Teresa Hamman: This is Teresa Hamman at the Mansfield library on August 9, interviewing Paul Rasmussen of Wayne D. Rasmussen. Paul, you were going to start I believe, with, first off could you tell me a bit about being born and raised in Washington D.C. and the surrounding area?

Paul Rasmussen: I grew up in the greater Washington, D.C. area born in the Takoma Park, Maryland which is a close in suburb of Washington and my first home was in the Bethesda, Maryland, Mom and Dad bought that a couple years before I was born. I had limited recollection of Bethesda, Maryland. Dad was away during World War Two or a portion of that. Soon after he would return from World War Two, we moved to another location, Annandale, Virginia which at that time was very rural in character. Our subdivision, fairly large subdivision, was built amongst trees and dairy farms. Indeed, outside our front door, there was a fairly large wooded area that I used to play in that ended over by a dairy farm some mile and a half through the woods. So, I grew up, in a very rural sort of wooded atmosphere so the traditional cowboy, Indians and other young boy activities were very much in my regimen. Another aspect of it is that Dad liked to do all the yard work and one of the main reminiscences of that location early on is that we would both go across the street into the woods and dig into the wooded area where there was composted good soil and haul, wheelbarrow it back, to the front yard and to the backyard so that the more difficult clay areas were enriched by the wood soil and so that seeding would be easier and stronger, long barrow. So we did that wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow. Not the typical thing you'd see happening in today's suburban area. Dad liked that, he liked outdoor work. He did a lot of course on the ranch in the Lavina, Montana area. While he has made work with writing and reading, breaking that with either gardening, working with the lawn, or even we did some chopping of wood for the wood burning fireplace that we had in my house. That was something that he enjoyed.

One of the aspects of the Annandale home, which is the main home I grew up in till I went away for college to William and Mary and subsequently got married, I was married my senior year and had a daughter, we moved back to the Washington area. But during the period I went to elementary school and high school, one of the main facets of the living room was built in bookcases in the living room around the fireplace. They held a very large number of books. In addition, Dad had bookcases up in the master bedroom that he and Mom had and had them stocked with often history books, but others too. He bought classics and belonged to the Franklin Mint later on where special classics were printed on embossed leather covers and special printing were done. He collected any number of classic books in that manner. He loved books generally and he had a lot of history books in the library downstairs and I remember as a
kid, I would go to those and either read through and some instances there were pictorial histories of the United States and I’d often gravitate to that. So by osmosis I learned American history just by my casual reading and looking at the books Dad had in his library at the time. Both in high school and later on, at William and Mary, it was a relatively easy set of courses for me just because I’d grown up with all those books and been interested in. Of course, I reviewed things and studied but it was some, a lot of the basic elements of American history were already imprinted so I didn’t have to study as hard as some of my other classmates did.

TH: Now you, I think, and your sister mentioned that your father had a great love of books and libraries. How did he work with his children, did he emphasize reading, or did he do it by example?

PR: Well I think by example. I mean, Mom and Dad encouraged us to read but it was never sort of a laid down as a requirement per say. More like, and they read, typically...we were one of the last houses in our neighborhood, at the advent of TVs to have TVs. As a matter of fact, our next door Sacassa, old black and white TV when they first came out and we all gathered around in the neighborhood. Our family, Cassa’s family, and others to watch the inauguration of Harry Truman. Tiny little screen, but there it was. Of course it was only happening about ten miles away but it was technically, the new invention, was the way to see it.

During my growing up I would frequently go over to the Cassa’a and watch Uncle Milty, the Milton Berle show or things of that sort and they enjoyed having me over. We were very close to the Cassa’s. We would have Paul Cassa and we had Judy over equally as many times. So it was a very open household between the two homes. But actually we did get a TV but we were pretty well engrained with books. Even with the radio and eventually TV. I think my sister’s and I still love to read and it wasn’t, TV didn’t dominate when it first arrived. But it was because of the novelty of it that we used it quite a bit but it wasn’t that we then forgave reading. We did both, but the TV was a novelty, not so that we all could watch a number of things.

TH: Your father had a very significant career at the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) ending as the chief historian. Tell me about how his career affected the family or what part you saw of his career.

PR: Well, Dad was always very studious and very dedicated to his work. The one story that mother may remember and discussing this with her is that before he joined the history division of the economic research, sort of the history branch of the economic research division, he was a clerk typist and he was doing this, not grudgingly because he enjoyed being at the USDA but it wasn’t the job he wanted. We lived still in Bethesda and we hadn’t moved to Annabel at that time. Mother and Dad went to the bus stop on Wisconsin Avenue to catch a bus in to town. On their way a gentlemen’s car was stuck by the side of the road. They both helped and Dad particularly helped push him out. The gentleman said, “Are you going downtown” and he said, “Ya, USDA,” and the gentlemen said, “Oh that’s where I’m going jump right on in.” Both mom
and Dad jumped in and in discussing what Dad was doing at USDA, he said, “Oh...what I really want to do is join the history branch.” The gentlemen he helped out of the ditch was in personnel office at USDA and the rest, as they say, was history. It’s a wonderful story. A good Samaritan came off in a very major why.

My reminiscences of Dad’s work though was that he worked at night and he, unlike me where I’m an early morning person, Dad said that he really got going in the afternoon and the evenings, and I’m almost certain that every weekday evening he would either be in his office area of the house or he would go into the office. This was both work related to what the office was producing on one hand, or book projects that he had initiated. He wrote profusely and then edited also, so it could have been any number of things going on in terms of the work that he did. But he often was at the office for several hours in the evenings. Sometimes on a Saturday but usually not entire days. So there was a workaholic beyond the normal eight hour routine essentially all of his life. And enjoyed it. He wouldn’t be doing this if he didn’t enjoy the work obviously. All of his work was handwritten in long hand on yellow sheets of paper. Most of it was probably typed at his office. Mother helped in some instances particularly earlier reminiscences of him preparing his PHD thesis. Mom had a card table set up in the living room with a typewriter, the original sheet with two carbons. She would type from Dad’s notes to the manuscript. It was a long process but that was the way it was done and obviously successful in the end. I think very late in life, Dad and Mom were given a computer, bought a computer and learned how to use it. They both went to class, but I’m not sure Dad was totally, completely comfortable with the ins and outs of basics of composition too. I think he knew that but either e-mails or more other aspects of what you typically use the computer for today he was, he didn’t do it for that it was basically word processing operation for him. I guess I follow in his footsteps, I’m not terribly computer literate although I do send e-mails, read them and other kinds of things but there’s a limited workatar and usually I have one of my staff people, who are substantially younger, and very, very knowledgeable about computers come help me out as I need. I’m in the Arizona Depart of Environmental Quality and I learned late about computers and still am unsure about them and I think I follow Dad in that sense.

TH: I think many of us follow your father in that sense. Your father’s life was quite a journey from cattle ranch in Montana to Washington, D.C. I’m guessing that you visited Montana at some point, or probably at several points. What can you tell me about your memories of where they lived and what you saw in Montana when you arrived here?

PR: My grandmother lived in San Diego with my uncle Paul for many, many years and then Paul married and they were still in San Diego and then moved to Los Angeles so there were three major family trips across country by car that we took before I went off to college. And one of those, I think it was the second one, we took the northern route through Montana so we could see Billings, see Alvina, Custard’s Battlefield and the like. The memories aren’t too sharp other than it was the eastern open plains section of Montana and quite frankly was a bit desolate. You drove for miles to get to the ranch site and I think my mother was reminiscing that my
comments were given my paper route, “I don’t want to be near this kind of thing.” So, having
grown up in that environment, it was a fairly harsh looking situation for me. I guess I refer to it
that way. I knew Dad felt it was pretty harsh environment in terms of working on a ranch and
teaching school. I think as he grew up in the throws of the Great Depression, he saw all the
chance to join public service as the opportunity to change his economic situation to help his
mother and family and that’s why he went to Washington, D.C. It wasn’t that he thought it was
a land of nirvana or milk and honey necessarily but this was where the jobs would be and that’s
what his interest was anyway; books and writings and that’s what he could do as a public
servant in D.C.

TH: To move back to Washington, if I recall correctly you attended the Kennedy inauguration
with your father?

PR: Yes that—in being in Washington we were fortunate to get, if we wanted to make the
opportunity, to attend inaugurals—in the instance of the Kennedy inauguration, it was a heavy
snow before inauguration day. It must have been fourteen inches and so there was, we couldn’t
get our car out of the garage onto the road, having not yet been plowed the drive down. So we
hiked through the snow to get to a bus stop. the busses were operating we had heart that that
was the case. So we took a bus into the area. We actually sat in the bleachers, as I remember,
somewhat in front of what became my old office building, but at that time was between 12th
and 13th street on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was part of the Post Office Department, postmaster
general offices at the time. Later on it became the headquarters for the U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency, which I worked in for many, many years. So those offices where the
bleachers were, were set, unbeknownst to me, to be later where I worked. The fact of the
matter is that we waited for the parade, although we heard his famous “ask not what your
country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” speech, the honorable speech.
They had the loud speakers on Pennsylvania Avenue. But then there was an elongated lunch,
celebratory lunch, that the leadership all went to indulge in the capital. So the parade schedule
was moved back and it was just bitterly cold because there was wind tunnel effect coming
down Pennsylvania Avenue, and it just was freezing your nose and your toe. We were bundled
up pretty well but it was, I remember, exceptionally cold. So we waited until the Kennedy car
came and saw John Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy and I saw Robert Kennedy, and a few of the
other luminaries of the Democratic Party. There were senators and congressman that you could
recognize. I can’t quite frankly remember whether Mansfield was in the parade as senator
democratic leader, which I think at that time he was but I just don’t remember that. I really do
remember John Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy and then Robert. I think in both cases all three
were in open air convertibles. It must’ve been very cold for them. After them we essentially
made a hasty retreat to the busses, warmed up in them, and sloughed home. So we saw the
event, so we didn’t stay for the foot parade because it was too brutally cold. But, we did have
the opportunity living there to participate in viewing public events.
When Kennedy was assassinated I was a junior, excuse me a sophomore, at College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia studying for an Italian exam and my friend across the way was listening to the radio, knocked on the door and said, “Did you hear that Kennedy was shot?” I said, “Ooh my goodness, no.” I went over and we listened for a while. Then I went to the exam, never particularly prepared for Italian which was my bet and ore in terms of courses, tenure phonetics was my least effective talent. You couldn’t even call it talent; it was a struggle and I finally did meet the language requirement, but it was only by the skin of my teeth. But to my great relief they cancelled the one exam I was studying for, given the news. We went over to the student union building to listen and the next day I walked into the Student Union where normally we would have breakfast and walked in just at the time Oswald was shot by Jack Ruby, and my comment to a friend at the time was this was a true Shakespearian tragedy. So we followed it vividly and we were all very upset about it. That weekend I believe they had a candlelight vigil at the Lincoln Memorial to which I drove up, took a bus to my home in Annandale and went over to the candlelight vigil and I took photographs, had a camera but also took photographs of it at the time. In black and white, which I think I still have, although I’m not sure where. So it was a very emotional time and both Mom and Dad were very upset for the loss of Kennedy. As a matter of fact I remember Dad telling me, driving down to Williamsburg, it would be Kennedy administration just getting started, that he was so thrilled that this would be sort of an English Renaissance period in American History. So an Elizabethan aspect to flowering the arts and hopefully the economy, and the country as a whole. He reckoned it to the Elizabethan period in England because his leadership was young and dynamic and articulate and all those things. I remember that distinctly and may have prompted me about my comment about Jack Ruby killing Oswald was a Shakespearian tragedy. At any rate, it was very deeply felt by almost everyone at the time, certainly our family was very upset.

TH: Certainly. Are there other events you recall taking part of in Washington? And if not you mentioned working in Washington D.C. for the Environmental Protection Agency for some time.

PR: Well, I worked in, in 1965 I graduated from William and Mary with a degree in government, minor in history and English. I joined the Federal Government at that time. The way the government works they have grades 1-15 and then they had what they called “super grades” for the very senior leadership. I started as a GS 5 in an intern program that got me to an 11 in three years. Five, seven, nine, then finished with an eleven which I was grateful for. I started in June of ’65 at a grade five making exactly 5,000 dollars a year. Which doesn’t seem like a lot but it was just enough for us to rent in (unintelligible) buy small cheverlot Camaro car which served us a good long time and didn’t provide us with a lot of expendable income but the basics were good.

When I joined the Jump Services Administration Public Buildings Program, my first boss ran an urban planning staff which basically did analytical work on public building sites and recommendations on which buildings should be built and where. Now it was fascinating with
the topic, the gentleman’s name was Jack, I asked Jack, “If I want to be an urban planner what was required, academics.”

“Oh, you need a master’s degree.” I kind of looked at him, because at that time I hadn’t planned on going to graduate school. He says, “There’s one right at Catholic University, in the area, at night.”

So I applied, I was accepted, and to everyone’s surprise and pleasure I did exceptionally well at Catholic University. It took four years which under a normal regimen would be two years with a thesis but I did it in four years which was normal for most of the students. Everybody was very thrilled, myself included that I did this. I never practiced urban planning in the true sense of city planner or county planner would be doing it in a city like Missoula, Montana or Alexandria, Virginia or wherever it may be. I did do activities related to planning on a part time basis in Alexandria that developed a comprehensive plan and I sat on the committee that helped develop that. That was right out of planning school, I think I just graduated, and was really quite thrilling for me to do that in that context because the work I was doing was not directly related to planning although the skills that you learned in planning school were very helpful in the tech type of stuff I did.

I left the Public Building Service after about four years and joined a little office that was planning a 1976 Bicentennial. That experience, which was quite interesting, it was right at the height of Nixon administration. We were literally two blocks away from the White House and some of the people in that office were appointed by senior Republican officials. One young lady who worked with us was the niece of Alexander Butterfield at the time, who was a senior staff assistant to Nixon, and Alexander Butterfield exposed in Senate testimony before the urban committee the existence of the taping system. It was like living with history because we were so close to the White House and we had people directly associated with the current players. Another name of Watergate history since it’s been recently in the news and exposure of Deep Throat, Mark Phillip. We worked in the program for developing plans for the Bicentennial with a Bud Krogh, Egil Bud Krogh. Bud was the White House special assistant for D.C. affairs and under those authorities we developed our plans and actually had a ceremony in announcing certain activities in the White House press room which was always a thrill. Going up in the elevator we encountered Erich Manjanor, senior advisor, and he said, “You’re doing your bicentennial stuff huh Bud?” And he ha-ha’d.

So there was a little bit of exposure to the Nixon White House under those circumstances. However, it was Watergate and resignation that led to President Ford’s presidency. At that time I had left and had gone to the U.S. Department of Transportation. But Ford wanted to use the bicentennial planning in the major cities in the east coast as a key element in his reelection campaign. He wanted it to go well. Well the four cities concerned were Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington. “Colonial Quarter” it was called. I was involved with transportation information for D.C. and no one else would touch it with a ten foot pole, so I was the guy doing...
that stuff. One of the odd aspects of it was that an assistant secretary for the Department of Interior chaired a group for D.C plans and reserved on a regular basis the Roosevelt Room of the West Wing of the White House for the meeting. So I as a mid-level civil servant would be waltzing into the West Wing of the White House with the marine guards opening the door for me, just by showing them my driver’s license and they had my name and Social Security number on a list and they checked that off. A much more leisurely security check than what you have to go through today. The Roosevelt Room is an inside conference room, immediately adjacent to both the Cabinet Room and the Oval Office. You could go out into the corridor and the President was, when I was there wasn’t in attendance, there was a velveteen rope across the entrance but you would stand there and look into the Oval Office for the length of time you wanted to do that.

My main impression when I saw it first, and several times afterwards, was it was smaller than I envisioned, but you did do that. There was one instance where my boss’s boss, at that time the deputy undersecretary of DoT, Department of Transportation, was asked to give a presentation in the Cabinet Room with the President in attendance. I said, “Oh, that’ll be nice for him.” My boss said, “Guess what, you’re going. He can only staff assistant and you’re the one that knows that, I sure don’t.” So I went along with my boss’s boss to the Roosevelt Room and there was a very large formal agenda in which about fifteen minutes into the meeting in all call caps, the President arrived. So 2:35 in the afternoon. Indeed exactly at that time the anti-room next to the Oval Office, his private study that was between that and the Cabinet, opened up and Joe Ford walked in and everyone stood up, and his first eye contact was with me because I had my back was to the Rose Garden, behind my boss’s seat, and he kind of looked at me, where am I and what am I doing. He sat down and the room bursts open and Robert Peirpoint from NBC news and others came to try and get a photo op, with a very limited period of time. Cameras rolling and all of that kind of stuff. John Warner was head of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, Or ARBA, and he was briefing Ford about something at the Library of Congress he’d recently done. Peirpoint looked at me and said “Who’s that” trying to mouth it. Then he burst out because John Warner, at that time former Secretary of the Navy, had a healthy ego and if he had known that Robert Peirpoint didn’t know who he was he would’ve been mortified beyond all belief. So these vignettes of White House activities and working the bicentennial respond. It was sort of an example of being up close and personal to the President and or Congress because we were living right there.

TH: Good. We’re very close to the end of side A so we’re going to pause for a moment and turn the tape over.

TH: When you think of your father, what is the most significant impact he had on perhaps your family, or I know he was very active outside the USDA in a number of different organizations, both history related, also and the Cosmos Club for example. Loved history, but still an intellectual activity.
PR: Well Dad brought work home and often in the evenings and sometimes on the weekends would be working and that was just a part of our normal routine. But he always made time for Mom, and all of us. Particularly in my case little league baseball, which I participated in for a number of years, although I was never a particularly good player. I would actually get a little nervous with Dad and or Mom watching the game, to be honest with you. When I didn’t have them there I wanted to make sure I did the very best and as consequence would feel a little bit nervous about it, I never did as well as otherwise. That also was true for high school basketball. Dad was always religiously coming to the game, and often Mom too because I was sort of under scrutiny from the stands, I never felt very, very comfortable. I played it for a couple years, I played the baseball for several years, and I also did scouting which Dad was very, very active in the council on a number of merit badges: stamp collecting, coin collecting, and other kinds of things that you could get a merit badge for. I never got the, I got the life achievement in Boy Scouts which is close to eagle but at that time, didn’t swim at all very well. I had an instance where I didn’t quite drown but I had a scare. I was afraid of water up until my mid-teens where I learned at my local pool house and I have since enjoyed it immensely. I have a swimming pool where I currently live. Because I was not adept at swimming in the Scouts, and that was one of the required badges that you had to have, I never made the eagle which was a disappointment for me, and to some extent my father but he never really showed that. But I was one of the troop leaders in terms of, you know there would be various divisions within the troop and I would be one of the leaders in that grouping and I always enjoyed that. Then, Dad always enjoyed doing it with me. When I left that and went on to college, frankly, Dad continued doing merit badge counseling and kids from all over the northern Virginia region who had to get merit badges to make the star life and eagle requirements went to Dad to do that. He did that for many, many, many years after I had left. So, if sort of shows his resolve.

One of his passions was stamp collecting. Reading for pleasure was also a passion. All of those... I got to the stamp collecting briefly but again I didn’t follow through with it in later life. Dad always did. So he set that by example. His dad’s example of being both studious and very self-disciplined and an avid reader certainly had an effect on me and my two sisters who did very well in college themselves. We did things as a family: taking trips, cross country trips for sure. One of the typical ones was Ocean City, Maryland which was the nearest large ocean beach to us. We actually bought a property near Ocean City but you had to have another ferry trip to get from the mainland across from the inlet to get to the property. Mom and Dad owned it for a number of years, and eventually it was taken over and became a part of the Assateague National Seashore Park, and so the Interior Department of the park bought it from Mom and Dad. The developer was actually going to build homes in that section, but the transportation constraints of a ferry never allowed them to do that. Since then, since it became a national park, they did build a road access to it, but it’s wild and open. It’s one of the few locales on the East Coast that has wild ponies, the famous Assateague ponies roam from the north and where the property was all the way down to Assateague Island in the south. So that was always fun. Often times, summer vacations were a trip to the beach and we would go to Shenandoah National Park skyline drive when the leaves change for a traditional picnic often times with the
next door neighbors, the Cassas. Typically they were small trips, about a week or two weeks, unless we did a major trip across the country to visit my grandmother who was living with my Uncle Paul.

We did that and Dad was very supportive of all the school work and urged me to do well, and I did reasonably well in high school. Came down a notch at William and Mary which was very tough for me, and then rose back up again. This was while I was married and working for GSA [General Services Administration] at the time to get my master’s degree in planning. I ended up with very good grades, a great shock and pleasure to my parents who saw me struggle and William and Mary. Nonetheless, all’s well that ends well, I did do well with that. I’ve used that on the side in my professional life.

We took great pleasure in Dad’s accomplishments, going to events when he would get the various metals that he would receive from the department and enjoyed that immensely. He also did a taping of vignettes of agricultural history on (unintelligible) across the fence. It was filmed at the NBC studios and I believe you may have the tape of some of his shows here at the library. He just did a short, three to five minute narration on some aspect of agricultural life that would be of general interest to the farming community. Johnny Appleseed, or the advent of the threshing machine, you know or why cotton was so important to the Deep South. Other issues like that, often personalized in an individual inventor or a well-known farmer or some sort of historical, you know. He did that on I think a monthly basis for a number of years. I actually took my camera in and got shots of him doing a tape recording session and I have those squirreled away someplace, I didn’t bring them with me on this trip, but he enjoyed that. I went with him twice and my sisters also, but he was like all of those things where you were appearing on T.V. for instance and he never made a big deal about it. We kind of joked because they would show him very early on Saturday morning, like 6:30 am, and no one was getting up at that time so we said that we were the only family in northern Virginia that would get up to watch “Across the Fence” at 6:30 in the morning on Saturday. But it was always a lot of fun.

Things like the Cosmos Club that you mentioned, he was very interested in that for a number of years. Some of his professional colleagues had joined and you had to be sponsored by a person or several member to join. He did join. He was thrilled with it, because it was the club founded by John Wesley Powell and Meltner Grovesnor, the originator of National Geographic back at the turn of the century for social activities for those involved with writing scholarship, exploration, and the like. He was very pleased that that happened, and he and Mom used to form quite a few events, and on certain family dinners, we would all go out together, and Mom and Dad went to several lectures there. There were these kinds of activities going on, and our wedding reception for my wife Ellen and I was held at the Cosmos Club, for instance. We enjoyed that, and he enjoyed that to the end, and was an active participant of it. But he was very active in the other professional societies that... the agricultural history society which he was instrumental in keeping going and editing materials and worked at and attended any number of conferences during a typical year that papers were being given, and he edited a lot,
those materials also. He stayed very active in every aspect of the work at USDA in which, the
thing emphasized to me and would tell other family members is he wanted to make sure his
work at the Department was relevant to the decision making of the time. Whatever the issue
happened to be, whether it was economic, dealing with price supports, or other things, he
would be able to do brief papers that would inform the decision makes up the line on
historically, what legislation did and how farmers reacted to it and was it a help or hindrance in
terms of encouraging good farming practices. He did that a lot, and his office would be asked a
lot of questions in history that they could respond to very, very quickly. He prided himself on
that.

He was very close to all of his staff, particularly Gladys Baker. We would see them, Gladys and
others, socially on occasion. He would mentor students interested in the field, particularly
young African students who were interested in getting the history and agriculture history. He
had several of them that he sort of took under his wing, and had visitors from places like Russia
at the time. They would come visit at dinner, and I would always be wide eyed and interested in
the discussions that they brought to the table. We mixed some of Dad’s professional interests
and some of the friends that he knew in bringing them to the house where we could visit and so
learn from them. We always had a very active dinner time. It was a very standard affair where
there was a lot of joking and discussion about whatever happened to be the topic of the day.
That was a very common occurrence with us, where a lot of families now either watch the T.V.
or eat separately, that wasn’t the case with us.

TH: That’s wonderful. We’re getting near the end of our time here. Is there anything you’d like
to add, anything we haven’t touched on that you feel is particularly significant as far as your
father’s life or your life or memory of growing up?

PR: Well, Dad always had said that his job was the best in the world and he truly stated that
without, for him, being any hyperbole. It was truly, he felt, the best job for him that he could
possibly imagine, and he reveled in that. Of course he retired after fifty years in the federal
service including World War Two and some early working on the survey crew for the USGS
(United States Geological Service). Putting that all together, he retired after fifty years, which is
well above and beyond the max, which is in the low forties, typically 42, and then you max out
your pension, meaning you can get 80% of your high for three years. Averaging of the high
three years or the last three years is almost 100,000 dollars, so your pensions for retirement is
almost 80,000 dollars, which is a very, very handsome arrangement under today’s pension
(unintelligible). But Dad went beyond the minimum of about 42 years required to do that and
went 50 years and he was enticed away to retire by getting two book contracts which still kept
him very, very busy.

He never really wanted to retire, couldn’t figure out eight hours a day in retirement, what to
do. He read a lot when he did retire. Mom and he fortunately traveled a great deal. He had
made some sound investments and he was careful with the money so they were financially set

Paul W. Rasmussen Interview, OH 398-002, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library,
University of Montana-Missoula.
very nicely. They went to New England to be near my younger sisters, Linda and Karen, and settled in Concord before Dad was diagnosed with having Parkinson’s Disease, which was very difficult for the last four years of his life. He lived to 89. He enjoyed travel, coming back to Montana for (unintelligible) school reunion and whitewater rafting down in the Teton area. This was what they had at the very beginning of his sort of decline with Parkinson’s. He may have had it at the time, but we didn’t know it. He thoroughly enjoyed all of those things. He loved to travel and he fortunately was able to do a lot of that. He was sent overseas by Voice of America to lecture on agricultural history to places like India and Afghanistan and Middle Eastern countries, which he enjoyed immensely. He didn’t travel extensively in the international sense other than vacations except for that one trip sent to him by Voice of America. That was a team of about four people. He loved it and he loved to read and he loved mysteries, and that was passed on to me. I love the same kind of genre in writing: John Le Carre and a local author here, James Lee Burke who lives in the Missoula area. He writes about a Cajun sheriff. I got my father interested in that, and he read all of his books which was typical. Once he liked an author, he would buy that author and read them for pleasure. He wrote (unintelligible) to the end, in terms of what his health allowed him to do.

Then the memory started to fail and so he had to be taken care of. I don’t think he ever felt sorry for himself, and I never felt, while I was unhappy that Dad was suffering a little bit physically, I always thought it was a no regret situation because he was recognized in his lifetime, he did what he wanted to do, and he achieved sort of the goals that he hoped that he would and was recognized for that and he had a loving family. It was very fortunate that my two younger sisters and I didn’t turn out too badly, which is always grateful to parents that their children do well. We always stayed very close as a family, always very loving. We get together at Christmas. Christmas day is my birthday and we would make a major deal of my birthday on Christmas day and then two days later on the 27 of December was my Mom’s and dad’s anniversary. Likewise, we would do something special for that, particularly on their 50th, 60th, and all of those, which were major, major events and we made major events out of them. When you reach a 50th anniversary or something like that you do want to celebrate. When you look back on his life personally, and look back on his life in a career sense, I think everyone felt that he had both done well and gotten the recognition that he deserved. In fact, now that his work will be here, residing at the Mansfield Library, I know it would please him to no end, and he must be smiling down on us to say what a nice event this is. Again, from the family standpoint, we couldn’t be happier that this has happened.

TH: That’s wonderful. Thank you very much, Paul.

PR: My pleasure.

[End of Interview]