U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History interview
Subject: Sam Anthony
Interviewers: Rebecca Brenner and Emily Niekrasz
Date: July 7, 2015

MS. BRENNER: This is Rebecca Brenner and Emily Niekrasz, and we are at Archives I about to conduct an oral history of Sam Anthony, in room Mezzanine 110. Today's date is July 7, 2015. Sam, will you please provide a brief overview of your career time frame at the National Archives?

MR. ANTHONY: Sure, I'll do that, and for the record, my name is Sam Anthony. I started working here in August of 1991. I began as a young recent college graduate working in the research room here at Archives I. The unit initials were NNRS, and that was many re-organizations ago. The old timers would know it. My job was as a GS-4 technician, soon to be GS-5, and I worked in our textual research room and our microfilm research room. And back in the day, we also had a motion picture and still picture research room. I had the great pleasure of kind of bouncing between all four of those over the years. I did that for about three years. And in 1994, we were in the midst of constructing Archives II, the "Glass Palace" as I call it. I saw an opportunity where we were doing different things because this was a unique circumstance with this move. I had a wonderful opportunity to work in the detail in the library to help manage the move, essentially to see the Mayflower company contractor movers to make sure the books were being loaded up properly in the right order before being sent. I did that, and then I was able to transfer to the library in 1994. That was a great moment for me, and I enjoyed that. And as a result, I started working between Archives I and Archives II, which was fun. I did that for about four years. In 1998, because my career has never been clear or planned or defined, I started working in another detail while I was in the library, working in the public programs office. I started hosting author lecture programs and genealogy workshops. I did that from 1998 until 2005. From 2005 to the present I have been Special Assistant to the Archivist: first Allen Weinstein, and then for Acting Archivist Adrienne Thomas, and now for David Ferriero, ten years on, so.

MS. BRENNER: How did your education influence your decision to begin work at NARA?

MR. ANTHONY: I knew that in college that history interested me because it was the stories that a few of the professors that I had were telling me. Let me clarify that: there was a Medieval History professor named Frederick Behrends at the University of North Carolina, who could just sit there without referring to notes, and talking like a televangelist, it was the gospel of medieval history, the fief, the vassals, Ostrogoths and I was transfixed. It was fascinating. And then, I took

two courses from a professor named Alan Downs, who taught a course on American Military History. One was from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, and the other one was from the Civil War to the present. And again, he would tell facts and such about this battle and that, but then he would get into the stories about a sniper hitting a famous general from 800 yards, or this, and it was just intriguing. I thought there was more of a history than what I remembered from my high school days which to me seemed rather boring, plotting, and pedantic. So, I knew that somehow, history, the storytelling, sharing information, was there. I didn't know exactly how but I just knew it was there.

MS. BRENNER: When you first arrived here, what were your original impressions of NARA?

MR. ANTHONY: Intimidating. Professional. Serious. I felt like I was out of my league. I felt very young. I also had the sense of looking at the building while it was a beautiful building. There were some other parts—inside the lighting was somewhat dim. And it was very easy to get that impression: what a drab place. And that wasn't helped or that drab sense was confirmed in the early 1990's by some of my colleagues, who I will not name, who really hadn't upgraded their wardrobe. And they seemed to be wearing their clothes that they still had from the '70s. And so, oh geez, I said what the hell have I gotten myself into? There were a lot of very nice and helpful people here, but there was also this sense that this place was a little shopworn, a little stale, that kind of thing.

MS. BRENNER: Did you have any mentors early on?

MR. ANTHONY: Oh ya, oh ya. My career has been moved and enhanced because of mentors: Ken Hager, who at that time, oh boy: "I'm dating myself!" But back then in the research rooms, not only did you have technicians, you actually had archivists of a professional grade who served as daytime and nighttime supervisor. Because, another thing you should add here, the research room, then, used to be open Monday through Friday until 10pm. Or was it 9pm? That shows you how old I am. It was late. It was 9pm because the museum was open even later until 10pm. There were just these long hours, so with research rooms being open from 8:45am to 9pm, you had a lot of time to cover—archivists, Ken Hager was the afternoon and evening supervisor. He taught me a lot about research: how to do research, how State Department records were set up, how to use the Congressional Serial Sets—the nuts and bolts of what was important.

Another mentor was the daytime supervisor Connie Potter. She was a genealogist by trade but Connie was kind-hearted, and she showed me the lessons of how to interact with people, how to get along, and how to figure things out around here. I looked at both of their examples. They were very different people, doing the same job with some overlap, and I saw how they both got

along together and I thought I could learn something from these guys. So, those two helped early on.

In the library there was my colleague Jeff Hartley who at the time was a senior reference librarian—he became the Chief Librarian, and was a good personal friend. But I also liked his cool, calm demeanor when it came to deadlines of research. People would come in and could say: I need this. And they could come into the research rooms or the library in a variety of ways. They could say: "oh, Jeff, I need this." Or they could say: "I need this tomorrow." He was always confident in his ability. He wouldn't let them see him sweat. And I liked his command of knowing where to look. If he didn't know the answer, he knew how to find it. And so that was kind of a buildup from what I learned earlier.

After that, I transferred from the library into the public programs office. I felt like I was learning a lot on my own. So, as far as my mentors for that, I didn't have anyone that, shall we say, guided me, but Edith James, who is the division director who brought me on board, the unit was called NWE, and she was basically a good boss who said: "look, be creative, I'm going to rein you in because you're young and a little impetuous, but go." In a way, having that hands-off management style was very, for a buck like me, to go where I wanted to and did, but on occasion she would correct me and get me back in line. And it was Allen Weinstein—he was the ninth Archivist, came aboard in February of 2005. I had known him by doing the lecture programs. Behind me are all those books by him, about six of them, and involved him.

Wow that was time. February 2005. I think it was February 15, 2005. He came on board as Archivist, and it was that spring he wrote me a very nice letter because, again, in my previous job in the author lecture program I had met him. And when he came on board, I remember him and his secretary both said: "we don't know anyone here at the Archives except you, personally. We know these people professionally, but we know you personally. It's a great comfort to know you." Then that spring he wrote me a very nice letter, saying: "I want you to work for me. You have a choice, but I'd like you to work for me." And he was the kind of, I would say, father figure where I didn't know the first thing about being a special assistant. We were figuring it out as we were going along. And there was another time when David Brown, who was on board as well in the office as a special assistant—I found out Weinstein, we figured things out: what were my strengths, what were his strengths, and we tried to figure out, okay, what could I learn and grow and improve to help support him. What were things that I could do to enhance what I already knew to be a better special assistant, but he had a very long slow fuse, and he barely lost his temper, and I think that made a big difference with me because I could screw up plenty of times and still get away with it and learn from my mistakes.

MS. BRENNER: What were your strengths and his needs?

MR. ANTHONY: His needs were—he was very much aware of, I would call him a historian activist. Not only was he passionate about history, but he also wanted to help make a difference, and so it was one thing to be interested in history to be kind of a passive observer witness. But Weinstein was the kind of guy where he would bring, because of his previous job, he was very well aware of the international scene, and he would bring people here to visit the Archives—former leaders of, say, Czechoslovakia and Poland, former leaders, former movers and shakers involved in, you know, nationally and internationally, and so as a result I realized I always felt that I was good at entertaining. That's been told by many a mentor that we've listed. And I realized that I had a bit of a confidence and comfort in dealing with ceremonial events, so whether it was my experience in doing public programs, literally having a stage, speaking, planning things. How will things appear to the audience, how will things move, you know, how will things appear and look professional and skilled. Here at the National Archives, I've learned always early on, and ever since: we have to do things on a shoestring budget, so there is a bit of a feat of leger de main to make something look quite polished when we're doing it with very little in the way of material, manpower, money. And so, I found that we had this beautiful building, we had these great documents, but we had these people who work here who know stuff, and some of them were rather passionate and willing to share, and I figured there's got to be a combo, and I saw all that, and I found that was one of my strengths was pulling this all together. With a shoestring budget, or with no budget at all, how do we make this place great, and how do we make it inviting to people whether you're head of state or a school kid or won an award, and get them in here and then see the Archives through their eyes. Show them the records, allow them to shake hands with the Archivist, and then they go, and so, I think one of my skills was event planning, protocol, public programs, and someone once called me a uniter. That was an interesting thing: bringing groups together and bringing people together and different people. It's something that I like doing.

MS. BRENNER: Did Allen Weinstein create your position for you, or was there already a special assistant to the Archivist?

MR. ANTHONY: There was already one on board named David Brown. The special assistants, as I learned early on, were new. They had been around for a long—previous Archivist years before, and for those of you who can't see, I'm gesturing here back in time because I'm that kind of person—way back then with my left hand, but I found that those with specialist titles knew, and it was viewed by some people in the Archives with suspicion because they were going: "who the hell are these people?" Because here's how Allen Weinstein brought me on the staff, and the staff was very small at first. It was: The Archivist, it was Donna Gold, his secretary who he brought over from his previous job who was his executive assistant. There was David Brown, who was very familiar with records management and archival processes and procedures, and

there was me. And it kind of quickly came on that I would work the ceremonial things, public programs, and David would work with substantive things like records management and other issues. But David Brown liked to say that my job was a one off, and at first, I was insulted by that, but I thought: "wait a minute, it's not how you drive; it's how you arrive. I'm here; I have the title of special assistant. I'm doing a job I like. I can make a difference. So, what, how it was created, I'm here. I'm a member of this team. I'm a contributing member. Let's go for it!" So yes, I have a feeling that Weinstein said: "Sam, let's do it. Let's make him special."

MS. BRENNER: Well, you mentioned a few questions ago that the hours of the researched room and the exhibits changed. Why has it changed, and how has that changed influenced the—

MR. ANTHONY: [interposing] Budget.

MS. BRENNER: Oh, okay. And how has that affected the goings on here?

MR. ANTHONY: Sure. The early 1990's saw the economy change, and this was right as Bush was leaving office and Clinton was coming in. And the economy was kind of on the [insert spitting noise]. The late '90s saw a great improvement, and we can actually see that through the Archives' budget. But I would wager, and you all can check the records but the budget of the National Archives in 1987 was 117 million dollars, which is nothing, but it grew over time, but still I had heard that there were RIFs, reduction in forces, or other problems in the early 1980s, so I was aware that the Archives was always a small budgeted agency. But I find it interesting, whereas a GS-4 technician when I was working in the research room with the researchers and up until 9:00 at night.

MS. BRENNER: Can you clarify: what does GS-4 mean again?

MR. ANTHONY: There was a pay scale, a General Services pay scale, scaling from Level 1 to Level 15. Within each level are ten steps, and that's a way that you can get promotions, your time-in-grade, you can get promotions for your years in service for your particular job. So, I was, shall I say, getting paid very little. And for the record, in 1991 and 1992, the paycheck for a GS-4 after taxes for me came to be $495 in Washington, DC, which was the exact amount for my rent. So, you know, one paycheck went to rent. The other went for everything else. So, I found it interesting that the research rooms were open for that late and I remembered that the technicians who were more senior to me were in charge of getting us to sign up for overtime. And they were begging us, so I remember how, back when we had paper, a technician would come up to me and look at the schedule and say: "fill in a day or two here," and I'd put in one and go: "Come on Sam, you can do more." I want to go out; I want to have a life. But so, in essence, I worked from 8:45AM to 9PM at night, with breaks in between, but the overtime helped, and that's the reason I did it. But I know that the research rooms were reduced because

archivists at the time like Ken Hager were noticing our budget officers saying: Why do we need to keep it open? It costs us money. We have to pay technicians, staff, the whole thing—we're facing a budget crunch overall in government, and they realized that it was costing more to stay open to fewer researchers at 8:00 at night or 9:00 at night. When they changed it, it used to be open only three days a week. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays we would be open until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. But I remember in 2006 we had a rescission to our budget. And eight million dollars was taken out of our budget. In fact, we had to close on time, even on Saturdays, so research was only open 9:00 to 5:00. And it was a dramatic change. It shows you how just a few million dollars can adversely affect. We had research rooms. How they are now—I can't recall.

MS. BRENNER: Going back to your overall time here, what would you say are the successes that you have achieved?

MR. ANTHONY: That I didn't get fired. That's a big success. I think there are about seven times that I could have been fired over the past twenty-four years, with cause. Definitely with cause. Falling asleep on the job—

MS. BRENNER: Can we dwell on that for a second? What were the ways that you almost got fired?

MR. ANTHONY: No one ever came up to me and said: "You're this close!" Nothing like that. I remember once I was really tired, and I was working as a technician in the research room, up in the microfilm research room. And in the microfilm research room there was this thing called a cage. It was kind of a stack area in the back which had access for the researchers to look at microfilm and it was a small location area where only we could go. And I would bring a pillow, so I would take a nap. And once I overslept. And I remember looking and there was Dee Cartwright. She was a lead technician, and she was just kind of standing there. And I just thought: I'm gone. I'm toast. There were other times…

MS. BRENNER: That's really priceless, but back to the successes. Thank you.

MR. ANTHONY: For me, I would say, going to the library was a success because I was able to go from working in the research room to working in the library. I saw the value of the primary sources and using secondary sources, using books to help complement and supplement your research. And from that, I then said: "I'm going to be a librarian." I got my Master's in Library Science, but that to me was a success. I tried something new and made something to work from it.

But the one I'm most proud of is working with the author lecture program. In my office we have two book cases which have books from some of the couple hundred lectures and book signings

we have done in my ten years from 1998 to 2005. Each one tells a story, and, you know what, I can look at one and be like: "That was a packed house that day. That one, C-Span came to it. That one only twelve people showed up, but boy they enjoyed themselves. That one there was a thunderstorm, and the turnout was horrible, but those who turned up came in soaking wet, and the author, just, they had a wonderful time." It was very impromptu. To me, these were the successes because these were a way of bringing history to life. It tied in my skills, Rebecca, that I have, the early ideas, my interest in the ceremonial, of the performance idea, educating and entertaining—started to come together. So, I view those as big successes. But for me, now, over the past ten years, every day I can walk away from the job or the Archivist, whoever he or she is, can say: Sam, thanks, that helped. To me, it's just, okay, writing the speech, or getting an answer, or getting something. If I can help the head of the agency do these jobs, then I'm doing mine. That, to me, is a success, so I've learned to check my ego at the door because here, my ego means nothing. There are people more important than me here, but to be able to help them, and to see it.

MS. BRENNER: What—you may have answered this a little bit already, but—

MR. ANTHONY: [interposing] Yes, I did.

MS. BRENNER: What aspects of your current position do you most enjoy?

MR. ANTHONY: I enjoy being able to thrive in chaos, being able to channel all of my experiences from the past twenty-four years, and be prepared to answer anything. Just before we started, the Archivist said: "Find me an example of the earliest records of the U.S. Secret Service, for the event that we are going to do tonight." And I'm just thinking, you know, I remembered working with an archivist where he took me to a stack and showed me some records of the Treasury Department from the Civil War. There was this ledger of Pinkerton's agents, who became Secret Service. This was their payroll. So, I'm just thinking, you know, I remember this from the past, I remember the archivist, I remember the staff, and I can apply it. So, I guess the greatest thrill for me is being able to apply everything, whether it's professional or hobbies, what have you, to this job, and make it work, because I feel like I'm flying without a net. I don't think there was a formal training for this job. I don't think there is a formal training for this job.

MS. BRENNER: That's why I skipped that question.

MR. ANTHONY: Okay. Well, now you bring it up.

MS. BRENNER: No, continue. I was just joking.

MR. ANTHONY: I would like to create formal training. I think a manual could be created for a special assistant. I think it could be done.

MS. BRENNER: Out of curiosity, what are those Pinkerton records?

MR. ANTHONY: Sure. The Pinkerton records were, I think, from the Treasury, from the Department of the Treasury, and it was from the Civil War. I can't remember exactly what year. But what I remembered was in a stack area, mid-level, on the west side of this building. Rick Peuser, Richard Peuser, who now works up at College Park, great guy, very helpful, and I'll put him down as kind of a one-off mentor. Rick Peuser had an enthusiasm about his job, and it affected me, kind of like Connie Potter and Ken Hager, they all were passionate about their job, but Rick had this outgoing style that appealed to me, that I could relate to, and we were also close in age, so I felt like we had more in common. But Rick showed me this record. It was a grey Hollinger box, and he opened it up, and it was this listing of names of people from the Pinkerton Agency, which was a private company doing security and what have you, and it was their payroll for that particular month, and they were getting paid for working for the Federal government. And, as I've learned over the years, that eventually became what we now know as the Secret Service. For some people it might not be anything but right now it means the world to my boss, so I have to find a way to find it.

MS. BRENNER: Can you describe a typical day in your unit?

MR. ANTHONY: No, but I will try. My typical day does not begin when I get here. It begins before. I'm holding up my iPhone, just so we can see what the future holds—so outdated. But before, it was a Blackberry. But I keep this on me all the time because I never know if a call might come. An email might come through from the Archivist, or Deputy Archivist, or chief of staff, and special assistant, or anyone, saying: "Sam, I need some help, or answers." I've found that those calls can come any time, any day. So, it starts when I wake up and I look and see what's waiting for me, and I come into work. There is a schedule, and usually my day will go according to the Archivist's schedule, kind of balance it off of that: what is he doing today, and how can I support him. Or, how can I keep out of the way. From that, then, I determine how I'm going to go about my day, how I'm going to prioritize—and all the various parts that I'm doing on my own, things I'm doing for the Archivist directly, and I plan. You can have a rule book, but you need to know how to throw that rule book away. And an example of that is when the Archivist comes around the corner and says: "I need something, or can you get, or Sam, help me with whatever." I know I'm going to pay complete attention, and I'm going to do what I can and see if I can get that as fast as I can. So, my days are unpredictable, and I love it that way. I do find that there are times when I can catch up on other things. But like laundry, there is always some

more to do, and I've learned not to stress about that. If you're not careful, you'll start working 12 to 14-hour days, and there will always be something else. You just kind of have to let go.

MS. NIEKRASZ: I'm curious about—so, you've worked for three Archivists of the United States.

MR. ANTHONY: Yes, I have.

MS. NIEKRASZ: So, how does that go—the transition from one Archivist to another? I know one was acting.

MR. ANTHONY: You know, it's been, I would call it peaceful and professional. When Weinstein, Professor Weinstein, left, Adrienne Thomas was his Deputy Archivist, so it was pretty matter of fact that she would just kind of take over for a bit. There is always, I think, anxiety, amongst the immediate staff, and then it trickles, so you see it through the senior staff, the various senior level people executives, like office heads, and we're all kind of wondering: "what does it mean to them?" I think it's very easy to fall into the trap of perceiving that people are trying to jock you from a position, when really, I think people just don't know what to expect, and so, I found that when Weinstein left, it was somewhat easy because Thomas said: "I want you to stay on board."

And during Weinstein's time we had increased our staff and we had an executive assistant, and she had an assistant to help her. David Brown and I were special assistants to begin with, and then we had a third special assistant: Jackie Budell. We had people working on detail with us. We had a woman named Sandy Collins who worked with us as a special assistant, and Michael Hussey was on detail, Rick Blondo and some others, so our office was growing, and so Deb Wall came aboard, and the senior special assistant—so our office was getting somewhat large, but when Weinstein left, we shrunk down to Adrienne Thomas, her personal secretary, Mary, and me. Everyone else was sent off to different various jobs.

MS. BRENNER: What are some challenges and issues that you have experienced here at NARA?

MR. ANTHONY: I found that a lot of staff feel, and rightly so, that they're overwhelmed, that they're undermanned. If you look at it from the amount of records we have, that's obvious. I mean, we have barely a brigade worth of people—3,000 people around our agency. We're dealing with 12,000,000,000 textual records we estimate, millions of photographs, motion pictures, electronic records are going faster on the geometric scale. So, as far as knowing everything that is there, we make do more with less.

I found that the budget is also big, that our budget grew over time in the late 1990's and early 2000's, and now it is shrinking. And we're having to really make our shots count, and one way that's manifesting itself is I don't think we're able to hire more people or promote people as much as I think they should be promoted. So, I think some of the challenges we face are—we have so many people coming into the research area from the Archives, so many people coming in from museums, so many people wanting. And we have so few staff having to deal with the records and the research and the museum goers and what have you. It could wear on you. It could be a source of stress.

I think a challenge is also technology. I wish there was a way to like Star Trek or something—that we could find a way to immediately digitally scan stuff, not only scan it, but organize the records so they can be retrieved. You know, it is one thing to say scan everything but as I've learned from library science you've got to find a way to index it, so you can receive the data quickly. I just wish we could somehow jump a hundred years into the future, get pieces of technology, bring it back, and then apply it because then I think people's jobs might be easier.

So, the challenges, I think, are we're outnumbered, outgunned so to speak. And we don't have enough money. I don't think Congress and the President are allocating enough money to this agency so we can really do the job that they want us to do. I think we're getting by—I think we're getting by a lot on the backs of hard-working people like Rick Peuser and others who, again, have a passion for this agency—Trevor Plante, any reference archivist, project archivist, and the number of technicians, who are just going above and beyond, who make my job easier.

MS. BRENNER: How has the relationship between NARA and other Federal agencies been?

MR. ANTHONY: That's a great question. I think that it's improving. I think that there has been a lack of understanding of what we do in other government agencies. I've heard enough stories of archivists or records managers from the National Archives who would go out and meet with government agencies and they might be like "Oh really? You all are, you know, we deal with y'all? They [records] go to y'all eventually…" It's like holy cow, did you not know? So, I've kind of viewed, early on, Rebecca, that my goal in life has been in this agency to help make people more aware of what we do. There have been enough times in my job over the years, whether it was family and friends innocently saying: "oh, you work at the Library of Congress?" because the Library of Congress or Smithsonian is more familiar to people than the National Archives. When you think of tourists, people are like: Smithsonian, Air & Space Museum, or you know, Library of Congress, but now the National Archives is not quite there yet. And so, I had enough people, friends and family, say: "oh, you work at the Library of Congress." "No, I don't, asshole." Or, I even had a publisher, when I was in the author lecture program, when I was trying to arrange for an author to come speak here, I had an email—I wish I could find it again. But the

publisher said: “could you tell me the command structure of how the National Archives fits in with the Library of Congress?” I was like: “F you, it does not. We are an independent agency. No, if your author is going to speak at the Library of Congress, they can also come speak at the National Archives. So, go to hell.”

You know, so, enough of that happened. Enough stories from colleagues saying that people from NASA or the Department of Energy or whoever were not sure about our role with them. I thought, let’s see what I can do. And whether it’s giving tours, whether it’s telling stories, or whether it’s just showing off this agency, to kind of reinforce it to people: “we are here, here’s what we have, here’s what we do, remember.” So, I think that things are getting better.

However, I just had a thing last night where I went to Allen Weinstein—had passed away, the ninth Archivist, he passed away on June 19, and his widow invited me over to their house last night, and there were about thirty or forty other people there, and I recognized some faces, and there was a colleague, a friend named Tim Naftali, who used to be head of the Nixon Presidential Library. He has since left, and he is working at New York University, but he is somehow—he finds that he is up there in a university setting, and a lot of archivists and librarians are in that sector, maybe the university sector, or others, don’t like the National Archives. They think that we—he says that they think that we operate at a different standard, that we don’t really take into account them, or whatever. I was just kind of sitting there with my glass of wine thinking about my former boss, who you know, he was telling me this, and I thought: “wow, there must be more behind this. So, there must be a story back there.” So, I’ve got to figure it out and talk to Tim Naftali. What the heck does this mean that archivists don’t like or don’t trust the National Archives, or why? What’s the founding of that, or is that just an isolated thing that Tim is hearing, or is it more widespread, I don’t know.

MS. BRENNER: About a minute ago, you mentioned the tours that you do. Could you speak to that?

MR. ANTHONY: Yes. In this office my primary responsibility when it comes to tours is giving what I call VIP tours, or tours for special guests of the Archivist. He just gave me a request to talk to a gentleman who works for the United States Court of Appeals. Who is a special guest of the Archivist? Anyone he says, whether it’s a head of state, we actually have the Archivist from Tanzania coming here later in the month. I will figure out who that person is, what they want to see, what their expectations are, what resources we have available, and then tailor it toward to make it worth their while.

And again, we talked about earlier, my job and all, I feel like it's just a culmination of all my experiences. I really believe we are the sum of our experiences, and it's wise to apply all of it. When I played kickball in third grade, playing soccer, and little league, doing community theatre as an adult, playing piano throughout my life, all that kind of factors in somehow, and so, it's kind of like how can we put on a good show? I don't say that as far as being trite or anything, but how can I make that special guest feel welcome, how can we make it feel like their time has been well-spent, and how can they walk away again, understanding who we are, what we do, and what we have, and to me the biggest trick of all, when we give a tour, is whether it be for Prince Charles, or the President of Afghanistan, or former Vice President Dick Cheney. How do you make him walk away hungry for more? How do you make him say—how do you hopefully give a tour that makes him want to come back and learn more, say: "I want to do that again. Jeez that was great, they were nice." How do you walk away with a good feeling and that they want to come back? To me, that's how you build allies and build relationships. That's how you build stakeholders, or that's how you make people know who the heck the National Archives is.

MS. BRENNER: Could you also speak to your boot camp program, as well as any other programs that you may have initiated?

MR. ANTHONY: Boot camp, boot camp is a personal thing. It started when, back in my second-to-last surgery, in 2012 I had surgery for cancer. It was the fourth one at the time, and I realized that I was really tired. I was worn out, and I said, "you know, Sam, you're not getting younger. See what you can do to get in better shape." And an interesting course of events I started picking up a sport that my daughter had been doing in high school: crew, rowing. I found that was a great way to get healthy.

I also started taking some classes being offered here at the Archives. There had been a yoga class offered by some contractors in our gym, and they were also offering boot camps, and I found they were wonderful. They were wonderful, it was beating me up, was great. I was learning a lot, and they were great for me. But it was making me a better worker because I was getting fit, and my energy level…my whole mood was. And I was getting to meet people in the gym, who I might not normally see. And all of these—I always liked going to the gym, but they made me more conscientious and structured: go, go, go, go.

And then with our budget cuts at that time, which occurred in 2013, that contracting staff in the gym left. The contract ended. And I saw how popular the program was, but I feel like I learned some things. I'm an entertainer and an educator like I'd like to be, and can try this. Let me try this, and see if others can help me, and let's make this kind of a group thing. And so, we started calling them staff-driven boot camps. And, you know, it was fun. We averaged four, five, six, seven, eight people. We show up at a certain time and do it. So, who wants to try this next time,

and we do things with our backs and arms. It made me force myself to learn more about different forms of exercise, better ways of stretching, diet, mixing it all together. So, it's a great way to meet people, including you. Thanks for coming in.

MS. BRENNER: Absolutely!

MR. ANTHONY: Like I said, I'm feeling very sore today, so, as a result of all this.

MS. BRENNER: Yes, and just a comment that I might add, one of the things I loved about your boot camp was how you talked to us about lots of interesting things throughout it. It was like we got to listen to music and you are our personal radio. It was so much fun.

MR. ANTHONY: Thank you. That's nice of you to say, Rebecca, because I found that if I could exercise and talk at the same time, first of all it might improve—I know what kind of pace we should be going at, and there's one level of exercise that you're going that you can have a conversation, and then there's one where you're going passed that threshold of being able to breathe, and where you're not taking enough oxygen, where you're actually burning and forming your lactic acids actually, so I've found you have to gauge the people you're with, and if you start seeing them turn purple, you know, let's back it off—when you socialize, you can all learn.

MS. BRENNER: Over the course of your time at NARA, what changes have you witnessed in the agency?

MR. ANTHONY: Technology, I think, has been the biggest. I remember talking to Don Wilson, who was the Archivist when I came on board, and actually, I'm sorry, he became Archivist while I was here. Let me get my facts straight here. Don Wilson was Archivist back in 1987, and he stayed on until Bush 41 left. So, when I came on board, he was here. And then, when he left, Trudy Peterson became the Acting Archivist from '93 to '95, and then there was John Carlin.

But what I remember Don Wilson telling me was when he was Archivist for a while, there was one fax machine in this building, and it was in his office, and through my studies of library science and working here, I knew about MARC records—machine readable format, and computerized records were here, you know, staff, protect, take care of, preserve, but it seemed kind of new to everyone. It was unfamiliar. But now we're at a time where I remember being at Archives II, when it was opened up, and we were all getting these accounts, these computer accounts, and we were getting these email addresses, which were like 58,000 characters long, and it was all new. It was fascinating, so to see how our life has changed since the printed memo, or paper with a routing slip which you could check off and sign and move around, which you can see in our old records, to now having emails and telephones, but just the iPhone, and

just how I can access my calendar on my iPhone, I can read the emails, I can communicate with anyone pretty much anywhere with this, it's just a total change from what it used to be.

I remember answering machines were a big change back in the '70s and '80s. You didn't have to be by your rotary dial phone—and then you had your push button phone, but now you actually have this, so the technology with communicating is staving information, and being able to drag documents into your email and send out a whole bunch of stuff is big. But also, being able to digitally scan records, to me, digitization is huge, and it's changing the whole ball game. I think it's making some things complex and more complicated, but I think it's an opportunity, and we have to seize it, and there are some people in this agency who are resistant to change. Okay, that's fine. But there are others who aren't. Have them bring everyone around to it because digital records and computerized records are going to be part of our future.

MS. BRENNER: I am actually writing a research paper on this, and it seems like your timeline here has been roughly the timeline of what I call the technological transformation of the past twenty years.

MR. ANTHONY: I am glad that I am part of history. Thank you.

MS. BRENNER: You truly are, in my opinion.

MR. ANTHONY: I'm living history! Fossil and everything! Yes!

MS. BRENNER: Can you possibly condense the key turn points in the technological transformation?

MR. ANTHONY: Sure. I think that the personal computer was big. From the late '70s through the early '80s, to make a computer small and affordable that means instead of taking up a whole room at NASA you could have it on a person's desk, soon to have it on every government worker's desk. From that, you start looking at the applications of the computer: communications, storing information.

For a long time, computers were like fancy typewriters, but as a result, word processing. So, I think going from computers being small, the portable computer, the PC, to then having the smartphone, and Blackberry, being able to have your cell phone, your portable communications device, and how that's enhanced over time, so you can now store information on it. You can record like you are doing now; you can really make this a tool for your job. It would be curious to see, ten, twenty years from now, how this tool or something similar would be used by the staff, or used by the Archivist. Will you be able to do really high-level scanning with something like this? Will a technician be able to go into a stack area and say, here's a nineteenth century

record from the provost marshal, which we were just talking about, from the 1860's—can I used this to make a scan, which today we have to use a flatbed scanner, something the size of like a notebook, something the size of, you know, this briefcase, but could be something that is handheld. How will that change the nature of our jobs? Technology does change your job. It can change your job. The PC, the smart phone, and the digital scanner being affordable, heaven knows what it'll be like if 3D printing could be used. I mean, I'm not sure we have those at the Archives yet, but it would be curious to see if it could be.

MS. BRENNER: Any specific anecdotes on how any of these devices that you've mentioned have affected your work or the activities of the agency?

MR. ANTHONY: Digital scanning allows us to make copies of records and then we can use records, as I call it, as currency, as gifts. When we talk about these VIP's come in here, to be able to say: "thank you for coming to the National Archives, you know, I'm sorry we only have an hour here, but I'm going to give you something to walk away with"—and to do that, you have to say: "ah, this guest is a big fan of tennis; let's make a scan from a patent of a tennis racket in 1904." Small things, because I say it small in that it's kind of an offhand courteous gesture, but because it is easier to make now, that I had seen over the years that it's quicker for the staff to make it more high quality, and to make something more affordable, where it doesn't take as much time or money to me to digitize or not to say we'd go on a tour or to say, "Rebecca, you saw this record, you saw this record, here, I'm going to send you some more scans by email later," or I'll text them to you or something. To me digitizing the records and having a method to transport them either by smart phone or by computer, is a wonderful thing. So, it makes my job easier.

MS. BRENNER: And in the age of emails and text messages, can you speak to the future of the ERA, the Electronic Records Administration, is that what it's called?

MR. ANTHONY: The Electronic Records Archives.

MS. BRENNER: Archives, and how will it change the nature of research, specifically of things like government department records?

MR. ANTHONY: Sure. I think that government department agencies are creating more and more electronic records. We are going to work with them to get those records to us quicker, we're hopefully going to find a way to use technology and along with a human element, to make sure those records are organized and retrievable—that way it will be easier for people. A challenge I think we have to face is storing it all and making it safe, so that you can access it, but someone cannot come in and hack it or manipulate it, or change it. But to me the biggest challenge is going to be storage, as the data gets larger and larger, and then also retrievability—how can you

come up with the right algorithm, so if you type up Elvis Presley, you know, terabytes of information, petabytes of information, how can you make sure you get five records of one, instead of the five million hits, how can you make sure you get exactly which one in an intuitive way?

We are seeing on google and other databases, some are better than others, when you type in the search. You say, "okay, I was trying to limit the search. Okay, how can you make that part quicker, easier? How can maybe the computer start anticipating what you want and start saying, well, how about if we do this, but still giving you choice?" We don't want the machines to start rising up because that is every science fiction nightmare, but I really think that the idea of the ERA can help. And I think it's inevitable because science fiction writers have a great way of guessing the future and they can be quite accurate.

Think about Star Trek with the communicator device. We have our phone, but others like Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert Heinlein, and others—some of that stuff has already come true. And, you know, we don't have our own little air-cars yet, you know, flying cars, but you've got to be able to have computerized databases, databanks, whatever they're called. And you've got to be able to access the records because you can't transport twelve billion paper records with you. But there's got to be a way you can access them on the moon when you are five thousand feet up in an airplane, or whether you are in Arkansas, and the records are here in DC. There has got to be a way, through the computer, or whatever the future iteration is.

MS. BRENNER: You mentioned some resistance, and you mentioned a lot of benefits, but for you, what is the overall impact of the technological transformation at NARA?

MR. ANTHONY: It's helping. It's helping me. It's helping my job, and I think it's going to help the researcher eventually.

MS. BRENNER: Can you describe your involvements with other professional organizations, such as SAA, or OAH?

MR. ANTHONY: I don't, I'm not a member of any of them. They come here to the Archives because we have various leaders who meet with them—so I see them as I'm preparing the Archivist for a meeting. I know they have a benefit and a purpose.

MS. BRENNER: Emily, do you have any questions before we conclude?

MS. NIEKRASZ: I'm okay.

MS. BRENNER: Is there anything you would like to add to the interview such as anecdotes or words of wisdom?

MR. ANTHONY: Yes, I think that the strength of this agency, well, what I like to promote about it are the records and the people. It's the people, and I think that some of the hardest working people are the reference archivists, the staff who deal with the general public, with their research questions, who become familiar with the records. I wish we could find a way to increase them fivefold. They are great. I just think about the years here, and you know, look outside my window, and here I am with an office on the mezzanine level of what we used to call mahogany row, and I get to see Pennsylvania Avenue—I think: jeez, I'm sitting here, and you're actually asking me questions. I'm humbled by it.

MS. BRENNER: We are humbled by the opportunity to ask you questions.

MR. ANTHONY: You may be my boss one day, who knows, because I realized, you know, time is changing, and I was your age once. I am 46 years old, I could retire in eleven years—I could retire from the Federal government in eleven years, and by then, I will have had 35 years in government. Me, I don't feel old, well, I do, I physically feel old, but I still feel like a kid in a candy store. I feel like there's always something new to learn.

MS. BRENNER: Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory—isn't the National Archives kind of like it?

MR. ANTHONY: Okay, you know what? That movie scared me as a kid. The oompa loompas scared me. As a child, they scared me. And you know what else scared me? Sesame Street had these characters, where there were like these shaman priests, and they were very wise, and they would sit there. And first of all, the Count, I liked him with his bats, I thought they were creepy. I didn't like how he talked to them, but they would never talk back. But there were these, one characters, who sit there, and they just scared me because they have these big eyebrows, and they would sit there and puppets, and so the Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory movie scared me because I remember one kid fell into the chocolate, and he got really plump, and yeah, that scared me, so to heck with your Willy Wonka?

MS. BRENNER: Back to the kid in the candy shop?

MR. ANTHONY: I can deal with that—the kid in the candy store, unlike Willy Wonka. And I thought Willy Wonka was weird. This place, there's hope, it's given me a career. I've learned something new every day, and it's really through these mentors I was telling you about—it's really, I was talking about Rick Peuser, but Gary Morgan, who was an assistant branch chief in the textual research room, taught me how to weather the storm here, but Allen Weinstein, Adrienne Thomas, David Ferriero, Deb Wall, David Brown, they were all—I've really had a lot of

people who gave me a break, but then people like Rick Peuser and other archivists, who shared with me what they found: “hey Sam, I was in the stack area, I found this.” It totally helps me out because then I think about that author lecture program and the stuff that the authors have found in our holdings, or what they come across—I learn something every day, and I have no regrets. But I have made some great screw-ups in my time, I mean some fine ones, oh yeah.

MS. BRENNER: Do we want to return to those for entertainment value, and/or learning from them?

MR. ANTHONY: 1850s’s census for Day County Georgia, in the very northwestern corner, I remember in the research room I had a researcher named Charles Bibb, and Charles Bibb came up, and he started giggling. He showed me on the microfilm that the third-to-last page of the census for that county for 1850—there was a group of four women, and their occupation was “fucking!” For 1850, it’s a historic record, so we can put it in here, and as a young 22 or 23-year-old I was tickled pink, and I was like: “wow, how cool, a whole new world at the Archives here, gee whiz!” And so, I remembered that. So, whenever I would tell stories, about work, you know, I would always include that. And people went: “wow, that’s an interesting place where you work.” And then they’d get into a debate the word “fucking” was around back then? Well, it was an 1850 census, so you tell me.

And I once gave a tour to some people from the Department of Justice, and I showed them that, the fucking document, and of course they were all like: “wow!” And one of the women who were there at the Department of Justice afterward said: “thank you very much for the tour, and I wonder if you could show that to my husband one day.” And I realized that her husband’s name was Gene Weingarten, who was a humor columnist for the *Washington Post*, and I remember that my bosses were very unhappy. Because he was contacting them, saying: “I want to see the “fucking” document. I want to see other documents, so I can write a humor story about the holdings.” I just remember they were very unhappy with me. They thought that this was going to put the Archives in a bad light. I did save the article that he wrote for the *Washington Post* Magazine, and it includes some other interesting things. I just remember how my boss and my boss’s boss were just, and I think that was one of those moments where if they weren’t going to fire me, they were going to find a way to push me out or something, make my life hell. But ya, I remember that.

MS. BRENNER: Then there was the pillow in the cage.

MR. ANTHONY: The pillow in the cage. Yes, makes me sound like a zoo animal. I also remember, up the street now, which was the Old Post Office Pavilion, which Trump is trying to make into a hotel. But that used to be a large area where you could—the Post Office Pavilion had a lot of

restaurants that you could go to. And as a technician who didn't have a lot of money, very tired of eating his own bagged lunches, I knew that there was a place up there called Enrico's Pizza. In the early to mid-1990's, in the Post Office Pavilion, there was Enrico's Pizza, where for a mere pittance you could get a slice or two of big greasy cheese pizza with pepperoni, but if you bought one of their 24 ounce plastic cups, you can get a coke in that, but whenever you came back with it, they would fill it up for half price. So, what was a young guy to do? I'd go buy my two slices of pizza, get my 24 ounces of beer at lunch, right? I would come back, get another one, at half price, and back then it was seven bucks—I could get all this food and drink. Well, a few of us would come back at lunch, and in the research rooms, we had lunch either 11:30 to 12:30 or 12:30 to 1:30 or 1:30 to 2:30. Coming back from lunch we smelled maybe like a brewery and we thought maybe but then when the buzz wore off, you'd kind of be in the research rooms getting a little sleepy—we were a little rambunctious. So, there were probably moments then when I was almost, I was this close, but you learn to maintain your buzz.

MS. BRENNER: Well, thank you so much for your time.

MR. ANTHONY: Yes, make sure that gets put in the records. Thank you very much. You're very good at interviewing. It was a pleasure to do this.

[End Recording]

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

National Archives History Office
700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington DC 20408
Tel: (202) 357-5243
Email: archives.historian@nara.gov

**DEED OF GIFT TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

I, San Anthony, do hereby give to the National Archives History Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted on July 7, 2015.

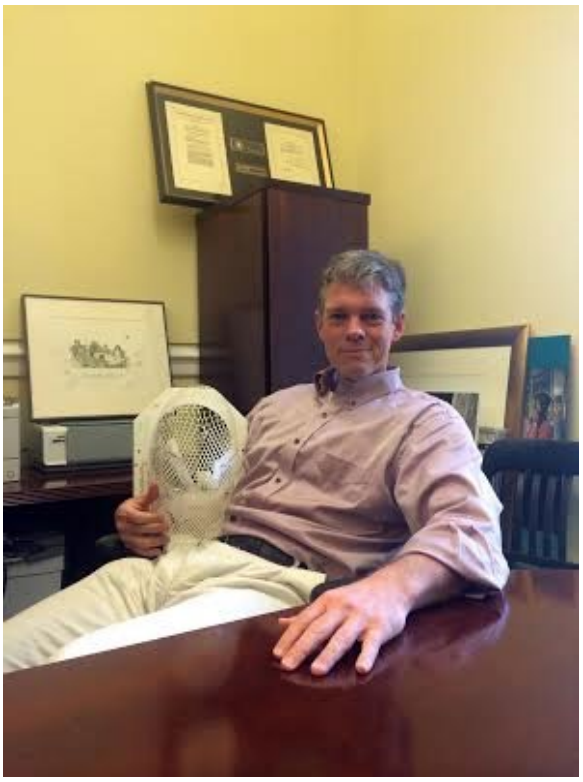
I authorize the National Archives History Office to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the historical objectives of their oral history program.

In making this gift I voluntarily convey ownership of the recording and transcripts to the public domain.

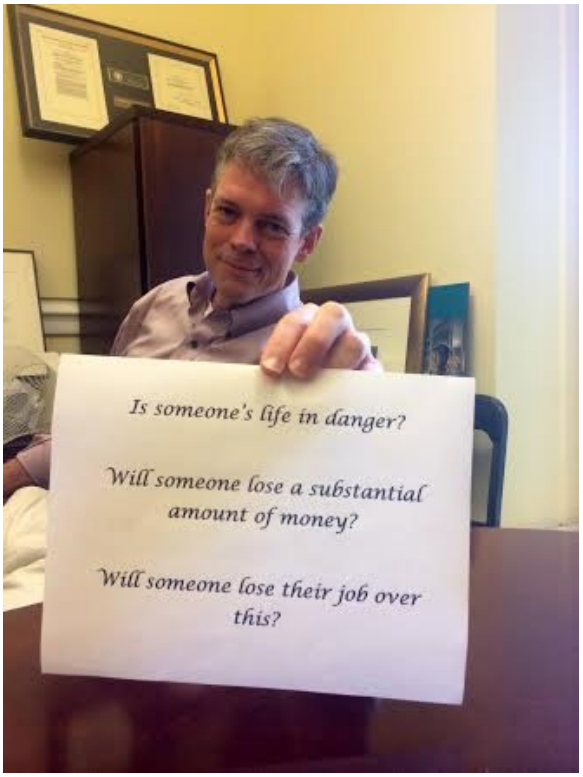
Rebecca Brenner and Emily Niekrasz (Interns)
Agent of Receiving Organization

Donor

July 7, 2015
Date



Sam poses with a mask that doctors once used to “blast radiation” into his mouth and throat, 2015.




Sam’s sign to live by, 2015.