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ORAL HISTORY

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Stacy B. Kimball  
Interviewer

Address:

SL42

Date:

April 19, 1991

James C. Abbott  
Interviewee

Address:

Archive  
Lovejoy Library  
SIUE

Date:

4/30/91

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SIUE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Summer 1990-91

John C. Abbott Interview, April 17, 1991

Interviewed by Stanley B. Kimball

Filename: ABBOTT.017

Q. Well John, Dr. John Cushman Abbott for the record. My great friend John, thanks for coming to my office. I'd like to talk to you about your reflections and experiences - good and bad, indifferent, all kinds of things as one of the old pioneers - particularly from your perspective as the head librarian around here for how many years?

A. 21 years. I came September 15, 1960.

Q. And you retired ...

A. I retired, or I stepped down as director of the library in 1981. And then I worked for five years full time until the fall of 1986 building up the regional collection which has always been a special interest of mine serving as the head of research and special collections. I worked with Allen McCurry, University Archivist. Allen was nominally under me. Then Allen retired and Louisa Bowen came aboard about one year later.

In 1986, after 25 years, I retired but continued to work being paid 15% of my final salary, which is fine. And I've worked ever since more like half time doing the same job that I had been doing before--my choice and no complaints. I especially like the people I work with--Louisa, Maria Hackett, Dona Bardon, and Gary Denué.

Q. Well I know that I hardly noticed that you'd retired. I think it was a pro forma thing because you've been around helping with the library ever since. What is your philosophy about local and regional collections in the library and what have you been able to do about it?

A: I thought from the beginning that we had a special obligation and mission to build up our regional collections, materials relating to our part of Illinois, Illinois generally, the Mississippi Valley with collecting emphasis tending to diminish as we go further away from the university's service area and Greater St. Louis.

Next to the University of Illinois, which has the Illinois Historical Collection, a non-circulating collection, we have I am sure the best and strongest Illinois and regional collection among the state universities, Western Illinois University being next closest to us.

Q: What would you say were some of your special collections within the regional collection?

A: Of course the Mormons which you were responsible for.

Q: How do you feel about our Slavic American collection?

A: I think it's one of the three best.

Q: What are the three best?

A: Balch in Philadelphia, Library of Congress, the New York Public, and the Immigration History Center at Minnesota.

A: Of course the library of congress has had a strong holding for but I don't know of the speciality New York public, Immigration and History, Minnesota.

Q: What would you say were the strongest parts of our regional collection? The top three collections within the collection here at SIUE at Lovejoy?

A: Your talking about the Slavic?

Q: Perhaps. I am just wondering what you think are the three best parts of the regional collection.

A: I have trouble singling out single categories. The John Francis McDermott papers, the Metro-East Journal morgue, the archives of East St. Louis.

I search, I acquire antiquarian book dealer catalogs and find it increasingly difficult to find things that we don't already have. Sometimes I will go through a list of twenty-five items and find only one that we don't have.

Q: This is in relation to what again?

A: Regional.

Q: Okay.

A: Which increasingly I see as being broadly defined. For example, you can't have a good Illinois collection without having a reprint of 1876 railroad atlas of the United States. Sometimes we buy things such as that or an ethnic atlas of the United States. Even a book on the development of sports and cities.

Q: A lot of people, too many historians, do not consider local and regional history important. I have never agreed with them and I have always appreciated the fact that you supported local and regional history and devoted a lot of time and resources to that here at Lovejoy. I am pleased that you have done it and happy to have worked with you. Now let me back up and ask, why did you come to SIUE anyway?

A: I had been the librarian at the Trinity University in San Antonio from 1955 until 1960 and I reached a point where I felt that I learned about all I was going learn in that position, and became a

little bored. I am the kind of person who likes to bounce ideas off other people and I didn't have such people there. They thought I was God I guess. I was ready for a move. I had taken a cut in salary to go to Trinity. I went there from the Library of Congress because I wanted the experience in an academic library which was my ultimate goal. I had worked up to \$8,000 there and made my move. I wanted \$12,000 and I got \$12,000 which was pretty good in those days.

Q: Nine of twelve month contract?

A: That was twelve months. All librarians are on twelve months. I received a letter in August of '80 from Ralph McCoy who had written my library school, the University of ----- . As you know he was the director of libraries for Carbondale and had some responsibility for Edwardsville, a responsibility somewhat controversial and not well accepted at Edwardsville. Anyway the letter was from him. They were looking for a head librarian for the developing campus at Edwardsville. I first went to Carbondale and spent the day there, then Ralph drove me here where I spent the rest of my time. I think the people looked a little bit askance at that. They would have rather made the first contact themselves but they didn't hold it against me. As far as I was concerned, the relationship with Ralph in Carbondale was always beneficial.

Anyway this opportunity came. I was still not a greatly experienced librarian. I had had five years at Trinity and four very different years at the Library of Congress. To come into a developing situation and you might say learn as I went along was



appealing to me. It was hopeful to be able to go to my colleague in Carbondale. Not for permission; I don't think that I ever thought that I was asking permission to do anything, but to.

ask, How are you doing this down there? and it gave me some ideas and maybe I would agree and maybe I wouldn't agree but the dialogue provided a starting point. I think I tend to work best in a conversational mode. I often do. I should say that I did like the spirit here when I came for the interview. I liked the people.

Q: Did Harold See interview you?

A: I don't remember an interview of such. I did meet Herald.

Q: He was, as you know, very enthusiastic and very ambitious.

A: I spent more time with Bill Going and particularly Milton Byrd and Eric Sturley who was head of the library committee at that time. It seemed like a very good move for me and one that I would profit from and enjoy plus the fact that being from the state of Maine the heat in Texas was a bit much for me and I had allergies eight months of the year down there.

Q: It couldn't be much worse than August around here.

A: I don't know. I'll take this climate over San Antonio anytime.

Q: Well were glad you did. Now the companion question John, as to why you came here is why did you stay here thirty-one years.

A: Let me say one other thing. I liked the fact that the Morris Library at Carbondale is a subject divisional library. I don't think they even had a general reference section. The public services as well as book selection were organized around four so called subject divisional libraries humanities, education, social sciences, and science. I was a very strong believer and still am that one of the things that we needed to do is create better jobs for librarians and one of the ways to do that is to combine a subject specialty with the other library qualifications. In early hiring, instead of hiring catalogers, we went four years without a professional cataloger. We hired a subject specialist. I don't know if you remember Chris McKee, who handled the social sciences.

Q: Very well.

A: And Sam Lewis who handled science and also handled business and John Dustin of course humanities, and Mabel Murphy came as fine arts and music librarian. We hired Mable when she was sixty-three years young. That was a little unusual, but she was a person of considerable spirit and ability and as you remember she was initially stationed at Alton, the rest of us being at Edwardsville.

I might backup and talk a little bit about the staffing when I arrived. As you know we had the two residence centers where instruction was actually carried on, at Alton and East St. Louis. When I came for the interview Al Harris was still librarian at Alton and there was also a Mrs. Scheldrup who was reference librarian. By the time I arrived a month latter they were both gone.

Q: You didn't inherit much?

A: No. In fact we went from September until sometime in November without a full time person at Alton. During that time Ollie May Williams, librarian at East St. Louis spent part of her time at Alton supervising the operation which otherwise was run not too badly by student assistants.

She herself in East St. Louis had only one civil service. Ollie May over the years has had her admirers and detractors, but it is probably more appropriate to speak about her achievements. Finally in November we were able to hire a good civil service worker at Alton. When I arrived and for sometime thereafter, right in the middle of the library in East St. Louis was the Public Administration and Metropolitan Affairs office (mixed voices).

Q: We used to call it Pa and Ma.

A: And also right in the middle of the library was the Bursars office. By gently prodding here and there she finally got them out. I think in '62 we were able to bring in Delta Masterson who was slated to be assistant science librarian at the new yet unnamed, unborn Lovejoy library. But it was a very thin situation. In Edwardsville initially we had the so-called Central Library on the Edwardsville site to consult Eugene Herscher who headed up the technical services operation. We had a Chinese fellow who was head of serials and periodicals. He left after a year. That job was taken over by Jewell Smith. I don't know if you remember...

Q: Yes, John hearing you talk is a real walk down memory lane.

A: He was one of our very successful civil servants who performed in capacities that would ordinarily be performed by trained librarians. Until the time he retired, he was a very successful head of the periodicals and was very much respected and black as you know. Another person in that capacity was Marguerite Hackett who headed our acquisition department until she retired.

I probably should mention her predecessor in that job, Maria Pass. We were lucky and successful in employing some very capable civil service people who performed at a very high level. Our staffing was very low. We had difficulty hiring professional people in the early days, but we did hire some good people. It wasn't until the building went up that we began to have much success and then all of a sudden there lots of good poeple available.

Q: Here in Edwardsville?

A: Yes, all of a sudden things turned around and we began to have more applicants than we had openings, but until then things were pretty tight. People were not attracted to a farmhouse out in the old Central Library on Bluff Road.

Q: Comment on the early, most primitive housing conditions.

A: They were primitive. It was kind of fun, but we were not sorry to leave the old Central Library. I don't know if you would call Alton primitive because its

Q: Small?

A: Small

Q: East St. Louis, you have already described that. I remember when half of what we owned was in a storage someplace and you and your offices were a tract house and Central Libray plus another building to the north or a farmhouse out here on Bluff Road for ages.

A: It was until we did move out of there to Wagner Electric. I guess it was around about a year before we moved into Lovejoy.

Q: And then for too many years after this campus opened August of '65, half of the university was in the library.

A: The University Center did not open until '67. The basement of the library served as the University Center food service, bookstore,

Q: Cafeteria

A: Right.

Q: Maybe you mentioned that. We ate out of machines.

A: And Of course, and still, textbook rental. We did not want textbook rental in the library.

Q: I don't want it at all.

A: President Morris was a majority of one on that point.

Q: Weren't there a lot of offices on the third floor of the library?

A: The third floor was largely occupied by faculty offices.

Q: At most the library only had half of the space initially. I remember those good old days. Come back to this anytime you please, but let me try this other question that I raised a moment ago. Thirty-one years is a long time, almost as long as I have stayed here. Why did you stay here so long, John?

A: I have always enjoyed the university, not every moment,, but I never had any temptation to try and go anywhere else. I think I had gone as far as I had wanted to professionally and this has become home to me. I am from the state of Maine, but I don't consider myself a citizen of Maine. I consider myself a citizen of Illinois and that's important to me to be a part of wherever I am. And I could never have that feeling about Texas; I never felt that I wanted to be a citizen never felt like being a citizen of Texas. Even though San Antonio was the most cosmopolitan part of Texas.

While on the subject of librarians, I mentioned that we didn't have a professional cataloger for four years and during that time we added at least a 150,000 volumes. Katherine Wigger was head of our cataloging operation she was another civil service person and Eugene Herscher did a very good job of training and bring such people along. Other than Trinity, my principal experience has been with the Library of Congress and I guess I had a tendency which Gene successfully checked to build systems around complexities whereas really you should build some systems around the most common characteristics, not with the idea of all the things that could go wrong.

Q: I have a question I like to ask and perhaps this is as good of lead in as any. We will come back to your best memories and success here, but I would also like to ask you what were your greatest frustrations here over the years.

A. One of them was civil service remuneration and the related issue of classification. We for sometime had bad relationships with the personnel department and then we had staff we felt were underclassified. For a long time I would have to say our relationship with personnel was a bad one. It eventually became a good one, but feelings on both sides for some years were not too good. Subsequently they became very good and now I think things are just fine.

Audio Visual Services is a frustration. Elmer Wagner, head <sup>of</sup> the operation, was not quite the person for the job. We sent Elmer off a year on sabbatical leave. Bruce Thomas more than anybody ran things

over in Academic Affairs. A lady by the name of Helen Smith was for Bruce the solution to all our problems and she was hired basically by Bruce. Helen thought she could do everything and anything under the sun and she didn't work out too well either. Bruce thought he could run things better than I could. I'm not saying that I could run them all that great. He wanted to bust Augusta Birckhead, who was the other professional in the department, down to civil service, and put her in charge of supervising the students who were providing the audio visual equipment to classrooms, which was the one thing that she was least capable of doing. Augusta's main talents were working with faculty and developing audio visual aids of various kinds, something that she was really good at.

That is a short and condensed way of saying that I decided to cast loose if I could audio visual services official because I felt that I was not really in charge and that as a separate unit it would receive better fiscal support.

Q: Let me ask you an obvious question. Book acquisition budget?

A: Well, that was fantastically liberal for a school in our position in the 1960s. In fact that was one of the attractions of my position here. The book budget in 1960 was all of \$90,000.00 a year and that did not include periodicals which was another thirteen. Which doesn't seem like a lot now.

Q: Was that big money then?



A: That was big money and you could buy a lot with that. One of the things we did not do was sit around and wait for the books to come in. We went out and got them, collections, and those of the book dealers and so forth.

Q: You had an excellent scrounger didn't you?

A: That was later. Paul Chamless. Paul worked for us for a brief period around '63 about about five months; we were able to put him on as a civil service position. He was what is known as a book scout. He went out and beat the bushes so to speak and got books for antiquarian dealers, buying them from individuals for the most part. He didn't actually come aboard on a regular basis until '69 or '70 thereabouts. You may remember it was feast or famine in terms of budget back in the late '60's. The university budget was out of control and one year; it would be over spent and another year it would be all the end of the year movies that no one knew what to do with. And the first time this happened, we had \$50,000 to spend on personnel in a period of two at the most three months. The first thing I did was hire Paul and, because nobody looked very carefully at his credentials, he got an academic appointment. Paul was a well self-educated person. The last time that he had been in a public school was in the sixth grade. His family were members of a conservative religious sect in Texas, but he educated himself. When we hired him in about 1970, he was a minister of a small town, Church of God in Sorento, Illinois. There were three churches in

town of about maybe a hundred people. He was the only full-time one and his main job was to visit the sick from the whole region in hospitals.

When he was hired he, I guess it was Church of God, told the fellow that hired him, I don't really believe in all of this so much any more and he said, I don't think you will do them any harm. But book scouting was his main love.

I did mention that, or did I, that we added in those five years, 1960-65, about 150,000 volumes. We had our regular appropriations for books for increased generously and in addition we had special funds something like \$350,000 as I remember it to spend over a period of several years to develop the collections. This was bond issued money actually. Libraries typically then worried more about the question, If we get the books how are we going to catalog them?

Well this is something that we never worried about too much. In fact one of the constraints or one of the questions which was typically raised when we were talking about library building was, If you build it so large where are you going to put all the books if you can't catalog them? Well to me that was not a important question. Somehow or other you got the books then you worried about cataloging them and eventually for the most part we did. Do you want to talk about a little bit about the building planning and so forth?

Q: Let's come back to that. There is something that I really want to know about. I would like to hear about some of the unusual humorous, weird, dangerous things that have happened in the library. For instance, I know somebody set a small fire in a trash can in the

60s and I am sure that there has been hanky panky and one thing or another in those sacred halls so share some of the hit or miss bizarre things that have gone on.

A: Well as you may or may not remember when we opened the doors in the Fall of '65, the doors did not even lock. We had no heat in the building until November. The main floor was carpeted. The second floor was not carpeted until later in the fall the only staff that was there was the circulation staff on a regular basis and everybody else was still over at Wagner Electric waiting for furniture to arrive, for the heat to arrive and so forth.

Well around the end of October we sent off two car loads of librarians to an Illinois Library Association meeting being held over the weekend in Chicago. That happened to be Halloween weekend, during which time the doors being completely unlocked. The Walking Man statue was decorated with a pumpkin head and some shorts much to the shock many in the administration. Of course they were looking for responsible people to talk to about it and of course we were all off. By the time I got back it had pretty well blown over and for years after that it was routine that someone would decorate the Walking Man. In fact, well after we had good security they managed to somehow to do it.

Then they came to the point where they came in when the library was open and do it and the library staff would let them do it and I would more or less facetiously ball them out for letting them get away with it. Then it was so easy that they no longer did it. Until this last year when somebody came in and did decorate it in a way

that could have been damaging to the Walking Man. When we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the library in 1990, we didn't call attention to that part of our history.

Q: What about this small fire in the '60s during some of demonstrations.

A: I have forgotten all about that to tell the truth. I guess I do vaguely remember such an event.

Q: I heard it was simply contained in a trash can.

The library has hosted art exhibits and lecturers and all sorts of things over the years. I think you have an excellent Friends of the Library group.

A: One of the best.

Q: What would you care to comment about them over the years or record about them over the years.

A: As you have intimated it was a very successful operation. Initially our programs were not directed towards raising funds. We had programs in association with the departments. For a music program, we showed some old films and Renate Premezzi, I forget his exact name, but anyway he used our so called silent cinema music collection to devise some music to go with silent films.

Mimi Zanger's mother came and did a puppet program. When we rededicated the maps library (we had a librarian you may remember for a year and he was killed in an automobile accident, and we were not able to replace him.) Well, anyway, we brought in a nationally prominent lecturer to in association with the geography department. We were doing that kind of thing. It wasn't until Homer Kennedy, then president of the Edwardsville National Bank, became president that we started to become a fundraising operation and our first venture in that direction was an antique show and how many years have we had this now?

Fifteen years anyway and book sales and as a result we were able to install the book security system which we have now during a year when our funding was severely cut by Academic Affairs. With Friends of the Library funds we were able to buy computer equipment which placed us in the fore front in terms of literature searching among Illinois academic libraries. Our endowment is now over a quarter of a million. Next to the University of Illinois, we are easily the second most successful among the academic libraries in the state of Illinois, and relative to our size and age of the university we have one of the best anywhere.

Q: I would hope that you consider that one of your great achievements around here. What do you feel, John, over thirty-one years, have been your greatest contributions and successes and joys over a long career here?

A: I think my largest contribution to the library profession, which has since gone by the board, was to bring in a library instruction librarian. I think you can say that with very few exceptions, library directors have not been interested in what we then called library instruction now known as bibliographic instruction.

We hired Millicent Palmer, who became one of the leaders in the national scene. We were one of the very few, the only one that I can think of among the larger libraries at the time, large in terms of student population, to undertake such a program. Mellicent had considerable influence, not only here but nationally. She achieved a lot, but in some ways she practiced overkill. She was so determined to succeed that she, well she tended to spend too much time lecturing. When she died in 1973 we hired Ruth Scluveke as her successor.

Ruth had a very different approach which on the whole I approve of. First of all she spent most of her time at the information desk, but she did promote her going out to talk to classes on library. Instead of lecturing she was always having them do something in an active way, some kind of brief test, or the like.

Q: Let me ask you an open ended question. I see you have some notes there and I very much want interviewees to record what they want to record and that's why I have this question which will give you a chance to say whatever you want to say and the question is, What would you like to record which might never appear in an official history of SIUE?

A: I might say a few things about the library building.

Q: All right fine.

A: I guess you know that President Morris organized an Educational Planning Committee which we all attended generally on a weekly basis. {Membership was from both campuses and we sometimes met at Carbondale.} The purpose of this group on the whole was not to make decisions. Clearly the president saw this as a means of educating key administrators and national leaders and educational leaders were brought in. Harold Taylor, Bucky Fuller and so on. The only plan that was submitted to that group was for the library. We did have a library committee of which Ralph McCoy, Director of Libraries at Carbondale was chair (END OF SIDE 1)

{Also members were Milton Byrd, Associate Dean, and Eric Sturley, then chair of the Library Committee.}

We got together one afternoon. Eric was not present and we roughed out our ideas of what we thought should be in the building, its main features, what should not be in the building and so forth. Ralph wrote these up in a very good form. They were submitted to the group in December and for final approval in January. For the most part they described the building that we got. That was the only time that I remember that that group was involved in what might be considered decision making. I think the building was generally a very successful one.

One thing that we fought, and fought hard was the central well. I was always very much in favor of the two story wells between the second and third floors. The central well was a disaster. It was

something that the architect wanted because he felt that he needed to break up the space and have a focal point. It did, of course, provide a place for the "Walking Man" statue, but because of the central well we were forced to accept a sprinkling system. We fought that to, but unsuccessfully. Fortunately that sprinkling system has only gone off two times. One time it was in a janitor's closet, spontaneous combustion apparently, due to oily rags. An enormous amount of water came down. Fortunately it came down in an area where there were no books.

Another time in the north east well there was a malfunction and the system went off and did some damage to some of our wall hangings. It was quickly found because over in the general utilities building were the controls and they know when it happens. Fortunately, we were able to close that central well, until then we had a terrible noise problem in that library with all the activity going on the top floor of the technical services.

I remember one occasion when poor John Francis McDermott had a convention of some sort going on in St. Louis and he brought people over, historians or Americanists to see the library and they were chattering away. I don't know if they were booing him, but the students were not treating the group in a friendly manner. But it was because of that darn well. Eventually as you know we got it enclosed and it is not now a problem, but it was initially.

Another problem with the building, which we hadn't anticipated, was the open wells in the north and south stairwells. That was life-threatening, especially with parents bringing their young children to the library, and it was always a danger that somebody would slip through and go down, plus the fact between on the main floor there



was just a little ledge. But people would manage to cross over from the inside of the library to the outside, that is from the control area to the non-control. And, of course we lost a lot of books by people throwing them down. Mike Guerra and George Grant eventually got that covered over.

Q: John, let me come back. You mentioned the Walking Man and the pumpkin head and the red shorts. For the record let me record one of the stupid jokes about that. It relates to the well that you just talked about and goes back to the Walking Man. I remember Kirt Glasser many year ago was critical of how far the parking lots were away. He said, Well hell they ought to put the Walking Man in the parking lot and let us park our cars in the library.

A: You know how it happened that we got the parking lots so far away?

Q: I think I know, but I want to know what you know.

A: Well we had this conference, Manscape at East St. Louis and a very prominent city planner by the name of Edward Bacon from Philadelphia was one of the speakers. The original idea had been to have parking lots you might say dispersed among the buildings and Bacon didn't like that idea. He felt that it was not to aesthetic and furthermore that it was good for people to have to walk.

Q: Well along that line, John, it has always been my private belief that one Delyte Morris did not want parking lots anywhere near the beautiful campus, which is not a bad idea, and that the phys. ed. designed them (mixed voices) for the same reason you mentioned, for our health. Carry on with some other things that you personally want to record.

A: Let's see. Of course the early years were years of considerable expansion and euphoria. That is after we opened up in '65. Our great expectations, as you will probably remember, we expected to have 18,000 students by full-time students by 1970.

Q: I remember that prognostication well; I thought it was 20,000 by 1970..

A: Something in that order which was not unreasonable in that UMSL had not started up and the junior college district had not started up in St. Louis and we were getting a large part of our student body was from Missouri and they were paying in-state tuition, but it turned out otherwise of course. Personally I'm just as happy about it, we did over build, that is over staffed and over funded and one year we went from 2 1/2 people in Philosophy to over 30 that was partly to staff an inflated, bloated you might say, general studies program.

Q: It was the empire building.

A: It was and I think it was disgrace.

Q: Yes, Jerry Runkel hammered that through.

A: And Dee Lovell and Mel Kazeck was one of the champions, ultimately to protect the jobs and people; it did us a lot of harm.

Q: There has been a lot of turf protection around here.

A: And we did a lot of good building in collections. But everyone of those 30 plus philosophers was a specialist. Our collections when I retired were in the neighborhood of 3 quarters of a million volumes and that's not counting those couple hundred thousand music items and 90 thousand maps and a very large government document collection, all of these created by scrounging.

Q: Created by what?

A: By scrounging. Not much money was spent. I remember we spent only \$75.00 on the Slavic collection. Well in a way we were too successful because we filled the building up and the building was supposedly designed to take four more stories but I have since been told that it wouldn't take more than two or three.

Q: Will we ever get one?

A: Well that's a real question and we won't get one for a long time. So we filled up the stacks and the spaces for readers. The result is that in order to make space my successor I started substituting microforms for the original bound volumes of periodicals. I hate the stuff myself.

Q: I do too. I understand why.

A: Apparently the students don't mind it. I think a lot was lost, I'm sure it is. We were very successful in building collections which were of considerable utility.

Q: Before this gets away, tell me about recreating the first library in the state of Illinois. The Edwardsville Library. Didn't you and Milton Moore recreate it?

A: That is kind of a separate story but I have recorded it to some extent in a preface to Milton's work on the so called 1819 Edwardsville library which along with Albion, Ill. was the first public library in the state. I think it was first, but you cannot prove it. The documentary evidence is earlier for Albion. Anyway there is a list of those books. One of the earliest pieces of printing in Illinois, by the way, is located in the Edwardsville public library. We know what was in that collection in 1819 and it so happened that a large portion of that collection came in the possession of Paul Chamless in the early '60s. He sold some of the real rarities and some of which were still around when I came. I bought some of the them for the library.

Q: You mean it came into his position personally?

A: Yes. It came down through the Brown family and he offered it to the Edwardsville public library. They weren't interested so he gave it to Louise Travous, who was a local historian. I was then on the board of Madison County Historical Society and I could kick myself. Louise asked whether it should go to SIU or to the County Historical Society and in a moment of nobility and feeling some conflict of interest said to the County Historical Society. I think now it would be better cared for here.

Q: Maybe I am wrong. What prompted my question was I had thought that we had gotten representative copies of most of everything not necessarily the original books, but copies of the books that had been in the old Edwardsville library.

A: Where the original copy was no longer in existence Milton for his publication on the Edwardsville library tried to identify a probable edition which might have been in that library.

Q: We do not have a replication of that library?

A: Well a considerable portion of it is in the Madison County Historical Society and we have about half a dozen titles which we got from Paul and also one of which I found over in the shelves of the Alton library. It had been there for quite awhile. How it got there I don't know but it had an Edwardsville library book plate.

Q: We have touched upon this quite a bit but would you care to make any further comments about what we might call the library and the community and how successful your work has been received, integrated into, or cooperated with just the area we serve?

A: Well I have always been a strong advocate of library cooperation and we did work closely with the Lewis and Clark regional library. In fact we were a major library backup resource for them. I think just our being here was a very considerable cultural asset to the people of the area. Just being able to use the collection and we were liberal in giving borrowing privileges to those who had a special need to use the collection.

I was a very strong advocate of library cooperation among the regional libraries in the greater St. Louis area; without much success because the bigger libraries Washington U. and St. Louis were U. opposed. A also the Illinois State University libraries were not too much interested either. So I I had limited success in those areas.

I always believed strongly in library cooperation and it coming into being in the state of Illinois through the insistance of the Board of Higher Education which strongly pushed the library computer systems which we have, which is also basically a circulation tool, but is used as a means of knowing what other libraries have, and that combined with the state wide delivery systems, has considerable impact on libraries in the state of Illinois, not only among academic libraries.

Q: We were talking about microforms and you said you hated it. I said I abhorred it and then you made a very important comment. You said fortunately the students don't seem to mind it. Would you say that was true of this razzle dazzle stuff we were just talking about -the OCLC and the computer hook up. So the question is, in your opinion, are our students handling it well?

A: I'm not a particularly good one to answer that because I'm not that close to the public services anymore. I guess they're responding pretty well. The system that we have I use all the time. I can sit down and go through a list in a very short time.

Q: I better get you to teach me, John.

A: Well, it's easy enough really once you know - you just have to use it a few times.

Q: Yes - user friendly. I understand that.

A: It's a great time saver. I don't rely on it completely because it's not completely reliable nor, for that matter, is the public catalog completely reliable, but it is a great time saver.

Q: Well, one thing I don't like. I don't like the signs on the card catalog that say "this is only partial." So now you have to go to the card catalog and then somewhere else.

A: Well, the reason for that is that they're no longer adding cards to the card file.

Q: Yes. I understand. I don't like it, but I understand.

A: I don't like it either, but it has something to do, I guess, with the shortage of personnel.

Q: Well, let me ask one or two final questions. In the next little while, what would you like to do? What would you like to see around here? What would you like to do around here relative to the library?

A: That I'm not doing now?

Q: What are your main interests right now and what do you want to do in the next few years?

A: Well, at the moment, I'm working on editing a second translation from the German. It is the autobiography of a young Swiss immigrant by the name of Heinrich Leinhard who came to this country in 1843 and in his later years he - Well, he lived from 1856, in fact, in Nauvoo, Illinois to his death in 1903. He wrote his autobiography, over 900 folio sheets. Two-thirds of it has been published in book form. One book is, you may know the book, *From St. Louis to Sutter's Fort, 1846*, and then another book which is comprised of his memoirs relating to his time in California, particularly his relationships with Captain Sutter. I'm doing this with Ray Spahn. This is the second such book we've done together.



Q: Yes. Wasn't it *Illustrite Mississippital*.

A: No. It was *Reisebericht*,, the travel account of the Koeplfi and Suppiger families from Sursee in Switzerland to New Switzerland in Illinois.

Q: Highland?

A: Yes.

Q: This is an important and fascinating bit of local history, regional history.

A: Yes.

Q: OK, any final words of wisdom or something for the record.

A: Well, I'd like to mention a few things about the library building. We had thought in terms of a couple of elevators. I'll have to give President Morris credit. He provided four, with provisions for three more, when and if we expanded vertically.

We were really holding our breath when the bids came in on the building as to whether or not we would get carpeting. If we had not had carpeting, the building would have been a disaster. I mean it would have been a total failure. As it was, it turned out well, we got our carpeting.

It was, I gathered, rather a fluke that we had 40,000 square feet added to the size of the building. Jack Randall and Harvey, I can't think of his last name. There were so many buildings being built at once that there came a point where individuals such as myself couldn't have the input, but we had it through Jack and Harvey and I guess it was somewhere along in there that we got our extra 40,000 square feet.

One thing I haven't mentioned which I am pleased to be able to say that I had something to do with and that's the acquisition of the Sullivan Architectural Ornament collection. I've been given more credit than I deserve, but I did deserve some. Jack Randall was a very close friend of Dick Nickel who was the one who assembled the collection initially. At the time Catherine Kuh, the art consultant of the university, was opposed, as was Arnold Maremont, a powerful member of the board of trustees. I was for it. We had the beautiful lounge space for it between the second and third floor. President Morris was persuaded and paid \$15,000 which Jack Randall was insulted by and wouldn't sign off on. We got that collection for \$15,000.

Q: That is incredible.

A: I went up with Jack to look at it. It was in some kind of store house facility in Chicago. It was all covered by dust. I had to take it as a matter of faith that it was as great as it was. But at that time Chicago was not interested, nor was the University of Illinois. Jack and Dick were good friends. Jack, as much as anybody

saved the Wainwrite and saved and restored its sister building and the Prudential in Buffalo. I was pleased to have been supportive of that and had some role in acquiring the Sullivan collection.

Q: I know it even goes on tour, parts of it. It's one of our prizes.

A: President Morris had a feeling with regard to art that it should be where the people are. Therefore, it was hung on walls and the library of course was a particular beneficiary of that philosophy. We got "Walking Man" and much else. The "Walking Man" cost \$29,000 and it's a symbol of sorts for the library and a great thing to have. Well, I don't know if I've got anything else for you or not. I'm sure I'll think of something.

Q: Thank you Dr. John Abbott. It's been splendid and this will go into the archives.

A: I feel very fortunate to have stepped down when I did in '81 and let Gary Denué to the problems which I knew needed solving and the privilege of working with Barbara Teters.

Q: Let me record, John, for posterity one other stupid joke. You have mentioned Gary - of course you mean Gary Denué. When he first came, that luncheon table we all used to sit at and still do, incidentally we miss you, for a few weeks made jokes about Denué librarian and Deold librarian, and so on that happy thought we close.

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