

Veteran Staffer Visits the Copyright Office

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David Perlman remembers being elated to get hired as a mail clerk in the Copyright Office in 1942. Not yet 18, he had moved to Washington, D.C., from New York City to join his mother, a secretary at a government agency. His annual starting salary was \$1,080. This past March, nearly 70 years later, Perlman toured a much-changed Copyright Office during a visit to the Library of Congress to submit his memoir to the Veterans History Project.

World War II was going on when Perlman started at the Copyright Office, causing a staff shortage. "Employee turnover in the Copyright Office during the fiscal year has been exceptionally large," wrote Register of Copyrights Clement Lincoln Bouvé in the 1942 annual report. "Sixty-eight employees, nearly 45 percent of the total staff of the Office, have resigned during the past year." Some entered the armed services; others were transferred to government agencies directly involved in the war.

Perlman pushed his mail cart through the Adams Building, then called the Annex, where the Copyright Office was located. He delivered copyright applications and correspondence to staff and collected mail. Other duties included filing and stuffing outgoing envelopes with public informational circulars. "We had air conditioning," Perlman recalled. "But it was primitive." He said

most staff smoked, taking breaks in the basement to do so. Among the perks of his job, Perlman cited being able to check out Library books and get haircuts in the congressional barbershop. "The barber charged 50 cents," he remembered. "I thought that was a little expensive."

Within about nine months, Perlman advanced from mail clerk to senior mail clerk to search clerk, which paid \$1,620 a year. He resigned in April 1943 after being drafted. He served in the 99th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Perlman said he kept in touch with Copyright Office friends while serving and was aware of the *Copyright Office Service Bulletin*, a monthly newsletter staff produced from 1942 to 1945 for the benefit of enlisted colleagues.

A star for Perlman appears on a special flag the Copyright Office made to honor the wartime service of staff. By the end of the war, 55 Office employees had served, and one, Alexander Chavez, 25, had died; stars for all of them appear on the flag, now on display in the offices of the Veterans History Project.

After the war, Perlman went on to a career as a journalist, writing and editing for union newspapers.

"I quite enjoyed my visit," Perlman wrote in an email. "[It] brought back good memories of friends I made during my relatively brief time working in the Copyright Office." ©



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David Perlman in the 1940s (above) and in March 2011 (left). Perlman stands by the Copyright Office service flag and is holding bound copies of the Copyright Office Service Bulletin.