


Spring 2008

Interview of Joseph O'Grady, PhD

Joseph O'Grady
La Salle University

Patricia Kissling
La Salle University

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Field Notes

Interviewee: Dr. Joseph O'Grady

Interviewer: Patricia Kissling

Interview Date: Saturday, March 29, 2008; starting 10:00 am

Interview Location: Dr. O'Grady's home at 127 French Rd, New Square Pa

Interviewee:

Dr. O'Grady was born in Germantown, formerly Irishtown, Philadelphia, Pa, in 1934. He attended North East Catholic High School and then attended La Salle College beginning in 1952 majoring in History and education. While at La Salle he participated in the army program, ROTC, the Caisson Club, and several other organizations. Upon graduation in 1956 he attended Notre Dame University to obtain his Master's Degree. Immediately following Notre Dame he attended the University of Pennsylvania in 1957, where he worked toward his Doctorate Degree. While working on his doctoral dissertation he was offered a job, by the Christian Brothers, to teach at La Salle in 1959. He took the job and quickly rose to the ranks of a full time, tenured faculty member. In his early years, in order to obtain tenure, he was extremely active on the La Salle Campus and in other historical organizations. He was responsible for organizing the Maurice Frances Egan Lectures, which were held at La Salle in 1963 and later published the lectures in Immigrants influence on Woodrow Wilson's Policies in 1967. He also founded several groups on campus including the Faculty Senate and was actively involved in the Pickwick Club. He served as the chair of the History Department for one term. He is also responsible for founding several groups on campus as well as the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations. While working at La Salle he also worked for the United States Army for eighteen years beginning during his time at Notre Dame. He often traveled to Washington D.C. and worked in the Pentagon conducting interviews and research on military affairs. He retired from La Salle in 1999 and since then he has been traveling with wife Connie to visit their five children and fifteen grandchildren.

Interviewer:

I, Patricia Kissling, am currently enrolled in the history graduate program offered by La Salle University. I obtained my Bachelor's Degree from Shippensburg University in 2006 and will receive my Masters Degree in August 2008. I conducted this interview as a requirement for the graduate seminar class Oral History 650 taught by Dr. Barbara Allen.

Background:

The class Oral History 650, is a required graduate course taught by Dr. Barbara Allen. For the class we are required to conduct a three hour interview with either a former faculty/staff/alumnus or a war veteran. I chose to interview Dr. O'Grady from a list provided by Dr. Allen. In order to gather some background information on Dr. O'Grady I contacted Brother Joe Grabenstien, who is in charge of the La Salle University Archives. From this information I found out that Dr. O'Grady had attended La Salle College to obtain his Bachelor's Degree and went on to study at Notre Dame and the University of Penn. I also learned that he organized the Maurice Frances Egan lectures and had an interest in Irish/Immigrant history. While this information was useful I decided to talk to Dr. O'Grady's former colleagues in the history department in an effort to gather more information. I briefly interviewed Dr. John Rossi, who not only provided me with Dr. O'Grady's contact information but also with other important details such as the fact that he was chair of the history department; his participation in the faculty senate and the Pickwick club; and his contributions to the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations.

I first contacted Dr. O'Grady with a letter dated on March 5th, 2008. The letter briefly explained who I was, why I needed to conduct an interview, the concept of oral history, and how I had obtained his name and contact information. After waiting a week with no response I called Dr. O'Grady and left a message. He returned my call March 16th, 2008 and left a message in which he apologized for the delay, stating that he had been out of the country visiting his son in Sweden. On March 19th, we were finally able to get in touch and decided to conduct the entire three hour interview on Saturday March 29th, 2008 at 10am. Though I offered to have the interview done in hour and half sessions he chose to do the interview all in one session due to his hectic schedule, he is planning to move at the end April 2008. He offered to conduct the interview in his house and that he would also provide lunch. He then proceeded to give me directions to his house, which I double checked with Google maps.

Description of the Interview:

I arrived a few minutes early to Dr. O'Grady's house despite the traffic along interstate 76. He lives in a large development in New Square, PA. There is a pond which attracted many bikers and families. The house, though well kept, showed signs of the upcoming move Dr. O'Grady mentioned with extra mattresses loaded into a truck and the yard a little bit unkempt. I rang the doorbell and Dr. O'Grady answered the door. I introduced myself to Dr. O'Grady and then I was promptly led into a sitting room to the right of the entranceway. I was then introduced to his wife Connie who offered us water and coffee, though we both declined. Connie then went upstairs and left us to get situated.

The sitting room contained a shelf with a television, pictures of grandchildren, and a small collection of books, which turned out to be publications by Dr. O'Grady. The room had a few pictures hanging on the walls and Easter decorations. Dr. O'Grady sat down in

a recliner which faced the television. I sat on a couch opposite him and was able to place my digital recorder and papers on a marble-top coffee table which sat between us. Before beginning the interview I briefly explained the legal release form for the La Salle University Archives and noted that he could restrict the material discussed if he was not comfortable committing it to La Salle. He laughed and noted that nothing we were going to discuss was top secret. I then gave him a brief description of what I wanted to discuss/learn about.

We quickly launched in the interview, which lasted for about four hours. Dr. O'Grady spent the first hour and twenty minutes of the interview discussing the topics that had I talked to him about during our phone conversation; his childhood; time at La Salle; Notre Dame; Penn; and his return to La Salle. He also talked about his time in the Army. During this time I let Dr. O'Grady talk for there did not seem to be an opportune time to interject my questions. When he finished giving his thoughts we took a short break, about two minutes. We then continued the interview for another two and a half hours. During this time I was able to ask specific questions on topics in which he would provide answers and then let me continue with my questions. We concluded the interview rather abruptly when we both learned that the time was 1:50pm; however we did cover almost all of the information I wanted to. After the interview was over I had lunch with Dr. O'Grady and Connie in their dining room. After lunch he signed the legal release and I informed both he and his wife that I would try to mail them a copy of the transcript for their revisions by the middle of the month so that if they wanted to make changes they could.

The only problem was that at first Dr. O'Grady controlled the interview. I found it hard to interrupt his story and interject my own questions pertaining to the topics he was discussing. However, after our short break and his mini lecture on oral history he was more willing to let me follow my questionnaire. Though I was unable to strictly follow my question outline we did end up covering almost all of the topics and questions I had created. I would have liked to ask more family related questions. He brought up family members names and stories a few times; however, I felt it was more important to concentrate on his time at La Salle first and if there was time to later talk about his family life.

This was the first interview I have conducted but I am pleased with the results. I feel I was able to get Dr. O'Grady to open up about his time as La Salle and discuss the changes that took place on campus and in the history department during his time there. He seemed eager to talk about his time and became more animated as the interview went on. Over lunch of homemade southwest chicken patties, broccoli salad, and cookies, which Connie obviously made with care; we discussed the interview and more personal aspects of our lives. I talked about where I attended undergraduate school and my future plans while they discussed their upcoming move and their grandchildren. Both Dr. O'Grady and his wife were very accommodating and welcoming. They both wished me luck and they seemed surprised by the fact that I was going to send them a copy of the transcript but grateful also. I promised to mail them a copy of the transcript before the

end of April so that Dr. O'Grady could make changes before I submitted it to the La Salle Archives.

I decided to transcribe the first two hours of the interview. While in the first section of the interview I was unable to ask many questions, Dr. O'Grady discussed at length the things that seemed important and memorable to him. Though he later opened up about some interesting memories and accomplishments at La Salle I felt it more important to transcribe what he thought important about his memories. This portion of the interview shows that he obviously put some thought into my questions and his memories and those were the ones he wanted to make known. The rest of the interview is logged by question. I include the question and the time it was asked followed by a brief summary of his answer.

Citations.

I used the following procedures throughout the transcript in order to make

1. **Bold:** names/spellings I could not find.
2. Brackets [] to clarify names/places, referencing books, organizations.
3. Brackets with ellipses [...] to indicate inaudible words/phrases
4. Parentheses () to indicate background noises i.e. dog moving, coughs, looking in books
5. A dash – to show false starts.
6. I also eliminated many false starts to make the transcript easier to read. I included a few false starts so as to get a feel for how Dr. O'Grady spoke

Sources used during transcription process:

1. La Salle University Website
 - faculty names
 - buildings on campus
2. Wikipedia.com for clarification/spelling on certain persons/things/books
 - Shibe Park
 - Pricewater House
 - Homburg hat
 - V12 Navy College Training Program
 - Winston Churchill; *The Second World War*
 - Independent Order of Odd Fellows
 - Allen Nevins
 - Phelps-Rosebery Treaty
 - Arthur Link
3. www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2007/hess.html Website for: Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Includes names and brief history.