

Spring 2017

## Interview of Frank McKee, M.A. English, M.A. Ed. Admin.

Frank McKee M.A.

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### Recommended Citation

McKee, Frank M.A. and Daley, Paul, "Interview of Frank McKee, M.A. English, M.A. Ed. Admin." (2017). *All Oral Histories*. 110.  
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## Field Notes

**Interviewee:** Frank McKee

**Interviewer:** Paul Daley

**Interview Date:** March 26, 2017

**Interview Location:** Olney Hall, La Salle University. 1900 West Olney Avenue, Philadelphia PA

Field Notes written on April 1, 2017, edited April 27, 2017

### **The Interviewee:**

Frank McKee was born into a blue collar, union oriented, family in 1948 in Northeast Philadelphia. Frank spent his entire childhood and academic career in Philadelphia, staying close to home until his military service began at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Frank's father worked in a battery storage facility and his mother worked as key-punch operator for early computers as well as raising a family. The oldest of three children, all of whom attended La Salle University. After graduating in 1971, Frank spent approximately two years working with his father before entering the Army as a Electronic Warfare Operator Analyst. Working covertly, while maintaining a career as a teacher, Frank served six years before being discharged. From there, Frank pursued two Master's degrees in Education Administration and English. He also earned his Principal Certification around the same time. By age 27, Frank was hired in Lower Moreland County to be the English Department Chairperson. He spent the next thirty-five years in administrative positions as well as teaching, coaching track and field. Further, Frank spent time as the Principal of both the middle and high schools for the school district. Frank also pioneered an American Studies program for the school district, building the curriculum from the ground up. Frank arrived back at La Salle first as an adjunct in the late 1980's through 1992. He returned in 2012 to a permanent position in the American Studies program. He is in line to be the next director of the American Studies program pending the provost and dean's decision.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Paul Daley, (b. 1993 in Clifton Park, NY), grew up in Schenectady County NY, earned a B.A. in History from James Madison University in 2015, and currently pursuing a M.A. in Public History at La Salle University, graduating June 2018. I am enrolled in HIS 650, Oral History, with Dr. Barbara Allen. Since I am new to the Philadelphia area and La Salle more specifically, I had very little prior knowledge of the University's history. This project has allowed me to gain insight in to La Salle as an institution and will further add to the Digital Commons Collection of interviews with past faculty, alumni, Christian Brothers, and neighborhood residents.

**Background:**

Spring semester 2017, I enrolled in HIS 650, Oral History. For the final project, we had to interview a former La Salle alumni, faculty member, or neighborhood resident to add to La Salle's Digital Commons. Being unfamiliar with most of the professors in the University, I asked for suggestions from Dr. Allen, our professor. She had a list of prospective candidates including Frank McKee who seemed, by her explanation, to be a fascinating faculty member. As it was relayed, he worked covertly during the Cold War in some capacity for the United States Army. This peaked my interest and therefore took the proper steps to get in contact with him.

I emailed Lauren De Angelis, program secretary, who provided me with his university email address. Over the course of two weeks, Professor McKee and I communicated through email about the project expectations, his upcoming availability and desire to be interviewed. Since I had never met him prior, we organized a meet-and-greet where we discussed our interests and shared passion for basketball over coffee. On that first occasion we spoke for approximately an hour and we both agreed that the interview should occur within the next two calendar weeks. We arranged, again through email, for March 26, 2017 in the morning to provide ample time for the interview. Then I researched Frank's career and life with the aide of a CV he provided. I came up with what I believed to be an exhaustive list of questions.

On Monday, March 26, 2017 I left my apartment around 8 a.m. to go to a meeting at work before our scheduled interview. It was extremely rainy. Due to the conditions, traffic was extremely heavy which forced me to be late to my morning meeting. I still believed that I would make the 9:30 scheduled appointment with Professor McKee and drove the back way to La Salle University instead of using the Schuylkill Expressway. I made it on time, Professor McKee and I set up in a quiet office space provided by Lauren in the depths of the history department hall way. Once settled in Olney, Professor McKee and I spoke for two hours about his upbringing in Olney, his career and lastly his projections for the American Studies department.

### **Description of Interview:**

On the morning of March 26, 2017 I attended a work meeting prior to meeting Professor McKee in his office at La Salle University. I arrived just after 9 a.m. and bought a coffee to bring for myself to the interview. After organizing the paperwork, questions, and recording devices, I entered Olney Hall walked to the third floor and entered the American Studies program office. There Professor McKee was listening to a podcast while grading papers. I knocked on his door, he waved me in to the cubicle and we greeted each other with a handshake and a smile. We both seemed to be very relaxed about the prospect of spending the morning doing the interview. Professor McKee and I set out to find Lauren de Angelis because she reserved a space for us to meet in a much more secluded area of the floor so that very little white noise from students or faculty would enter our conversation.

Professor McKee and I then set up the room to our liking. We both replaced uncomfortable chairs with more suitable, cushioned, seats so that we would be comfortable for the duration of the interview. We spoke briefly about the inclement weather as a test for the recording devices. Both seemed to be working. Professor McKee and I sat across from one another with a large desk in between for us to place our morning coffees and recording devices. After reviewing the general order of the interview, without any further delays, we began the interview around 9:45 in the morning.

At this point, I was nervous and excited to be conducting my first oral history interview. The questions followed a general chronology of Professor McKee's life from his upbringing in Olney through his Catholic School graduation from Cardinal Dougherty. We spoke at length about his experience as a student versus being an adjunct and finally a professor here at La Salle and the impact the institution had on his career and outlook. Right before the twenty minute mark, Professor McKee received a phone call, the vibrating is semi-audible on the recording. He chose to ignore the incoming call and without hesitation we continued unabated until 11:45 in the morning. We did not take any breaks and the discussion seemed to flow nicely throughout the two hours. Both of us paused from time to time to drink coffee but there were no other disruptions to speak of. About half way through the interview, one of the recording devices ran out of battery. I noticed it but did not want to make a big deal because my iPhone was also recording simultaneously. I did not remove the dead recorder from the table because I did not want to disrupt the flow of the interview however I am glad that I used multiple devices as a precaution. At the conclusion, Professor McKee signed the waiver and released all rights for the interview so that it can join others on the Digital Commons webpage. He and I were both satisfied with the result of our discussion.

There were a couple pitfalls that could have been avoided during the interview process. First, the phone call disrupted for a moment, Professor McKee's train of thought but it did not hinder the completed product. Second, the recording device dying could have ended the interview had I not provided a simultaneous back up. If I have the opportunity in the future to interview other people, I will maintain the two recorder system because of

the danger of dead batteries or technology malfunctions. I thoroughly enjoyed making Professor McKee's acquaintance as I hope he did mine as well. We continued to talk after the recorder had been turned off about the college basketball tournament and his trip to Madison Square Garden with his grandchildren to watch the ACC tournament. I followed up with another email a short while later and will continue to talk to Professor McKee as he is a bright, energetic man who seems to be an integral part of La Salle for the foreseeable future.

### **Notes on Recording:**

I used two recording devices for the project. The iPhone6 was the device which captured the entire interview. The other device, an Olympus WS-853, died just a couple minutes shy of the one hour mark. That same day, I connected my iPhone to the computer and transferred the recording on to iTunes. Also on the same day, I changed the format of the file to an mp3 so that I can use ExpressScribe to transcribe the interview at a slower than average pace. Then I played back the entire interview and edited the transcript once more to ensure meaning and clarity. Finally, I changed the file format again from mp3 to wav and transferred the file on to a USB drive for safe keeping. I will upload the wav file, field notes, and transcript to the Digital Commons webpage before the conclusion of the semester.

### **Editing the Transcript:**

- 1) Eliminated empty words at start of interviewer questions for readability. Words like "certainly" "right" "sure"
- 2) Bracketed missing words for clarity
- 3) Underline to emphasize point
- 4) Frank's diction was to reaffirm his statement. I did, I did. Yes, yes. Kept those for authenticity and style.
- 5) Hyphened tangent sentences or incomplete thoughts
- 6) Replaced "ands" "so" "because" "you know" "um" and created multiple sentences instead of having a run-on
- 7) Ignored interviewer's interjections in transcript for readability.