Oral History Interview with Duncan Aldrich

Interview Conducted by Mary Larson June 29, 2009

Government Information Living Indexes Oral History Project

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Interview History

Interviewer: Mary Larson Transcriber: Natalie Nielson Editor: Tanya Finchum

The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The oral histories collected as a result of this project will preserve the voices and experiences of government information workers who have invested a good portion of their careers to providing and insuring access to government information.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on February 15, 2007.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Duncan Aldrich is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 29, 2009.

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About Duncan Aldrich...

Duncan Aldrich was born in Elmira, New York and went through grade school and junior high in Elmira. Then his family moved to Manchester, Massachusetts and then to Troy, Ohio where he graduated high school. After high school he pursued an undergraduate degree from Ohio University in History, graduating in 1974. He would then go on to earn two graduate degrees from the University of Oklahoma, a Master's in History in 1977 followed by a Master's in Library and Information Science in 1985.

In 1986 Aldrich began his library career as an international and state documents librarian at the University of Nevada-Reno. In 1990 he became head of the Government Publications Department at the University of Nevada –Reno and then in 1994 became the head of the combined Business & Government Information Center there. He is currently the Data Services Coordinator for the University of Nevada-Reno libraries.

Aldrich has been active within the government information community and within the American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) having served as chair of GODORT in 1994. He has also chaired GODORT's Legislation Committee, International Documents Task Force, and Publications Committee. He participated in the DuPont Circle meetings helping to facilitate the Chicago Conference on the Future of Government Information. In 1996 he authored the "Federal Depository Library Manual" and in 1996/97 he worked as an expert consultant for the Government Printing Office (GPO) and prepared the first draft of "Managing the GPO Access Collection," a discussion document outlining the electronic FDLP (Federal Depository Library Program).

Aldrich was appointed to the Depository Library Council twice, serving 1997-2003 and 2003-2006. He chaired the 1999/2000 session. He has also published several articles on the use of electronic government information products in libraries.

Aldrich lives in Sparks, Nevada with his wife, Mary.

Government Information Living Indexes

Oral History Project

Duncan Aldrich

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Mary Larson June 29, 2009 Reno, Nevada

Larson Okay, today is June 25, 2009. My name is Mary Larson. I'm here at the

University of Nevada-Reno with Duncan Aldrich and we're going to be talking about his career with government documents and information management. Now just to start out, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up, a little bit about your family and

your hometown?

Aldrich Okay. I was raised in Elmira, New York, where I was born. Spent my

school years in Elmira, however our summers were spent at my grandmother's in Erie, Pennsylvania. Went through grade school and junior high in Elmira. Moved to Manchester, by the sea, Massachusetts to finish most of high school and then moved to the Dayton Ohio area, Troy, Ohio where I actually graduated high school and then attended

Ohio University.

Larson Okay. Do you remember the first library you visited as a child?

Aldrich Yes, I remember the library, and probably what I remember most about

it was they had a place where children weren't allowed, the adult book area. And that has a really different connotation than it does today. I don't remember what the name of it was, as I'm trying to recall the look for the first time in probably forty-five years or so. It probably was a

Carnegie library.

Larson Were there any librarians from the old days that stood out when you

were a child, in your memory?

Aldrich Not really. No.

Larson Now if somebody had told you back in school that you were going to end

up working as a librarian, what would you have thought?

I had no idea what I wanted to do when I was in school so I would have been surprised by anything that I found out about. So I would have been surprised. Not something I ever thought of doing until I was in college.

Larson

Now you've got a bachelor's and a master's degree in history. How did you get from history to government docs?

Aldrich

History to government docs? Actually it's feeding myself and my wife. In the summers when I was in graduate school, in the history program, I worked in the library. In one year I was running a crew—we were moving from one building to another and a job opened up and my boss at the time said, "Apply for it. I can't imagine you won't get it." So I did and then after one semester decided to—I was, at that time, enrolled as a PhD candidate in the history program and I just switched over to the library science masters.

Larson

Okay. And that would be how you decided on librarianship?

Aldrich

Yes. I really enjoyed the work in the library and the people who worked there. And found that I really enjoyed doing things and making things happen more than researching and writing which is what you spend your whole time doing as a history PhD candidate.

Larson

One of the things that I've noticed as both a researcher and someone working in libraries is that you understand what patrons need more once you've been on the research side yourself. Do you find that that was helpful for you?

Aldrich

Yes, I'd say that's a fair statement, a good comment. I always enjoyed the library when I was doing research there. Other than photocopying hundreds of journal articles to read at home.

Larson

That was after photocopiers were widely available.

Aldrich

That's true.

Larson

Now what did you know about the profession when you made the decision to go into librarianship? Sounds like you'd already been working in the field for a little bit.

Aldrich

I have a little bit of trouble answering that. What did I know about the profession? I knew that it required the master's degree. That you could get a PhD in library science but with a master's you could get a job in academic libraries and that's basically what I was targeting at the time. That's an interesting question. Basically my approach is very pragmatic and as I say at work all the time, "I don't have a philosophy on whether

you should do it this way or that way, let's just make it work." It's a very day to day approach.

Larson

Now when you first started working in the library, the first job you had there, was that in government docs? Or was government documents something you got into a little later on.

Aldrich

When I first worked in the library as a library staff person, I ran the library stacks or managed the book collection and various other things to do with the building. Moved from there to the circulation department and then from there to interlibrary loan. I didn't actually work in a government documents department until I got my first professional position. And a good part of the reason I got the documents position at the University of Nevada is my advisor at Oklahoma was a guy named Chuck McClure and Chuck McClure was one of four or five top people in government documents at that time. He edited one of the main government information journals. So the job opened in Reno. I applied for it, he was one of my references and here I am, still, twenty-three or twenty-four years later.

Larson

So he would have had a big influence on you in that regard.

Aldrich

Yes, I think so. I wanted a public service job, and it was a public service job.

Larson

What did your family and friends think about the choice of going into librarianship?

Aldrich

I think they thought it was fine. My mom and dad both went to college and my dad's mom and dad both went to college so education is appreciated and working as a faculty person, and on a campus, is probably a pretty good thing.

Larson

Now once you got into government information, how well do you think your library school background prepared you for getting into that? Were there unanticipated challenges?

Aldrich

Oh boy, now you're asking the good questions. I'd say most of what I learned in graduate school was more theoretical than when you hit the work place. You have people who report to you who really do need to be dealt with in various ways. So it's a lot more nuts and bolts. They couldn't possibly train you on all this in school. So all they can do is hit the high points. I'd say over the years, most of what I've done, I probably could have done without going to get my MLIS. Okay, that was a little cynical.

Larson No, no, as you said, it's the pragmatic things, the everyday things. It's

hard to teach supervision, and that's hard.

Aldrich You either learn it, or you don't. And if you don't, you get out.

Larson Now do you want to talk a little bit about your work experiences at the

different locations before you got into government documents and then

after you got to UN-R?

Aldrich Okay. Again, back in Oklahoma I started managing the stacks. One

thing that I remember from that is that the crew I ran, which is about twenty student assistants, was also responsibility for sorting out all the materials, pre-sorting the materials, before we took them up to the stacks to shelve. The sorting area was right behind the circulation desk where students sat and did homework while they were waiting for people to help. When I moved from stack management to circulation, the first thing I did was turn that around so that the circ students, in their spare time, were sorting. That's probably the first unpopular decision that I

made as a manager. Well for the circ students.

Larson Right (laughter). But it was efficient.

Aldrich Yes and it worked.

Larson Okay. So after that, why don't you talk a little bit about your first job in

Gov Docs here at UN-R?

Aldrich I'm going to back up just a moment because you triggered a memory.

My last position at Oklahoma was running the interlibrary loan department. At that time, we got what was the second microcomputer in the building. It was hooked up through a phone modem with OCLC, which is the big library consortium that operates out of Dublin, Ohio, and we used it to request books from other libraries and to fill requests from other libraries for our materials. It was really interesting to, sort of,

cut your teeth on this.

Larson What year would that have been?

Aldrich That would have been about 1983.

Larson Do you remember what kind of computer it was?

Aldrich It was an IBM, IBM dual floppy drive. The A drive and the B drive and

you put the software in the A drive and your data disk in the B drive. Prior to that, when I was still in the history program, I learned the SASS Data Analysis software as a research assistant for a faculty member who was doing quantitative analysis of voting behavior in Wisconsin. So I had to learn SASS—teach myself SASS. I used to go into the computer room and fill in all these IBM cards. And when I was doing that, a guy on the big chunky chunker printer that printed out the reams of green stripe paper, was looking at his printout, circling stuff, crossing stuff out, typing some cards over, sending it back, and it came out again with corrections. And I said, "what's that?" And he said, "It's a word processor." And it was at that time I think I, kind of, fell in love with the idea of words not being stuck on paper. That digital information had to be the direction we were going. So I learned how to do that software.

Larson

So your tech roots go deep?

Aldrich

Yup.

Larson

Now when you got to UN-R, you talked a little bit about how you got the position or when you got the position. What was the job like? What did you do when you first got here?

Aldrich

When I first got here, I was the international documents librarian and state of Nevada and a small collection of foreign documents. International documents meant international agencies, IGO's like the United Nations, International Labor Office, just a variety of international agencies. State of Nevada has a depository program. I had one staff member who did the clerical work on all the collections and she was wonderful, made my life easy because she was so good. And then did general reference on the whole collection. Shifted materials, ordered materials, and what not. Provided a public service and at the university here the documents unit is basically a stack management. We manage the collection and we provide public service on it. The cataloging and other technical service jobs were done in a different unit.

Larson

So what was on your day to day, your average day?

Aldrich

The average day was...

Larson

Or was there an average day.

Aldrich

A lot of public service, collection development which means combing through catalogs and looking for things that we'd probably want in the collection, doing other sorts of committee work for the libraries and campus. Not too long after I was there we began using CD-Rom databases, bibliographic databases in order to help with public service. We could sit down and type in keywords and find the thirty or fifty documents that had something to do with the topic. That greatly simplified, of course, going through countless what are called *Monthly*

Catalogs of government publications. So it was pretty quickly we began to move in the electronic direction.

Larson Okay and you got here around?

Aldrich I got here in 1986. It was about three years later that the head of the department left. And eventually I became the head of the department.

Larson Now you've mentioned a couple of times about public service. Do you have a favorite public service story?

The second of th

Aldrich Public service story...

Larson I think every librarian has one of those odd public service stories. You

know, the strangest request.

Aldrich Well, I guess it'd have to be the person who came in and I was helping

look through the *Nevada Revised Statutes* for information on diplomatic immunity. And it ends up, he was the ambassador from Venice. So it was an interesting discussion. Nevada does not have any stipulations regarding diplomatic immunity and he was unwilling to really listen to

that.

Larson And especially because I don't think we have diplomatic ties with

Venice. No ambassadorial contacts.

Aldrich That's right.

Larson Well the first library that you worked in would have been Getchell.

Aldrich Right.

Larson Here on campus. Do you want to describe a little bit about what the

work area was like? How it was laid out? Did it have that library smell?

Aldrich Well the Getchell library was a catenation of two buildings and the

government publications department was almost an entire floor of the old building. We had close to a million paper government documents and probably twice as many in microfiche and some microfilm. The interesting thing when we got here is we had one of the very few, again, microcomputers in the building. We had a front office where we had a phone modem hook up and all the librarians would do online searching. Back in those days, you didn't have things like—well Google's the obvious thing. But even the library databases we deal with today like EBSCO and ProQuest. Back then you had to come and sit down with a

librarian and we charge you a lot of money and we'd put together

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searches and key them in. We had it up there because the patent office had a search engine and we're a patent deposit library. So we would sit down, very primitive searching compared to what we do now. But we could get lists of patents that people should consult in similar technologies to what they were looking at. We had really ample office spaces, a pretty nice place to work but a very old building.

Larson Do you know what year that part of the building was built?

Aldrich Oh, it was probably the late 1960's or mid 1960's.

Larson Yeah, it has that look to it.

Aldrich

Aldrich

It had a wonderful cork floor that over the years had been mistreated and people had tried waxing it and stripping the wax. So it was probably

really nice when it opened.

When you first started in government documents, what were some of the Larson

major issues that were facing the profession at that point?

You know, it's just the old GODORT thing, which is Government Documents Round Table of the American Library Association, as free access to government information. Your tax dollars pay for the

production of the information, so you shouldn't need to pay again to have access to the information, which is sort of the underpinnings of the depository library program and the Getchell or UN-R Libraries are a federal depository so just pressing agencies that were selling information. Sort of ongoing struggles with an agency. National Technical Information Service (NTIS) which makes hundreds of thousands of federal government technical reports available at a cost, which they need to do because their legislation makes them self-

sustaining but it was still kind of an issue.

Larson And there were probably issues of public domain as well.

Aldrich Yeah issues of public domain in terms of—actually those get interesting.

I don't want to go there right now.

Larson Okay (laughter.) Well, in your field you mentioned Chuck McClure. Who

were some of the head folks in the field of government documents when

you started out?

Aldrich Well another one, interestingly enough, was Steve Zinc. And Steve Zinc

> is still the Dean of Libraries here as well as the VP for the IT on campus. But Steve Zinc was chief editor of the other big government information journal available at that time. There was Bernadine Abbott Hoduski.

Bernadine was one of the original founders of GODORT. She was an EPA librarian, I believe, at that time, working for the EPA. Who else? Jack Selzer at Penn State. I'm thinking of people that I knew because they were the leadership in GODORT at that time. There was Susan Tulis, Julia Wallace, oh just many, many people. Couple of people in the government printing office that were important at that time were Jay Young and Don Fossedal, the Superintendent of Documents at that time.

Larson

Now was there anybody within the Gov Docs profession that sort of served as a mentor or role model for you? You mentioned Chuck had been important earlier?

Aldrich

There were really three that I'm going to rattle off the top of my head. One is Ridley Kessler who was at the University of North Carolina and later chaired the Depository Library Program. Jack Selzer, I mentioned already. He was the chair of GODORT then and later served on the Depository Library Council and Susan Tulis, who I already mentioned as well. I'm going to throw somebody else in there, too, Prue Adler, who was the legislative liaison for the ARL which is the Association for Research Libraries.

Larson

I know you would have been working closely, obviously, with the GPO. Were you dealing with a lot of gray literature or mainly books? Gray literature, manuscripts?

Aldrich

At that time it was almost exclusively government publications. And these are anything from Senate hearings to bills and public laws, statistical compendiums like *Digest of Education Statistics*. All kinds of stuff on health from pamphlets—I say we had a million items. It's not like a million big volumes. Thousands of these things were just pamphlets and sheets that get handed out in the offices. Maps, department...

Larson

Technical reports.

Aldrich

Technical reports. Environmental impact statements. All kinds of stuff. But not really gray literature.

Larson

Okay.

Aldrich

Okay. Now we got mostly the stuff that was finally published. Mostly stuff that was printed through the Government Printing Office. The agencies would check off whether it goes to the depository libraries.

Larson

Now when you first came to Reno, how did you learn your collection, essentially?

I spent a lot of time in the collections. Basically, just reviewing it and reading some literature on how the agencies that I worked with published—or what their publishing patterns are. As well as how they organize their publications. International agencies tend to divide between documents and publications and I've been out of that for so many years it's blurring. Like books that they published versus official records of meetings and things like that, if they did studies or issued a report. Anyway, helping with the reference and walking around in the stacks a little bit and just seeing how it looks on the shelf and stuff like that.

Larson

Okay. Now just personally, how do you tend to learn things? I mean not learning the collection but are you a visual person? Or are you a spatial person?

Aldrich

Well it's interesting that you should ask this, spatial because I am a spatial person. I cannot read, as an example, a software manual. I need to sit down and put it in and just see what it does. And then go, oh I can't figure this one out so let's go consult the manual. Sort of how I described learning the collection. Just jump in and try to sort through it, figure it out, and see what the connections are. I'm much better with location than I am with labels. So if you move some of that—part of the collection, I'm in big trouble. Yeah.

Larson

When you were starting to try to get to know that collection, was it overwhelming? All of that material at once, or did it seem pretty manageable?

Aldrich

Starting with the international material, it was reasonably manageable. Of course, the first week or two are overwhelming, just moving to Reno. Joanne Guyton, who was the staff person in charge of the maintenance of the collection, international in Nevada, was so good. That's actually an interesting thing to be a supervisor when people that work for you, know and you don't. So she was really good with that.

Larson

Now just speaking about moving to Reno, how much of a culture shock was that?

Aldrich

Oh, I don't think that much. I had moved around some. Moving to Oklahoma for graduate school is probably more of a shock than moving to Reno. I love mountains, so moving here was like moving home, somehow.

Larson

Now, things have changed so much over the years with library information services and gov docs specifically. For the people who are coming in new to the field now, how would you recommend they learn to

use and operate the older more traditional resources?

Aldrich And was the libraries or gov docs? I can't remember.

Larson Either one actually. I guess you could take libraries more generally and

then government docs specifically.

Aldrich I would say mostly take advantage of the new because the reason it's

new is it's working better than the way we used to do it. There are some things in government docs that are really specific to knowing how to assist in the area. Probably the most obvious is legislative tracing or tracking which means sort of follow from the introduction of a bill through its passage, or not passage, as a public law. What's the basis for the policy for clean water, or whatever. That's actually, I always thought, one of the most interesting parts of the whole thing. Another convoluted one is the patent procedure. Identifying how people would categorize a patent in order to pull up a list of the pertinent patents to what the person is thinking he or she is going to get a patent on.

Larson *So trying to learn the organizational sense.*

Aldrich Yes, so much of librarianship is just looking up stuff. If you want to look

up stuff on Abe Lincoln you basically go into the card catalog or journal databases and look up Abraham Lincoln or the Battle of Shiloh. In the government information area, there's a lot of rich information that you need to know how to follow it back. I guess in Science and Chemistry that can be true too in following the atomic construct of chemicals and

their interrelationship with literature and things like that.

Larson So really you have to know the system with gov docs more so than with

some of the other reference.

Aldrich Some areas of reference. People need to be patient and learn those things

because in the old days there was no quick way to get to the information. You needed to know all the steps. Now there's quick ways to get to the information. But if you don't know—not necessarily the steps we took to look them up, but just the steps involved, in say, the policy

formulation process then you're going to miss a lot of stuff.

Larson Now, in working with government docs, what would you say are some of

the major challenges working in the area? And that can be either at the

beginning or now.

Aldrich And actually I'm out of government documents now.

Larson So when last you were involved.

I would say the biggest challenge is informing or making other people in your library aware of the significance of government information to their research process. And that can be as simple as if a student is doing a five page history paper that, wow, there's a couple of government—you know, senate reports say, and I'm making this up completely, but on the Battle of the Little Bighorn. If they could throw those in as footnotes, their professor is going to be pretty impressed. Almost any social issue like teenage pregnancy, the TEACH Act or whatever these various education things are, you can just get a lot of really useful primary information. A lot of librarians who are used to working the main reference desk are going to look first in the journal literature and then the library catalog and may not take it the next step to say, "Oh, maybe there's some testimony in a congressional hearing that would be right on the topic this student is looking at."

Larson

What do you think were the biggest rewards from working in government docs?

Aldrich

The biggest rewards for me are the same as they are today, and that's making it happen for the person who needs it. Basically they have an information need, you can fill it. One really rewarding aspect of government information is hardly anything would be answered with a no. And by that, I mean if there isn't some information piece, you figure out what agency would be working on this particular issue and you pull out a federal government phonebook and you call. You might start with a library for that agency and call them and say, "Do you have anything on this?" Or you just call the agency and kind of wander around and figure out who's doing it. Whereas, if they walk in and say, "Do you have any books on the battle of Shiloh?" You look up in the card catalog, "Oh, it doesn't look like we do, sorry."

Larson

Right, you either do or you don't.

Aldrich

You either do or you don't, yeah.

Larson

Well we've kind of danced around the issue of technology a little bit, but it's been really important in your career, I think. Do you want to describe how technology's impacted your work over the years?

Aldrich

Well it's made it interesting. To me the technology is probably not unlike crossword puzzles to people who do crosswords. And I did crosswords for about two years when I was in graduate school and said, "I'm going to stop doing these" because you get trapped. Well now I'm trapped in technology. And just the way you can tease the technology to get at stuff that you never would have been able to. I mean a classic example of where technology has gone now is the entire—I say entire,

but I don't know if they've actually got it up to current but the—at least the first hundred or some years of the *Congressional Record* and the *Congressional Serial Set* are digitalized. And you can go in and put Little Bighorn and find that it was referred to in a hearing that had absolutely nothing to do with the battle of Little Bighorn but there's an interesting couple of paragraphs in there that are just "Wow, nobody's ever used this before," because they never would have stumbled upon it. So you just have this incredibly greater ability to access the information and manage it and ship the information. I mean, we've probably all by now attached word documents or PDF's to an email and sent it to a colleague. I hated faxes. And before that it would have been mail. I gave a talk one time in Orono, Maine where I was playing the devil's advocate role and just pushing for total electronic. I got into this idea of containers and what I want to do is take the information out of the container and just (sound effect) you know.

Larson

Let it run loose.

Aldrich

Yeah. Pretty much.

Larson

Give it the run of the place.

Aldrich

Yeah. And another talk I gave for the Department of Energy I did an analogy to the Starship Enterprise where Captain Kirk would push a button and say, "Computer give me all the information you have on Tanya at Oklahoma State University in 1999" or whatever and they would spit it out. And you see it now with Google, with cell phones, I mean it's—as the word is getting trite but ubiquitous.

Larson

Now you've been working, I'm sure, with the GPO and the FDLP over the years, how have those institutions changed with the advent of digital access and digital dissemination?

Aldrich

How have those entities changed? I think they're probably changing more right now in the last few years than they did earlier. I'd say probably 1988 or 1986 was when they first sent out a CD product, a Census disc. Then if you remember bulletin boards and the internet before it was the web, they had a Federal FDLP Bulletin Board, in fact. I think that's still around somewhere. They had to, of course, ride two systems as you've got a paper system and then an electronic system. And it took a lot of work to convince people that we can begin having secure archival collections that are digital and we don't necessarily all need to have all of this stuff. That we can have our clients access it remotely. And there is an interesting movement going on the last five or six, seven years on, maybe it's really more like ten years, to come up with ways to have pretty good size digital collections distributed around

and about so you have fifty to a hundred complete collections of digital information as well as paper information. I still think that's a little bit of a pipe dream. I think if you have a good archival system with reasonably good back up, that's good enough.

So they had to do the two systems and then there's also the politics of that. And I don't mean government politics, the library politics, and part of it gets back to the access issue of people who don't have access. That was a really big issue in the early days for libraries that didn't have any kind of internet connectivity and if you shift stuff on to the internet then their clients are cut out of the loop.

Larson

And in rural Nevada now, that's still an issue in a few places, I understand.

Aldrich

Could be, in homes, but I'm sure all the library branches out there now have it. I think there's not a single depository library that doesn't have access. But once again, with the ubiquitous idea is sort of like all for one and one for all. We're all depository libraries now because we all have computers that our people can sit down and get census data. They don't need to go to the depository. I love the fact that my clients can just get their information at home and don't need to come to the library. Although implications for future work might be a little bit scary, but who knows. But I think the transitions—you know there's a big hump there of some area where you need both and then gradually they still needed people wandering around cleaning up the streets in the big cities before all the horses and wagons went away. After that, it's all cars and those guys who were sweeping up the droppings are out of work.

Larson

Would you say it's the last five years or ten years that would have the most change?

Aldrich

I would say probably the last five years. I think it's beginning to transition into a situation where a lot of information is basically electronic and there's not a need to get all that paper out. Started way back with some maps, topo maps and things like that is just, "Guys, we need to cut" –familiar these days with the budget situations around the country – "so much money from our budget and if we just sent CD-Rom's for these digital archival photo quads we could save the money we need to save. Is it okay with the community if we do that?" GPO is a really good agency in terms of having a dialogue with the library community and other communities that they work with, and responsive in that way. Doesn't mean they always accepted what we said.

Larson

We're heard people say the more you handle materials, the better you know your collection. How do you think that translates in a digital

world?

Aldrich

I would have to say it's a false argument. I mean it's a straw man. If you have a million items in your collection, you're probably only handling a few thousand. If it's digital and you put in a keyword search, you can pull up all the items that have Wounded Knee or whatever I was using as an analogy earlier. So I think you're way better off with the digital than you were with the tangible collection. Yeah there's a couple of thousand items that may become your friends and maybe they don't become your friends when they're in computer, in the same way.

Larson

Although I would think if you're doing public service, you're going to come up with the same documents a lot of the time in the same way you would if you were physically handling them.

Aldrich

Yes, you would.

Larson

The other thing you mentioned before was systems. If you know the systems, maybe it's the sense of knowing the systems more so than knowing the individual items. If you know the system, you know how to get to things, which may be...

Aldrich

It really works in government documents because in the call number system, they use the SuDoc number. For example SuDoc 1.1 for whatever agency is always going to be your annual reports and things of that nature. So A 1.1 would be your Department of Ag Annual Reports. D will be your defense department and so on. So that was kind of handy. That seemed like it might work. You could just walk to it on the shelf.

Larson

Now, I'd like to talk a little bit about your service to the gov doc community because you've been involved in a lot of different things. I know you've been involved particularly with GODORT. How did you originally get involved with that?

Aldrich

Well, I don't know. When I came here as a tenured track academic faculty position it was never clear to anybody looking for tenure what exactly is it—I'm supposed to write five articles or what is the thing? So I kind of got this philosophy of helter skelter librarianship where just anything that sounded like it might be useful toward getting tenure I'd raise my hand and say, "Okay I'm there. I'll work on it." That get's to Susan Tulis, who was one of my mentors, was an acquaintance, colleague, friend perhaps of Steve Zinc who is the Dean of Libraries here. And he said, "You know if you can get Duncan on the committee, go ahead."And she came up to me at an American Library Association conference and said, "I do have a position on the legislation committee." "Yeah, sure, okay." No idea what this was. And ended up being

probably the most rigorous committee you can get on in GODORT because there's all kinds of efforts to rewrite the laws that pertain to the depository program and that's—I mentioned NTIS earlier, you know trying to monkey around with some of their regulations to make them more open to depository collections.

The next year Jack Selzer, who was the following Chair of GODORT after Susan, asked me if I would chair the legislation committee. And perhaps in retrospect, foolishly, I said, "Sure. That sounds like it will look really good on that resume for tenure." And that's just a really pretty heavy-duty lot of shots being taken at you and learn to stiffen up a little bit. So that's how I really got launched into it. A few years later—actually after I got tenure at UN-R, the nominations committee asked me if I would run for chair of GODORT. Actually I said no before I had tenure, but after I had tenure I said, "Yeah okay, I'll do that" and got elected chair of GODORT and that was I think 1984-85.

In 1985, in the spring, was approached by the Government Printing Office. They were hiring depository librarians to consult on their transition to a more electronic depository program. That meant working for them full time for a year and moving to Washington and working with them. So that was really an exciting year. That was a lot of fun. And found out that—it's really interesting to sit in meetings at the Government Printing Office and just like looking at people and going, "Now that's the people I worked with." It was just a different organization but sort of similar politics and cliques and learned a lot about how organizations work. Came up with a really important report as well as I, actually for a while, managed a unit because the person who ran it was gone and I was the only one around, sounds like how a university works sometimes, as a consultant.

When I was leaving there, the Superintendent of Documents said, "Have you ever been on the Depository Library Council?" I said, "No." He said, "Well you will, starting this year." So I got appointed to that. That's a three year appointment. Got off of that and moved out of documents at UN-R. And a couple years later got a call from a new Superintendent of Documents when a guy named Bruce James had been appointed Superintendent of Documents and he wanted somebody from Nevada, as he's from Nevada. He lives in Incline Village. He wanted somebody from Nevada on the Council and I accepted and said, "Sure, I'll do that again." And my third year, at that time, I was the chair of Council.

Larson *So what year?*

Aldrich So I was on council from 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and I guess it was

that time I was chair in my third year. And then I was on again probably 2000, 1, 2, and 3. I'd have to look that up.

Larson Just ball park.

Aldrich Yeah.

Larson You mentioned there was an important publication that came out of the

GPO work. Do you remember what?

Aldrich Yeah. It was describing how the digital depository program would work.

And I'd have to look up—sorry...

Larson *It's okay.*

Aldrich I'd have to look it up again. That was about a ten page report. It's pretty

short.

Larson Now I saw reference to the fact that you participated in the DuPont

Circle meetings and helped facilitate the Chicago Conference on the future of government information, is that what led into the GPO work?

Aldrich I think so. I got onto the DuPont Circle group because I was chair elect

of GODORT. You have to bring the chair elect in to carry the work on as things progressed. Then one thing that was decided is that we should have a conference of depository librarians, just kind of pulled together, seat of the pants, ad hoc, rather than part of ALA or ARL or the GPO. I was part of the planning group for that. Then it was around that time I was chair of GODORT and really as chair of GODORT I worked closely with GPO and was really struggling to press on digital issues that were not popular. Jay Young, who was head of the depository group in the GPO at that time, asked me to come and work there because he

somebody he could work with.

Larson Yeah, and that's important. Especially when you're going to be spending

a lot of time on something it's good to know who you can spend long

appreciated what I'd done as chair of GODORT and he thought I was

hours in meetings with.

Aldrich Right.

Larson At some conferences you're locked in a room for 8 hours a day.

Aldrich Right.

Larson Well, I don't know about GODORT but most organizations have those

working groups.

Aldrich

Which is why the bars are popular after the conference, you know.

Larson Indeed. Now when you first started with GODORT, how would you characterize the leadership there when you became active? Do you think

it's any different now?

Aldrich I don't know what the leadership has been the last few years although I know the people who are in the leadership roles, I knew from when I was active in GODORT. I don't necessary know their leadership

> moving along well. I was a leader with an agenda and so that makes it somewhat tougher, to be a leader with an agenda, than a leader trying to build consensus. Before me there was Steve Hays, Susan Tulis, Jack Selzar and Julia Wallace. They were all really strong leaders, good leaders. Immediately after me there were good leaders as well. Andrea Sevetson, wow, haven't heard that name in a while, she was at Berkeley at that time. Just good groups of people. The current chair is somebody I

knew back then. She's a really good person out of the University of

qualities but they were good people so I would assume things have been

Washington.

Larson Well you mentioned coming in and being a leader with an agenda. Was

that the digital agenda?

It basically was. I've always had this agenda that when I was in the depository council the second time, there was a big push to, "well some of the depositories are dropping out because why be a depository if it's available digitally. We need to come up with a plan to bring people back into the fold." And I said, "Why don't we start talking about how do we make them more effective consumers of government information as nondepository libraries than trying to make them into depository libraries?" And, of course, there's politics if you go to the senators and congressman and say, "We've got fifteen depository libraries in your community," and that has more clout than if we push the stuff out there

and everybody can use it.

Now, there seems to be a strong sense of community with gov docs folks. How do you see the government documents community? What do you

think ties people together?

Aldrich I think if you're active in government documents, at least when I was really active, and you like the work you were doing you were a little bit of an outsider within your own organization. You were kind of not specifically with reference people and you weren't with the technical

people. You sort of were a little bit of an outsider. And because you

Larson

Aldrich

were having to press your agenda you felt maybe a little bit like you know one of the bad boys or something. So at conferences I think...

Larson

The maverick gov docs.

Aldrich

Yeah the mavericks sorts of thing. And you were all then thrown together with all these other sort of mavericks. And perhaps like oral historians within the history profession. I don't know, a little bit different in some ways than the main stream. So I think there's a lot of camaraderie in that. Plus you work differently in a lot of ways. It's the same with all of you but different from everybody else. So while you do some of the cataloging and some of the public service that everybody does, you just do this really unique set of things.

Larson

Now we were talking about GPO and FDLP and everything. Having worked with the FDLP council and having chaired it, what's your vision of the program? What you think it will be doing in say 2015 or 2021?

Aldrich

What I would like to see it be doing is providing almost totally digital access to federal information. And again, other than maybe having like federal depository librarians rather than federal deposit libraries. So there are librarians in institutions who are affiliated with the program and hence the librarian in that way would be associated. Because the skill is really going to be—as the collections become more electronic, there's less of a reason—less containers you need to manage in the building. So you have less need for those specialized people who manage the collection. So what you need though is to maintain that level of expertise with the materials so that's something, again, we talked a lot about in my second stint on the council is having the skill set without having the collections. And that's where some people would say that just won't happen. And I don't know, we'll see. The programs—I don't know. I'm going to kind of finally say I don't know.

Larson

I just didn't know if you had a particular vision for what you'd like to see them be doing.

Aldrich

I'd just like to see it all electronic. Maybe people are putting up sort of pathfinders and guides and materials that they can share with other librarians and other people who can follow them and can use them to get to the information.

Larson

Now you mentioned the issue just now about specialization and so on and how that's affected by changing times. All organizations have bumps that they go over. Was there anything else going on besides that sort of issue that was a particular controversy or a difficult time for either the FDLP or GODORT when you were involved with them?

You know, there's always kind of a threat to the GPO as a federal agency, as agencies in all kinds of governments realize that any day the rug could be pulled out from under and zoom. So there's always an edge of that. I think that probably a really significant thing that Bruce James did, and I will say that it's an odd thing because I'm not sure how much I appreciated what Bruce was doing as the Public Printer when he was the Public Printer. But I do really appreciate the fact that he really pushed GPO into a more electronic environment. I was working at GPO under his predecessor and it wasn't at that time. But he just came in and said there isn't going to be a call on the part of the federal government for printing presses like we run ten-fifteen years from now. So if we're going to survive as an institution and maintain a level of centrality for government information so all agencies aren't just going out to all different kinds of private sector publishers or just throwing their stuff up on to the web willy-nilly, the GPO needs to reinvent itself. He did a really good job of setting up a system that's just about to be launched which is basically a digital information ingest system and meta-data cataloging and all of this stuff. I'm trying to think of the name of the system but I can't remember. FedSys? Something like that. Again that started just as I was leaving. My interest was waning in being professionally involved. So that was pretty much a hump there. There's probably more threat at that time, but I think he pushed them on through and they're viable.

Larson

In libraries there seems to be a push and pull between one group that wants to have a lot of control over particular information, and one group that wants to get it out there as widely as possible. Is that something that you've noticed? That push and pull in gov docs.

Aldrich

Well, there are a couple of things there, a couple of different questions. And one is—boy I remember in my MLIS program reading an article about the librarians in their white coats and how the faculty needed to come to them and sit down to do bibliographic searching through what was—the main company the was Dial-A- Log and Orbit, I guess, was the other one. And when we started having CD products and stuff like that, some of the people who were really good at that and saw that as their careers said, "Oh well, this will never work letting people just sit down and throw in their own keywords and they won't know what a subject is versus a keyword versus…"

Larson

They don't know the Library of Congress terminology!

Aldrich

Right, exactly. "How will they know what subject heading to use?" So that's one level. And I think that that to a certain extent is gone. Although it's still there in the way of seeing oneself as the intermediary and—which I think is past. We're beyond it now. But six, seven, eight

years ago it was, "Oh people are just using Google," and we're still there in the library world, generally, as questions that come up that we as intermediaries can help with. Like what's authoritative and what's a refereed article as opposed to a popular magazine article or a newspaper article. So, you know, that does imply if there's an intermediary that there's control. I'm not sure how to answer that one.

Larson

Maybe it's not within government documents.

Aldrich

But there is also the issue of keyword searching versus, you know, subject catalog and controlled vocabulary and that's kind of another question. I actually hang on the fence on that one. I say, overall we're better off with keyword searching. But you can add a lot of value by using controlled vocabularies and to categorize information because it's a good way to put a handle on. If you have a free text item that doesn't mention the battle we're talking about is Little Big Horn and you do a free text search, you're not going to find that item whereas a librarian immediately reviews that as a subject heading. On the other hand, it can work the other way, too, is you put in subject heading and there's going to be a whole bunch of information that maybe in a another field that is related to what you're looking for but it never got cataloged that way. So you would miss it either way.

Larson

Well just some general questions for the last part of the interview.

Aldrich

Sure.

Larson

Do you have any favorite memories involving your gov docs work?

Aldrich

Favorite memories other than some of those meetings after the meetings in the bars. Oh, just getting a couple of, you know, and I can't even remember exactly what they are, but a couple of contentious resolutions or recommendations passed. Actually, it's not so much the hammering out of language and some of the resolutions, but actually finally having a resolution that was put on the table and "phew" just a lot of reward in getting something done. And are we talking professional or was it the library work as well?

Larson

And the library work as well.

Aldrich

When you get an email from a faculty, they're all not always good about it, but some of the nicer faculty will send you an email saying, "Hey, that's really great. I never would have figured out how to do this." Once in a while a student will actually send an email and say, "Wow, I got an A on my paper." So that's basically it.

Larson Do you have an "I-can't-believe-they-did-that-in-the-library story?

Aldrich You mean from one of our customers?

Larson No no, probably the staff is what I'm thinking. I mean just something

bizarre ...

Aldrich Boy.

Larson *Pink flamingoes in the hallway.*

Aldrich I'm usually the one doing the weird stuff.

Larson (laughter)

Aldrich Can't believe they did that in the library. One thing we did when we got

our poster printing operation going was we got a life size cut out of President Glick and had students have their pictures taken with Glick.

Larson *Oh I missed that.*

Aldrich And we would print out and give---we were promoting that we had this

poster service. That was a little off the wall.

Larson When you began working in government information, and I realize

you're not there now, but did you think you'd stay in it as long as you

did?

Aldrich Same as my early answer about you know in high school if I thought I'd

be a librarian, no idea. That's what I was doing day to day so that's basically what I was looking at. And I've known a couple of people, actually one, Maggie Farrell. She's in Wyoming now. When I first met her she was brand new as a documents librarian and said, "In five years I'll be this and ten years I'll be a library director." And she was a library director at Wyoming in ten years. That, to me, was just so amazing that

somebody would...

Larson *Chart a path like that.*

Aldrich Chart a path like that. To me it was. I want to do well in what I'm doing

on a day to day basis and just get on with my life.

Larson Now when you ran into difficult questions in the gov docs area, was

there one place that you could always turn for answers? Besides the

federal phone book, I guess.

We had a couple of really good staff people in the building who had been working in documents for years so I could turn to them. In about 1992-93 they started a listserv called GovDoc-L and I was actually, early on, involved as a moderator in GovDoc-L. Like with any listserv now, "Hey, has anybody ever been asked how many pieces are in a Scrabble game?" Of course, we wouldn't get that, but there is a Scrabble game sitting right there which is why I used that example. Or like how many zebras are there in Africa? That's actually one of the few "no" questions I've got. No, who would count how many zebras there are in Africa. So that would be my answer to that. I forgot I moderated GovDoc-L. That's amazing.

Larson

Over the course of your career, what's been the most difficult part of working in government documents?

Aldrich

In working with government documents, the most difficult part. I'd actually say there has been no difficult part in working with government documents. The most difficult part in working is motivating some staff who is not interested in being motivated. Occasionally a staff person is one who is convinced that the old way of doing things is better than the new way of doing things. An example might be prying a staff person's fingers off of an IBM Selectric and putting them on to an IBM PC. And just having to deal with on one hand the angst and on the other hand is just the unwillingness. "No. This is better." And I still say that sometimes, "Well, the software we were using was better." "Was it better? Or did you know it better? Look at what...

Larson

Or were you were just more comfortable with it...

Aldrich

More comfortable with it. You'll be comfortable again. So that's just probably in any job, is having to coach. Although where I am now, the coaching is great. I have a wonderful team.

Larson

That's good.

Aldrich

And I don't work with books anymore, so there we go.

Larson

There you go.

Aldrich

I run an IT unit in the library, basically.

Larson

I was going to say, do you want to talk a little bit about what you're doing now ...

Aldrich

We opened a new facility at UN-R last August called the Knowledge Center which combines the library, which moved out of the old building, and instructional design, and the IT helpdesk unit operation. The first floor of the new building is all technology. It's got about a hundred and fifty computers. We have two sixty-inch wide poster printer, and scanners, and laminators and we run a video collection. We have about 15,000 videos. We check out high definition video cameras and twelve megapixel cameras and laptops and lighting units and dollies so you can do motion shots when shooting video. And we run a dynamic media lab that has top end Macs with video editing software and audio editing software. We have the sound recording booth and I love it. Like I said, I never knew I'd be a librarian and I never knew I would be a—we call the area @One as in the @ sign and the one, O-n-e, and we run a data analysis lab, high end data analysis software, digital mapping, GIS and whatnot. So I administer the floor. I have four—one, two, three, four, five, six staff people reporting to me. Two of whom are administrative faculty positions.

Larson

It's a very helpful floor at the Knowledge Center.

Aldrich

Well thank you. Guess what, from all my other comments, customer service is what we do. We're there to help people accomplish what they need. It's really kind of fun because we are working with that information I was mentioning. They're grabbing stuff off of the web and putting it into posters and you know the old Confucius, "One picture tells a thousand words" thing we put a couple of maps, a couple of pictures, a few paragraphs of texts, an equation or two. They're probably conveying as much information as the eight-page papers I used to struggle over when I was in school. So it's kind of neat.

Larson

Throughout your career, what's the greatest professional joy you've experienced?

Aldrich

Okay, that's funny. I think the thing that tickled me most was when I was chair of the Depository Library Council one of the top people in the library community, not the documents community but the library community, was a member of Council. It was the first meeting that I chaired and oh just making this thing happen was a lot of work, a lot of energy. I sat down with her at lunch, and she said, "You are doing an amazing job. How do you get motivated to do that?" and I looked at her and I said, "Fear of failure." And it really is. I could not stand up in front of three to four-hundred people and just have this thing not work. And so that, a compliment from Sharon. I can't remember her last name either. Oh well, Sharon.

Larson

Over the years, in your career, what do you think has had the biggest impact on libraries and government information over all?

The biggest impact, maybe it was the first speech I ever gave at a Depository Council meeting in about 1990 and four-hundred people out there, scared to death, about a twelve minute talk on what to do with these CD-ROMs that they're sending us in the mail. I outlined a concept that I actually borrowed from another librarian called Levels of Service. And it was basically the census stuff you need to be able to help them with. This other thing, and I gave about four levels of service. And I said, "and, of course, you all got the CD from whatever agency it was, did you also put it in your bottom desk drawer and hope it would never—?" Anyway the bottom line is just this idea that digital's coming and we need to learn to use it and it's good. But it's going to work differently given the different products we're getting.

Larson

Do you think your emphasis on the electronic transition has been one of your greater contributions?

Aldrich

I'm with a few dozen other people who was pushing that, but yeah I think being part of the cadre of librarians who were pressing for that, the DuPont circle group, the Chicago group. Being willing to stand up there and be at the forefront and yes, that's probably it.

Larson

Overall in the library profession, what do you think has been the greatest change since you've got into the business?

Aldrich

It is getting the information out of the containers. It's the change in information from being a scarce commodity to being ubiquitous. It's overwhelming. And the greatest change is probably from getting scarce resources so you barely have enough to write a ten page paper, to saying out of these eight-hundred things you might use, you probably only really want to focus on these twenty in order to write that ten page paper. So the greatest change has been going from scarcity to overabundance. And then instead of trying to build a little mound of stuff you could use to being able to throw away a lot of probably good stuff and if you're doing a ten page paper for a policy class it's not like you need to cite everything you could.

Larson

Right. So when people write about you in the future, what would you like them to say?

Aldrich

That he tried. That he made it work. Some things that he was pushing for came about and he wasn't a frivolous force. He really did see some stuff coming down the pike and basically the containers issue and the container can be virtual instead of a solid thing. That's where we are now. In my department here @One bought a Kindle which is the Amazon.Com handheld digital book, I'd guess you'd say. Sort of a notebook like item. It's really nice. And when I was reading an article

back in the early 1980's about—it was by a guy named Lancaster talking about the paperless society, I was thinking well instead of reading a book, maybe you'd have something like—remember heating pads?

Larson

Aldrich That you'd put on your leg or whatever, and it had a wire going. So I

still imagined a wire. But you could read it and then you'd just kind of scroll through the pages and maybe have audio coming out of it and stuff like that. So when Amazon did the Kindle, I went, "Well I was thinking something a little more flexible." You have the container but you can

change the contents all the time.

Larson *You can change what's in the bucket.*

Aldrich Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yes.

Larson Well is there anything that you'd like to talk about that we haven't

touched on so far?

Aldrich What would I like to talk about? You know I guess I'll probably pass on

that. I'm not sure. I'm sure if we were at that bar on Friday night, I'd

probably come up with a few things, but nah.

Larson Okay.

Aldrich This is fine.

Larson Thanks very much for your time, we really appreciated it.

Aldrich Well, thank you.

----- End of interview -----