

# A Conversation with Margaret Martin

Miron Straf, with Ingram Olkin in attendance

*Abstract.* Margaret E. Martin was born in 1912 in New York City, New York. She grew up in Yonkers, New York. She received a B.A. degree in economics from Barnard College in 1933, Phi Beta Kappa, and an M.A. from Columbia in the same field the following year. She spent a year as research assistant in the Department of Economics at Iowa State College and two years as research fellow at Smith College. In 1938, she joined the New York State Division of Placement and Unemployment Insurance as a junior economist in the office of research and statistics. In 1942 she received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in economics. The following year, she moved to the U.S. Bureau of the Budget's Division of Statistical Standards where she remained for the next 30 years, retiring as an assistant chief of the Statistical Policy Division in charge of the labor and income statistics fields. During 1962, she worked part-time as Executive Secretary for the President's Committee to Appraise Employment and Unemployment Statistics. She received the Director's Exceptional Service Award, Bureau of the Budget in 1968 for her efforts. Immediately following her retirement from government service, she became Executive Director for the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council. She retired as Director in 1978 but has since continued working with the Committee in various capacities. She was President of the American Statistical Association (ASA) in 1980 and received its Founders Award in 1989, the first year the award was given. She is an elected member of the International Statistical Institute and an honorary life-time member on the board of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics. She was chairman of Section U (statistics) of the AAAS in 1986.

The following conversation took place in Atlanta at the annual meeting of the American Statistical Association in August, 1991.

**Straf:** I thought that we should start with some history, asking you to recount some of your early professional life. Can you remember how many American Statistical Association (ASA) meetings you have attended?

**Martin:** No, but I attended most of them since I joined the ASA in about '43. I was a staff member at the Bureau of the Budget then, and there was a great deal of pressure on the staff to join

professional associations in the area in which we were working. This was one way of becoming better acquainted with the needs for statistics and what statistical changes and improvements needed to be made and the opportunity to make some contacts with academic people. We didn't have many chances for such contacts in those days. There were much fewer advisory committees, for example. When we had an advisory committee, it was generally thought of as a federal interagency committee.

## EARLY DAYS

**Straf:** Tell us about your early life. What brought you into statistics, and how did you get interested in it? Was it through economics, or another path, that led to your career?

**Martin:** I started out in a girl's high school being very much interested in mathematics. I had a rather unusual set of math courses. We had math

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from freshman through senior year. It was considered to be a subject like English literature or a language which you needed to take continuously—it wasn't divided into algebra and geometry and so forth—and we even had about a half a year of calculus. I loved math. When I got to college this particular mixed-up math series I had been going through was unheard of. I hadn't had a complete course in most of the subjects (e.g., trigonometry) which were requirements for the more advanced courses. I started taking trig over again from somebody who considered this subject beneath his dignity, I think. It was a very bitter drudgery for him, so that math suddenly became that to me, too, instead of being such an exciting and interesting subject. So I looked around for something else to do and I think it was really my mother who said, probably because I was the oldest child of four children, "I think you ought to be good in business. You like to manage things." So I decided I'd major in economics as preparation for going into business. This really was not a very carefully thought out career choice, but I did major in economics at Barnard College. I took statistics as a part of preparing for economics. My elementary statistics teacher was a lady named Clara Elliot Raup, Joan Rosenblatt's mother.

**Olkin:** Economics at Columbia had a galaxy of stars. Harold Hotelling was there as well as Frederick C. Mills, Frederick B. Croxton and Wesley C. Mitchell. Did you take courses from any of these?

**Martin:** Mills taught graduate courses in the business school, as opposed to the graduate school of arts and sciences. I took his course on business statistics and a seminar on economic organization which dealt a lot with statistics. Also, he was my professor for my master's thesis. Wesley Mitchell was a major figure in the graduate department. He gave an excellent course on the history of economic thought, which was a delight to go to. It was a huge lecture course. At Barnard I had been accustomed to class sizes of ten to thirty, whereas the largest at Columbia was a lecture course of 200 or 300 people in which Mitchell took up the major economic figures. He would have one lecture on the conditions which led to the new theory, one lecture on the principles of that economist himself and then a lecture on the effect that this economist had on ensuing economic conditions. So as a beginning course for graduate students who hadn't had that sort of background, it was a very popular and useful course.

**Olkin:** How about Helen Walker?

**Martin:** She was in Teacher's College, Columbia University. I didn't take courses there. The other statistician whom I recall was one who came over and taught a course, at Barnard, that I took as an undergraduate. That was Robert Chaddock. He



FIG. 1. Schoolgirl in Yonkers, 1920

gave a course in vital statistics which provided a good background because he stressed the use of the statistics in health programs. For example, I remember his talking about the importance of precinct census information in New York City and how using statistics on such small areas was very useful in a number of health programs in the city.

**Straf:** We've skipped a bit from high school, college, to Columbia University. Thinking back over your education, what people or events do you feel made the biggest impact on you personally or on you professionally?

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION

**Martin:** I really think that the biggest event on both me and my career was the Great Depression. It wasn't connected so much with which university I went to or which course I took but was just an overriding condition with which we lived. You see,

I started college in 1929. The stock market crashed about three weeks after I entered college. From then on, I saw apple sellers on the corner; and I knew that there would be no job for me when I graduated from college. There was little part-time work for college students then. There were only a few fellowships and scholarships. So our attention was mainly directed to how did one cope with such a major economic upheaval. I can remember the adverse impression I had as a graduate student taking a course in money and banking from a professor, H. Parker Willis, who thought that the way you handled a depression was to let the market settle things, so that there should be none of the support programs that President Roosevelt was trying to put in to keep things together. Willis thought the bank holiday was just dreadful. His students didn't agree with him. That was shortly before Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* appeared, but his ideas were known to some of the students.

**Straf:** I take it that you didn't agree with Willis either.

**Martin:** Oh no, no.

**Straf:** Was the depression visible in the teaching? Certainly it must have been felt among the other students? Did it affect the type of instruction? Was it present in the classroom?

**Martin:** I really don't have a very good answer for that. I think it appeared to some degree, but it was too early. The academic people hadn't had enough time to react to it or to do a great deal of thinking about it. Although, by the time I was a graduate student, a few of the faculty were doing research on the depression, and some were certainly active in advising Washington on some of the New Deal projects.

**Olkin:** It must have been visible since both Barnard and Columbia were private universities which charged tuition. More students must have had to go to work for financial survival.

**Martin:** You remind me that one of the New Deal programs was the National Youth Administration (NYA) program that did provide opportunities for doing work around the university that would help out students.

**Olkin:** Margaret, I remember that when I started college in 1941 I received 20 cents an hour from NYA for working in a library.

**Martin:** I think that's what I got, too. I didn't get on NYA until graduate school when I did some bibliographic research.

**Olkin:** Was the decision to go to college affected by the Depression?

**Martin:** No, not in my family. My father was a high school teacher. My mother had been a school teacher before she married. She was the first girl

from her tiny community in upper New York state to go to college herself. My father had taken a position as a teacher of history at the Horace Mann School for Boys, which is part of the Columbia University system; and part of his salary, a noncash part, was an agreement that his children had free tuition throughout the Columbia system. He took the teaching job just as he was getting married; there were no children when this agreement was made. I don't know if Columbia would have made such a promise if they'd known he was going to have four children. If we had lived close enough, we could have started going to Horace Mann in kindergarten. But, we lived just north of New York City, and it was a commute so at the age of 13 I first went, as a freshman, to Horace Mann School for Girls, which was on the edge of the Columbia campus next to Teacher's College. This school no longer exists. There was no question that we would go to college, and there was no question that we would go to Barnard or Columbia. If we wanted to go elsewhere to college, we would have had to earn our way. That would have made quite a difference.

**Straf:** And the decision to go on for a master's and then a doctorate, was that in your mind?

#### BEGINNING GOVERNMENT SERVICE

**Martin:** Again, that was relatively simple because when I graduated in June of 1933 I couldn't find any job. Graduate school was the only feasible option at the time. A friend of mine who graduated one year later in 1934 felt very fortunate. She'd gotten a job selling at the B. Altman department store; she worked 48 hours a week and earned \$15. But, even those jobs were relatively scarce. We had an occupation officer, Miss Florence Doty, at Barnard, and I went to her to talk about the possibilities of going to Kathryn Gibbs, a secretarial school. I didn't know where I'd find the money, but I thought that would be a skill that could at least earn something. Miss Doty really had an influence on me. She was not an easy person to get along with, and a lot of the students stood very much in awe of her, but I always thought her bark was worse than her bite. She just turned on me, "I would never recommend that you take a secretarial course! If you learn to use a typewriter, and show that you can use a typewriter, you will never do anything else but use a typewriter. You have been trained to be a professional, and you should be looking for a professional position." In those days, with positions so tight, it was taken as a matter of course that what positions opened would be given to men because they would have families to support. So, this really left nothing. By this time I wanted to teach economics rather

than go into business.

Miss Doty decided that one thing that I might do was to get a job in the government, as positions started opening up. So, after I graduated she sent me announcements for government examinations. For two or three years I disregarded these, because I had been trained by economists primarily, and they had a very low opinion of government work. Most economists felt that bureaucracy was by nature inefficient, and hence it would be very undesirable to work for the government. I finally took one of the examinations, more out of a feeling of guilt that she'd been sending me this material for so long, and I'd never done anything about it. It turned out to be a New York State examination rather than a federal government examination, and it was for a new organization administering unemployment insurance that had just been set up as one of the New Deal agencies.

**Straf:** Was this a state or federal agency?

**Martin:** Unemployment insurance was set up as part of the federal Social Security Act. But the Act encouraged the states to participate and to do the administration, and the way they did that was by assessing a tax on employers and then forgiving most of that tax if the state set up its own system. It was an incentive system to avoid interstate rivalries about trying to lower the taxes in order to attract industry.

**Straf:** This was an application to go to work?

**Martin:** It was an application to take a New York civil service examination. Of course, I knew nothing about unemployment compensation. When I looked at the questions on the examination, I almost got up to leave; in fact I did get up and start to turn the paper in saying to myself this isn't for me. Then I got mad at myself, saying look at all the time you've spent studying economics and if you can't apply that to a specific situation, then what have you been doing? Well, it turned out the examination had been set by a college professor who didn't know too much about unemployment compensation either, so that a lot of the questions were somewhat general. I don't remember now what they were, but I do remember that one of the questions was on the cost of living index, which I knew something about. It was an examination which a lot of people who were already working for the agency, which had been in existence for nearly a year or year and a half at that point, had to take in order to convert from a temporary to a permanent status or to get a promotion from, say, a senior clerk to a junior economist. Many of them failed the examination because, although they knew about the unemployment compensation system, they did not know some of the more theoretical economic background. I was lucky. I think I came

out number three on the list for the state so they had to consider me when filling openings.

**Straf:** And this was what year?

**Martin:** This was after I had left graduate school. What happened was that after my second year of taking graduate courses at Columbia, I had an opportunity to go as a research assistant to Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa. Iowa State divided its economics courses into different groups depending on whether they were for agricultural, engineering or home economics students. This research assistantship was for the home economics group. Margaret Reid taught there. She was very much interested in prices, consumer economics and housing economics. She later went to the University of Chicago where she remained for many years. She wanted a research assistant and I got the position. I think my salary under that fellowship increased a great deal, from 20 cents an hour to \$55 a month. But it was enough to live on in those days in Iowa. For example, my room rent was about \$11 a month at the college, so prices were very different from now. After that I applied for and got a fellowship at Smith College. They had a program in economic history to develop studies of the economic history of the Connecticut River Valley, which accounts for the specific choice of topic for my dissertation, "The Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley from 1755 to 1820." It was while I was at Smith College that I went to take that examination for New York State. That would have been about 1936 or 1937.

**Straf:** How long were you in Iowa?

**Martin:** I was in Iowa for one year and then two years in Massachusetts at Smith College. I don't recall if it was during the first or the second year that I took the exam. I didn't take the first offer that came along. I wanted to finish my dissertation before going to Albany, New York. I went there in the summer of 1938 as a junior economist. I did not know what I was getting into at all. I learned statistics really from the nitty-gritty end, from the ground up. My first assignment there was the industrial and geographic classification of employers covered in the unemployment insurance system. We had to classify the establishments. I remember designing the form for the multiunit establishments so we could apply different industrial codes to the different units of the company within the state. We reviewed the accuracy of the reports, we planned tabulations and we wrote up the little analyses of what they showed. The interesting thing about those data, which were really summaries of the employment and wages paid by these establishments by industry and by the various locations within the state, was that this was about the only information that was available on a

local basis but covered the whole state. So, there was an interest in the statistics. The head of that office was Meredith B. Givens, the head of the research and statistics office for the unemployment compensation program. He had been in Washington serving as the Executive Secretary to the Committee on Government Statistics and Information Services (COGSIS), a committee jointly sponsored by the ASA and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) at the invitation of the government. COGSIS reviewed the statistical activities in the federal government and prepared an important and influential report on what needed to be done.

**Straf:** You and I referred to that report. What year was it?

**Martin:** The COGSIS report was published in 1937 by the SSRC. The Committee's work extended from mid-1933 to 1936 and had a major beneficial impact on federal statistics—in improving individual series, in employing more advanced statistical techniques and in fostering interagency cooperation. An early recommendation, for example, led to the establishment of the Central Statistical Board in 1933 during the first months of the new Administration.

During World War II the research and statistics offices of the different state unemployment insurance agencies around the country were taken over in whole or in part by the newly-established War Manpower Commission (WMC), which would run the rationing of the labor force for the country. Givens, who had held his own against the federal office of Employment Security that considered him a difficult man to deal with, wasn't taken over as part of the War Manpower Commission. He was left with a third of the staff to continue to work for New York State's unemployment insurance. The office was divided into two parts: the people who continued to work for the State, who worked five and a half days a week and a half hour less each day, had to be moved to the front of the office so they wouldn't be walking through the people who had to come to work a half hour earlier and worked six full days a week. Here we were, one federal and one state, but still all in this one big office.

**Straf:** Where was it located?

**Martin:** It was in Albany in an old warehouse building in the place that new agencies were given. Givens himself was in New York. He had most of the research staff. All of the operations were in Albany. I was assigned to stay with him and became his top person in the Albany office at that point. I had been expecting to be promoted so when the second in command, Leonard Adams, who became the head of the War Manpower part of the divided office, offered me a job at the higher rate in War Manpower, I

moved over becoming a senior economist, going out and interviewing employers about whether or not they had sufficient labor force and what were they doing to economize on the labor force.

**Straf:** So your interest in the labor force was a result of the availability of these kinds of jobs?

**Martin:** That was one interest. Another interest was that Givens served as a consultant adviser with the old Central Statistical Board and then its successor, the Division of Statistical Standards (DSS) of the Bureau of the Budget. He realized that DSS needed more staff, and he recommended me. I don't think he would have if I'd still been working for him. But I had moved over to the other part of the office, and so he felt quite free to suggest that I might come to Washington. Things were so tight DSS didn't even try to get me down for an interview. They just sent me a letter, "would I come?" I thought it over for two or three days and said, "yes, I would".

**Straf:** When was this?

**Martin:** This was the end of 1942.

**Straf:** Was this your first time in Washington?

**Martin:** Yes. I can still remember that first day because I went to three different meetings with Givens. I was exhausted. We got back to the office at four and William Leonard, who was the deputy to Stuart Rice, the head of DSS, called me into his office. I had made a move from Albany to Washington without getting the approval of the WMC. I had to go over to the Social Security building and talk to somebody and defend this action in order to get retroactive approval for it. Well, I was naturally a bit concerned; but Bill said, "Don't worry, they're not going to do anything to get in bad with the Bureau of the Budget. You really do have to go over there." So, I did and the WMC agent started in about how it was their function to assign people and so forth. I guess I was tired, so I was not very polite. I pointed out that I'd filled out a civil service application for federal employment a good year before, and I came out well on the rating. I was not at the top but well above passing on the rating, and I had never heard word one from a federal agency asking me to come down. This was the first offer I had and I had come. So, he said that he guessed that was the way things worked and approved the transfer.

**Straf:** You shifted from a qualitative approach to economics to a quantitative approach in these state and federal agencies. Is that a fair statement?

**Martin:** Yes.

**Straf:** Was that a difficult switch? Either in your mind or with your abilities?

**Martin:** No, I think I'd never been too theoretical, to tell you the truth. The economics at Barnard had been what was called institutional economics in

those days—descriptive. One reason that Columbia was difficult for me was because they were much more theoretical. I went into economic history because that was more factual. I think really what shifted me more than anything was that I discovered that I hadn't enjoyed the teaching of economics. I had a little of it in Iowa; while we waited for the research data to come through, I taught elementary economics for a quarter. This is what I had been training for and I discovered that I didn't enjoy it. When I got to the research and statistics group in Albany, I liked the interaction, I liked the work. I enjoyed much more dealing with colleagues than with the teacher/student interaction. When I had been in Albany a year and a half, I did have an offer to become an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, as I recall, and I turned it down. I realized then, fully for the first time, that I didn't want to go back to what I had trained for.

**Straf:** It might have been less the quantitative appeal than working in that atmosphere, with researchers.

**Martin:** In some casual reading just the other day, somebody talked about what she liked about this job as opposed to that job; and she said, "I enjoyed the dynamics of it." I think that's really what it was. Of course, if it hadn't been for World War II, things might have turned out very differently. It was World War II that opened up a lot of opportunities for women to get jobs in the government as well as elsewhere. These might not have been open otherwise. If you liked one job and did well at it, even though many jobs were held open for men when they came back from the service, nevertheless, there were a lot of opportunities to make a career which might not have been available earlier.

**Straf:** Could you elaborate on how it was for a woman in those early years, given society's expectations.

**Martin:** Oh, I can remember a few horror stories. I remember an undergraduate classmate of mine who wanted to get a job at one of the large international banks. She was a political science major with a lot of economics in her training, and they wanted her. They offered her \$1600 a year which was a darn good beginning salary in those days. But they pointed out to her very carefully, they said, you know, as a woman, your top salary here will be \$2000. That was the highest she could aspire to if she took that job. During the Depression, I don't think that I ever even questioned the idea that what few openings there were would go to the men who would have to support families. That was a common assumption which really made it very difficult if you wanted to pursue a career. When I got in the civil service, either in New York State or the federal gov-

ernment, there was much less discrimination, particularly in the initial hiring stage. But there was some discrimination in terms of promotion. In the Bureau of the Budget, for example, when I arrived, the budget examining divisions didn't have a single professional woman on their staffs. Women were considered to be too emotional and sensitive to stay in the battles that go on in the budget hearings. It's all changed now, but it didn't change for quite a while. I do know that I got a raise once, a promotion to a higher grade (I thought it was overdue) and I was told later by supervisors that they had recommended me for a couple of years. The first year the front office people had said, "well, we gave so and so, another woman, a raise this year, so we certainly can't raise another woman the same year". As if promotions were to be controlled by sex rather than whether you deserved it or not. But I seldom felt much discrimination personally.

**Olkin:** I wanted to ask you whether there were any other women statisticians in your classes at that time who we might know now or even men who were cohorts?

**Martin:** At Columbia there were people whom you would know, but they were economists rather than statisticians. Among the ones that I knew at Columbia who became statisticians were Peggy and Bill Pabst. I knew the economist Moses Abramowitz and Milton Friedman slightly.

**Olkin:** One of the Pabsts wrote a paper with Hotelling.

**Martin:** That would have been Peggy. She was a mathematics major from Vassar and she studied mathematical economics at Columbia. I knew Hotelling slightly, not through his classes but because he was in the economics department. There was a graduate student group, an economics club I think they called it, that used to have a picnic once every fall; and Hotelling would come to those picnics and sing the cautionary tales of Hilaire Belloc. I knew Peggy Richards (later Pabst) rather well then. I knew Carrie Glaser who married Moses Abramowitz. The economics club offered to teach some of the newcomers who thought they didn't have enough theoretical background and ran little seminars for them in the evening. I joined one of those which was very helpful. The graduate student who led that was Raymond Saulnier who later became, for a short time, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Eisenhower. Another economist, Eli Ginsberg, used to come down and advise Eisenhower on manpower problems.

**Straf:** The wartime then not only created opportunities for women but for many interesting assignments in statistics. Can you talk about some of your most challenging ones?

### THE WAR YEARS

**Martin:** During the war, which was the first three years or so that I worked for the Bureau of the Budget, I was still a junior staff member, and a junior staff member used to get bits and pieces rather than big, important assignments. For example, when I came to the Bureau of the Budget, they had one of their staff members assigned full-time at the War Production Board because we had the assignment of reviewing questionnaires. The War Production Board was developing questionnaires a mile a minute which had to be reviewed, coordinated and approved.

What I remember as my most challenging assignment in the early days was one where I really put my foot into it. Fortunately, it turned out all right. Since I had been working on unemployment compensation, I was assigned the whole area of social security, employment service and unemployment compensation forms to review. The year before another part of the Budget Bureau had come up with a strong recommendation that a government agency should not require applications for benefits and similar forms to be notarized. A law had been passed which established certain sanctions against making false claims against the government, and this law was just as operative if a claim was not notarized as if it were notarized. So it made a great deal of sense to stop doing this feudal, expensive, time consuming task.

I was assigned to review the application for social security benefits, and there was a requirement for notarization on it. I pointed out this new Budget Bureau recommendation and the answer was that after all, this was the business of Social Security. I pointed out that it was also the business of the Bureau of the Budget. In talking to the Social Security staff their argument was, "Look, this isn't any real problem because there is somebody who can notarize it in every Social Security office. So, applicants don't have to go traipsing out. It's a very simple thing to have done." So I said, "Are all applications filled out in the office?" All but 20%. "Well, how many were there?" It turns out 20% was thousands and thousands of people. I forget the exact number, but maybe 60 or 80 thousand people who were allowed to file their claims by mail rather than in person. How could they be allowed to do that? Either they were sick or they lived so far from the office that it was impossible for them to get there. I said it seems that you haven't sold me on this since these would be the ones that would have the most difficulty in finding a notary. So I said no.

Arthur Altmeyer, who was the head of the Social Security Administration, heard about this and took great umbrage. He complained to my boss, which

is what should happen if anyone didn't like what I had done, and Stuart Rice wanted to know why I had done this—so I told him and he said that my point of view sounded reasonable to him so he stood behind me. I can remember that Rice had to come into the office an hour early on several occasions because that would be the only time Altmeyer would have, and the two of them went at it. I was not in on those sessions, I'm happy to say. But in the end, Altmeyer appealed to the Justice Department saying that the Social Security Act should take precedence over the Federal Reports Act. Altmeyer's argument was that the Federal Reports Act was really meant for statistics and that this was an administrative form, and the Act should not apply. If his argument had won, this would really have put a dent in the whole forms clearance operation. After seven months, the Justice Department gave an informal opinion that since the Federal Reports Act had been passed in 1942 and the Social Security Act in 1936, the later Federal Reports Act had precedence over the Social Security Act. The Justice Department assumed Congress knew what it was doing.

**Straf:** You nearly brought down the forms clearance operation.

**Martin:** Yes, I didn't realize it at the time but thinking about it afterwards, yes.

**Straf:** You describe a very early challenge in your career with the Bureau of the Budget—what was the name of the office at that time?

**Martin:** The Division of Statistical Standards (DSS) at the Bureau of the Budget. It was the old Central Statistical Board, organized on the recommendation of the COGSIS report, which had been combined with the Bureau of the Budget in 1939, when the bureau was moved from the Treasury Department to the Executive Office of the President. We had three principal functions in the DSS. The first, acquired from the Central Statistical Board, was to improve the statistics compiled by federal agencies for the use of the public, by promoting the use of advanced methods and by encouraging collaboration among the agencies. We called the latter "coordination." The second, the clearance function established by the Federal Reports Act of 1942, was to review all proposed questionnaires going to the public to make them more efficient, less burdensome, and to avoid unnecessary duplication. The third function was to determine needs for new or improved statistics—we used to call it "identifying statistical gaps".

**Straf:** What was the title of your position?

**Martin:** The working title was simply a staff member of the DSS—it was more like a collegiate group than a hierarchical group. Stuart Rice was head, Bill Leonard was the deputy; there was one

assistant chief (later three), but other than that, we were assigned an area of review. Technically, we were called statisticians, although few of us had been trained as statisticians. Analytical statistician/economist is what the Civil Service called it.

I will go back to one of your earlier questions about what attracted me to the particular area of employment and unemployment statistics (and later on added to that income and poverty information). It was the fact that one of the consultants to the DSS staff was Gladys Palmer. She had been employed for several years before I arrived, first when the question came up of whether or not the results of the new Work Projects Administration (WPA) survey of labor force and unemployment should be made public because the results differed so from all of the other estimates of employment and unemployment and people were highly suspicious of this new household sample survey technique. Gladys had established an interagency conference of the agencies concerned to decide whether or not the new data should be made public. They decided to publish. The agencies who were putting out conflicting figures were encouraged to look into their own figures as well as to accept this new idea of getting information from a sample. Soon, the growing prospects of World War II made it clear that WPA itself would not last and the Budget Bureau called Gladys back to do a second job: Should this new statistical activity be saved, and if so, where should it go? The three candidates for taking over what is now the Current Population Survey were one, the Census Bureau, on the argument that it would be a miniature population sample, and it would be a good idea to have a full-time staff at the Census Bureau that would be working on problems relevant to the decennial census; two, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which said that employment and unemployment statistics were its business and since the BLS had the establishment series, it should have the sample population series, too; and three, the Bureau of Employment Security, which administered the employment service program and the unemployment insurance program, and said, after all, it was the agency whose major function was employment and unemployment. The decision finally was to transfer the new survey to the Bureau of the Census, accepting its argument, but with conditions; one was that the interests of the other agencies in the information from the surveys should be recognized from the beginning. Other federal agencies were major consumers of the data. Two interagency committees were established, sponsored by the Bureau of the Budget: one chaired by Stuart Rice was a policy committee that met infrequently and only if there were major issues and the other was a technical

committee and Gladys Palmer chaired that. It met frequently and handled various issues, conflicts between estimates arising from household, establishment, and administrative data, questions about concepts, and needed improvements in all the statistics on employment and unemployment from any federal agency. Gladys ran that committee and she was an enormously productive and effective person, not at all authoritarian or aggressive, but she would get the various groups to look at issues and forget their bureaucratic interests and really try to find out what the problems were. This was so interesting, that I think that this was what really attracted me to that area.

One of the photographs is of Gladys Palmer, Emily White, who was a colleague there at Statistical Standards, and Gertrude Bancroft who was the major analyst for what was then called the Monthly Report on the Labor Force and is now called the Current Population Survey (CPS). This photo was taken in Vermont, on our way home from the 1954 ASA meetings in Montreal; we were all looking pretty shaggy at that point.

I just this morning watched the ASA film of Morris Hansen talking about his work at the Census Bureau. He describes the development of the Monthly Report on the Labor Force following the 1937 check census of unemployment. I, too, was very much interested in that from '43 on, yet you could put our two sets of comments together and they would barely overlap. They'd be touching, but they wouldn't overlap because he's talking about the statistical design, the sampling development, and the use of statistical methodology.

**Straf:** The enumerative check census.

**Martin:** He starts with the enumerative check census but then he talks about changing to an area survey and putting in regression analysis and cost/benefit—cost versus accuracy estimating and the contributions of the consultant group of mathematical statisticians. I was working on our interagency committee; it was called the Labor Supply, Employment, and Unemployment Statistics Committee (Gladys Palmer's technical committee), all that time and I never even heard of that group of mathematical consultants until years later. Morris would come to our meetings occasionally when proposals for changing the sampling design were considered, but otherwise we discussed either conceptual problems or, what we called then, reconciliation problems, such as how can it be that the household survey shows one level of employment and the establishment survey shows a very different level of employment? Or, we don't have the same pattern during the year, or should we seasonally adjust the unemployed? Seasonal adjustment was a big issue



during the early '50's. Some people took the position that you couldn't seasonally adjust people. If there were two million unemployed, then there were two million unemployed. You couldn't say that there were only a million eight because it happened to be June. So, all of these battles went on separately from what people were inclined to think of as the directly statistical issues of the sampling and the estimates of uncertainty and so forth. I really think this is a problem in statistics—that we don't have some way of bringing these two points of view on statistics together better. The statisticians think, well, it's got to be different in each area—I can apply my techniques in any area; I just have to learn what the issues in those areas are and talk to the experts in that area. But they should tell me what concepts they want to measure. The experts in employment and unemployment, they were the economists trying to analyze the labor market. They weren't expert on how to ask questions about employment and unemployment either. Both needed to work together to develop relevant statistics.

**Straf:** Did you see this as your calling? To bring these two groups together?

**Martin:** Not so much then as I see it now, although it was recognized as a problem. But I felt my calling then was to help to figure out how to convert the generalized concepts into operational questions, and how to bring people together who were producing such different figures on employment, trying to find out what caused the differences, and what could be done to find something closer to the truth. This is moving ahead a little, but one of the major issues was timing. The Census Bureau was coming out with employment and unemployment results of the Current Population Survey and the BLS with results of employment from the establishment surveys each month only about a week apart. The Bureau of Employment Security (BES) was coming out with the insured unemployment figures weekly. There were two sets of employment figures each month and two of unemployment, and they didn't agree. Who was right? As long as people stay in their own agencies, they naturally think they're right. I mean they know what they're doing and what it is, and they don't understand the other agency's estimates. One of my main functions was to get these people talking to each other to recognize some of the differences and to do their best to resolve those differences.

In the Eisenhower administration, Arthur Burns (who later became chairman of the Federal Reserve Board) was appointed chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. There was a strong joint Economic Committee and staff in Congress. Both found that having CPS and BLS statistics going in differ-

ent directions and being at different levels was really very difficult. There was a recession in '54, you recall. To get the total labor force, Burns thought the answer would be to take the BLS employment figures and add the CPS unemployment figures. He didn't want to be bothered with two different employment figures, and he didn't trust the household sample, anyway. He argued that, after all, the establishment figures, although a sample, didn't have the variability; they were benchmarked, once every year or two, to business records. Furthermore, they were reports from business which he assumed were much more accurate than reports from households. He wanted, at a minimum, to have a single publication of the data to avoid some of the public confusion. In the end, it was agreed that the two separate series would be maintained, but that there would be just one release of the data. Although it's true that you couldn't combine the figures sensibly in a single total, at least you could announce and explain them together. So there was to be a joint release by the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of Labor on what the employment situation was each month. This release was to be written by a technical staff person from the Census Bureau concerned with the CPS, someone from the BLS employment statistics branch, and someone from BES who knew the insured unemployment figures, and I was to chair the group.

**Olkin:** Your position was then what, Assistant Chief?

**Martin:** No. I was just a staff member at that time. I was to chair it and we were to do a dry run. Of course, in the dry run, we couldn't come to any conclusions. We got paragraphs from each point of view, but we couldn't get the group to agree on the paragraphs. The next month was to be the real thing and it took us two days, but we finally came up with something. It was a dreadful job until people worked into it and realized they were going to have to do it. Sometimes you simply could not explain differences—one series going one way and one going the other—but many times there was an opportunity to make the figures more understandable or at least to avoid conflicting pronouncements. We did develop a pattern that tried to make allowances for sampling error as best we could. That went on for several years, until responsibility for publishing the monthly labor force figures from the CPS was transferred to the Labor Department. The BLS continues to issue both sets of data in a combined release.

**Straf:** You tell an interesting story about forcing them to agree so they could go to lunch.

**Martin:** Oh, yes. Bob Pearl, the Census member of the writing team, who came from the boondocks



FIG. 2. Stopover in Vermont on way home from 1954 ASA meetings in Montreal. From left to right, Emily White, Margaret Martin, Gladys Palmer and Gertrude Bancroft.

out in Suitland, enjoyed very much this opportunity to come into town and eat lunch in a decent restaurant instead of a government cafeteria. There was a very good German restaurant called Arnold's around the corner from my office. I discovered that Bob really wanted to go to Arnold's for lunch, so after about three months, I got wise and I laid down a rule; if we had the draft ready for the typist by one o'clock, we could go to Arnold's for lunch. If we didn't, we had to go downstairs to the basement cafeteria, eat a quick lunch and come back. That improved things considerably.

**Straf:** What was your role in the early work of the development of the CPS questionnaire? You described what went on but not what you, personally, were involved in.

**Martin:** There was a subcommittee of the technical committee chaired by Gladys Palmer that reviewed concepts of employment and unemployment in 1954 and '55 which went into whether or not any of the concepts should be changed. In depth. The report of this subcommittee was submitted to the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress and published in one of its reports. I worked actively with that subcommittee. One of the roles I performed in that connection was to prepare a supplementary statement on the differences between the household survey and the establishment survey on level, trend and seasonal patterns, which I think was the first public statement that had examined the differences in such detail and indicated what might be the reasons for the differences. The household survey was a relatively easy survey in which to add questions,

whereas the establishment survey since it was handled through 48 different states, on a cooperative basis, was much more difficult. Also, the pattern of the questionnaire itself was much more rigid. When we found differences, we generally tried to resolve them by making changes in the CPS, particularly, by adding questions. I think we improved the usefulness of the household survey a great deal, in part because we were trying to understand why there should be these differences between the CPS and the establishment series. For example, if people said they had a job but didn't work last week, we added a question on whether this was paid or unpaid leave. So you could tell the difference between the people on paid leave who, of course, would still be counted as on the payroll, or working, in the establishment series. For the first time we had economy-wide estimates of paid leave and the surprising (to me, at least) amount of unpaid leave.

**Straf:** You told me a story once, and maybe this came at this time, where the CPS questions were changed by starting off asking people, "Tell me, what did you do in the last week?"

**Martin:** That was earlier. In fact, that happened before or just as I joined the DSS staff. It was the change from the emphasis on unemployment from the depression era to the emphasis on employment during the war time labor shortage. A question was added concerned with whether women would work, take jobs outside the house; and it was discovered that when this question was added (it was just a simple question; if there were a job available, would you take it?) the figure of employment for women

went up by about a million that month. Apparently, a lot of these women who had been reported as not in the labor force were already working. They must have thought of it, you see, as unimportant, kind of a secondary occupation. It was decided to start with a question, frequently referred to as the can opener question, which would allow people to report their status first and then ask them, in addition, did you work for pay? The women could then report themselves as housewives or the children as school children, and still a question could be asked, "In addition, did you do any work?"

I think I'd like to say a word about Stuart Rice because he made a strong impression on me. He was a sociologist who had been with the Census Bureau in the late '30's and then was appointed chairman of the Central Statistical Board. He became Assistant Director (of the Bureau of the Budget) for Statistical Standards when the Board was combined with the Bureau of the Budget. He was a very strong believer in the usefulness of statistics for public policy and for society generally: not only economic statistics but also social statistics. He was a very strong believer that a free economic system, market system, needed a lot of information; and, similarly, a democratic social system needed a lot of information and it was a responsibility of the government to provide this information. He was a great stimulus to me in recognizing the importance of good information, and made it seem desirable to devote one's life to developing the information that others would use.

**Straf:** Were there any other major impressions on you from your work in Statistical Standards, later called Statistical Policy?

**Martin:** I might mention our relations with the Council of Economic Advisers. The Council was housed in the Old Executive Office Building, as was the Budget Bureau. First Gladys Palmer, then later I, used to go down to the floor below once a year to invite the staff person assigned to the labor area to join our interagency committee. In the midfifties, that included, in succession, Clarence Long, Al Rees and George Shultz. The Employment Act of '46 was the reason for establishing the Council of Economic Advisers, so of course, statistics on employment and unemployment were very important to the Council. I remember later on, Raymond Bowman, Stuart Rice's successor as the director of DSS, used to go down once a year to talk with the chairman of the Council on the Council's needs for statistics. I used to accompany him and those were very interesting sessions. In an informal, unstructured way, we were attempting to identify statistical gaps and set statistical priorities. In those days, DSS annually developed a statistical "budget" for the country that cut across departments and agencies. I can

remember similar discussions with Art Okun later on, because of his interest in using statistics for employment policy, in defining full employment and in studying the relations among employment changes, wage levels and inflation.

Then in 1961, the September *Reader's Digest* published an article criticizing the employment and unemployment statistics severely because unemployment had not declined as expected after the recession of '54 and then the recession of '58. After each recession, unemployment declined, but it remained at a higher level than it had been before the recession. The article claimed that the statistics were faulty and ended by saying that the Labor Department had manipulated the figures in support of President Kennedy's social welfare program. President Kennedy was greatly concerned about this accusation. He told the Labor Department that he wanted an outside committee appointed to review the statistics, see what the problems were, and make a public report. The Labor Department felt it could not appoint a committee to examine its own statistics that would appear to be impartial. So, finally, it was decided that there should be a presidential committee, that it would be run from the White House; that the Bureau of the Budget would take responsibility for its operation. The BLS would provide funds to support it and then the question was, "Who should do the work?" I was on vacation in Europe someplace, while all this was going on. I came back to discover that I had been assigned to work for this committee half time, that the staff director for the committee was Murray Wernick, who was on the staff of the Office of Research of the Federal Reserve Board, chief for the labor force and related economic areas. He had been on the Palmer committee for years and had chaired the subcommittee on seasonal adjustment of the CPS. So he knew a great deal about the series already but refused to take over the full job and said he'd work half time if I would be assigned to work half time with him, as executive secretary. Each of us found ourselves doing our regular jobs in half time and working for this committee in half time.

In any event, a very small outside committee was appointed. It was chaired by Robert Gordon, a professor of economics at Berkeley, and it included Robert Dorfman who was then at Harvard and was a leading cost/benefit analysis person; Fred Stephan, who was the statistician at Princeton who had a great deal to do with the early development of the CPS as well as working with the Census Bureau as one of their mathematical consultants; Al Rees, who was a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, and then one person from the business interest, Martin Gainbrugh, a vice president of the



FIG. 3. *The Committee to Appraise Employment and Unemployment Statistics delivered its report to President Kennedy in the Oval Office. From left to right, Robert Dorfman, Albert Rees, Martin Gainsbrugh, Robert A. Gordon, President Kennedy, Margaret Martin, Frederick Stephan, Murray Wernick, Stanley Ruttenberg, Mary Smelker. Martin, Smelker, and Wernick were staff to the Committee.*

National Industrial Conference Board; and one for the labor interest, Stan Ruttenberg, who was the research director for the AFL-CIO. It was a six person committee. We had one or two staff members in addition and then a number of persons who were consultants or asked to write papers. Marc Nerlove, for example, wrote a paper using spectral analysis to evaluate the seasonal adjustments of the CPS.

**Olkin:** This was in the '60's that you're talking about.

**Martin:** This was in '61, '62. We developed a report for President Kennedy which we delivered to him in September of '62, and it was a full-size volume. We had hearings and the Joint Economic Committee (JEC) had hearings both on the issues and then later on the report itself. The JEC carefully invited the author of the *Reader's Digest* article to come and testify at each of these hearings, but he refused to appear. One of the things that I remember doing at that time, since the committee didn't have a sufficient staff to do a lot of research ourselves, was going around with Murray Wernick to the major federal agencies that were concerned with either developing or using the various employment and unemployment series, and asking them to prepare papers on their use, on their needs, their criticisms and their recommendations for improvements. A lot of those became appendices to the report.

**Olkin:** What was the thrust of the report?

**Martin:** Most importantly, the report stated clearly that there had been no finagling. It gave the President and the statistical agencies a clean bill of health on that. One major chapter was on the uses, and whether the concepts met the uses for these kinds of data. Then we went into problems of comparing the various series and what might be done to improve comparability. We did come up with a large number of recommendations for improvement. From my point of view (this goes back to my interest in the dynamics of these operations), it was a very interesting experience in the way of getting recommendations of the report adopted. The report was delivered to President Kennedy in mid-September. In those days the budget review process was already starting at the Budget Bureau. The agencies should have submitted their proposed budgets already. Normally, anything new to go into that budget would have had to have been developed and approved by the agency in May, June or July. Here, we had these recommendations in the report which was accepted by the President and letters sent out the very next day to the secretaries of the concerned departments saying, please review these recommendations and decide at once what you're going to do about them. Within a week, I was able to get three agencies (the BLS, Census and Employment Secu-

ry) together; and we developed one or two proposals which crossed departmental budgetary lines. Each of the agencies had to agree to put its own piece in its own budget and put it through in a rush. The result of having these presidential letters was very effective so that we did get some of the recommendations into that immediate budget. But the major improvements that required a lot of planning and research came later. The report's recommendations did result in a revised CPS questionnaire, particularly recognizing the need to identify discouraged workers. For the first time that I'm aware of, it was recognized that these changes in the questionnaire might have a major impact on the series, even on questions that weren't changed. We had an overlap sample for close to a year and a half of 50% of the original sample size, so that we could estimate the impact of the change in the design. The major impetus was trying to get more information on people who left the labor force because they believed there was no work available—discouraged workers.

**Straf:** What would you say are the high points, the most fulfilling moments of your career?

**Martin:** I think the presidentially-appointed Gordon Committee was really the high point. It was very interesting to me to work with such an active, dedicated and thoughtful group. The members worked well together and brought new viewpoints.

**Olkin:** It certainly was a high level group.

**Martin:** It was a high level group of people, mostly from academic pursuits; but everybody was really interested in doing the best job they could for the government. It had good dynamics.

**Straf:** Reflecting back, what do you think were low points? Difficulties? Frustrations?

**Olkin:** You had mentioned salary issues.

**Martin:** I never felt salary was an issue, even though promotion was slower than I liked on that occasion I mentioned.

**Olkin:** But salary wasn't an issue?

**Martin:** No. Because I was getting so much more than I would have elsewhere. Most of the time in the '40s, '50s and '60s, I was getting more than I could have in an academic position. I don't think that's true any longer, but it was then. And certainly, I felt there was much less difficulty in the government on account of being a woman.

**Straf:** What other things? A particularly difficult administration?

**Olkin:** ... or else a set of people you worked with ...

**Martin:** Most of the time I enjoyed very much working with the people that I did. Sometimes I felt frustrated by the attitude that whatever wrong happened, it was the fault of the Bureau of the Budget, but that was minor.



FIG. 4. *Eleventh International Conference of Labor Statisticians, sponsored by the International Labor Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, October 1966. Robert J. Myers, Deputy Commissioner of Labor Statistics, was the U.S. delegate and Margaret Martin accompanied him as an advisor.*

**Straf:** Was it frustrating working in the Nixon administration?

**Martin:** Yes, and I found it difficult to work with Julius Shiskin, who succeeded Raymond Bowman as director of DSS.

**Straf:** Was it personality or political ideology?

**Martin:** Personality. I'm not quite sure why. He said that I seemed to get along so well with little staff so he wouldn't give me any. The most I could do was get a little money for consultants. So, here I was, an assistant chief with almost nobody except myself to do the work. His staff was being decreased most of the time so he didn't have a lot to hand out; but when he did get another slot, he'd give it to one of the other assistant chiefs. There were three of us. That annoyed me.

**Straf:** Did you leave during Shiskin's tenure?

**Martin:** I left while Julie was still director, before he himself left to become Commissioner of Labor Statistics. What had happened was Bill Kruskal had called me to ask me if I would accept the position of Executive Director to the newly-organized Committee on National Statistics at the National

Academy of Sciences, and I had turned him down. I wasn't immediately attracted to it and I didn't think I'd do a good job. So, months went by, maybe nine months, and he called me again. He was chairman of the Committee. It was in the middle of the budget season. I had just had one of these awkward incidents with Julie which I would have probably forgotten in two or three days, but I hadn't when Bill called me. Furthermore, I was in the middle of my 29th budget season. It was enough, you know. Bill called up and said, "I know you turned me down, but I'm calling again because I have a list of people..." They wanted somebody who had experience with the federal government's statistical system, since few on the Committee had. He wanted to read me a list of names, and would I please comment on these people. I just heard myself saying (I hadn't thought about it at all) "I had no idea the job was still open, but if you were serious about asking me before, I'd like to be considered on the list." He said, "Well, that's it. I'm not going to read the list, then." So, I never did find out who was on the list.

**Olkin:** That does raise another important part of your life, namely the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT). Tell us about the early days of the Committee.

**Martin:** That was an extremely interesting experience for me. I enjoyed working with people from academia, as the Committee members mostly were. I hadn't worked in a university since I'd been a research assistant at Iowa State, way back in the '30s. I found that very interesting. I found learning about the National Academy of Sciences interesting. But it was also a very frustrating period at the beginning. The Committee itself knew that it wanted to spend its time advising federal agencies on improving their statistics, but they had already had two meetings before I joined them, and they had their third one just after I came on. They were still floundering with which was the most important statistic to improve.

**Olkin:** That's because you were dealing with academics.

**Martin:** Yes. From my point of view, there were lots of important statistics, and it would be better to start with one and get a little experience rather than spending too much time arguing about priorities. So before we could get the first study or two started, it was quite a frustrating experience. I had never looked for funds before. We were being funded for a year by the Russell Sage Foundation, and we did get an extension which I managed to stretch out for two years instead of one year. At that point, I received some very good advice from a colleague. I was advised to see if I could get joint funding from a number of federal statistical agencies, and I went

around to about six or eight such agencies and found considerable acceptance of the idea. I had thought it would be very difficult, but I was pleasantly surprised. In particular, I remember how helpful Harry Trelogan at the Department of Agriculture's Statistical Reporting Service was. He was instrumental in actually getting the joint funding started and we did get a little bit from the National Science Foundation. Later on, Murray Aborn, at the National Science Foundation, was most helpful. Joe Duncan, who was Julie Shiskin's successor, was very helpful at OMB.

I have never really forgotten the comment made by Joan Turek-Brezina, who sponsored our first contract. She was not a statistician but, I believe, a political scientist in the office of planning and evaluation at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She had just been assigned to review the statistical agencies within the department to evaluate whether they were doing a good job or not. She was concerned about how to know what they *should* be doing. In a naive fashion she thought, well, its statistics, I'll look at some statistics books and see what they say about what statisticians should be doing. She looked at three major text books on statistics and, of course, there isn't word one about what statistics should be collected, only about how to compute them. She wanted some help on establishing statistical priorities. The Committee set up a panel to study the question. I don't think we helped in a very major way, although the panel's report set down some helpful preliminary thoughts and outlined additional needed research. Statisticians need to contribute to priority-setting. I feel that the statisticians and the subject matter people have to figure out better ways of coordinating their efforts.

Bill Kruskal made an enormous contribution as the first chairman of the Committee. It was a great pleasure to work with him and the other members of the Committee. I feel very fortunate to have had a second career that was so different from what I'd been doing that it was very rejuvenating.

**Straf:** Then you were nominated to run for President of the American Statistical Association?

**Martin:** Yes, I had participated in the Association in many ways over the years since I joined. I had been president of the Washington Statistical Society in the late 1960's and I was a vice president of the Association when I was nominated as President-Elect in 1978.

**Straf:** What did you feel when you found out you were running against your friend, Julie Shiskin?

**Martin:** I was a little startled, and I assumed that he would win the election because at the time he was Commissioner of Labor Statistics and frequently appearing on television when the monthly



FIG. 5. *Receiving Director's Exceptional Service Award from Charles Zwick, Director, Bureau of the Budget, 1968.*

unemployment figures would come out. He had been well known at Census as well and as the author of its seasonal adjustment procedures. By the time that the election results became known, Julie was so ill that it was good that he wasn't elected. His wife kindly brought me his congratulations from his hospital sick bed.

**Straf:** Looking back then on these, your second and third careers—with the Committee and the ASA, what do you think were the most fulfilling events of those careers? Let's start with the Committee first. Were there any accomplishments, events, or reports, that stand out?

**Martin:** As far as the Committee on National Statistics is concerned, it's hard for me to isolate any single report or single event, but I feel very pleased with the Committee that originally was so slow to get off the ground. In the first two or three years, the office was run primarily by me half-time and a half-time secretary. It wasn't really making a great deal of progress; and then you, Miron, and Ed Goldfield came on the staff. One thing which helped get us started, I think, was Vince Barabba, then Director of the Census Bureau, asking the Committee to do some work on how important confidentiality pledges were to respondents. The National Archives was trying to open up older censuses for public use and the question was, would this harm future data collections? Bill Kruskal came up with the idea of doing the kind of empirical survey that was funded

there. I was very pleased with the work of that panel. The committee took off after that, sponsoring a variety of useful reports. There come to mind the work that you and your panel did, Ingram, together with Bill Madow, on missing data; the influential report recommending improvements in the statistical activities of the Department of Education; the path-breaking report on surveying subjective phenomena; and the successful seminar the Committee held to promote interaction between statisticians and cognitive psychologists on questionnaire design. These examples illustrate the Committee's wide-ranging interests.

**Straf:** What about your work with ASA?

**Martin:** I enjoyed being President, but I can't recall that I made any particular impression or accomplished a great deal. I've done two things since then for ASA. One was to work with the building fund, as co-chair with Ralph Bradley, and we finally did get enough money to buy a building. Although I'm not fond of asking people for money, I do manage to do it. It was a great opportunity to revive old friendships. I wrote a lot of letters to people I hadn't seen for a long time. I found that part of it pleasant. The other project for the ASA was the development of a manual of policies and procedures to hand to new officers each year. ASA had none, so they were spinning wheels some. I did a job for them in pulling together the constitution, the by-laws, the various recommendations, policies and actions that



FIG. 6. 1983 photo taken by ASA in connection with Building Fund.

the board had taken over the preceding 20 years into a manual. That was really quite interesting to do, although it was a much bigger job than I had anticipated.

**Olkin:** Margaret, you know we've talked about discrimination problems women had and I know you've been involved recently with a variety of women's groups. What do you see as some of the problems remaining and what could be done to diminish the problems women have in the profession?

**Martin:** I'm really not a very good person to answer a question like that because I've never personally felt very discriminated against. I think to my

mind, the major problems now are promotion as opposed to...

**Olkin:** ... the pipe line...

**Martin:** Yes, sometimes referred to as the glass ceiling. And I'm not one who feels that a woman necessarily has to have a female mentor because, certainly, Stuart Rice was, for example, a mentor for me as well as Gladys Palmer. But I haven't been in a situation where I was a lonely women who was being cold-shouldered by the men. Nor have I had to resolve problems of bringing up a family with a career.

**Olkin:** What do you see as some of the future





FIG. 7. *Four successive ASA presidents. From right to left, Margaret Martin, 1980, Ralph Bradley, 1981, William Kruskal, 1982 and Richard Anderson, 1983.*



FIG. 8. *With two grandnieces on the porch at Lake Dunmore, Vermont, July, 1989.*

directions of statistics? You've talked a lot about government, but you've also had a broad view of the field in general. Are there any special caveats that you'd like to mention?

**Martin:** This is just a very general feeling. We seem to be going off in all directions. I think applying statistical techniques in a more widespread

fashion is a great advance. But I hate to see it too compartmentalized. The issue is how to encourage more applications in different directions while at the same time keeping statistics unified as a profession. The other part of that question is how do we work out ways of getting the statisticians and the professionals from other disciplines, with quantitative



FIG. 9. Receiving the ASA Founders Award from Robert Hogg, Past President, and Janet Norwood, President, at the 1989 meetings in Washington, D.C.

interests, working more closely together and getting that kind of activity better recognized as a truly professional commitment. I remember, for example, something that Ann Miller once told me. Ann Miller is a sociologist who is most concerned with improving the data for sociologists to work with. She has done a great deal of work, for example, on trying to make the occupational classifications of the 1910 census comparable with the occupational classifications of more recent censuses. Where does work like that get published? It's so seldom that a discipline other than statistics will devote much time to publishing results of data improvement for use in that discipline. At the same time JASA seldom published such studies. So I think there's a real need to somehow shed an aura of more academic respectability over the people who are working at this interface between survey statistics and related disciplines.

**Straf:** Well, I have a few more questions. In looking back on these three hours here, I think I would stress three aspects of your career. One is what you have just talked about now—a goal of developing statistics and information and improving it. That's something that obviously has been a very satisfying goal for you and you continue that in all of your careers. Another is an especially good talent, widely recognized, maybe not fully appreciated, of bringing people together and arriving at a consensus, getting them to work together to develop something much more than what they could do individually—whether it's on unemployment beliefs or with the

Committee and its sponsors because they were very far apart when the Committee first started or the donors and the staff of the ASA to obtain funds for the building. Where do you see that part of your character as having developed?

**Martin:** I think I would really give a great deal of the credit to Gladys Palmer as a mentor because that was what she did with the Labor Supply, Employment and Unemployment Committee. Furthermore, she refused to be swayed by bureaucratic notions. She insisted, for example, that the people who were on her committee were there as technical experts, not as representatives of their agencies. She encouraged the spirit of cooperation in order to develop a better product.

**Straf:** The third aspect that I see of your character in these discussions is one of principle. Your stand, for example, on the elimination of the notary requirement on applications for social security benefits. In understanding right from wrong in statistical work. Can you trace the origin of that?

**Martin:** No, I don't know that I can, and I'm not sure that I've always distinguished right from wrong correctly.

**Straf:** The area that we have left untouched is the life outside of the statistics world and how it affected your view of life inside the statistics world. The interest in the arts, traveling, music and having been a first director for the Committee on National Statistics; it was a renaissance of sorts.

**Martin:** I really don't know what comments to add. One of my first travels abroad was with a government statistician for a cultural purpose. Gertrude Bancroft and I, in 1959, spent nearly two weeks at the Salzburg Music Festival. We hired ourselves a little Volkswagen and traveled around the Austrian Alps during the day and listened to gorgeous music in the evening. That was a memorable occasion. Another one of my interests is in family. I have two sisters and a brother and nine nephews and two nieces: most of whom are married with families by this time. I have a summer cottage on a Vermont lake. One sister and her husband are nearby and we do quite a bit of entertaining of these relatives up there which is all very pleasant and enjoyable. But I don't know what impact that had on my statistical input.

**Straf:** Is there anything you have to add?

**Martin:** I think about all I might add is something that we have touched upon, but I would like to emphasize—that there is nothing in statistics that tells you which statistics to collect. Deciding what to collect is not really, entirely, the responsibility of

the nonstatisticians. I think statisticians and members of related disciplines have to work together and I hope we'll be looking for ways to encourage that joint enterprise.

**Straf:** Here at our ASA meetings, there was a special meeting of the chairmen of departments of statistics, at which I noted that, of all our work, we spend a lot of time on accuracy, timeliness, reducing errors and the like. But, most of our effectiveness comes not through accuracy but through relevance.

**Martin:** Very good. And, I think it was here in Atlanta at the 1975 meetings that John Tukey gave a lecture on the importance of relevance in contrast to accuracy.

**Straf:** Margaret, this has been a fascinating opportunity to learn more about you, especially about experiences and relationships that have made you who you are. Your election as ASA President was more than giving you an opportunity to serve the profession further, it was an honor given in appreciation for your many contributions. Thank you for this interview.

**Martin:** Thank you.



















