


Spring 2013

Interview of Thomas J. Wurtenberger

Thomas J. Wurtenberger
La Salle University

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Field Notes

Interviewee: Thomas J. Wurtenberger

Interviewer: Charles D. Muzyczek

Interview dates: March 7, 2013 and April 2, 2013

Location: Golden Pheasant Golf Course at 141 Country Club Drive Lumberton, NJ 08049

The Interviewee:

Thomas J. Wurtenberger was born and raised in the Lower Olney (Feltonville) section of Philadelphia in 1935. He was raised primarily by his mother after the death of his father in 1944. Tom attended North Catholic High School where he took business courses. He did not have aspirations to attend college right out of high school. He was encouraged by a former employer to better himself by going to college and earning a degree. One year after graduation Tom enrolled at La Salle College. He chose La Salle because of its reasonable tuition and proximity to home. Originally Tom desired to major in Physical Education, but La Salle did not offer that option so he selected German since he was raised in a strong German community. He graduated in 1958 with his degree in German as well as a minor in history and education. Despite his education in German and history, Tom became a biology teacher when an emergency replacement was needed at South Catholic High School in Philadelphia. He had only one year of biology, but with the help of grants offered to improve science education in America Tom was able to obtain over 150 credit hours in the sciences including a Master's Degree in Botany from the University of Texas. Tom would spend the over thirty-five years teaching various science subjects at the high school level. The majority of his career was spent at Rancocas Valley High School in Mt. Holly, NJ. In addition to teaching and studying science, Tom has a strong interest in history and genealogy. He attends many lectures on Pre-Revolutionary War America and has traced his family line back to 1746 Germany. Since retiring in 1996 he has made seven trips to Germany to continue research and is currently hoping to return soon to explore new information he has discovered about his family.

The Interviewer:

I, Charles D. Muzyczek (b. 20 July 1973 in Mt. Holly, NJ), met Mr. Wurtenberger in 1996 just prior to his retirement. He has given me valuable advice that I was able to use during my time as a teacher. Tom and I have spent countless hours discussing history and the lack of appreciation people have for it today. When presented with this project, Tom was my first choice to interview. I saw it as an opportunity to get to know him better on a personal level and perhaps deepen our relationship.

Background:

This interview was conducted as a part of Dr. Barbara Allen's HIS 650 course held during the spring 2013 semester at La Salle University. I requested permission to interview Tom as an alumnus of the university and someone not on the recommended list. After receiving permission I contacted Tom to see if he was willing to sit down with me and be interviewed. He agreed on the spot and we set up our initial meeting for March 7, 2013. We met at the Golden Pheasant Golf Course. We chose this location because I work there and Tom is a member and it was most convenient for both of us. Originally the interview was to be conducted in one sitting, but a scheduling conflict

forced us to split it into two sessions. At the end of the first session we had agreed to meet the following week, but again due to scheduling conflicts we were forced to postpone it for another three weeks. We were able to meet again on April 2, 2013 at the same location.

Description of the Interview:

We met promptly at three o'clock on each day. Fortunately for our interview the weather was rainy and the golf course was quiet for the most part. We met in the lounge of the men's locker room. It is well lit with a large fireplace and comfortable seating. The room is decorated the way one would expect at a golf course. There are pictures of famous golf holes from around the country and a variety of golfing magazines on the table. We arranged ourselves around the center table with the recording device in the center. Tom sat directly across from me with the list of questions I was going to ask. At times throughout the interview papers can be heard rustling as Tom answered questions. On one occasion the wind became rather gusty and can be heard in the background as well.

We were able to conduct the majority of the interview without interruption. Tom did notify me at the start of the interview that his wife made dinner plans with friends for that evening and he would not be able to conduct the interview in full. As we were discussing his teaching career his wife entered to notify him that it was almost time to go. We scheduled our second session at that time and spent a few minutes in general conversation. It was the first time I had been formally introduced to his wife. The second session ended when a gentleman enters the building believing there to be a members meeting that night therefore one of Tom's answers was interrupted at the end of audio file two and continued at the beginning of file three. These interruptions were easily edited out using mp3 editing software available online.

Note on recording:

I used an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-802 for the interview. I uploaded my recording from the recorder directly to my Toshiba Satellite laptop computer via the recorders direct USB connection to the laptop's USB port. I converted the files from mp3 to wav when I cropped the files to eliminate interruptions at the end of each session by using *Mp3 Editor for Free* software I downloaded. All three audio files were then saved to CD and flash drive along with the abstract of the interview and accompanying field notes.

Final Presentation

The entire collection of abstract, audio files, and field notes on CD were submitted on April 30, 2013 along with hard copies of the abstract, field notes, and legal release forms to Dr. Allen and the Connelly Library Digital Commons.