Lucile M. Kane
Narrator

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Interviewer

Kane's home
St. Paul, Minnesota

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RG: This is an interview of Lucile Kane by Rhoda Gilman on March 10th 1990 at the home of Lucile Kane.

Lucile, I think I'll have you start out by telling me some of the background of your life before you joined MHS. I think we agreed that this is very, very important to the directions of your career.

LK: It's a bit strange because—well, among urban historians, I often say I became an urban historian of sorts, but I've always been an agrarian. I was born on a farm not far from Ellsworth, Wisconsin. It's in Pierce County. I was—let's see, the third generation of Kanes to be—

RG: In that area?

LK: In that area, right. My great-grandfather, James Kane, came to that area in early 1870s, and there's been a direct line since through James to George, my grandfather; Emory, my father; Sheldon, my brother; and now his two sons are operating the farm.

RG: Was this an Irish family?

LK: Yes, an Irish family. My mother's—let's see. My father's mother was Ellen O'Connell, and she either came as an immigrant or when she was very young. So Irish we were.

RG: And you attended rural school near Maiden Rock [Wisconsin]?

LK: Yes. Maiden Rock was only about four miles from our house down through, as we called it, the Cooley Way. But we lived on the hills and Maiden Rock is on Lake Pepin, and it was a gradually sloping table of land from the Highlands to the Lake Pepin area.

RG: And then from rural school you went to boarding school in La Crosse [Wisconsin]?

LK: I went to La Crosse after leaving the one-room school, which I understand is becoming a fairly rare experience in our time. I went to La Crosse to attend Washburn Orthopedic School and I lived with my grandparents, my French grandparents, at that time. So that gave me a better feeling for that side of my heritage. Which as my mother often complained, was dominated by the Irish clan. [Laughter]

RG: Were you alone in going to La Crosse? I know you had a number of sisters and at least one brother.

LK: Yes.

RG: They sent you to La Crosse by yourself?

LK: Yes. And the orthopedic school was not the earliest, but one of the early attempts to combine education with medical treatment. So there we were, about thirty of us in one schoolroom, a bit like the Montessori. There were students there for treatment, probably seven or eight years old, and the oldest in the room was sixteen. So there was one teacher, and the older children were assigned to help the little ones.

RG: Like a one-room school all over again.

LK: Right. And then there was a clinic right next door—or a medical room—and we all, in our turns, went in for our daily treatment.

RG: Physical therapy?

LK: Yes.

RG: How long were you in La Crosse?

LK: Only ten months.

RG: Ten months. And then you went to St. John's Parochial School?

LK: Yes. And that is still in Plum City, Wisconsin, but it's no longer a boarding school. Oh, it's just so common now to run the school buses out into the countryside to pick up the children. And it was barely beginning, this bus system, in our part of the country when we were in high school.

RG: That would have been in the early 1930s?

LK: I was born in 1920. Yes, early 1930s.

RG: And then for high school you went to Ellsworth?

LK: First Plum City.

RG: First to Plum City then—

LK: Yes. And then the buses, the Ellsworth school system—oh, God, a fleet of buses—and they went out, I think, campaigning for students from other high schools. And for one year, Sister Alora—that was her name in religion. My sister's real name, we'll call it, is Georgia. She and I went to Ellsworth, rode the bus, while my sister Leona decided to stay in Plum City with her classmates.

RG: She was a little farther along, so the change was harder.

LK: Right. So Sister Alora and I rode the bus for one year and then we were roomers in town, a light housekeeping room. That sounds a bit like the Dakotas where the Brown children went into town and stayed for the school term.

RG: It has a real agrarian background ring.

LK: Yes.

RG: Now that area is so close to the Twin Cities that it's almost verging on being suburban.

LK: Yes.

RG: And it's interesting that as late as the middle and late 1930s, it was still very much a rural area. How did you feel those years of the Depression? What impact did those have on your growing up?

LK: I think when we were small—grade-schoolers—the big difference we noticed was a simple thing. We no longer had school shoes and good shoes, or the coat we wore when we went to church or special events and the school coat. In fact, in a family of women as we grew up, we had one good coat among all of us; and whoever had a special event, wore the coat.

But farm children so often had no real physical deprivation because of the huge gardens. To us, a treat was to be able to buy a dozen wieners, but we had pork and beef and chicken and all the things that would have been a luxury in the city. I think we felt the Depression more as we got into high school and into college, because our minds were expanding along with our bodies and we could see the world outside our neighborhood.

RG: You didn't go very far away to college, even so. River Falls State Teachers College is right in the area.

LK: That's right. And there was a double selectivity there. It was kind of a neighborhood college, and unless you were quite wealthy, you just did not go to the University of Minnesota or go to

Harvard or Princeton or whatever. There were people we knew in the community who did, but most of us, if we went to college, went to River Falls or Stoddard Institute.

RG: Oh, yes. That's in Menomonie [Wisconsin].

LK: Yes.

RG: That was—really still is—a technical college more than an academic.

LK: Right. And going to college itself was something very special.

RG: Why, I can believe it. In a farm family with many children, that showed a real dedication on the part of your parents. Did you intend to become a schoolteacher?

LK: No. I didn't know what I wanted to be. I did not like going to school. In fact, I did not begin school until I was eight years old because I didn't like the confinement. I was a restless child. I persevered in college. I didn't want to see it through, but I knew it was the only way. And I persevered in graduate school, waiting for the emancipation.

RG: Did you go direct to graduate school from River Falls [Wisconsin]? Or did you work for a while first?

LK: There was a one-year interval. I went from River Falls in 1942 to teach school at Osceola, Wisconsin, again not far from home. At the end of the first year of teaching, I began summer school at the University [of Minnesota].

RG: I see. Then you went back for another year of teaching?

LK: For one more year, yes. I started a third year, but I was just so restless I wanted not only to finish graduate school, but also to explore other professions.

RG: So then you moved to the Twin Cities?

LK: Yes.

RG: The big time. [Chuckles]

LK: The big time, but still not far from home, because my sister, Leona, was already there. It wasn't long before we were creating a home in St. Paul.

RG: A nest of Kanes in the Twin Cities. [Laughter]

LK: There still is a nest.

RG: And then you worked at the University of Minnesota Press from 1945 until 1946 for about a year there.

LK: Yes.

RG: Were you going to graduate school at that time?

LK: Right. The University Press hired a lot of part-time students, most of them from the English department. I worked full-time after the first couple of months, but there was such a great liberality. We could run across the street to Burton Hall and attend a seminar, come back to the Press, finish out the day's work, and then compensate for the hour by working on. It was a very fluid situation.

RG: What we call now flextime.

LK: Exactly.

RG: With great pride that we have finally achieved it. [Laughter] I have the sense that the experience at the University Press was rather crucial for you. We will get back to it later. Is there anything in particular you'd like to say at this point?

LK: I think we can reserve our talks about Margaret Harding and the other fine women I met there for a later time. But just a word here that it was my first real exposure to life outside the teaching profession. Anything seemed possible after I wrote ads and got together book catalogs, wrote news releases and found that, even though I wasn't an expert, I could make my living that way.

RG: Yes. The advertising world seems like a kind of a jumping off the deep end of the pool.

LK: Yes. [Laughter]

RG: Though at the University Press in those days, it probably wasn't comparable to what it is now.

LK: Yes. But I do remember a comment that Helen Louise McDonald, the sales manager, made when I was trying my hand at writing jacket copy. She said, "In writing jacket copy, you're not reviewing a book." [Laughter]

RG: So then it was a fairly logical transition from the University Press to become an editor and a researcher for—let's see, that's the Forest Products History Foundation?

LK: Yes.

RG: In 1946.

LK: Yes. And it was natural in another way because Rodney Loehr, who was director of the Forest Products History Foundation, was also a member of the history department at the University.

RG: And one of your teachers.

LK: That's right.

RG: Let's say a little bit more about your graduate school training. You got a degree in history?

LK: In American history.

RG: American history.

LK: And a minor in French.

RG: I see. Well, that's perfect preparation for a job at MHS [Minnesota Historical Society]. [Laughter]

LK: Yes, it was.

RG: And so, then, at that time, the Forest Products History Foundation was officed in the Historical Society building in St. Paul.

LK: Yes, it was.

RG: And so from 1946 to 1948, you were, but were not, a part of MHS.

LK: That's right. And I had done research at MHS before I joined the Forest Products History Foundation. Because when I was searching for a thesis topic—this is M.A.—I never did get my Ph.D.—my major advisor, Ernest Osgood, looked at my credentials and said, "At last," that is a major in American history who had a college major in French, also, and gave me *Military Life in Dakota* to translate.

RG: Oh, yes. Your first book.

LK: That's right. And that took me to MHS to do research.

RG: Regarding *Military Life in Dakota*, you mentioned Ernest Osgood gave it to you. How did this happen? I mean, you were one his prime graduate students, obviously. Was this a book that he wanted to see translated?

LK: Yes, for a long time. In fact, he had it on his bookshelf in his office, and he felt that the partial publication that had been done years before just indicated the value of that as a source book on

western history. So he had been watching for a graduate student.

RG: How long did it take you to finish this?

LK: It took me a long time. He gave it to me at the end of the summer of 1943, and I finished the first translation in 1945, the annotation by 1946, then we got the original manuscript. I went to New York and met the grandson of General [Philippe Régis] de Trobriand and borrowed the original, and the original turned out to be different from the published version.

RG: Often those things happen.

LK: The differences were not remarkable. It was different phrasings, cutting of things that were deemed to be indelicate in the 1920s, like syphilis among the Indian tribes and such things. But it did require a collating of the handwritten manuscript and the published book. And Mortimer Naftalin, Arthur Naftalin's brother, was my partner in collating it.

RG: Then you were really finishing this at just about the time you started work at the MHS?

LK: Yes. I got my degree in 1946, and then decided to work toward a book by getting the original and doing that and doing a whole lot more research for annotation. It was in the fall of 1946 that I came to the MHS on the staff of the foundation.

RG: Oh, that was for the Forest History Products Foundation?

LK: Yes.

RG: Was *Military Life* published ultimately by MHS, or was it published by the University Press?

LK: It was published by the Alvord Memorial Commission that had been founded many years before. The Alvord Memorial Commission contracted with the University of Oklahoma Press, and the Oklahoma Press did the publishing. They had limited responsibility. They did not contract the marketing, and the marketing was done through MHS, because Grace Lee Nute was chairman of the Alvord Memorial Commission.

RG: Ah yes, I have heard of the Alvord Memorial Commission a number of times. It seems to have had some sort of informal ties with MHS programs. This would be largely through Grace Nute and also Theodore Blegen perhaps? Clarence Alvord, too.

LK: Theodore Blegen was very interested in it. In fact, Blegen was one of the editors who started to work on the book that became *Ho! for the Gold Fields[: northern overland wagon trains of the 1860s.]*

RG: Yes. That's where I have heard of it, really. Those two books both contain references to it.

Well, to go on then to your career at the Minnesota Historical Society, perhaps I should just review. You were curator of manuscripts then from 1948 to 1976?

LK: Yes.

RG: A total of twenty-eight years by my arithmetic.

LK: Right.

RG: And then you were state archivist from 1976 to 1979, three years; and senior research fellow from 1979 to 1985, six years; and then senior research associate emerita from 1985 until now.

LK: Yes.

RG: That's a total then of forty-four years association with MHS, not counting the two years with the Forest History Products Foundation. In 1987, you received the American Association for State and Local History Award of Distinction for that long career.

LK: Yes. It's very interesting in thinking back over these time spans that I think, like so many women, at the beginning of my career I was rather slotted in. I thought in terms of one becomes a teacher, one becomes a nurse, perhaps a secretary. We didn't have a full realization of what there was out there. But once I began to experiment, leaving the teaching profession for the University of Minnesota Press and then had exposure as an editor for the Forest History Foundations and research as a field, it seemed like a great big, interesting world out there. But at the same, for the first time I settled down to one job over a span of years.

RG: Though given the immense changes that occurred in the MHS over this span of years, your professional experience, probably somewhat like mine, involved a great deal of change. Even though you were, in fact, technically in one job, there was great change in that job over the years in what you were actually called on to do.

LK: Right. You could list, I think, more areas than I in your movement through the MHS.

RG: I bounced around more, but I think you were in an area that expanded enormously and, as I say, technically changed a great deal.

LK: Yes. I think the early years as curator of manuscripts were years that were before specialization began, so one was a field representative or a cataloger or a reference person, an administrator, a hands-on worker.

RG: Yes. That's in some ways a much more pleasant working situation that we face now. [Laughter] During those forty-four years, you had the opportunity to work under and experience the

administrative style and the historical approaches of a number of directors. The first, as I recall, was Arthur Larsen. He was director when you started at the Forest History Products Foundation?

LK: Yes, he was.

RG: Is there anything particular you want to say about Arthur Larsen? [Chuckle]

LK: Well, I always think of Arthur Larsen as in the Blegen tradition. He was very close to Theodore Blegen. I didn't think of Arthur in those terms when I first met him, but as I grew to know Theodore Blegen well, I could see that there was a strong imprint, both on Arthur Larsen and Carlton Qualey.

Arthur Larsen was a very kind man. I think in some ways he felt thrust into a position where he had to be tougher than his nature dictated to him.

RG: How long was he director at MHS? Do you recall?

LK: He was director at two different times. He served in World War II.

RG: I recall that.

LK: And took a leave of absence from the Society. During that leave, Lewis Beeson was director.

RG: Oh, yes. This was a period at the Society where there were a number of rather short-term directors.

LK: Yes. And then Arthur, after the war, came back, and Lewis went on to—I think he went on to Michigan.

RG: I believe so.

LK: Then Arthur stayed a short time at MHS and back to Washington. I think he, too, had experienced a different world. [Laughter]

RG: A bigger stage.

LK: Yes.

RG: I recall he did eventually return to the University of Minnesota at Duluth, because I knew him during his later years there.

LK: And those were happy years for him.

RG: He was succeeded then by Carlton Qualey, and you and I have, in our interview with Carlton—

one of the things I recall most keenly is the fact that the directorship of MHS was decided at the graduate school of the University.

LK: Exactly.

RG: And a deal was cut, so to speak, with Carlton that he would take on MHS, even though he really preferred to stay in Northfield [Minnesota] at Carleton College.

LK: Yes. I think that is illustrative, too, of undemocratic procedures, sometimes very unorthodox procedures.

RG: It's illustrative of the passivity of the council at this time.

LK: Right. And the dominance of the University of Minnesota with respect to MHS.

RG: Yes.

LK: I think, perhaps, that relationship lingered longer at Wisconsin than at Minnesota.

RG: Perhaps by physical proximity.

LK: Yes.

RG: Certainly it was established at Minnesota by Solon Buck and continued by Theodore Blegen. And it's, I suppose not surprising, that it continued through the 1940s with a number, as I say, of short-term directors.

LK: Yes. And it was very noticeable to me because I came from the campus to MHS, and I think I reflected somewhat the opinions of my mentors in that I found MHS initially as sleepy, I thought limited, parochial, and agrarian, a number of things that in my mind at that time were bad, they were negatives.

RG: I guess my sense is that Carlton Qualey had very little impact on MHS. He was only director for a year.

LK: He didn't have time.

RG: He did, however, hire some significant people, you among them.

LK: And Arch Grahn at the same time.

RG: And Arch Grahn. Those two people both began under Carlton Qualey. Then Carlton was succeeded in 1948, late 1948 or early 1949, by Harold Dean Cater.

LK: Yes.

RG: And we will be saying more about the Cater era at MHS, but is there something, anything, you'd like to say now?

LK: You know, there may have been a University of Minnesota connection there, too.

RG: Really?

LK: Guy Stanton Ford, who had been president of the University of Minnesota, met Harold Dean Cater in Washington. This was after Ford's presidency, long after. I think he was associated with the American Historical Association at that time in Washington, of course.

RG: That's interesting. I have never heard that.

LK: And he met Harold Dean Cater at a party, so the story goes, and was impressed with his personality and general bearing. And MHS was looking for a director at the same time.

RG: That is interesting. So that may have been the last extension of the long arm of the University in MHS governance. [Laughter] In our interview with Russell Fridley, I think it became clear that the Cater era provoked a resurgence—maybe not resurgence, but an upsurge of responsibility and interest on the part of the council by necessity in dealing with some of the difficulties that developed under Cater.

LK: Yes, it did. I think Harold Cater's feelings about the sources of power and about the type of person who would be most useful on the council did something to shape the composition of the council, but it certainly was not wholly in his image. There were strong people who, like Leonard Carpenter, who were of the establishment in strict terms, but still did not totally endorse the Cater approach.

RG: And what would you say was Cater's—what characterized his approach to MHS? I think we were discussing this a little earlier. Cater was essentially more of a museum man than any director had been before that.

LK: Yes. I think he was very much impressed with what had happened at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin where they moved from directors like Joseph Schaeffer—you know, Joseph Schaeffer equals Solon Buck.

RG: Yes. [Chuckle]

LK: And then came Ed Alexander, who saw the institution in quite a different light. Not that Ed Alexander or Clifford Lord, who succeeded him, let down on the scholarly tradition. When you see

what happened in collection development there, you knew that it wasn't an either/or.

RG: Yes. But it was more of a sense of public history. A responsibility to the broader public, rather than strictly the academic community.

LK: That's a good way to put it. The *Badger Historian* started at that time, and there was—

RG: And under Cater here, the *Gopher Historian* quickly followed. [Laughter]

LK: The *Gopher Historian* began during the Territorial Centennial. And the Territorial Centennial, I found later, had much more of an educational emphasis than I realized at the time. Because it was not only the mimeographed *Gopher Historian*, but there were works on curriculum.

RG: Oh, really. That early?

LK: Yes. I can't remember now the titles of the projects, but very definitely a feeling of responsibility for history in the schools.

RG: Well, I believe it was during—was it at that point that the young people's organization was started, the Gopher Historians or whatever?

LK: Yes.

RG: And a position was first established to deal with young people in schools.

LK: Right. Polly Canfield was the editor of *Gopher Historian* and organized the various units of Gophers.

RG: Yes, the young historians.

LK: Yes.

RG: Well, in some ways I have always felt, coming from my more recent association with the educational program and with the exhibit program at the Historical Society, that the Cater era had great promise, but it, in a way, tragically fell short and was truncated in a way by the difficulties that Harold Cater got into. He was, to put it bluntly, fired. I think we do agree to that.

LK: Yes.

RG: At that time, then, Russell Fridley was his administrative assistant and was put in temporary charge and later confirmed in permanent charge.

LK: When you try to analyze the Cater era, as we did in our interview with Russell and as I think

historians who look at the Society will be doing for a long, long time, it is hard to come down to a precise definition of what went wrong. The closest those of us who lived through it have been able to come to it is to say that he just could not deal with people in a respectful and, I'd say, positive way. In so many ways, his concept of the Society—the outreach, the growth—he'd feel very much at home with the organization today. But he couldn't get from the concept—

RG: To the reality.

LK: To the reality. Although he wasn't an exact imitator of Clifford Lord, he could see in Wisconsin a man who was getting there. I think there were tensions that built up. There's a holdover, too, of what might be called an elitist feeling within the Society.

RG: Older staff members.

LK: Even beyond that, a feeling that there were people who counted and there were people who did not. It was beneficent in the eras of Buck, Blegen and Larsen. There was nothing really exclusive about it. There were just the stars of the organization, such as Grace Lee Nute and Bertha Heilbron and Mary Wheelhouse Berthel.

RG: Beneficent depending on your point of view, I suspect. [Laughter]

LK: Yes. And there are people like Willoughby Babcock—

RG: Who just never made it. [Chuckle]

LK: And in retrospect, I think he has attracted the respect. Beginning with, say, F. Sanford Cutler and June Drenning Holmquist, people who saw him as a learned man.

RG: Yes. Well, the Cater era lasted approximately five years, as I recall. And then in 1953, Russell [Fridley] became director, and, let's see, he retired in 1986.

LK: Yes.

RG: So we have a lengthy period there. How can it be characterized, do you think? [Laughter]

LK: It was very, very difficult. I remember a conversation Elwood Maunder and I had while the search for a director was in progress, and Elwood was, perhaps, the leading candidate. He told me why he did not want to become director. You know Elwood, don't you?

RG: I never knew him well. I've barely met him.

LK: After long, conscientious reflection, he concluded this. But he said something interesting after he had made the decision. He said the institution was in such shambles that he felt it would take the

career of one director to pull it together before positive progress could be made. It would be a healing process.

RG: I think maybe he overestimated the difficulties. [Laughter]

LK: Overestimated it, or probably—well, none of us could have foretold what the very special qualities of Russell Fridley were that made him the perfect person to become director at that time.

RG: As I recall from interviews with several other people, the impression of him was, at twenty-nine years old, just a skinny kid. [Laughter]

LK: Yes. The photographs would bear us out.

RG: Right. Very youthful looking for his age, and not one to inspire immediate confidence. But I recall Bertha Heilbron telling me, I think she used the words, "He had a positive genius for administration."

LK: Yes.

RG: That certainly was apparent in the early years. Do you feel that it continued through most of his career?

LK: Yes, I do. I think we could approach this question in so many ways, but I think if we had a continuity from concepts of elitism, that there are people who counted and people who may not have counted, to Russell's feeling of respect. I have rarely heard him speak of a person in toto without mentioning strengths. He would probably object to these broad categories, like "had respect for everyone from a division head to the stockroom man." That in itself is wrong, because why should the stockroom man be at the bottom of the pole? It was a human awareness.

RG: He does have a tendency to see people as individuals.

LK: Yes, he does.

RG: Very much.

LK: At one time when we were writing summations, I believe for the observation of his twenty-fifth anniversary as director, Don Holmquist said—I think it was Don—that Russell Fridley is a classless man. That he had never known anyone who would speak, say, to the president of a tremendous corporation who was giving, you know, just all kinds of support to the Society in the same way that he would speak to a person who walked in off the street and needed some help with research. It was a feeling of equality.

RG: One of the things that I always admired about Russell, and I found very helpful sometimes,

being a rather stiff and shy person when I started at the Historical Society, was the immediate way in which he placed everybody on a first-name basis. There was never any hesitation. If there was a pause, Russell would walk into a group, immediately stick out his hands and say, "Hi, Joe." There was never any title, and he did it in such a way that everybody suddenly felt more at ease. And he did this with everybody, from the stockroom down to the president of the Society. I always admired this greatly, and I have tried to emulate it. [Laughter]

LK: Yes, I think another quality is related to that. This quality, too, is very important in the healing process and in progress from there. And that is that Russell Fridley is a non-judgmental person. By that I mean that he just took it for granted that everybody makes mistakes. In one famous meeting of division heads, when a mistake had been made and bad consequences grew out of it, he said, "When you make a mistake"—and he made it clear we all do it—"speak up. Tell me, tell the person, the people who are involved, define what has happened, so together we can take remedial measures." I think the people had enough faith in him that rarely was a mistake made without being reported to him.

RG: That is interesting.

LK: I think people, with that in mind, were not prone to be too timid in program development, too.

RG: Yes, I think that's true. He always had a very positive attitude toward new ideas, unless he thought they were really off the wall. I can remember in some ways a characteristic saying would be, "That's a great idea. Why don't you pursue it?" [Laughter] Some of us got a little wary about that after a while.

LK: Right. Well, he probably became more wary about that, too.

RG: I think that's true. I think, looking at Russell's whole career, probably the public awareness mostly fastens on the immense growth of the Society during his administration. In his thirty—what was it, thirty-five years, something close to that—as director, the Society expanded and grew enormously. I think those of us who have been close to the world of history in those years recognize that this was part of a national trend. The Society, MHS, was not alone in this by any means. However, not all societies grew to the scope and strength that we did. What part did Russell play in this?

LK: I think the word "lobbyist" that was used so often in news stories about his retirement, I think that it had a rather bad connotation to me. Perhaps I don't properly understand the role of a lobbyist, but it seemed to me that Russell truly believed in what he was doing, that he wanted people to understand it, both the staff and legislators. He had the knack of inspiring belief that a legislator to whom he talked, I believe, would have the feeling that Russell meant what he said. That he wasn't a man who was maneuvering to enhance his own position by getting the bigger budget, which would create the bigger institution, etc., etc.

To me, quite indicative was a comment made by Gene Newhall, who at that time was covering the legislature for the Minneapolis newspapers. As we were riding along together in the bus one day, Gene said, "I appreciated"—something to this effect that he was glad to have news out of the capitol of the success of the Society's budget request. And he said, "Russell Fridley, I feel, whenever he wins, I win. I have a wonderful identification there, and it's because I see myself as an unassuming person who is trying to, you know, do the right thing and works hard, etc. So I don't always win, but when Russell does, I have this feeling of identification."

RG: There was always a modest sort of folksy quality about Russell, in the good sense. The rumpled suit, the scuffed-up shoes, he never came across as a high-power type at all. Did his youth have something to do with his immediate success? I believe you have commented on that to me before, too.

LK: Yes, I think so. Growing up in Iowa—well, Russell just didn't come on as a city slicker.

RG: Yes, right.

LK: And he had small-town roots and a thoughtful approach to life. Not that urban kids were excluded from that, but, yes, I'd say a small-town Iowan, a person who grew up into a city dweller, into a very sophisticated person if you analyze this.

RG: Speaking of being a city dweller, I recall that in probably the first five or six years that I worked at the Historical Society, after 1958, Russell still did not drive a car to work. He rode the bus. I don't believe he had a driver's license. He finally acquired one and acquired a car. Some of us had some reservations as to how well he learned to drive. [Laughter] But it was interesting that the Society's director arrived by bus during those years. I believe you once said to me something about the advantage that younger people have in achieving their goals. If you want to do something, you should do it while you're young.

LK: Right. And that came from an observation by Rose Kennedy and made, perhaps, fifteen years or so ago. But she said, "When you are young, do what you want to do, because you have everything going for you then." And, probably speaking of her own handsome children, "that you can be beautiful, you can be talented. People don't expect a whole lot of you. They are surprised when you achieve." But I thought of Russell's early years in that respect. We had had such a dismal time for five or six years that, in addition to Russell's own qualities, to having the qualities that fit the time, he was so young and so successful.

RG: Yes. And people simply did not feel threatened by him.

LK: No, they didn't. I think that that held true throughout his career, even when he became more remote from the staff, necessarily, I think there still was that feeling that basically we still knew him, and we were not threatened. We knew that he would do what he could to help us achieve the common goals, most of which we had agreed upon, not always. [Laughter]

RG: To that extent, yes, not always. I recall that with the gradual expansion of the historic sites program, tensions began to develop concerning the Society—emphasis, institutional emphasis, within the Society. As we draw toward the end of Russell's career, I tend to see it overshadowed by a great deal of tension within the Society, which he never really succeeded in resolving.

LK: That is so recent that I don't feel that I have as clear a view of it as I do of the earlier period. In fact, as you are raising a question, I sometimes do to myself. For example, historic sites. Why was it that we were all so supportive at the beginning? For instance, Jean Brookins and June Holmquist out making a survey. I remember Evan Hart, early historic site supervisor, who very much respected the work that was going on in other divisions, and people felt so positively toward him. It may be that we had a bit of envy. I hate to bring up the serpent in the Garden of Eden, but it may be true that the budgetary emphasis, what seemed to be the fastest pace of growth, was in the historic sites area. And now as a retired person of several years, I can look back and say, "What a wonderful program. That it achieved so much that all of us wanted to achieve, and yet how many feelings of other programs being deprived?" Now I ask, "Was that really true?" True, we had slower growth, but would we have had that amount of growth if we had remained the traditional institution?

[Tape interruption]

RG: –The development of the historic sites program may have influenced, and pulled along with it, support for the other programs.

LK: Yes.

RG: My sense during those years was that was precisely what Russell was trying to do. He saw state funding in enormous quantities, mind-boggling quantities, coming for historic sites. I always felt that Russell's real heart was really with the library, the scholarly side of the institution, particularly with publications. Yet, he went for it. When the funding was there, he would take any historic site that was given him, some that we have since found very embarrassing and have gone through a lot of agony trying to get rid of.

There was an empire-building quality in Russell, too, I think—a hesitance to turn down any money available. Now this probably came from the very hungry years in the 1950s. I, too, wonder about the historic sites program, what it—obviously it had an enormous impact on the institution. It was just starting when I started, the year I started, we acquired our first historic site. Certainly it didn't take off really until Donn Coddington was hired. Do you have any particular sense of whether Donn Coddington was responsible for this? Or was he just the person that happened to be in place at the time?

LK: I think geography, that is, the location of historic sites offices away from the Society, had something to do with it. Per se, this situation should not have developed. Donn Coddington was a very cooperative person. I worked with him quite a bit when I was head of the manuscripts division,

and he was always willing to join with you to help get something done. I didn't feel that historic sites was a demanding division; that is, was asking for more services than we were bound to provide. But it seemed to me that the beginning of the dispersion of the staff came then.

RG: Yes.

LK: And here we have a number of factors join. We have historic sites moving out to Fort Snelling, and it did seem way out. We had manuscripts and archives moving to 1500 Mississippi.

RG: Somewhat later.

LK: Yes. The staff was growing. We're losing this tie, this informal communications that had been so important to us.

RG: That is right. Returning a little bit to Russell's role in this. I do remember that, I guess I would say until the beginning of the 1980s, Russell still almost knew the first name of everybody in the Society.

LK: Yes, yes.

RG: After that, he seemed to lose the spirit of, well, of learning all our names. But that was, to me, one of the characteristics of Russell's era, too, the strong personal ties. And, as I say, toward the very end of it, that lapsed even on his part. But it certainly was characteristic of the man and of the institution he ran up through the 1970s.

LK: I remember that in the 1970s, Bob [Robert] Wheeler had organized a series of staff meetings in which each division would put on a program. The programs came to be known, rather slightingly, as "show and tell," but that wasn't the original plan. But in the process, the division head would introduce various members of the staff of the division. One division head must have had stage fright, because he forgot the name of one person he wanted to introduce. And Russell, I don't know if he stood up, but his voice was heard loud and clear, "There should be a demerit for such a thing." [Laughter] It was half-joking, but he meant it, too, to know your staff and we should never be so big that we should lose this.

Rhoda, there's another point about historic sites and Russell. An observation—you may have made it—Russell's great pleasure in going out into the field, even when he had heavy management responsibilities.

RG: That was certainly true.

LK: I think the term you used was, "He needed renewal at the grass roots." I can remember so well when he would come back from these trips out state—obviously working hard; he always worked hard on his field trips—but the look of joy.

RG: Yes, yes. Well, he, himself, told us that he spent his first year after being hired, out in the field, pretty much with Arch Grahn, learning about the state, and I think some of the charm of that never completely left him. I think he also felt rural people responded to him very strongly, and, as you say, that was, I think, part of the renewal, the sense that he came back feeling good about himself and about the Society. [Laughter]

LK: It reminded me a little bit of Theodore Blegen. I was reading in the Society's archives a number of letters written by Blegen in his role as collector of manuscripts. In the letters of acknowledgement, there was, of course, "Thank you for the papers of, etc. They will be a great contribution, etc., etc. Thank you, also, for the cookies. I enjoyed them very much. It had been a long time since I had had a certain variety of cookie." Now that wasn't all put on. [Laughter]

RG: Theodore Blegen, himself, was quite a charmer. I only knew him in his last years, but he had not lost the charm.

LK: Yes. And he was genuinely interested in people.

RG: Yes, yes. I think his whole life, and many of his books, indicate that.

LK: Yes. And Russell, too. Very much so.

RG: The final director that you have had some experience under is Nina Archabal. Do you have any observations to share on Nina?

LK: It's hard to express it because I like her so well, and it is such a short exposure.

RG: The perspective of years hasn't accumulated yet.

LK: It hasn't. And Nina became director just about the point where I was leaving the front lines. In 1979, I moved into publications to do research.

RG: She became associate director, or assistant director, at that time.

LK: That's right. So my associations with her have been on special things, like the self-study of the Society and, of course—

RG: You played a key role in that self-study, as I recall.

LK: Yes, although the process was alien to me. I was working within a format in which I was not comfortable. In fact, as I have seen the studies evolve, I gained much more feeling than I had then that this is the right way to go at it. At the time, it seemed to me the process played such a role.

RG: That is characteristic of Nina. [Laughter] She organized that. I guess I regard it as a very key event in the history of the Society.

LK: Yes.

RG: I think it was in many ways a turning point for a lot of things, but certainly the emphasis on process was when Nina first showed her hand there and I think has continued to emphasize process very strongly.

LK: I think, too, that it was the time as well as the lady, because I participated in drawing up the standards for her self-appraisal for the Society of American Archivists. That was a little bit after our self-study, and the elements of process were very much the same. In fact, the SAA was very much interested in what Nina had evolved in the approach to the self-study of MHS. So she may have had quite an influence over there.

RG: Yes, as a matter of fact, I remember a session of the AASLH [American Association of State and Local History], an annual meeting at which she was on the panel about self-studies, and, unfortunately, was not able to attend the session. Something else came up, and I gave her talk for her, or represented her, reported on our self-study. But I recall the immense amount of interest it had attracted around the country.

LK: Yes. What was a very significant thing for MHS in so many ways, the appointment of Nina as director. Here we had, for the first time, a woman as director of the MHS. We can talk a great deal about the matriarchy of the MHS, and perhaps I have talked more about that than anybody else, but we had outstanding women on the staff. I don't think anyone would deny it.

But, yet, you think of a critical point in the Society's history. Theodore Blegen left the directorship at, I would say, the height of Grace Lee Nute's career. She was much honored as a person of manuscripts, you know, evolving these ways of doing things that were copied across the country. She was much honored as a scholar. But, as far as I know, there was not a serious consideration of choosing her as director of the Society, and the job went to Arthur Larsen. Thereby hangs a tale, too, of the enmity between Arthur Larsen and Grace Lee Nute that may have blighted her last years.

RG: Did she have ambitions to become director, do you think?

LK: I don't know. I never heard her say it.

RG: Certainly she would have been a logical person.

LK: Oh, yes, she would have been. Given the situation we have just set up now where she was in her career and the respect that Theodore Blegen always had for her, I am surprised that more people of the MHS of that generation have not talked about, you know, the puzzle. But they didn't. I think her personality, the enmity she had created within the Society, may explain why people were not

more surprised at her not being appointed. And who knows? It might have been offered to her and she turned it down. [Laughter]

RG: We don't know that.

LK: We don't know that, right.

RG: But certainly Nina did not turn it down. She became director in, let's see, it was 1987 when she finally was confirmed as director. She was acting director for six or nine months before that and played a very key role as associate and deputy director for a good five years before that.

LK: Yes. In fact, one of the pleasant images I have of Nina as associate director is the team, Russell and Nina, and the care Russell took to bring Nina into conversations with division heads, of very wisely breaching that great gap that there had been between Russell and division heads and whoever was assistant director, etc.

RG: Associate Director Robert Wheeler was, and, in fact, simply spent most of the later part of his career directing special projects.

LK: Yes. And trying to rebuild the bridge with the division heads.

RG: Yes, but never successfully.

LK: Trying very consciously to do that, and never quite understanding that he had become estranged from them.

RG: How did this happen?

LK: He was out of the mainstream. His opportunity was right there, as we learned when John Wood joined the top team. John Wood moved right into that great area of relationships between the Society and the state.

RG: Yes.

LK: And Bob Wheeler, I believe, had that as one of his job responsibilities, but he was much more attracted to the special projects. There was a whiplash there, because the division heads, in administering their divisions, very much needed support in the state, down to things like getting the building properly cleaned. I mean, down to very basic things. Bob was not terribly interested in that sort of thing, and his special projects were off the mainstream. They weren't strictly supplementing what was already being done, and created an additional workload.

RG: I recall many bitter complaints about the arbitrariness of that workload.

LK: That's right. It wasn't a matter of the projects Bob wanted to do, being things the Society should not have been doing. Indeed, they were things we should have been doing, some of them very innovative.

RG: They attracted great public interest.

LK: Right. It was a matter of priorities.

RG: Yes. I recall another area where Bob was given responsibilities and, quite frankly, flubbed them, and they then went to John Wood at [unclear]. That was in the area of personnel administration.

LK: Oh, yes, indeed.

RG: Bob simply had no talent for that at all.

LK: Russell once made a comment about how interesting it was to see John Wood moving so efficiently into the areas where attention was badly needed: personnel, relationships with the state, enormous help with the budget formation and presentation.

RG: To the point where John Wood became absolutely key to the running of the Society.

LK: Exactly.

RG: It was one of the witching things of Russell's later years, and says something about Nina Archabal, that fierce rivalry never developed between the two of them. Nina very consciously insisted there had to be cooperation between them. She and John had to present a united front. And that went very deep, I think, in Nina's character.

LK: It did. When you speak of character and Nina, well, I think that we're going to see a mark on the Society from Nina's strength of character—you know, her honesty, her directness—that will be quite a bit like the mark that Russell made, that we believed in him always as a sincere and, well, a man of character.

RG: Yes. His integrity was unquestioned.

LK: Yes.

March 17, 1990

RG: This is now a second session of this interview. We are starting again. This is an interview with Lucile Kane and I am Rhoda Gilman on March 17th 1990, again, at the home of Lucile Kane.

We're now starting with some ideas that you had, Lucile, of the contrast between the Historical Society as a small institution and as a large institution, which it definitely is now.

LK: Yes. It probably is a good thing that this growth came gradually, or at least in spurts, over a number of years, because those of us who began with an institution of twenty-five to thirty staff members, it projected suddenly into an institution of—what is it, Rhoda, 250?

RG: At least. It all depends on how you count the staff. If you include part-time, seasonal, and contract staff, it's well over 300.

LK: Yes. Well, that would have been a transition that would be very hard to make gracefully. But there seemed to be plateaus and then movements ahead. For example, when you came in 1958, I think we had not begun our great period of growth, but we had increased substantially.

RG: Yes. As I recall, the statehood centennial year had brought an increase in staff membership. That was also the year that we acquired our first historic site, the Le Duc House.

LK: The real landmark in the institution's history.

RG: A lot of agonizing over that decision.

LK: Yes. When you came in 1958, we were beginning the great rash of retirements of the people who had been with the Society since it was professionalized by Solon J. Buck. I think it was in 1963 that Lois Fawcett and Esther Jerabek retired, and Mary Berthel in 1956 or 1957.

RG: Yes. She had retired before I started.

LK: Yes. And Bertha Heilbron, of course. Willoughby Babcock. So it was quite a change in the character of the institution. Then we grew in a modest way through the 1950s, and, at least in manuscripts and archives, the great growth was from the mid-1960s, through the 1970s, and into the 1980s.

RG: That's right. That's when you acquired the great industrial and railroad collections.

LK: Yes. We began contemporary collecting of political papers in the mid-1950s, and I think that gave us the clue on how we wanted to proceed, which was to become active, rather than, more or less, passive. And I don't mean to imply that the previous people in the division had been consciously—well, they were not deliberately passive. They did not have the staff to go out and do

field work on a systematic basis. But beginning in the mid-1950s, we decided to start with the political collections, and then, of course, after the Hubert Humphrey papers and Eugene McCarthy and some of these that you might call star collections brought the name of the Society into the ranks of the major collecting institutions, then the whole process became easier.

But I got off the track just a bit there. There were virtues in that small institution we had in the late 1940s and early 1950s. We knew one another very well. I know that isn't always an absolute plus, because personal matters and professional matters tend to fuse. I think there was perhaps more pettiness, more dividing of the staff into cliques, more classifying of people as—well, to say, worthwhile people and not worthwhile people, that's too severe, but a person would be labeled as a little bit dull. In this small environment, there wasn't much opportunity to change opinions.

I think I mentioned before what happened when June Holmquist and F. Sanford Cutler came and became acquainted with Willoughby Babcock, and a complete change of attitude took place. Willoughby was, of course, he was a little old-maidish, and he had his funny ways, but he became a object of laughter with Willoughby jokes making the rounds. But Sandy and June recognized him as a learned man, and they started using him as a resource person when they had problems in ethnology, anthropology. He also knew so much about early travel in Minnesota. As they used him as a resource person, they would talk about what he had contributed, and a very nice change took place.

RG: In a sense, Willoughby blossomed, too.

LK: He did. He did.

RG: I knew him somewhat after I came, and, as a matter of fact, I think I published two articles by him in the magazine, which were the first that had been published. I was willing, essentially, to take his research notes and talk to him and write the articles for him, which Bertha had never been willing to do, perhaps rightly. I don't make a judgment on that, but at least it was good for Willoughby. [Chuckle]

LK: It was. I think even though it was hard work to help him get an article in publishable form, in a way, Rhoda, it was a payback, because he had helped so many people with his note files and with his counsel.

RG: That is true. One of the things that I became aware of with Willoughby very quickly, when I first came to the Society, was the fact that he had a very young staff of minority, mainly Mexican-American, fellows working for him. Do you know anything about how that came about?

LK: No. I know the proximity of Mechanic Arts High School was one factor because some of the minority assistants to Willoughby I knew were students at Mechanic Arts. But I don't know, for example, if Tino, Faustino Avaloz, came from Mechanic Arts, but I do know that the minority students were devoted to Will and they learned from him and they worked hard in the programs he

laid out.

RG: Yes. They were, as you say, very devoted to him. I got that from Tino in the early years. We haven't discussed it much in recent years, but he, in very quiet ways, helped a lot of those fellows get a start in life.

LK: Yes.

RG: That was, as I say, one of the things that impressed me about Willoughby when I first came. Again, about the Society as a small institution. You've already indicated there were personal cliques. I have always had the impression that it was a rather stratified group of people.

LK: Yes, very much so.

RG: There were definite hierarchical lines there. Perhaps more so, I think perhaps Russell had a great influence in breaking some of that down.

LK: Indeed, he did.

RG: His own personality, together with the rapid expansion of the Society and the breaking of other lines and traditions, sort of dissolved a lot of that closely held sense of professionalism as against clerical help and so on.

LK: Right. I'll answer the phone right now.

[Telephone interruption]

RG: Well, you have mentioned some of the advantages of the smaller institution. You have mentioned communication. People talked to each informally and there was probably more a sense of cohesiveness in the awareness of all the different programs and more sense of purpose, of collective purpose in the Society.

LK: Yes. And sometimes a problem-solving around the lunch table. Very often, practically every day, a number of us would gather around the lunch table in the Capitol cafeteria, and most of the department heads were there and other people came and went. An example of what we could accomplish when we didn't set out to have a meeting, per se, was the publication of that Dakota Chippewa bibliography.

RG: Oh, yes.

LK: Jim Dunn, who was head of the library, spoke up and said, "We have so many reference questions coming on the Dakota and we have so many holdings that it is really hard to respond over the phone or by letter and give a full sweep of what we have."

And I said, "What are the subjects that you have used to catalog your Indian material?"

Jim got a light in his eye, listed a few of them, and I said, "Well, without trying to, we're more or less compatible in subject headings."

And then Jim said, "Hmmm. Could we merge them and merge our catalogs for this purpose, and without going into a great big project, put out a reference guide consisting of our merge catalog cards?" And June Holmquist of publications, she's there. She said, "Yes, I think that could be done. Let's run a sample," that around the lunch table.

RG: Yes. Today it would take three meetings scheduled about a month apart, at each one of which you'd have to review what had happened and get everybody back on track.

LK: Right.

RG: As we all know, large institutions have their advantages, too. My impression is that mobility was not very great on the staff.

LK: That's right. So very often people hired in for a certain job, and they were in it for life. Well, I was certainly an example of that. I became curator of manuscripts in 1948. I had the same title, enlarged responsibilities, but the same parameters, job parameters, until 1976, when we merged state archives and manuscripts. And you can think of Mary Berthel, Bertha Heilbron, they hired in, perhaps—editorial assistant was the title given—but more or less the same job all of their careers.

RG: Yes. I remember Bertha, really, edited *Minnesota History* for thirty-five years.

LK: That's right. And the mobility, not only upward within the same division, but moving sideways within the same division. To do a different kind of work, like moving from cataloging to reference, or reference to cataloging, or going into conservation in the big collecting divisions. But moving from division to division, well, you know about that, Rhoda.

RG: That was unheard of. [Laughter]

LK: Then you did it.

RG: Well, yes. As new divisions and new programs, wholly new programs, began to take shape, there were these opportunities. I certainly benefited by that a lot.

LK: Right. Now I don't know how common it is, but it certainly happens.

RG: Yes. I think in some ways we are becoming more inflexible in a different sort of way within a more strongly bureaucratic frame. Also the job situation has changed immensely. I recall when I

started at the Historical Society, and particularly the period when June and I were looking for editorial assistants to replace me, in fact, anyone with a Ph.D. in history would not even consider looking at the Society. Our salaries were low by comparison to academic salaries and jobs were plentiful in college teaching. So there was very little opportunity to hire in competent people. Now that's very different.

LK: And that lasted so long, Rhoda. In 1970, late 1969 and 1970, I was interviewing for two positions. One, head of reference, and another, a position in the cataloging unit. We had, I think, two applications for the head of reference and only one for the cataloging position.

RG: That's amazing.

LK: I started to recruit, that is, called up the library school and advertised in the *American Archivist*, etc. Still no great flood. But then it changed so swiftly in the 1970s, for reasons that we well know.

RG: Yes. Well, I do think that the job market had something to do with the Society's, through the early 1960s, promoting from within. That was where you could get people for a newly created higher-level job.

LK: Yes.

RG: Among the other things I think of, were the limited opportunities for travel in those early years. I'm sure it was even worse in the 1940s and earlier 1950s.

LK: It was. I think in turn, that helped produce an institution of more isolated people than we have now. For example, the staff of archives and manuscripts, they are very active in the Society of American Archivists, in Midwest Archives Conference, Sue [Holbert], as state archivist with the records managers, with the state archivists organizations, and it is a continual fertilizing of ideas and identity with a national profession, and indeed, an international one. If you can't travel, if you see people only on an occasional trip to another institution, if not many people are coming to your institution, it can be a bit sterile.

RG: Yes. I recall in my earlier years, and this, again, was after the Society had begun to grow somewhat and was getting more into the historic sites and museum areas, we became quite active in the American Association for State and Local History. But even then, I recall a number of years when a national meeting would be in Pennsylvania or elsewhere on the East Coast, and the Society would simply take a State station wagon loaded full of people and drive that whole way, even though air transportation was certainly available. It wasted a lot of staff hours. Finally, I believe it was really John Wood who pointed out the financial folly of this approach. I think it persisted partly because of Russell's parsimonious Iowa background. But it had some advantages, too. Those carloads of people were forced to talk to each other a lot on the way.

LK: Yes. And the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the staff members were doing the same

thing.

RG: They were? I wasn't aware.

LK: They were very much travelers by station wagon. And there was a camaraderie in that.

RG: Yes. There's no time to get to know the boss better than when you're on a trip with him.

LK: And comment on his driving.

RG: Right.

LK: I think John would be cost-conscious when you think of all of the staff time to take five people on the road for a couple of days. That was costly.

RG: Indeed it was.

Related, I think, to the size of the institution, you mentioned before some of the expansion into larger collections. I'd like to get back to that now.

LK: Again, as we have indicated with active rather than a passive role in collecting, we cannot say that the people who came before my generation were totally governed by subjects like missions and fur trade. Sometimes we've made the off-hand comment, oh, yes, the pioneers, missions, fur trade, etc. You get down into a study of the records of the division, and you will find that Grace Lee Nute was acutely aware in the 1930s that the wholesaling trade was closing out in St. Paul. There's evidence that she made inquiries about records, about the scope of them, etc., but undoubtedly it came down to where are we going to put them.

RG: Space and personnel.

LK: Space and personnel, precisely. I think that that discouraged the mass collecting. But interestingly enough, Grace Lee Nute, taking in one massive collection—it was considered massive for the time, the Jason Easton papers—with her innovative mind again, she came through with a system of organization that wasn't truly recognized in the profession until much later. She organized by the form and function, you know, and it's old hat now.

But it wasn't until the archival techniques were very much adopted by the manuscripts people that we look back and say, "Oh, yes. Look at what Miss Nute did with the Jason Easton papers in the early 1940s." So intellectually, the staff was equipped to do this, they understood the importance of subject matter, but—you said, I didn't—it amounted to space, personnel, and, overall, budget to buy those supplies and, you know, sustain a collection at that time.

RG: Plus the reference service to help people use them.

LK: That's right.

RG: In some ways, that probably hasn't really developed until the coming of the computer.

LK: There's room for quite a bit of discussion on reference service, and I'm not perfectly equipped to give wise judgments. Because when I left the manuscripts division in 1979, computers were just beginning, and it hadn't developed to the point where it was really a factor in reference service.

RG: Now Helen White was one of the people that started us first in the very earliest applications of computers, trying to explore ways to use these effectively.

LK: And on next Tuesday, I'm meeting with Duane Swanson, who is going to interview Helen. And that precisely, the move toward automation, is on my list of Helen's great contributions to the division.

RG: You've also mentioned that Lydia Lucas played a role in this.

LK: Oh, she did. She did. Lydia was the first person, as far as I know, who came to us out of the new archival training schools. She had a Master's in library science, a Master's in history, and had attended Maynard Brichford's courses in archives at, I think, University of Illinois [School of Library Science.] So Lydia—well, you know in addition to that, she has a wonderful mind. Well, Lydia very soon took hold of this business of organizing mass collections. Fortunately, we all had known enough to keep the form of the records, like Hubert Humphrey papers, 500 file boxes. We didn't yield to the temptation to attempt to throw everything into a sequential chronological arrangement. We had the file folder titles, everything, all intact.

RG: You kept his organization at the base.

LK: Right. And made file lists, etc., but Lydia went much further because her feeling was that in the age of mass collecting, we're always going to have what is called backlogs. We're never going to be able, within reasonable time, to take these mass collections, get them into the physical shape, and have the reference tools prepared on the same scale—or of the same kind—as we did for small collections. So she devised these intermediate steps to make the information available to scholars before you had time to do the final job.

So starting right with the accessions form, when a collection comes in, whatever lists you can make while you're unpacking and doing all these jobs that you have to do anyway, get it down on paper and build your reference tools, refining them, expanding them, but not saying to the research public, "Sorry, can't see these for twenty years." I felt that was a tremendous contribution. And interestingly enough, when Lydia moved into the work of the Society of American Archivists, she was drawn into the committees, asked to read papers, and in general made her mark.

RG: Lydia joined us at just about the time we were having to cope with the railroad records, is that right?

LK: Yes, 1969.

RG: 1969. As I recall, we acquired the Northern Pacific papers in, what was it, 1960—

LK: It was kind of in stages.

RG: By stages, but basically by 1968 we actually acquired them.

LK: Right. We signed the agreement, and I think they began to arrive early in 1969, physically arrive. Lydia, when she applied for the job, we took her on a tour of the warehouses of the railroad where the records were stored.

RG: This was in Seattle?

LK: No.

RG: Both Seattle and St. Paul.

LK: It was in St. Paul. Helen White was headed out to Seattle the following year, so we hadn't tackled that yet. But what does Lydia call that experience? Professional enrichment. To go into a warehouse and see records in situ and start making your decisions at that point. How are we going to move them? How can we move them in such a way that we can achieve stage one and get some control over the collection and start feeding the information to researchers.

RG: The first really large collection you acquired, was that the Hubert Humphrey papers?

LK: Yes.

RG: Back in—what year would that be?

LK: Let's see. I started negotiating with Hubert Humphrey in 1949, right upon his election to the Senate. I saw his records on my Washington trips. I would see the files and his assistant, Charlotte Horton and I, started to do the preliminary work on how we would handle the transfers. I think the transfers began in the early 1950s, probably 1952 or 1953.

But we worked out all of these things that had to be decided, like give us the records when they reach the point of, you know, being heavily used in the office. We realize that a lot of this involves privacy, confidential relationships with the constituents, etc., but we'll draw up a contract that will require permission of the Senator for access to the papers and the researcher will state purpose, etc.

Initially we had the requirement that the researcher would be willing to submit the manuscript to the Senator before circulation. I don't know if that clause is still used in the contract, but it was a compromise. For years and years, as one of the custodians in the Senate Office Building told me, a senator would leave office, the records would be pushed out into the hall, and hauled away to the dump. Even on an annual basis, there would be housecleaning. Again, the hall corridors would be jammed with files being—

RG: Cartons of files.

LK: Right. So how to save them, instead of picking up the leavings after ten, fifteen, or twenty years, and still do right by people on the privacy issue.

RG: Well, undoubtedly, this set a pattern for the other large political collections that we acquired.

LK: Yes, it did.

RG: It seems clear that our first step in the large, modern collections then was through the political ones.

LK: Yes, it was.

RG: Was this partly a response to Russell's deep interest in politics, or was it just that they happened to be available and accessible at the time?

LK: I think we had begun by that time to think in terms of cycles. That is, you do not go for the papers of one individual. Well, you still did it, but the ideal is to think through the whole subject matter field and to make an organized collecting effort. The Society, as we look backward, really had done that, consciously or not, in the field of politics, because we had the records of Ramsey, of Sibley, well, Rice, not much.

RG: What survived.

LK: Yes. There was an effort. Then you move up into the era of the Nonpartisan League, and we have the records of the organization itself, the National Nonpartisan League, and then the records or papers of a couple of the key people in the organization. Now you move on to the Farmer Labor Party.

RG: It was right about then that we acquired the Donnelly papers, too, right about the time of the Nonpartisan League, really tough years.

LK: Right. So those cycles, we thought more and more about them. So when we decided to ask Hubert Humphrey for his papers, we were thinking not only of him, but of the DFL [Democrtic Farmer Labor] party's records.

RG: This was the point at which Minnesota clearly was moving into a phase of great influence on the national political scene.

LK: That's right. A very exciting period. With a good start on the DFL, we continued the cycle idea from the viewpoint of catching up other political viewpoints in the spectrum. With that in mind, we approached the Republicans. This was an example of too late. The DFL had some of their earlier records. The Farmer-Labor Party was fragmentary. The Democratic Party, the records nonexistent. But the Republicans had destroyed the records up to a certain date, just scatterings of them until I think it's around 1940.

But we told them what we were doing with the DFL, and that, again, was matching the plan we devised for the Humphrey papers, annual installments or periodic installments. So there was a system to the thing. And the Republicans did what they could for us. They scraped up some and then helped us to go to Ed Thye and other prominent Republicans, Walter Judd, and from the personal papers tried to get a decent show for the Republican viewpoint.

Then we moved to the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Communists, not a great deal of success. But I think when the radical project began, I felt, "Well, now, this has achieved the status of a special project." And I think they improved it a whole lot.

RG: So the times have changed so much.

LK: Yes.

RG: Trying to get the Communist Party papers—

LK: That's right.

RG: —there was simply too much fear in the atmosphere to allow it.

LK: Yes. Vince Dunne made a very telling statement when I was walking with him. I went to his office, and we walked around the offices looking at what there was, and he agreed to give them to us. So many of the files were pamphlets, etc., and nice to have, but you felt you didn't have the guts of the organization at all. Well, I asked Vince Dunne if he would consent to be interviewed. I said I would like to gather together some people who know of the history of the party and the context, and we could have an interview to supplement this.

And he said, "Well, what would be the status of the tape?" I said, "We could restrict it." He said, "Would that tape restriction apply if the court issued a subpoena?" I said, "I don't know." So I asked the Society's attorney, and they said, "No, we would have to deliver the tape." So Vince Dunne did not consent to be interviewed.

RG: Yes, as I recall, that had been a problem. That was the Socialist Labor Party, too. That was not the Communist Party of the United States, which was under even greater pressure.

LK: Yes. This was Socialist Workers, which was the Trotskyite branch.

RG: Yes.

LK: But I really was quite envious when the radical project [Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota Oral History Project] was going on, and they were getting these wonderful interviews.

RG: Yes, that so many had already died.

LK: Yes.

RG: So many, too, were beyond the point where their memories were very clear and sharp. They were strained, you know, sort of filtered through the years.

LK: Yes. Well, the attention we were giving to cycles and attempting a systematic increment to major collections, that developed then into our special-projects approach. Conservation is an example, and labor, too.

RG: Cooperatives, as I recall, were special.

LK: Cooperatives. The cooperatives, that was not as successful and for this reason. We were not in the position then to fund it as a special project. When we did labor, which I believe came next, we hired Phil Coreth, one of Hy [Hyman] Berman's graduate students, and he spent two summers doing nothing but organizing this project and out in the field working. For conservation, we hired Gloria Thompson.

So you have the focus of which you don't have if you try to take staff time, people involved in other things. And then we went from that point into the—we joined the library and with audio-visual into the Mexican-American project in which we truly approached it from the collections viewpoint with the manuscripts, the published items, the interviews. But following that pattern, we had a problem with labor to hire somebody to do this.

RG: Mentioning audio-visual collections and the library brings up a question that has been, I think, more in the foreground of people's thinking recently, the way in which subject-matter collections were traditionally split up according to the media in which they happened to be recorded.

LK: Right.

RG: And some unfortunate things happened as a result of that.

LK: It did.

RG: The loss of pictures which were separated from manuscript collections, unidentified and, therefore, disposed of because they were unidentified. There was not clear communication between the departments. Do you want to go into that some?

LK: I would like to, because our major problem was the different focus in collecting policies. In manuscripts, when we brought in, for example, the William Davidson papers, William Davidson, the steamboat man, his steamboat line ran between St. Paul and St. Louis. Well, for manuscripts from way, way back, we have no problem with that. We wouldn't think of splitting it. This is the collection built around the man and does include, not only steamboating from St. Louis to St. Paul, but the ownership of the land in Oregon. We keep that together. That's a fundamental precept of the profession.

But albums of photographs came with it, and much to our surprise—and didn't think to talk this over, you know, as a whole collecting group—the photographs relating to the trade centered on St. Louis were transferred to the Missouri Historical Society. So now we have split photographs.

But those problems were not easy to resolve. I will say that it is very easy to talk to Lila [Goff] about the collection approach, and this was years ago. Lila was very much prone to ask, "Well, what are the needs of total documentation? When you transfer pictures to us, you tell us what the needs are from the viewpoint of collection integrity. We'll try to do it." So we're moving ahead, I think.

RG: Nevertheless, it's my understanding that at the present time, the manuscripts and archives collections have more, at least greater quantity, in the way of pictorial documentation than the audio-visual collection has.

LK: I am surprised, because we had years and years of transferring.

RG: In recent years we have acquired large quantities of things on particular subjects.

LK: Oh, yes. Yes.

RG: I'm thinking, for example, of iron mining pictures. For the textbook we found most of our iron mining pictures in the archives and manuscripts collection rather than in the audio-visual collection.

LK: Yes. Which collections were involved there?

RG: I can't honestly recall. Dave Wiggins did most of that actual research and I didn't.

LK: There is a technical point involved here, which is the reason I asked the question. Before transferring anything out of a manuscripts collection, you have to think of it as a records collection. To what degree is there an intimate relationship between the photographic or pictorial material and

the paper material? An extreme example would be a letter is written, you say, "Dear Aunt Maggie: I'm giving you the family news, etc., etc. Enclosed is a picture that we took, and you will note that Aunt Henrietta has put on some weight." [Laughter] This is very extreme.

RG: Yes. The information about the picture is in the manuscript.

LK: That's right. In the railroad records, there was quite a bit of discussion when we looked at the publicity unit, because the publicity unit has pamphlet material. Well, the whole thing is about producing these publicity materials. Okay. Are you going to then take the final product, strip it out and transfer it to the library? But, again, using some good sense and cooperation, much can be solved.

The unit called Northern Pacific pamphlets, we talked about this quite a bit, and then someone in the manuscripts group spoke up and said, "You know, I don't think we have to worry this one through. I think we have enough pamphlets to make a duplicate set." [Laughter] That, of course, brings up a problem in the space-conscious age. But this was not a huge enough footage to make a great deal of difference.

But these are some of the things that are involved, and I am sure, since I've been gone for ten years, that there are other considerations very much to the fore.

RG: I think one that has come to the fore, though, in recent years has come to my attention, anyway, is the relationship of some of these collections to museum objects. For example, Frances Densmore's collections included manuscripts, pictures, and largely the main point of her collections were museum objects. These were all classified separately, and when we did the Densmore exhibit, it took Carolyn [Gilman] a matter of two or three months to reconstruct the Densmore collection from our rather faulty records at that time.

Another recent example has been the Gilbert Wilson collection upon which we based the "Way to Independence" exhibit. That existed in the library in manuscripts with his field notes, in pictures with his photographs, which at the time that we started research, the audio-visual library was considering returning them to North Dakota because they all related to the Hidatsa, then his artifact collection that he had given the Society. So all of this was ultimately one collection and produced a magnificent exhibit to study, but no one had realized this fact because of the, as I say, the classification of collections according to the medium in which they were recorded.

LK: Yes. And I think that that did us a disservice particularly since so many of us had a blind spot about three-dimensional objects. I think that our minds got around the pictorial evidence, etc., much better than it did around the museum objects.

RG: But even that occurred gradually in the 1940s and 1950s. Before that, I think, even the photographic evidence was sometimes overlooked.

LK: Yes. But I do hope we've solved that geographic incompatibility among the different media because that has done us damage.

RG: Yes. Well, I think that was one of the fundamental motivations in the thrust toward consolidated reference within the History Center. Some of this had come to Nina's attention as a result of our work with the exhibits, and at her own work on Frances Densmore. In all the research she did on Densmore for her chapter in "Women in Minnesota," she never was aware that we had museum artifacts and pictures or at least manuscript material relating to Densmore. She never saw the whole collection.

LK: You know, that brings up an interesting point about reference that you and I have talked about occasionally in the past. And that is that with the volume of researchers growing and the volume of collections growing, that we've lost some of the helpful contacts that reference personnel and researchers used to have. Again, the lunch table was great, casual conversations, time to sit, to talk. And now we are truly dependent, well, always on knowledgeable people. But on the reference tool, and that's where automation, the integration of information, plays a key role.

RG: Yes. Maybe some of this relates or can lead into some of the thoughts you have on training of people at the Historical Society. As a smaller institution, that training was much more generalized.

LK: Yes, it was.

RG: I can recall some of that myself.

LK: Yes.

RG: You have had some thoughts on what you call the "apprentice system" in the Society.

LK: Right. Which was very good in so many ways. In fact, it was a boon to young people who would come with, say, a liberal arts background and a training in nothing specific to move into the Publications Division and be painstakingly taught how to prepare copy, how to collate, how to check margins, how to do technical editing, how to reorganize a manuscript, how to reproof. Well, every step was taught from scratch.

What you got then was a person who knew very well the practices of a particular institution. What you lost was the grasp of what's going on in this profession—how do other people do it? Is there a better way? And that was true of manuscripts and archives, too. In manuscripts and archives, when we began to get the influx of people out of the training school, the people who had been to Midwest Archives Conference, to SAA, who had worked in other institutions. Then enrichment came and some very helpful challenges like, "Why are we doing it this way?" You know, "Is there another way?"

RG: Yes. I certainly think that's happened in Publications, too. Even very recently the coming of

John McGuigan, who was really the first person we had hired from the University Press scene, who had actually been engaged at the upper levels of University Press management, brought a whole new point of view to the Society. In some ways it was resented, I think, and John didn't last very long, but I don't think that was because of the innovations he brought.

LK: That's right. And I think some of the feeling about John was not because he was proposing something new, but because his personality was not compatible with some of the others. But it's a far cry from the opinion simplified to say, "Get them young and train them right." But that carries quite a bit of the message of the apprentice system.

RG: One thing we never had was an apprentice system for museum curators, because we had no real expertise in it.

LK: Yes. That was interesting and also for directors. We drew our directors from the ranks of historians. I think Nina is American studies?

RG: Yes, and art and music history. But she had had museum work before she came to the Society, at the University art museum.

LK: I think it's true of other cultural institutions, that we hire someone from the subject matter field to take over a major management job.

RG: Yes. You came to the Society with some experience as an editor. I assume that you feel that you were a product of the apprentice system under Grace Nute. Is that right?

LK: No, there was a gap of two years between Grace Lee Nute and me. Maureen Leverty was the overlap. She had been the secretary for Miss Nute, and I think there were either three or four people who took charge of the division in those two years, with Maureen the only person who stayed. So Maureen became the repository of information, which was very helpful. But Grace Lee Nute was a systematic woman. I was an apprentice to the system, and as I made my way from the basic records of acquisitions to stack controls, known as the shelf list at that time, to the catalog, where the subject matter things appeared and the inventories, the systems taught me, and then I took off from there.

RG: Now Grace Nute was still in the area, actually still on the Society's staff, as a research associate. Was she any great help to you during this period?

LK: Yes, she was, when I would ask her a question. But she had been in manuscripts since 1921, and I think she was joyfully turning her mind full-time to historical writing. But she was always courteous when I asked a question, and I was grateful for that because I had no one to talk to.

RG: I seem to recall your reminiscing once about your state of panic when you first took over the manuscripts collection. [Laughter]

LK: Oh, yes. I walked into the manuscripts division and there was Maureen, sitting in solitary glory. I said, "Well, Maureen, what can I do first?" She said, "Take over the telephone, so I can have a coffee break." [Laughter] She'd been alone for quite a while.

But then the first people who walked in to ask for something that required a trip to the stacks—yes, it was a stressful period. But at the same time I felt lucky, because you could not help but feel that here was a wonderful opportunity, for personal satisfaction and work. I had been so restless, bounding around from one type of work to another. It was good.

RG: You've already touched on mentioning Grace Nute's great sense of liberation in moving in to her own research and writing. You refer to this as the archivist's dilemma. Is the archivist a cataloger and professional archivist, a caretaker of collections, or a historian?

LK: Yes. I like the phrase Herman Kahn used when he called it "the divided heart." Herman Kahn was doing his graduate work in history at the time of the Depression, and like so many other talented young people, [there were] no jobs for historians. A bit reminiscent, isn't it, of the later period?

RG: Yes, indeed. You bet.

LK: So Herman and Oliver Holmes and Robert Bahmer gravitated to the National Archives, which was a new establishment in the 1930s. There they became archivists on the job. But each one of the three—I grew to know them well—would talk rather wistfully: "Wait until I retire. I'm going to write."

Of course, some of the people went from graduate schools went into the Historic Records Survey—that's the WPA [Works Progress Administration]—and to the National Archives, and they continued to write history. But there was that pull, and you could almost say, "All right, these people are all historians. They are historians who do archives, and there are other historians who teach." It was just a different slant.

I think the struggle of the archivist to be recognized as a professional, as a professional archivist, rather than as a tradesman or craftsman—that's tied into this, too. Though many gifted people in the archival profession just forthrightly said, "I am an archivist, I may also write history, but there's no doubt about my identity." A lot of this feeling was fostered by the success of the national archival establishment, I think. You could have role models for lots of people there. You could identify with them and hope to emulate. A lot of it was fostered by SAA. Even though today you can still see, on the programs, discussions on the archivist as a professional, or archives as a profession.

RG: You have mentioned that you never served as president of the SAA. I have the impression that you played a fairly crucial role in its founding and growth. Is that true?

LK: I was not a founder. I came to SAA in the very late 1940s; it was founded in the mid-1930s. But I was very lucky, because the founders were very active in SAA, and they told stories about how

it used to be. We're talking about MHS as a small institution; they would say, "Remember that meeting we had in Wyoming in that hunting lodge. You know, when everybody could get into the living room." And the bonding that took place—all part, I'm sure, of the evolution of an American profession. Europeans could laugh at us, because it's been a profession there for a long, long time. [Laughter]

RG: There were some state people who played key roles, too.

LK: Oh, yes.

RG: Who were some of the ones that you had long associations with? I remember Mary Bryan.

LK: Mary Givens Bryan of Georgia. She came into the profession a little bit after I did. She used to give me a quizzical look when I would say, "Mary Givens Bryan is a politician," because she had, in that complex southern situation, just the golden touch.

She, like Russell, was a grass roots person. She was out all over the state talking to the Daughters of the Confederacy and many different groups. The upshot of it was that the Archives of Georgia moved out of that one old house on Peach Street to a multi-storied archives building, and the staff, you know, just grew and grew, and they do a splendid job. Mary is long dead. She died young. But her portrait hangs in the lobby, and it should be there.

RG: Another I recall having met myself is H. G. Jones.

LK: Oh, yes. He was the successor as archivist to Christopher Crittenden, who was a founder. And Christopher Crittenden, well, as you talk to H. G., you can see the respect and affection. He had his role model right at home.

RG: What state was that?

LK: North Carolina. Or is it South Carolina? It's the "Tar Heel State."

RG: I think that's North Carolina.

LK: We won't let H. G. listen to this tape. [Laughter]

RG: Right.

LK: H. G. is an example of a man whose primary identification is archivist, but he writes not only things in the archival field, but he writes history.

RG: Well, you have continued to write history very much in the tradition of Grace Nute and others in the profession. Do you feel it has had a real impact on your career as an archivist?

LK: I am never sure whether what I've reasoned is truly a rationale for doing what I wanted to do anyway, or what I had said is true. This is the face I put upon it, that subject matter is terribly important, and by being a scholar you acquire subject matter. You are also very close to the processes. You know what it's like to go into a reading room and see, you know, what are the perils of research, what are the problems of them. In fact, I used to say that in all my tours around the country doing research, I'd sit down in a reading room with my mental checklist, you know, "How is this organization run? What are the good things that they're doing to help researchers? And what are some of the bad things they do that really make it tough?" But I think probably the basic thing is that I love to write, I love to do research, and I could not imagine life without it.

RG: This came to my mind yesterday as I was looking through some of the records in preparation for this discussion. In 1978, there was a luncheon honoring you at the National Archives, and Frank Burch characterized you as one of the great archivists of the twentieth century. And yet a lot of the honor and a lot of the comment at the luncheon seems to have focused around your most recent publication, which was the Long journal at that time.

LK: By the way, at that session, which was really beautiful, we had quite a bit of laughter about this.

RG: About the divided heart?

LK: Yes. But there was another reason for the meeting, and that is it was organized by Sarah Jackson, who has been a vital member of the National Historical Publications Commission. The book is the documentary, and the Commission, although it didn't give dollar support, supported generously with research help—Sarah going to certain record series, you know, and having photocopies made and sending them on.

RG: I see. So in some ways, they saw it as a national historical publication.

LK: Yes. Right.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

March 27, 1990

RG: We are now continuing this interview on March 27th 1990. The same interviewer and interviewee as before. I think this time, Lucile, we are down to the bottom of our list, taking sort of a retrospective view. And we were going to start on your recollections of the Cater era at MHS.

LK: Yes. Now, I think that Russell has done such a beautiful job of outlining steps toward the termination of Mr. Cater's association with the Society that we don't have to go over them. I think I've put in my comments at the time. But I will share with you a little bit of the staff feelings.

Russell, of course, was a member of Cater's staff, and had some of them, too. But I very well remember, well into Cater's tenure, when a group of us met on a Saturday morning. We said that instead of complaining about each thing as it came up, we were going to try to come to some agreement on the basic things that were wrong that in turn were spawning all of these dissensions and creating virtually a solid block of staff in opposition to the director, an unheard of thing. And the people who met were Elwood Maunder, whom I hope we interview one of these days; S. Sanford Cutler—do you remember him, Rhoda?

RG: Oh, I remember Sandy very well.

LK: Yes. Gene Becker. You remember him very well.

RG: Oh, of course.

LK: And we talked for quite some time.

RG: Was June Holmquist there?

LK: No. Perhaps we should mention the fact that June did not enter into associations with the staff members in these groups like in the planning committee that I shared with Dan King, Mary Berthel and Bertha Heilbron or in this group that met to talk this whole thing through. June was very articulate on specific instances and also in a kind of a counseling role.

RG: She was very new to the staff at that time.

LK: She was. She was.

RG: Some of the junior members.

LK: But I think other junior members were very much interested in her opinions on this or that. But the rest of us that met—to us a significant Saturday morning—and talked for quite a while. Then Elwood Maunder, with his great facility for summing things up, for analyzing, to get to the bottom of it, said, "I think that what we are saying is that there is no trust whatsoever between the director

and the staff." Elwood, who is a very humane person, made the observation that he thought it might be as hard on the director as it was on the staff, because no matter what he proposed at this juncture of affairs, the staff's initial reaction was negative. But he said, "There's no trust. There is no faith." And on that, with that in the background, it's very hard for anything to go right.

RG: Can you recall what year this was?

LK: I would say we could narrow it down by the date that Elwood came and Elwood left. I'll make a guess subject to further checking. This was probably about a year before Mr. Cater left.

RG: I see. Can you just give some examples of the sort of thing that got the staff thoroughly upset?

LK: Yes. I'll give you two instances. One on what may have been considered a fairly petty point, although it wasn't to the people who were involved. Ruth Abernathy—Russell talked quite a bit about Ruth in our conversations with him. She was in charge of the Women's Organization, and also press contacts. She was our public relations woman and also the main person who kept the Women's Organization, you know, keyed directly into the Society. She built up a great backlog of vacation, and every time she wanted to take some vacation, there was some event, so she couldn't take it. So there came a point when things were fairly clear, and she was going to take her vacation. She spoke to Mr. Cater and he said, "No way. I have this or that or that I want you to do." It was at the point where she was going to lose vacation. She was tired. She needed a break.

So Ruth was not a docile person. We had the staff organization going at that time, and fortunately or unfortunately, I was president. It was important because at that point, the staff organization entered into what I think it probably was an illegal status. We became the bargainers just like a labor representative dealing with management. We didn't know we had stepped over the line and nobody told us.

RG: Well, it was an informal thing.

LK: Yes. So I met with Mr. Cater and with Ruth, and, of course, I was the labor representative speaking for the represented person, and we reached a compromise. But very bad feelings stemmed from that. It was all over the staff, the knowledge that Mr. Cater was trying to do Ruth out of her vacation. You know, a thing that should never have arisen, probably would not have, if we had a director with which you assumed good faith. But there was that lack of faith.

I would say the epitome of staff resentment was demonstrated when Mr. Cater fired our museum curator. She was—oh, I thought so much of her. Why did her name escape me? It will come to me. She was the first professionally trained museum person we had had on the staff. Esther Sperry. She was really doing a good job and getting down into museum organization, you know, the type of records you need to assemble an exhibit, the idea of a museum not just as an exhibition place, but a big ability for the surge of collection. Well, Mr. Cater and Esther Sperry came to grief, of course, and he fired her by telegram, had a telegram delivered to her apartment. And the word, of course—

the grapevine, we speak of grapevine now, it was not a patch of what the grapevine was.

So Mr. Cater probably heard from a lot of people or at least significant people. He called a staff meeting, and he stood before the staff and said, "I want to state my point of view." Well, he had lost the war right there. Any time a director gets before a full staff and said, "I want to state my point of view," it's the defense.

RG: It's an acknowledgment of—

LK: Right. I think afterward those of us at that meeting were not proud of what we did, but without any previous consultation among people such as how are we going to conduct ourselves, it was a silent meeting. Mr. Cater was inviting comment. Absolute silence, except from Larry Oliver. Remember Larry?

RG: Oh, I remember Larry.

LK: He was so kind-hearted and so loyal.

RG: Large, innocent bookkeeper.

LK: His voice kept murmuring, "This is terrible. This is absolutely terrible. This is just awful." So Mr. Cater finally just picked up his folder and walked out of the meeting. So that had come to a pretty pass, I must say.

RG: I remember, I recall when I was first working at the Historical Society, I saw a copy of a memo that he had circulated, on the subject of coffee breaks, I believe it was.

LK: Yes.

RG: It was full-page memo discoursing on why staff should not take coffee breaks, and it was a model of asininity.

LK: Yes.

RG: If this was typical of his handling of situations, then I can see why he was in trouble.

LK: I think one point on that famous memo was that if you take coffee breaks, you must not take them together. [Laughter]

RG: I don't recall the details. I just recall its incredible length for the subject covered.

LK: Yes.

RG: The very fact of putting something that essentially trivial and subtle into a memo.

LK: Yes. Then you take these instances that we have mentioned and things that we have talked about in Russell's interview and put it up against the fact that here was a man with imagination, who liked the institution we have now, that he didn't like to see people poorly paid on the staff and went to bat on reclassifications, etc.

RG: You have mentioned that. He was a strong champion of better staff somewhat.

LK: Yes, he was. Also in his own way, he had loyalty to the institution. He came back from an expensive trip one time. I met him on the steps, and he was hurrying into the building. He said, "You know, it's always so good to get back here." So he wasn't without feeling for the institution and was not completely without feeling for people.

RG: You mentioned the staff organization. When was that formed? You started discussing the meeting. Was that the inception of the staff organization?

LK: Yes. We figured from the fine chronology you prepared that it was probably 1953. Russell was new to the staff. When we began to talk about the staff organization, it was on a completely different level from what it became. The Society had various committees like the flower committee, the party committee, and the committees kept trying to draw up rules and regulations. For instance, flowers—if there is a death in a staff family and the degree of relationship is this or that, they get flowers or flowers of a certain value. You know, nice things that everyone wanted to do, but you had to have some ground rules or there would be great inequities.

So someone wisely suggested, "Instead of all of these little committees, let's have a staff organization." As conversation about the organization grew and grew and grew, some people felt, "Well, it would be good to have a forum. Obviously we have a lot of common problems. We can talk them over, etc." And we could think about having staff programs and something broader than flowers and party regulations. So we met in the museum—there was a small auditorium there—and we invited administration to attend. And Russell, of course, attended with Mr. Cater.

Well, I don't know who had this dumb idea, just any of us might have had it at that stage, but the nomination for president was Russell Fridley. And it was a dumb idea because Russell, well, he summed it up. He got up and said he declined the nomination. He was a member of administration, and he felt that that would not be appropriate. So we then elected Gene Becker. Now, Gene was a very—well, Russell has spoken so well of him—just a fine fellow. He was not an administrator. He was not a great achiever, but had a wonderful sense.

RG: Very good people sense.

LK: He did. He guided the organization through its first year. He had a number of flaps. For instance, in that first year we learned that staff was not automatically endowed with terrific good

sense just because we were in this fine organization and stood for something that was excellent. We had what was known as the "Coke-machine flap." We all wanted a Coke machine. The staff organization took leadership in getting it installed at first floor. Well, it's just fine for the staff, but how about the receptionist who had to make change. She put up signs, "Cannot make change! Do not ask me!" [Chuckles]

So it escalated and escalated. And at that point, we had a little sympathy with management who had to cope with these things. I've forgotten how we straightened out the great Coke-machine flap. But then as we went into 1954 and probably 1955, we became very much concerned in acting in the role of spokesperson, especially—well, there were some people who could defend themselves and some people who could not; some people felt better in their brouhahas with administration if they could talk it over and feel that they had some formal staff support.

Then Russell came and the staff organization just disappeared. It was revived sometime later, and Pat Harpole was first president.

RG: Yes, I was there for that chapter of the staff organization. It became very much just a social—again, taking over the flower function and the cards and the parties.

LK: Yes. We have come full circle.

RG: Yes. Now you were president of the staff organization the second year then, probably?

LK: Either the second or the third. Elwood Maunder was president, and I can't remember what the sequence was.

RG: Now, my recollection is that June had told me she was president at one point. As a matter of fact, she always claimed that she would have nothing to do with the second reincarnation of the staff organization, because she had paid her dues the first time around.

LK: She had paid her dues with the flower and party fund. It was a great, almost a staff joke, because June with her excellent mind sat down with all of this record of conflicts over who was going to get flowers, etc., and she worked out some excellent guidelines. And that was…

RG: Good common sense.

LK: Good common sense, that's right. Let's not have a big flap over this, you know. There's a way to do it. And then I can't remember—

[Tape interruption]

RG: I think we have pretty well exhausted the staff organization. How about going on to Julius Nolte and Carl Jones?

LK: Yes, Russell talked a little bit about Carl Jones, but I think Carl's presidency [of the Executive Committee] was over or virtually over by the time that Russell became director. Carl Jones, to understand what he did, I think we should have this background. He was a tremendously independent person. He was a gifted person. Whatever field he went into, he gave it his full attention and worked hard. For example, one of his interests, other than the newspaper work—his family owned the *Minneapolis Journal*—one of his great interests was magic. So he didn't just become a party trickster, he assembled a library. He learned the history of magic. He sponsored scholars, who were writing about the history of magic. He worked on his own performances until— He didn't have a wide repertoire, but what he did was very good. He also was interested in fields of art including, I think, enamel or cloisonné. So he went to Japan to study, and he took it so seriously that he entered the workshops and enrolled as a worker, you know, sat on the floor, and not just a dilettante dropping in—he learned it from the ground up.

Well, he was independent socially, too. He was a member, of course, of the—what would we call it? Well, the Minneapolis Club founded by the millers and the wheat merchants and so on. As a member of the Jones family of the *Minneapolis Journal*, he came naturally into this circle. But his friendships were legion in many, many walks of life. So this was the man who became President of the Minnesota Historical Society. It was not an unmixed blessing, because the staff was not accustomed to having a hands-on approach.

That is, Mr. Jones would walk into my office and say, "What are you doing today?"

I would say that, well, I'm doing this or that.

He said, "Essentially, that's counting paper clips. I would rather see you out meeting people, learning what the resources are. Where are the manuscripts? Go out and get them." And to show me how to do it, he did it. He would walk in with his arms laden with letters or diaries and say, "Now, if you cannot identify this person, the Society won't get the records. John Stevens." Then you had to relate the biography of John Harrington Stevens. [Laughter] Or he would ask a question, "What have we done about getting the records of Senator [Henrik] Shipstead?"

I'd say that, well, I've written this letter. I've made this telephone call.

He said, "You don't know how to do this, do you?" So he said, "Come home with me"--he did this quite often, took me home with him—he said, "Now, the next morning early, we're starting out for Alexandria."

And he took Mrs. Jones's best bottle of bourbon, knowing that Senator Shipstead liked bourbon. When we left in the morning, she said, "Carl, not my best bourbon! It's my birthday bourbon!"

"Hmh! This is in a great cause!" And off we went.

So when we got to the Shipstead house—this is a little bit humiliating—he said, "Now, you talk to Lou, Mrs. Shipstead. Henrik and I have things to talk about." So they settled down with the bourbon, and after a discreet number of hours, we walked out with the Shipstead papers. But he took great joy in that sort of thing.

RG: Sounds infuriatingly fraternalistic.

LK: Yes. I think that I learned from him that in dealing with members of the Council or, you know, great patrons of the Society, that it was not necessary to simply accept these things. Because the first time I had told him that he was infringing upon my role, a look of glee came over his face. [Laughter]

RG: Really?

LK: Yes.

RG: He'd finally goaded you to resistance.

LK: Yes. Yes. His son, Winton Jones, married the daughter of Julius Nolte. Julius Nolte, who was dean of the Extension Division of the University of Minnesota, was selected to chair the Territorial Centennial, and, of course, in that role came into direct conflict with Harold Cater. And many things took place in this conflict between Nolte and Mr. Cater.

When the pot was really boiling on the other side of the Society's affairs, Carl Jones was president of the Society, and Julius Nolte as Territorial Centennial head had some very long and thoughtful meetings. Just like the staff group that was meeting to try to assess, "What's wrong? There are grave perils here for the institution. What should be done?" And Carl Jones then, as far as I know, took the leadership in having the Executive Committee come full force into finding out how the Society was really being operated.

I've forgotten. He died very suddenly, well, a short illness. I can't remember just when his death came or his severe illness in this terminal time for the Cater directorship.

RG: One of the things that occurred during this period that involved you most directly was the discovery of the Clark journals. Can you say anything about that? The story of how you found them, I think, is pretty well told. But one thing that I have not found in the record anywhere was the way that the journals escaped the Society's possession.

LK: Yes. I think the court case and the records—we carefully collected the records relating to the case as it was going on to the dispute with the family, etc. So it's pretty well documented, but what may not appear in the record was how did we get into the mess in the first place.

RG: Exactly.

LK: I can tell something about that. You know how field trips go, you start off on a field trip without any feeling of, you know, "I'm going to discover something great today." It was, as Joe Friday [from "Dragnet"] says, "It was a routine call." [Chuckles] Sandy Cutler, Gene Becker and I went to the house on Farrington, and we did, as we always did, with permission of the person, Mrs. [Vaclav] Vytlacil, who had come to see the dispersal of the family's belongings, her mother's belongings. Her mother was Mrs. Burnside Foster. We just made our way through the house, and in the attic were these things. I won't go into it because it's all photographed, in the desk, in the box, on the floor, etc. I was not sure what we had when I sorted these balls of manuscripts and just pieces, fragments of stuff and put it all together, I thought, "It looks like it! It can't be!"

So instead of writing to Mrs. Vytlacil, other than an acknowledgement and saying she would hear from me later, because there was a very interesting group within the Hammond papers that should be studied, other than that we didn't publicize it. I asked for Mr. [Ernest] Osgood, the specialist in the history of the West, to come, and we started to examine internal evidence and then moved on to external evidence. "Is it real?" Well, it turned out to be so.

Then two things happened. One was that we knew that we should go to the donor in New York, Mrs. Vytlacil, and give her a full report on what was here. We asked Dean Blegen to meet with us. So it was Ernest Osgood, Theodore Blegen, Harold Cater and I meeting in Harold Cater's office. The question was who should go to New York. Harold Cater—and I corrected this—the story is that Harold Cater said that this is his trip. But that was not so. He said that I should be the one to go. Then Dean Blegen, it was very clear that he felt that the top person within the organization should represent the Society on so important a matter.

So Harold Cater went. According to Mrs. Vytlacil in her later conversations with me, he talked very little about the Lewis and Clark papers. He talked about the body of the Hammond papers. So when the story broke in the St. Paul paper about—oh, exaggerated things like "The discovery of the century!" And *Newsweek*, *Time* magazine, *National Geographic*, all, you know, they didn't all want a piece of the action, but you could see what was coming.

Well, why, you might say, did we give such a spread to this in the St. Paul papers. What a dumb thing to do! We had no choice, because very soon after we brought the Clark papers into the building, Ruth Abernathy, probably the only mistake I've ever known her to make in public relations, she was talking to Will Reeves, a reporter in the St. Paul newspapers about some writing he was doing at budget time. Ruth was very good at this, alerting reporters and asking to run features, etc., to play up the Society while the legislature was in session. Well, she dropped the information, you know, "It's been very nice of you to do what you've been doing for us. And down the road just a little bit, there's going to be a big story." She virtually gave him an exclusive on that. Then he began to put on the pressure. So it was a rather serious situation, and we all felt trapped.

RG: Then the heirs to the papers felt that they had been mislead as to the importance.

LK: Exactly. Misrepresentation. They had no intention of alienating property of this value. It was not properly described to them. There were other legal angles, too. Then the suits began. That is very well documented, so I don't think we need to…

RG: So you would say that the, perhaps, fundamental error was on Mr. Cater's part in not being as clear as he should have been with the heirs?

LK: Yes. Yes. And the related error was in tipping off this thing.

RG: In the press.

LK: Yes. Until you were no longer a master of the, you know, how are we going to handle this from the public relations point of view and make sure that the family, if not seeing copy, do. So that's the Lewis and Clark.

RG: Unrelated, but perhaps parallel, on my notes here, is the case of the James J. Hill papers.

LK: And that I know so little about in a direct point of view. I talked to Duane [Swanson] and Jim [Fogerty] about this, and gave them a little background so they could include it in their questions to Helen White, who was immediately involved in that.

RG: I see.

LK: But overall, the James J. Hill papers had been available for research on a very, very restricted basis. And the whole thing had so much good in it. We wanted the papers, of course, for the Minnesota Historical Society, and at one point, you know how you drop long-range plans and make very sweeping statements?

RG: Yes.

LK: And one of mine—and I must cut it out and mount it—was, "The keystone of the collection: James J. Hill, Great Northern, Northern Pacific." Of course, later we got the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern. But the James J. Hill papers became a special project, and Helen will give the correct information. I think all of this was done under what was—it wasn't the Northwest Foundation at that time. It was the Lewis and Maude Hill—

RG: Hill Family Foundation.

LK: Right. Hiring a special staff, headed by Grace Lee Nute with assistance by Bob Brown and Helen White. The situation was that they were to—well, the directive was to organize the papers and get them ready for research. Then Helen, I'm sure, will carry on from here and tell about the problems that arose.

RG: That arose so ultimately, we did not get the papers.

LK: Yes. We wouldn't have in any case, but it just—the repercussions through a small academic and professional community like this were rather extensive.

RG: Your mention of Bob Brown brings up the question of the Minnesota State Archives. Is there anything you'd like to say about the history of the State Archives? You fell heir to that history.

LK: Yes. I think one thing I should say is that we had a stroke of wonderful luck. Before Miss Nute came—I think she came in 1920 or 1921—a young woman from the Iowa Archives came to work at the Society, and her name was Ethel B. Virtue, and virtuous she was. Because she learned at the Iowa Society the difference between private manuscripts and public records. She brought with her a very good foundation for a classification system that took note of the nature of records. Even though at that time she had both personal papers and public records under her jurisdiction, I think staff of one or maybe she was only part-time, she kept the Society—and was later reinforced by Grace Lee Nute—from getting into the mess that so many organizations did. That mess was intermingling, organizing things, say, by subject—pulling, you know, and losing completely the integrity. So that gave us a good start.

After that start, not very much was done, and it was nobody's fault. The Manuscripts Division was never properly staffed until recent years, and Miss Nute struggled along with a couple of assistants. They had not only to serve the people coming in mostly for the use of personal manuscripts, but they had what was called the Census Records Service. Beginning with the social legislation in the 1930s, the proof of existence became critical for Social Security, Old Age Assistance and so on. So the Division was flooded with applications for census searches. To read Miss Nute's reports for those years, it's really a little sad, because she had a fine program going, and it still progressed, but not nearly what it would have without that burden.

Well, the first movement there was the survey of the archives by Herbert Keller. But I won't go into that, because Bob has done some writing in which he places the Keller study in its proper context. But things began to move around 1950. There was legislation, I believe, in 1947. But Bob Brown was appointed the first full-time state archivist in, I think, 1950. And he worked very hard, initially with the great good luck of having Arthur Naftalin as commissioner of the administration. The legislation of 1947 set up an Archives Commission on which the Society was represented, but Archives was not organically then a part of the Society.

With Naftalin's support and Bob's hard work, they made some progress. The most important thing in the long run, I think, is that they established an identity of archives. Even after the events of the 1970s, when we brought back together archives and manuscripts, we had learned our lessons well. We had a joint reading room, you know, a common reference room, the processing staff processed both archives and manuscripts. But following Ethel Virtue as president, we never intermingled.

RG: Bob Brown remained state archivist for a good many years, didn't he?

LK: Yes, until his death. And he died in—I've forgotten the year. He was only fifty years old when he died from a diabetic attack, and he was succeeded by Frank Burch, who came from the National Archives, and stayed for several years. Then a year after Frank left, then Russell asked me to take over archives and administrate the two units.

RG: They were then, again, put back organically as a part of the Soceity

LK: Yes. Yes. The legislation, I think, has been—

RG: That would have been in about 1973, somewhere in there?

LK: Mid-1970s, yes.

RG: In 1972, that must have been when the Society again absorbed the State Archives. Would you describe what happened? They were placed first under the library.

LK: Yes. If Frank Burch was still state archivist, then Jim Thusen was librarian. And technically Jim Thusen was to administer archives, I think, as a unit of the library. But it never really took. As Frank Burch was a master—I already stated at one time that Jim brought the staff a box of candy and that was the last they saw of him. [Laughter] But it was the wrong timing. Also Frank Burch was a splendid archivist, and he had his pride, too. He had come to Minnesota to administer a major archival program, and then the legislation—I believe it was 1971, Rhoda—put it under the Society then to be assigned as a unit of the library. I think he made his preparations for departure at that time.

RG: At that point, yes.

LK: Yes.

RG: Well, I'm afraid it probably couldn't be said that Jim Thusen was as good a librarian as Frank Burch was an archivist.

LK: That's right. There is a great feeling in the profession, too, that these mergers can be dangerous.

RG: Well, that carries us, I think, into some of the developments of the later years at MHS. Some of the events, well, I think it was in 1972 that Sue Holbert was hired as your assistant, is that right?

LK: Yes. That was a happy day. [Laughter]

RG: A happy day. Lee [Leland] Anderson had been your assistant for a while.

LK: Yes, he had.

RG: Then he left.

LK: His training was as a private collector, and I think that he was never really happy in the job, and I was never really happy with him. Like a gentlemen he resigned. Sue came fresh from Macalester [College] where she was in charge of the grants program. She had been with the Society earlier as an editorial assistant, just had a broad background in journalism and public relations and the very exacting work of grants. She was a success practically from day one.

RG: It was that same year, as I read the record, that the first regional research center was established.

LK: Yes.

RG: Do you want to say something about that whole program?

LK: I think we were a copycat on that program. Wisconsin had done it. Ohio either had done it or getting into it. It seemed to be the thing. Bill Lass of Mankato, who did his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, was very much in favor of the program. So was Russell because regional—

RG: Russell was at that time?

LK: Yes. In fact, Russell, I think, saw it as a part of outreach, just as he felt about historic sites. Here we are getting out into the state, etc. I was very reluctant because—probably overly conservative on this score—but I felt that we were just getting together, you know, a powerhouse in which we were doing the job of collecting on a contemporary basis. We were planning ahead. We were doing so many things that a good collection should do. But we were very, very thin, thinly staffed, thinly funded, and so I guess I saw it as a lake with some mighty thin ice on it.

But it was Russell's wish, and I thought even at that time, "I might be holding back because this is a major change that I don't want to see." But I entered into it with, I think, very good spirit. We established our first centers at St. Paul and Mankato. The coming of Jim Fogerty as our first liaison person in the centers made all of the difference, and I believe that came because of a major grant that we got from NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities]. I'd have to look at the records to see if that's correct. Excuse me a minute.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Jim was hired at the time of the NEH grant or whether it came before or after. It was Jim who organized the system. We expanded it greatly. Jim achieved some of the things that I think Russell had had in his mind. We transferred some collections to the centers. They undertook some collecting themselves. From the use point of view, I think the system never met the hopes we had had for it.

RG: There were ultimately seven—or was it nine regional centers?

LK: I think nine with the Iron Range.

RG: With the Iron Range.

LK: Yes, which has a special status.

RG: Then it was, I believe, in 1980 or 1981 that those centers were cut loose from the Historical Society.

LK: Russell lost interest in them, and, of course, I was gone from archives and manuscripts from 1979.

RG: Yes. That's right. That was after your retirement.

LK: Yes.

RG: I know that Sue found there at the divesture of those centers a hard blow to take.

LK: Yes.

RG: I think she felt that she had devoted a great deal of effort to them in good faith, feeling that she was following Russell's wishes.

LK: Yes.

RG: And then found the rug jerked from underneath her.

LK: It was never clarified for Sue, I believe. It was perfectly clear to me at the beginning that he wanted them. It was perfectly clear that through application for NEH funds and so on that he was moving toward supporting them. But there was a tension even at that point. I think Russell felt—and we'll have to verify this in any future interviews we have—I think he felt that the state college system should pick up a greater responsibility for sustenance there.

RG: There was some discussion at the time that happened—I was division head at that time, and so there was a good bit of discussion on the management level as to whether, perhaps, it had been a mistake to associate the centers with the history departments in the various institutions rather than with the libraries. I believe in some instances there was rivalry over the control of that within the state colleges or state universities, which then damaged the centers.

LK: I didn't hear anything of that. I was on the scene when the dissention between a few county historical societies and the centers was taking place.

RG: Yes, I recall some of those tensions, too.

LK: Yes.

RG: But that had pretty well been, in most cases, smoothed over.

LK: Yes. Yes. And I think one of the good things was that people like Bill Lass considered themselves more and more outreach in the community, that he would go, say, to the Blue Earth County Historical Society and enter into their programming, too.

RG: Yes. Well, as you say, that is a question for Russell in the next round with him.

LK: Yes. Yes.

RG: To pursue some of the other later developments, you became state archivist officially in 1975, as I read the record, and that was at the same time that construction was going forward on the new research center at 1500 Mississippi Street. And for a while there, you were in the unenviable position of administering a division that was divided between two locations.

LK: Three locations.

RG: Oh, and the state archives at that time were separate.

LK: Yes. Right. We started to move into 1500 Mississippi Street earlier than that. Even before the brewery staff completely moved out, we had work space there. So it was from the very early 1970s.

RG: And, finally, I can't recall what year you finally consolidated your position at 1500 and were all in one place again.

LK: I think it was 1976.

RG: Somewhere in the late 1970s then.

LK: Yes. Jim Fogerty, by the way, has a video on that, and I think that will be a good part of the record.

RG: It was in 1976, also, that the State Historical Records Advisory Board, better known as SHRAB, was established. Is there anything you want to say about that?

LK: No. In fact, the SHRAB, I think the planning for it and really good work with it was assigned to Sue Holbert. That is, she took a major responsibility for it, and it was when she was state archivist that I felt it had its best development.

RG: Again, I seem to recall, and I could be mistaken about this, a fair amount of tension between Sue and Russell over the role of SHRAB. I have very little insight into that because I didn't know much about what was going on.

LK: That must have come after I had shifted to publications in 1979, because it went very smoothly while I was in charge. But on the other hand, not a whole lot was accomplished.

RG: One other thing that started earlier, actually way back in the late 1960s, that might be worth some comment is the Public Affairs Center.

LK: Yes.

RG: I believe that was established as a result of a requestor, a gift from Madge Hawkins.

LK: That's right.

RG: How do you feel about that? Was that successful? What was it? [Laughter]

LK: That may be the beginning of the national vogue for centers. You can't just do something. You must have a magnet of some sort. I think the research grants were probably a valuable part of it. The guide I think we did of the public affairs collections and I think the emphasis for public relations purposes was very good, because this was a continuity of—I think we mentioned this cycle, the new cycle of political collections that we started in the 1950s and the expansion. You know, public affairs, what do you mean by it? It's not just politics. We got into conservation and many things that were matters of public policy.

RG: Right. Public policy as distinguished from political power.

LK: Yes. We did some record surveys.

RG: These were funded by the Public Affairs Center grants?

LK: Yes. But the major advance in the funding, I think, well, those research grants, it just encouraged the whole use, and the uses sometimes are very much neglected because it's more abstract, and, say, we need money for, you know, arrangement, description, shelving, boxes, etc., but reference use is a little more abstract, it's easy to bypass it. [Chuckles]

RG: Well, I recall the perennial question around the MHS being "what is the Public Affairs Center?" No one had heard of it outside of archives and a few people who were in on the secret. It never had a staff. It never had a specific location. It really only had funding.

LK: Right. I think we think of the Public Affairs Center when we talk about establishing various centers, and it's always a question in a collection that has multiple facets from the subject matter

point of view. If you have a center for public affairs, if you have a center for women's history, if you staff it, how much of the total resources then is going to gravitate to it, how many new things are you going to overlook. You know, the program can get skewed very easily.

RG: That is true. That is true. I think this is one of the things that there has been a lot of agonizing over in recent years, specifically the Women's History Center, which I took a position in firm disagreement with Sue Holbert and a number of others on the committee. Time will probably tell who was right.

LK: Right. And the fact that we were discussing a labor center very early in the 1960s, and Clark Chambers—this was before he established the Social Welfare Center—and he was very willing to have it at the Society, but on a nationwide or international basis rather than a state and regional—

RG: Somewhat analogous to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's Labor Center.

LK: That's right.

RG: Do you want to say anything about the continuing tensions through the 1960s with the University of Minnesota and some people who really, as I understand it, would have liked to acquire our manuscripts and archives collections for the University. [Laughter]

LK: I think that the comment about acquiring our manuscripts collection from the University was not made, the suggestion was not made in complete seriousness. [Laughter]

But it seemed that every time we met to discuss the relationships between the Society and the University, it did come down to this unique material, to the valuable research services rather than a broader ground. I think in later years, perhaps Russell talked to the University on a broader basis.

RG: Who were some of the main actors in this negotiation besides Clark Chambers?

LK: Clark and Hy Berman. Hy, at that time, wanted to establish a labor center, wanted to establish it at the Minnesota Historical Society, and he had worked so extensively in the labor collections of Wisconsin that I feel that he felt we should be doing a whole lot more, and he was right. We hired one of his students, Phil Coreth, for two summers to do labor records surveys.

RG: I believe you mentioned earlier that that was one of the successful ventures in the special projects.

LK: Right. And Hy was very good. He was instrumental in getting the Minneapolis, the central labor union records to us, and we had already made good progress on the St. Paul central.

RG: Was another one of them Timothy Smith?

LK: Timothy Smith. Now, Timothy studied education, but I can't remember what area of this empire was designated for Timothy. No, it's gone. Russell will remember all too well. [Laughter] But I must say that both Hy and Clark, although we've had a few kind of rough meetings, that they became good friends, or probably were good friends to the Society at that time, but they were seeing things in a different light from what we were.

RG: Well, I remember Hy as being around the Society a great deal in the mid-1970s, well, from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s.

LK: Yes. I think he and Russell enjoyed one another's—they enjoyed their association. Of course, with Russell's deep interest in politics...

RG: And Hy's equally deep interest in politics. [Laughter]

LK: Yes.

RG: Well, let's see. That brings us to—let's see, you retired in 1979, or that is moved to publications.

LK: That's right.

RG: A sort of semi-retirement position, senior research fellow.

LK: Well, it seemed that my life was starting all over again, and I remember rather than feeling retired, I felt refueled. [Laughter] Maybe you have some of the same feelings when you move from being a division head.

RG: Yes.

LK: Into research fellowship.

RG: I think for you it was a sharper break, and, again, it went back to that divided-heart situation in which you had been simultaneously a professional archivist, one of the leading archivists in the country, with a major collection, plus being a historian in your own right.

LK: The pressures are great, and I think I felt through the first year of my change to publications, that I was in a decompression chamber. I've compared notes with other people who have done this, notably Alice Smith of Wisconsin who went from a major administrative job to research. I told Alice once that my attention span was about ten minutes, because I'd keep my attention on something, then almost automatically reach for the telephone or look up to see who's entering the door. So switching to intense concentration over a long period was quite a change, and it seemed wonderful. [Laughter]

RG: Well, in 1980 the Division of Archives and Manuscripts received the Distinguished Service Award from the SAA.

LK: Yes, I was so pleased.

RG: And that was after Sue Holbert had succeeded you.

LK: Yes, that's right.

RG: Had been appointed to your position. I recall that from my point of view, that transition was not by any means automatic.

LK: No, it was not.

RG: Do you care to say anything about that?

LK: We didn't progress beyond the—I should say Russell. I was not doing the hiring. It was internal advertising, and one other person in the division applied for the job. But Russell seemed to give long and deep consideration to the future as he saw it, and to probably the capability, Sue and himself, too, to work together smoothly. I felt that the pause was freighted with some serious questions about whether they could work together well.

From my point of view—well, Sue is a superb archivist. She had the entire support of the staff. She had the support of the state agencies she worked with. She was a skilled collector. To me, Sue had everything. I don't mean that Russell's appointment of Sue was grudging, but I feel that some of the differences of opinion that came down the road, probably had been anticipated on both of their parts.

RG: I have often wondered whether the severing of ties with the regional research centers would have happened if you had been in charge at that time. Do you want to speculate on that or not?

LK: I think that there is this, Rhoda. In fact, remember in the interview with Russell when I asked him, probably a little impertinently, what his reasoning was on the reorganization of the Historical Society, that one of the things that resulted in was the disestablishment of the Division of Archives and Manuscripts. He gave a very interesting answer to the effect that perhaps I had over-persuaded him to my point of view over the years. And at one point, he said that he was awaiting a—was it a strategic retirement? —something of that sort, which I thought was wonderful, because it probably sums it up. [Chuckles] That any person who has been on the staff for thirty or forty years, for good or for ill, has something of an entrenched position. It's not always good for the institution. It's not always good for the people involved. But it can be good.

RG: That's true. That reorganization occurred in 1985, and the Division of Archives and Manuscripts was essentially dissolved and became two departments of the library under Lila Goff. It's no way of avoiding the fact, this was a major blow to Sue Holbert. She had been state archivist

and was essentially demoted from a division head to a department head. As I recall, she was at that time president-elect of the Society of American Archivists. I felt that it was extremely embarrassing to the Society on the national level.

LK: You know, I had very strong reactions when that happened.

RG: I know. As I recall, you sent a bunch of roses to the staff of the ex-D.A.M.

LK: One for every year.

RG: For every year?

LK: For every year that the division had been formally organized. My reaction was very sharp, and we can never analyze our reactions, you know, in a completely objective way. But my immediate feeling I'll put down here, and that was, "Is this how we reward merit, success, etc.?" Because if you look over the performance of that division after I left, what did they do? They brought us into the age of automation. They tackled the enormous job of a sterner appraisal of records, "Let's not let any useless stuff in here." That's oversimplifying, but they went to work on that. They went to work on long-range planning, not just what we're collecting today or five years from now, but do a complete collection analysis so we know where we're going. There was tremendous morale, good morale within that.

RG: You bet there was.

LK: Yes. And every time I'd walk through that division after my retirement, I thought, "Oh, great! This is so…

RG: "It's working."

LK: "It's working." I think Grace Lee Nute would have felt the same way. You know, a tremendous investment had been made of people who had been dedicated to it. You can look at it from another point of view, "So, are we frozen in time? These are good things. Is it automatically written then that there should be no changes?"

RG: Well, that is a very philosophical way to look at it. I guess we all need to be philosophical.

LK: Yes, we do.

RG: One thing we skipped was the NHPC [National Historical Publications Commission]. You wanted to add that.

LK: Yes. And the Massachusetts History Society and the Minnesota Historical Society, I think it was in 1965, were selected to begin the program of producing microfilm editions of manuscripts.

And at the beginning, we were really excited about this. It goes back to a Minnesota connection, of course. So many things do. Oliver Holmes was head of the NHPC, knew Minnesota very well, the institutions, people, etc. He also had a close association with Steve [Steven T.] Riley of the Massachusetts Historical Society. So I think Helen White will cover a lot of this.

RG: Yes. She was somewhat in charge.

LK: She was project director, and she brought into that group Maureen Leverty, who had been in the division at the time of Grace Lee Nute. She brought in Debbie Neubeck, Connie Catamas, really talented people. And, in turn, I think they did a wonderful job of exploring the possibilities of developing techniques, etc. I think Tom Deahl had a good role in this, too. Well, good and bad. Conflict came, of course. Some of the ideas—

[End of Interview]