James “Jim” Stimpert
Interviewed by Allison Seyler
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Johns Hopkins University
Oral History Collection
AS: So I'm Allison Seyler and I'm here today with Jim Stimpert, the Senior Reference Archivist, and we're conducting an oral history for the Hopkins Retrospective Program on September 12, 2022, and we're at the Brody Learning Commons. So thanks for being here with me, Jim. I'm just going to start by asking you to tell me a little bit about when and where you were born.

JS: Okay. Thanks, Allison. I was born in 1957 in Canton, Ohio, which is in northeast Ohio. In 1963, when I was six years old, we moved to a suburb of Youngstown, which is just across the border from Pennsylvania. It was then a big steel producing area. Not any longer. But I was in my kindergarten year in Canton when we moved, and we moved about a month before the end of the year. At that point kindergarten was optional, but I like to say that I was a kindergarten dropout because I never finished my kindergarten year, but it doesn't seem to have had any adverse effect. [Laughs]

But I went first grade through twelfth grade then at Poland High School, which is a suburb bedroom community just south of Youngstown. So my family had joined a Friends Church, Society of Friends Church, and for that reason I was aware of Malone College in Canton, and that's where I wound up going to college, which was then much more intimate. You could get to know the faculty, and it was really a good place. Not a lot of world-class researchers or anything like that going on like we have here, but it was a very good place to be an undergraduate.

AS: So what can you tell me about your family? Is there anything you want to share about your parents or maybe siblings if you have any?

JS: We were part of, I guess, a traditional family. Dad worked, he was an office manager for the US Department of Agriculture. Mom was a stay-at-home mom, or to the use the term that she always told people, she was a “household executive.” [Laughs]

Youngstown was about halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, so the office he was working in at Youngstown more or less closed down, but he wound up spending his days driving either
to Cleveland or to Pittsburgh every day, five days a week, and he
did that for many years.

Finally, he retired at the age of 55 with a generous federal
government pension, and he spent the last 42 years of his life as a
retiree. [Laughs] I have one sister, Candy. She's two years younger
than I am. When my parents were still living, I would visit them in
the summer and at Christmas and I would stay with them. Now
that they're gone, I stay with my sister and brother-in-law when I
go back to Ohio to visit. But my brother-in-law also enjoys nature
photography as I do, so when I'm out there we go to a lot of places
in the area, a lot of places we've gone to year after year, especially
in the summertime. We both like to do photography out there.

AS: That's great. Could you tell me a little bit more about what it was
like for you to grow up in Ohio? Maybe what you did for fun?

JS: Northeast Ohio was a rather flat area, and as a kid I was not at all
impressed with the area, I preferred, I guess, the more hilly or
more rural areas, which there are farther south and east in Ohio,
but looking back on it, it was not a bad place. I guess because I
was there I didn't really like it, but having gone back there many
times over the years I can say, okay, it's where the family is and
that's why I go back. But the town I grew up in, Poland, was a very
homogenous community, and looking back on it I'm sure it was
artificially enforced that way.

At the time, as a kid, of course I never even thought of anything
like that, but looking back on it I'm sure that families of the
“wrong ethnic” background were probably steered away to other
areas. I do remember, when I was in junior high, the junior high
school was across the street from the high school, so we would
walk the same direction, and there was at least one Black family
because I would see, as I recall, two Black girls generally walking
with two or three white girls going to school, which even at the
time I thought that's unusual.

[0:05:00] But I guess they were ahead of me, so they would've graduated and
they must have been the only children or the youngest children of
that family. I never knew what family it was, but I guess it's
probably a case of, well, there's only one family so they're not a
quote/unquote threat to the homogeneity of the neighborhood. But
looking back, I'm sure it was sort of an upper middle class
bedroom-type community and rather conservative, so I'm sure they
would not have welcomed a great influx of non-Caucasian people. The high school I went to, I got interested in history basically in junior high when an uncle of mine got me interested.

He got me several books, especially the American Civil War. That's what I really began looking at. An historian by the name of Bruce Catton became my favorite writer for a long time, and I read virtually all of his books. But always say if I hadn't gotten interested in history in junior high I never would have in high school because the history teachers in high school were a uniformly mediocre lot. Several of them were football coaches. One was a short, rotund misogynist, and another one was an officer in the Naval Reserve who presented himself as Admiral of the Fleet to his class. We would kind of laugh at him behind his back. He was not that bad of a teacher. We were just amused by the fact that he presented himself as a senior officer. I think he was a lieutenant commander, which knowing what I know now is about right in the middle of the officer ranks in the Navy. So he was not exactly a strategy maker or influencer by any means. [Laughs]

AS: Yeah.

JS: But I played church league softball for several years at my – there was a Friends softball league and we would travel around to various other churches as well. We had a large, empty field behind our church which became our de facto softball field for many years. I also played intramural softball in college for, I think, at least two years and had a lot of fun there. Didn't win a whole lot of games, but we had a lot of fun. [Laughs]

AS: So speaking of college, can you tell me a little bit more about your college experience. What was that like for you?

JS: Malone College, as I mentioned, was a rather small school, it's a lot bigger now. It's now Malone University. You know, sort of the college inflation, every college now wants to be a university, apparently. But it was a Quaker-supported liberal arts college I attended in 1975 right out of high school and graduated in 1979 with a bachelor's degree.

As I said, I majored in history. I was always interested in history, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with it. When tell people, especially at church, I was a history major – oh, you're going to teach? No. I didn't really have any plans to teach, although I've done a little bit of that since then, which is kind of amusing to me looking back on it. No, I didn't really want to teach.
I got a little bit annoyed at the constant question – oh, you're going to teach? – As if everyone who studies history becomes a history teacher. I think I did reply to someone I was annoyed with maybe that, well, does every law school graduate teach law? No, some of them go out and practice what they've learned. That's what I wanted to do with history, except I didn't really know what it was I wanted to do. I guess I was only vaguely aware of the field of archives and, you know, so I eventually then went into that.

I had the same roommate for all four years in Malone. You know, we were thrown together randomly as freshman. We liked each other and we just stayed together for all four years. I stayed in touch with him for a while afterward. In fact, he is the reason that I am here now, and I'll go over that a little bit later. My senior year, I worked as a campus security guard, which was interesting, it mainly involved locking the buildings at night and unlocking them in the morning. They would run shifts between I think 5:00 PM and 11:30 and then there was a night shift from 11:30 to 7:00 AM where you'd just patrol the campus and try to make sure that campus rules were not being broken. It was a very conservative, church-oriented school, so there were no co-ed dorms. My boss used to like to watch from certain vantage points.

And individuals were known to sneak young ladies up into their room, and rather than immediately interrupting them he would usually wait 10 or 15 minutes after they got in there, and then he would use his master key and go in and catch them in the act of something. [laughs] I never did that, I always thought, you know, okay, I don't – if I see them, yes, I'll report them, but I'm not going to go barging in there and interrupt anything. But that was an interesting job.

I also saw the, I guess you could say, “the underside” of some of the administrators who were, you know, not quite the highest religious types that they projected on the outside. I think there were a couple of affairs going on with people who were married to other individuals who were having things – having a little something on the side. [laughs] I don't remember any names. I wouldn't name them anyway, but I don't remember any names.

AS: Was Malone – did they have coeducation at that point?
Coeducation, yes, but there were men's dorms and women's dorms, and as they say, “never the twain shall meet.” They would usually – once a month they would have open dorm, one evening for two hours, where you were allowed to visit the dorm of the opposite gender, and the door to your room was required to remain open, and we always laughed because there actually was a rule that – everyone had to have at least one foot on the floor at all times. 

/Both laugh/ When I got there, in fact, as a freshman, there was a 10:00 PM curfew only for the women. The guys did not have a curfew. And, of course, the women, some of them were unhappy about that, you know, why are we being discriminated against when the guys don't have a curfew but we do?

Well one of the church matrons who went to our church, they were considering relaxing or removing the curfew on the women. She was up in arms about how this was going to lead to all kinds of promiscuity and all kinds of bad stuff, and my mother, bless her heart, very sweetly spoke up to this saintly matron of the church and very sweetly asked her, "Could you explain to me exactly what is it that a young lady can do after 10:00 PM that she can't do before if she's so inclined?" [Laughs] And I think that got sort of the fish look, you know, open and closing mouth with nothing coming out, and she didn't have any idea how to answer that question.

But they did – I think it was after my sophomore year they did remove curfews for everybody. I think first-term freshmen, men and women, had a curfew, but after that there were no curfews. So that was a major change there.

Yeah. So getting a little bit more into the answer that you started to bring up earlier, did you kind of – I guess you didn't always know you wanted to be an archivist. So I wonder if there was a moment or a person that kind of left the impression on you that that was the career that you wanted to pursue after college then.

Yeah, I went to grad school immediately after graduating from Malone, so I entered Kent State in the fall of 1979. It was right up the road from Malone, about maybe 20, 30 miles north of Canton, and in part because a couple of Kent State professors were acquainted with some of my professors and they would come down. We took a field trip up to Kent with a bunch of seniors just to check out the campus. Of course, Kent State being a state school was a lot larger than Malone was. So we met this professor, I think we sat in on a class or something like that just to see what it was like.
But that summer of 1980, after I finished my first year of grad school, I got a work study job working in the Kent State University Archives, and there were, as I recall, three other guys who were hired as student employees over the summer. Well, it quickly became apparent to the archivist, or our boss, that for me at least it was more than just a summer job. I went into it thinking, okay, I'll make a little bit of money, you know, i.e. minimum wage is what they paid us then, but I'll get to see this profession up close and decide maybe if it is one I want to do for a career.

So I think by about the middle of July I realized, yes, this is what I want to do. The archivist could see it was more than just a summer job for me, so he became my mentor. He would give me things to read, professional societies and publications to look at and newsletters to look at, and he also was the one who advised me that – I was already in the history program. Kent State had a library school too.

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At that time only two schools in Ohio that a library school. One of them has since closed down in the Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. But because there was a library school there on campus at Kent State, he advised me that, you know, you can't go wrong having a double masters, Master of History and Master of Library Science. And yeah, that sounds good.

So I talked to my parents, who were paying my entire college way, and they agreed, okay, this is what you want to do, this is what you need to get there. Okay, we will cover this additional coursework. So I wound up getting what amounted to a double masters. It didn't start out that way. In fact, the history degree I got in '83 about a week before I moved out here, I told them to put a stamp on the diploma and mail it to me, I had no intention of going through summer commencement.

My library science degree, I finally got in '87. When I moved out here I was so thrilled at not being a student, which I'd been for so long, and I kind of – I had one course left to finish up, which I signed up for some kind of individual investigation. I sort of let it slide, I thought I had six years. Well it turned out I was in the sixth year because it got backdated one year because of some courses I transferred from the history program, so I had to apply for a one-year extension, plus the faculty member who was also the Dean of
the school, that I'd signed up for this individual investigation with, he had the audacity to die during that time.

**AS:** Oh, no.

**JS:** So when I heard the news that he had expired, I went, oh good, what does that mean? So I wrote to the school, and the dean or interim dean at the time said, "Okay, yes, you actually have expired, but you can apply for a one-year extension. It'll be granted automatically, but there are no further extensions beyond that one year." So I did that and I worked with her. I wrote a paper, research paper on automation in archives in 1987. We had just had a computer for two years, which I'll get into a little bit later.

You know, that paper, I got an A on the paper and got my degree then. But looking back on it, automation and archives, of course there was nothing like the internet. I didn't even mention the word internet. It was all what a computer can do to help you write and revise finding aids, so from there it sort of **[laughs]** – it sort of went on from there. Jim Geary, who was the archivist then, anyway, as I said, he became my mentor and we did stay in touch. And in fact, when I applied for the job out here he was one of my references as well as I also spent a year working between during library school.

1982, I spent the calendar year working in Cleveland at the Western Reserve Historical Society processing the papers of Cyrus Eaton who was a protégé of John D. Rockefeller, a major industrialist. He was also one-of-a-kind in that this was in 1950s at the height of the Cold War; he was a very anti Cold Warrior. He agitated in favor of trying to understand the Russians, the Soviets as to where they were coming from and the fact that, okay, if there's a nuclear war it will not be good for either side. Whoever wins will ultimately lose as well as the losing side.

So, of course, he was criticized by the State Department. John Foster Dulles was one of his biggest antagonists. Because he was a multimillionaire, possibly billionaire, he would travel to the Soviet Union, which at that time was not done unless you were a government official. Well he had ways of doing that because he was so rich, and he knew if Joe Citizen had tried to go over there he'd have been arrested the first minute he set foot back in the States. But Eaton was rich and influential, so he was able to do this. He met with Premier Khrushchev on at least one occasion and apparently got along well with Khrushchev. He also met with later Soviet leaders.
He died in 1979, so he was already gone before détente and then the dissolving of the Soviet Union. But he was a very interesting character, and he had a voluminous collection of both his personal papers and business records, which he apparently took out. He was active in a lot of basic industries – coal, steel, things like that. His first iron ore – his first venture I think was iron ore from Wisconsin, Minnesota, fields of the northern part of the Midwest out there.

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That's where he made his first dollar, I think. And then he went on from there. It was a fascinating collection, and I spent 12 months working on it. When they interviewed me – as I learned later, they already had somebody who had done some kind of internship there, so they knew that person and that person was the odds on favorite to get the job. Well they interviewed four of us, and one of the questions they asked me was, "Can you do this in 12 months?"

Well apparently my competitor, again as I learned later, had seen the collection at some level and thought he was being professional in saying, "Well, you know, I'm really not sure it can be done in 12 months." I said, "Sure I can do it in 12 months!" [Both laugh] So I got the job apparently on that because I was confident that I – I guess I had particular confidence in I could do it in one year. Later on, a few months into the job, after I got to know the boss a bit better, at one point he asked me, "Did you really think, did you really know it could be done in one year?"

I said, "No. [Laughs] I wasn't going to disagree with you. I knew what the answer was that you wanted and I was not going to disagree with you." [Laughs] So we had a laugh over that. I did wind up – I think I went back for two days as a volunteer unpaid to finish up some loose ends, but I did basically do it one years' time, including typing, finding aid on a typewriter.

AS: Wow.

JS: Which was, I don't know, 400-and-some pages. [Laughs]

AS: That's incredible. Wow. That's a really interesting experience too to have when you're starting your career.

JS: Yeah.
AS: Since you're kind of rounding out your time here at Hopkins, I was also really curious about your journey to actually getting the job at Hopkins and then sort of the founding and early days of the university archives, because I know it wasn't necessarily a thing before a certain point in time.

JS: Right. Yeah, yeah. Okay, yeah, as I mentioned earlier, my roommate at Malone for four years, upon graduation he went to Harvard, entered Harvard Divinity School, got a Master of Divinity, and then came to Hopkins as a graduate student in philosophy. When he was at Harvard, he had gotten a job in the Harvard Archives, so he had some experience. So he was the absolute rarity or one-of-a-kind in an incoming student who had prior experience working in archives.

I've not seen any of those since then. [Laughs] But he got the job basically because he had experience, okay, you're in. Well I had been planning on coming out here to visit him and his wife at the end of – in May of 1983. He called me a few weeks beforehand and said, "I just heard the assistant archivist is leaving. There's going to be a job opening. Are you interested?"

Well I was finishing up my last semester minus that one class in library school. I said, "Yes I'm interested. Of course." I had been a lifelong Orioles fan for a long time, so I was coming out – we found, okay, the Orioles are in town that week, so we went to three – that was the year they won the World Series, '83. So I came out. We went to I think three games, which they lost all three of the games and then went on to win the World Series.

But anyway, I had the foresight I guess to put together a resume, and so he walked me over across – they were living right across Charles Street. We walked over here to the library for what I thought would be sort of a shake hands, foot in the door sort of meeting and then I'd come back later for an interview. Well we sat down, it turned into a full-scale interview, and I had the foresight to put together a resume, which I handed her. She checked my references, as I learned later from my boss at Western Reserve as well as my mentor at Canton. I forget who my third reference was, but it didn't matter.

But I know she did check my references because they got back to me and said they were impressed that she had actually called them to ask about me instead of just seeing, oh, a name on a page? Okay, it must be good. [Laughs] So my roommate wound up continuing on as a student for a couple years after that, then he got
into writing his dissertation, of course, and he was no longer working. But that was my – when I began working here, he was still working also, so he helped me get acquainted with some of the places on campus.

As I mentioned, my first day here, the archivist took me on a walking tour of the campus, and as we were going along – I don't remember where it was on campus now, but someone approached us and asked directions to some building.

Of course, I had no idea but she gave the direction, pointed them in the right direction, and I was listening to her I thought, well, maybe eventually I'll be able to answer those questions as well, and yes, I have done that many, many times over. But the archives itself was founded as a result of the planning for the centennial celebration. The centennial was in 1976. The planning for it began in 1971, five years in advance. Dr. Ferdinand Hamburger, Jr. was a recently retired professor of electrical engineering, nothing to do with history. But he had gotten both his bachelors and Ph.D. here, spent his entire academic career teaching here at Hopkins, so he had a love of Hopkins and a love of its history.

So he was asked to serve as Director of Centennial Planning at the beginning of this planning effort, which he took the job. The story is that a history of science professor had been engaged to write a history of the university for the Centennial. As I have heard it, this professor was having cold feet about agreeing to do this, so when they brought him in, showed him into a rather small room with a few books, a few boxes on shelves and said here's the archives, go to work, he found the perfect excuse to say, "Nothing is in order, there are no finding aids, I don't know where anything is, there's nothing here. I'm out of here, goodbye, thanks, I'm out of here."

And I think he was just looking for a way out and that served as the perfect excuse for him to back out of what he had agreed to do. But that did sort of serve as a reminder, okay, it's not just a few boxes and volumes on a shelf. You actually need people to interpret those things, people to create finding aids. And at that point, the first couple of archivists were actually clerical staff, neither of whom had any knowledge of archives, one of whom apparently spent most of her time typing little stickers saying "restricted until a year" and every folder got one of these stickers. The person who hired me, Julie Morgan, she put an end to that
quickly because it was a huge time consumer and it didn't really do any good.

You put something in the finding aid saying, you know, these materials are closed for X number of years. You don't put a sticker on every folder. But she was really the one who turned the archives – she herself had no prior archival training, although she did take several workshops after she had been hired, but she was the one who really turned it into a professional archives. In '82, a year before I started here, she was able to get funding for an assistant archivist position. Up to that point, it was a loan arranger, one-person shop type deal, and she got the funding for this position. My predecessor in that job held it for one year, and her either husband or boyfriend was a reporter who got a job in Detroit, and so they pulled up stakes and they moved to Detroit, so that is what resulted in the job opening for which I applied. And as I found out later, it was a support staff position. They had no intention of advertising widely. They were just going to adverse in the Hopkins community and in the city I guess, expecting that whoever they hired would have no prior experience in archives. So of course I had a years' experience working in Cleveland, so that made me a more attractive candidate.

You know, as I said, I dropped in to see her. It turned into a full-scale interview, and that would not happen nowadays. Even for a support staff nowadays there has to be at least a three-person committee I think, which is a good thing. Of course for others it's a larger committee, but it worked out for me in a way that again could not happen nowadays, but that is how I wound up getting here. Totally serendipitous. I would not have known about the opening even if I – if I had known about it, I'm not sure I would have bothered someplace, you know, 300 miles away.

I had also applied for a job in the University of Akron archives, which is right up the road from Canton, in the vicinity. I had met the archivist there, so similar job, assistant archivist. And I don't think I interviewed for that job, but I did stay in touch with the archivist. I'd already decided, okay, if I'm offered one of these jobs I'll take the first one that's offered. Well, you know, this job was offered.

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And I found later their HR people apparently got their fingers into the thing and had it messed up completely, and they wound up – I'm not sure – if they hired anybody it was many months later. So
if I had turned down this job I would've been sitting, twiddling my thumbs, looking for something else. So as it turned out, I was not at all sorry that I took this job and moved out of state.

AS:
Yeah. So when the university archives first started, was it housed under the library or through a different administrative office?

JS:
I guess because of the way it was founded as part of the centennial planning celebration, Dr. Hamburger, as director of centennial planning, reported to Ross Jones who was then vice president and secretary of the board of trustees, and there was something called university collections at the time, also which included Homewood Museum which was not really a museum then. They had plans for it. Evergreen House was the other component of university collections, which of course included the Garrett Library up at Evergreen. So they needed to decide, okay, where does the archives fit?

Okay, let's make it part of the university collections. So our boss was the director of university collections. She reported to Ross Jones, and so Ross Jones, at that point, was our boss two layers up, the director of university collections. She didn't really care what we did as long as we didn't spend too much money or cause problems. So it was sort of a benign neglect. We were able to do what we thought best. If we needed to spend some money, we had to ask her and justify it, but at least it served – she was not looking over our shoulder saying, "Why do you want to do that? Shouldn't you do this instead?" So on the whole I guess it worked out okay. Initially, I believe there was some conversation with the then library director about an archives being part of the library. Well at that point the library director did not want any part of an archive, saw no value in an archives, so we were always physically located in the library, in fact, in part of part of what's now the cage area on D level at the north end of the building. But we were never administratively part of the library until 1991.

Along the way, the library director, who I will not name, she became aware that people were coming to us for information. They were asking us questions, which we were able to answer. She said, "Oh, that should be part of the library," and we wound up fighting off two or three attempts at I guess annexation with the help of Ross Jones, who at one point apparently told his library director where to go and how to get there in polite terms.

Finally this library director left in 1989 or '90 – '88 I think it was. And a new library director – they were not deans then. They were
library directors. They did not become deans until Jim Neal, Winston's predecessor. But the library director was a much more agreeable sort of person in our estimation. And at that point, Julie Morgan, she left the archives, went over to Garland Hall, became an assistant secretary of the board of trustees, and at that point the archives became part of the library and I became part of the library. In 1988, we had also gotten a third position, a part-time position of someone. So he came along with us as well. So instead of being three we were back down to two. Actually I think it was one and three-quarters because I think he was three-quarters FTE. So there were two of us in the archives when we moved in to the library. They were getting ready to renovate the D level area, so we were told we had to move out. We'd gotten space over in Krieger Hall, in the basement of Krieger, so we were moving things over there. They set up shelving. And the story was, you know, we had to be out of there by July 1, 1991 because they were going to be coming in on July 2nd to start work. Well we made our deadline. The library did not meet its – it was six or eight months later before they did anything in that space, but we had to be out of there because they were going to be in there right away working on it. So I guess the military idea, hurry up and wait. That sort of applied here, I guess.

Then at that point, then we moved up to A level, which was then the location of special collections, and we had offices. We had a reading room. So up to that point, you know, we informally cooperated well with special collections. If they found a collection which was primarily university records, they would let us know. If we found something that was primarily personal records of somebody, we would let them know and it worked out very well. Julie and the head of special collections at the time worked very well together, and that also explains why the difference in naming, numbering collections. We had our scheme, they had their scheme. We still had the two schemes. There always was a gray area in between.

There's still a distinction, but as something is RG or something is MS, a record group or a manuscript, but it's become a lot less important now, but that's in part because the archives is part of the library now. So I was the first archivist who was part of the library up to that point. We were not part of the library and we were fighting off attempts at annexation. [Laughs]
AS: That's really interesting. So we might talk a little bit more about what it means to be an archivist with this question, but I know – obviously you touched on processing records and creating finding aids, but I also – you're at this sort of peak time where computers are being introduced too in your career. So what did y'all use for processing and all that kind of stuff before computers? And then we'll talk about the transition to computers.

JS: We used a typewriter. [Both laugh] No, we had an electric typewriter, which was the traditional kind. No electronics or anything. It was electric, but that was it. About a year after I started here, we acquired an IBM – I forget what the thing – it was an IBM typewriter, but it was a typewriter which had a 2K memory in it. We actually would type in a few of our standard forms and then just a button and it would print those forms out for you. Wow. [Laughs]

You couldn't really store much of anything in there aside from these forms, but at least we didn't have to duplicate those. We had a very poor quality photocopier at the time because it was a castoff from the library, so that's why we had it. We could produce these forms, which looked better than a photocopied version would have. But basically at that point usually sometimes people would make a – at the typewriter, usually you would write it out on legal pads, then type it in yourself, or if you had a student to do it the student might do it on our behalf, and then you'd go through and proofread it and make any corrections that you had to or additions, type it again, and then a photocopy was then put in a set of binders which were the public version.

The master copy, the ribbon copy, would go into a file cabinet, a folder in a file cabinet, and that's what we would use if we needed to make another copy of it for somebody else. Of course, at that time reference was done either telephone, letter, or walk-in. We would on occasion photocopy a finding aid and send it through the US mail unless it was too large. There were some cases where if something was 200-some pages and we said we really can't do that. So they would have to come out and see us and see the finding aid, which of course meant that they couldn't know what they wanted to see before they got here.

But on the other side of the coin, all of our boxes were housed in a room next door to where we were. So there was no offsite facility. We could go browse the shelves ourselves. We could pull a box off, open it up, look in, okay, nope, it's not in here. Try the next box, oh yeah, this is the one I want, take it out and give it to the
researcher. You know, nowadays you retrieve something, oops, it's not the right box, send it back, the next day get another box unless you have the foresight to say, "Well, it could be in one, two or three so I'm going to retrieve all three of them," which is what I do quite often because it saves time in the long run even though it means somebody pulling three boxes off a shelf when I know that I only need one.

But the processing at the time, this was before MPLP or more product, less process I think is what that acronym stands for. This was before that became a thing. We would go through every folder, check or restore the original order of the folder, take out duplicates, take out things which didn't need to be there, you know, someone stashed a typewriter manual something in a folder. We would toss that because it was not a permanent record.

We would remove nearly all metal fasteners, all paperclips and usually staples, unless they looked like they were in good shape. Then we would write heading on an acid-free folder and put it in. We would also check the filing arrangement and see, okay, what arrangement is it? Is it alphabetical? Is it something else? And make sure that we followed that.

But yes, we would go through every single document in every single folder. And now obviously we could not do that. The volume of records has grown greatly. You know, the number of staff devoted to that aspect of the work has not grown nearly as quickly, so it would not be really possible at this point to do that anymore, and obviously we were not alone. Meissner, Greene – or what was the other guy who came up with MPLP?

AS: I don't remember his name.

JS: I forgot. There were two guys who came up with that term, and they were heavily criticized at first by the traditionalists who said you have to go through every folder, but we can't. Okay, but we can't obviously eventually won, but now we don't do that any longer. It was interesting in that you could go through and follow a thread all the way through and see what so-and-so said and what the reply was, and sometimes there'd be internal memos in there that said, you know, this blankety-blank so-and-so is advocating this, he's wrong, and we've got to make sure that doesn't happen.
Of course that was not what was passed along, but it's sometimes I
the file so it could become quite interesting to read. A lot of it, obviously most of it, was very dry stuff. It's the mundane, day-to-
day workings of any organization, any office within an
organization, but it did occasionally become interesting when you
found things in there or explanations as to why something
happened, something that I – an event that I knew about and, oh,
this is why it went down that way because of so-and-so and so-
and-so. [Laughs] It went through that way.

But it never occurred to us when we were down on D level that at
some point in the future, all these boxes, which were then next
door to us, might be several miles away. So we came up with this
scheme for dividing into subgroups, series, subseries, and
numbering boxes. Every new series began with box one. Subseries
did not begin with a new box number. But because we were
retrieving boxes ourselves it was not a problem to go back into the
back room, find what we needed.

After we began moving stuff out, first to Moravia Park, which was
an area on the eastern edge of the city, a warehouse, and then more
recently to LSC down on the APL campus. It became a lot more
difficult. The problems in that, because we had no idea that this
would ever be an issue, otherwise we would have done things
different, and you know, 20/20 hindsight and all that.

AS: Right. So you talked a bit about the ways in which you process
records and also creating the finding aids on the typewriters and
accessing them for patrons. How did that stuff start to change with
computers and were you able to provide access to images or
reproductions other than just not so great photocopy?

JS: Yeah. Our first computer was acquired in 1985. We already had
this electronic typewriter, which we thought was great, and then lo
and behold, Ross Jones, bless his heart, approached Julie one day
and said, "Hey, could you guys make use of one of these new
personal computers?" Well Julie was not about to say no, [laughs],
and she said yes. We came back and started looking into, well,
what might we do with a computer?

[0:45:00] At that point, computers were primarily glorified word processes.
You could type in a finding aid, a letter or something and correct it
on the screen before printing it out and say, oh, I made a typo, I've
got to retype it all over again. But what they did was they made it a
lot easier to create these finding aids. Instead of sitting at a
typewriter or writing it out longhand first then typing it, then going
back and having it proofread and then going back and fixing
mistakes or deciding we need to rearrange this, that subseries
should come before this subseries so you've got to retype that part
of it, so you could just do that on a computer, on a little 12-inch,
green-on-black screen, the old style. Our first computer was an
IBM PC/AT.

You know, the AT allegedly stood for advanced technology. When
IBM was the big player in personal computers, before all the
clones came along, which was IBM's fault because of their
business practices, but we would create – and then we'd store these
finding aids on a 20 megabyte hard drive. That was one of the
reasons for the downfall of the IBM because they insisted that no
one would ever need more than a 20-megabyte hard drive which
led to other after-market, third-party producers creating computers
and hard drives much larger than that. And son of a gun, people
really did want larger disks and they needed larger drives, so IBM
was forced into a catchup when they never did catch up. They lost
their shirt in that deal because of their poor practices in the
beginning. I think their crystal ball was a little cloudy on those
days.

But yeah, for a while there, you know again, we had this computer,
we had finding aids, and of course Word Perfect was our first word
processing software. I still use Word Perfect at home. I still think
it's far superior to anything that Microsoft has ever churned out,
but around here we use Microsoft Word, so it's what I use.

But we would create these finding aids, but we could search within
the finding aids, but of course there was no way to search across a
repository. You know, there was nothing – no database program at
the time. Well we found out, we learned about two years into
having this computer that there was this program called Marcon
which had been put together by a father and son who were both
Hopkins alumni and were working down in the College Park
campus. At that time, College Park sort of an incubator program
for small businesses to give them help, I guess managing their
business, technical help, getting things set up. So we acquired this
program called Marcon, which I have to say was far ahead of its
time in that unlike the dBase-type programs at the time, it would
index more than 255 characters per field.
dBase programs would only index the first 256 characters actually of any one field. Marcon would index the whole thing up to – I think there was some theoretical limit, but it was huge. So we went, okay, this is the way to go. Unfortunately, there were a lot of bugs in the program, which the people running it never did seem to get worked out. We were – as the saying is, when you're on the cutting edge sometimes you bleed, and we were on the cutting edge. We would encounter bugs that they had never encountered before and we would report them and, you know, they would try to fix them.

They would sometimes come out to see us and see the program onsite, plus their marketing efforts were a little bit less. They never really did figure out how to market. They were a couple of gearheads and they never did figure out how to market what they had, and unfortunately Marcon was eventually taken over by one of the major players in the database market. I don't remember which one it was any longer, but they were taken over and promptly shut down. We knew as soon as we heard that, okay, there will never be anymore updates to this program again.

So for a while, okay, we can keep going with Marcon, but eventually there is not going to be any support for the program, so at that point we adopted Microsoft Access as our database program. At the time with Access – you could have more than 250 characters in a field, but it would still only index the first 256.

[0:50:00]

But it worked fairly well. I designed the photograph database template, and that was something else. In Marcon, I devised the fields that you we used. I named them, I set up the parameters. I did the same then in Access first for our photograph database and then for our finding aid database, which we were ultimately able to input with the help of certain other individuals in what used to be systems around here who were no longer around, unfortunately, but we were able to get the photograph catalogue, which began as three-by-five file cards in a typewriter with added entry and cross references cards.

Then we'd put them in drawers. I typed every one of those over 8,000 cards into – I think in Marcon. I think we had that in Marcon. Yeah. I fixed a lot of typos and mistakes myself at the time. A lot of them still got through, but I fixed a lot of issues there. At that point, if someone called us or wrote to us, we could get on this computer and do a search and find out, yes, there's
something here and there and then maybe mail them some excerpts or some finding aids or something. It was better than pre-computer, but it was still not ideal. Eventually – I want to make sure I'm not getting ahead of myself here.

AS: Yeah. I mean, I think – no, I think that's a good picture of how you eased into using computers. The next sort of question is more based on reference and your position specifically. So how has your role as a reference archivist changed? I mean, even more broadly, what you see archivists having been doing in the 1980's versus now, because I think that that gets to what you just started talking about, like providing access – or answering reference questions if people write in or stop by, but then with the dawn and age of the internet and all of that, that really shifted and changed I'm sure.

JS: Yeah. Let me go back a little bit to something I meant – once we did, you know, get the internet here, and in fact this position, Brian, who was in it, he was – he had been into soldering his own motherboards and building his own computers, so he knew the nuts and bolts literally. When we moved up to A level, he set up an email server and we all had email before the rest of the library had email.

AS: Cool.

JS: We were very amused at for quite a while. But one of the things that we were also able to set up, this in the pre-GUI or graphical user interface age, something using the internet. It was called the Gopher. It was named that because the software came out of the University of Minnesota, which are the Golden Gophers in athletics. And this was software that would allow text finding aids to be uploaded and browsed. Again, no images, nothing like that, but plain text could be browsed and could be, I believe, downloaded and searched, and we also set up sort of a clearinghouse with repositories which, you know, had finding aids online through using Gopher.

So we would set up a clearinghouse, a list of institutions from which you could link and go to their sites, and at one point people were notifying us, hey, can you add me to your Gopher page? Yeah, sure, okay. Get the details and we'll add you to it. I think at one time there were a couple dozen institutions listed on that. And then once the internet became more common, more usable, more accessible to greater numbers of people as well as the rise of Windows and the graphical user interface, there was no longer any need for this so it sort of went away. But for about a year or two
there, you know, we were at the forefront and we were the ones who were serving as a clearinghouse for other institutions to get them listed so that people could find them and go to their sites because they didn't know what the address would be or anything like that.

[0:55:00]

So that really took off. In reference to reference, at that point, when I started here basically I was a jack-of-all-trades. There was acquisition, accessioning, processing, describing –

AS:
Did you deal with donors then? People donating?

JS:
Oh, yes. Yeah, at that time we weren't really collecting the personal papers of anybody, but we would go out to offices, look at what they had in their file cabinets, try to give them an idea, yes, we'd like this, you know, no, we don't need this draw full of gazettes or magazines or, no, we don't need a folder full of operating manuals for various hardware that you have. We don't need receipts from financial transactions, stuff like that. But we would not do in-depth weeding onsite.

We would try to tell them, okay, half this draw is magazine. We have that already. Thanks, anyway. So you can take that and trash it, recycle it, whatever. But at that time, reference work was really a smaller part.

I think there were many 100 inquiries per year, and Julie and I would handle those. I think I was probably doing most of them, or it might've been 60/40, but Brian, our third person, was doing some occasionally, although he was more or less a processing archivist. I think that's where the money came from to get him, to get that job created. But now – I took a look back, and since 2013 we've averaged 664 inquiries per year with a high of 779 in 2018/19.

Now it dropped off in 2020 because of the COVID shutdown, and it hasn't gotten quite back up to that point yet. I think last year was something like in the high 600s, low 700s. So we haven't gotten back up to where we were in 2018/19, but nowadays I handle probably 90 percent of those inquiries because we're also counting Levy reference inquiries. Sam probably handles 5 or 6 percent and then the others would be divided up among others, people when I'm not around, things of that nature.
And these questions come in through email and phone?

Probably 98% email now. I could check the stats. I didn't, but my sense is that it's probably 98% email with the occasional – with a few telephone calls and once in a while the occasional letter, usually from some elderly person who hasn't gotten a computer and has no by-god intention of getting a computer. [Laughs]

Right. They have a preference for calling. So you do reference interviews, obviously you assist researchers who come in and use the reading room. Could you talk a second about your work with classes that come to special collections and maybe also – I know you've written a historic walking tour of campus as well as like I know you work closely with the digitization lab in order to digitize records for patrons, so could you speak a little bit about any of those things?

Classes visiting the archives was not really a big thing either in the archives or in special collections until probably the late 1990s really. We would occasionally go and talk to classes at their location, and if it was convenient we might take an example or two of something with us, something small, something that could be carried without danger to the item. But we didn't really have classes coming in, in part because we had no place to put them coming in prior to the BLC and the Macksey Room and these rooms where we're located now.

We would have try to book other areas. Sometimes we would even shut down the reading room for a class to take place there, and other times the classes would take place down in the cage when there was a more open area on what's now the book side of the cage. It never was exactly aesthetically pleasing down there, but I sometimes worked. But there was not really space. Around that time is when the whole idea of this entire institution becoming a teaching library really came to be.

There was not really any emphasis – you know, we were placed where books were on shelves – people who needed books would come and look in the card catalogue or look in the early online catalogues and find what they wanted, go down, pick it up, check it out, and take it with them. There was not really an emphasis on teaching people how to use a library. You know, nowadays and for many years now we – of course, incoming freshman, there were classes being offered how to use a library because most students
have never used their high school library. If they have a high school library, it's a few computers, very few books on shelves. Maybe a few things, but not very much.

But you know, nowadays, of course, we're going to the other extreme of moving books out of the library to make room for other things, some of which hopefully will include teaching spaces because we do need more of that. But we've gone from being a place with books, people come in to get the books they need to, saying the book's offsite and you can retrieve them online and then come and pick them up and take them out with you, but there are fewer and fewer books in the library. And I guess with the upcoming renovations, whenever they take place, at the end of that whole effort there will be a lot fewer books in the library from what we have been told.

Again, classes, the whole idea of explaining, gradually professors would contact us both for rare books as well as for history-type classes. You know, Bill Leslie was one of the earliest ones to contact us and say can you do this? Margaret had put together many years ago an exercise which would allow students to actually examine a small set of original documents, and then we would give them a worksheet to try and answer questions – what biases can you see in these documents, what might you also want to see in addition to have you here, what might tell a different side of the story being told here? Things like that.

Then the classes would break up into groups and they would discuss this, then they'd come back together. And it was really a fascinating exercise to watch. I remember in one case, in this room, Bill Leslie, for one of his classes, he was going around from one group to another saying, "This is fantastic, this is wonderful, this is great." Then the groups would come back together and report their findings and Bill and/or I would then comment upon what they'd found or what else they could've found. In one occasion, I remember they were using some typescripts of early diaries, of Gilman's diaries from the 1850's.

And we were saying, "Okay, what problem could there be here?" And someone actually came up with, well, I don't think the typewriter had been invented yet. I said, "Exactly. We don't know unless you compare it to the original, did someone misread a word? Are there typos in there which makes a word a totally different word?" But as I mentioned, I told them, okay, apparently there were two stories as to when the typewriter came about, but both of them have come in the 1870's. They're different years, but
whichever one you believe it happened in the 1870's, not in the 1850's. So those typescripts were not the original documents. Someone at some point sat down at a typewriter and typed what they were reading and they may or may not have been totally accurate.

AS: That's great. That's a good catch by a student too.

JS: Uh-huh.

AS: So how do you work with the digitization lab here at the library?

JS: Before that lab came to be, which has been seven or eight years I guess it's been around, we had a flatbed scanner, and in a little closet, literally in a closet, and that was where we would scan materials. We also had an early face up scanner made by Minolta which I need to mention that. I don't think I have that – okay. We had this Minolta face up scanner, which was – I know you have heard me talk about the Bookeye. This Minolta face up scanner was worse than the Bookeye ever was on its worst day.

[1:05:00]

It was totally proprietary. The cable connection to the computer was a proprietary cable. You had to put a card into that computer so it would accommodate this cable, and you would – the thing was constantly freezing up and you'd have to reboot the computer in order to get the scanner to go again, and when that thing finally – I think something finally happened to it. It was not going to work. Minolta was no longer making this model. The next model available, the cheapest model available would've been $10,000, and there was no way we could get that money out of our budget.

Well I was already a photographer at that point and I, not humbly speaking, came up with the idea of what if we put a digital camera on a copy stand and used it to photograph documents and create photocopy quality images of these books or documents? We had to go through and get approval from the big digital offices in the library, but when we emphasized we're not producing digital surrogates, we are producing photocopy quality reproductions, we got the go ahead to do this. And we wound up – this new Minolta scanner would've cost $10,000 – what we wound up spending for the camera and the associated peripherals and all was $1,000.

I did a presentation at an RBMS conference out in Los Angeles a few years later on this effort, which I called it the 10 percent
solution, and we were able to do this fairly quickly. We had the camera plugged into the computer, so the images were saved directly to a hard drive, not to a media card or anything. The camera itself was plugged in an AC adapter, so we didn't have to change the batteries. So we had a setup with lights with two lights on either side pointing down at the camera deck, and it worked very well.

In fact, we used that until we moved up here, but it was shortly after that then that the Digitization Lab came about and we then began taking things down to them to be digitized. And the way it is now really is that if it's only a few pages I'll do it myself on our hardware here. If it's something that's more elaborate, something that involves books, I'll usually take it down there. Now, of course, we have a Bookeye scanner in the reading room which the researchers can use, which works a lot better than it originally did in the first few years of its existence.

That thing's been there for over 10 years now. It arrived I think in August of 2012, so it's been around for over 10 years now. But that has worked fairly well. It's got its quirks, but it also allows the researchers to do their own copies. So as a result, we used to offer photocopying services at $.25 cents per page with a surcharge, like a $10.00 surcharge I think it was beyond a certain number of copies to try and discourage, okay, I want everything in this box copied, you know, sorry, we can't do that.

But it worked fairly well. We would have students doing the photocopy projects, and we would try to indicate to them, okay, this is where you want to copy, this is where you want to stop, but it meant the students were doing that and not other things. So eventually we ended up – we stopped – when we moved up here, we did not offer paper copies any longer. If it's someone, depending on who it is, and they want a page or two, yes, I'll go back there and crank out a page or two, but nowadays, you know, we allow people to use the – of course, people have smart phones, which they all have cameras, and you can use your own smart phones.

You can also use the self-serve Bookeye scanner in the reading room, and really it's very, very seldom anyone asks us can I get copies of this folder or this document? You know, you can stand there with your own camera, you can bring in your own camera, use your smart phone, whatever, or use the Bookeye, whichever option you prefer, and no, we don't offer paper reproductions any longer.
AS: Yeah. I think it's a really nice aspect of our reading room that people are allowed to take their own photographs of the materials.

JS: And some places didn't allow that for a long time, and I never have quite understood why they forbid that. There was a hesitation about allowing researchers to make essentially full, complete copies of a collection.

[1:10:00]

And, you know, there were those early on who said, "What's the big deal? You know, we're getting our materials out there. As long as they know where it came from, what's the problem?" Whereas there were others. But if they have this, they might share it with somebody else who is not going to come to us, which means our stats are going to be lower, our incoming revenue is going to be less because we're not making copies for them, and it came down to really we don't have a staff to do it any longer, so that sort of trumped whatever objections anybody might've had here or elsewhere.

There was some hesitation or, you know, people thinking are there copyright issues here? And we would have a form that we would fill out or have them fill out. We used to have a form that they had to fill out this form before they could take any photographs themselves and we had these little paper targets that would ask them to put them in the frame and keep them in the frame for every page. Well we had no intention of checking what they had, so we had no intention – if they were cropping in their camera to keep it out entirely, you know, it's not something they ever did very often. The students in the reading room never really tried to follow up on it, and how could they really in reality unless they're looking over their shoulder or looking through the viewfinder of their camera or looking at their camera screen.

But that was one of the hesitations that some people had, and that sort of – that finally went by the wayside again because it's just – you can have this rule, but if it's unenforceable why have the rule in place at all? You know, now we have the standard thing on the Bookeye saying the same thing that you have on the public machine, saying copyright law governs the copy. You are responsible for any potential copyright infringement, not us. That's the same thing when we did do copies, we would have that statement on the form that they would sign and, you know, we would also say we reserve the right to refuse to do any copying of,
in our estimation, it would violate copyright law, and I don't know that we ever did anything on that basis. We would sometimes – people would come across confidential things. We would say no, we can't really copy that. You shouldn't have seen it in the first place, but that's not your fault. [Laughs]

AS: Right. So I wanted to just ask you one final thing about part of your job and then we can shift to maybe talking about the libraries. But I know you developed a historic walking tour for campus. Can you talk a little bit about that and maybe just how people have been interested in that or maybe the response that you've gotten from the different community members?

JS: The campus tour idea began, as far as I can remember, about 15 years ago when I was asked to give a guided tour for two visiting librarians from Egypt. I was asked by a predecessor of Heather Stalfort in the public relations area of the library if I would. So, yeah, okay, I didn't have any kind of a script or anything. So we walked around campus. I remember standing on the plaza behind the library, and I was talking about Gilman Hall, how it was the oldest major building on campus, having been built in 1915, and these two Egyptian librarians looked at me kind of funny, and I realized what they were thinking.

I said, "Yes, I realize that where you come from, you know, 95 years is a drop in the bucket. You have things that are thousands of years old, which we do not have here, [both laugh] but yes, 1915 is really the oldest major building on campus." But from that, I think a year later I think there were another couple librarians from Egypt, and I did the same thing for that. I don't remember exactly how it came about, but I think I started doing tours for new department staff, which sort of branched out into new library staff who might be interested. And at some point, someone from what's now Family Weekend contacted me and said, you know, would you do tours for our family weekend? I'm not sure how they learned of this possibility. I don't remember that. But then, of course, alumni weekend, people started asking if we would do campus tours, and so, yeah, for a while there, you know, pre-COVID, I was doing several tours per year and then, of course, you've done a few yourself and will be doing more in the future. [Both laugh]

[1:15:00]

AS: Mm-hmm.
But at that point, nothing for the first few years was written down. It was all in my head. And Katie's predecessor, Jordon Steele, suggested that it might be a good idea to write something down in case I wasn't able to do a tour for some reason, someone else would at least have something to look at and read from or something. So I did that. And in fact, Jordon and I walked through this. I sort of gave my tour to him as we were walking along and he made suggestions, most of which were very helpful on what I might want to add or the route we used.

We used to go all the way down and up the stairs and we realized, okay, that's one more impediment to people with mobility impairments, so we wound up at that point going through the breezeway here and around, which took out one set of steps. Of course, there was still one and we have a workaround for that, but it's not ideal. But that's the only way we can do it. Various development offices on campus have learned of these things and they have contacted me with the idea being that, you know, if – they were trying to persuade potential donors to give money, and maybe if it looked like they knew a little bit about our history it might be more of an encouragement for these donors put on another zero or two on the end of those checks that they're writing.

So yes, okay, you're interested. I don't really care why you're interested, but you have an interest. Okay, I will give a tour. This past year for alumni weekend, you know, I was asked to do a special tour for the 50th anniversary for the reunion class which would focus on the areas that they were most interested in, not in what I thought was most historically relevant, and that was interesting. It went pretty well.

I did a special tour a year or two before COVID I think, in 2019, for the class of ’69, which was just a standard tour but open only to members of the class of 1969, which as I went outside to meet them, they had come directly to this tour from a wine reception in the basement of Homewood Museum, so a couple of them were feeling no pain when we began the tour. They may have sobered up a little bit on the way, but they were a rather gregarious group and they didn't really care who heard what they said. [Laughs] But no, that's really been one of the most enjoyable things about the job, is I found is doing these campus tours. Again, I never thought I would be into teaching anything like that. Well, you know, this is a manner of teaching, just the same thing as talking to classes either here or in their own classrooms.
And, of course, I should mention also Bill Smedick has been a big user of ours for his Clark Scholars program, talking to that group of freshman about our history. I usually do find that these students, some of them are interested. They are surprised at some of the things that were not around when they learn that there were no women undergraduates until 1970. Some of them think, oh, that was over 50 years ago – so what? [Laughs] Or some – well, that recently? And explain, yes, that's how it was, that's how it came to be and that's why it was.

But a lot of them, they are interested. As we found out from the commemoration day displays that we've done, you know, we show them old photographs, and yes, they will stop, they look at these photographs, and it connects them to their predecessors in a way. The famous photograph of the guy sitting in his dorm room with a little portable typewriter perched on a barstool between his legs and he's banging away on this typewriter, and when students look at that I will say, "Hey, if you replace that typewriter with a laptop, could that be you?" And they'll laugh and say, "Yes, absolutely. Yeah, I've written many papers at 3:00 in the morning when it's due at 8:00 or 9:00 the next day." [Laughs]

That's also been a major source of enjoyment. Early on, the commemoration day ceremony – I'm going off topic a little bit, but I think this is relevant – but the commemoration day ceremony had been a formal academic convocation.

[1:20:00]

Faculty in their robes, held in Shriver Hall, and they would have some big names speak, usually some foreign dignitary speak on some topic on world affairs, and of course the students couldn't have cared less about this unless they were IR majors maybe. And it was also an extremely expensive show to put on because it also meant an honorary degree for the speaker, a reception afterwards with something more than cheese and veggies, and it became a bit more expansive, and they decided, okay, we're going to stop doing this. Well a former – I'm not sure what – a vice provost I think it was, Paula Burger – I think that was her title – she had the idea of why don't we try to create something celebrating our university's birthday, something that will appeal to students?

So the very first year was a trivia contest that she ran and I helped out with some of the questions and answers. Then they had cake over in Levering Hall. And I think the year after that is when she said, "Hey, would you be interested in showing some historical
photographs? We're going to do this in the Glass Pavilion this year." And yeah. So I had some prints made and mounted of photographs and put those out, and that turned out to be a big hit.

You know, of course along the way they had cake, eventually cupcakes, but at that time was cake and lemonade. It was usually held, you know, on or around February 22\textsuperscript{nd}, which is our official birthday, and we started doing that year after year, and that became a lot of fun because the students would come and they were all interested especially in the older photographs. Again, it's something to connect them to their past. Okay, you are a current student, these people were your predecessors. You know, you are not the first but you won't be the last around here.

\textit{AS:} Yeah, and I think it's interesting when they make the connection to photographs of themselves today and photographs of these students in the past, especially the transportation ones where the students are taking –

\textit{JS:} The horse-drawn wagon? Yeah.

\textit{AS:} – the horse-drawn wagons or even the really old cars in the parking lot.

\textit{JS:} Yeah, yeah.

\textit{AS:} And the students are thinking about taking the shuttle today or walking to campus from their off-campus apartments. So I think that connection is really neat. Thanks for mentioning that. So I know we touched on how the archives became part of the libraries, but could you talk a little bit about working at the libraries in general?

I guess maybe how the libraries have changed over the years. They've obviously gotten bigger and acquired different things like museums. And can you talk about how leadership may have changed or if there's been an increase of sort of importance or highlight on special collections?

\textit{JS:} Yeah. There has definitely been an increase in special collection's importance and relevance. Early on, it was almost entirely a rare book collection. The library has always – I don't know how this came to be, but the library has always had the papers of our founding president Daniel Coit Gilman. Obviously if the library had not had them they might not still be in existence because the archives didn't come around until 1971, '72. But, you know, that's
been in manuscript collection, but primarily it's been a rare book collection, used primarily by people finding things in the card catalogue and saying, oh, I have to use that in special collections. So, they'll come here and they'll not have any idea in some cases why they have to come here. They just know that for some reason that book's only accessible and I can't take it out with me, so I have to sit in a reading room with somebody watching me and use the book there. But, you know, there was not a lot of outreach efforts. There was nobody really trying to promote the department, to promote the rare books, to promote the collections, and that sort of also came about with the whole idea of the teaching library and people – I think Earl's predecessor John Buchtel was one of the first two to start bringing classes in and teaching classes, using the materials in our collections. And that became a major focus. It still is a major focus. But it's part of the whole idea of the teaching library, where it's not just a building housing books that students come in, grab stuff and leave again. It's a place where you come and you learn something while you're here.

[1:25:00]

Of course nowadays it's also a place to come and socialize, to meet your friends as well as group study in various rooms or out in the open. But the libraries themselves in that respect have changed greatly. The library just used to be a book repository. You know, now that's moving less and less in that direction, more and more away from that focus. But I think the library is still going to be a center of learning, it's just a matter of what kind of learning, learning in what way, and how is that learning different now from how it was then?

Students are learning different ways. They have the internet. They don't need to travel to another library to see something. They can – maybe what they want is already online. They don't have to go anywhere. Or maybe they can at least find out what they want before leaving and narrow their focus down or we can help them narrow their focus down if they will let us do that for them.

AS:

Yeah, and I know – we so also have an outreach librarian. Can you tell me a little bit, if you know, about that creation of that position and what they do now?

JS:

That's a good – I don't really know how that came to be. Again, I think it's part of the whole idea of a teaching library, and someone suggested to someone that we ought to have someone, one whose focus was to promote the department in the larger library and in the
larger university, and she's done a very good job, a very admirable job at that. She's had that part of her job for many years now. I think before we moved into the BLC I think that was part of her title. So it's been probably 15 years that she has – that's been one of her responsibilities.

AS: Okay, thanks. So you mentioned earlier the upcoming renovation of the library. Are there any other sort of moments, if you want to talk about that, or even just what one might call construction eras of the library? Because I know, you know, we've had the Eisenhower Library and then added onto the libraries, the Brody Learning Commons, but then also now we've demolished the Mattin Center and are building a new student center. So just, you know, maybe a reflection from someone who's been here for almost 40 years about construction eras on campus.

JS: In terms of the library itself, the upcoming renovations, whenever they actually begin, will probably be the third sort of major project in my time here. The first one was in 1996-97 when they renovated M, A, and C levels of the library. They left B and D levels alone, but they renovated M, A, and C levels. Well, Special Collections was on A level, and at that point, you know, we remained open through almost the entire thing. There was a time when our front area was demolished, so we were closed I think for I guess it was maybe a summer or maybe a fall, but it was two or three months that we were closed.

But prior to that, we were told that we were going to remain open and we would keep going on as if nothing else was going on around us. At that point, they were drilling holes down through the ceiling in the library and my opinion is they didn't really care where they drilled or what precautions they took, because we had literally all manner of dust, debris, muddy water, and yellow water coming down through holes drilled down through the ceiling. In some cases that fell down – if somebody's working at a desk, dust or debris would fall right down on their desk. In one instance, memorable instance, a colleague of mine was across the hall from me. I was over there talking to her. They drilled a hole down through the ceiling. Someone was pushing a metal conduit down. Apparently he lost his grip on that conduit, this metal pipe came plunging down, narrowly missed my colleague who was sitting about as far away from me as you are.

[1:30:00]

And I think I grabbed that pipe, jerked it, and screamed something up through, which was not exactly complimentary toward their
biological heritage I think. But that was an illustration of really the lack of concern the library had for its staff who were supposed to keep on working. There were many days when the drilling was so loud that I would sit there looking at my phone. Even if that thing rang, I wouldn't hear it ringing. Even if I did hear it ringing, I could never hear anybody on the other end of it so there's no point in even thinking of answering the phone because you can't carry on a conversation. My hope is, and I did make this known to someone who has since departed the library, that there would be some kind of an ombudsperson with the upcoming renovations that staff can go to and say, you know, I'm supposed to keep on doing my job; I cannot.

We had no such person then. We were told to shut up and get back to work, and I do have rather strong feelings on that but it's because I lived through it, I experienced this, I witnessed these things myself. You know, if they try to say, "Oh that never happened, "I can say," Yes it did because I watched it happen." So I'm hoping they will be a little bit more considerate towards the staff now. I don't know how they're going to do it.

I mean, obviously they're talking about moving most, if not all, staff out of the building, so in one sense that would be a solution to the whole idea of staff expected to keep on going through whatever is coming down on top of them, literally. I don't know. They're going to have to I think keep some people in the building. They might be moving things around a little bit, but they've got to – so maybe that will solve the bulk of that problem. But yeah, the second renovation was really building the BLC here, which involved some noise, but they had a wall put up at the south end of the existing building, which deadened some of the noise. There was some.

There used to be a semicircular well from the library, which ran around really right where we are now, which was supposed to be a light well to let light down as far as D level at this end of the building. Well the BLC was built where that light well was, so they had to dig out and then knock out this semicircular concrete retaining wall. Of course that involved jackhammering. That became very loud. The people in A level farther down, closer to this end of the building from us, they had a bad time for a while.

That was probably the worst of it. After that it was just normal construction noise, which the wall they had in between did help to deaden some, but it also took away a lot of study space with students, but at least it did deaden some of the noise. So that was
not anywhere near as bad an experience as the 1990's renovation was. I hope nobody ever has to go through that again because that was – we did get – they gave us an extra day of vacation as –

**AS:**  In exchange?.

**JS:**  For us serving through and keeping going through all this we got an extra day of vacation that year, so there was – we said thank you. [*Laughs*]

**AS:**  Very interesting. [*Both laugh*]

**JS:**  You mentioned the Mattin Center too, which in 2001 they opened the Mattin Center, named for an alumnae and donor Christina Mattin. It was composed of three different buildings, each named for somebody else. It was built as a student arts center, which I think the administration thought, well, that's close enough to a student center. That'll be fine. That's what they want, that's what they need.

Well it turned out to be not quite what the students wanted, because these administrators thought, well we've not actually been in the classroom for decades, but we know exactly what these students want so we're going to build that for them and they will thank us. And they quickly found out that, no, that's not what the students thought a student center should be. It did serve that function for many years, but finally, and perhaps to a certain someone's credit, they decided that maybe we really ought to listen to the students, ask them what they want in a student center and try to follow up on that. They did that, and so I think they got some good information. Which probably disagreed with what some of the people over in Garland thought the students should want or would want. But of course then they decide, well we can’t – we're going to build this new structure on the site of the existing student arts center, so of course the existing student art center has to go away.

[*1:35:00*]

So 20 years after they finished building the Mattin Center, you know, last year, starting last summer, they began knocking down the Mattin Center and Whitehead Hall, which was nearby, because the new student center is supposed to occupy I guess both of the footprint of not only the Mattin Center but the old Whitehead Hall which had been sitting beside the Powerhouse.

**AS:**  Right.
JS: So that's going to be a disruption. The banners keep saying it'll be finished in the fall of 2024, and that may be correct. It may get pushed back. But until then, there's going to be noise. To some of us, of course, it provides entertainment as we look out the window and wonder why they're doing what they're doing or imagine the beautiful Lake Mattin out there. [Both laugh]

AS: I know too it's been – we've had our thoughts about the other historic buildings that are around, so it's very close to Merrick Barn, which is an original structure.

JS: Yeah, right. One of the original buildings on campus prior to the university taking over this property.

AS: Right.

JS: I wondered if there's any chance of what they're doing destabilizing that 200-and-some-year-old barn.

AS: Right. So far it looks okay, but we'll see.

JS: So far it's still standing. [Laughs]

AS: Yeah, we'll see. So shifting back a little bit to the actual collections themselves, I am really curious if there's like – and this might be our last question for today, if you want to talk about favorites that you've processed, ones that you reference often, you know, patrons ask about, or just ones that you find particularly interesting, because you've had a pretty wide experience working with different types of collections.

JS: Yeah. When I began, you know, again, one of my major duties was processing records. The very first thing I worked on was the minutes of the Board of Trustees, and that was not a huge collection. After that, I took on the Office of the President, which had been begun by my predecessor and then she left in the middle of the biggest series of that collection, and I finished that up. I did probably 75% of the work, she did about a quarter before I got here. It was really interesting as you could see all the things the President was involved in at the time, some things that you wouldn't ever imagine he might be involved in. But yes, there were things regarding the community. You know, people were writing to him and expressing their views on this, that and something else, even though he's not an elected official or any appointed government official. Because he's president of a major institution
in this city it's assumed that he has knowledge of that and has an opinion on that one way or the other.

But I guess the collection that I've enjoyed working with most often is the photograph collection; I am a photographer myself. I began looking at the photograph collection early on and I've probably gone through those boxes many times over. Some of the folders I've gone through many times, and until last year that collection was here onsite and it was easy to go through it. And if I was looking for something, I could try various topics because I wasn't always sure I remembered. I knew I'd seen it but where I'd seen it. So I'd pull a box off and look there, and no it's not not there, okay, try this one. But I mean it's always been fascinating to me, as I think it has been interesting to students as well, but the early photographs of this place, photographs showing students in classes as well as engaging in fun activities.

Yes, college students have had fun at college ever since the beginning of universities, sometimes frowned upon their faculty who think they ought to be spending 24/7 with their nose in a book. But it's always been interesting to see these things. I enjoy looking at historical photographs and looking at things and seeing things oftentimes that I hadn't seen before even though I might've looked at it many times before. There was one case, a photograph of a faculty member named William McElroy. The catalogue record for that image says that he's sitting in front of a pile of minerals on a table in front of him.

[1:40:00]

And that's how it was catalogued. I looked at it – not the first time I looked at it, but I looked at it eventually and I thought, wait a minute, because I realized that McElroy's, his claim to fame was that he had done experiments with the substance that makes fireflies light up at night. Something called luciferin. And I knew because I had read elsewhere he used to pay neighborhood kids to bring him jars of fireflies, dead fireflies, and he'd pay them like a quarter a jar or something like that for these fireflies. And I looked and it's funny, I went, no, what that professor is sitting behind is not a pile of minerals. It's a large, about a foot high maybe pile of dead fireflies. There had to be thousands upon thousands of fireflies in that pile. [Laughs]

AS: Incredible. That's wild.
And as a kid I used to go out at dusk on summer nights and grab fireflies, put them in a jar, put some grass in there, poke a few holes in the lid so that they can breathe and then take them in, let it sit beside my bed at night, and once in a while one of them would light up and, ooh, that's cool, and then the next day let them out if they survived. Some of them didn't survive the night for whatever reason, but then I would take them out, put them outside, take the lid off the can and eventually they would crawl their way out of the jar. [Laughs]

Yeah. I think the photograph collection is really neat. So what years does the photograph collection span?

The earliest photograph is probably photographs of Daniel Coit Gilman. I think there's something in here from 1850s maybe or at least 1860s. I'm not sure exactly what the earliest is, but probably a photograph of Gilman from the 1860s might be the earliest. We also have – when he was still out in California, before coming to Hopkins, so early 1870s, there's at least one photograph of him there. That's probably the oldest photograph.

I think there is one or two daguerreotypes in our department. They're not part of the historical photo collection because I don't think they depict anything of Hopkins. I think they're –

They're not related.

They're daguerreotypes taken, created somewhere else, so they're not considered part of that collection.

Okay.

But yeah, there are a lot of photographs from the 1800s. The original campus buildings, just about all of them, were documented photographically, to a greater extent or lesser extent depending on the building, but we have those photographs so it's easy to see, because none of those buildings are still standing and they've long since been torn down.

So I guess I'll ask one more about the periods, people or events in Hopkins history that are kind of most interesting to you, and that's kind of a good segue I guess from the very beginning of the university because I know you often give lectures on the first faculty members, but it doesn't have to be something that you're asked to talk about. Are there any particular periods, people or events in Hopkins history that you find particularly interesting?
Well I guess because my initial graduate study was in the American Civil War, that's sort of what I've been interested in all along, and obviously Hopkins didn't come about until 11 years after the end of the Civil War. But of course, as we know, one of our faculty members, Basil Gildersleeve, served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and that's always been a connection with me to the early faculty members, the early people involved in the history of the university. So really I guess what has drawn me is the earliest years, the 1800's, the pre 20th century period as well as my current reading interesting, my reading interest for the past many years now has been World War II.

So I've really become interested in thinking about how World War II affected Hopkins and really all universities in the country. Prior to World War II, there was almost no government-funded research. During the war, that became a huge emphasis as the governments were paying universities to do research and to develop new apparatus, new weapons, and of course Hopkins with its (?) with the proximity fuse, which was the founding project of what became APL, but how the university existed during World War II with a president who was spending half his week in Washington as an advisor to the State Department and basically leaving the university in the hands of the provost at the time, P. Stewart Macaulay.

They managed to run the university. Of course, everything the university did at the time during the war was focused on the war effort. The chemists were involved in new discoveries to benefit weaponry and the humanities were involved in translating foreign documents and things like that. So everything had some connection with the war effort. We have not seen that kind of mobilization since then and we probably never will. I mean, Korea was a drop in the bucket. Vietnam was just over there somewhere and we never really devoted a lot of time to benefitting the war effort in any sense of the term, good or bad.

Of course, you know, APL has been around all along and they have developed guidance systems for various missiles, and they've been criticized for that throughout virtually our entire existence. That's been one of the emphases of the university, and APL is helping the government in return for what the government pays us. Now there's a lot less government funding, a lot less military
funding of APL, so they've had to branch out and find ways to benefit the civil sector of the society.

AS: And Hopkins was also impacted by World War II, I guess the aftereffects of it with GIs coming to campus.

JS: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So I think that's an interesting aspect too in terms of the housing that was available to them. It was married housing and those sorts of things.

JS: Yeah. The first off-campus housing acquired by the university was Bradford Hall, the corner of 33rd and St. Paul, which was acquired I believe in 1946 when the university realized that the many students coming to campus, either returning or coming for the first time were older because they had served in the military. Many of them were married, and the dormitory setting with a bathroom down the hall didn't really appeal to them. So okay, let's buy this apartment building and make it into married student housing, and they did that.

You know, the Homewood down on the 3000 block of North Charles was the second one along those lines, you know, married student housing. I'm not sure if it still is that, but when it was acquired that's what it served as. But yeah, there were changes, of course changes reflecting social changes in the university. The first – I guess the second Black students admitted were in the late 1940s after Kelly Miller. I guess you'd call him the one-off in the 1880s. For whatever reason he was the one and only until the late 1940s.

AS: And he was in a graduate program?

JS: He was a graduate student in mathematics for two years in the 1880s. And since then I guess it's the university realizing, okay, society is changing. We may or may not like the direction it's going, but we have to keep up. Really the students really were at the forefront of integrating Charles Village at the time. Charles Village was very much white only, and the students were the ones who began staging protests and sit-ins at the various bars and restaurants in Charles Village, and it was the university who said, "If we don't get out in front of this in a hurry we're going to look really stupid."

So they came up, "Okay, yes, you know, we support the students' efforts to integrate Charles Village. We also are going to go one
further and we're going to set up a housing registry. If you want to be on the approved registry to rent to Hopkins students, you have to agree to not discriminate in renting housing on the basis of ethnic background or anything like that." It didn't mean that they couldn't still do that, it just meant that they couldn't be on this official registry which was where a lot of students would come to – okay, this apartment building, yes, they're on the registry, okay, I can – here's the contact information. I'll go check with them and see what they can tell me.

In those years, of course, freshman only were living on campus. Sophomores, juniors and seniors had to find their own housing. Nowadays, of course, it’s freshman and sophomores who are required to live on campus, and juniors and seniors have to find their own housing.

**AS:** Well I think that's a really great spot for us to stop now.

**JS:** Okay.

**AS:** So I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording.

[New recording begins]

So this is Allison Seyler with Jim Stimpert here at the Brody Learning Commons on September 14, 2022.

[1:50:00]

And we are doing part two of an oral history interview for the Hopkins Retrospective Program. So today I wanted to just start with circling back a little bit about a question that we had discussed the other day, and I was kind of curious about how you may have provided access to images, photographs or reproduce those things for patrons in the past.

**JS:** Yeah. Okay, prior to the advent of any digital scanners, the only way we could produce copy prints of images in our collection was to photograph the photograph. And we would take it to the lab and they would create a four-by-five copy negative and then print whatever prints we wanted from that copy negative. Now for a long time, in the earlier years, we did not have any sort of photographic capability anywhere on this campus. And I think this was for at least two or three years. It's hard to believe it went on that long when I describe what the process was, but I believe it was at least two or three years.
But there was an office in the East Baltimore campus, Pathology Photography, and they did a lot of the photography for the Chesney Medical Archives as well. So what we would do, if we needed a photograph duplicated, something other than a photocopy, we would take the print, put it in an envelope, carry it down to the shuttle stop, which at that time was behind Shriver Hall, and put it on the bus, let the driver know that somebody would be picking it up in East Baltimore. Someone from the Chesney Archives, who we would have called in advance and set this up, they would send someone out to the bus stop to meet the right bus and pick up the envelope.

Then they would carry it on to Pathology Photography with our information inside as to what was needed, and then two or three days later they would reverse the process. They would pick up the envelope from Path Photo, drop it off with the shuttle, let me know when they had done that and I would go toddling off toward the back of Shriver Hall to the shuttle stop and pick up hopefully the original image as well as the copy negative and whatever prints we had requested. There were a couple of occasions where the wires got crossed a little bit and it was not on the same bus, and at least on one occasion I know I had to drive down to East Baltimore on Saturday morning because we had somehow missed connections.

I don't recall who did what, but because no one had picked up the envelope, the driver at the end of his shift had left it in the security office in East Baltimore. So I drove down there, and sure enough there it was. I think they asked me for an ID and I showed them my ID and they gave me the envelope. As far as I know that only happened once. Sometimes they forgot to meet the bus at that end, and at least a few times I think I forgot to meet the bus at this end.

I think we would occasionally send a student if we had someone available, but we had a lot fewer students at the time so that was not always a possibility. Most of the time it was me and someone from the Chesney Archives at the other end picking this up. So when I think back on that, that was an extremely cumbersome way of doing things. Fortunately, it did not happen on a daily or even weekly basis, but usually at least once or twice a month we would have to use that procedure. And as I say, the process was to create a copy negative by photographing the photograph on four-by-five film and then we would get that negative back so that if somebody else wanted copies of that same image, instead of sending the original print back again we could just send that copy negative down, let them know what size prints we wanted and how many
we wanted, but it was the same procedure with using the shuttle buses.

At that time, they weren't running as many shuttle buses as they are nowadays. Nowadays, when there are three or four buses lined up at the bus stop at any one time, trying to figure, okay, which bus might this envelope be on would be extremely confusing and frustrating. But it worked then because I think they were only running at most every half hour. I think during the rush hours they would run more buses, but we would avoid that and we would just do it around between, say, 10:00 and 3:00 during the day.

So we could be more sure of meeting the right bus and making the connection at both ends.

**AS:** And so today, you know, like in 2022, how do – do we get many requests for printed photographs or how do we provide those photographs for patrons?

**JS:** We don't really get that many requests anymore for prints. I think most people are savvy enough now to realize that what they're going to get is going to be a digital image. Whether or not that's what they want as an end result, that's not our problem. But what we do is we will provide a digital version, usually a TIF image of generally at least 600 dpi, so it's sufficient resolution to create almost any kind of print somebody might want.

If they have a need for something that they're going to put on a wall or something, or a large photo to have on a wall, they do need higher resolution. Of course we can now scan those images at the higher resolution, up to, say, 4800 dpi, and we can provide again the TIF image via our file-sharing site. They can download it there and then they can have it printed however they want to, if they have the ability in house to print their own photographs or they can upload them to a commercial photo printing service. That's not our responsibility. It's up to them to figure out how to make the required use of the digital image that we supplied.

But very seldom anymore does anybody ask for a paper photographic print of anything. If they do, and I think we have on occasion been asked that very rarely, but we have on occasion been asked that, and I tell them, "No, sorry, you will get a digital image and then it is up to you." I think I've also given suggestions for what labs they might use to upload to if they're new at that task or
don't know what the process is. I've told them, "Okay, you can go to this lab or this lab, upload your image and put in your information. You put in your credit card information and they will be happy to print whatever you want and ship it to you, either UPS or FedEx."

AS: Yeah, there's a lot easier ways to print materials now, and I think a lot of our requests too come in as just reproductions for books and print materials, that kind of thing.

JS: Yeah, and a lot of requests too are just for a website, a web image. So the jpegs that we have on the JScholarship site for the graphic and pictorial collection, those are generally sufficient for any non-print use that people might have, and that is a large part of what people want now, just something to accompany a blog article or some other online article. We usually try to – I try to check with them – and say okay, what is the end product that you have for this?

If it's just something that'll be viewed on a computer monitor then the jpegs that we have should be more than sufficient. Obviously if they want to print something larger and on paper or in print then a jpeg might not be sufficient and that's why we do offer then to supply the higher res TIF images for those purposes.

AS: Yeah, it's great to be flexible. So I am really curious about this question. It's kind of one of my favorites. I know you've developed a lot of relationships with different folks at Hopkins, and I wanted to ask you about those. Are there any that you want to highlight? I know you've had the opportunity to work with different historians and alumni and some community members.

I won't name them all but I have a few in mind. I know you've helped some folks write some books along the years and then also have supported recently some historians doing some research on our first presidents and that sort of stuff. So I'll let you kind of chime in there with your highlights.

JS: Okay. Yeah. Based on some of the suggestions that you made, I will comment on them. Neil Grauer is a third generation Hopkins alumnus. His father, his grandfather both went to Hopkins, and we have papers of his family as well as Neil's papers himself. He spent most of his working life working at Hopkins in one capacity or another.
He's sort of always been there in various capacities and with various divisions of the university. He's written at least a couple of histories of a couple of medical divisions. I know he wrote the history of the school of nursing and I think the school of medicine as well, so he's been primarily affiliated with the medical divisions; however, he was at one time working here on this campus. He lives close by. In fact, he lives across the street from me in a different condo building.

But he and I sort of got together once. He asked me once what was the significance of these two wooden poles in the ground in front of Gilman Hall on either side of the main sidewalk, and I had seen them. I had never stopped to look at them, but I knew what he was talking about. There were these two white poles about seven or eight feet tall each, and he one day got curious. He went over to look at them more closely and found a little plaque attached to them saying that this was the Robert Layfield Memorial, and he started asking me about that.

And I said, hmm, that's fascinating. I had never looked at them. Again, I knew what he was talking about. I walked over there myself and looked at them, saw the little plaque, and then I started looking through the photograph collection and looked for photographs of Gilman Hall, and sure enough a lot of the photographs from the 1920's and early 1930's had a flagpole standing on either side of the main entrance to Gilman Hall. There were two flagpoles.

None of the photographs we have show anything on the other flagpole. One of them usually had the US flag flying from it. It could be that the intention was that the Maryland flag would be hoisted on the other flagpole. I don't think Hopkins, we've ever had a flag for our university or nothing that was ever run up a flagpole, but perhaps the Maryland flag most closely resembled the University of Maryland, which of course was our major lacrosse rival, maybe someone decided, well, we are not going to honor our archrival by displaying the flag which is very similar to that university down in College Park.

But anyway, when they were getting ready to start the renovations of Gilman Hall in 2008, we learned that they were going to take that memorial down and they would put up something suitable somewhere else, and we kind of said, okay, yeah, kind of suspecting what they really had in mind was not exactly what they told us. They took out those basically white stumps out of the
ground, and we don't know why they cut those flagpoles down. It could be maybe they were wood and after a few years they started rotting and they decided it was not worth putting them up again.

But what we discovered, and I need to backtrack here, what we discovered is that in 1914, an undergraduate by the name of Robert Layfield, was playing quarterback for the Hopkins football team, was playing up in I think Lehigh, Pennsylvania. At that time, when you played football you played both offense and defense. He was quarterback. He was also then a defensive back when Hopkins was on defense. The opposing ball carrier was heading for our goal line. Layfield was the only person between them. He made a flying tackle, brought down the ball carrier, short of the goal line. Unfortunately, the ball carrier fell on top of Layfield, who I think was about 140 pounds maximum maybe. The ball carrier was considerably larger than Layfield was. So as one account at the time said, the ball carrier got up after the tackle, Layfield did not. And it was later determined that he had broken his spine in the tackle, so he was laying there on the field paralyzed.

He ultimately, of course, was taken to a hospital. This was in 1914, I believe. He was taken to a hospital where they realized they really can't do anything for him. They patched him up as best they could and they sent him back down – his family was from Wilmington, Delaware – I think they sent him to Delaware first. They couldn't really do anything there, so they contacted Hopkins medicine and the doctors here came up with basically what was a last-ditch effort to save the guy's life. They said, you know, this is a Hail Mary pass really, but it's the only thing that we can try that has not been tried.

So they brought him back to Hopkins Hospital. They did this surgery. It was not successful. He wound up being in a full-body cast for several months. And his teammates wanted to cancel the rest of the season. They were heartbroken at their teammate's mortal injuries, what it turned out to be.

He in his best Knute Rockne fashion said, "No, you must go back out there, you must keep playing, and I'll be out there again with you soon. You know, they're going to fix this. I'm going to be out back on the team. I'll be out there with you." And of course that did not happen. The team, as I recall, when checking the schedule and the scores, had been something like two and two up at that point.
They lost every game after that for the rest of the season. I think it seems fairly clear that their hearts were not in the game even though they were on the field. The yearbook at the time made a departure, because the yearbook was primarily published by the seniors and focused on the senior class of that year. They published a full-page tribute to Robert Layfield, who was at that time a freshman, and published a full-page tribute to him noting what had happened and their admiration for him for his perseverance. By that point I think he had passed away. Anyway, this goes back to the memorial being taken down in front of Gilman Hall. Later on, when they finished the renovations, we started inquiring as to, okay, you said you were going to put up another memorial somewhere else. Gosh, you know, where is this memorial? Well, they hadn't quite gotten around to it yet. They were still studying the matter. And it became clear that they really didn't intent to put up any sort of a replacement.

Well Neil and I, I think, sort of shamed the relevant individuals in the athletic center or in athletics into doing something, initially saying we don't want to focus on something so negative as this. Why not? Okay, yes, the truth is that Robert Layfield remains the only Hopkins athlete to die as a result of injuries incurred during play in any sport – football, lacrosse, basketball, whatever.

**AS:** Wow.

**JS:** He was the only Hopkins athlete to die as a result of injuries suffered during play. I think we did finally shame them into saying, oh, all right, we'll put up something near I think the lacrosse center up near – somewhere around Homewood Field. I have not seen it myself. Neil I think did say that he had been there and he checked up on them and, yes, there is something there. It's not exactly a neon sign pointing to it, but there is something there now to replace what was removed from in front of Gilman Hall. Maybe they took those flagpoles down because they thought at the time, well, this is too morbid, this is celebrating the death of an individual. Well, you could also say they were celebrating the life of that individual as well, not just his untimely demise.

**AS:** Yeah. So I think one of the things that I find fascinating about Neil too is just his penchant for Hopkins history and he's very committed to sharing it but also sparking ideas for you and others to kind of research and follow, so I think that's a really great example.
Yeah. Neil did write a little sidebar in the old Hopkins magazine on this matter to sort of enlighten readership as to what happened. Coincidentally, around the time they were talking about this, and we were trying to urge them, I received a phone call out of the blue from apparently a descendent of Robert Layfield, who was then living in West Virginia, saying that she had just heard that there was some sort of a memorial on Hopkins campus to her, I don't know, grandniece or something, great-grandniece possibly, but she was a collateral descendent of Layfield. And that was right at the time – and I thought at first someone had prompted her to do it or they had heard about what was going on here. Well no, apparently it was totally serendipitous. She heard about this and she tried to contact us. So I told her what I knew and what the current status was, and I passed her name along more or less to show people, okay, there are people interested in this. Why don't you get moving and do something? And also mentioned that to Neil Grauer. So for all I know that might've helped matters along too.

But eventually they did do, in my estimation and in Neil's estimation, the right thing and put up something else to commemorate the life, not necessarily the death, of freshman Robert Layfield.

That's great. So are there other folks you want to chime in about too? I know you worked with Mame Warren, for instance, on her book.

Mame Warren. I'll comment next on I think Ross Jones.

Okay.

Before the archives became part of the library, Ross Jones was our boss. We reported to him. And upon his retirement as vice president of Hopkins, he had a lot more time on his hands. He was also Hopkins alumnus, had spent most of his career here. I think he spent some time in the army and then working in some private company, but he came back to Hopkins I think in the 1950's as an advisor to Milton Eisenhower and remained as an advisor at least through President Brody. I think he retired while William Brody was president.

But upon his retirement, he started doing some research. He wrote a few articles for the Gazette, sort of looking back, historical-type articles for the old Hopkins Gazette, which was our official newspaper at the time as distinguished from the Johns Hopkins...
News-letter, which was the student newspaper. So he had an interest in Hopkins history. Somewhere along the line he became acquainted with Elisabeth Gilman, the daughter of our founding president Daniel Coit Gilman. He started looking into that and saw that, you know, there had been no biography of Lizzie Gilman, as she was known, and he took it upon himself to start researching and writing about a biography.

He completed it. It was published – four or five years ago I think it was published, and he did a very good job on it. We supplied materials for him. Elisabeth Gilman was quite the character in her own right. An early feminist, certainly. She was also campaigning for the right for women to vote early on. She also became a socialist later on in her life and ran for the governor several times, ran for various other lesser offices in Maryland several times and never even got close to being elected to any of those offices.

But she made sure that people were aware of who she was and what she was and what she believed. This I think is what made her fascinating to Ross, who wrote this book which I read and found it also very fascinating. Ross did a couple of book talks up at Evergreen, which I found fascinating also because he sort of branched off a little bit further into the Gilman family, the Garrett family and how they intertwined.

Then there was also Barry Richmond, who I first became acquainted with when he showed up at a couple of our commemoration day ceremonies in the Glass Pavilion. At the time, I didn't really know who he was. He showed up, he started talking, and we were talking and talking and talking, and next year he came back and we started talking more and found out that he was also Hopkins alumnus, was a retired federal administrative judge, I believe, again, still with a deep interest in Hopkins history.

I found out also that he was coordinating an annual birthday observance for our founder Johns Hopkins at Clifton with the country estate that our founder owned until his death, and he every year, around May 19th, which was Johns Hopkins' birthday, he would have this basically ceremony where he would invite members of the Hopkins family as well as others to come, and there would also be one person giving a principle address. And I think in 2015 he asked me to do that, so I wound up giving a 15-minute talk on the early founding of the university. Each of the 12 trustees gave a little capsule bio of them and it then went on from there.
So Barry was always someone else who was always there. He was definitely always there commemoration day, and he was also a huge patron of the Johns Hopkins Club and would invite us over to lunch on occasion at the club on his membership, which we of course always appreciated. But Barry is still around. I kind of think he's given up on the idea of these annual ceremonies. I think they became a little bit too much for him to handle. It really was basically a one-man show. He was doing all of the booking, all the planning with some help from staff out at Clifton, but he was primarily the entire show according to my understanding of how thing worked.

[2:15:00]

AS: And with the pandemic it's much harder to gather in person.

JS: Right. Obviously, you know, the event that would've taken place in 2019 was canceled because there was a flower show in Philadelphia around the same time, and Barry wanted to go to that and knew that a lot of the folks who would otherwise be at Clifton would be up at Philadelphia, so he canceled that with the understanding that in 2020 we would resume these things. Of course, this would've taken place in May 2020, and by May 2020 we were deep into COVID and everything was shut down and nobody was supposed to breathe on anybody else because of that. So 2021 was more of the same.

I did ask him – I think I contacted him earlier this year to find out if he was planning anything for 2022 since things were reopening. I think what he told me was no, he was sort of evaluating things. So it's possible there might be something happening in 2023. It would be nice if there would. It would be nice if there was someone who could help him plan this and not make it just a whole one-man operation.

AS: Sure.

JS: Bill Leslie, professor who I gather I think is now professor emeritus of history of science and technology. He was someone who early appreciated the archives, and he would come in and do research on what we have. He taught a lot of classes. Obviously I wish I could've taken a class with him because he was probably the most enthusiastic history teacher at any level that I have ever come across in my life. He projected this enthusiasm, something that would make students want to study history even if they had no intention of majoring in history.
He made it interesting for them and made them want to find out more to do well in the class, do the assignments to the best they could, and he would bring classes over here and I would give them a little tutorial on looking at original materials, evaluating those materials and figuring out, okay, you know, what biases might be apparent in these materials or partly submerged in the materials? What other viewpoints might there be on whatever that topic was? Then they would break down into groups, study these things, come back and report.

Then Bill and I would comment on them. It was really fascinating. There was one class that took place right here, where as they were doing this exercise, Bill was going around from one group to another saying, "Wow, this is great, this is fantastic." [Laughs] I assume Bill is still working on his history, which hopefully will come out soon. I hope it does, because from what I've heard of it I think it will be a major addition to the knowledge surrounding our history.

Mike Benson is someone I worked with more recently on apparently just a visit to Baltimore to visit a donor or something who was living around here. At that time, he was president of Eastern Kentucky University. He dropped in – as the story goes, as he tells it, he dropped in at the Hopkins Bookstore looking for a biography of Daniel Coit Gilman. I guess he had heard of Gilman as the founding president and he was interested in reading more about him. Apparently he was standing in line, was asking the clerk behind the counter at the bookstore, and someone who I presume was your predecessor Jenny I guess was standing behind him in line, heard him ask the clerk, so she chimed in because she know there has been no biography of Gilman published for almost 100 years. And that is what prompted I think Mike Benson to come over here, ask, and yes, we confirmed that that was the case, and he started doing a little look into it and thought he'd write an article maybe for a journal or magazine on Gilman. It quickly turned into a book project, which he talked to the Hopkins Press and they approved it. So Mike – I think this was in 2018 that he started working on this, and the book is scheduled to be published on October 18th of this year, 2022, so I'm looking forward to seeing it in print.

[2:20:00]

I did work with him very closely. I've read the book a couple of times, especially the parts relating to this university, I've read
myself and I commented on them both for the press as well as for Mike's own benefit as he was in the writing process. That was one of my work-from-home tasks when we were shut down during COVID, so that worked out pretty well. But Mike was really, I'd have to say, a dream researcher. He was someone who – you know, he would talk with you, he would ask for your expertise. He did not claim to know everything himself.

He would ask people for their viewpoints on things and I would suggest resources to him. He would look at them and he would come back with further questions, which I would try to answer and produce additional materials if we had them to produce. He was really a lot of fun to work with, very undemanding. You know, he would make clear what it was he was looking for and the question he was trying to answer and then it was up to us to produce what we had or to tell him in some cases I don't think there is any documentation for that, unfortunately. I wish there was.

Another researcher that I worked with prior to that was Mame Warren. She was engaged I think it was 1998 or '99 to write a book on Hopkins for what was then the 125th anniversary celebration, which took place in 2001. So she was engaged to write – it was never really intended to be an institutional history. It was meant to be a coffee table type book with lots of photographs. But she did a lot of research. Mame herself was the daughter of a regional photographer, Marion Warren, who did a lot of photography in and around the Chesapeake Bay area.

Mame served as her father's assistant out in the field as well as writing text and captions to accompany the books that her father published. So that gave her a start I guess in research and writing. So she had written – I think at that time she was at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, and she had written a history of that institution I think for some anniversary that they were celebrating, and that's what I think brought her to the attention of people around here, so she was engaged to write this history. So she – I worked with her closely. You know, she looked I think in most of our photograph collection at one time or another. Mame could be very demanding, but she always made it clear how much she appreciated what we were doing for her. It seemed at times like she wanted something yesterday, but she did always make it clear that she appreciated what we were doing, and she was under certain time constraints and this had to be done by a certain time so it could get to the publishers so there could be books on hand to pass out to people or to sell for the 125th
anniversary celebration. And unfortunately, the biggest drawback of the book that she wrote was it contains no index and that was because they simply ran out of time.

I think it was printed in South Korea, and the book had to go to the printers by X date, otherwise it would not be on the boat heading back across the Pacific heading this direction in time to be used for the celebration. So unfortunately, you know, there is no index. She did produce a meticulous timeline, which has been very useful, covering not just the Homewood Campus Division but all divisions of the university. In fact, that's one section that I scanned and have saved as a PDF and given out or sent to various people who have asked questions. I thought, okay, I think this will be a benefit to you. So of course that goes up through the year 2000, so there have been 22 more years since then, but hopefully what is coming from Andy Jewett and/or Bill Leslie should cover the intervening 20 years.

*AS:*

Thanks, Jim. I just wanted to mention briefly that both Mame and Bill conducted oral histories for their book projects, so I don't know if you have anything to add about that. I guess just maybe that they are in the archives.

*JS:*

Yeah, I was not involved in any of that. I know Mame was doing oral histories. She did ask us for suggestions on people to interview, and she was also interested in not just in interviewing faculty and senior administrators, but she wanted to talk to students.

At the time, we had an undergraduate working for us who was a very free-thinking person, very smart person, very interesting person. And we said, "Why don't you talk to Chris?" So I put him in touch with Mame and they did an interview, and apparently Mame came out of it thinking this was one of the best interviews she had ever done. *[Laughs]* I think she really enjoyed it because Chris was very free with his estimations, his student's viewpoint, undergraduate's viewpoint on various things, which in some cases is different from what the people in the lofty offices believe or want others to believe sometimes. But yeah, I know she did quite a few oral histories, and of course she also included the movers and the shakers, the people in charge, the presidents, vice presidents, deans, faculty at various levels. Not just the senior faculty, but the lesser ranks as well, as well as other students, not just Chris, but across divisions. So, you know, she did create I think a balanced
picture of not just the quote/unquote official history as the administration might like it to be known, but the actual experiences of faculty, including younger faculty who were here at the time as well as students. So yeah, she did a lot, and that was really – Mame herself was a long-time oral historian. I think she had been involved in something called OHMAR, Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region. I think it stands for OHMAR, which was a group similar to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archivists, and there was some overlap there.

But she was active for a while in that organization, so she knew how to do oral history from the beginning. So she knew how to do it and that's how she did it. Then once she was done with her research, she turned these interviews over to the archives, and most of them are now in JScholarship. There are a few which are restricted for some period of time, but most of them are open to anybody with the time and interest to listen to them.

AS:
Thanks. So shifting a little bit to a different topic, I'm really curious if you could speak to some challenges that you've faced in your career. And that's a complicated question, so happy to see where you take it.

JS:
Okay, yes. Well in terms of the COVID shutdown, I will remember that I think for the rest of my life, because where we were was actually right here. Jenny Kinniff and I were – no, it was you. AS:
No, it was me.

JS:
That was you, of course. You and I were teaching a class on Johns Hopkins Baltimore for Odyssey, and during our first class meeting in here in the evening, we heard a roar come up from outside in the atrium where the students were gathered, and a lot of noise, and we kind of wondered “what was that?” And at the end of the class, one of the people in the class turned her phone back on and found an email saying that classes had been canceled for the rest of the week, and that was the week right before Spring Break, and they would revisit things and after Spring Break they would see what the conditions were and hopefully we would then reopen in some capacity, well of course we did not.

And thinking back on the very idea that they could've come back with two weeks after the beginning was, of course, perfect hindsight, but the whole idea that they could shut down for two weeks and then come back and everything will be fine, that just didn't happen. But at the end of that week then it was announced
that the library would be closing and that staff were expected to work from home, and that was when I got my first in-depth acquaintance with Zoom with your help. [Both laugh]

[Laughter]

And of course most of us quickly became sort of experts on Zoom and how it works and how to use it best and how not to use it and what to do in situations and whatever. But we shut down, so I was working at home. On my last day here, the Friday before the shutdown, you know, I packed up a few published histories and sources. I took them home with me. I figured, okay, however long we're out, these might come in handy. As it turned out, they did come in very handy because we were closed down completely until July of 2020. In July of 2020, we did partially reopen and I was one of the first to come back along with a couple of other staff.

[2:30:00]

We reopened a reading room on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only to Hopkins affiliates, but we were able to at least reopen in some capacity. And I will also always remember sitting in our reading room – we had a researcher in there. The first day back in July it was a dark, stormy morning, and I'm sitting in, looking out the reading room window realizing that first of all half of the lights were off outside anyway along with the dark and gloomy conditions outside looking out, and there was not another person in sight anywhere outside that huge picture window. Knowing that even over Christmas break there are people in the library doing something and moving around, and there was not a soul out there moving around anywhere near or far. I think, you know, this is completely unnatural. This is Hopkins. There are always Hopkins students as well as faculty in the building. [Laughs]

Of course, they weren't allowed in the building unless they – you know, undergraduates were banned from the building. The stacks were officially closed. Q and M levels were open, and everything below that was supposed to be closed except for staff who would go down and retrieve books on request from affiliates and then put them in paper bags and leave them between the outer and the inner doors of the entrance where people could then come and pick them up, and there'd be no personal contact between them.
I also remember bottles of disinfectant and all kinds of stuff. We were supposed to spray everything, wipe everything down, because at that time they just didn't know how long this virus was going to last on a table or a chair or a keyboard, and I think that sort of got old quickly. That was sort of a rule observed in the breach only. But for a while there we did try to – certain services we would try to disinfect. How can you disinfect a keyboard? You can't –

*AS:* We quarantined materials too.

*JS:* You can't dunk it in water – yeah. That was part of the idea of being open Monday, Wednesday and Friday only, was that it would give the materials a chance to rest for at least 48 hours. So whatever nasty things were on them would hopefully have kicked the bucket before someone came back two days later to use them. We were also supposed to keep things on hand for a certain amount of time before, setting them back again so that whatever germs, viruses, whatever were on them would hopefully have expired in the meantime.

Again, looking back on it, people just did not know what the situation was and the whole idea was better safe than sorry. They definitely erred on the side of caution, keeping things closed down. Not that we were the only ones. In fact, I think at least partially we opened a lot sooner than a lot of other institutions did. I think there are still some that are still closed to non-affiliates. We have been open to non-affiliates for quite a while now. But that was working from home, doing what I could. Another project which I'd already had sort of queued up was updating the history of buildings on the Homewood Campus, which that was one of my goals for that year.

So that was something that I could do at home generally with the sources that I had or with the internet searching. I found a surprising, I guess to me – maybe it shouldn't have been surprising – but a surprising amount of material in terms of press releases, which would at least say, you know, who the architects were, who the builders were for this building. We know when it was dedicated, when it was opened on these press releases which were online. So that was a big help.

So I was able to do that and get things going again and try to at least answer a few of the questions people were asking. Part of my response was if they were coming at me outside – most of them I think had – they were checking just on the off chance, better – you know, no harm in asking. Is there any chance I could get in there? If you're not a Hopkins affiliate, sorry, no you can't. That's a
decision made by much higher echelons than me, and that is what we have been told. That is the law and that is what shall be enforced.

AS: Yeah, it was a pretty challenging time to kind of rethink how to do your work.

JS: Right.

AS: Especially when you're a person who has to have the physical collections in front of you to do your work.

AS: Right. It was. There were a lot of questions I couldn't answer.

[2:35:00]

A lot of them I followed up on since then or people have gotten back to me and said, you know – of course not knowing how long this was going to last, I'd say, "Well, you know, check back in X number of months to see if things have changed because we don't know and we might not necessarily be the first ones to know based on the communication around here sometimes. [Both laugh] But check back is all I can say, and I'll let you know what the current status is then and what we know if we know anything further about it." But again, nobody knew what was going on or what the proper course should be, so let's shut everything down and hope for the best.

AS: So I am also very curious about what you're proudest of in your career.

JS: I would say lasting 39 years. [Both laugh]

AS: Yeah, making it this far.

JS: Thirty-nine years, you know, dealing with the administration of this place, which sometimes you wonder, okay, I can see where the book *Alice in Wonderland* came from because we have definitely fallen down a rabbit hole, [laughs] and I'm sure you've experienced the same thing in your tenure here. But I have developed a deep respect for this institution. You know, we have done a lot of things right, a few things we have done maybe less than right over the years or even now currently perhaps, but we have done a lot of things right. Daniel Coit Gilman was instrumental in changing the whole approach to higher education in the United States, bringing in the seminar method of instruction
basically from Germany, but from Europe in general. That's how things were done. That was not how things were done around here, and Gilman saw the chance to make a change somewhere where you didn't have a lot of faculty saying we've always done it this way, it's always worked, why should we change, we don't want to change. There were no faculty at the time. He came up with this idea. The faculty that he hired, he said, "Okay, this is what we're going to do, so if you're not on board with this now then let me know because this is how it's going to work."

Well most of them of course had studied in Europe, if not actually being from Europe, so most of them were, "Yeah, that's the way it should be done. God bless you, Daniel." [Laughs] So that's how they went on. I like to say by the turn of the 20th century, 25 years later, virtually every college or university in this country had adopted or was moving toward adopting the same method of instruction that we had started in this country, in part because they were saying – they could see employers coming to Hopkins saying, "Who do you have graduating in the next year or two because we're interested in hiring them."

Their own graduates weren't getting quite the same amount of attention, and they realized, okay, we've got to change, we've got to catch up if we want to stay in the running. So it works for them, so if we change it'll work for us and our graduates will be in the same kind of demand that Hopkins graduates are.

**AS:** And I think too the administration, he talked about the administration generally, but then there's also the more specifics I think of the environment of the library, and so working here under different leadership, under different managers, I think that's something to be really proud of too, because there's different personalities and different tenures of folks. So 39 years is – yeah.

**JS:** And I can remember, I think this was either prior to the archives becoming part of the library or shortly afterward, but the person who was then head of reference, you know, there is no such job title now, but the person who was then head of reference, she apparently was quite surprised when she learned that I was answering questions relating to Hopkins history, because I was not a quote/unquote reference librarian so how could I possibly have the audacity to answer reference questions? And I explained to her as gently as I could that I know a good bit about this place. People ask me, I'm going to answer them.
I am not going to refer them to someone else who I know knows less than I do about that topic. [Laughs] And I think once she got used to the idea she realized, okay, yes, Hopkins history questions, send those on to Jim. He can answer them easier and faster than we can, and we'll have time for more important stuff.

AS: Well and honestly, I can't imagine right now anyone referring anyone to anyone else other than you.

[2:40:00]

[Both laugh]

AS: So, you know, it makes sense to me. So, you know, with that, I know you're going to be retiring soon. I wanted to ask what sorts of hobbies or things you're going to be pursuing in your newfound spare time.

JS: Photography is my primary interest outside of working hours, and when I will have more time to devote to photography, to creating more images and maybe figuring out a way to make use of them, which might bring a little bit more money to myself, one of the ideas that I've been playing with and that I'm going to start assembling the hardware is what I want to do is start experimenting with photographing flowers indoors in a controlled environment, basically an enclosed cube which has lights that I can position and turn around and other spotlights to photograph flowers and develop my own vision as use effects, lighting effects as well as other effects in Photoshop on those flowers, because that really takes hours at a time to do and it's not something that I really – I did – early on in the pandemic, I was out at the grocery store and I picked up a bouquet of cut flowers and brought them home and just played with them, doing some photography. It helped to maintain my sanity in that line. I think that was maybe in April of 2020 that I did that. Yeah, I don't really have enough time to devote to this now, but it's something that's in the back of my mind. I have been thinking about that more and it's something that I do want to get into. I think I have pretty much all the equipment that I will need to do that, and I am looking forward to that.

I enjoy hiking, being out in the wild. I began doing this in the 1980's before I knew there was such a genre as nature photography. I was hiking up at Gunpowder Falls State Park and taking a camera with me, which was at that time a little point-and-shoot camera, and I realized, okay, I want to do more than this camera is capable of doing, and that's when I got into higher end
cameras and interchangeable lenses and all that good stuff and shooting film at first, and then in 2006 moving over to digital photography where I've been ever since. Once of my fascinations is to use something called extended depth of field to create photographs with incredible depth of field far more than any lens can produce on its own by taking multiple images, changing the focus slightly between images, and then putting them together in software that will combine them, take the sharpest parts of each of those images and create a photograph with incredible depth of field.

That's been my primary interest in photography. I will still sometimes do other things, but I enjoy shooting landscapes too, sunrises, sunsets, but flowers are really my passion as well as now that I have this extended depth technique that's really made it even more interesting to me.

I just thought of this. I know you mentioned earlier not ever thinking that you would teach, and I just wanted to ask you briefly about how you have taught others photography or even how to store their photographs. I know that's a passion too.

Outside of Hopkins, I've given three or four photography workshops. A couple of them took place up at the Monkton Station along the NCR Trail, which is part of Gunpowder Falls State Park, and there was a park down in Calvert County that I did a workshop because I was visiting that park quite often. And a friend of mine that I met down there at that park, she and I did a workshop. So I've done some teaching of photography, the basics, you know, what to look for, how to develop your own vision, what to do, what are the rules and know the rules. Then if you choose to break the rules at least you know what you're doing and can decide, okay, yeah, I like that or, no, that didn't really work.

Then here at Hopkins, a former colleague and I were asked to do something over at the Homewood Museum in January on preserving family photographs, and so we did this 90-minute session, which was not nearly enough time to really cover what we wanted to cover and what we felt needed to be covered.

And I sort of came out of that thinking, oh, this could be expanded into something longer, and my thought was, okay, I wonder if my colleague here is interested in doing this or not. Well it turns out I think she was about to be a mother in the coming months so she
didn't want to. I didn't really want to jump in and say, okay, I'll take over, I'll do my part and yours. It became clear from talking to her that she had no intention of taking it any further. Okay, yeah, I would like to take that further, so I would handle both the preserving film and prints as well as preserving digital images, having done both in my own life.

So I pitched this to the folks who were running Odyssey at the time, and they picked up on it, and I offered three of those classes. The last one was on Zoom I think in Fall of 2020 or Spring of 2021. I think it was Fall of 2020.

AS: Yeah, I think so.

JS: That was the last one that I offered totally on Zoom. I had the satisfaction on all three occasions, that class sold out very quickly, and it was always the first one to sell out among the classes being offered that had something to do with photography in part because we kept it down to a smaller crowd rather than having a huge group because I wanted to make it more of a discussion-type thing rather than a lecture series with just talking to people and not letting them ask questions or interact or bring up their own issues or questions. But that was fun. By the end of the third one, I'm not sure that that class worked so well on Zoom as it would have in person. That sort of coincided with a whole new leadership in Odyssey and they didn't ask me if I wanted to continue and I didn't offer, so it sort of went away. I figured, you know, they knew what I had been doing, and if they were interested in continuing that they would've – they knew how to reach me, and they didn't so, okay, I think we're done with that. [Laughs]

AS: Yeah. I think it's still something that could potentially happen in the future, especially as you're figuring out your new schedule.

JS: And I also enjoy reading, mostly World War II nowadays, but I sometimes go back to my quote/unquote first love, the Civil War. I also enjoy reading mysteries set in the Southwest US. I read all of Tony Hillerman's books set on the Navajo Nation. Those books I found fascinating. I used to read one of those with a roadmap of Arizona open, because Hillerman would describe going up route such-and-such. I'd say, yeah, there it is on the map. Turning left on this route. Yeah, okay, that's where that road is. So that part was totally authentic. He wasn't making up roads that weren't there. He was using the actual roads that existed, and how it was not easy to get from one place to another. They were maybe 300 miles apart
with a single, two-lane road running to it with absolutely nothing in between, because that area is wide open. [Both laugh]

But there have been a few other authors, and in fact, Hillerman's daughter, Ann, has sort of picked up her father's characters and has written five or six additional novels using the same main characters. They're okay. You know, they're better than a lot in that genre. Of course, she's approaching it from a different perspective herself and I respect that. She's taken her characters the way she wants them to go. Okay, that's – and I'm sure there are people who prefer her books over her father's books, but I sort of prefer her father's books.

I've gone back and reread a few of those, which I almost never reread a book once I read it, but I've gone back and reread a few of Hillerman's books. Yeah, I also enjoy watching college football. It's now football season again, so I usually spend about 12 or 13 hours on a Saturday watching games starting at noon and ending at midnight or after.

[Laughter]

AS: While you have your chili cooking in the slow cooker.

JS: Right, right. If I could, I'd like to go back to something else that I am proud of, when you asked that, that question.

[2:50:00]

I mentioned earlier, but the Marcon database that we set up, you know, I set that up myself and I think I am justified in being proud of that. It was the first database that we had, and I set it up, we made it work. It had its faults, it had its bugs. Not all of them were ever ironed out. But anyway, it worked. It was something much better than what we had prior to that, which all we had prior to that was what was in our own heads and pulling a binder down and looking at a finding aid to see, okay, is there something here? No, okay, what other collections might there be? You know, there was no – this allowed us at least to search across collections and find out what we could know. Not something that the general public could access, but we could at least access it on their behalf and let them know what we found in terms of search matches or materials that might be useful to them.

And the other thing I'm proud of I mentioned earlier is setting up the digital camera on the copy stand when our Minolta scanner
went to the Great Beyond, wherever scanners go when they die. That saved us a lot of money at the time. It allowed us to keep producing images of rare books that we could not put face down on a copier because it would’ve damaged the pages or the bindings or whatever. So that's also – I'm very proud of that.

*AS*: Yeah. I think both of those things also indicate your willingness to embrace technology and change, and there's some leadership or archivists in the past who have maybe been not so keen on that, and so that's something I would say too, is that like you doing those things have allowed the department to modernize.

*JS*: When we got our first computer, I mentioned last time, Ross Jones had asked Julie, my predecessor, "Could you find use for a computer?" Well she of course said yes. So we placed the order and got the thing delivered. Now what the heck do we do?

*AS*: Right.

*JS*: And, you know, that was pre Windows. We were running DOS, disk operating system is what it stood for. Windows was a glimmer in Bill Gates' mind at the time and nothing more. It quickly became clear to me, and I don't mean to brag, that if one of us didn't start playing with this thing it was going to sit there and be a very expensive and very heavy paperweight. So I didn't know anything at all about computers at the time.

I managed to finagle someone from one of the IT offices around here outside the library, because the library had no IT office at the time, and I sort of bugged her a little bit. She ended up – I went over to see her. She wound up walking back from Garland over to the library with me, because she knew the only way to get me to shut up or go away would be to show me in person how to do it. So she came in and she showed me, and from there it was, oh, okay. I subscribed to a couple of magazines which were, I thought, very useful in explaining how these things worked and what you could do and troubleshooting these things.

Then when Windows came around, you know, the first version of Windows 3.0 and 3.1 were simply programs that ran on top of DOS. They weren't in themselves operating systems. That was not the case until Windows 95. But yeah, I was also proud of setting up that computer and getting it going. We, again, used Word Perfect, and I would show her, okay, this is what you do to run the program, this is how to save your document, this is how to send it to the printer when you're ready to print it.
Yeah, the basics.

Uh-huh.

Yeah. So those are all of the questions that I have for you, but I do like to end my interviews by asking if there's anything else you want to add or something that we didn't talk about here that you want to elaborate on.

I don't think there's really anything to add. I'll just say, you know, it has been a great ride for 39 years, and I've worked with a lot of wonderful colleagues, present company included. [Laughs]

Thanks, Jim.

And a lot of people who I've worked with who I respected very much who are no longer around here, but I learned from them and maybe they learned a few things from me, and now we've got new people coming in and asking questions. As I mentioned, right before I walked in here, somebody asked me a question which I answered for her.

[2:55:00]

So, you know, I've learned a lot. I'm still learning more about Hopkins, how this place runs and various aspects of our history that I was not aware of or was only vaguely aware of, and that's interesting. I will be continuing for some period of time in a part-time capacity, so I will still be around. I guess my final thought is no one is irreplaceable. I have no doubt that someone will step in, learn the history of this place, and make their own contributions as I have done or hope I have done over the past 39 years. Someone will come along and they will pick up and keep things moving. So I guess that's really all I have to say. [Laughs]

Thank you so much, Jim. That's a great point to end on. And I do think – I'm not going to get into the irreplaceable thing, but I do think that we will try to pick up and continue on and do provide the service and the sort of reference work that you've always provided as long as we can for our patrons and our community, so thank you for sitting down with me.

I'm looking forward to – you know, again, I'll be around part time and hopefully, you know, if things work out the way I hope they will, I might get a chance to help train my successor.
AS: Yes, yeah!

JS: That'll be interesting. That'll be a new facet. [Laughs]

AS: Yes. I think it'll be something to look forward to, and we're very grateful that you are willing to do that.

JS: Thank you.

AS: So thank you again for sitting down with me, and I'm going to stop the recording now.

JS: Okay.

[End of Audio]