

MR. GEORGE L. HARRISON
Miss Mary McCarrick, Secretary

January 21, 1954

Interview (1) -- Thurs., 1/21/54

Mr. Harrison retired "a couple of weeks ago" as Chairman of the Board of the New York Life Insurance Co. He has been out of the Federal Reserve System since 1941, when he resigned as President of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. He has not been well. There is some trouble with a knee which has been successfully operated on, but his doctors, fearing for his heart, will not let him take the exercise required to put the knee back into commission. It is my impression, though I did not actually see it, that he is able to travel at present ^{only} in a wheelchair. He is expecting to go to Florida within a few weeks (around February 15), where he will spend February and March.

Mr. Harrison expressed great interest in this project and complete willingness to cooperate in any way possible. Asked what he would pick as the important guidepost around which notable events clustered, he said that he and his secretary would talk about it and send us a memorandum. He said, when asked to think about his period of twenty-seven years within the System, that this was like opening a door long closed. He went to the Federal Reserve Board as Assistant General Counsel the year that the New York Bank was opened (1914) and before the other regional banks were opened.

It was obvious that the opening of the closed door to Mr. Harrison's memory brought back so much that he found it difficult to pick out any details on which to talk. It seemed wiser to keep this interview on the basis of an introduction and gaining of his willingness to cooperate in the future. At the end he said he would be glad to see the Research Director "at any time."

Mr. Harrison's papers have been under Miss McCarrick's care and she may be more specific about them in a second interview. Mr. Harrison said that during the banking crisis of the 1930's things had moved so fast that he had kept no memoranda which were worth anything. On the other hand, he had asked Mr. Allan Sproul to keep memoranda and there were several "black books" by Mr. Sproul which would be of great value. Obviously, it is important to note these.

Mr. Harrison said that his papers would be found mostly in the institutions with which he worked as he does not approve of the practice of removing such papers when a man goes to another post. This would suggest that within the files of the New York Bank and the Board it would be possible to find much of his work in either New York or Washington.

He contributed certain early details. Asked, for example, whether Woodrow Wilson had understood the Federal Reserve System which was set up during his Presidency, or had merely sponsored it, he said that Mr. Wilson was the System's friend, although he had at one time been eager to make an appointment which would not have been to the System's advantage. The great question was whether Mr. Carter Glass, who is generally considered the architect of the System, really understood its technical working. The men active in operations thought he did not, and that this may have explained some of his recommendations with which they did not agree.

There is every reason to believe that Mr. Harrison will talk at greater length on later interviews. His health is such that those interviews should be held as early as possible.

MA:z:km