

Spring 2013

## Interview of John P. Rossi, Ph.D.

John Patrick Rossi Ph.D.

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## Field Notes

**Interviewee:** Dr. John P. Rossi

**Interviewer:** Kevin Bretz

**Interview Dates:** April 3, 2013 (session 1) and April 14, 2013 (session 2)

**Interview Locations:** Dr. Rossi's office at La Salle University (session 1), Dr. Rossi's home at 500 Chelton Ave. Jenkintown, PA 19046 (session 2)

Field Notes written April 5, 2013 and April 16, 2013

**The Interviewee:** Dr. John Rossi was born in Philadelphia on April 7, 1936. He grew up in Lower Olney with his aunt and uncle, later writing a memoir on the experience. He attended La Salle High School and then La Salle College, earning a BA in History in 1958. He graduated from Notre Dame with a MA in history in 1960 and earned his PhD from Penn in 1965. He has taught at La Salle since 1962 and has received a number of distinctions, including the Lindback Award for teaching in 1977, the Macmillan Award in 1998 for best historical work on baseball, and most recently professor emeritus in 2006. Rossi is the author of a number of books articles including his most recent work, co-authored with John Rodden, *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell* published in 2012. His research interests include the history of baseball, European history, British history, and George Orwell.

**The Interviewer:** Kevin Nicholas Bretz (b. 1988 in Harrisburg, PA) grew up in the suburbs of Harrisburg in a small town called Linglestown. He moved to West Chester, PA to study at West Chester University. He graduated with a BA in history and a teaching certificate in social studies in 2012. Currently, he lives in South Philadelphia and is enrolled at La Salle University to work on an MA in history.

### Background

Deciding on a person to interview for an oral history assignment was, in some ways, an exacting task. I wanted to choose an individual that was a faculty member at La Salle for quite some time. I was not really interested in interviewing someone else who had lived in Philadelphia and did not have a strong connection, or any connection, with La Salle. Therefore, I wanted to choose someone who had witnessed La Salle's evolution from a smaller school with fairly limited programs to a strong, expanding university that it is today. To make my decision easier for me, I came across *Living the Promise*, a book celebrating the history of La Salle. The author was John P. Rossi—a name I was not familiar with up until that point. After learning a little more about him, such as his research interests and influence at the university, I knew that he was someone I

wanted to interview. Rossi had already been interviewed in early 2006 for the same oral history assignment. The interview covered most of his life, especially his childhood, and early professional life. I was intrigued by the interview, and I wanted to ask him more. Besides, he had just written a book on La Salle's history, and to my knowledge, no one had asked him a substantial amount of questions in an interview about it. Although the assignment was to record an interview more along the lines of a life history, I believed that this interview would be an important continuation of Dr. Rossi's life. In those seven years since his formal retirement in 2006, Dr. Rossi has still been involved in the university, as well as continuing various writing projects

The research process, then, was not very arduous because there were valuable sources readily available for the interview. Most notably, the 2006 interview with Gregg Pearson gave me a strong foundation in which to base the interview. Although I was not much interested in his early and mid-life, it did provide me with key pieces of information on which to expand upon. Another valuable source was Rossi's publication of *Living the Promise*. Although interested in the details of the history, I wanted to find out more about the unmentioned aspects behind the writing of the book—the research, writing, and publishing processes, as well as its reception at the university. Other invaluable sources included his other books and articles. Because Dr. Rossi has published a significant amount of material, it was not difficult to ascertain what his scholarly interests were. Moreover, Rossi's CV provided an accurate account of his education, training, and professional work. This information was readily available on La Salle's website. I contacted Dr. Rossi by email about my interest in late February, and he was more than happy to do it. He acknowledged that he was only on campus three days a week in the afternoon, and setting up meeting times appropriate for us both may pose a small problem. Nonetheless, we agreed on a couple days in late March. Dr. Rossi informed me that week that he had personal matters to attend to for at least a week. We then rescheduled for Wednesday April 3 at 11am—right after Dr. Rossi's European history class.

## **Interviews**

I arrived to Olney Hall at approximately 10:45am on April 2, 2013. Dr. Rossi had a class that morning from until 10:50. I waited outside his office room 340 until he was finished teaching. This was my first time meeting him, but I knew what he looked like from pictures. The door was already open when I arrived, so I assumed that he got done early. I sat down on a chair and waited for him to come in. He arrived in his office a little before eleven, and I introduced myself to him. My first impression of him was that he seemed kind and was fairly soft-spoken. He sat down in his chair at his desk and told me to have a seat. Before recording the interview, I thanked him for allowing me to interview him, and I also explained a little about myself. He asked me if we should get started because he had to leave around noon. I put the digital voice recorder on his desk and tested it to make sure it was properly recording. I wanted him to understand that this would be a continuation from the last interview and suggested the topics for discussion. He consented.

The interview lasted approximately one hour before we had to cut it short. In the interview, I was pleased at how well Dr. Rossi expanded on some of my questions. He seemed like he was enjoying himself, as he would sometimes laugh at the responses and even ask me questions about myself. During the interview, he made a few attempts to locate books that we were discussing. During the interview, Dr. Rossi moved around occasionally in his swivel chair in the office. As far as the interview itself, I tried to refrain as much as possible from interjecting. However, some topics I found interesting and could not help myself from elaborating on certain things. Overall, I think that we both were satisfied with the information, especially the portion on *Living the Promise*.

Because of our conflicting schedules, it was somewhat difficult to arrange another meeting. Therefore, Dr. Rossi suggested I come to his house in Jenkintown Sunday April 14. He was attending a wedding the day before. I agreed because I had the whole day free. I left my house around 12pm in South Philly because I expected that it would take about an hour to get to his house. Surprisingly, there was little traffic, and I arrived at his house on time. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon in April when I drove through Dr. Rossi's neighborhood. Blooming plants and trees lined the streets of the Jenkintown neighborhood. I could not quite locate his house (he had taken down his door number because he was painting). After calling him, I walked up to his front door and met him. He invited me inside and we sat down on his couch in the living room. I noticed the bookshelves filled with books and also his dog in the corner. Before turning on the voice recorder, I asked how he was doing, and we talked a little about Jenkintown. Around 1:15 we started recording. This was an ideal setting for the interview because there were hardly any distractions. I was satisfied with his answers, and it was fairly obvious we were enjoying ourselves. Like the last session interview, it was sometimes difficult for me to refrain from speaking or not respond to questions he asked me. This interview lasted just over one hour, and there no distractions for the duration of it. At the end, while the audio was still recording, I asked Dr. Rossi if he wanted to add anything important that we did not cover in the interview. He was satisfied and believed that we had hit all the main points.

### **Note on Recording**

I recorded the interview using an Olympus VN-7000. After recording the interview, I transferred the *wav* format audio files to my laptop. I then transferred the files into mp3 format and made additional copies of each. I also transferred the files onto a USB flash drive as a backup.