

**Interview #1. Dr. John Rossi. Time: 00:00:00**

The interview was conducted on Tuesday March 25<sup>th</sup> 2008. The narrator was Dr. John Rossi, former student and colleague of Dr. O'Grady. The interview was done in an effort to gain some background information on Dr. O'Grady and explore topics for his interview. This interview took place in Dr. Rossi's office, 340 Olney Hall, with the door shut to limit the noises. Dr. Rossi was animated and helpful in the interview by providing information on Dr. O'Grady's scholarly efforts and possible questions to ask in his interview session. Dr. Rossi does not overly criticize or praise Dr. O'Grady and instead attempted to provide an accurate and relatively unbiased view point. The continuous squeaking or banging noises throughout the interview come from Dr. Rossi's desk chair. The noises increase when he becomes excited about a particular topic.

Patricia Kissling: This is Patricia Kissling, interviewing Dr. Rossi on March 25<sup>th</sup>. And do you approve to have this recorded?

Dr. John Rossi: Yes

Patricia Kissling: Alright. Um as you had just said you were, um you were students with Dr. O'Grady.

John Rossi: Yea, I was a sophomore in an upper level class and he was a senior. And matter of fact we sat across from each other. I didn't know him real well. He was also, I forgot that, he was also my ROTC commander. I was in ROTC for two years, and he made it, he was in there for four years. And he was my commander. And the last year gave me demerits because I wouldn't get my hair cut right. (chair)

PK: Um you said you had a class with him while you were here?

JR: This was as I say an upper level class in European history and he was a senior and I was a sophomore. We got the same grade, which I'm sure he wouldn't like to know but,

PK: When did you return as a professor here?

JR: '62.

PK: '62. And he was already here at that time?

JR: I think he started, I could be wrong, I'm going to guess, say '60, maybe '60 in that range or '59, '60. Yea

PK: You were colleagues for about forty years is that what you said?

JR: Well until he retired. I don't know what year he retired. But from '60. I was here for forty-two. He was '62, he was here from '62 on having started earlier. I want to say he retired in the late '90s, what thirty-five years? Some thirty-five plus.

**Time: 00:01:36**

PK: Are there any other current faculty members that were here when you had first started, that, like had taught during the same time while he was here and you were here?

JR: Yea, Stow taught while Joe was here. Uh Theo Fair. I think, and I think Chip, Chip Desnoyers was here for a few years with Joe, when Joe was here. Probably Stewart, maybe a year or two. Brother Ed. Yea, Brother Ed **Shea**. So there are a handful of us. But for the long stretch I was the longest.

PK: Ok. And I understand that he specifically dealt with immigrant history and Irish history.

JR: Yea, yea.

PK: Were those the only kind of classes that he taught do you know?

JR: No. No he taught, you know this is going on memory now. He taught, we used to have a class that was a basic class and it was a kind of American Survey and he taught that. And then his specialty was foreign policy, and especially the role of immigrants in foreign policy. And I know he taught, he taught that (moving around in his chair). He probably taught a couple, used to, seminars. Do the seminar, he'd offer the seminar every couple years. And then I don't know what, he would pick a topic for it you know. Um, I'm trying to think of anything else. He knew, he knew Irish-American history, but I don't know whether he ever taught it. That was one of his specialties, Irish-American History. And he used to let me teach the Irish course. He just didn't seem to want to teach it. So I taught the Irish and he did some of the Irish-American, but whether he ever offered a specific course in Irish-American I don't know. And then of course he did the regular surveys that we all taught. Western Civ[Civilization], and Modern Europe, that kind of thing.

PK: And do you remember um, I don't know if you would know this but, what kind of professor he was. Did the students think that he was a tough professor or...?

JR: Yea, he was regarded as very tough. Very hard. Very demanding. Uh, it's hard -- He was extremely well organized. I mean, one of his, one of his strongest points was that everything, the organization was very clear. You knew exactly where you were supposed to be at anyone time. (hands slapping together to emphasize rigid structure). In his class if his syllabus said March 15<sup>th</sup> we are going to do the civil war, you could be pretty sure March 15<sup>th</sup> you were doing the Civil War. So it was very highly structured, very well organized. Uh, I don't know what his in-class teaching method was, I think it was lecture, 'cause I never sat in on one of his classes. And he was considered very tough. A hard grader.

PK: And I have learned, through Brother Joe provided with some information, and I learned that he organized some speeches or um lectures on campus.

**Time: 00:04:48**

JR: Yea, in the, in his early years. The first ten or twelve years he was extremely active on the campus. He was the first secretary of the faculty senate. He was one of the people who helped organize the faculty senate. And he organized the series of lectures on immigrants in Woodrow Wilson's foreign policies [Immigrants and Woodrow Wilson's Peacemaking Policy], somewhere in the late '60s maybe 1970. And that was fairly successful. Maybe about five, six speakers came in for that. Some pretty big names.

And he was involved in a discussion group here called the Pickwick club. There was a club formed by the teachers to discuss, books and readings and topics about once a month or once every three weeks. Joe was involved in that. Named after you know, Dickens' Pickwick papers but uh. I'm trying to think.

And he was, he also was one of the founders, some role I don't know exactly, but some role in the founding of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Policy. So yea he was I think the secretary of that organization for a while. And uh that was, matter a fact I have, (looking on his shelves for the journal while in his chair) this is the journal. *Journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations*. I got close you know (smiling). And he was, this was in, he was, lets see if he's, if you found an old issue of this you would see his name in the (pointing to front cover to show me where his name would be and I nod). But that was one of his big fields. American diplomatic history. (chair).

PK: I also found out that he was head of the history department for a short while.

JR: He was chairman for four years. Yea.

PK: Were you here during that time?

JR: Yea yea. I succeeded him. Yea he was chairman for four years. In a difficult period. We lost our chairman and we needed a chairman and he took over. He was, he was, that was one of the things he could really do. He was a very effective chairman. I mean you knew everything was run smoothly when he was chair. So he was very good at that. But he didn't want to, he didn't want to keep the job. I mean he could have had it for another term, but we'd all have been happy to have him. But he decided after four years, he came and told me I'm not going to be a candidate for the next time around. And he said I think the consensus of the department is that you should be the chair so I replaced him.

PK: Is it four year terms?

JR: Four years.

PK: Um what kind of policies or contributions did he have, did he make. You said it ran pretty smoothly, what do you mean by that?

JR: He took over at a time, just around the time when they were changing. Every few years they get this idea that you have to change the curriculum. That it's absolutely necessary to change the curriculum. So this particular change, history which had been a

**Time: 00:08:00**

required course, was now made an option. So the result was that the numbers in our department plummeted just toward the end of his, and when I took over, you know. So the last year or so of his chairmanship and the beginning of mine was a nightmare because we had, you know we had faculty who we didn't have jobs for. And what we were doing is some faculty were, had to teach class at night to make up their schedule. That was called split scheduling. And so we scrambled to try to figure out a way around it. Took us a couple years to get back on our feet. But in his, when he first took over, we had huge numbers of majors. And a lot of people were majoring in history and going into graduate school. By the time that he had stepped down in '74, '75 the number of history majors, because there were no teaching jobs, the number of history majors just dropped. We used to have one hundred some, we went down to about forty or thirty. And now you see the problem with that is that you need, you need classes for, for the professors. And at one point we had all those required classes so that filled up, you know you always had a class. Now all of a sudden you don't, that's optional. And they don't even have had the upper level classes for you. So it was, it was, most of the period of the '70s and early '80s was tough for history. (moving in chair)

PK: And do you think that was his reason for leaving. The fact that it was dropping off?

JR: No I don't think so. I think he just wanted, he just wanted to concentrate on teaching, writing. He was doing some writing at the time. And I think he had a kind of lost the interest in doing the job. Plus he knew that he had me as a replacement. And Stow behind me. So he knew that, you know, the department would be taken care of theoretically if we both served two terms. He new what sixteen years. (chair). And so he could step aside.

PK: And I understand also that La Salle also used to be an all male school. And it was like that when you both attended right?

JR: Yea.

PK: When did they admit females?

JR: I want to guess around, there were some women at night. But I'm going to say that they came 1970. (chair)

PK: Were there female faculty members or...?

JR: Yea there were a handful. Not many. Not like now. And we had one of the first women teachers. Full time. And I'm going to guess it was around the time that he became the department chair that they admitted women here.

PK: And I hear that there were, that was controversial.

**Time: 00:10:45**

JR: Well it was in one sense but I don't remember a lot of opposition because the general drift was away from single sex schools. Both all girls and all boys. And this is a trend, and La Salle is always at an end of a trend you know, we catch on at the end of the thing. But anyway, so I don't remember too much criticism about it. And a lot of the smarter people said well wait a minute, we are going to get a fresh group of students, tap a pool we hadn't tapped. And secondly, generally speaking you know girls are more serious students, especially young girls, than guys. And so you know -- we could see a noticeable, the first year or two you could see a noticeable improvement and quality of the students you had. Most of the girls were pretty good.

PK: And how do you think other professors and faculty members remembered Dr. O'Grady?

JR: Well he was a great complainer. They probably heard his complaints. But, you know, he didn't really have any particularly -- he was one of those guys that knew everybody but wasn't particularly friendly with anybody. Didn't have -- like didn't have like Stow and I. We'll go out for dinner together, his wife and my wife and I will go out for dinner, you know. (chair) Joe wasn't like that. He was more, he was very friendly. I mean if he saw you, you'll see! When you meet him he is as friendly and easy going as you want. But he kind of kept himself a little bit aloof from everybody, you know. He came to [this] job and left. Wasn't a guy for missing classes. So you never had to worry about that, class is canceled, Professor O'Grady won't be in. He was there.

PK: Do you think there is anything in specific that I should include in my interview?

JR: With him?

PK: Yes.

JR: (chair) Well, I would certainly ask him, you know to reflect on his years here because he was here for thirty-five, forty years. And his connections with the [Christian] Brothers. He was here for an undergraduate and working here. So it actually gives for longer than forty years. Ask him how much he enjoyed his time. What he really liked. Joe was pretty blunt, he's going to tell you what he liked and what he didn't like. So you're going to be, your ears are going to get singed a little bit probably.

You might ask him, I mean one question, I don't know how to phrase it, but why he stepped aside after one term, because he was a very good chair. Business was transitive, but he did it one time. I was shocked when he did it. I figured he's going to be chairman. So you could be chairman for twenty years if you want. I mean Bernie **Bloomenthall** downstairs in the German department, I think he's, or foreign language. I think he's been chairman for thirty-five years. So that would be one.

You could ask him about any particular students that he remembered. He had a student who was, I think the, one of our first students to win a Fulbright. Fellow went to Ireland. (thinking noises) He was related, **Bob Lavrey**. You can ask him about him because I think Joe was pretty much responsible for him getting that Fulbright. Other

**Time: 00:14:42**

thing you could ask him about, does he have any other students who come to mind. And the other interesting one, (chair), there was a little guy who came here and he for some reason hit it off with Joe and it was kind of a strangest one because this guy was a little fellow a Jewish guy. And later became a rabbi. Neil something. And he and Joe became really close. And I always thought that was really funny, it was a kind of a, you know, a strange combination. **Shidel, Neil Shidel.**

And he got involved somewhere in, toward the end, in some kind of scholarly work. I just don't know what it was. But it was still connected with Irish history. So you might ask him what he has done since he retired. He used to come here to the library once a month or so every couple of weeks maybe.

PK: Did he travel a lot while he was here?

JR: He, he was very active in that society I told you about. And I know he went to Ireland a couple times but whether it was while he was here or just towards the end I don't know.

PK: And one last question. You had said that the curriculum was changing. About the time when he was stepping down. Is it, the curriculum meaning that it became an option instead of a mandatory class or what was being taught. (chair)

JR: Yea well what happened is. For example when I came on board there was one or two required history courses. So every student here at some point usually in their first or second year had to take a history course, introductory history course. Then if they wanted to take any others that was fine. Somewhere in the early '70s around the time he took over there was a change in the curriculum, in that history was no longer a required course it was made an option so you know, (chair) you could take political science and fulfill the requirement that used to fulfill for history (chair). Or you could take history or, different kind of categories. So what it, the impact of that was to lower our numbers sharply. Our numbers dropped off for that.

PK: I just wanted to clear that up for myself.

JR: And then they changed the curriculum again. I think it's been changed three times since then. So now we have required courses back. We actually, actually have two required courses, I think we have two semesters, or a semester and a half or something like that.

PK: And is there anything else you would like to add or say?

JR: No, I, one other question you might want to ask him is to reflect on his colleagues. See what he says. Because he'll probably be pretty blunt. Tell you what he thinks. Ask him how he thinks the school was run, you know in his day by the administration. You'll get some interesting comments there. Might want to ask him what he thinks of the state of the profession, history profession. I think he is still fairly active.

**Time: 00:17:54**

PK: I know he was just in Sweden.

JR: Oh is that right is that where he was? He was a great father to his kids. He had a fairly big family. And I mean he was great with the kids. I taught two. I taught his two sons, I don't think I had his daughters. But I had his two sons. One was extremely bright and very successful. The other son I don't remember as well. But the other son was very smart, but like, he was like the last of the line you know, I think he kind of cruised a little bit. But the oldest son Pat, who I had was a hell of a student.

PK: That concludes.

**Ending Time: 00:18:40**

Notes on Citations:

1. Parentheses ( ) used to describe noises/actions made during interview
2. Dashes – used to indicate false starts
3. Some false starts were eliminated from the transcript to make it easier to read
4. **Bold** font to indicate names that I could not find spellings for
5. Brackets [ ] to provide clarify words others may be unfamiliar with