

**Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center
Institute for Advanced Study**

**Oral History Project
Interview Transcript**

**Lily (Nan) Agar
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius
July 9, 2009**

**Permission to use this material for anything beyond personal research
must be requested from the Institute's Archives. Please contact
archives@ias.edu with questions.**

**Institute for Advanced Study
The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center**

Oral History Project Release Form

In exchange for good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which are hereby acknowledged, I (the "Releasor") hereby irrevocably give, donate, assign, transfer and grant to the Institute for Advanced Study (the "Institute") all of my right, title and interest in and to all audio and/or video recordings of the oral history interviews in which I participated, together with all transcripts thereof (collectively, the "Materials"). My gift, donation, assignment, transfer and grant to the Institute includes: (i) title to the Materials, free and clear of all liens, encumbrances and interests of others; (ii) the right to all present and future copyrights, including but not limited to, the exclusive right to make, reproduce, publish (in print, on video and in all other formats) and to otherwise exploit the Materials, excerpts of the Materials and works derived from the Materials; and (iii) the right to use my name and likeness as required by the Institute in connection with its use of the Materials. For the avoidance of doubt, I hereby authorize the Institute to use the Materials (excerpts and derivative works) for any and all commercial, educational, research or other purposes.

Public access to the Materials is subject to the following conditions (please check one):

- None.
 Closed for 10 years from the date of the interview*; full public access thereafter.
 Closed under other conditions as stated below*; otherwise full public access:

*I understand that prior to the date of public access, access to the Materials may be given by the Institute to its staff and to others for the purposes of preserving and cataloguing the Materials.

I acknowledge and agree that this is the entire agreement between the Institute and me respecting the Materials and shall be binding upon my heirs, representatives and assigns. It may be modified only by a writing signed by all parties. This agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of New Jersey and the federal and state courts situated in the State of New Jersey shall have exclusive jurisdictions over disputes between the Institute and me.

Witness:

L. G. Arntzenius

Name of Witness: LINDA G. ARNTZENIUS

Lily B. Agost
Signature of Releasor

Name of Releasor: Lily B. Agost

Date: 12-9-09

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* It is Thursday, July the 9th, 2009, and I'm here at the Institute for Advanced Study with Nan Agar and we're going to talk about your almost 30 years, 29 years at the Institute as Librarian in the Math Library.
- Nan Agar:* No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No? Correct me.
- Nan Agar:* That was all one library.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So it was *the* Library, the Institute Library.
- Nan Agar:* It was *the* Library.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was before the School of Historical Studies had its own library.
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So it wasn't just the Math Library.
- Nan Agar:* No, no, it was the Library for the whole Institute.¹
- Linda Arntzenius:* Whole institute. Well, before we get to that point could you, first of all, Nan, tell me a little bit about yourself, your parents and your birthplace and growing up in Princeton, please?
- Nan Agar:* Certainly. I was born in Trenton and at age 6 moved with my family to Newlin Road. So I remember the landscape without the Institute when it was just a cow pasture. A little plane once landed on it, much to my delight.
- I went to Miss Fine's School and college and so on, and I never got very far from home. I married the boy across the street. And so I've been in the area for a long time.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You said you lived in three houses on Newlin Road?
- Nan Agar:* That's correct. Number 8, where I grew up, now much changed. After my father died my stepmother sold the house and we went across the street to Number 11, a former community club house known as "the Fish Bowl." When I got married my mother-in-law lived in Number 1, across the street from Professor Hetty Goldman².

¹ This and subsequent footnotes added later by Nan Agar when reviewing the transcript, November 2009: "When I started working in the Institute's Library there were only three buildings on its campus: Fuld Hall and Buildings A & B. About a decade later, a separate library was built for the schools of Historical Studies and Social Science. Nan also recalled that the American School of Classical Studies was for many years, housed in the library.

² Hetty Goldman (1881-1972), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1936-1947; Emeritus Professor, 1947-1972.

Linda Arntzenius: You were born in 1920 and you were a teenager when the Institute was founded and when Einstein³ came here. Do you remember any press coverage of that?

Nan Agar: I don't remember "press coverage," but I'm sure there was lots of publicity about his coming to Princeton, the Athens of the Modern World.

Linda Arntzenius: How did you hear about it?

Nan Agar: It was a big event, everybody knew all about it at the time. I remember when Fuld Hall was under construction and later we used to see Einstein walking to work, of course, from where we lived.

I remember from those days that Princeton was called the Athens of modern times. And it was just part of the everyday world.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you have any interactions with Einstein?

Nan Agar: Actually, yes. When we were about 12 or 13, I believe, on Halloween a group of us were going around Trick-or-Treating and we knew where Einstein lived, so we knocked on his door. We thought it would be a great thing to see him.

He ushered us in and (perhaps shook hands with us?). I guess it was Miss Dukas⁴ who was there, I'm not quite sure. But anyway, of course, none of us spoke German and he didn't speak a great deal of English. He wanted to give us money, pennies, and of course, that was the European custom, but we didn't know that and we were horrified.

But that's in a book written by James Sayen who lived next door to Einstein for many years with his family.

Linda Arntzenius: Was James a contemporary of yours?

Nan Agar: His mother was the contemporary and friend.

Linda Arntzenius: Was she one of the trick-or-treaters, do you remember?

Nan Agar: His mother, no. They lived on the other side of town; it would have been too much of a hike in those days.

Linda Arntzenius: Now your father was a newspaperman.

Nan Agar: My grandfather. My father was what was then called a Vice Chancellor, which was a judge for a civil court.

Linda Arntzenius: I see. And tell me about Hetty Goldman, what you remember of her.

³ Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Professor in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1933-1946; Emeritus Professor, 1946-1955.

⁴ Helen Dukas (1896-1982).

-
- Nan Agar:* As I said, she lived across the street from my mother-in-law, and I do remember her. I was very much impressed with her as a woman archaeologist. Of course, she was much older, but I remember her as being very friendly, a very nice neighbor and that's about it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What did you understand as the purpose of the Institute when you were a teenager?
- Nan Agar:* Well, to be a, what we would now call a Think Tank, a place where scholars could gather and do post-graduate work. I believe that in the beginning they were going to give Ph.D.'s and things like that, but I don't think they ever did.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So then the war came and you did war work. Could you speak a little bit about that?
- Nan Agar:* I would like very much to have joined the Women's Air Corps branch, but I had a little boy, so I couldn't exactly do that. So the next best thing was to become an Airport Controller, and I worked in a tower in Caldwell, N.J. during the war.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Were you aware of anything going on at the Institute during the war? For example, the Electronic Computer Project?
- Nan Agar:* I don't think so.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No, that was after the war.
- Nan Agar:* Yes, it was, it was '48.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, you're right, yes. And was it of interest to you that Oppenheimer⁵ came around that time? Was he someone in your field of vision?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes, very definitely. Of course, I knew about him before that, and his work on the bomb at Los Alamos. At one point, this was before I worked at the Institute, I used to take his two children, as well as my son, to school for a while. So that was a connection⁶.
- And then when I came to the Institute, of course I saw him around all the time. I did talk to him once about schools and things like that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me how it came that you got a job at the Institute.
- Nan Agar:* I don't really remember how I found out that there was an opening in the library.

⁵ J. Robert Oppenheimer, (1904-1967), IAS Director, 1947-1967; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1967.

⁶ "I had many connections to the Institute before, during, and after the time I worked there. My Uncle, Professor Raymond Sontag of the University of California, Berkeley, served with Professor Kennan on a government foreign affairs project, so I knew Professor Kennan slightly and admired him greatly."

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you know Judith Sachs?
- Nan Agar:* Not until I worked there. I remember going over and talking about the job with her, and finding I had it. It was a big deal.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was very convenient for you.
- Nan Agar:* Very convenient.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me about Judith Sachs. Her father was a musicologist?
- Nan Agar:* That's correct.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And a Jewish émigré from Germany.
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What do you remember of her?
- Nan Agar:* Well, I remember quite a lot. She was a very bright person, a very intellectual person. She knew a great deal. She was – she was an individualist and a scholar and she taught me all I knew about the Library, that's for sure.
- One of her accomplishments was adding to the Rosenwald Room collection. She knew a great deal about old books and about the authors of books and what books would be appropriate for such a collection here at the Institute. And I think she did a great deal for the library in that sense as well as running it.
- She also put together a book, I forget what it was called, but it was all about the members of the Institute and the articles they had written while at the Institute, which I think was a wonderful thing to do. I'm sorry nobody ever did another one. I can't remember the exact date that it came out but it's too bad it wasn't a tradition that was kept up.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, that was under Oppenheimer as Director. And after that –
- Nan Agar:* It was Dr. Kaysen⁷, formerly with John F. Kennedy's administration.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Dr. Kaysen came in. Judith resigned at that time, is that correct?
- Nan Agar:* Yes, I think it was '68. She didn't resign right away. And I think that's when the new library was built, if my memory is correct. Judith Sachs was not consulted very much. Dr. Oppenheimer was still here then, it must be, yes. And I think she felt not only that she personally was overlooked, but I think she felt that it was a very strange way to arrange things. That in other words you talk to the people who worked there, what do they want? what do they think is helpful?

⁷ Carl Kaysen (1920-2010), IAS Director, 1966-1976.

you know, not just take a plan off some architect's head. But that was more or less what was done.⁸

Linda Arntzenius: So there wasn't any consultation of the library staff as to what they needed in a library?

Nan Agar: The staff? No, not even Mrs. Sachs. Well, she had some say about it, but it was not a happy time.

Linda Arntzenius: Would you like to say something about the different Directors that you worked under when you were here?

Nan Agar: Not particularly.

Linda Arntzenius: Tell me about the faculty at that time. Who stands out in your mind?

Nan Agar: Oh, well there are a number of people that do. There was Professor Panofsky⁹, who was our Art Historian, of course, and he used to run his Irish Setters in the field.

And he was followed, of course, by Professor Meiss¹⁰ whom I remember with great fondness, and also his wife. She was, I think, a very outstanding person.¹¹

There was Professor Cherniss¹² and his wife, whom I knew fairly well. And there was also Professor Harish-Chandra¹³ in the Math Department.¹⁴

⁸ "The annoying thing to me was that the building was awarded a prize!"

⁹ Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1935-1962; Emeritus Professor, 1962-1968.

¹⁰ Millard Meiss (1904-1975), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 1940; Professor, 1958-1974; Emeritus Professor, 1974-1975.

¹¹ "There is an anecdote about the Barnes Foundation and its great collection of Impressionist paintings. In those days, professionals were not allowed, so Professor Meiss drove Dr. Panofsky as chauffeur to a "Doctor" and they got to see the collection."

¹² Harold F. Cherniss (1904-1987), Faculty in the School of Historical Studies, 1948-1974; Emeritus Professor, 1974-1987.

¹³ Harish-Chandra (1923-1983), Research Assistant in the School of Mathematics, 1947-1949; Member, 1955-1956, 1961-1962; Faculty, 1963-1983.

¹⁴ "Lily Harish-Chandra and I became friends later on. Professor Clagett, whose office was in the library, became a friend, as did Professor Gilliam and Professor Habicht, and to a lesser extent Professor and Mrs. Hirschman, who were near neighbors of mine. Professor Geertz, also a neighbor, bought the house that, I believe, was built by a retired employee of the old Princeton Water Co. Professor Lavin knew of my riding activities and asked for a few lessons. One became a disaster because the lead line broke and his horse took off for the barn. Naturally, he fell off, hurting his ankle. So there were no more lessons, but he didn't hold it against me. I knew Professor and Mrs. Thompson from teaching their twin daughters at Miss Fine's School. Off the record, I think her work was better than his. As you probably know, Felix Mendelssohn was Professor Gilbert's grandfather. Professor Weil, the brother of Simone Weil, was a good friend of Mrs. Sachs so I had contact with him."

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* I remember you describing Lily and Harish as a most attractive couple.
- Nan Agar:* Oh, they were wonderful. That was long before I had anything to do with the Institute, or I mean, I didn't even know them. But they were outstanding.
- There's Professor Dyson¹⁵ who's still around who I think is a very, very interesting person. He writes exceedingly well. I think for people who, like me, know nothing about science, it makes sense when he writes about it.¹⁶
- Oh, and there was Professor Montgomery¹⁷ in the Math Department who had been on the faculty at my college.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Which college was that?
- Nan Agar:* Smith College. And when I was an undergraduate. Oh, I'm sure there were lots more that I can't think of right this second.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Are there any particular characters that stand out in your mind or incidents, anecdotes that you would like to share?
- Nan Agar:* Not that I can think of right off the bat. My memory now is very slow.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, were you involved with the Einstein Centennial in '79?
- Nan Agar:* No, not particularly.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you remember that?
- Nan Agar:* Actually, I don't.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, you were a reenactor at one point, no? Did I get that wrong?
- Nan Agar:* I don't think so. I love the reenactments that they did that one year. I guess it was the first one that they did on the battlefield, and the weather conditions were supposedly the same as the original one. And a lot of the enactors were here at the Institute, as their base, so to speak.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Trying to keep dry presumably.
- Nan Agar:* Well, the – no, it was fair weather. It had snowed before and it was very cold. And that was the big thing about it because if it hadn't gotten cold it [the battle]

¹⁵ Freeman J. Dyson (1923-), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1948-1950; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1953-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994- .

¹⁶ "I remember reading articles ("Letters from") in the New Yorker by Professor Dyson before I went to the Institute, and books by him to the present. I knew one of his daughters because she became a veterinarian.

¹⁷ Deane Montgomery (1909-1992), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1934-1935, 1941-1942, 1945-1946, 1948-1951; Professor, 1951-1980; Emeritus Professor, 1980-1992.

would probably not have [happened] – it would have been a disaster because everything would have gotten caught in the mud, you know, that sort of thing.

But it froze so the ground was okay to transport the horses and the cannons and so on.

Linda Arntzenius: Someone told me that they had been introduced to the Founder's Letter by you. Is that something you recall?

Nan Agar: The Founder's Letter?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, the Founder's Letter which states the purpose of the Institute and that it should be opened to all kinds of people regardless of their race and religion and –

Nan Agar: This is where the memory is, my little computer is overloaded, I guess. No, I –

Linda Arntzenius: That's not something you remember?

Nan Agar: That's not something I remember.

Linda Arntzenius: Because I wondered if it was something that people discussed or were aware of, whether people here at the Institute while they were working here had a conception of the Institute that was close to the original – close to the founders' intentions?

Nan Agar: I think that that was true of the people that I knew when I first came to the Institute. I'm sure that was something Miss Sachs felt very strongly about.

I think gradually the Institute became something that everybody knew about and took for granted kind of. Later, there were more institutions of similar types, so it wasn't so outstanding.

Linda Arntzenius: When you were working in the library, what was the relationship between the Institute's library and the University library?

Nan Agar: Oh, the University library was open to any and all Members of the Institute. So – but there was no particular – just library to library kind of relationship at all.

Linda Arntzenius: No? You didn't go there to pick up books and vice versa?

Nan Agar: No, the members picked up their own books. But there was interaction of a sort, I guess.

I know I went there at one point to discuss things about storage and technical little things at the time that they started to build the new library.

Linda Arntzenius: What was the issue with storage?

Nan Agar: Well, if you collect books and somehow or another you don't get rid of them, by and by you don't have any place for them.

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was a problem in Fuld Hall, I take it?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, definitely. Yes, I can't remember when the new library was built the Historical Studies and ultimately the Social Science Schools went there, what had been the main library became the Math Library.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, when you were working in the library, this was before computers.
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Nowadays many of the faculty work in their own offices; they have their own computers, doing their own research. What did you do for the faculty through the library? Did they come to the library?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, they came to the library all the time. They requested books that they wanted. If we didn't have a book we [used] the Interlibrary Loan [service] or we ordered bookd faculty requested. All that sort of thing we did for them.
- Linda Arntzenius:* How did you find out that another library had the book that you wanted without a computer?
- Nan Agar:* You just looked it up in the Library of Congress catalog I guess. I can't remember how we did that. But we – yes, that was easy, and we kept track of books because we had book cards. So everybody who took a book signed a card and we filed it under his name.
- And I'm thinking particularly now of the annual members. And so when they got ready to leave we knew what books they had and so we kept track of them that way.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you ever have to chase down a book with a particular faculty member?
- Nan Agar:* I don't think with a faculty member. We might have with an annual member. The computer, when I learned about that, and I went to several conferences on the thing, at that time it was nothing like what it is now. But they had this wonderful deal where you could send a list of all the books you had, the things you had – new books that you wanted to catalogue and then they would come back on the little file cards in the proper order to be filed in the regular catalog.
- And it saved all sorts of time. And when I found out about this I thought, "Well, certainly the Institute for Advanced Study should have this." But it was a long fight and I decided that once I – we got a computer I would then retire, which I did.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So you had to fight to get a computer for the library?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes, it was expensive.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Isn't that rather an irony since the Institute was responsible in many ways, for the founding of the computer.
-

-
- Nan Agar:* Exactly, exactly. Oh, yes, that was another thing; von Neumann¹⁸ was on the faculty then and I, as a new recruit, had a lot to do with lending information about the computer to other libraries when it first began. So I knew quite a lot of – not how it worked, but how it had been developed and so on.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right. So other libraries were keen to know – keen to have information about the founding of the ECP, the Electronic Computer Project?
- Nan Agar:* Yes. Oh, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And when would this be, in the '60s?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, no, this would be right away in the '50s.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, okay.
- Nan Agar:* And we had – not microfilm even, what do you call it?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Microfiche?
- Nan Agar:* No, it's just – they were just copies. They weren't carbon copies, they were better than that. But, oh, I can't remember.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, like made from a stencil? Is that how you did it?
- Nan Agar:* I think so. Yes, well we only had – we didn't have that, we had the results of that. And I think we may have had two copies. But it was closely guarded, it was semi-secret, you know?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Can you remember any of the places that contacted the Institute?
- Nan Agar:* No. I think they were mostly individuals who wanted this information.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But von Neumann was open to having this information disseminated to them?
- Nan Agar:* I don't know what the regulations were. I know that not just everybody could have it. It was very important to know who wanted it and why.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So did you interact with him, with von Neumann himself?
- Nan Agar:* No, I taught his daughter later.
- Linda Arntzenius:* When you were teaching at Miss Fine's School?
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You taught History there.
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Is that something you enjoyed?

¹⁸ John von Neumann (1903-1957), Faculty in the School of Mathematics, 1933-1957.

-
- Nan Agar:* Yes, and no. I was not prepared for that. Those were the days when a lot of people felt that all you learned in, what was then called a Normal school, Teachers College, was useless. What you should know was your subject and so on. I discovered that that was not true. Unless you're a born teacher, you need training as a teacher. You need to know how to organize your material and how to present it, as well as keep discipline and so on.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And did you teach at Miss Fine's before or after the Institute?
- Nan Agar:* Before.
- Linda Arntzenius:* When you look back, what was the most enjoyable aspect of working here, or the most fun that you had?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, I think just being at the Institute was a wonderful feeling. I felt very privileged really. I knew I was very lucky to have fallen into this because I didn't have a library degree. And so it was on Miss Sachs' recommendation that I was made Acting Head [of the library], and they never bothered to get somebody else.
- Because they mostly ran things themselves, you know? They knew what they wanted –
- Linda Arntzenius:* The faculty?
- Nan Agar:* – and there was a library committee and they would tell me what they wanted and, "Do this," and, "Don't do that." And so on.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So you learned as you went along.
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes. I did learn. And in some ways that was a terrific advantage because I wasn't stuck with a whole lot of rules and regulations that I felt I had to do. And I was very fortunate at having a very experienced cataloguer that – who was here. I guess she was the original cataloguer.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What was her name?
- Nan Agar:* Hope Gibbons. She came from an old Princeton family. I think they had been out – I somehow always associate the – what's it called? The Armenians and their terrible times. I had a feeling that her parents were in the Near East.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So the staff and the people associated with the Institute were quite an international group, you would say?
- Nan Agar:* No, I wouldn't call them international because they were mostly all Americans.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Or emigres.
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes. Like all Americans, because we're all from somewhere else.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me what was the most challenging or difficult aspect of your work?
-

-
- Nan Agar:* Well, I tried very hard to do a good job, to anticipate what would be needed, and I had to – as the library grew, as the Institute grew my staff – once I became Acting Head I had to expand the staff and so forth.
- The most difficult time was with one of my employees. But for the most part it was just the challenge of meeting growing needs. I’m not expressing myself very well.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, it’s difficult when you’re being grilled like this.
- Nan Agar:* Well, it shouldn’t be. It shouldn’t be that difficult.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Your grandfather was a newspaperman, did you ever think of becoming a reporter?
- Nan Agar:* No, I never thought about that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It was always architecture for you, was it?
- Nan Agar:* That was a good major for me because I could take more courses that I wanted to that way. I had originally wanted to go to France for my junior year, but, of course, the war stopped that one.
- But after I graduated I thought I would like to go for a Ph.D. in Philosophy.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But you didn’t do that.
- Nan Agar:* No, I didn’t do that. Well, I had a baby, you know?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.
- Nan Agar:* And we were moving around the country, and then during the war I was working. So I never got back to academia.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No, is that something you regret that you wish you’d been able to do?
- Nan Agar:* What I regret is not being able to go to France. That I would have liked to.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And to fly, do more flying perhaps?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes. That was one of the hardest things to have to give up because I kept up with it when my husband was stationed in Georgia. But when we moved to South Carolina we were too close to the coast to allow any civilians around. So that was the end. And that was difficult, I must say.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Flying was something you’d learned when you were at Smith?
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There couldn’t have been too many women pilots at that time.
-

-
- Nan Agar:* There weren't, but there were a number of them. Gloria Heath, I think was her name; was a mover and shaker in that. She was a class behind me and I think she had a lot to do with organizing the unit that became the Women's Unit of...
- Linda Arntzenius:* A women's unit in the Air Force?
- Nan Agar:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* During the war?
- Nan Agar:* Yes. I'm trying to remember what it was called. It was like the Navy people, what were they called? I can't remember.
- Linda Arntzenius:* The WAFs?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, the WASPs, yes, that's I guess what they called them, Women's Air Service or something. They were not trained as fighter pilots or bomber pilots. They were trained to fly these planes and to take them from one place to another. Delivery from production to an air base or things of that sort is what mostly they did.
- They had a remarkable record. And they did have some crashes and they lost some pilots, but on the whole they did very well, I have to say.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, you retired from the library in 1984. Is that correct?
- Nan Agar:* I guess it is.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What has been your association with the Institute since then?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, at first I did keep up some contacts. I went to some of the lectures. That was one of the big privileges, I could go to the – the Historical Studies School had lectures by the visiting members every – I think it was Wednesdays at 4:00. And I enjoyed those very much.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What sort of subjects were you interested in? Do you remember any of the particular lectures?
- Nan Agar:* Well, I was – most of them were – I was going to say most of them were in archeology but that isn't exactly true. There were people that spoke about medieval times, you know, whatever person was giving a lecture, whatever his field was.
- There was one that I found very interesting that started with the idea in building up the Roman Empire with how it worked when you got your soldier – how the soldiers became soldiers; the economics behind the build up of the Roman Empire. I thought that was very interesting because usually it isn't given that way, it's given the other way. There were a number of them that were of interest to me.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So that was one of the perks of your job?
-

-
- Nan Agar:* Oh, absolutely, absolutely.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And you kept coming after you'd retired?
- Nan Agar:* Well, I came to more of the public lectures and concerts and things of that kind. I had several friends who were Friends of the Institute so I would do things with them, but gradually that began to taper off.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Since you were associated with the Institute over three decades, I wonder if you could tell me how the culture of the Institute changed during that time. The way the faculty interacted with each other, with members, what the atmosphere was like.
- Nan Agar:* I think that is difficult. But I think that when I first came, which was the year – a few months after Einstein died. So it was still pretty new, and most of the original faculty were still here and it was still a small, very specialized organization.
- It also, at that time had the problem of Oppenheimer and Communism and so on and so forth. He had been cleared, I think, but it was hanging there.
- In fact, when I first came there were still some records in the basement of Fuld Hall that had to do with the investigation and so on, that did not belong to the Institute but belonged to the government, I guess.
- Linda Arntzenius:* They were in a safe were they?
- Nan Agar:* Yes, I think they were in a whole room that was a vault.
- But gradually like the rest of the culture it branched out. They had more things – more subjects than they had had. And I don't think there was any astrophysics until several years after I came.
- Of course, Sputnik was a big thing. In the beginning the Institute used to have a big party once a year and everybody came, and I mean everybody. It was good in that sense because in those days, of course, there were still a lot of differences in who you were. I mean there were social distinctions. But for the Institute's party, and I forget what they called it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Was it called the Institute Ball?
- Nan Agar:* No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Or the Christmas Ball?
- Nan Agar:* No, it wasn't at Christmas. It was usually in the spring, I think. Anyway, it was a big party with everybody there. And it was well done, and it was fun. And there were several incidents along the way, but mostly it was good.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now, when you say "incidents," what are you referring to?
-

-
- Nan Agar:* Well, I think one time there was a fight – with the grounds people or something like that. I don't know. The liquor flowed free, that's for sure.
- Linda Arntzenius:* This would be the '60s?
- Nan Agar:* It must be the '60s. But gradually that stopped. I don't know exactly when. I don't remember, maybe during Kaysen's Directorship or maybe when he left and I can't remember who came.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Goldberger.
- Nan Agar:* Goldberger, okay. I don't remember him.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No? He wasn't here for very long and then I think Phillip Griffiths came in.
- Nan Agar:* I'd gone by that time.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, that's right, you had.
- Nan Agar:* There's a gap there somewhere. Oh, I wish Barbara [DeMeritt] was here, because she could remember a lot of the things.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So who was on the staff? How many people were working in the library at the peak when you were working here? What kind of staff?
- Nan Agar:* Well, I don't know that that was the peak exactly, but when I retired there was a cataloguer, an interlibrary loan, periodicals, and orders, I guess. Well, there was Barbara [DeMeritt], there was Denise [Diamond], there was the other Barbara [Tucker]. I guess that's it.
- And then by that time there was a Social Studies Library, also. She could have told you a lot. It's too bad. She died quite a while ago. Pat Sher had been at Los Alamos. She knew the Oppenheimers very well.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Was there any stigma associated with the Institute because of Oppenheimer's investigation?
- Nan Agar:* I think there was in the general public. There were people that were very anticommunism and so on and so forth. But I never noticed it here.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What do you think the Institute's impact on Princeton was?
- Nan Agar:* Well, that's difficult. I don't know. I think there were a lot of interactions more and more as time went on. In the beginning it was so small and, I mean, it depended on Fine Hall for the Mathematicians and, you know, there weren't all that many people involved.
- So I think the Institute – or the University was a big help to the Institute in the interaction of the faculties. Later on I think this became very valuable to both institutions. It led more to the Princeton tradition of Town and Gown.
-

On the whole I think it was a good thing. And half the time people thought that the – or more than half the time thought the Institute was a branch of the University.

Linda Arntzenius:

Yes.

Nan Agar:

That was something that was hard to correct.

Linda Arntzenius:

So looking back, what highlights could you share about your time here?

Nan Agar:

Well some of the highlights I'd rather not discuss because they were low lights.

Linda Arntzenius:

Now, you realize this will be embargoed. So if it has relevance for the history of the Institute I would encourage you to share those things. But that's your choice.

Nan Agar:

Well, I think, you know, the whole thing is you don't say bad things about the dead.

Linda Arntzenius:

Yes.

Nan Agar:

Plus controversies are part of all historical events. I don't think that they have all that much relevance as far as the Institute is concerned. All organizations have problems, and I mean, people are the same whether they're scholars or workmen or what. And also, I don't know all the facts about any of this stuff.

Linda Arntzenius:

Are you particularly referring to the Kaysen period and the trouble on Mount Olympus, that period of time?

Nan Agar:

Well, there was that and there were smaller ones, more directly that I was concerned with. I didn't know too much about the higher ups. I mean, I knew they existed but I didn't know much about them.

No, it was too bad, but there were some unfortunate things, but I think – I don't think it's up to me to talk about them.

Linda Arntzenius:

All right.

Nan Agar:

I mean, everybody has problems and the ones that I really know about don't affect the whole picture at all anyway.

Linda Arntzenius:

All right. Well, if there's anything else you would like to add, otherwise I think we can conclude our interview.

Nan Agar:

Oh, there was something I thought of, but I can't think of it now, of course.

Linda Arntzenius:

Did you make a few notes or you brought something?

Nan Agar:

No, what I did, I did remember, this was pre-Institute, it really hasn't got anything to do with the Institute, but the path that's down by the Institute Woods is the old trolley track.

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.
- Nan Agar:* And I used to ride the trolley to see a relative in Trenton. And you could also, from my bedroom window, you could see the ridge and you could see the trains going by because you could see the steam from the engines, –and you could also see some of the Zeppelins that were going into Lakehurst.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now isn't that where the Hindenburg –
- Nan Agar:* That's where the Hindenburg burned, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, my.
- Nan Agar:* I didn't see that, of course. But – well, I could have, of course, if I had looked at the right time.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So that trolley was active until what, the mid-'50s? Do you remember when the trolley disappeared?
- Nan Agar:* Oh, it disappeared before that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Before then?
- Nan Agar:* It disappeared as part of the Depression or the war, or both.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right.
- Nan Agar:* There was another one on the other side of town called the Johnson Trolley, and the tracks there were dug up during the war for scrap metal, or something of that sort.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So the war made a big impact on your personal life with the loss of your husband.
- Nan Agar:* Well, yes, it did.
- Linda Arntzenius:* – and your war work.
- Nan Agar:* Oh, yes, I hope that somewhere in this historical background of the Institute somebody knows more about the Director's house, the Olden Farm. I remember that as a child because we had – what was it? It was the 100th anniversary – or the 200th anniversary.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Of that house?
- Nan Agar:* No, of Washington's birth, 1732. Anyway, and that was when I was particularly – I was about 12, interested in battles and that whole thing, and I remember later on when I was in high school our history teacher, we were all, you know, violently pro-revolution, and she said, "Well, of course, you all would have been Tories anyway." We were furious.
- But it was – it is, I think, a nice old house and there's not much left of it.
-

-
- Linda Arntzenius:* Why do you say there's not much left of it?
- Nan Agar:* Well, it's been expanded, it's been rearranged. The basis is still there but it was a very small little place, I'm sure, when it was first built, which I believe was 1695.
- And so I think it's nice that something remains. The Oldens were like the Stocktons and I think the Fields and a few other people, some of the earliest settlers in the area. So I think that's nice.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And who lived in the house when you were a child? Do you remember?
- Nan Agar:* Yes, the Oldens.
- Linda Arntzenius:* The Oldens lived in it then?
- Nan Agar:* It was a branch of that family, and it seems to me there were some Dinsmores too. How the Dinmores and the Oldens were related or weren't related, I don't remember.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Is it a place where you would have gone Trick or Treating as a child?
- Nan Agar:* No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* No? Why not?
- Nan Agar:* I don't know. I really don't know, maybe – I have no idea. We discussed the – yes, and then there's the battlefield. And –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you remember the gift of some of Institute lands to the battlefield?
- Nan Agar:* No, I don't remember that. I do remember a couple of reenactments and I remember a big brouhaha recently which I think is a little much. But – oh, the housing, that was the only other thing.
- My bedroom was on the south side of the house and I overlooked a field, and it had been originally part of the development of so called Battle Park, which is where Newlin, Ober Road and Haslet Avenue were behind Battle Road.
- Battle Road was already established. But this was a development after World War I, and it didn't – it was one of those things that fell by the wayside. This is off the record but it was one of the things that my stepmother remembered after World War II and she felt that she should sell our big house and move because the thing would go to pot.
- Well, of course, it didn't. We sat across the street and watched the house getting sold for higher and higher prices.
- But this was a bust, but originally where the Institute Housing is was just big fields. And there had been laid out streets and we used to play on the next
-

street down from Newlin Road where there was an excavation for a foundation for a house that never got built.

I don't remember whether there were others like that or not, but we used to go and play in this place and we had – it was a special friend of mine who lived across the street and we used to go down and make what you'd call bas reliefs on tin cans tops with mud, you see?

That was very nice. We were very much encouraged to do that by – I can't remember her name. But I didn't realize this until maybe 10 years ago or something like that, that this person was the one who would encourage us to do these things and use watercolor paints and stuff on the dry things. But she was quite famous later on. She was just – she was much older than we were.

Linda Arntzenius: Was she an artist herself?

Nan Agar: Not a formal artist, she was certainly artistic and she did a lot of things with – I wish I could remember who she was. I think – it doesn't matter, but I think her married name at that time was Olds, like Oldsmobile. But she may have married – she may have been a Lambert, but I don't remember.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, I'm not going to press your memory any further.

Nan Agar: I'm sorry.

Linda Arntzenius: That's all right. If you think of anything, we can get together again. You can call me.

[End of Audio]
