

Fieldwork Write-up

For my second interview, I chose Dr. Joseph Steelman, a retired East Carolina history professor. He taught at ECU for thirty years. When I called him to make an appointment, he seemed eager to contribute to our oral history class project on the history of ECU. I made the appointment for Friday November 16, 2001 at 1:00 pm at his home in Greenville.

When I arrived at Dr. Steelman's home, he made me feel very welcome. Upon meeting him, I liked him instantly. He has an elegant, sophisticated air about him. Before the interview, he showed me pictures of his wife Lala Carr Steelman, who was also a history professor at ECU for thirty years. Also, he said they were married for fifty-two years. At this time he also talked for about thirty minutes about the Elias Carr collection that is currently in the ECU manuscript collection, and his wife's auto-biography on Governor Carr that she was working for prior to her death.

Overall the interview with Dr. Steelman went very well. I had my fieldwork plan in front of me, but Dr. Steelman was a good narrator and, as a result, I did not have to refer to it as often as I did with my first interview with Dr. Price. During the interview I learned that Dr. Steelman served in the army during WWII. I enjoyed this part of the interview the most. His comments were enlightening and interesting. He served as an army engineer, as well as a language interpreter. I tried to ask similar questions of Dr. Steelman as I did for Dr. Price because I was hoping to see similar or contrasting answers. This line of questioning resulted in a few surprising answers. For instance, when asked about the Professor Lebaron, Dr. Steelman remembered him and the controversy surrounding him, in the same detail as Dr. Price. His description of the strange events was by far the most surprising of the whole interview. During this interview, I was hoping to find out more about the social changes that were taking place on

campus. However, I was disappointed in that both professors did not really see the dramatic changes that I expected, especially on desegregation.

On the whole, this interview went more smoothly than the first. I felt much more relaxed than I did during the first interview. Also, Dr. Steelman was a better narrator than Dr. Price because he tried to tie the questions that I asked with the broader themes of North Carolina life and the history of ECU. Also, I did not have to prompt him to add details the way that I did with Dr. Price. However, in looking critically at my interview performance, I see that I should have tried to ask better follow up questions. Another glaring mistake I made was when I asked Dr. Steelman if he remembered the Bob Thonen vs. ECU case. When he could not remember the case and he asked me what it was about, I could not remember the details. I flubbed my answer and turned red. In addition, I was surprised at the comments that Dr. Steelman made about his relationship with Leo Jenkins and his comments on how Jenkins was hired. However, overall my performance improved because I had the experience of the first interview. Finally, I mailed Dr. Steelman a "thank you" card as I also did with Dr. Price.

Transcription of Second Interview

Counter number Topic of discussion

001 Born in Wilkes County in Brown's Ford near Wilkesboro on the Yadkin River in North Carolina. Near the Blue Ridge Mountains.

003 Parents names: Father, Joseph S. Steelman. Mother, Gertrude Edmonston Steelman. Native of Wilkes County. Father was a farmer. Mother was a school teacher. Taught in a local two-room school. Taught for 44 years. He had two brothers. They had a rural background with a big house. He was born in 1922. He has vivid memories of the Great Depression and was aware of the programs of the New Deal.

023 Mother's education: His mother had a teacher's certificate from Greensboro, NC. She also took courses from other colleges.

029 He got interested in college in high school. He was on the debating team and in 1938 went to state championship and was in the semi final. In 1939 was in the state debating quarter finals, where he vied for the Charles B. Aycock cup. He did not win, but took an interest in Chapel Hill. After high school he went to Chapel Hill and majored in History and minored in English. He entered in 1939 and graduated in 1943.

041 WWII. He was in the infantry. In the Army's 71st infantry as an engineer. The army sent him back to school at the University of Mississippi rehearsing French in order to be an interpreter. Then he went to Indiana University to study Finnish. A year later he was in Europe: France, Germany, and Austria.

051 He was in Patton's third army. They broke out of the Battle of the Bulge. Then broke into Germany and Austria. He was not injured in the War. He was in the Army for a total of three years.

062 He stayed in the Army until after 1946, where he played baseball in Germany. In 1945, he went to the Fall term in Liverpool University, where he audited courses. The English were interested in American studies. On weekends he traveled England. Then he returned to Germany. After the war, he returned to Wilkesboro.

096 stopped to check sound quality.

097 He discusses HBO's "Band of Brothers" miniseries. He did not experience the horrors that was depicted. His unit went farther East than any other unit. They actually went into the Russian Zone.

- 131 He did not have too many friends in the service because he had to move around away from his unit.
- 138 He planned to come back to Chapel Hill. His professors told him to come back to Chapel Hill.
- 152 He was interested in North Carolina History. Had a colleague Author Link who was interested in Progressivism. Master's thesis was entitled the "Emigration movement from 1865 to 1890." Talks about his thesis.
- 200 Talks about his dissertation on the Progressive Era in NC. Also talks about articles he published on the topic. He wrote his dissertation on his farm in Wilkesboro. He talks about how he wrote his dissertation.
- 201 He meets Lala at Chapel Hill on her birthday. They took the same courses and worked together. She was from Georgia. They were both teaching undergraduates. They lived in Victory Village in Chapel Hill. Old Army temporary housing. They married in 1952. His wife could not become a part of the faculty because she was a woman.
- 290 He applied for jobs at colleges all around the country. He took a job at the University of Texas for one year. Then went back to Chapel Hill. He then got a temporary position in Upstate New York in Courtland.
- 362 Went back to Wilkesboro to finally finish his dissertation in 1954 to 1955.
- 388 Went to Greenville in the fall of 1955.
- 406 President of ECU John Messick asked him to come to Raleigh for an interview for a position.
- 423 Lala was hired as a professor. She taught French and History. They both taught in the same department for thirty years.
- 440 Talks about how others look down on ECU.
- 462 He discusses the AAUP and its effects.
ECU as and "instant university."
- 563 He explains the changes in the History Department. Mentions some of the students who went on to get PhD's.

Tape one Side B

- 000 Social Changes on campus. Talks about desegregation and the Pearsall Plan. Mentions Gov. Terry Sandford. He was on the disciplinary committee. Says there was no rioting.

- 024 talks about the faculty and desegregation. Most of the faculty in the History Dept. was from other places.
- 036 Lebaron was a racist history professor who wrote Cliff Johnson, a popular teacher, a letter challenging him to a duel. Lebaron said they could go out to the police firing range. Johnson showed the letter to the Dept. chair Paul Murray, who did not want to do anything with it. So Johnson took the letter to Mr. Messick (Leo Jenkins was Dean) The school checked on Lebaron's credentials. He claimed to be a graduate from the university of Rome, but it he was a complete fraud. His contract was terminated. Lebaron had a radio (or TV) program "History in the News." Johnson did not agree with the way the chairman handled the situation. Johnson went back to TN, then on to Tulane University. Lebaron went on to teach marriage relations.
- 085 Problems with other faculty who made exaggerated claims of their writings.
- 107 Class workload. He taught 15 hours a week. Classes were big 45 to 85 students. He was too busy to publish. He had a Southern fellowship at Chapel Hill.
- 122 The History Department started a publication. Jenkins gave them some money. The first volume "Essays in American History." The second year "The Essays in Southern Biography." The third study "Studies in the History of the South."
- 168 Reflections of Leo Jenkins. He could not discuss the hiring of Jenkins because "it is confidential." Although, he talks about the procedures of his hiring. He and Jenkins were good friends, they played golf together, but they did not "talk shop". Jenkins encouraged being involved in politics. Campaign of 1960 and Terry Sanford. He says that he was ECU's "greatest friend." Jack Kennedy came to campus.
- 250 Changes on campus for women. His experience was with co-ed classes on North Carolina History. The campus became more diversified. Also women got into sports. Women faculty were in all fields. He thought ECU was a place of opportunity for women. He says that in salary there was no discrimination.
- 306 Changes between students and teachers. Classes became smaller. He worked mostly with graduate students. He enjoyed it. Students became more sophisticated. Talks about the quality of the school of Art, the Drama Dept., and the music Dept.
- 358 Talks about the North Carolina Literary Review.
- 377 He does not remember the Bob Thonen Vs. ECU case.
- 393 Mentions Ovid Pierce, a novelist.
- 415 The Whichard visiting professorship program.
- 454 He does not recall the Brewster Building rumor.

- 482 The Mimi Jenkins Alumni Building. Faculty met for coffee and discussions before classes. They had Danforth Lecture Program that sponsored lecturers.
- 518 Discusses the Elias Carr project—the collection, which is stored in the ECU manuscript collection. Lala was working on Carr's biography.

Tape two side A

000 The beginning of the Manuscript collection.

013 The organization of historians in NC. It was a union of historians in the Eastern part of the state. Eventually became statewide. Dr. Brewster gave money to the program. Mentions Brewster lectures. He and Laya traveled to lectures.

Biographical Information

1. Birthplace
2. What are your parent's name's?
3. Where were they born?
4. What kind of work did your mother and father do?
5. Where did they go to school? Did they go to college?
6. Do you remember anything special about your childhood?
7. Where did you grow up?
8. When did you decide to go to college? Did you take any time off before you went to school?
9. Tell me about your college career.
10. Your dissertation on the Progressive Era in North Carolina is considered very important research and is still cited. Why did you decide to write about that topic?
11. Why didn't you publish your dissertation?

East Carolina

1. After you received your PhD, did you apply to teach at any other schools in North Carolina or anywhere else?
2. Was being a teacher always your goal, or did you think that you would use your degree for something else?
3. What year did you begin to teach at ECU?
4. What were your first impressions of ECU?
5. Was it what you expected?
6. How many classes did you teach during the quarter?
7. How many students were in the classes at the time?
8. What was the atmosphere like on campus at the time?
9. What did the campus look like?
10. Did Greenville have a small town feel, or did it feel like a sprawling campus town?
11. What did you think about the way that Leo Jenkins was chosen as president of the college?
12. What did you think of him?
13. In 1959, the first black student was enrolled on campus, what do you remember about that?
14. How was integration handled by the school?
15. Did the students want to talk about desegregation in the classroom?
16. What was the campus like after desegregation?
17. What did the faculty members think about desegregation? Was it being talked about in the History Dept.
18. Do you remember a professor in the History Dept. named Lebaron?
19. Do you remember his radio program "History in the News"?

20. Dr. Price said Lebaron was a fraud and that he claimed to have a doctorate from the University of Rome, but that he actually had no degree at all. What do you recall about it?
21. The 1960's was a time of tremendous change, what to you think was the most important change?
22. Women's roles changed in the 1960's, what changes did you notice on campus for women faculty and students?
23. Was there any change in the way the faculty and the student's interacted?
24. What do you remember about the Bob Thonen vs. ECU case, which set important precedents in laws that governed student papers?
25. Where did you stand on the case?
26. There is a rumor that Brewster Building was built with the "Vietnam campus riots" in mind. What is the real story behind the Brewster building. Did the faculty have a say in its construction?
27. Over the years that you were a professor in the history department, what are some of the major changes in the department that you thought were good, and what changes do you think should have been made?
28. What courses in history did you teach?
29. How did you manage to do research and carry a heavy teaching load?
30. What did you publish?
31. I understand that your wife was also a professor, what did she teach and where did she work?
32. Did you work on any projects together?
33. Lastly, have you done any research since your retirement from ECU?