

Salve Regina Oral History Project

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Interviewee: Brother John Buckley, History. Retired 2010.

Interviewer: Allison Graves, Class of 2018

Brother John Buckley was a full-time faculty member in the History department for 33 years. He started teaching at Salve in 1977 before retiring as a part-time faculty member in 2015. During this interview we touched upon how he built up the History department, and the changes since then. We also talked about some of his thoughts on faculty members, Presidents Lucille and Therese, and events like the proposed name change and graduation.

Allison Graves: [I'll be asking questions about Sister Lucille...]

Brother John Buckley: I came there in 1977 four years after Salve became officially co-ed. The Policemen had been here earlier. One of the men I used to meet at the "Y" claimed he's the oldest male graduate of Salve, after graduating in the late 60s. Police went to class after 4pm with the upper level girls. I ran into another retired policeman last week who graduated in '71. Sister Lucille made it officially co-ed soon after her arrival. Most of the male teachers there were retired FBI men since the salaries were low. There were many more Sisters than there are now and Drs. Cook, Marquise, and Farrington (slightly later) were mainstays of the Administration of Justice Department. Sister Lucille requested the Brothers. Brother Michael Reynolds, a brother of one of the Sisters on the faculty, was our pioneer, followed by Brothers Eugene Lappin. The Long Island- New England had no university in our province as we were a small breakaway province from New York district. Salve became part of our work and we had about eight Brothers here at one time.

The History/Politics department split 1984, and I became Chairman of History while Sister Ann Nelson remained in control of Politics.

The main division was between European and American History. Unfortunately, there were only two full time teachers. I taught American History and Sister Consilii Reynolds the European. When Dr. John Quinn joined the department, we developed each concentration. Everyone took Interpretations of American History I & II, a non - Western course, and Europe 1914 - Present. The European specialists took Europe 1789 - 1914 and four of the national histories - England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Russia. The American group selected from a list of electives - American Immigrant Experience, Modern America, Urban and Economic America etc. The department also had History and Secondary Education majors. They took Western Civilization and the American electives. All also took the Seminar with its Presentations and Defense.

During my eighteen years as a high school teacher and department head I had visited the classrooms of various teachers. I continued this practice with Dr. Quinn, and later, Dr. Neary since I needed to make recommendations for Promotion and Tenure. I extended this system to the student teachers at their schools in the area. The State Education Department required the American concentration. Originally the Cultural and Historical Preservation major emerged under History when Dr. Garman was hired full time. Until the department grew, they were part of our presentation and defense.

When I came here in 1977, Sr. Lucille was the President and Sheila Megley was the Vice President, and pretty much they ran the show.<sup>1</sup> They came in a time of crises. Providence College had gone co-ed, and some women are attracted to the concept, especially, when it has a national reputation. A few people suggested that a small state needed only one Catholic university. Sr. Lucille led us through reaccreditation, and created a unique doctorate program that combined technology and the humanities.

Sr. Therese consolidated these achievements and used her financial talents to significantly enlarge the endowment of the University. Both Sisters enhanced the campus. Sr. Lucille built the Library, while Sr. Therese developed the gym, and transformed the Antone Center.

Last Fall I was supposed to teach Immigrant Experience, but it got cancelled. You're a disappearing person if you're only there one semester a year, and only teaching one. I taught two for a couple years, then I taught one every Fall. I was going to finish last Fall but it got cancelled, so I finished a year ahead of time. I was happy that I left the department in the hands of John Quinn. He has a different style, and the department has three fulltime people. This had been my multiyear goal.

Who have you had as a teacher?

Allison: I've had Dr[s]. Quinn, Neary, and Leeman.

Br. John: What did you have them for?

Allison: I had Dr. Leeman, he's doing the Historical Research and Senior Thesis with us, and I took American Revolution and History of Warfare with him.

Br. John: I used to teach Warfare.

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Lucille McKillop was President of Salve from 1973-1994. Sister Sheila Megley was appointed Vice President under Sister Lucille.

Allison: Then Dr. Neary, I took Sport in America with, and Historians Craft. Then Dr. Quinn, I had Modern England, the second section of the European [survey], 1914 to Present, and I think that's it? I had a few part-timers too.

Br. John: Well then you have a good variety of people!

Allison: Yes!

Allison: Did you have a favorite course or lesson to teach?

Br. John: No, I don't really think so. I liked the Immigrant Experience, and encouraged Dr. Quinn to teach it just to get some people who were American majors. It was one of the few courses we offered every year. Dr. Quinn is the one that developed the Historiography in junior year. He's interested in research, and he felt it was too much to expect students in senior year in the first semester to do the discussions, the paper, and everything without some earlier official preparation. He used to teach it all the time. I think he switches now with Neary, and Leeman.

Allison: Yes.

I don't know Sister Jane, as she was only there one year with me. Or I should put it the other way around [laughter]. I had one year with her and she's on her eighth year. When she came in 2009, the trustees were surprised that they got a Sister to take the position.

Some people told me they wouldn't major in History because they didn't want the presentation and the thesis. I explained that sometimes you don't look forward to something when you're doing it, but later you feel a sense of accomplishment. I've had parents telling me occasionally about how glad they were, and how surprised they were at how accomplished their son or daughter was. I think it's one of the best things about the department. I also think that the department has good teachers.

Do you have a favorite teacher?

Allison: ...

Br. John: Don't tell me! [Laughter.] It's on tape! [Laughter].

Allison: , In the eighties they talked about adding "The Newport College", or changing Salve to be the "Newport College," do you remember that, or...

Br. John:

Oh, that went on. They kept changing the letterhead. It was going to be the "Newport College-Salve Regina" or it was going to be just "The Newport College" or it was going to be "Salve Regina-the Newport College." In some ways it would have been a positive thing. Newport has a good location, and that would be attractive to people in a distant place. The obstacle was the official charter was in the name of Salve Regina. I also heard that a lot of the alumnae, did not want to change the name. On the other hand, it's a name that non-Catholics don't know. It was argued that Newport would be more positive particularly out of the state, and out of the country. Newport has a good reputation. Some other colleges that are more famous are located in little towns where "nothing" happens. The change of name would might stop Rhode Islanders: 'Well, isn't that a girls' college?' I say: 'It's a little state! It's been forty something years it's been co-ed!' [Laughter]. And it still hasn't gotten to people in Providence or Warwick yet!

Br. John: There are more females in college than men nowadays. I think that was one of the things behind the name change. It also made sense to go with the name of a very positive location.

I have been here for many years. I had originally had intended, while I was getting my doctorate, to go to Manhattan College, but things changed, and as the jobs market got tighter, faculty didn't move. The Superiors used to wait until some layman transferred someplace else, and then the Brother who had the doctorate would step in.

Allison: Right.

Br. John: When Sister Lucille asked Brother Michael whether the Brothers [would come], we accepted and have different people coming through, and then some staying. I was the last Brother left.

How many Sisters are at Salve now?

Allison: Sister Betty, Sister Jane...I think there's only like five or six.

Allison: If you want to add anything that we haven't talked about yet that you can remember; stories of events, faculty, something that happened in one of your classes, anything.

Br. John: Hmmm. Well, I've enjoyed my years here. I used to really enjoy teaching older people who were coming back, while working full time, because I found a lot of them actually were *afraid* of the undergraduates 'til they met them! [Laughter].

I was looking forward to teaching last year, but it was time to stop. I was eighty last November, and I thought it's time. Dr. Quinn asked me to teach this Fall semester but I was already committed to going with my sister somewhere in Europe in November, so I said I wouldn't

finish the last three weeks of the semester. [Laughter]. I had thrown away all my notes, and my background readings as I had finished each course in the two year cycle. Each semester, boxes of books of textbook notes, and my history stories would go.

I got a call from one of the guys who graduated about ten years ago, and he's teaching in the Bronx, in a public elementary school. He says, "I remember when I feel careless, of you with your notes and your stories in different colors." (I used to have a sheet of the major points taken from a variety of sources, and then in color I would put in my crazy stories and later readings). He says I remember that and he says "well I shouldn't goof off." I thought, well that's good! I taught you something!

Are you enjoying it here [at Salve]?

Allison: Yes!

Br. John: Where are you going to look for a job?

Allison: I want to get into museum work.

Br. John: Oh!

Allison: I'm looking into the Illustration Museum, behind Watts.<sup>2</sup> The Historical Society, the Preservation Society, just somewhere to get my foot in the door, for now.

Br. John: One of our students, Kathy, came back when she was a museum director.<sup>3</sup> She came back to honors society's membership assembly about four or five years ago. She's going to get her doctorate, and she's probably finished now. She had gone from a History and English major, into museum work in the Boston area. Dr. Quinn asked her to come and talk about how she got attracted to this occupation. It's more in the line of Cultural and Historic Preservation, but History majors can do it, as I used to say: 'It doesn't matter what your major is as an undergraduate.'

...

Are you in the Honors Society? .

The Honors Society was another of Quinn's introductions. He mostly has graduates come back and talk about their careers. There was a teacher that came from Massachusetts from Lawrence, and he was teaching up there.<sup>4</sup> And he came back and talked about how enjoys teaching in his

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<sup>2</sup> William Watts Sherman house is a sophomore residence hall on campus located between Shepard and Victoria Ave.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine Viens '84 has worked at the New England Museum Association and the Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> The man that Brother John is referring to is Jonathan Turrisi, '05.

home town. He was a football player, bright guy, hardworking. It's more impressive to listen to somebody who's been in the department, than to listen to an historical presentation.

...

Allison: Well, thank you for speaking with me.

Br. John: You have nothing else?

Allison: Nope.

Br. John: Trying to think if anything else comes to mind...you know I just thought that I think the best thing was when they split the departments, and they grew.