

Patricia Tunstall

Assistant Vice President

Richmond Fed career: 1965-2005

Interviewed in August 2012

INTERVIEWER: To start off, just to give us some background, when did you start with the Fed and what jobs have you held?

TUNSTALL: I started at the Federal Reserve in 1965 and worked until March of 1966, at which time I was pregnant and during that time you could not work at the Federal Reserve when you were pregnant, you had to quit. So I resigned, uh, in March and, um, stayed off, uh, came back in -- until I had my child and then came back in like 1967. Um, say fall of '67 or at -- it might have been in the summer of '67, I can't remember exactly when it was. But I did return in 1967.

And, uh, when I worked in -- when I started at the Federal Reserve in '65, I started as what was termed at that time, a runner. And we worked in the tube room delivering mail. I was a mail carrier and we, uh, delivered mail on the 10 floors of the Bank. Um, some hard -- we had to deliver some hardcopy mail and then some other things that were able to be inserted into pneumatic tubes to run through the pneumatic tube system. We, um, delivered those through the pneumatic tube system. So that's what I was doing until the time that I left in -- from '65 to '66.

When I came back in '67, I came back as a check processor and that was, uh, encoding checks. I was a check encoder. And, uh, we had these machines where we encoded the ABAs and the dollar amount and that type of information. And then those checks -- and these were on low-speed machines, low -- low-speed coding machines. And then the checks, once they were encoded, were then turned over to a high-processing check operation and those checks were then processed on high-speed check processors to get the banks, uh, their credit for their, um, checks.

Uh, so I did that, uh, as an encoder, check encoder, until we decided -- until the Bank decided that it was ready to automate. And the first thing that they were going to automate was the, uh, daily -- or the banks' settlement sheets. They -- we had over 700 institutions, or whatever, uh, number of institutions that were members of the, uh, Fed settled with us every week. They had to submit something called a BK-1's, BK-1 settlement sheet that, uh, had all of their processing figures and all for a week on them and they had to be automated. So I was selected to be sent to keypunch school. And I went to keypunch school for one half day for one week. And then I would come back -- I would run on the keypunch machine, be trained for that week, and then come back for the rest of that half day, the other half of the day, and process on the encoders.

And it was very interesting because the keyboards were reversed on those machines. So I was keypunching with keys in one direction on -- for half the day and then another direction for the other half of the day. So, needless to say, I created quite a bit of excitement, uh, at the Bank when I came back from keypunch school each day.

Uh, once we -- once I did get that training, though, uh, the Bank purchased keypunch machines. And I started, uh, keypunching the BK-1 data that was then processed, um, on a huge, gigantic PC -- well, it wasn't a PC -- on a huge computer system. This was back when a computer system, uh, was in a -- a room. It -- it required a room (laughing), the computer did.

Um, so anyway, we processed on a keypunch machine. We had one machine and I was keypunch operator. Then we expanded to two keypunch machines. And me and a friend named Marita Savage, another one of the check encoders, were the two keypunch operators. And we were keypunch operators until, uh, they decided to expand even more and got more and more keypunch, uh, machines and hired keypunch operators. And we then had what we called eight data processing sections. And, uh, we then were keying the -- that data and then we started keying other data.

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Um, as we started, uh, keying other data, I was selected again to go into, um, well, to go to other places. I went to, um, what is -- Atlanta, I was

sent to Atlanta to learn some programming and, um, I came back and helped, um, I forget the name of that machine that we installed there. But anyway, I was teaching -- going into other departments teaching people. We had what was then a dumb terminal on people's desks. Uh, PDP-1134, I think it was. I went into, uh, the departments and taught members in each of the departments how to, um, key in their information into -- to the dumb terminals that was collected in a host machine in our data processing department. And, uh, that information -- and again, it -- most of it started with the accounting. The accounting information was, uh, put on the computers first. Of course check processing was there. I don't know how to say that. Check processing was already being processed on high-speed equipment and was going into, uh, the computer system. But then, once we started processing other data -- automating other data -- then I was selected to go to the schools to learn how to process it and then come back and teach people in the other departments how to use it.

Uh, let's see. Hmm. What else did I do?

So, I was a keypunch operator, a check processor, uh, I was the Bank accounting clerk for a period -- period of years, couple of years. I did the settling of the branch, which Chicago -- with Richmond who, in turn, settled with Chicago. I did that for a couple of years until we had all of that automated also.

Um, I was an assistant supervisor of the keypunch section. Then I was the supervisor of the keypunch section. Then, uh, once we had that, um, automation started, I became the supervisor of the then data processing section.

Uh, from there, I was in the data processing section when the Bank decided to, um, automate -- well, to construct that new building that you all are probably sitting in. And, um, they were going to automate the cash department as part of that, because prior to that, people were sorting currency, uh, on -- by hand on these special machines that, of course, I was not -- that was in the cash department, I was in the data processing department.

But I was loaned from the data processing department to the building design team who was designing that new building. And they wanted me to work with, uh, specifically with the automation efforts in the cash

department. They were working with a company out of Germany, um, Giesecke & Devrient, uh, and with, um, a company out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, um, who was responsible for the high-rise storage system. And the, uh, they wanted me to work with those, uh, two entities in automating, uh, the cash department.

So we work -- I worked with the company, um, wish I could remember the name of that company that built the high-rise storage system in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Because that was the very first automated storage system and it was a vertical storage system, uh, in a vault. Uh, first automated vault storage system in the Federal Reserve. And I worked with that company to help design that system, test it, so forth and so on.

Um, and then, uh, I was working, doing some work with, uh, the cash department and how that system would operate throughout the department. Um, and then how the data would be collected, because we also had, um, moved the PDP-1134s. We were putting in automated systems in the cash department, automated computer, that I was working with also, uh, and developing how that data would be collected, how the cash data would be collected on that computer. How it would be entered and so forth.

So I worked with that while the building was being constructed and had the pleasure of working in a hardhat and steel-toed shoes in an unheated building. Um, it was very exciting, being a part of that building going up, uh, watching it grow and, uh, testing all the equipment and all the different facets of the department, as the building was being constructed. Because the cash department was a huge part, a major part of the design and, um, construction of that new building at the time.

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Um, let's see. What else? Hmm.

So I worked with the design and, um, construction of that building and, then, um, I thought my job was over with the cash department, once the equipment had been designed and installed. The computer system had been designed and installed. The data platform had been developed and was ready to be put to use and the building was finally constructed and the move was ready to be made, so I thought my job would be over. But it wasn't. I was strongly encouraged, an offer was made that I could not

refuse to get me into the cash department, as part of their management team, so that I could be there in the cash department and help with the automation effort.

So I was moved into the cash department, um, I'm trying to think, as an assistant manager in 1985. We -- we moved into, um, that building -- I think we moved into that building in '86. So -- so I was an assistant manager. Mm, getting all my jobs -- I had so many jobs in the Federal Reserve.

Um, I'm getting my jobs mixed up. I was an assistant manager, I think, before I moved into that building. Uh, but anyway, I was convinced to go into the, uh, cash department as an assistant manager. I was the second assistant manager because Joe Hissey was an assistant manager in the cash department already. But then I did go into the cash department when it was moved into the new building and I worked as the assistant manager in the cash department, uh, until 1987. Then in 1987 I was made the manager of the cash department. And, uh, and then in 1990 I was made an operations officer. And then in 1992 I was made an assistant vice president and that position I retained until I retired. Uh, I took an early retirement in 2005.

Um, so I, uh, had those many, many positions and, uh, I worked in the cash department. Once I went in, when we moved into the new building in '86, I was still in cash, uh, and was the assistant vice president over cash services when I left in 2005. So I, um, was part of the growth -- the automation and the growth of the cash department in the Baltimore office and subsequently worked in the District with the District cash operations and worked with the System operation. I held many System, uh, positions in the cash operations, uh, during my years as the cash officer. And, um --

INTERVIEWER: How do you think the changing technology affected your job during your time here?

TUNSTALL: It certainly helped my job because I was the one selected in most cases to -- I was sort of a leader, uh, in most of the automation efforts. Because when we went from processing checks to keypunching the -- and automating the accounting data, I was selected to go to keypunch school. And I came back and taught other people.

Then when we started, um, disseminating information, having people in - - because at one point in our -- in the Bank's operations every -- every department sent their data to the keypunch department or to our data processing department, section, rather. And we input the data and it went to the host computer. Then when the Bank decided to disseminate that -- distribute that information, or that opportunity out to all the departments and let them input their own data, I was selected to be taught how to use those computers and the -- the dumb terminals and so forth. And then I went out and taught the other departments how to input that data into their, um, dumb terminals and then in the data -- my section in the data processing section, we collected it and transferred it to the host computer.

Um, and then when the Bank decided to automate, do a huge automation effort with, um, the cash department, with the move into the new building, I was selected to work on that and to work with the automation of the cash department. So it had a huge impact on my job, on my life and my progress, uh, my abilities, my skill, and my abilities, um, to work with the, uh, new technologies as they were coming on board or being discovered or whatever. Um, made me a viable entity to the branch and that helped my promotion. I mean, it helped me to move, to advance.

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INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. I -- I -- I -- I -- just in listening to you talk about those changes and, um, you know, between that and your first day on the job, how much has the Bank changed, since you -- you began your start here? I mean, you get to see the people and the -- the changes from the technology and the automation, but, I mean, overall, how do you think the Bank has changed?

TUNSTALL: Light years of change and so many ways. Um, when I first started at the Bank -- I mean, because at that time, of course, we were going through, uh, integration. So it had social changes as well as the technology and -- and service changes.

I was one of the first African-Americans to be hired, uh, at the Bank. We only had a handful of people there in jobs other than cleaning, and cooking in the dining room. So, um, I saw -- I have seen tremendous growth advancement over the years of the Bank, uh, being more

inclusive, uh, to all ethnic groups, um, in low-level jobs as well as management jobs. Uh, so that was a significant change.

I had many challenges, being the first woman, the first African-American - every position I held at that Bank, I was the first African-American and, uh, first woman. Uh, for -- well, first African-American woman and for -- so it was a two -- two-for kind of thing.

And certainly because of the time, the period when I started, it was very challenging going places and being the first woman. I was in a -- I was in a male -- a white male dominated environment. They didn't necessarily want women in some of those jobs, much less a black woman.

So it was challenging. My first job and some of my assignment was to make the people around me feel more comfortable then we could get some work done.

So that was a challenge. I even had other officers and people tell me: Boy, we got more done in this meeting than we've ever had done in a meeting before. I said, hmm, I wonder why. I don't know what they were doing, what they were talking about, what their conversation was, but because I was a part of the group, it changed and we got more work done.

So I did -- I had challenges, but I grew up being a survivor. I was the first, uh, African-American to graduate from my high school. We integrated the high schools in my hometown in Virginia and I was the first black to graduate from the high school and I did it in my senior year, which is very difficult to do. And we had to be escorted to school and all that kind of thing. And I had a horrible time. But I was determined to see it through. So I was used to the challenges when I came to the Federal Reserve. And, um, I knew that I would have to be a very strong person. The challenges made me stronger and better.

INTERVIEWER: What did your family think about your first -- your first job here at -- about your job here at the Fed, your family and friends?

TUNSTALL: Um, well, my family, um, was very proud of me as I progressed and everything. And I have to say, some of my jobs did cause some -- some problems in my family because of the hours that I had to work. Uh, the hours I -- like I said, my jobs were very, uh, demanding. As I took those responsibilities on, there were a lot of demands and it did cause -- I have to be very candid about it -- it did cause some friction, uh, in my, uh, home. But I had to deal with that too. I had to work with that also.

My friends were extremely proud of me. And of course my extended family, brothers and sisters and so forth and all, were extremely proud of me. My little hometown in Pulaski was proud of me. They would put information about me in the local newspaper, uh, as I was progressing at the Federal Reserve Bank. Because that was a -- that was a big thing back then --

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INTERVIEWER: Well, it certainly has been a delight for me, just to hear you, um, speak about the Fed. I -- I have only been here two years myself and --

TUNSTALL: Oh, my gosh.

INTERVIEWER: -- and I feel like I'm seeing a lot of changes in two years, but you've certainly shed light on a lot that's happened.

TUNSTALL: Oh. Tremendous. And I can't even remember parts. I can't even remember a lot of it, but -- but that's some of it.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughing.) Well, is there any --

TUNSTALL: I was here -- I was there for -- I was there for 38 years, so --

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

TUNSTALL: -- that's a lot of history.