

Oral History Interview
with
Judy Russell

Interview Conducted by
Jennifer Paustenbaugh
February 16, 2007

Government Information Living Indexes
Oral History Project

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Interview History

Interviewer: Jennifer Paustenbaugh
Transcriber: Jill Minahan
Editors: Tanya Finchum, Juliana Nykolaiszyn

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 Judy Russell is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 16, 2007.

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About Judy Russell...

Judith C. Russell currently serves as Dean of Libraries at the University of Florida, a position she has held since May 2007. Having served as the 22nd Superintendent of Documents at the U.S. Government Printing Office from 2003-2007, she is the first woman to have held this position. Russell served as the Deputy Director of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science from 1998-2003. Here she advised the President of the United States and Congress on Americans' information needs. Having helped establish *GPO Access*, one of the Federal Government's most frequented websites, while directing GPO's Office of Electronic Information Services, Russell assisted in providing online access to more than 2000 federal databases. She worked in the private sector from 1996-1998 as the Director of the Government Services division of IDD Enterprises, L.P. She has consulted for other private information companies such as Mead Data Central, the Disclosure Information Group, and IHS, Inc. Russell served as director of GPO's Office of Electronic Information Dissemination Services and the Federal Depository Library Program from 1991-1996. She has also worked with COMSAT Laboratories, the Program of Policy Studies in Science and Technology at Georgetown University, and the U.S. Congress' Office of Technology Assessment.

Russell earned a bachelor's degree from Dunbarton College of the Holy Cross in Washington, D.C. as well as a Master's degree in Library Science from Catholic University.

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Paustenbaugh *It's Friday, February 16th, and we're here at the Oklahoma State University Library. This is Jennifer Paustenbaugh, and I am with Judy Russell, who is the Superintendent of Documents. She is here visiting our campus to help us celebrate the 100th anniversary of our Federal Depository Library as well as the 50th anniversary of our Patent and Trademark Library. We're really glad to have you in Stillwater, Judy, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.*

As we discussed before we started the interview, this is the first interview in a project that is entitled "Government Information Living Indexes," that's being conducted by Tanya Finchum and eventually others in an effort to talk to government documents librarians who have had extensive careers in documents to find out how they educated themselves; became really knowledgeable about their collections; and what advice they have for others that would be either starting out on that career path or just are interested in finding out more about these people that they've always heard about but they've never actually gotten to meet. We're going to start out by talking a little bit just in general about your background and if you don't mind sharing a little bit about where you grew up, your immediate family, about the town and the time itself.

Russell My father was an Army officer so we moved around a good bit. I was actually born in West Point, New York. He was on the faculty there, but we left there when I was six months old so no childhood recollection of West Point (Laughs) although I visited later in my life, many times. We did live in a number of different places, but probably more in Washington, D.C. than anywhere else. I actually graduated from high school and college and did my graduate work in Washington, so it's what I consider to be my home.

I'm the youngest of three children. I have an older brother and an older sister and through subsequent marriages I have actually additional

siblings so in total there are now seven of us, two brothers and four sisters. We have a much more extended family than what I actually grew up with.

Paustenbaugh *It's somewhat unusual to actually be able to call Washington, D.C. your hometown. I grew up in Maryland, but in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. and that's usually where I tell people I grew up.*

Russell My father was first assigned there when I was in first grade so I was there through most of grade school and then again, as I said, back in high school and college so it's home, as much as anywhere.

Paustenbaugh *How did you become interested in librarianship?*

Russell Well, I've always been an avid reader. Actually it's sort of a funny story. My father was transferred to Carlisle, Pennsylvania when I was in eighth grade, to attend the Army War College. I was in a public school there and the first week of school, in the homeroom they were handing out forms to volunteer for things and for whatever reason, I guess it was my assigned seat, I was sitting in the back row. They asked anybody who wanted to volunteer to sign up for clubs or the band or whatever else to raise their hand, and they'd pass back a form. I very carefully sat there not raising my hand since I had no inclination at that point to volunteer for anything. But they sent one extra form back in my row so it ended up on my desk. And since I'm a compulsive reader, if it was on my desk I'm gonna read it rather than just turning it over ignoring or shredding it or something. So I was reading it and I discovered that one of the things you could volunteer to do was work in the library. So I checked that box, filled out the form and sent it back. That whole year I did volunteer work as a student assistant in the library and then kept doing it in high school and college. Actually by the time I went to college, I had already decided that I was going to major in English and then go on and get a degree in library science, which is what I did.

Paustenbaugh *Wow. Not that many people know that early on that that's what they want to do.*

Russell Just one of those happenstance things.

Paustenbaugh *With an English major, it wasn't necessarily clear that government information would then become a vital part of your career as a librarian. How did that come about?*

Russell The summer between high school and college, I got a job at Georgetown University. I was actually working in the graduate school chemistry library, which was unusual because I had never even studied chemistry

in high school. Each summer when I was in college, I worked in a different special library because I had gotten very interested in special libraries. Again, I'm not sure quite how—it just sort of happened, but I worked in one that was a special operations research office, which was at American University. It was a defense contract and organization, and then I worked at the American Council on Education and the Aerospace Industry Association, and then ultimately at the American Psychiatric Association.

I worked in very different disciplines, and I guess I was very inquisitive and so it was really interesting to just sort of get exposed to different subject areas and that kind of thing. In each of those institutions, I guess less so probably in education, but certainly at the aerospace industry and even at the Psychiatric Association, there were some government documents that were part of the collection. And, in fact, when I was at the Psychiatric Association the NLM (National Library of Medicine) was just developing the classification for medicine when they broke away from the LC (Library of Congress) classification system and did the DMWs. We actually had the opportunity to send recommendations for them to do finer gradations within the area of psychiatry, which was kind of interesting and fun. So I ended up working then at the Psychiatric Association all through my senior year of college and all through the time I was in graduate school.

When I got out of graduate school, my first professional job was at the Communications Satellite Corporation. That was in the very height of the space exploration and a really exciting time to be there. Again, we had a very heavy reliance on government documents so we were getting a lot of material from DTEC (Department of Technical & Economic Cooperation) and NTIS (National Technical Information Services) and places like that because a lot of the cutting edge research was being done under government contracts. It was, I guess, a rather specialized part of government documents but nevertheless working with them.

Because of my work at the Communications Satellite Corporation, I was later recruited to a job at George Washington University and an NSF(National Science Foundation) funded project on technology assessment. We were looking at the whole issue of how the innovations come about, how do they diffuse and get accepted in society. Again, looking at a lot of research that had been government-funded as well as other types of academic analysis of innovation and diffusion of the innovation. Even at that point though, government documents were always a component, but they were never really a focal point.

I went from there to actually work for the government. I went to Congress and worked for the Office of Technology and Assessment, and

that was, again, in the very early days when it was being set up. Technology assessment was still not even a clearly-defined field and they were doing a lot of research studies. The whole point of the office was, before Congress passed legislation dealing with issues related to technology, to try to determine what the social and economic impacts of it might be. We were supporting, in effect, in our small library, research projects on various topics that were coming up for action by Congress. We used a whole variety of resources to support those particular projects.

Then I left there and went into the private sector. That was when I first left libraries and went into the private sector. The company that I went to was a company that had a whole bunch of products built on government information. I was working in product development for a company called Information Handling Services, now better known as IHS, in the Denver, Colorado area. They had already decided that they wanted to do an index to the *Code Federal Regulations* (CFR) and they were doing a complete set of microfiche of the historical collection of the *CFR*, and so that's probably when I really first got very, very heavily involved with government documents. I visited many libraries to look at their collections, to try to see what we could borrow to be sure that we had a complete set. I did a lot of research to try to determine the volumes we were missing, whether they had ever been published so we could document the completeness of the set. Then we designed a controlled vocabulary index to the *CFR*. So, I think from that time on my career never left having a heavy focus on government information.

Paustenbaugh *That seems like that would really make a difference in the way that you approached the material and approached people wanting to use the material if you had been a user of it yourself rather than just satisfying other people's requests for information. Do you think that that's true?*

Russell I think that's very true and, in fact, I suppose we'll get to that in more detail on another point, but I was at the Government Printing Office (GPO) at the time the law passed that created *GPO Access*. We demanded that they put the *Federal Register* and *Congressional Record* online and were allowed to put other materials up. I was very much involved in the design of those databases and all the original help files, and of course having been a heavy user of those materials in various aspects of my career, I really knew what the common searches were, how people approached it. All the original help files, all the original sample searches were searches that I developed...

Paustenbaugh *Because you had actually done those.* (Laughs)

Russell ...and the people who were building the database were part of the

internal production staff at GPO. They were building out of a database that was used to produce the print, and they certainly understood the structure of the information. They knew every typesetting code that was in there and how you might use that typesetting code to establish a field of information, but they had no concept at all of how someone would use the information. So it was a really nice blending of my knowledge both as someone who had assisted other people in using it and a user myself, with their knowledge of exactly all the intricacies of the structure of the data in order to end up with a well designed database.

Paustenbaugh *It sounds like all of the disparate experiences that you had had culminated in being able to take leadership for that project. How well did you feel that library school prepared you for your career in government information?*

Russell I never actually took a government documents course in library school. I'm not even sure if they offered one when I was there. I went in knowing I wanted to be in special libraries, and so I really focused my coursework on things related to special libraries. I took what few courses they had in automation, as we've been calling it in the very early days of that.

I think the main thing that library school prepared me for was that additional discipline about organizing information and evaluating and analyzing sources...that type of thing rather than specifically to focus on government information as such. Certainly government information came up in a number of places in terms of general reference and, in fact, the person who taught the special library administration class ran one of the large government information centers and so he had some of that perspective that he brought to that but not in terms of specific training in documents.

Paustenbaugh *At the last Depository Library Council meeting in your capacity as Superintendent of Documents, you recognized Benton Harbor, a public library as the Depository of the Year. I thought the quote you chose to read from their submission for that award was really interesting- that- they were successful not because when people came in they looked at what information they could provide them, but at what government information might meet their needs. It sounds like, over time, you sort of developed that philosophy for yourself of being so familiar with it.*

Russell Well, I think that Benton Harbor may be a little bit atypical because they're in an area that has had severe economic hardship. They don't have a lot of resources for buying materials, and material you get free through the federal library depository program is a very important part of their collection. But I've said for a long time that I think most of the

time people come into the library and are looking for information and they don't always know that the government information could answer that question...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell ...and so part of the role of library staff is to alert them to the fact that there's this wealth of information there. That's exactly what Benton Harbor has done because they have so little resources for buying other kinds of materials, they have trained the reference staff to say, "Is it possible to answer this question with government information?" And they're finding something like seventy-five percent of their reference questions can actually be answered out of their government documents collection.

It's kind of amazing, but I think people assume the government will do things dealing with regulatory information. I used to joke and say, "Well, the only time they come in knowing they want government information is for tax forms," and then someone said to me, "No, no. They think H&R Block produces the tax forms." (Laughter) And I thought, "Oh, this is probably right, what a terrifying thought." But the reality is, I think, that when you take people to government information and when they start looking at the huge array of subject areas in which the government produces information, they're just amazed...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell ...because it isn't what they think—and I think that's one of the interesting things about the materials that end up in the GPO sales program. We've had coffee table art books, we've had cookbooks. We have posters. We have all kinds of health information and, obviously, educational materials. They had a wonderful display up at Alva, Oklahoma yesterday, they were also celebrating the 100th anniversary in Yukon, of some of the children's books that government agencies have specifically prepared. Literature designed for children in order to educate them on various issues and to communicate information to them in a way that they're comfortable with and yet, I don't know that people would think of coming to the government for coloring books, or coming to the government for children's books.

There is a beautifully-illustrated children's book that was designed for teaching Native American children about diabetes. When you look at it on the shelf, it just looks like any other beautiful children's book and it's done in a lovely, lovely way, but for a specific purpose. So there's just a huge, huge amount of information that comes from the government and it's kind of fun always to bring people into that and then the "wow"

factor is just, “Oh, I had no idea. I knew the government did this or this or this, but I”—you know, just opening them up to that whole range of information.

Paustenbaugh

Thinking about the way at least most academic libraries are set up—those libraries that are either regional or selected depositories tend to be a separate entity so that in order for someone to actually get to government information, they have to deliberately go into that section of the library that, unfortunately, for whatever reason, most of our reference staff are not thinking about, “Oh, there might be government information that will answer this,” unless, you know, they’ve worked in documents before or they’re just particularly astute. Do you see that as a problem from your perspective, and do you have any ideas about ways that academic libraries could do better outreach in that regard?

Russell

More than half of our documents libraries now have what we call blended reference where they don’t maintain a separate reference staff for government documents, and that has both its positives and its negatives obviously. You get very, very deep expertise when you have a dedicated staff and they have an intuitive knowledge of the range of material and the interrelationship between things or what agency might have done work in a certain area that might not be obvious to someone who doesn’t work closely with the documents. Most of those people spend a lot of time training other people on the reference staff, even if it’s not a blended reference, so that they do have enough awareness to know when to refer somebody to government documents.

I think it’s always a challenge when you have these large and very separate collections. How do you make them more integrated into the library as a whole? How do you make them more visible? And, again, to—not having tried to count—but certainly dozens and maybe more than hundreds of depositories in the four years that I’ve been Superintendent of Documents, and it’s fascinating to see how individual each library is and the way they treat their materials. But we’ve seen some very interesting things. There’s a public library in Arizona that set up a Spanish language reading room because they have a fairly large Hispanic population. They went through their government documents and took out every document that was in Spanish regardless of the subject matter, catalogued them, put them in the Spanish language reading room, and documents that nobody had ever touched are circulating like mad because they’re in a situation that makes them visible to a population for whom they’re relevant.

The state library of Michigan has taken parts of their government documents collection and moved them over into the genealogy section because as a state library, they have a huge interest in genealogy. They

looked at their collection and specifically extracted things they felt would get better use and higher visibility in their genealogy collection. So you see individual libraries making decisions based on what's the emphasis on this campus or the city or the area they might be serving, and then trying to highlight the parts of the collection that are of value. I think that's really the important approach, each institution to really make that judgment about how do we best integrate this information? How do we best present this information to our users? How do we draw them in, if it's a separate collection? How do we cross-train staff so that they are sensitive enough to understand when they should be referring people to government information? By and large, I think it's a very effective program and I think each of these institutions is finding its own equilibrium in terms of what works in the specific culture of that institution.

Paustenbaugh *I'm sure it has been really interesting to see the variety of areas...*

Russell A pretty amazing part of this job is the opportunity to go to so many different libraries and see how they're working with this material and the enormous pride that they take. It's very humbling, really, to see the commitment that they have to public access and the various things that they've done to try to ensure that this information is available to people in their communities.

Paustenbaugh *When you first got into the field of librarianship, what did you feel like some of the major issues were facing the profession and how do you think those have evolved? And it can even be within a narrow context if you would like it to be.*

Russell I think the thing that has transformed the profession is really, first automation—but going beyond automation, Internet access. I worked at LexisNexis for a period of time and there was a period where you had to buy a specific terminal that connected to Lexis and that was the only way you could access it. We all make jokes now, about those wonderful—I think they were red—wonderful old terminals, but...

Paustenbaugh *Kind of like OCLC?*

Russell Yes. It was hard-wired, too. Well, a lot of the early things that in order to really manage the access, you really had to get them into your mainframe and the way to do that was with these dedicated terminals. So, when we think back on it now, it seems so bizarre because obviously we're all used to using the web and things, but it really caused us to change.

And I'll tell you an interesting story. When I first started to work at

Comm Sat [Communications Satellite Corporation], they gave me the opportunity to travel around the United States and visit other engineering libraries. They wanted to have a superb engineering library, and they wanted me to go to major engineering libraries and visit them and then come back with ideas because it was a new company and they were starting a new library so we had this opportunity. One of the places that I went was an R&D lab of a Fortune 500 company in the telecommunications field, and their librarian had come there shortly after the end of the Second World War. She had an incredible reputation nationally as being the best engineering librarian at the best library—and she was very gracious. She spent lots of time with me and took me all through the library and was very, very helpful. Then we got to some questions about automation, she just said, “I don’t do that. I have people on my staff. If you want to talk to them, but…” I mean, essentially, “I’m not learning this. I’m close to retirement.” You know, “This is off—you know, just—“I’m not touching it.”

When I came back from that trip, of course lots of ideas I ultimately implemented, but the thing that stuck with me is that conversation with her. Through my whole career I have found myself asking myself, “When am I going to do that?”—you know, not letting myself ever say, “I don’t want to learn that,”—or, “This is too much.” It was just stunning for a young person just right out of graduate school. It was just an incredible revelation to me that this was something that I had to guard in my whole career against falling into that.

You asked what changed and what’s been the challenge. I think the challenge for each of us individually has been to adapt, you know—that there’s always been an adaptation to new resources and new materials and new indexes and new tools. This incredible change that’s come through automation and then through the Internet has really challenged a lot of people in terms of their own confidence in their ability to handle the new technologies and just their openness to learning new things. It’s not the way we always did it, and I think it’s become increasingly a challenge as you find patrons coming in, young people particularly in a setting like this where, “It’s not electronic? You want me to look at a book? Or, you know, “But I can’t cut and paste,” or, “I can’t search for this,” or, you know—so kind of that whole transition to a generation that now assumes that if it’s something they want and need, it will be electronic, where for us that’s still something we didn’t grow up with and that we’ve had to learn.

I often think back to that meeting and find it’s been something that has stayed with me in terms of just making me constantly assess my openness to change and my willingness to learn a new thing. I think that’s really—it’s a challenge, I think, for the library schools now

because they have students coming in who are very much this ‘point and click’ digital generation, but they still have a huge amount of information that is not digital and they still have to learn those kind of traditional resources. They still have to learn how to link the newer resources with the older ones because there’s times when you do have to bridge back. Yet, oddly enough, their willingness to learn our way, the way we grew up with—is as much a challenge, I think, sometimes for them as ours is to learn the new way so...

Paustenbaugh *I started out here as the head of our patent and trademark library, and it was at a time when patent and trademark information was just sort of coming online and at first there was a dedicated system and then it was disseminated on CD and now, you know, there’s a web-based system. There was this big transition going on and I felt like I was trying to learn all these different systems of getting at this information and some of these really arcane print indexes, but I really found that a terrific advantage to learn how to use those arcane print indexes was because, at least in the development of this, sometimes information that you expected would be online, you know, wasn’t there and you knew that you could get at it...*

Russell ...another way.

Paustenbaugh *Right, and people that came along after me that didn’t have to rely heavily on a print system. I would get these even years after I wasn’t in that department, “Well how do you find?”—you know, “Somebody’s looking for such and such and there should be some way they can get at it, but how do you do that?” And so—I don’t know, I just think it’s really interesting is this—saying it’s such a challenge for the library schools to educate people, but also when people come into your library as newly-minted...*

Russell ...on the job...

Paustenbaugh *That’s right, and it just almost seems overwhelming the amount of information that you have to sort of take in and then be able to call back up at a moment’s notice for somebody that might want it.*

Russell And yet, don’t you think that’s one of the things that is—at least I’ve found in my experience with people who choose to be librarians, and I guess particularly those who are interested in reference but—that they are basically people who are quick learners, very inquisitive and who delight in finding out an obscure fact or the back door into some information and as a result they really retain that. So part of, I think, what attracts them to the profession is just the puzzle to be solved. When I look back at my career and particularly as I sort of decided those early

years, I mean I, you know, was in aerospace and medicine, defense and education—and I loved all of it. It was really hard to sort of figure out where I wanted to be...

Paustenbaugh *Sure.*

Russell ...because it was all interesting. It was kind of nice to be in a place where you could learn one thing and then go learn another and constantly have that growth and challenge of new information. I think that's something that attracts a lot of people to this field.

Paustenbaugh *So did you have any tricks, since you did work in such a wide variety of areas, did you have tricks that you found over and over again helped you learn a collection well or...*

Russell I don't think so. I think a lot of it was more just—as I say, curiosity and listening. What I found was, of course, particularly in special libraries we had such a close relationship with the people we were serving really, so...

Paustenbaugh *It was more of a partnership.*

Russell ...their willingness to explain something to me so that I could then help them. I felt like it was very reciprocal in the sense of if they came in and they were looking for something that was cutting edge and so there wasn't likely to be a lot of literature and, of course, it was their particular field. It was something that just fascinated them and that's obviously why they were working on it...

Paustenbaugh *Sure.*

Russell ...and so, you know, their willingness to sit down and try to explain it and, you know, to try to help me understand terminology and what the things—where related things might be so that I could help them and find things. I think that was why I said it was so opportune, really. It was something that was educating me as I was trying to help them.

I don't know that I have a specific piece of advice to offer other than just to kind of—that we all fall back on that kind of reference interview, but the willingness to continue to ask a question until you understand what they need enough to be able to go and help them find it.

Paustenbaugh *I know that throughout your career you've been involved in developing electronic sources of information, and I think your description of working for—was it the American Psychiatric Association...*

Russell American Psychiatric Association.

Paustenbaugh *...and helping with the part of controlled vocabulary dealing with psychiatry, would you consider that your first experience in what would later become database development?*

Russell I guess in a sense because we, as the Psychiatric Association, our collection was almost exclusively in psychiatry...

Paustenbaugh *Sure.*

Russell ...and we'd have—my recollection is over 10,000 volumes just in that one field—and so, of course, to NLM who was looking at the whole of medicine. My recollection we had, may be false but WM100 was psychiatry. Well, we couldn't classify our entire library WM100 so obviously we needed to begin to break out sub-disciplines and that kind of thing. The ability to do that analysis of, you know, having a large body of information in one field and a specialty in that field with our own members and things to be able to then come back to them and make recommendations about terminology and refinements of the classification system. It was like just a—well, you know, for somebody who was first in college and then just in graduate school, to be tinkering with that was kind of neat. It was like, "Wow," you just sort of—it's kind of fun to think that here you can be so junior in your profession...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell ...and yet because you are working with a collection that has a specialty, you have something to offer and an ability to gauge and make recommendations. So it was kind of an interesting puzzle to solve.

Paustenbaugh *Well, your whole comment about wondering if you would ever get at the point of your career that you wouldn't want to learn things anymore, and being an administrator now, we have that conversation a lot and some of us are still in our mid-forties and think we have 20, maybe more, years in the profession and things are just evolving so quickly. Do you have advice for people that are going to be in this for the next 20 or 30 years and how to manage all of this?*

Russell I was having a conversation a week or so ago with a colleague who is also trying to manage change in her organization, and we got to talking. The analogy that we were using was that we're going through a period of whitewater and just this incredible rapidity of change and the amount of turbulence, and that part of what's hard to convey to people is this isn't a brief passage of whitewater that we're passing through, but that for the foreseeable future we're going to...

Paustenbaugh *It's all whitewater.*

Russell ...be in whitewater, yes, and so trying to prepare people for the idea that it isn't enough just to sort of cling to the raft and close your eyes and wait to get through it, but that you really do have to try to pay attention and steer the canoe, if you will, and the raft and try to take as much control as you can even when there's this incredible amount of turbulence around you.

I know that's a real challenge for some people because some people are just not as comfortable with change, particularly with change that comes with that kind of speed, and so I think as administrators, it puts a lot more on us in terms of how we communicate about the changes that are coming and how we help our staff work through. I don't think you want to protect or buffer them from it, but nevertheless to at least make them feel that there's some semblance of control or some sort of plan, you know, of action so that they don't feel like they're just being constantly buffeted by its happening.

When I look back at my career and the amount of change in the past ten years is just probably as much or more as in the entire rest of my career. When I came to GPO in the 1990s, I originally was working with GPO Access in the depository program. We were looking at a program that was 95% paper, and the five percent that was electronic was mostly stripping out floppy disks and CD-ROMs. Now we're in a program where 92% of the new material we identify is online, even if you also have it in tangible form. So in ten years we've gone from a paper-based program to an electronic-based program and that's just—had we gone, what, a 180 years before that with a paper-based program?

Paustenbaugh *Well, it's kind of like you jumped from the 19th century into the 21st century in a ten year period.*

Russell Right. We had microfiche in the 1980s, but that really wasn't that dramatic a change. People had been using microfiche and microfilm for decades and in lots of other areas. This is just a complete change and has really caused us to have to rethink so many of the things that we do. So, you're right. You sit there and you try to think, well, what will we be dealing with? What's the technology we're gonna be dealing with in 10 years or 20 years? It's almost impossible to imagine what that might be, and so the ability to really prepare for it is much different.

When I got out of graduate school, in the very early days we began to have online databases and things, so you could sort of see that that was coming and it would be more and more of an asset, but not that it was going to just turn everything topsy-turvy.

Paustenbaugh *Right. Well, the whitewater analogy is a really good one, and one thing that I think about whitewater is that there's a lot of noise associated with it.*

Russell Yeah. (Laughs)

Paustenbaugh *I think that's really a challenge. There's so much noise in figuring out what the things are that are really going to be the critical things that you have to do and other stuff you...*

Russell Not be distracted by those.

Paustenbaugh *Right. So have you found any sure-fire way that's worked more often for you than not?*

Russell I can't say that I have a secret weapon there. It would be nice to have one. I think it's more—again, maybe it goes back to sort of listening carefully. I think the advantage of touching base with so many different people in so many different institutions is that you begin to kind of pick up the patterns and you begin to sort of see where somebody's coping a little better with this and somebody else is coping a little better with that and you can begin to blend some of those things together. I think we're all kind of pretty much at that same stage and so, as they say, some people are getting a little bit better control in one area and some in another, but I don't think I've seen anybody who's really got it down to the point where it's a formula that the rest of us could then pick up and fly.

Paustenbaugh *Right. Yes. It sure would be nice though.*

Russell It would be. (Laughs) Make life so much easier, wouldn't it?

Paustenbaugh *Yes, but maybe not as interesting.*

Russell That's true. Well, we can never say it's been dull. That's certainly not a word I would apply to my career in the last decade.

Paustenbaugh *Right. Well, and it still surprises me the people that think that, you know, librarianship is a really dull occupation and the reason people get into it is because they love to read—and that could be the reason that they get into it, but it's certainly not the reason that...*

Russell ...that they stay.

Paustenbaugh ...they stay, yes, in it as well.

- Russell** I think that very much, too. I think this was very clear going out again and visiting. We were at Alva yesterday with John Phillips and Vicki and others. You have this incredible motivation to service. I think that's another characteristic that you really find in people in this profession is that they really not only have the desire to know for their interest and their own sake, but they're just delighted with the idea that they're helping somebody else get some information that then allows them to pursue a personal interest or a business need or, you know...
- Paustenbaugh** *Sure.*
- Russell** And there's just such a sense of reward in the fact that you've been able to help somebody overcome a problem or search out a path.
- Paustenbaugh** *Do you think that that is a characteristic in particular of documents librarians or really of all librarians? I've been at this institution for 16 years and so, you know, where I've really seen this is in our documents department, but I don't know if that's just this institution or if that is, you know, a characteristic...*
- Russell** I think the thing that blends with the general characteristics of librarians and documents people as an added thing is this enormous commitment to public access, and so I think you generally find people who are very concerned and engaged in global processing. I don't mean kind of campaigning for people or things, but who really are concerned about kind of the citizen's role in government and having the response of government and a responsible government, and who really place an enormously high value on the fact that citizens should not only be able to have oversight of their government but also take advantage of the huge amount of information that government compiles and chews up and spits back out. When you blend that kind of commitment to public access with already a very service-oriented profession, you do get a double dose. You get a group of people who are just really particularly diligent about it and committed to assisting people with information.
- Paustenbaugh** *With your background as a librarian—and it's my understanding that you're only the second librarian to have been appointed a Superintendent of Documents—do you have a sense of the amount of service that is delivered out of these collections that are all over the United States? Do you feel like your colleagues at GPO have that same understanding of how much locally is invested in making this information accessible?*
- Russell** Oh, absolutely. I was telling a little joke at Alva yesterday, a little funny story. When I came back to GPO as Superintendent of Documents, some of the early discussions with some people who had not been historically

at GPO, coming from the outside and were trying to begin to understand the depository program and some of the other things, were looking at our financial resources. One of them said to me, “Well, maybe we should see if we could get authority to charge dues to the depositories for participating in the program and that would give us additional money?” And I said, “You don’t understand, they’re already paying their dues. They’re just not paying them to us.”

The fact that every one of these libraries is investing their own money in staff and in equipment and in housing these collections, I mean it’s an enormous contribution and there’s a huge multiplier, well beyond the amount of money that the federal government has put into this program. It isn’t just the commitment of the documents people but it’s the directors of these libraries and, you know, that they are seeing this as something which adds to the overall ability of their library to serve whatever their primary constituency is and then in addition the willingness to reach out and serve a broad community. And when you think about it, it’s kind of amazing that the small investment on the part of the federal government, so many libraries have stepped up and taken up that responsibility and it’s really, I think, an incredible example of what you would like to think happens with government, that the multiplier effect of the government putting some sum of money into a program that then everyone else kind of picking it up and adding enormous value by the way they handle it. So it’s inspiring really to see how many of these institutions have taken on that burden and not seen it as a burden but see it as an opportunity for expanding the service to both primary and secondary clientele. It’s a really remarkable thing that they’re willing to spend their own dollars to do this. That we’re not paying them to do it, we’re simply providing information and they’re picking up the rest of the cost.

Paustenbaugh

Well, if you were to talk to a library director that was considering cutting the staffing that they had for documents, which, you know, I realize is a trend everybody’s looking at, cost-saving measures—what kind of advice do you, if you were asked by those directors, would you offer to them?

Russell

Well, I think it goes back to what we were talking about earlier with places like Benton Harbor. I think in every library there are parts of a collection that may not be heavily used and materials that are bought and housed because of the belief that at some point they may be useful or they support a more general area. I think it’s hard in any collection to know what’s going to be really critical to the person who comes in tomorrow. You’re always trying to second guess that.

With the government documents, there is just an enormous wealth of

information, and I think as we finish some of our retrospective cataloging that more of these materials are more visible and as we begin the digitization of the retrospective materials so that more of it can be retrieved electronically and blend in with other kinds of resources, that it will become more valuable, and more heavily used. But I think the real issue there is the expertise.

When we look at future systems and goals, we're always building a future system at GPO. We're also kind of trying to look as far ahead as we can in terms of what's going to happen. When you think about the idea that people may just be finding government information through Google or just on the Internet, it's really a little frightening sometimes. I can give you so many examples, but let's take the *Code of Federal Regulations*. There are very specific regulations and they are presented in a hierarchical way. You might do a search and you might come up with a very specific regulation that told you something about, let's say, how to ship a specific radioisotope and if you're naïve and you've been searching for, you know, shipment and some specific radioisotope, here's my answer. If you don't understand that that's hierarchical and that you also have to know all the regulations for shipping radioactive materials and hazardous materials and just shipping in general, you're going to make a bad decision because you're going to think you know everything when...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell ...you only know a piece of it, and so we've talked about how in the future might we do kind of an Amazon like thing, "People who read this regulation also read these regulations." (Laughs) "Look out," you know. Or if you think about doing a search and maybe the terminology that you used brought up something that was in a regulation or a law or a medical document several years ago, but the new terminology is different and so how can we link that forward? How can we say, "Did you know this, what you got is from 1995? Is that what you want or do you want us to find you the more recent material that may not actually have that same information?" Well, that's what's going on right now with the documents librarians. That's the intuitive expertise that they have so when somebody comes in and says, "Give me that regulation on how do I ship this radioisotope," they instinctively say, "Here's everything you need to know," or, "Here are the other sources you also need to look at." At this point we don't have and it's hard for me to imagine, no matter how good our systems get—no matter how many of these little tricks that we build in...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

- Russell** ...that we're ever going to get to a point where the randomness of finding a single document or a single fact or piece of information is going to be sufficient to assist people to really understand how it fits into the bigger puzzle. How many people really understand that at the end of every Congress, every bill expires? And so if you see something in the newspaper that says, "Senate Bill 1234" and you search for it and you turn up the one from the past Congress, do you really realize that that's not the right one? You know, it's those kind of things so there's that teaching that goes on to help that user really understand the contents and that's just invaluable and can avoid enormous errors or misinterpretations. You use statistical data and you don't really understand how it was compiled. You can draw false conclusions from it. That...
- Paustenbaugh** *You can do that when you do understand.* (Laughter)
- Russell** Well, that too. So I really feel that that human resource is really what adds value to a collection.
- Paustenbaugh** *I know that in the patent community that was certainly a big concern because it's great when people find something that's like their inventions. When they say they've found nothing and they've done their search on the Internet and you think well what exactly was it that you were looking at?*
- Russell** Right. Did you look carefully enough?
- Paustenbaugh** *Right—and did you ever find the right classification for your invention, so regardless of what the inventor called it, it was in this one area and, you know, it would be like one in a thousand people that would say, "Yes, I looked in such and such," and, you know, and then you could think, "Well, then you should have a fair degree of confidence" but...*
- Russell** Another example I often use, when I was at Lexis, they completed the building of a database of the 50 state statutes. They were really proud of the fact that you could go on Lexis and you could put in a search and could determine all the state laws on a single topic, and they had given us in customer service, a number of sample searches. And I remember one of the searches, I couldn't reconstruct it now if my life depended on it, but it was for seatbelts. There was like a whole paragraph—it was passive restraints and seatbelts and then a number of other terms, and those are the only two I remember. But if I were searching 50 state statutes and I put in 'seatbelts' and I got 12, you know, something would tell me that I was missing something and cause me to start thinking about synonyms or other ways to expand my search.

If I'm searching in something that's less bounded, there's always that tendency to think that because I got something, I got everything, or because I got something, I got the right thing. Like your example of the patents, you may have not gotten what you needed because the way you framed your search and it might have given you a fragment of what you needed and not all of it. And again that's where having, you know, somebody else who kind of can help you navigate through it or validate the technique that you've used just becomes invaluable, particularly when it's something that's really critical, either economically or health or scientifically. You really want to know that you're not just taking a random chance on the fact that you won't find it recently enough or that, you know, that particular document's been digitized when others have not or...

Paustenbaugh *That were even better than what you found.*

Russell ...than what you found—exactly.

Paustenbaugh *It's kind of a paradox in a way that there's all this information out there and yet it seems like in a lot of ways people's general knowledge has decreased. So your example of finding the bill that expired but, oh it just happened to have the same bill number, as one that did pass a couple of years ago and you're not looking at the same thing at all and people just not even having enough of a knowledge of how their government works to realize that, "I found this, but I didn't find the right thing."*

Russell Right thing.

Paustenbaugh *Yes. "I found this number, but not the right thing at all." I know that one of the things that we're interested in with this project is looking at the service to the government documents community. How did you become involved in the documents community as opposed to just working with documents in a library?*

Russell It was very interesting and goes back again to this whole issue of the transition into the electronic information. The Depository Library Council was an advisory group to the Public Printer and to the Superintendent of Documents. Back in the 1980s when it was just the beginning of the CD-ROM publishing and the online databases and things were becoming more prominent. I don't think any of us really had enough vision to see what was really going to hit us.

My name was recommended for service on the Depository Library Council because I had a lot of expertise in electronic publishing and it was felt that this was a change that was going to begin coming to the depository program and it would help them to have technical expertise.

So although I wasn't somebody who was a working documents librarian, I was somebody who had worked with government documents and who had been working in a number of different publishing companies that were doing electronic products based on government information. At that point I had been at IHS. I'd also been at Disclosure (Information Group) which was done on the SEC filings and some other databases and then at LexisNexis, so I was nominated to be on the Depository Library Council.

Then the Public Printer, Bob Houck, appointed me to the—no, actually I guess I was appointed by Ralph Kennickell and then Bob Houck came in while I was still on Council so I became a non-depository person on the Depository Council. At that point I began to meet a lot with working documents librarians and of course the Council was looking at a whole range of issues relating to things that were going on with the depository program, but increasingly beginning to talk about what might be coming in the way of electronic information and how to integrate it into the depository program. Because of being on the Council, I met Bob Houck when he was appointed Public Printer, and he and I had some conversations about electronic information and the changes that were coming, and he invited me to come and work at GPO.

Initially, you know, in a policy position and reported to him, to look at electronic information and then I actually was tasked to run the depository program. And then we set up an office of electronic information dissemination services. When the GPO Access bill passed, I had been working with the head of the library program and also the head of the electronic information program, and I was told I had to pick. It's like choosing between your children. It's like, "Wait ... wait. I can't do this. This is somebody's choice." But I chose the electronic information because I thought that was where I could be most valuable, and so that was why I got involved then in setting up *GPO Access*.

It was kind of an interesting evolution, I guess, of coming from having been on the private sector side developing products based on government information. Of course, in that context I had visited a lot of libraries to see about materials that we could use from their collections or to show them the products that we were developing and get their feedback. I had those kinds of contacts, but that was really the way that I began actually working more directly and more from within the documents community, if you will.

Paustenbaugh *Are there other Superintendents of Documents who have been on the Depository Library Council?*

Russell I think Fran Buckley, who was my immediate predecessor. He had also

been on the Depository Library Council and had been a documents librarian. He and I are the only two who have ever been librarians who have been superintendents. And again, if you think of what the whole system was, essentially we were a book dealer. We weren't really running a library. We were running a book dealer, so we would get publications in from the printers or printed in-house and turn around and package them up and ship them out to the libraries. Most of the prior superintendents were people who were much more oriented toward warehouse management supply, you know, that type of business function. I think the need to have somebody with more of a library background has become stronger and stronger as we've moved into the electronic environment and as we're beginning to restructure the program to be more of service to the libraries in this kind of environment.

Paustenbaugh *Sure. And this might not really be a fair question, and you don't have to answer it, but do you expect that your successor will be somebody that is also a librarian?*

Russell I don't know. I mean, it certainly isn't in that sense a specific requirement of the job...

...but the advantages—I think there's real advantages to it in terms of the ability to communicate with the community and to understand the issues that they're facing. I think that's probably certainly a factor that will be considered for whoever is my successor as what's their ability to work with the community. It may be possible to do that without a library degree but certainly a library degree is an advantage.

Paustenbaugh *What's it been like to be the first woman superintendent?*

Russell You know, I guess it's certainly a fair question, but it's a hard one for me to answer simply because I don't know what it was like not to be, so that's part of it. But also because it's something that...I think that I'm there because of my qualifications, not because I'm a woman...

Paustenbaugh *Sure.*

Russell ...and so I guess to me it's kind of a, it's nice but it's sort of a side issue.

Paustenbaugh *Right. You're the superintendent who also happens to be a woman.*

Russell ...to be a woman rather than otherwise. When you look at my career, Bruce James said to me at one point when he was recruiting me for the job, he said, "It's as though your entire career you have been preparing for this job." The mix of the private sector background and the fact that

I'd been at GPO before and had been involved with the depository program and *GPO Access* and worked right down to the National Commission on Policy relating to library information science—I mean, there was just this whole number of factors that just seemed to qualify me for the job. It was nice that in addition I happened to have a library degree and in addition I happened to be a woman, but neither was really the single determining factor. So I guess it's hard for me to step back from that and say one way or the other. It certainly—I think is an important thing for GPO in the sense that it's the first time we've had an operating manager of any business unit at GPO that's a woman. I think that's kind of a signal, too, of the changes that have gone on at GPO. But I think it's less of an issue than my qualifications for other reasons.

Paustenbaugh *Well, to follow-up on our question about being the first woman Superintendent of Documents, in your mind there weren't obstacles or barriers because you were a woman, but do you feel like there were as far as the way colleagues treated you at GPO or elsewhere within the government?*

Russell I never have felt that way, and maybe that's an over-abundance of self-confidence. I don't know. (Laughs) But I mean I've always felt that I brought enough to the table in terms of my knowledge and so forth that even if there was some initial skepticism, I was able to earn people's respect. I've never really seen it as much of an issue and certainly not so much now this time at GPO but certainly when I was there before it was very seldom that there was another woman in the room when there was a meeting planning things or whatever it might be. I never really felt, you know, that I was an outsider.

Paustenbaugh *...or it was you against the rest of them?*

Russell Yeah, as they say, it was just in that whole partnership of developing *GPO Access*. I was enormously appreciative of the knowledge that the people who did the publishing had of the data. I couldn't have designed some of the aspects of the database because I would not have known the structure that they had embedded with the printing typesetting codes...

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell ...but on the other hand, I brought a different expertise and so there was a partnership there that each of us was able to respect what the other one brought to the table.

Paustenbaugh *I have some more general questions for you. One of them is—you spent almost your entire career in Washington, so what has it been like working so close to the Capitol?*

Russell

Well, and living there, too. I practically live on the Capitol. When I mentioned that I had worked at OTA, I was actually working in Congress. I was a Senate employee and I was there during the Watergate years. It was just a time of a different kind of whitewater—turbulence, yes. But when I left there I went out to Denver to work at IHS and, when I first left, it was just enormous relief. It was like, you know, just been so intense. It was such an emotional time, I think, for the country, but to be right in the midst of it.

I think I was walking down the street to go the Library of Congress to do some research one day when they had just come out of the Supreme Court and were announcing the Nixon papers decision. It was just that kind of sense of getting caught up in history that you get in Washington. Local news is national news and so it's all kind of there. At first it was like this kind of big sigh of relief, to be away from it, and then after a few months I began to think, "You know, if it wasn't for Walter Cronkite I wouldn't even know what was happening." (Laughs) This was, you know, before CNN and C-Span and stuff. I began to get this sort of withdrawal symptoms, like "Wait, wait—don't these people know what's going on? Don't they care?" For if it wasn't Watergate, it just didn't make the local press and I was like, "There are people back there who are doing all these things that affect these people and nobody's telling them about it."

I think you become addicted. You really do get to the point where it's just part of the air you breathe and the water you drink, and you don't know how to step back from it. But it's wonderful to be in Washington because you do have this sense of closeness to the government and the sense of awareness of things that are happening. I had a colleague when I was at Lexis who did some of their government relations work and who had been in Washington for a meeting about a bill that was pending, and she came back and she was shaking her head. She said, "You know, they had come in with some suggestions of some changes they wanted in the bill," and essentially what she was told was before the bill was ever introduced, they had met with the people they felt were the constituencies that had to be addressed and they negotiated this all out and nothing more was going to change. It was that, "How does a bill become law?" It's like the bill is introduced and then you have hearings and then, you know, it was like, "Wait a minute. What about that whole step?" Then I thought, "Well, I knew that." And then I thought, "Well, how did I know that?" And I honestly don't know how I knew that. I just knew it.

Paustenbaugh

Right.

Russell

You know, because it was just part of growing up in Washington. You

knew those things and somebody must have told me at some point or I was part of a conversation of somebody who'd been in one of these pre-drafting things or something. But she was a lawyer. I was so startled—like, “Well, how can I know that and she didn't know that?” So, there's some things.

Paustenbaugh *All that stuff they don't teach you in your civics classes.*

Russell Exactly. It's a magical place and there's times when it can be a frustrating place, of course, but it's endlessly fascinating being there and just observing what's going on. My children will tell you that they sort of liked the idea that we were living in D.C. and so they're disenfranchised. My son would say, “Well, they can't hold me accountable for that because I didn't vote for any of those people.” (Laughs) It's a sort of a funny environment because we were so much of Emerald City and yet as citizens of that city we don't have our own senators or our own members of Congress.

Paustenbaugh *I think I like the license plates that say, “Taxation...”*

Russell Taxation without Representation.

Paustenbaugh *Yes.*

Russell Exactly, yes.

Paustenbaugh *Yes, I remember the first time one of my children saw that and they...*

Russell “What does that mean?”

Paustenbaugh *Well, no, but she would have been, you know, learning about the Revolutionary War and she said, “Why is that on there?” And I said, “Because there's still a place where—in our country.”*

Russell ...where it happens.

Paustenbaugh *She was just, you know...*

Russell ...which is why they put it there, hoping that people would notice that and say, “Oh, maybe we should let those people vote.”

Paustenbaugh *Yes. Do you have any favorite memories involving government information work?*

Russell Oh, well—probably thousands, but favorite ones, huh? Well, I'll tell you one. GPO, of course, was originally founded to do congressional

information and only in 1895 began to do printing for the entire government. As I mentioned to you when I went to Colorado I was doing this controlled vocabulary index with *CFR*, so there were several years of my life where I was just deeply embedded in the *CFR*. I got to know a lot of people in the offices of the Federal Register—a lot of things like that—and so when I came to work at GPO for the first time, they had a number of the presses. The *Record* and the *Register* are produced on the same presses and they're produced overnight so if Congress meets during the day, when the Congress recesses at the end of the day they send the data over and it's processed and printed overnight and it has to be back off to them the next morning. A similar kind of process happens with the *Register*.

The presses were labeled at that point, "Record Press One, Two, Three." I don't know how many there were, but when I got there what I wanted to do was I wanted to see a *Federal Register* being produced. The *Record* was much less interesting to me (Laughter) which was heresy at GPO. It was like, "Well, we're in the legislative branch and it's congressional." So, I got to come in at night and actually see the *Register* being printed. For some reason, that just really—because I had worked with the *Register* and the *Record* so much it was just really exciting to me to see it. I still have that great interest and affection for the *CFR* and the *Federal Register*. It was neat just to see that this is where it's really done, you know.

We actually just recently celebrated the 70th anniversary of GPO working with the Office of the *Federal Register* to produce the *Register* and the *CFR*. Both agencies were bragging about the fact that in all that time, they'd never missed a day. There's been terrorist attacks and Anthrax and snow storms and all these other things and they've managed. It really is the same mission as the daily newspapers in some ways.

Paustenbaugh *Right.*

Russell When Congress recesses the *Record* suspends, but the *Federal Register* comes out every business day that's not a federal holiday, and it—between us, never missed an issue.

Paustenbaugh *That's quite a business continuity record.*

Russell Well, it is and it's interesting because it's a partnership between the executive and the legislative branch which—you know—even with the separation of powers... Here's this executive branch agency that's responsible for publishing it, but by statute, prints it through GPO and so, we're two agencies that work so closely together.

Paustenbaugh *That is really remarkable. Do you have an, “I can’t believe they did that in the library,” story? (Laughter)*

Russell Oh, I have one that everybody probably thinks is an urban legend, but actually a member of my staff is the personal witness to this. We used to joke back when I first got on the Depository Library Council that people during the open forum times would bring up obscure cataloging rules and other things that were important to them. So, we had this joke about people who were always complaining about something including the wrinkled shipping lists. They’d do a shipping list that they’d put in every box and, of course if the box isn’t packed just right or isn’t sufficiently full, the shipment could get wrinkled in shipment. Well, there actually was a librarian in Michigan who had an ironing board and an iron in the office. (Laughter) She just retired in the last few years, and one of my staff who had been an inspector and had actually been in her library and had actually seen this. She would open the boxes and iron the shipping lists—and so, you know, we had all joked for years about people always complaining about wrinkled shipping lists. But in fact here was somebody who was taking action and was ironing the shipping lists. I mean it just sounded like an urban legend. It sounded like there really couldn’t be anybody who would do that, right? And I think if my colleague hadn’t actually seen her, (Laughter) I still wouldn’t have believed that anybody actually did it. But she swears up and down. She actually can name the library and the librarian—whom we will not name here.

Paustenbaugh *She probably also didn’t do that automation thing either.*

Russell Probably not. Probably not. (Laughter)

Paustenbaugh *Oh, that is pretty funny.*

Russell Yes—that is really funny.

Paustenbaugh *When you became a librarian, did you think that that would be what you did for your entire career or did you ever think that you might make a career change at some point?*

Russell I must say that my career has been filled with serendipity when I look back at it. At times, I could see the path for which I got from Point A to Point B but it was in no sense a planned path. It was in no sense something where I anticipated, “Well, if I do this, then I will be able to do that.” It was more—I guess I use the word ‘serendipity’ rather than ‘luck’ but, you know—just kind of being in the right place at the right time and with the right combination of experience. So I certainly could never have foreseen, ever, even when I was on the Depository Council

or even when I worked at GPO in the 1990s—never occurred to me that I would ever be Superintendent of Documents. I mean, I’m not even sure if it was ever, like, an aspiration. I just never thought about it but it was a matter of just, as they say, a confluence of events. Kind of being in the right place at the right time.

I think I was very startled when I found myself in publishing and I had seen myself as working in libraries and, yes, I had branched out into this information center that was NSF-funded, but, you know, still kind of very much within that context and when I got the call from this company asking me to come and interview. They had been given my name by somebody at the Library of Congress who I knew—but I didn’t know her very well. Why she gave them my name, I don’t know, but they called me and they invited me up for an interview and I thought, “Well, I’ve never been to Denver so I might as well just go and interview,” and ended up taking the job. So then suddenly I found myself out of the library field and I think I was probably one of the first professional librarians who was in product development. They had some that had begun to do sales and marketing kinds of things, but it was unusual at that point to bring in someone with that background. But with the sense that if you were developing these products to be used by librarians, then it might help to have somebody who was one, you know that could... (Laughter) What an interesting idea. Now, of course, that happens all the time, but it wasn’t that common at the time.

I’ve had these various points in my career where, you know, a fork in the road has come and I’ve ended up doing something different than what I had anticipated. I don’t think it ever occurred to me that I would work at GPO and when Bob Houck asked me to come there, it was just like, “Oh, what an interesting idea.” I thought, “Well, gee, I’d been kind of on the other side for a long time, both first as a user and then, you know, as somebody who was in companies that were re-publishing government information and so,”—sort of, “Gee it would be kind of interesting to get on the other side of the fence and see, like, what’s really involved on the government side,”—but again not something that I would have ever consciously set out and said, “Well, now it’s time to work in government or...”

Paustenbaugh

Right. Well, you said that it wasn’t ever an aspiration to be a Superintendent of Documents. Did you have any early aspirations in your career?

Russell

No. I mean, I think it’s funny. In fact my sister and I have had these conversations recently because I’m retiring from GPO and so I’m at another fork in the road.

- Paustenbaugh** *Sure.*
- Russell** She's also a librarian and an archivist and so we talk family, but we also talk business. We've had these kind of career conversations, and she's always operated on a five-year plan. I have never in my whole life had a five-year plan and (Laughs) I just have, I guess, always taken it for granted that an opportunity would arise and I would follow it. But it's never been, "What are you going to do when you grow up?"
- Paustenbaugh** *Right.*
- Russell** So, in fact, we've had these conversations. Here I am 62 years old and I'm getting ready to retire from government and at another point where I can say, "Well, what do I want to be when I grow up?" I laugh at myself and I start saying, "Well, by the time you're 62 you really ought to know what you want to be when you grow up." In fact, I've been approached for a number of future job opportunities that are things that I am now looking at seriously that I would not have ever considered going and looking at absent somebody saying, "Come and look at me and talk to me about this." So I'm still operating more by serendipity, I guess, than by planning—which is interesting because part of my whole business career has been very much oriented around strategic planning for the organizations that I'm in. I don't tend to do that in my personal life, maybe because I'm doing so much planning at work the planning at home just takes a back seat, I don't know.
- Paustenbaugh** *Well, I think we get in different mindsets depending on where we are or some people do. You know, outside of things like compensation and benefits, what are things, when you've looked at these opportunities—that have really attracted you to one position or to another?*
- Russell** I think it's most always been the challenge of doing something that was different or something that would cause me to grow. I think I've most often been willing to change jobs when it started being maintenance rather than innovative—innovation and development. I don't like to be bored. I'm fairly detail-oriented and I like seeing things through and I like getting it finished, but still there's a point at which you have gotten something going and now it's just going to be...
- Paustenbaugh** *Right.*
- Russell** ...staying on track for awhile. I think at that point I tend to be more susceptible to being lured away. (Laughter)
- Paustenbaugh** *I haven't heard you say this, but I've read this transcripts of speeches that you've made. You've talked about the documents community being a*

community of helpful people and that if you ask, someone will answer. So, where have you turned for help with difficult questions?

Russell You mean sort of research questions or...

Paustenbaugh *Well, or just like in being the Superintendent of Documents.*

Russell Well, I think one of the things that I have really loved about this position has been that it's very collaborative, both in terms of the people inside GPO but even more so with the depository community. I've had the opportunity to do the ladder of what-ifs. "Well, what if we did this or what if we did that?"—or pick up the rock and say, "Gee, what's crawling underneath there?" or "Why are we doing this?" It's been wonderful to have the freedom to go back and say, "Well, okay, so we've always done it this way, but do we need to continue? Is that really the right thing to do?" But then to take those things to the community and to have an opportunity, whether it's through a speech or a series of speeches or a white paper or whatever mechanism to really get feedback and test out ideas and get the community then to engage in that process. I think that's been both what's kept it pretty interesting but it's also, helped make better decisions.

There have been times when we've put out, say a white paper on an issue where we were talking about a new way to approach something, and I'll get, like, a dozen responses. There's 1,260 libraries out there so as I'm talking to people, I'll say, "You know, this could mean that we have put forward the absolutely perfect proposal," but it's more likely that everybody's distracted by something else and they're not paying attention. (Laughter) I really want people to comment because if we go down the wrong path, it's not that we can't stop and back up, but that's costly in time and money so it's really gonna be better if we can get this out there and let you kick the tires. It's really important that you tell me before I'm going the wrong direction and take the time. I know it's a lot and because we've been going through so much change, there's just been one paper after another and one issue after another that they've been asked to comment on, but nevertheless that opportunity for them to help, and it's factored into that whitewater analogy. They can help steer the boat. They can help decide what the right choices are and what direction to go.

One of the early speeches I gave, I was talking about when I'd been at GPO before and I'd done this study on the transition to a more electronic depository library program. We started asking then the question about, "If and when everything was available free on line, would there still be depository libraries and why? What would, you know, need to be the services and things that would keep the program together?"—and the

first question I got at the end of the speech was, “Well, what’s the answer?” I was like, “You know, if there was an answer, (Laughs) we wouldn’t still be asking the question.” But in reality, that’s been a part of it, listening to the different institutions as they are talking about how they are changing, not in their depository but overall in terms of how they’re dealing with electronic journals, how they’re dealing with changes in the user requirements, those kinds of things. The documents has to fit within that and it has to be an asset to that institution so really the only people who could answer that question have to be the institutions themselves. What is it that you need from us, from GPO, to make this program work for you? What are the services we need to provide so that you can provide the services to your constituents? What are the changes we need to make that add value? We’ve been looking at a whole range of things. We have a whole document called “carrots document,” one of the incentives to remain in the program. (Laughter) So it’s sort of the, you know, “carrots and sticks” thing. There have always been sticks. There have always been regulations and inspections...

Paustenbaugh *Sure.*

Russell ...and these other kinds of things that can be annoying but, one of those carrots—that really has been a wonderful process to talk with people throughout these libraries about. What do they see changing in their own institutions and what do they need from us in order for this program to remain relevant. That’s, I think, been probably one of the most interesting parts of it and to recognize also that we’re administering this program for the libraries. It’s not really our program. The bulk of the dollars are their dollars. It’s their staff, their collections that they’re housing and managing. To recognize that GPO has to be respectful of that and we’re providing service to them and it needs to be the service they need so that kind of need for it to be a dialogue and partnership is, I think, really special.

Paustenbaugh *Well, you brought up a lot of accomplishments that you could point to, or others could point to, in your career with the GPO Access and is there anything that—if there was one accomplishment by which you could be remembered or which you would like that to be...*

Russell I think it’s probably not so much one as maybe that kind of collection of things that have happened while I’ve been Superintendent of Documents. We’ve gone through this elaborate planning process and there’s still lots of pieces that have to be finished once you have a general direction. When Bruce came in, we defined issues that we needed to address. Those were access and preservation and authentication and version control. Really, in some ways, you can’t

separate the four things. If you're going to provide access over a long period of time, you've got to have preservation. Too often, I think, we focus on getting the access today and not think about the consequences. We're suffering with the CD-ROMs that we sent out in the 1990s where they were all proprietary formats. There weren't trap doors that would let you extract the information, how many people were still running Windows 3.1 and have a specific sound card. We don't even have sound cards in our computers anymore (Laughter) so you can't even install some of those. We're now working actively to extract that information back.

So the access decision has to be a decision that's tied to the preservation decision. How do we make it accessible now and make sure it's going to be accessible in the future? And the authentication, which we're very close to finishing. I'm hoping since I'm retiring on the 28th that we'll actually launch the first authenticated database before I go, although it's nip and tuck as to what it will make on that in March but if it does, it does. The work has certainly been done. But we had done when I was at National Commission, a study of government agencies and their publishing practices, and one of the questions we asked—and this had been a study that had been initiated in cooperation with GPO was, “How do you authenticate your information?” The most common answer was, “The seal of the agency is on the cover of the document.” Well, when you think about it, in the old days where it all went to press, that was...

Paustenbaugh

Okay.

Russell

...okay, but I mean you and I could take the seal of just about anybody and put it on just about anything today with desktop publishing. The whole issue in the electronic environment is about how you can rely on this information. If you downloaded it from us, you got it from a trusted source. But now you e-mailed it to a patron and that patron has passed it to somebody else or put it up on their web site and it's been downloaded from there. You know, how do you know? And so the ability to begin to apply digital signatures so that when you open that document, you get a seal that tells you that this document is unchanged since it was issued by GPO, no matter how many hands it's passed through, you can rely on that information. If you're going to make a health decision or an economic decision or whatever, you know, life decision you're going to make, you certainly want to know that that hasn't been altered either deliberately or inadvertently.

Then the version control, I think, is in a way the one that we're still struggling with most. The whole issue of, again back in the print world, when enough change occurred, you issued a second edition and it said “second edition” on the cover and it had a different date and you could

say, “Well, this was the first and this was the second and this was the third.” But in the electronic world, this constant tinkering—“Well, I just found an error and I’ll just fix it,” or “There’s a typo here and I’ll just fix it,” or “I forgot to attach that appendix and I’ll just fix it,” you know. At what point have you changed it enough that you really should acknowledge that it’s a new edition and separately catalog it, separately preserve it?

We see things happening with the national map, for example, where it’s in many ways a quarto. There’s parts of it that are on the GPS servers but a lot of it is on the servers of each state government or even some county governments and city governments that are then making it accessible to be pulled in. At the point where you ask for a map of the Stillwater area, some elements of that may be coming from the State of Oklahoma or even from the City of Stillwater or whatever county you’re in. Then others may be coming from the USGS (United States Geological Survey). But as a result, each of those entities is constantly changing and updating their data and there’s no way to roll it back. There’s no way to say, “Well, this is today’s data but was that boundary there three months ago or three years ago or thirty years ago? It’s just a continuously changing database so the issues that we’re going to have to deal with in terms of permanent public access, how do we identify when there’s been enough change for it to be a new version and what do we call version triggers? What’s the trigger that says this change is sufficient for this kind of document? And it may be different for that kind of document or another kind, and then the technological challenges of the whole platform upon which the national map has been built does not lend itself to taking snapshots. We still haven’t solved that challenge for that particular type of database. There are other kinds that we have methods for doing it.

I think starting down that path, I think starting the depository program down the path, starting GPO down the path, as a government agency to work with all of the customer agencies to help educate them about the importance of these decisions that they’re making, in terms of not just the immediacy of, “I have this information, but I need to communicate today for my primary mission,” but the consequences of that decision for future access in terms of people’s ability to rely on the information and our ability to preserve it.

Paustenbaugh *It’s a huge undertaking.*

Russell It is, and fascinating. It is something that will have to be revisited continuously. But, I think just getting the focus on those things and the acknowledgment of the task that needs to be done and taking these early steps to doing it is huge in terms of starting down a path. We’ll have to

adapt to all the changes that come, but at least acknowledges what those responsibilities are. If you don't accept it, if you don't even know that you're responsible for doing it, then it isn't going to get done so...

Paustenbaugh *No one else is going to do that.*

Russell ...so getting in focus and set the guiding principles by which we now are going to be making these decisions as we go forward, I think, is real critical.

Paustenbaugh *Besides the advent of the Internet, what do you think has had the greatest impact on libraries and government information?*

Russell I'm not sure that it's separable from the Internet, but I think it goes back to what we were just talking about. It's the changes in publishing practice. Even before the Internet was there as a means for dissemination, the changes that were beginning to happen in the production and they lead to some really interesting challenges.

One of the very first electronic documents that we published at GPO was the Gore report called *Red Tape to Results* where they were beginning to look at dismantling an overabundance of regulations, simplifying. We had asked the White House for permission to publish it electronically. We were given the print obviously, and within a day or two of the time the publication was released, they sent us over—I don't remember now whether it was Quark Express or Pagemaker—whatever desktop publishing we were using to set it up. They sent us over all these files and said, "Yes" that we could release them electronically but they no longer knew which files related to the final copy because they had been editing chapter one and then they backed up and started editing another version of it.

This gets back to the whole version control issue. Because it was so critical and because it was such early days and we actually printed these things out and proofread them in order to determine which was the correct copy so we didn't put out an electronic version that didn't correspond to the print. Obviously that's not economically viable moving forward, but the very fact that these documents were beginning to be produced in that way and that they were flowing in an electronic way, began to give us an ability to change our production. A bill is typeset now. That bill is read into the record and comes out in a different format and record when it, more central public law, you know, it gets edited and then reformatted in that way.

So much of the content is being re-used rather than being re-typeset and that ability, even before we talk about the dissemination, just to be much

more efficient with the flow of information. All the challenges that rise up, the version control—knowing that this is the same version that went to press—is enormous. I think if that's the foundation on which all this public access really got built because if we hadn't changed the production methods, we would not really have been able then to do something with *GPO Access*. It was only because we actually had the electronic data to typeset the *Register* and the *Record* and everything so we were able to create those databases.

Paustenbaugh *I asked you about what one achievement you would like pointed out, what do you feel has been your greatest contribution to the profession?*

Russell Well, that really is something that others, I guess, would have to assess. I really don't know, other than just the issue of dialogue. Not so much our making decisions, but our challenging the community to have a dialogue with us so that decisions could get made and confront some of these things. Again, it's that whitewater issue of not just trying to ride the rapids, but sit down and think about what we need it to be. Again, it's difficult because you've got a huge community and they're all dealing with somewhat different resource issues depending on their own institutions and different constituencies, depending on the type of library and different places in their careers, different kind of support from their administrations. It really is a challenge to get people to sit down and come to some general consensus about what's the best approach to take on whatever the issue might be.

Paustenbaugh *And listening to what you say though, one thing that strikes me is that it doesn't necessarily occur to me that someone who has spent the majority of her career in Washington would necessarily have that mindset. It would be easy for me to think that if looking at where you've been that, "We know best," or "You're in Washington and this is the way it is going to be," and thinking that it would be very easy to really want to impose the program on the 1,250 depositories. I think that's really remarkable that, for whatever reason, that you've always seen this as a partnership and an opportunity to, as much as possible, develop some consensus about where it is that you are heading and how you're going to handle certain things.*

Russell Well, in a sense though it does come back to what our role is. Really our role is, in a sense, facilitating, implementing. Obviously we have a judiciary responsibility and we're ultimately constrained by the money that Congress gives us, but dollar for dollar, there's way more money being spent in the library than we're spending. So it would be really unrealistic to think that we could dictate that. I'm sure had we tried to take a less collaborative approach, (Laughs) it probably would have helped us redirect our energies, but I think it's in part the very nature of

the program that makes it necessary to approach it that way and logical to approach it that way.

Paustenbaugh *It seems like there is a constant need to educate our legislators since they make the appropriations decisions about the value of this, and I know even with the Library of Congress and the recent decision that they made on series cataloging. Many libraries view that as a highly cost-effective way to have that done. What has your responsibility been as far as being an educator of the legislators?*

Russell Well, and I think that is one of the roles that we do play is. Ultimately when we put together a budget and we go to Congress or when we go to our oversight committee, we are trying to convey to them that this is what we believe needs to be done for the program. It does have this collaboration, too, to be able to say, "...and here's the consultation that we've done to show that this is supported by the community or what the community also wants."

Obviously, any time you're asking for money on the Hill, you're competing with hurricanes and wars and whatever everybody else's priorities are. Part of our responsibility is to be an advocate for the program and to do what we can to demonstrate the need and to do that, and I must say you could not want a better partner than the library community. The real advantage to us of having 1,260 libraries is that there's almost no congressional district where we don't have somebody who's a part of the program who could communicate with their member of Congress that this is actually helping his or her constituents because it's bringing content to them, training to them and cataloging records to them and whatever the other services might be. So that really is an enormous benefit that we have in the program. If we've done our homework properly, we're correctly advocating, correctly representing the needs of the community and then the community is in a position to help us find their own communication with their senators and congressmen about the fact that, "Yes, this is a valid..." And that's been another part of the partnership that I think is very strong.

Paustenbaugh *So you have a sense that the libraries are really doing their job...*

Russell Yes...yes.

Paustenbaugh *...in that regard? They are?*

Russell In fact, when Bruce came to GPO as public printer, there had been a conflict going on between OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, in the executive branch and GPO. Title 44 does say that all executive printing was to go through GPO and he was trying to re-write

regulations to, in effect, say that it was an option for agencies, but that they were not required to go through GPO. And the library community started writing letters to Mitch Daniels, who was then the director of OMB, telling him that he would undermine public access, and it created a climate in which Bruce could come in as the new public printer and craft a compromise. But it was really interesting. It wasn't the printing industries who potentially could lose the printing contracts for GPO. It wasn't the agencies themselves who often aren't free to speak anyway against policy that OMB is putting forward. You know, it was the library community coming in and raising the visibility of the relationship between printing and the public access that enabled the policy to be turned around, and that wasn't something that GPO asked them to do. It wasn't something that we could have appropriately asked them to do, but it was something that they just immediately saw that connection and began educating the channels about what the impact of this decision would be.

Paustenbaugh *Right, which I think it's really easy to just sort of lose track of how one decision you're going to make impacts—yes, exactly. Is there anything that you want to tell me about that I haven't asked you, that you wish that I had asked you or...*

Russell No, it seems like we've ranged pretty widely here, but I can't think of anything at the moment except that it really has been a great honor to be the Superintendent of Documents. I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity. It's been really an amazing experience, not something I want to ever forget nor that I could. It's hard to imagine in that sense to know what the next job could be that could compete with that so, whatever I do from here, it'll be something very different. This will always remain, I think in some ways, the most special part of my career.

I think we get sort of an idea about government and bureaucracy and things, yet I think there's really an enormous number of people that work in government who really see it as public service. I think that's very much what I have seen is just the incredible opportunity to work with the program that I personally value enormously. I hope that I have helped it along the way and improved it along the way and set a path for others to follow because it's something very well worth supporting. And we've gotten it this far through history and I'd hate to think that the change to electronics would upset the apple cart. It's going to need to change, continue to change because the environment will change. I think the fundamental principle of having a system that brings public access to government information to the people in the local community, I just don't think you can substitute. Well, you can do an Internet search and walk away and say, "Victory," and then think it's—so I hope that we never lose that—that we continue to value having that personal contact,

that reference librarian, that collection and that commitment to the local community that you're never going to get at the national level with just an Internet search.

Paustenbaugh *Right. Well, thank you so much for your willingness to participate.*

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