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David R. Carr : USF 50th (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project: interview by Lucy D. Jones

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David R. Carr 1942-2009.

Lucy D. Jones

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Current Position: Associate Professor
of History at the St. Petersburg campus
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Interviewer: Lucy Jones
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Campus
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Dr. Carr came to USF in 1971 as an assistant professor of history.

Circumstances that brought Dr. Carr to USF

He received his Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska. A position opened up for a medieval history professor at the USF St. Petersburg campus. The position was one of three jobs in the nation at the time specifically designed for a medieval historian. Dr. Carr decided to take the job at USF.

Numerous medieval historian positions open up in the nation during the Vietnam War

Once academia decided it was going to be anti-war, almost every department in the nation cut out what was making men susceptible to the draft, western civilization. More students were flunked out of that type of course than any other course. This had enormous impact on the departments, and generated the numerous medieval positions.

Dr. Carr on his way to Florida

He says it was quite a traveling experience in 1971 on his way to Florida. He drove a U-Haul with a VW Bug behind it, and almost got arrested in Georgia by a “typical southern cop.”

Job requirements for the St. Petersburg position

One of the expectations for the position was that the historian had to teach a wide variety of European history, which Dr. Carr did.

The scenery and location of the St. Petersburg campus

“It was as neat as I can remember, being from Nebraska.” Everything was contained on the peninsula at that time.

Dr. Carr’s first office

He shared his spacious office, complete with windows, with the two other historians. He had a nice view of the bay. Dr. Carr says near his office was normally a site of pandemonium, with people coming and going, and students rushing in and out. “It was no place to get any work done.”

The St. Petersburg campus is on a site originally used by merchant marines during WWII
Buildings constructed for merchant marines during WWII inhabited the campus. Faculty and staff used buildings that were officer's quarters and classrooms. Dr. Carr's first office was in the A building which was built like a bunker. "It's still there because I don't think they can tear it down. It would take a lot of dynamite."

Dr. Carr develops many history courses throughout his career

In the years prior to him receiving tenure, he developed close to twenty-five different courses. The campus was on the quarter system. The courses would rotate very rapidly and there were full teaching loads.

Dr. Carr's first semester teaching

He taught classes on medieval society and the Renaissance and Reformation. Also, Dr. Carr taught a seminar during his first semester. "It was quite challenging." Commenting on the full teaching load he experienced right away, Dr. Carr says, "It was a real baptism by fire."

Other historians at USF St. Petersburg (one turns out to be a fraud)

At the time, there were only two other historians on the St. Petersburg campus, John Belohlavek and Bob Burke. Belohlavek eventually transferred to the Tampa campus at the end of 1971. Burke styled himself as the chair of the department. He was entrepreneurial in his approach. He recruited Dr. Carr. Dr. Carr knew Belohlavek because he also graduated from the University of Nebraska. Burke also left at the end of the year "under a cloud of suspicion, which turned out to be very accurate." He had tricked many people into accepting credits that were non-existent. Dr. Carr says that because it became known that Burke was a fraud, relations with the history department in Tampa became strained. Since Dr. Carr had been recruited by Burke, he was "tarred with the same brush." "That was difficult."

The frustration of having the Tampa campus take away historians from the St. Petersburg campus

Dr. Carr says that new recruits often would be "nurtured through tenure and then snapped up by the Tampa campus." "And we would be put back to square one again. It was frustrating to say the least. That happened in numerous departments. It didn't help the relationship between the two history departments."

The number of historians currently in the history department

The St. Petersburg History Department now has five historians. He says some historians have additional responsibilities, so they still do not have that many history courses, but they are offering a lot more than they did.

Growth of competitiveness in the history department and in the College of Arts and Sciences

As more people have been added not only in the department, but also in the college, it has become more competitive. "The bulk of the new faculty have been more or less indoctrinated in graduate school with a kind of competitiveness, such as if you're not this

way or that way, you won't get promoted or get tenure. To some degree they are right because the standards have increased over the years."

The increased emphasis on research

The expectations for teaching have decreased while the expectations for research have increased. "It works to the disadvantage of the old timers, who began their careers heavily involved in the teaching aspects. In the early days, we were actually discouraged from doing research."

Less campus social functions now

He also says there has been a decrease in campus social functions. However, the new vice president of the St. Petersburg campus, Karen White, has taken steps to counter that decline.

An interdisciplinary-community exists in the early days

Dr. Carr says the three colleges on the St. Petersburg campus were jammed together. There was an enormous mix of offices since all of them were in the same building. Now, Dr. Carr's office is in a building that is totally Arts and Sciences. "[Back then] you would wind up speaking with someone in economics or finance, perhaps as often as you would wind up speaking with someone in history. There was an interdisciplinary-community, which grew up quite naturally. It was beneficial. And there was not a real competitiveness among the three colleges. Even though we were jammed several to an office, the offices were great, and the camaraderie was great."

Socialization among faculty members in the early days

Dr. Carr says faculty socialized outside of work a lot in the early days both as faculty and friends. He says there were a lot of personal relationships. He says in the first decade there were constant picnics and they often played volleyball. "There was a good deal of extramural gathering."

The asparagus club

One of the earlier deans, John Hinz, created the Asparagus Club. He named it that because he found a passage in Thoreau, where the author expressed his total distaste for asparagus. The club was a gathering of community and faculty. The faculty presented their research to the community. The community asked questions about the research. "It was a very nice event."

Socializing with the staff of the St. Petersburg campus

In the spring Hinz usually had a beer party at his house. Everyone in campus was involved, including the staff. "The relationships were good with staff. There wasn't really a caste system that had developed yet."

Dr. Carr's salary in 1971

When he was hired he came on at \$11,000 a year. "And I thought I was a king."

Diversity in the history department

In the beginning there was no diversity. It was all male. In the mid 1970's, there were two women in the Tampa history department. But, their positions were short-lived; they moved on. Racial diversity did not exist until the 1980's when the history department finally hired a black professor. He was at USF St. Petersburg for two years before he was "bought away." "That was the problem most departments faced. We would recruit a bright and promising African American, and the moment it became known that he was bright and promising, the job offers from other institutions would pour in and you would lose him. It was like we were on this stationary bike."

Building expansion on campus and Dr. Carr moves into a new building

In 1980 a new building, the Davis building, was built, to which Dr. Carr moved. The new building was part of an expanded campus. The city of St. Petersburg bought up the land around the harbor, and got rid of a lot of "nasty" boat yards. The Davis building was the first structure built specifically for the campus. Then Coquina and the library, which is now Bayboro, were built. There is a new library now.

Dr. Carr comments on the physical growth of the campus

"It has been satisfying to watch the campus grow. I'm glad it hasn't grown as much as say the Tampa campus. We can't spread out very much, so it's far more coherent and cohesive." He says it requires a short walk to get from one building to another as compared to the Tampa campus, where it takes ten to fifteen minutes to walk in between buildings.

Enrollment growth

Dr. Carr says history enrollments have done very well. The College of Arts and Sciences' enrollments have been "stunning" in the last three or four years. Enrollment has grown by at least seventeen percent each semester.

Professors from Tampa and St. Petersburg exchange courses

Dr. Carr taught repeatedly in Tampa. Professors from both campuses would exchange courses. "There was so few faculty in St. Petersburg, so Tampa professors would come to teach their specialty, while we went to Tampa and taught ours." He says that certainly helped the relationships between the history departments, and the students to be exposed to more approaches to history. Every department on the St. Petersburg campus taught in Tampa at least once a year.

First dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

The first dean of the College of Arts and Sciences was Travis J. Northcutt, who was sometimes referred to as "Boss Hog" because he had a southern way about him and was a generously proportionate man.

Support from the Tampa campus for the history department in St. Petersburg

"I would say that the whole Tampa campus viewed the St. Petersburg campus as a drain on their resources." Dr. Carr says that feeling ran through the bulk of the faculty and all of the administrators in Tampa. He says there was very little cooperation. For example,

when they exchanged courses, the St. Petersburg campus would pick up Dr. Carr's travel expenses to and from Tampa. They also picked up the traveling expenses for the entire Tampa faculty to and from St. Petersburg. He says the Tampa campus never offered to pick up the traveling expenses. He thinks the St. Petersburg campus is getting louder lip service from the president. "But, as you move down the ranks...these folks have it in mind that it's a closed economy, and USF only gets a certain amount of money, and if any is given to the St. Petersburg campus, then that's their loss, it's right out of their pocket. I don't think that is true."

How is USF different from other institutions where Dr. Carr had previously worked?

USF in general, and in particular the St. Petersburg campus, was far more relaxed. "Nebraska was a tight spot. There were a few younger professors who were looser, but the bulk of them were pretty much buttoned-up." He says Nebraska had the atmosphere of "tweed jackets with pads on elbows and pipes."

Dr. Carr adjusts to USF (dress code much different)

Dr. Carr says it was the first time he ever wore sandals to class. "I don't think I ever taught in shorts, but a lot of people did." The whole of the U.S. had become far more relaxed with the bell-bottoms and long hair. He says the dress code virtually disappeared. He says students had some pretty strange choices in their wardrobe. He says sometimes before classes began, he would wonder what the students would have on that day.

Dr. Carr's early students versus the more recent ones

Dr. Carr says the difference between students then and now is enormous. In the early days the average age of a coed on the St. Petersburg campus was forty or over. They were people who were married and had children early, and their education had been interrupted and they decided to go back to school. There was an enormous percentage of part-time students. A full-time student was a rarity. Full-time students were not that common in Tampa either. He says the St. Petersburg campus adjusted to accommodating the part-time student, the evening student, much more rapidly than the Tampa campus. Dr. Carr says now the students are much younger. He is not sure what the average age is. The number of full-time students has skyrocketed. He says this is due in part to the campus becoming a four-year university as opposed to the campus being two-years in the beginning. It was an upper division campus with juniors, seniors, and graduates.

An agreement with SPJC limits the courses that can be taught at USF St. Petersburg

In the early days the College of Arts and Sciences had an agreement with St. Petersburg Junior College. Any history courses the junior college offered, St. Petersburg could not offer those same courses. They could not teach a lot of the basic courses in math and science. Also, there were no foreign languages offered.

What is Dr. Carr most proud of in his thirty-two years at USF?

Dr. Carr is most proud of his time as coordinator and director of the College of Arts and Sciences and getting programs started that had been absent—programs that were going to serve all students. Dr. Carr was the coordinator and director from 1999 to 2002. He is proud of reorganizing the college and getting the staff support to where it should be.

Where does Dr. Carr see USF St. Petersburg in the next decade?

“We are now on the cusp of adding dormitories. Having resident students on campus will change the character of the campus enormously.” More and more students are living closer to campus. He hopes that at some stage the College of Marine Science will become genuinely a part of the St. Petersburg campus. It is administratively part of Tampa even though it is located in St. Petersburg. It is still a Tampa college. That is something he has fought and argued for thirty years. He says the campus definitely will get some new buildings. He says a student center will be built.

Dr. Carr does not want the campus to become too large

“I would hate to see it get too large. It has an intimacy that both faculty and students enjoy.” This intimacy occurs in the classrooms.

Dr. Carr designed the science labs with the intent of maintaining intimacy among students and faculty

He designed the science labs so they would accommodate no more than twenty-four students. He did that because as an undergraduate he experienced mass science courses that were meaningless. It was hard to pay attention.

Maintaining the intimate character of the St. Petersburg campus

“The charter needs to be maintained.” He says people who have come on to the campus recently were aware of the character right away and attracted to it. He thinks they came because of it. He does not want to see it become another Tampa campus. “We are fortunate not to have a lot of land to expand on.”

Final thoughts

“The most ardent hope I have is that Tampa stops viewing us as a threat and starts seeing us as an attribute. When that day comes, I’ll probably have to check my pulse and see if I’ve died and gone to heaven.”

End of Interview