

Spring 2019

Interview of William E. Watson IV, Ph.D

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Field Notes

Interviewee: William E. Watson IV., Ph.D

Interviewer: Richard K. Girkin

Date: March 11th, 2019 (morning)

Interview location: Duffy's Cut Museum, Gabriele Library, Immaculata University

Field Notes were written on April 8th, 2019

The interviewee:

Dr. William E. Watson was born in 1962 in New York City. The son of musicians, he moved to Lower Merion Township in Pennsylvania with his mother and twin brother in the mid 1970s. Graduating from Lower Merion High School, Dr. Watson attended Eastern College for his Undergraduate degree in History, and the University of Pennsylvania for his Masters and Doctorate degrees in Russian and Medieval Studies. He taught at Drexel University and La Salle University as an adjunct professor before going full-time at Immaculata University in 2000. Dr. Watson is one of the co-founders of the Duffy's Cut Project, an ongoing archaeological dig to uncover a mass grave of 57 Irish rail workers killed in 1832. He has authored several books, appeared in documentaries related to Irish-American history, and a member of several historical organizations.

The interviewer:

I, Richard Karl Girkin (b. August 30th, 1990) grew up and still live in the Northeast section of Philadelphia. I attended Immaculata University for my undergraduate and received my Bachelors Degree in History in 2013. In addition to majoring in History, I received my certification to teach Social Studies in the secondary school system. During my time at Immaculata, I became involved with the Duffy's Cut, an archaeological project to uncover the lost remains of 57 Irish railroaders from 1832. Currently, I am attending La Salle University to receive my Masters Degree in Public History.

Background:

I have known Dr. Watson for many years. When I started my undergraduate degree at Immaculata University, Dr. Watson was my advisor for the History program. One day after class,

he and his colleague, Dr. John Ahtes, asked me if I wanted to join the Duffy's Cut Project. Though I knew nothing about the Project, without hesitation, I said yes. Since 2009, I have continued to work on the Project in any way possible. When it came time to choose who we wanted to interview, I knew that I wanted to interview Dr. Watson. In one of the books we used in his Russian History class, it said that Dr. Watson was a teacher at La Salle. He had not been previously interviewed for Digital Commons, so I contacted him.

The initial contact was on February 15th, 2019. I asked Dr. Watson if he was willing to sit down for an interview, briefly explaining its purpose. He agreed, so I began to formulate questions that would expand on his early life, career as a professor, and of the Duffy's Cut Project. A few weeks later, I met with Dr. Watson at a memorial service at West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Bala Cynwyd. Near the entrance of the cemetery is a memorial where the remains of five workers are buried. Every year since 2011, a memorial service is held for the recovered remains on the Sunday closest to the burial date. After the memorial service, I discussed with Watson on when he would be available to conduct the interview. Dr. Watson had suggested Monday, the 11th, but this was the beginning of Spring Break at Immaculata University, so I was unsure if the Gabriele Library would be open. I called the Library to make sure they would be open and, upon hearing that they would be open, I contacted Dr. Watson to confirm the day.

Description of the interview:

I had planned to arrive at Immaculata University earlier than the scheduled time due to traffic concerns. Upon arriving at 9:30 a.m., I entered the Gabriele Library to survey the area. It was Spring Break for the University, so the library was more quiet than usual. Fortunately, the Duffy's Cut Museum was open, so I went and put my belongings in there. The Museum, during my early years as a student there, used to be a quiet study room, so it was not entirely big. I took out my digital recorder to test the sound quality in the room, seeing if any external sounds would be picked up. Upon listening to the playback and hearing nothing that would interfere with the recording, I took a stroll around the Library. During my time at Immaculata, I worked at the Gabriele Library, and most of it has changed since I was there. With the time of the interview drawing nearer, I made my way to the entrance to await Dr. Watson.

Because of our familiarity with each other, both me and Dr. Watson were at ease for the duration of the interview. Before the interview began, we muted our cellphones and I had Dr. Watson sign the legal release for the Digital Commons at La Salle University. We had decided to break the interview into two parts. The first part would be of his education and time as a professor, both adjunct and full-time. I guided the interview with my prepared questions, but made sure I was listening to the words of Dr. Watson, making sure to ask follow-up questions. Once we were done discussing his career as a professor, we took a lunch break at a local pizza parlor that we

had used after digging at the site while a student. During lunch, we talked about the Saint Patrick's Day Parade and the upcoming events concerning the Duffy's Cut Project. We returned back to Immaculata University and continued with the interview. The second part focused on the Duffy's Cut Project, both its history and its impact. Because of my involvement with the Project, I knew most of the responses that Dr. Watson would give. This could be looked at in two ways. On one hand, due to my familiarity, I might not ask follow-up questions. On the other hand, my familiarity could allow me to ask the correct follow-up questions, knowing the responses.

Once the interview ended, I thanked Dr. Watson once again for allowing me to interview him. He was not able to stay long after the interview because of the prior commitment.

Notes on recording:

I used a Sony ICD-UX560, running on battery power, to record the interview. When I got home from the interview, I connected the recording to my Samsung Chromebook, via USB, and stored it in my Google Drive. To transcribe the interview, I used an external microphone, placed it near my speaker, and played the recording. Once the recording was finished, I started to go through and correct the grammar and spelling, since the dictation was 60% accurate. The process of correcting the transcript took approximately one and a half weeks.

Editing the transcript:

While reviewing the transcript, I used the following techniques:

- Eliminating filler words, such as "you know," "like," and "um."
- Use of parentheses () to indicate sounds or actions described by the interviewer or narrator
- Use of brackets [] to indicate an inaudible word or group of words
- Use of ellipses to indicate a new thought given mid-sentence.
- Use of italics to indicate a book that has been referenced