Oral History Interview of Gleason L. Archer

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Interview Summary
In this interview, conducted by his cousin, Ted Duncan, Suffolk University founder Gleason L. Archer (1880-1966) discusses the founding of the university and his other professional endeavors. The interview covers the founding of Suffolk Law School in 1906, Archer’s work doing radio talks on legal and historical topics, and the books that he has written on those same topics. He concludes by discussing his resignation from Suffolk University and his subsequent activities on his farm in Pembroke, Massachusetts.

Subject Headings
Archer, Gleason Leonard, 1880-1966
Boston (Mass.)
Radio broadcasting--History--United States
Radio--History
Suffolk University
Suffolk University--Law School--History

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TED DUNCAN: Good morning, or good afternoon, or good whatever time of day it is you’re listening to this tape. This is your southern cousin, Ted Duncan. I have a cold. I don’t normally sound this way. But I found a tape that I thought perhaps you would like to listen to, and I’m taking this opportunity on the weekend to dub it and send it to you. In cleaning out some of the tapes that I have recorded over the years, I came across a tape I recorded out at the Archer nursery in 1960 or 1961, in which Dr. [Gleason] Archer talks about his career and he talks about the establishment—the establishing of Suffolk University and the writing of the history of radio, and some of the other books, histories that he’d written. And I thought, well, perhaps you’d like to have this tape to sit and reminisce some of the times that you knew Dr. Archer and worked with him.

I know Dr. Archer has two sons and a daughter living somewhere in the United States. He tells me on this tape that was recorded in the sixties that a son lived in Tennessee, one lived in California, and a daughter lived in Maine. But after listening to the tape, if you feel that the members of the family would like to have a tape, write me back, and I’ll be happy to dub one and mail it to them if you have their addresses. I put the tape on this cassette because it’s relatively easy to borrow a machine to listen to. It’s simple enough to wrap up and mail. I hope you enjoy it.

Anna and our two children, Tripp and Jennifer, are getting along fine. Tripp now is nine years old and he’s in the fourth grade. Jennifer is five years old and will be starting kindergarten next year. She’s in pre-kindergarten now. Anna works as a dietitian, or manager, of the Florida State University School. She has—she’s classed as an instructor. She’s in charge of the dietetic department or preparation of food for their high school or total school out there. Not the university system but for their university’s school. I don’t think I made that very clear. But at any rate, that’s what she does. And I’m still employed with Florida Petroleum Council as a lobbyist representing the major oil industry in Florida. We have not been to New England in quite some time, and if we ever get there you can rest assured we’ll look you up. Nice talking to you by tape. And we look to hear from you by Christmas card. And please correspond with us as your time permits.
So now I’ll go ahead and record on this tape then, the tape that I dubbed, or recorded, with Dr. Archer in the early sixties, 1960 or 1961. Because I talked to him to obtain information for the preparation of a paper that I was doing while I was enrolled in Boston University.

DUNCAN: Now the establishing of Suffolk University came how many years after your graduation from Boston University with your LL.D degree? What year did you graduate?

GLEASON ARCHER: I graduated in 1906.

DUNCAN: 1906. Which you just said.

ARCHER: But I had been teaching a group of businessmen law, during my senior year—one evening a week during my senior year.

DUNCAN: You were sort of a tutor.

ARCHER: Yes.

DUNCAN: And you were helping the people out.

ARCHER: I was helping them out. And they were—they liked it so well and then they made such progress. It was an eye opener to me to see how eagerly these men took to law as compared to the fellows who I was studying law with in the law school. Sort of lackadaisical, would do all kinds of foolish things. But these fellows were so anxious to get legal training that they paid very close attention.

(5:36) DUNCAN: Now these fellows you talk about, they bought the law books on their own. They weren’t enrolled in any particular—

ARCHER: They didn’t have any law books. They had my notes.
DUNCAN: Oh, I see.

ARCHER: I dictated notes to them.

DUNCAN: Well at that time was there a bar association?

ARCHER: Oh, yes.

DUNCAN: But these men are past their law—they could’ve—in other words, they didn’t have to pay enrollment fees and whatnot. They could just get your learning—pay you a certain amount without having to go to law school and pass the bar examination and go into private practice.

ARCHER: But of course, these men, the first year, my senior year in law school, they were merely getting it for its value to them in business. I taught them contracts.

DUNCAN: I see.

(6:25) ARCHER: And then when I graduated from law school—let’s see, right away after I graduated I went to see Mr. [George] Frost¹ about my debt. And that’s when he brought out all the [promissory] notes that I had signed with …(inaudible) cut off.

DUNCAN: Now that was in 1906, also.

ARCHER: That’s in 1906.

DUNCAN: In your senior year.

¹ George Frost was a businessman with whom Archer had a chance meeting on a stagecoach in 1903, when both men were traveling to Boston from Cape Cod. Frost was sympathetic to Archer’s desire to go to law school and admired his ambition, so he became Archer’s benefactor, financing his legal education (and helping him pay off some medical bills).
(7:00) ARCHER: He said to me, that he wouldn’t allow me to repay him. But I could—if I passed it along to others he would feel that he was being paid. And then I told him about my idea of starting an evening law school for fellows who—like these that I’d been teaching, who wanted to get a legal education. And he thought this a grand idea. And he came up to visit me after I was married. I got married that fall, too.

DUNCAN: You got married in 1906, also. It was a big year for you wasn’t it?

ARCHER: (laughs) A big year for me. He [Frost] came out and visited one of my lectures. And he said to me afterward, “If I was a younger man, I would take this course myself.” (laughs)

DUNCAN: And the woman you married was whom? Was this the wife that you—

ARCHER: Yes. Elizabeth G. Snyder. I met her father—her father was a congregational minister. She was a classmate of mine in college.

DUNCAN: Okay. You had three big deals that year. You got married, you graduated, and you started the—

ARCHER: And I started the law school. Passed the bar and sworn in as a lawyer.

DUNCAN: You were really a growing man. Well then for how long did Suffolk University go just as a law night school?

ARCHER: Until 1934.

DUNCAN: Until ’34. And then you enlarged it and went into liberal arts and journalism. And it was in 1934, then, that you found that you wanted to teach journalism, or history of radio.
(9:00) ARCHER: I’ll tell you how we happened to do that. I had been fighting in the American Bar Association against this business of trying to close out the opportunities for men who didn’t have college training. And I said to them and the bar association, “If you’re consistent in this, you will push for the establishment of evening colleges, so that men can get this training.” They failed to do anything and so I thought I’d lead the way and show them how to do it. But we could have men going through college and getting their training even though they’re working for a living.

DUNCAN: And then Suffolk University was one of the first—

ARCHER: It was the first school in the East to give academic credit for evening study in college subjects.

DUNCAN: I see. And this was the first and because of that many others have followed in its footsteps.

ARCHER: That’s true. Northeastern [University] had an evening school, but they wouldn’t allow college credit for their evening studies. They had to leave and go to their day school in order to get credit for what they’d done in the evening.

DUNCAN: Well, after you established Suffolk University as a law school, an evening law school, and then after you decided that you were going to leave the—try to get some other people to follow along, you were going to set the example by establishing a night school that gave full credit for night study. You decided that you needed a history of radio or something of that—

ARCHER: Well that came along when we established the College of Journalism. I thought that journalism was—that radio was getting to be such an important field, that it ought to be represented.
DUNCAN: Was this in 1934 that you established—

ARCHER: No. That was in—it was about 1935 or six.

(11:34) DUNCAN: I see. And that was when you found that you didn’t—that there was no information written on the history of radio, and you went to—you set about to write the history of radio.

ARCHER: Yes. And I found that there was nothing written.

DUNCAN: And that’s what took you many hours of hard work and many months to get it out. (Archer laughs) And now, prior to this you were popular in New England and in Boston for your radio work. And after you—let’s take it back now and leave Suffolk University after a moment, and go back to when you graduated from Boston University Law School in 1906.

ARCHER: That’s right.

DUNCAN: And you were married in 1906. And then you mentioned later that you did some law talks at WBZ.² This was the first—

ARCHER: That wasn’t until—let’s see—1929.

DUNCAN: This was 1929. And those first talks over at WBZ were dealing with what subject? On law?


DUNCAN: Just on the subject of criminal law.

² WBZ Radio is located in Boston and was the first commercial radio station in the country. Its first live broadcast was in 1921.
ARCHER: Yes.

DUNCAN: And that lasted—for how long did you give talks? Nineteen twenty-nine until—

ARCHER: Well, probably just two or three months.

DUNCAN: Just on criminal law?

ARCHER: Yes.

DUNCAN: And then you went to—still with this program on WBZ, you gave talks on the colonial history?

ARCHER: Well, I didn’t give them until after I had given talks on the tercentenary program.³

DUNCAN: Was that the way it happened? That you were doing your WBZ talks on criminal law and—

ARCHER: Yes, all along.

DUNCAN: [Boston mayor] James Curley then nominated you chairman of the radio committee for the tercentenary.

ARCHER: That’s right. And vice chairman of the tercentenary.

³ Archer is referring to the tercentenary (or three hundredth anniversary) of the founding of the city of Boston, which was celebrated in 1930.
DUNCAN: I see. And then you felt that it was apropos that as long as there was a big tercentenary to go ahead and switch from criminal law talks on BZ to go on to talks on the colonial history, right? Or did you give—

ARCHER: Well, I was carrying on the talks on criminal law until after I’d gone through these talks that I gave on the network to the children, you see. And then when I came to get the privilege of giving the law talks, I shifted the law talks to the network, and the history talks to BZ. And from that time on it was history talks over BZ.

DUNCAN: Let me see then. Were you giving the law talks, criminal law talks, at the time that the young lady came up to you, or the woman came up to you, and said that the mayor was supposed to give a series of lectures—

ARCHER: Oh no, I hadn’t given any—I hadn’t talked on the radio at all. Never had talked on the radio until that time. And as I told you, I didn’t think that my voice was good—would be any good on radio.

DUNCAN: And after that time, then you went to WBZ—that was WBZ.

ARCHER: That was WBZ.

DUNCAN: They asked you to stay there and give talks on criminal law.

ARCHER: Well, not immediately. But they began to get letters all around, from all around, about the talk that I did.

DUNCAN: Which was on education—

ARCHER: Equality of opportunity in education.

DUNCAN: Which was part of a speech you had given in Tennessee.
ARCHER: That’s right.

DUNCAN: Then say several weeks later, or several months later, as time went by, didn’t WBZ decide to use you—

(15:56) ARCHER: No, it was right away that they—they asked if I would give another series—give a series of talks. And so I did. Of course, remember I went to Memphis and gave a—and made my speech there. It was an hour long and the whole darn bar association—the whole American Bar Association crowd came in to hear me because they knew I was going to tear the lid off this situation. And I did. But after I got back from Tennessee, then [program director] Mr. [John L.] Clark of BZ suggested that I give a series of talks. And I started, intending to give about six on criminal law, but they liked me so well, so I kept right along until, as I say, until I began to—

DUNCAN: And at the same time you were giving talks over at WBZ, WBZ thought that you were doing such a wonderful job, that they thought the network might—

ARCHER: Yeah, that’s right.

DUNCAN: They wrote they network and said that they needed you.

ARCHER: I have the letter they wrote to him, or a copy of the letter they wrote to him saying they didn’t think to be—

DUNCAN: Now what nature of talks did they—they wanted you to do a criminal law talk just like you had given at BZ over networks? Is that right?

ARCHER: Well they didn’t come right away. They had turned down my talks. And when I got through with the history talks to the children over the network, I said to them, “Would you like to have me try out? On this same period, these law talks.” And they said
yes. I don’t remember when they—I think they must have given me an evening program on that. Because the evening, what I did was talks.

**DUNCAN:** What I’m trying to get at is when did you first go to the network, and what type of program did you give to the network?

**ARCHER:** Well, it’s right in that book I gave you.

**(18:27) DUNCAN:** (inaudible)

**ARCHER:** No, no, no. The network talks to the children came in April following Dr. [Walter] Damrosch,⁴ of course, and I think I’ve explained it in my *Laws that Safeguard Society*, that book I gave you.

**DUNCAN:** Yeah, in the preface.

**ARCHER:** Yeah, that’s right.

**DUNCAN:** Well, then I’ll check that over and get this all squared out.

**ARCHER:** Yeah, you’ll find it.

**(18:56) DUNCAN:** Then we’ve got programs. You became very popular for your program, both in New England and really nationwide over the years that your network was RCA [Radio Corporation of America].

**ARCHER:** They told me that I had an audience—they estimated it at eighteen million—

**DUNCAN:** Eighteen million.

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⁴ Dr. Walter Damrosch (1862-1950) was a conductor and composer who hosted a radio program on NBC Radio called *Music Appreciation Hour*. He was also the network’s music director.
**ARCHE**R: I think perhaps that’s an enlarged idea but—

**DUNCAN**: Too bad they didn’t sell popcorn in those days. (laughter)

(19:31) **ARCHE**R: But I had some interesting experiences with some of my friends about this. One of them said that he wanted to get some kind of a program—I’ve forgotten what it was—the night that I was speaking. And he turned to four different stations and he found me talking from all those four stations. (laughter) I couldn’t believe it. In this area, everybody is seeing it. I have a lot of—I have scrapbooks, you know, that show what these radio editors said about my talks. They praised them high.

**DUNCAN**: I think that I could probably take a few notes on the criticism that you got from the editors on the radio talk, and also on the criticism that you got on the History of Radio when it came out. I’d like do that sometime; that would be great.

I’d like to get a more colorful description about the time that you called Major Armstrong and asked if he could give you some information on FM for your second edition, Big Business in Radio.

**ARCHE**R: Second book.

**DUNCAN**: Second volume.

**ARCHE**R: I was working at the book in Marconi’s office there at RCA. And I called Major Armstrong. I think I got him up to Columbia University. And told him that I was working on this book. I wanted to write up about the facts about FM. And as I told you, he said, “Whatever you write will be wrong.” And I demanded to know why he felt that. And he said, “Well, you’re working at RCA.” RCA book. Well, I said, “Nothing of the

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5 Major Edwin Howard Armstrong (1890-1954) was the inventor of frequency modulation (FM) radio.
6 Archer is possibly referring to an office that once belonged to the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America, which was a predecessor of RCA.
sort. I’m trying to get the facts. And of course it’ll be wrong. But I’ll write about FM if I can’t get information from a man who knows.” And we had quite a little debate. Then he said, “Come over.”

**DUNCAN:** And after he said, “Come over,” you found out, or you knew long before you went over there that they were having—that he was mad at RCA over the litigation.

**(22:30) ARCHER:** I knew that from him but I also knew it from our vice president at RCA, or former vice president—

**DUNCAN:** That was Elmer—

**ARCHER:** Elmer Bucher. He told me that Armstrong was a raging lion (laughs) so far as RCA was concerned.

**DUNCAN:** And that was all over the misunderstanding of what RCA did by sending him over [simultaneous conversation].

**ARCHER:** Well he didn’t limit it to that. He said there were other things. He married a woman who was [David] Sarnoff’s secretary.⁷ (laughs)

**DUNCAN:** Oh, I see.

**ARCHER:** And the marriage turned sour. (laughs)

**DUNCAN:** So he blamed RCA for the marriage.

**ARCHER:** He blamed them for everything. (laughs)

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⁷ David Sarnoff (1891-1971) was a pioneer of radio and television broadcasting. He founded the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1926 and served as an executive of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) from 1921 until his retirement in 1970.
DUNCAN: When you went over you found that he had a very fancy establishment there.

(23:20) ARCHER: Oh yeah. It was inspiring, alright. The place where he—he was way up over the East River. And the night that I was there it was stormy; oh, it was an eerie place. You’d see this wild man walking around telling me that …(inaudible) RCA. It was quite an evening. And I stayed with him until one or two o’clock in the morning. (laughs)

DUNCAN: I was reading on page ninety-three of the History of Radio, you’d been talking with Owen D. Young, and you had gotten a lot of your information from Mr. Young.

ARCHER: That’s right.

DUNCAN: Who had a stenographer come in and take it down and gave it to you after it had been typed. And it said—you were talking about—that interference was usually the fate of nearly every great invention, such as the—[Lee] de Forest had an awful lot of trouble with his Audion and although he invented it in about 1906, it never—radio didn’t develop as such until 1916 or 1922. Which was about—

ARCHER: When you see that book—one thing at a time. He invented that thing but he didn’t have the other things to go with it. And it all had to be invented from different directions. And that is how it happened. There were so many different patents that came in to this consortium, this cross-licensing business. Nobody had the complete set of patents; it was interdependent.

DUNCAN: (pauses) My mind is blank. (laughter) Well, I’m still confused about your various radio programs. But I will get that out of the Laws that Safeguard Society. I will read that.

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8 Owen D. Young (1874-1962) founded RCA in 1919.
9 Lee de Forest (1873-1961) invented an electronic amplifying device known as the Audion tube in 1906.
ARCHER: You’ve got the preliminaries and the thirty-six lectures in that book. After that I kept on, of course, for a total of three years.

DUNCAN: You established Suffolk University, and then after that you went on to write many law books.

ARCHER: Well, how I happened to do that—you see, I started in with the intention of practicing law. That was my main purpose. But I was working for Carver and Blodgett, the admiralty firm in Boston, and I wanted to get into practice for myself. In the first year of the law school I held it in my rooms in Roxbury, and then when I left Carver and Blodgett to go in for myself, I took offices at 53 Tremont Street in Boston. It’s an old building, an old bank building. And I carried on there from September 1907 until about March or April of 1909 when we moved over to Tremont Temple, because we outgrew our accommodations over at the other place and I wanted a better place for the school.

(27:49) DUNCAN: This is—you were still doing some tutoring and it just sort of outgrew the building that you used.

ARCHER: Well, no, I had a law school, you see. I wasn’t really tutoring.

DUNCAN: Oh, you went from tutoring to law school, and then you outgrew that and went on into a bigger building for law school. And then you went on into Suffolk University as it is today with your liberal arts and your other courses.

ARCHER: But of course my problem always was space. We outgrow our space, and then we have to have more.

DUNCAN: Well then when do the—you have written, what, seventeen law books?

10 Located at 88 Tremont Street in downtown Boston, the Tremont Temple is a Baptist church that was built in 1896. It houses an auditorium and other commercial spaces that can be rented, with proceeds going to the church.
ARCHER: Thirteen.

DUNCAN: Thirteen law books. When did these law books come to be?

(28:32) ARCHER: Well, I began to—I was forced to do it by the fact that there were no textbooks that were of any special value to students. I enlarged my notes on contracts into a book. Yes, that was my first law book. No, it wasn’t my first law book. The first law book was *Law Office and Court Procedure*. I had found that the fellows going into a practice of law from a law school knew nothing about the practical side of it as the previous system of studying in a law office would give them. But I found that every lawyer knew—after a long period of practice, he knew a whole lot of things that they couldn’t get in law school.

So I put it all down in my textbook on law office and court procedure; I have a copy of it right here. I’ll let you see it. And I took it to Little, Brown and Company. They had some difficulty in getting any real financial return from it, but I did get some. And they published an edition of five hundred copies, and they said that it would take them years to get rid of them. They sold them all in three or four months. And that made me one of their budding authors.

Then I got out I wrote another book, *Ethical Obligations of the Lawyer*, which was accepted on my mere outline, in the same year. Now both those books, *Law Office and Court Procedure* and *Ethical Obligations of the Lawyer* were published in 1910. And it’s interesting to note that in that year they published only three law books, and two of them were mine. (laughs)

DUNCAN: And you went on and wrote eight more.

ARCHER: My next book was *Contracts*, and I wrote that—well, the date—it was after the big legislative fight was over. You see, I had to get power to confer degrees, and it took us three years to do it. And after that I wrote my—no, I’m wrong. That book on
contracts was out before that, not after. I’d have to look up the date on that. But because I
know when we were in the legislature, having this scrap, one of our enemies said he had
nothing but praise for my textbook on contracts, but nothing but scorn for the law school.
(laughs)

(32:25) DUNCAN: You wrote your law books because you were interested and realized
that there were many students that could get what they needed out of law school and
needed—

ARCHER: We needed more than we could give them in dictated notes. And so I wrote
the first law book, Contracts. The next was Agency. The next was Torts. Then I guess
Criminal Law. I carried along the freshman subjects first and then I went on to
sophomore subjects, junior, and senior subjects.

DUNCAN: Alright. But then you had written several books on colonial history, on
Myles Standish, John Alden and Priscilla. And I believe some of that …(inaudible).

ARCHER: Well, those talks came out of my history talks that I gave on BZ, you see.

DUNCAN: How did you find out this history?

ARCHER: Oh, I dug it out.

DUNCAN: Was this a hobby of yours?

ARCHER: Yes. Well, I’ll tell you this. After I had been up here for some time, I’d been
digging into my ancestry, which I didn’t know anything about when I began. I had to dig

11 John Alden and Priscilla Mullins were both passengers on the Mayflower and arrived in Plymouth in
1620. After Priscilla’s family died, she attracted the attention of Captain Myles Standish, another
Mayflower passenger who was the first commander of Plymouth colony. According to a story passed down
by Alden’s family and immortalized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in “The Courtship of Myles
Standish,” Standish asked his friend John Alden to propose to Priscilla on his behalf. Priscilla asked Alden
to speak for himself, and the two were soon married. (from the Alden House Historic Site website,
www.alden.org)
it out. I applied for membership in the Society of Mayflower Descendants. And they turned me down. They treated me like a burglar. I was so mad, I went after it to get the background, and I did get it and proved my case and so on.

**DUNCAN:** With all that information it took to get into the Mayflower Society and the club—

**ARCHER:** Yeah. I got very familiar with colonial history.

**DUNCAN:** You had enough start your first book, practically, which was—

**ARCHER:** Well it wasn’t my first book; this was 19—

**DUNCAN:** Well, your first book as far as the history of New England.

(break in audio)

**(35:34) DUNCAN:** Then after you did that you decided you might as well go ahead and do another one, didn’t you? That one was—

**ARCHER:** As books were needed, I tried to supply them.

**DUNCAN:** What was the first book dealing with New England history? What was that?

**ARCHER:** It was *Mayflower Heroes*.

**DUNCAN:** And that was the book that you compiled by asking—that was the book you—

**ARCHER:** Made up of my talks.
DUNCAN: While you were trying to find out—

ARCHER: No. That book that I showed you, I think, *Ancestors and Descendants of Joshua Williams*, that’s what gave me the deep insight into colonial history. Because I had to—

DUNCAN: You had to go through all that yourself before you can prove to the people who—

ARCHER: Oh yeah, surely.

DUNCAN: Okay, that was your first book dealing with New England, and the history. And then after that you wrote—

ARCHER: *History of Law*.

DUNCAN: Yeah, but as far as I’m talking now—as far as the history of the Pilgrims and New England—

ARCHER: Well, I know, but in my *History of Law* I painted the background of colonial history, don’t you see? To show why this was done, why that was done—the Mayflower Compact signed at Plymouth.

DUNCAN: Is that the basic—is that the foundation on which the United States law, the Supreme Court and all that comes from?

ARCHER: Well, it was the forerunner of the Constitution of the United States. The Declaration of Independence and so on. You’ll find some of those expressions in most—.

DUNCAN: Alright, then you wrote, after that, what book?
ARCHER: Well, if I had the—I have a list—let me see if I can find—now, reading from *Who’s Who in America*, I will give you the list of my books. *Law Office and Court Procedures*, 1910; *Ethical Obligations of the Lawyer*, 1910; *Law of Contracts*, 1911; *Law of Agency*, 1915; *Law of Torts*, 1916; *Equity and Trust*, 1918; *Law of Evidence*, 1919; *Introduction to the Study of Law*, 1919; *Building A School*, 1919, that was a history of Suffolk from the beginning to that time; *The Law of Will and Property*, 1923; *Criminal Law*, 1923; *Wills and Probate*, 1925; *The Impossible Task*, 1926, that was the history of the building of the university building now; *Ancestors and Descendants of Joshua Williams*, 1927; *The Law of Private Corporations*, 1928; *History of Law*, 1928; *Digest of Criminal Law Cases*, 1929; *Digest of Evidence Cases*, 1929; *Laws that Safeguard Society*, 1931, *Mayflower Heroes*, 1931; *Motor Vehicle Law of Massachusetts*, 1934; *With Axe and Musket at Plymouth*, 1936; and the others came along. (pauses) Now I can give the others to you.

DUNCAN: Let me ask you this, Dr. Archer: which story—when you went to NBC you gave children’s stories after the Damrosch series, and you told about the … (inaudible) that started our state legislature there.

ARCHER: The … (inaudible) that gave us our house and senate.

DUNCAN: Were these stories compiled—did these stories come from a book? Did these stories come out of a book that you had previously written, or you just knew of this from—

ARCHER: I knew of this—

DUNCAN: You just knew these tales.

ARCHER: —from my *History of the Law* and so on.

DUNCAN: I see.
ARCHER: I could pick it out easily. In fact, one interesting thing happened so far as to Edith Nourse Rogers\textsuperscript{12} is concerned. I had her on the program of the tercentenary, and she was to give a talk on the New England Confederation, which was a confederation of the colonies for mutual defense and so on. And when the time came for her talk, or just about time, she telephoned to me in great distress. Said that she had sent to the Congressional Library and nobody could find anything on that. And I said to her, “Mrs. Rogers, if you have them go back to the Library of Congress and get my History of the Law, I can give you pages where you can find the whole story.” So she had a nice talk. (laughs) It’s what she took from my—

DUNCAN: She took from your book.

ARCHER: My book. (laughs)

(break in audio)

DUNCAN: It seems that you are a historian—there’s no “seems” about it, you are a historian because you’ve written many of the books that deal with New England and New England’s history, with many of the people that—founders of New England, starting from the Pilgrims back, and it seems that several of these books were at least written by accident because you were trying to prove to yourself, or to other people, who you were. And to do this you had to do much library work, consultation, and then after you finished, you had enough to write the books, enough material to write the books, so you wrote the books. And so you have about—what is the book? The musket and axe?

ARCHER: 	extit{Axe and Musket} [With Axe and Musket at Plymouth]. Well, 	extit{Axe and Musket}, that’s my second plume of history.

\footnote{Edith Nourse Rogers (1881-1960) was a Republican congresswoman who represented Massachusetts’ 5\textsuperscript{th} Congressional District from 1925 until her death in 1960. She was the first female congresswoman from Massachusetts.}
DUNCAN: That was your second plume of history. Why was that written?

ARCHER: Well that was compiled from my history talks. Just a continuation, you see.

DUNCAN: That went along with the tercentenary, then, didn’t it?

ARCHER: That was after the tercentenary, you see. I carried on for five years.

(43:06) DUNCAN: Well now, we’ve carried you through to—you’ve written your books, you’ve established Suffolk University, and the fellow got on there on the board of trustees. So you resigned. And you came out to Pembroke and set about—

ARCHER: I resigned because they got into my board of trustees and turned everything over; instead of the system that I had been operating under, they went over to the Harvard case system. And then of course they were trying to starve me to death. They refused to allow any of my books to be sold. And they threatened students who persisted in buying them or using them, and all that sort of thing. So I said—

DUNCAN: Why do they hold it against you for publishing books?

ARCHER: That wasn’t the point. They were trying to drive me to the wall, you see. I hadn’t collected any salary for five years. And my resources were dwindling and dwindling.

DUNCAN: This was just something else to get your back closer to the wall.

ARCHER: That’s right.

DUNCAN: Well then you came—

ARCHER: I came down here.
DUNCAN: Came down to Pembroke. Set up the blueberry farm and you’ve been here ever since.

ARCHER: I’ve been working in the blueberry fields from April until November, and writing from November to March.

DUNCAN: You’re writing now.

ARCHER: Writing now. I’ve written quite a good many books down here, but I haven’t been published.

DUNCAN: You’ve written a lot of them but there doesn’t anybody seem to——

(45:19) ARCHER: Well, I haven’t pushed them because I felt this way, that I was getting old. And I couldn’t tell when old age would hit and strike me down. I was going to get those books out of my system. And they’ll be, I think, saleable later on. Trying to provide for my family by having——

DUNCAN: Some books that can be——

ARCHER: Some books that can be used.

DUNCAN: That’s fine. These books, what’s there content concerned of? What are they written about, basically? How many have you written, would you say? And what are they about?

ARCHER: Well, I’ve written a history of the American Revolution. Of course that was more recent. But I wrote a history of the Tudor dynasty of England. And it was a fruitful field of research. I took it from John of Gaunt right down through to Elizabeth. And traced the development of the thing. Very enthralling history to me.
And then I wrote the history of the United States. But I was doing it because of the fact that the history of the United States has been so—well, wiped out you might say in the schools and in the public mind. When I was a child, the great heroes in the American Revolution were revered as heroes. But when they began to debunk them and defame them, and leave them out of the books, that’s a different thing. And so this history of the American Revolution that I’ve written is based upon not only upon the old records—you’ll notice a lot of books I have there that are old. You go back beyond 1900 and you’ll get quite a lot of real American history. But since then—any books published since then, are derivative.

(48:08) **DUNCAN:** You have finished this book on the United States history?

**ARCHER:** Yes.

**DUNCAN:** And that’s one of them that hasn’t been published—

**ARCHER:** I took it in to the publisher Monday. I don’t know just what they will do with it because you can’t tell.

**DUNCAN:** But they’re reading it, and they’re going to let you know about it.

**ARCHER:** Oh sure. And the book on the Tudor dynasty, I took to Macmillan [Publishers], but I didn’t expect they’d do anything with it (laughs), because it handled—it brought out facts about English history, and Macmillan is the head of—Harold Macmillan is the head of the thing. It’s an English publishing house. And so they didn’t take it. But I haven’t submitted it anywhere else.
(49:16) DUNCAN: Ms. [Carrolla] Bryant. She’s your secretary. Now, she worked with WEAF?

ARCHER: Yes, she was with WEAF, and NBC during its formative years. But they broke her down. She’d work herself to death on things and she was—well, I guess she got down to—so she weighed about eighty pounds. And I bought a house over here in West Duxbury that was one of the old Pilgrim houses. And I needed to have somebody look after it, so I told her that she could live over there and take care of it. Wouldn’t cost her anything. And she did, and built her health up. And then when I needed somebody in Boston at the university, I took her in there, and she did a swell job as secretary of the College of Liberal Arts, and later as executive secretary of the university. But when this gang got after me, they found that they couldn’t get anywhere with her. They’d gotten everybody else on their side, but they couldn’t get her.

DUNCAN: She was on your side.

ARCHER: And they just fired her. Threw her out without any warning, just as soon as they got voting control. And of course I thought that was such an injustice, having this done on my behalf, so when I started the blueberry business, I continued her as my secretary.

(51:32) DUNCAN: Your family lives in New York City, your wife and your—

ARCHER: Oh yeah, my family; my wife, my children, live around different—

DUNCAN: One son’s in Tennessee or Kentucky.

ARCHER: One’s in Tennessee.

13 WEAF was the first radio station in New York City. It was purchased by RCA in 1922, then became part of NBC after that network was formed by RCA in 1926.
DUNCAN: Tennessee, yeah.

ARCHER: One’s in California.

DUNCAN: California.

(51:50) ARCHER: My daughter’s in Maine. My wife—after the children grew up, she became a roving grandmother, but she didn’t get along very well with the wives (laughs), so she went to—

DUNCAN: You mean she was too much like them?

ARCHER: —went to live with as companion to her wealthy cousin in New York. She’s booked in New York. And she got along so she got so fond of the town and city, she didn’t want to go anywhere else. And I was perfectly willing for her to stay there (laughs). Because she didn’t like the country. She didn’t like farming. And I knew she’d be an awfully unhappy woman here.

DUNCAN: She got to be too much like the talked-about mother-in-law while she was visiting all the children. (laughter)

Well, Dr. Archer, I’ll close the tape just as soon as I get this final question. This brings us on up to date now between the lawsuit, the litigation between Philco Radio and RCA.14 And this is quite a big thing. And so I understand that you are taking part in this also.

(53:18) ARCHER: I don’t know how I’m taking part of it. I’m simply a person to whom they come for information in regard to the history of the thing. They were trying to get an

14 In a 1961 lawsuit, Philco accused RCA (and its subsidiary, NBC) of employing monopolistic practices in its acquisition and administration of broadcasting licenses, in this case specifically in Philadelphia. For more information, see 293 F.2d 864 (1961), PHILCO CORPORATION (PHILCO), a Pennsylvania corporation, Appellant v. FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, Appellee, National Broadcasting Company, Inc., Intervenor; No. 15891; United States Court of Appeals District of Columbia Circuit.
agreed statement of facts of how the books happened to be written and so on. And as they say they were trying to pin the books on RCA, and I made it clear to them that I was an independent operator, and when they tried to dictate to me they couldn’t do it.

**DUNCAN:** They wanted—

**ARCHER:** On one or two occasions they tried to get me to leave things out of the book that I put in. They wanted it to look nice for RCA.

**DUNCAN:** Now when was this? I mean, this was recently?

**ARCHER:** No, that’s when I was writing the first history.

**DUNCAN:** Who tried to get you to leave this out?

**ARCHER:** That was the legal department.

**DUNCAN:** Oh, that was the legal department. The legal department of RCA wanted you to leave some things out that weren’t too good for RCA, but you went ahead and put it in anyhow.

**ARCHER:** But it wasn’t simply—they’d had trouble with de Forest. And they suspected that de Forest was infringing their patents. So they put a spy into his place. And they found out it was true. So I wrote that in it. They wanted to leave it out.

**DUNCAN:** They sent the spies in.

**(55:08)** **ARCHER:** Yeah, they thought, oh, that was terrible, that was terrible. Well, I got through half a day, and then I took it to Mr. Sarnoff. I told him just what I told them, that if I left that out somebody else traveling the same route would find it. It would cast doubt upon my book.
DUNCAN: Well, that very same instance came up just this year, and when they go into a suit with Philco. And if the lawyers reading your book find out that that wasn’t in there, then they would think you were writing for RCA, which is just what they were trying to prove, isn’t it? In this case, that you were—they think that you were—

ARCHER: They were trying to show that RCA dictated to me, but I proved to them that they didn’t.

DUNCAN: Well, and in proving that RCA dictated to you they would have a one-up on their case.

ARCHER: Yeah, that’s right.

DUNCAN: And they were trying to prove that all you said in the book wasn’t true, because RCA dictated it to you. In other words—let me see if I can get myself straight. If they could prove to the court that the book History of Radio was written only by RCA—

ARCHER: Controlled by the RCA angle.

DUNCAN: —written from the RCA angle, then this wouldn’t go over too well for RCA in this court. So they came to you—these lawyers, today, that were trying this case came to you several weeks ago and asked you if this book was written.

ARCHER: The Philco people approached me last June. They kept this up for a long time until they filed a suit and then RCA people came doing it. So I’ve been between two fires for several weeks.

DUNCAN: But you finally—
**ARCHER:** Finally, I got out basically when I said, “Now here, you fellows, each of you, producing something and sending it to me, you get together and thrash out something that you agree upon. Then send it to me. And I’ll tell you whether it’s right.” So they did. And the suit is going on now, as I understand it.

(57:42) **DUNCAN:** Well, you’re just a mutual bystander in that corner now.

**ARCHER:** That’s right. That’s right.

**DUNCAN:** Well, Dr. Archer, thank you again for your time and your patience tonight.

**ARCHER:** You’re very welcome, sir.

END OF INTERVIEW