared all of the problems and made joint decisions, generally. The big problems that you get into in that job of Archivist generally involved getting money, getting enough money so that your programs can go - and then it's people. Fifty per cent of the time you spend on getting money, and the other fifty per cent you spend on keeping the people happy, or getting the proper people into the proper jobs - not all of them, but the jobs that count in terms of running the programs that you tried to get money to finance. Then you try to keep track of them. Bahmer told Rhoads at the very beginning that he was being groomed to take that job over when Bahmer decided that he had had enough and was going to get out. Many of the things, when we were fighting this battle of independence, got into a row with Julian Boyd and his group, those decisions were Bahmer's. Rhoads did a lot to keep things from boiling over. The finish of that story.. Bahmer was doing things that you wouldn't expect a person of ~~his~~ ^{my} position to do. Two guys came over from the Budget Bureau and sort of told him he was getting off-line.

QUESTION: I thought you were on the same side as Budget Bureau trying to shoot down independence....

ANSWER: Bahmer was for independence, but not for the reasons pro-independence partisans gave.

QUESTION: Could you elaborate on this?

ANSWER: The pro-independence group said that every program we had, arrangement, description and so on - was due to the interference of GSA and/or lack of GSA support. That just wasn't true. The reason that the National Archives couldn't get along further with many of these programs was because we never got money enough, which wasn't due to GSA. It was due to Congress turning down our appropriations. Bahmer went on to say: "We stole money from GSA in the first twelve, fifteen years that we were under GSA... We made money out of GSA."

QUESTION: Was that just for the records management and records centers?

ANSWER: Bahmer made clear he didn't mean "steal". The Archives would transfer funds. They'd overestimate costs for the records centers and put the couple of hundred thousand dollars into archival operations.

It was the Presidential Libraries which caused financial problems for the Archives. They kept growing. NARS got the Truman, Eisenhower, Hoover, and Kennedy libraries. The libraries needed trained people and the easiest way to get them was to recruit personnel from the National Archives. After a while the personnel drainage hurt the National Archives, because there was a long period in the 1950's when not many good trained people with a history background or political science background wanted to come and work at the National Archives. Salaries weren't attractive. Academic work was more appealing. Schools were always looking for new people for instructors and assistant professors. The National Archives was doing its best to try to get good people to take exams and come in, but it wasn't having a lot of success during the 1950's when academic work was more appealing than work at the Archives. Currently you can get a lot of good people to come into the Archives, because salaries are better, and the academic life is no longer quite so open.

It would take two or three hours to talk about all the arguments that flew back and forth when Bahmer met with the two budget people. Finally, they asked what Bahmer wanted. Bahmer asked for three things: an Archives council, Prologue, approval for requests for appropriations to set up archives departments in the records centers. They approved all of it. Bahmer's idea was that they should approve money so the Archives could send copies of ~~its~~^{its} microfilm, as it was made, to each of the centers. Bahmer wanted to get copies of records out of Washington so people wouldn't have to come to Washington every time they wanted to look at a Federal record. To a certain extent, that's done, although Bahmer admitted it proved costly, and when hard times came, the big program was discontinued.

Bahmer cited an example involving Artel Ricks, who as a Mormon was very interested in genealogy. The Archives put copies of the 1910 Census in the Archives branches in records centers, thereby increasing business in the records centers by 400%. At the San Mateo center near San Francisco they increased microfilm readers from one to seventeen. There were lines of people and two-hour time limits put on microfilm reader use.

QUESTION: Did it make any difference to you that the sales of Archives microfilm fell way off?

ANSWER: No, replied Bahmer. He knew that it was going to happen. He didn't think the Archives should necessarily try to make money and support a whole lot out of the Trust Fund. He remembered when the Trust Fund was \$20,000. In the last years the figure had jumped into the millions. The Archives charged cost plus ten percent. Walt Robertson was able to figure a lot of things into cost.

SIDE 2

ANSWER CONT: Loans of tape used to be carried out through the Ft. Worth center. Bahmer felt that these records belong to the people and the people ought to have access to them, and they shouldn't have to pay. It's like public education. It ought to be free to the people. Bahmer resisted time after time against the institution of a user fee on people coming in and using the Archives. The most that the Archives would do was if you wanted copies of something, you would pay the charge for copying. The Archives sold lots of film to universities. Bahmer got into another jam with the Budget Bureau when they wouldn't let him put copies of NARS film in San Francisco. Bahmer wanted to make it available to area schools. He hoped to get enough material out there to get the history faculties to know what was there and begin to have their students use this material. Bahmer related that when his daughter was in graduate school in the social sciences her professors didn't have her do research with original material. He told of having hired Walter Rundell from the University of Maryland to make a survey to see what had happened in the graduate teaching of history. Bahmer wondered why there wasn't more use of the basic sources and what had happened to historiography, the study of sources and so on. Rundell's report indicated that such things had fallen into disfavor.

QUESTION: We haven't mentioned the name of Theodore R. Schellenberg. Could you speak a couple of words about what his role was in the Archives?

ANSWER: Bahmer indicated he worked for Schellenberg for a number of years. Bahmer characterized him as a very smart man, who had a lot of talent, but he was "a Nazi" in his philosophy. Bahmer knew Schellenberg well. He called him "arrogant" and said he "hated Jews" and "hated black people".

QUESTION: Let me play the Devil's Advocate just for a second. Harold Pinkett was hired by Schellenberg. Meyer Fishbein says he got his great break from Schellenberg. How does this fit in with his reputation?

ANSWER: Bahmer didn't think what Fishbein and Pinkett said was entirely true, since there were other persons besides Schellenberg involved in those decisions.

Bahmer then gave background on Schellenberg. Schellenberg went off to the the Office of Price Administration during the war. Grover and Bahmer were over at the War Department. All three came back. Schellenberg did a good job at OPA. He came back and he had to have some kind of a job. According to his rating he should have been entitled to a division directorship, but there weren't any open. Grover and Bahmer didn't know what to do, except to set up a job. Bahmer knew that the other directors didn't like Schellenberg. They quarreled with him all the time. Grover and Bahmer didn't make him director or Assistant Archivist in charge of the National Archives. They made him Director of Archival Administration. His was a staff rather than a line job.

QUESTION: Can you go over that. I had always assumed that that was in effect, Assistant Archivist for the National Archives.

ANSWER: No, he wasn't. He resented the fact that he wasn't. His title was something like Director of Archival Management or Assistant Archivist in charge of that. He never had line authority over anyone. He was supposed to coordinate. It was an anomalous situation. Grover said that he was not going to let Schellenberg run him, because if Schellenberg had tried to run Paul Lewinson and Oliver Holmes and the other people that were division directors there would have been a revolt. Paul Lewinson resigned in the end because he just couldn't get along with Schellenberg. Little by little, frictions developed all over the place mainly because Schellenberg resented his anomalous situation and the others resented anytime Schellenberg....

Bahmer kept encouraging Schellenberg to use his talent. We wanted manuals. We wanted literature. And he produced some good things. Finally the opportunity came along when the National Librarian of Australia wanted someone to come over on a Fullbright for nine months to help them set up an Archives. Bahmer remembered telling Grover, this is the opportunity. Bahmer said he'd talk Ted Schellenberg into taking it. He was happy to take it. He wrote his book the first year of his visit. He came back and wrote more and more and more and made a substantial reputation as an author in the field of archival management and administration.

Bahmer always got along pretty well with Schellenberg. They never had any open quarrels. At one point Grover decided to get Schellenberg out of his job. That's when they set up the Office of Records Appraisal. Ted Schellenberg and Bahmer started the Archives Scheduling Program. Bahmer wrote the first schedule that was ever produced for an agency - in 1938 or 39.

Bahmer then indicated he was less than satisfied with that initial schedule. He knew what he wanted to accomplish, but didn't know enough about the agency to know how to go about doing it. Bahmer started to say what Lewis Darter, Jr. had done but Bahmer didn't complete the sentence. Darter still lives in Bethesda. He worked for records management. During World War II he was drafted and worked for Emmett Leahy's outfit.

In any case, it was Schellenberg and Bahmer that set that whole thing in motion. Because of Bahmer's identification with scheduling and programming the disposition of records, ~~L~~^{SEA}ey wanted him over at Navy. That's why Grover insisted Bahmer had to go over to the Army War Department.

QUESTION: I'm puzzled by one thing. Wouldn't scheduling have been the role of a Special Examiner rather than a Deputy Examiner?

ANSWER: The positions of Special Examiner had long since been abolished. Those positions were abolished about the time the Deputy Examiners had pretty much completed their survey of all the accumulation of records. Then the National Archives changed its organization and set up archives divisions, one for each major department: Agriculture, Commerce, State, Labor, etc. They've all been juggled around a dozen different ways since. Schellenberg was made director of the Agricultural Archives. Bahmer's field was agricultural history. He asked to be assigned to Agricultural Archives if he had to work in records. From that point on, he handled all the disposition work from the Department of Agriculture as well as the transfers records from the agricultural agencies.

In the 1930's, there used to be Special Examiners. Also, the National Archives used to have Classification Division and all sorts of divisions that never really worked out. Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr., a librarian, tried to impose the same kind of control over some of the Archives records that you had on a library book. At any rate, all that had disappeared by 1938 or 1939. By 1938 the Deputy Examiners had finished that big survey. Records had started to come in. The Veterans Administration records had started coming in. The State Department had sent records as did Agriculture. Agencies had begun to clean out many of the old attics and basements of records.

QUESTION: Could you speak on where appraisal should be: in a separate unit or in the textual units? Was the establishment of an appraisal unit simply a subterfuge to get rid of Schellenberg?

ANSWER: The real impulse to setting the office up was to get Schellenberg out of his job into something else, primarily for the good of the working people in the divisions. Bahmer added: "And if you ask me today, is it better to have it done by the people in the custodial branches or to take the people from the custodial branches and put them in one pot and get on with the job, I think you'd get more intelligent appraisal by putting them on that job and keeping them on it, rather than have that pieced in along with seventeen other things that you are doing in the custodial branches, along with reference and description and the rest of it. Somebody told me that they'd gone back to an Office of Records Appraisal."

Bahmer had a feeling that in putting all the Archives' emphasis on disposal lists, the Archives wasn't paying any attention to what should be kept. He thought attention should be paid to writing the schedules and in working with the agency records officers. He felt the Archives should be paying more attention the kinds of records that are being kept, or shouldn't be produced and kept. He stated, "We were putting all of our time and attention on just approving 99% of the things that come in. You don't have to have any Ph.D. to know that you don't keep bills of lading forever. You don't keep supply vouchers and you don't keep most of the bulk of that housekeeping and so on. What you should know is what they're keeping that is going to be the permanent record. We were all very vague on that."

Bahmer remembered telling Schellenberg, in trying to make his job more palatable to him, that he ought to put his effort in that area so that the Archives could get some literature with some kind of standards and reference points so the Archives could begin to talk about keeping permanent records and agencies producing permanent records.

Bahmer said he probably wrote more of the Federal Records Act of 1950 than anybody else. He remembered glibly writing that each agency should be responsible for the production of records of this, that, and the other - permanent records. Agencies should take care that if something happens that it doesn't get into the records, that you write a memo for the record. J. Lee Rankin who was Solicitor General, (attorney for the Attorney General), and later attorney for the Warren Committee during the investigation into the assassination of Kennedy, had told Bahmer that that was an invasion of privacy. Rankin had said, "You couldn't get to first base in court if you tried to enforce that to make a guy make a memo for the record.". Bahmer's reply had been: "I don't care what it was, it ought to be done."

Bahmer then indicated he'd soon have to end the conversation for the day.

QUESTION: Can I ask one last question that deals with preservation. I've heard it said that the Archives used to laminate instead of encapsulate, and that really was a disaster. Can you speak to that point?

ANSWER: Bahmer replied he didn't know how much of a disaster it was, but the Archives had indeed been stuck with laminating. The Bureau of Standards, before the Archives was set up had run a series of tests using cellulose acetate with the paper as a sandwich. When the Archives was established, they hired the man, Arthur Kimberly from the Bureau of Standards, to come down and do that. None of the archivists knew anything about the chemistry or technical things involved with lamination. Soon they learned there was a fellow in Richmond, Virginia, who said it was all right if you washed the paper and got all the acid out of it. The issue was do you wash or don't you wash. After Grover and Bahmer returned to the Archives they went back to the Bureau of Standards and said: "Give us an answer to this. Do we wash, or don't we wash?"

QUESTION: But the Archives was not washing, is that right?

ANSWER: No, they just laminated. Well, the Archives opted for washing in the end. About the same time this was going on, the Archives ran an inspection. The Archives looked at something that had been laminated eight or ten years before, and found out the the documents were as brittle as could be. The saving thing was supposed to be that you could de-laminate them without hurting the documents. The Archives investigated as to why the documents were so stiff and brittle. Jim Gear began to look around. He found out the Archives was buying the laminate from DuPont and there was no real "spec" on it. DuPont had changed the mix over the years. They found it cheaper or easier to do something. Whatever mix it was that was supposed to keep it pliable and flexible over the years had been changed. The Archives thus thought it had that cured. The Archives wasn't ever happy with lamination after that. Bahmer asked: "Do they still laminate?"

QUESTION: No, they now do encapsulation.

ANSWER: What's encapsulation?

QUESTION: Instead of sealing, you make a plastic sandwich and seal around the edges.

ANSWER: The Archives' European friends were always skeptical of lamination. David Evans, head of the British Public Records Office, said he would wait a generation or two and see how the United States would come out on it. The Archives ran into that same trouble with microfilm. The Archives had things on microfilm. In inspecting the microfilm they found "measles." A lot of the images had little red spots on them, just as if the things had measles. The spots kept growing, and began to eat into the letters. If the process went on it would destroy the text of the things that were on the microfilm. The Archives went back immediately to the Bureau of Standards again and asked what was going on. Bahmer thought the Bureau had discovered that most of the problem was with film that had been sent to the Archives by the agency. It was a failure of proper processing. It hadn't been washed properly or something. Again, Bahmer's European friends used to say: "We won't do microfilm unless we have a couple of generations experience in your shop and see whether this stuff is any good."

QUESTION: Ross indicated he hoped the two of them would be able to talk again on Bahmer's next trip to Washington.

ANSWER: Bahmer said he'd probably be back in Washington. He also said he was planning to go to the fiftieth anniversary of the Society of American Archivists in Chicago in 1986. He offered to continue the conversation at that time. Bahmer indicated he was one of the few remaining Founding Fathers of the SAA who had attended the first meeting at Brown University in Providence.

QUESTION: Ross said he'd enjoy that, since they hadn't talked at all about the SAA and the question of National Archives dominance in the organization during earlier years that you were....

ANSWER: Bahmer said the SAA couldn't accuse "us" of that. He added: "We kept our hands off. Now, the dominance was in the period from Connor and Buck through to about '50. We did have the editor here. Nobody else had the resources to support the job. We did. And, we played some part, but we were very cognizant, you know, that as the state archivists began to develop they began to - you know - feel that the damn National Archives was just running everything. We tried our damndest not to run it. We didn't want any quarrel with the state archivists."

QUESTION: Wasn't there a session in Canada around 1949 when there was almost a stalemate and the favored candidate, Phil Brooks, almost didn't win?

ANSWER: Bahmer indicated he wasn't at that meeting but he could still remember the hullabaloo. The basis for the problem went back to Solon Buck, who was a dominating person.

Buck and Dean Theodore C. Blegen from Minnesota were responsible for starting the SAA. They thought archivists ought to have their own society instead of remaining a committee of the American Historical Association. They met in Chattanooga in 1935. When the AHA met at Brown University it was pretty well decided that the SAA would be founded. A couple of dozen people, mostly from the National Archives, became charter members. They included Herb Angel, Bahmer, Paul Lewinson and Wayne Grover. Four men drove up to Brown together: Bahmer, Lewinson, Grover and one other. Another charter member was Morris L. Radoff of Maryland.

FINAL INTERRUPTION AND CONCLUSION

QUESTION: Farewell until next year in Chicago.