

John Parker

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Interview with John Parker

**Interviewed by Professor Clarke A. Chambers
University of Minnesota**

**Interviewed on December 19, 1994
University of Minnesota Campus**

John Parker - JP
Clarke A. Chambers - CAC

CAC: This is the afternoon of December 19, 1994, Monday. I'm interviewing John Parker who is the long time director of the James Ford Bell Library in the university library system and great manuscripts map collection of just enormous richness. He is a person who played a major role in library and university affairs for the third of a century that he was with us.

John, as I suggested, we can start with an intellectual or academic autobiography . . . start with family, that's fine. How did you get interested in the things that you did? Why did you go to Michigan? What inspired you, etcetera?

JP: My parents were sort of frontier school teachers. My father immigrated from Ontario as a young man with very little education. He went out to North Dakota to work on a farm for his uncle. While there, he discovered there were opportunities to teach school. Having had roughly the equivalent of an eighth grade education, he took the teacher's exam, and passed it, and taught in a country school for a couple of years. He could see that there was a future in teaching; but, he would need a college education and, indeed, a high school education. At the age of about twenty-four, he completed his high school education and, then, about three years later completed his college education at Jamestown College in North Dakota, where he met my mother who was the daughter of farmers who came out from Pennsylvania in the late 1880s. She was born in Wimbeldon, North Dakota, in 1892. Her parents were not well-educated people; although, her mother was a woman of considerable cultural aspirations. She played the violin a little bit. She wrote beautifully. She knew how to carry on a conversation in a manner that was very dignified. So, mother had that kind of background. She went off to Jamestown College and was there when my father arrived. Ultimately, they were married and settled in this little village of Nekoma where my father had been teaching even before the village was there. They taught there.

CAC: They both taught?

JP: They both taught. Mother took time out, of course, to have children. She had five. Dad taught there for thirty-seven years. Mother taught off and on, I suppose, for about twenty-five. We grew up there. The loyalty, of course, was always to Jamestown College because of what it had done for my parents; so, when my second oldest brother was ready for college, he went off to Jamestown. Then, I came along and there was no choice but that I would go to Jamestown also, which I did, starting in the autumn of 1941 having graduated from high school that spring.

My undergraduate education was interrupted by World War II. I went off to the Army Air Force, as it was called in those days, and spent three years traveling about the world, literally going around the world. I spent eight months in India with the 20th Air Force. When that Air Force unit moved out into the Mariana Islands, I moved with it, and was stationed on the Island of Tinian for another eight months or so, and then that's where the war ended.

CAC: Were you with the 20th Bomber Command?

JP: I was with the 20th Air Force, yes. Tinian was the island from which the atomic bomb was flown.

CAC: I was there!

JP: You were there, too?

CAC: I never knew that about us, John. [laughter]

JP: You were on Tinian?

CAC: I was on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. When things got too tight, too bureaucratic, a buddy and I volunteered to go into Okinawa, soon after the security of Okinawa. We weren't in Tinian at the time the bomb was dropped; but, I was there for ten or eleven months in the Marianas and in the 20th Bomber Command. I was intelligence and weather.

JP: Is that right?

CAC: Were you a flyer?

JP: No, I was a mechanic. I repaired gunnery equipment on the B-29s, the big airplane of that time.

CAC: They were making the fire raids on Tokyo and other places at that time.

JP: Those were our planes. I arrived there in April, having come by sea from India, a forty-day time at sea, and was there until the last part of November, when we were finally shipped home, after the war was over then. Yes, we have that common ground, eh?

CAC: Good grief.

JP: I remember looking across the bay there to Saipan often. I never got over to Saipan actually. It shows how limited, how provincial we were.

CAC: John, I was Christmas shopping yesterday and by gosh! they're making shirts and pajamas in Tinian and Saipan now.

JP: Is that right?

CAC: Tinian is not large enough to have a factory there; but, by gosh! they are.

JP: It was large enough to have about 500 airplanes. [laughter]

CAC: You bet.

JP: That's interesting that we have that common ground. I don't often meet people who have served in that area.

CAC: Right.

JP: I have know a few people. I just have across a few people who were Tinian when I was.

CAC: I knew we were on the same wave length; but, I didn't know why.

JP: [laughter] I came back from there in December, just about this time, as a matter of fact. It's December 19th. I think I got home on the 18th of December. In January, I went back to Jamestown to college. The first person I met when I came in there on a stormy night was my wife, the person who became my wife. Again, the Jamestown connection had it's social and romantic implications as it had for my father and my brother before me. I went to Jamestown then, and finished up my undergraduate work, and, I must say, without any strong sense of direction as to where I would be going from there. I thought for a time of just going out and teaching school like my parents had. I thought at one time maybe I should go into the ministry. Then, one day, one of my professors, Professor Cornelius Plantiga, the Philosophy professor, called me in and said, "What are you planning to do?" I was a good student by this time, a very good student, getting *As* in all my classes. Professor Plantiga wondered what was to become of me and I didn't really know.

CAC: [laughter]

JP: By this time, it's March and I'm going to graduate in June. He said, "You ought be to be getting a scholarship someplace." I asked him what he had in mind. He was a graduate of Duke University and I think he had also gone to Michigan as an undergraduate. He had a cousin who

was in the History Department at Wayne State University. So, he had connections at all of these places and suggested to me that I should be making applications for graduate school. If I got accepted, then he would help me to find an assistantship. I applied to all three and I got accepted at all three. He thought that it would be very good for me to have a teaching experience right off the bat. This cousin of his, Professor Bossenbrook, at Wayne State would intercede on my behalf and get me an assistantship.

CAC: In History?

JP: In History. In those days, there were no search committees, or competitive exams, or anything. If somebody recommended you and that person was a good friend . . .

CAC: Weren't you and I lucky that was the case?

JP: That's right. [laughter] Yes, we didn't have to go through much ritual. I went off to Wayne State that fall with a teaching assistantship, which was quite a heavy responsibility for a young guy just out of North Dakota. Here I was in Detroit at Wayne State where, I would say, more than half the students were older than I was in the class that I had. The teaching assistantship, in that time, did not mean that you assisted the professor. You were the boss in the classroom three days a week and one day a week, those students went off to hear the great professor do his lectures. I had a class of forty students and I would say more than half of them were older than I was. It was racially integrated and I had never been in that kind of a situation before in college—or even in the Army, as a matter of fact, because the Army was not integrated.

CAC: Of course.

JP: It was a great experience. It was just the most exciting time I could imagine . . . very exciting teachers; and the teachers were colleagues because we all shared an old house that was the History Department.

CAC: Ahhh.

JP: So, there was coffee always on and it was just very sociable. The great professors were just sitting around. Then, we young guys could listen to them, and talk with them, and argue with them whenever we wanted . . . a great experience. I taught there for that year and it was pretty apparent that I should not stop with a master's degree but should go on out to Michigan, which was nearby, where I'd already been accepted and work on a Ph.D. in history. I didn't complete my M.A. at Wayne that year. I still had a thesis to write because they required that. They didn't give a Ph.D.; so, the end-all, be-all, was the master's degree. I got married that summer, went out to Michigan, and took some classes, and at the same time was writing my master's thesis for Wayne State. I would make a trip in once a week to come visit with my adviser. I had a lot of good materials out at the University of Michigan because I was writing a history of the first thirty years of the Packard Motor Car Company. They had some papers of some of the early

people at Packard. Henry Joy's—he wasn't the first president but he was the first real dynamic president of Packard—papers were there. I finished that up that spring, took my oral exams, and while doing all of this, I went off to the Mississippi Valley Historical Society's meetings in Madison, Wisconsin, with a colleague.

CAC: I know it, yes.

JP: He was a teacher, a young colleague there at Michigan. While I was roaming the halls and looking, I suppose, a bit lost, I was confronted by the head of the department at the University of North Dakota. He was looking for an instructor. I allowed that I might be available; so, right there and then, he hired me, you might say. There wasn't a whole lot of . . . I guess there was a letter of recommendation from the chairman at Wayne State—I think that was about all that it took—Professor Raymond Miller. I went out to North Dakota and taught for three years, going back to Michigan every summer taking more classes in History, taking my languages, getting all that stuff out of the way.

CAC: I see.

JP: So, I had three years under my belt at the University of North Dakota. My wife was teaching in the Education Department there. It was reasonably happy except that, in those days, there was not much chance for advancement in History. There were too many young GIs like myself just out with their degrees. I didn't have my Ph.D. yet. I was a little unhappy with some of the personnel things there in the department, some of the personalities; so, I decided to leave and go back to Michigan. Since, History was filled up everywhere, it seemed to me, and my wife, being a librarian and teaching in the Education Department, was getting journals that showed how many opportunities there were in Library Science. Those journals indicated to me that I could go about any place I wanted to geographically and that salaries were just as good; so, I went back to Michigan and . . .

CAC: Basically, it would be the same kind of work.

JP: Yes. I went back and took a degree in Library Science; and while I was there, I worked at the William L. Clements Library, which is a great . . .

CAC: Oh, one of the great research libraries.

JP: . . . Americana library. I was a student assistant there. That sort of convinced me that I wanted to be a rare book librarian. Up until then, I would have been happy . . . In fact, I made an application or two to some state historical societies because I would have liked to have gone into a state historical society. While I was at Michigan at the Clements Library, James Ford Bell was negotiating here in Minneapolis to place his books at the University of Minnesota, his alma mater.

CAC: At Clements Library, you knew that that was happening? You got wind of it?

JP: I wasn't aware of it, no, until Dr. [Ned] Stanford, here at Minnesota, wrote a few letters around to major rare book libraries and, in a sense, asked, "Do you have a young person who would like to come Minneapolis and start a rare book library?" My superior there at Clements, [unclear] Storm, who was the acting librarian, called and asked me if I was interested. I said, "Yes, that sounds really good." He said, "I can't imagine anybody wanting to go to Minneapolis. It's so damned cold there." I said, "Where are you from?" He said, "Chicago." [laughter] I couldn't believe that a person from Chicago could bad mouth Minneapolis about the weather.

CAC: [laughter] Well, you were hardened with North Dakota.

JP: Right. To me, as a youngster growing up, Minneapolis was always south. My hometown was about 450 north of here, right up on the Canadian border. That's how I applied for the job, came out here, and was interviewed.

CAC: Interviewed by James Ford Bell?

JP: Interviewed by James Ford Bell, and Dr. Stanford, and Virginia Donahi who had done a lot of the cataloging of Mr. Bell's books. That's all the interviewing it took in those days. There was no search committee.

CAC: At this point, the library itself had not been established? James Ford Bell had built this library on his own?

JP: On his own. The books were downtown. I went down to his office to be interviewed and I was shown the books.

CAC: Had he trained himself on the job for this?

JP: He was an instinctive collector.

CAC: Say something about that. He was of the milling family, right?

JP: Right. James Ford Bell was of the milling family that came out here. It was his father that came out to work with Washburn Crosby and, then, as it developed, James Ford Bell himself was the founder of General Mills. He brought together some milling companies and made that corporation out of it. If he had not been into a milling family, he would almost certainly have been a professor of history someplace or of philosophy. He had a fantastic grasp of the past and its relationship to the present. He had also a grasp for always wanting to be at the beginning of things.

CAC: Ahhh.

JP: He wanted to know how something started or to know what the fundamental ingredients were. Whether it was a loaf of bread, or a fishing reel, or whatever, he always wanted to know, What is the fundamental ingredient of this? So, as an amateur historian, he always asked, "How did this start?" Here he was running a big corporation in Minnesota up here on the Falls of St. Anthony. The question that he had to answer for himself was, "How did it get here? How did business get here? How did this whole area become a business community?" Of course, that took him back into the fur trade and the Hudson Bay Company from the north, the French from the east and the south meeting here at the top of a hill, which Minnesota is. That's how business began here.

CAC: Would he have had an agent to help him select in the early days?

JP: Oh, yes. He was known to the major booksellers of this country and abroad.

CAC: I see.

JP: He didn't buy that many books.

CAC: He was buying manuscript maps as well?

JP: He was buying maps and rare books. Before he got really going into the French on the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, and the Hudson Bay Company, and so on, he had toyed around with collecting American literature, English literature. In this, he was influence, I think, by, I suppose the most prominent collector this community has ever had, Herschel Jones. Herschel B. Jones was a generation ahead of James Ford Bell. He told me often enough about Herschel's collection, and how he admired it, and so on to convince me that this was the next generation following the previous generation. Yet, the English literature didn't satisfy that quest for beginnings that was so much a part of his intellectual life. He always had to know where it started. If it took him to Babylon, he would have to go to Babylon to find out, get the books and so forth. That's how he started. Through the 1930s and 1940s, with interruptions for service during the war and one thing and another in government agencies, he put together a collection of French Americana primarily, but some Hudson Bay stuff dealing with the French coming into the heartland and that was heavily Jesuit materials. When I came here to look at that library in March of 1953, I suppose there were about 500 books in it, all carefully chosen, all stacked away in a little old steel filing cabinet down in his office in the old McKnight Building. He and I sort of liked each other, I think, right off the bat. His remark the day I was being interviewed, which told me what he wanted . . . he said, "I want somebody who hasn't made up his mind about too many things."

CAC: [laughter] Wonderful!

JP: I didn't know enough to have made up my mind about very many things in the world of books at that time; but, I had good teachers at the Clements Library. These people, once they

knew I was coming out here, really loaded it on me to learn everything I could about French Americana and so forth. So, when I came, I had enough of a background to sort of talk like I knew something even though I didn't know very much. The object here was not just to move the books from downtown out to the university . . .

CAC: Yes . . . develop?

JP: . . . the object was to set forth a plan that would enable this library to grow all through this century, and well into the next, and forever.

CAC: He had an original endowment to make this possible?

JP: At that point, he didn't have. At that point, he was willing to write the checks to pay for the books.

CAC: On an annual basis?

JP: Even not on an annual basis. When we'd turn up some books, he'd pay for them.

CAC: I see. He covered salary and staff?

JP: To begin with, he covered my salary. That became a little bit troublesome to the university, in the sense that I was being paid at the same rate as other beginning librarians. It caused some difficulty. It would be much better after two years, they concluded, to let the university pay the salaries, and James Ford Bell buy the books, and the university would continue to make some contributions toward the book budget in view of the fact that already and historically, this library was spending money on Seventeenth Century French and Seventeenth Century English materials to satisfy people like John Wolf and Herbert Heaton. People of that sort and this library had a great tradition in those fields. Whether the Bell Library had come or not, those expenditures would have continued just as a part of a good research library in those fields. It was decided that the library would continue to make sort of a modest contribution to the book budget; but, the heavy stuff would come through James Ford Bell. He retained ownership of those until such time as he could work out his own disposition of the future. He had to do his will and his relationship with the university so that this could become permanent. He wanted to make sure that the university was equally committed to doing something; so, there was about an eight year period, up until just before his death, when there was that going on. Really, in those days, locally my job was to make it clear to him that, yes, the university was committed, the university was doing its part, and at the same time to convince the university that this was something that would be a great boon down the road a long ways. I didn't have to work very hard at that because Ned Stanford was very energetic in the world of collecting books. He wanted to build a great library. That was the modus operandi in those years. We got along very well. Mr. Bell and I traveled to Europe a couple times together. I went every year to Europe to buy books. There, the motivation was not just to come home with a bag of books; but, I've always thought

of it as a job in diplomacy to get this library into a position with the major booksellers so when something really great came up, they thought of us first. I roamed the book stores of western Europe, even into eastern Europe a little ways . . . Poland, Finland, Yugoslavia . . . looking to see what was there . . . down into Egypt on one occasion . . . Istanbul . . . trying to scope out what would be possible. After three years of doing this, I wrote a report as to what I felt the future could be at this library. He liked that.

CAC: It broadened out into exploration beyond French?

JP: Right. I'm glad you asked that question. The original theme, of course, was Americana . . . European expansion into this continent really; but, it was apparent to Mr. Bell that this was only a part of a much bigger story. He could not be satisfied with only a small piece of a big story. The rationale here was . . . work something out that places this in its world context. Mr. Bell was a world trader. He was a person who believed in open trade everywhere in the world. He felt it was a natural and instinctive thing that human beings would always trade and they would always get around any regulations that prevented them from doing so. [laughter]

CAC: [laughter]

JP: We decided, yes, after looking to see what was available, and of course, in terms of what you could buy with your money. You could buy three important books on the Portuguese in Asia, let us say, for one important book on the French in North America just because the world had not yet caught up with this vision.

CAC: I see.

JP: So, we bought heavily on the Portuguese in India and China. We began buying heavily Jesuit relations in China, India, Ethiopia, and so forth, which corresponded to the ones we had for New France.

CAC: I'm going to interrupt. Most of these are rare books?

JP: Yes.

CAC: No manuscripts at all except for maps?

JP: We bought some manuscripts; but, manuscripts were not very available for one thing. Most manuscripts wind up in national archives—which is where they belong—or provincial archives.

CAC: Sure.

JP: We would buy a good manuscript if we could find one—and we did. We bought some great manuscripts and a few great manuscript maps; but, 90 percent of what we were buying was

printed books. They were printed books which had no geographical limitations on their scope but a chronological limitation that we decided . . .

CAC: Or any language limitation?

JP: No language limitations at all; although, western European was what we were after. We didn't buy Arabic. We didn't buy Chinese . . . western European languages but the world scope in terms of what they wrote about. We did set a chronological limit at about 1800. We felt that the voyages of Captain [James] Cook, which pretty much outlined the continents definitively, the oceans, the French Revolution, and the American Revolution made the Nineteenth Century so different from all that had gone before, that we did not want to get into that and also, with respect to the American side of it, we did not want to put ourselves in bad relations with the many historical societies in this country that were collecting that kind of thing. We decided pretty much to cut it off at 1800 and, in some instances, going a few years beyond; but, for the most part, that was it. We set about buying books in those early years, finding new booksellers, getting ourselves so positioned with certain of them that when a great book came up that had not appeared in the market for thirty, or fifty, or sixty years, they thought of us. We got good books that way.

CAC: Did he have other members of the family interested in this?

JP: No, it was his thing.

CAC: Within the library, it was your thing?

JP: It was my thing.

CAC: This was really a partnership.

JP: It was a partnership. It really was a partnership; although, I must say, in the library, Harold Russell was extremely interested in what we were doing. As long as he lived, Ned Stanford, yes, was very observant and helpful and, I must say, helpful in so many ways and Ralph Hopp as well. As long as these people were here, the James Ford Bell Library had a very special place in their vision of the total library picture, very much so. I had great help, I must say, just great help. The relationship with Mr. Bell was very close in the sense that I could go down to his office with a bundle of books that had come in the mail; and it seemed to me I could use up as much time as I wanted, even though there might be a vice-president from the cereals division or something sitting outside waiting to get in. James Ford Bell and I liked talking about all kinds of things. We traveled together. We ate together. We had some good times.

CAC: Ah, that's a nice story.

JP: He was a very gentle man. He was generous. He was exacting. He wanted to know and he didn't want any glossing over or anything of that sort. I can recall sending him a description of a map, a very important map, and it took three pages for me to explain why this map was so important. He sent back the description and said, "I think you should explain it in one page." So, I did. [laughter]

CAC: You came when you were thirty. How old was he then?

JP: At that time, he was in his early seventies. He died in 1961.

CAC: So, you had seven or eight years with him?

JP: We had about eight years together, yes. He answered every letter I ever wrote to him from anyplace.

CAC: In the meantime, he had set up an endowment to continue this?

JP: Right. Now that he was convinced this thing was going to work at the university. Of course, he was a Regent in those years. He knew how the university function.

CAC: Ah.

JP: He wanted to make sure of the commitment and nobody blames him for that. Then, as he became older and somewhat ill in the later years, he put together the endowment. That has provided for book acquisitions ever since and still does. It goes on, we hope, forever. That's sort of how it got started and that's how it developed. He had definite ideas about this library having, what he called, social acceptability in this community. To that end, we should organize something which we called the Associates of the James Ford Bell Library, which recruited some of his friends, academics, all kinds of a mix of people. That continues to be a major support for publications of the library. That was the idea of it.

CAC: Do they function in an advisory capacity also or primarily to facilitate?

JP: Primarily to facilitate . . . advisory in the sense of, yes, programs of publications and that sort of thing. They do advise on that. On acquisitions . . . in the early years, we did have an advisory committee, which consisted of one member of the Bell family, one member of the university community, and a couple of other people, including the dean of the Graduate School at Harvard University, who was Frances Rogers. He was one of our great friends, one of the great advocates for this library because he was a specialist in Portuguese exploration literature. We would meet once or twice a year for four or five years—that was just after Mr. Bell's death—to kind of get a feeling for how this was going. All of this while, the head of the James Ford Bell Foundation, which was the patron organization, and of, what was called, the Book Trust, the endowment—these were two separate organizations but, they both helped us—the strong

man in all of that, was T. R. Anderson who had been Mr. Bell's lawyer and financial expert, you might say, during the last fifteen years of his life. Dick Anderson became our greatest friend after James Ford Bell was gone.

CAC: When you came here, were there other major special collections of that sort or another sort?

JP: Yes, but it was not organized. It's interesting that you would use the term special collections because I don't think that term was in use in 1953; but, by 1960, it was everywhere in use.

CAC: Not only here but nationally, one assumes?

JP: Yes, nationally, everywhere. I've often thought about that that I came into this profession at a time when something very big was brewing. It got its name in the library parlance as special collections of which . . .

CAC: Because many of them were beyond rare books; although, they would include rare books?

JP: Right.

CAC: [unclear] children's literature, for example?

JP: Right.

CAC: Was that in order when you came?

JP: No. The Kerlin collection had not yet begun. It was just getting started in the next few years. Irving Kerlin would send in great boxes of books and I, kind of a young naive rare book librarian, thought this is no way to build a library if you just buy books by the ton, you might say. I was buying one book at a time. [laughter] It very quickly became apparent that this was a massive and very important collection. I had to learn things like this. Other collections came along like the social welfare history archives. I suppose, at the first, I wouldn't have thought that was a special collection because it was too big and too nefarious, included too much. Obviously, Ned Stanford had the good sense to see what these things could do for a university research collection. Ultimately, you get the immigration archives, the social welfare history archives, and you get the Kerlin collection, and a little bit later on, you start the Wangenstein collection over there in Bio-Med. Then the University Archives got a boost and the manuscript division got a boost; so, that during those years from 1955, let us say, up to 1975 or 1980, there was a tremendous growth in these, what we have come to call, special collections. They became the *real* jewels of the University Library system.

CAC: I suppose in some part because in the 1960s, down into the mid 1970s, there was grant money available, even if it weren't a president of General Mills, there were others.

JP: There was grant money available not only for acquiring but for cataloging and taking care of . . . yes, it was a good time, up until, I would say well into the 1970s. Then, I recall, grant money began drying up. We called it the Depression of 1969 when things just didn't come through as they had done before. It was great to be a part of all of that even though at the beginning, I must say, I was not emotionally sympathetic. I was too rare book oriented; but, I came around gradually to see, yes, this is good stuff. Originally, what had been thought of as rare books at the University of Minnesota had been the "Y" collection and the "Z" collection, which were two separately sequestered batches of books depending upon value of all sorts of weird criteria.

CAC: The good sex stuff was up there in "Y" or "Z" and not for general circulation.

JP: Right. There was no consistent criteria. For example, I mentioned the university's strong commitment in the field of Seventeenth Century French, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century English materials. These would, by and large, have been in the "Z" collection, but not always. I would roam the stacks looking for things that were openly available in the stacks. Anybody which might fit . . .

CAC: Oh, my heavens!

JP: . . . into the James Ford Bell Library. I can recall finding one pamphlet there that I think is the only copy known of the pamphlet.

CAC: It was just sitting on a dirty shelf?

JP: Just sitting on the shelf as a part of a collection of pamphlets, which I think at the prorated cost of those pamphlets, this particular one had cost something like ninety-seven cents or something and I was being offered another addition of the same pamphlet for something over \$1000. In the course of searching books, searching the stacks for books, we found a lot of things that had just been there, not through negligence really; but, over the years, a library grows up and what was common becomes rare. Out of all of this concern that Mr. Russell began to show, and Mr. [James] Kingsley, and I, and others, for all of the rare stuff that was scattered around through this system . . . began to bring it in and organize what came to be called the Department of Special Collections.

[break in the interview as telephone rings]

JP: There's an aspect of the Bell Library that I wanted to bring up here; and that is, the conviction that Mr. Bell had that these books should be used and they were not to be sequestered and never displayed or used. His idea was that this was a research collection . . .

CAC: Good!

JP: . . . and, therefore, it would be incumbent upon the university to establish a graduate course in History or some related subject which would use these books as materials, and it seemed incumbent upon the curator of the library to be the teacher, the instructor, in such a course or at least an assistant in the course. That was written into the contract really, a little bit vague perhaps; but, nevertheless, it was there. Very early on, we began thinking of this as a teaching library and started giving classes, first in the Library School because there was a request from them, "Could we make use of these books as a laboratory type course for books for librarians who might be interested in going into rare books and special collections?" We did that. Then, a little bit later on, the arrangement with the History Department worked out so that Professor [Paul] Bamford would work with us in the library and we would teach a class in History. The Library School one continued until the Library School folded. The History Department connection is still going on, as you know.

CAC: Passed along to different persons?

JP: That's right.

CAC: Didn't Stuart Schwartz and Carla Phillips . . . ?

JP: Stuart Schwartz picked it up. Right, after Bamford retired, they picked it up. I think that Stuart did it one year while Paul Bamford was on leave. Others have participated. It's been a relationship that Mr. Bell wanted very badly.

CAC: I'm sure you've picked up a national and international clientele, as well, of patrons?

JP: Oh, yes. It takes awhile to erode into the mentality of the academic world that something new exists. It takes awhile, especially with the senior generation of professors. They have enough work, as you and I know, to last the rest of their lives.

CAC: Sure, yes.

JP: It's the young people coming in who are looking for new things to do; so, we did not have great success, I must say, with interesting Herbert Heaton, or John Wolf, or any of the other sort of senior people in the early years. It was the younger people, Paul Bamford coming in, and, then shortly after I came, and then some years later Stuart Schwartz, Carla Phillips. I remember when Stuart came here to be interviewed. His adviser, Louis Hanke, came with him from Columbia.

CAC: God! I'd forgotten that.

JP: Louis brought Stuart over to the library because Louis Hanke knew us from a number of connections because he knew some of the things we were buying. I can remember him sitting Stuart Schwartz down at the table there in the library and showing him some things that would

be worth his attention. That's the way it happens . . . the younger people. Stuart has gotten us connected with people at Johns Hopkins and lots of other places. Carla Phillips has gotten us connected with other people. Francis Rogers, whom I mentioned before, who is professor of Portuguese language and literature at Harvard—he had connections all over the world obviously—treasured his connection here. He got two books published through the University of Minnesota Press because of his connection through the library. He was an extremely well-known scholar and had great prestige. He directed people here.

Way back in 1960, the man who was then my assistant, Steve Schloesserauf, went to a conference in Lisbon to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator. While there, we met a professor from the City of College of New York, Tom Schoolstien. We decided we want to form something called the Society for the History of Discoveries, which we did. It is now a flourishing organization.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

CAC: Slowly.

JP: Slowly. We deliberately resisted the route that some libraries took, that is, of endowing fellowships and scholarships to bring the scholars here. We felt that if we were good enough, the scholars would come. It was the old better mousetrap theory. Mr. Bell believed in that and I believe in that, that a library should not spend its resources buying researchers; it should spend its resources buying books. If you get enough books, the right ones, you'll never want for clientele. I think that has worked.

CAC: If you make a good breakfast cereal, people will come and buy it.

JP: That's right. James Ford Bell believed in this. If you have a good product, selling it is not that much of a problem. It's getting the good product, making sure that it's superior.

CAC: You described a lot of special collections, to use that term again, that are kind of free-standing. I'm wondering what your perception was of whether there was parallel play, whether there was a coordinated effort to support special collections?

JP: I think at the beginning. Dr. Stanford was really the architect of this part of the library's policy. These collections begin showing up in various places. He was just out there grabbing them. There was something called the Hess collection, which was dime novels and popular literature. He just went out and got it. The idea was to bring these things in. It was much the same with the immigrant collection, the social welfare history collection. When they began, I don't think we knew where these things were going to go.

CAC: That's for sure.

JP: But, you can't get them to go anyplace until you have them in hand. Ned Stanford was an inquisitive person. We had an acquisitions librarian for some of those years named Carl Jackson who was equally inquisitive. Carl Jackson could never turn away from an opportunity to get something that somebody else didn't have. We conspired on several occasions to bring in important collections of books just because we knew, in time, they would be useful, prove useful. When I was traveling out buying books for the James Ford Bell Library, if I saw something that I thought would fit into the general collection as an important resource, I would send a note off back to Carl Jackson that we've seen this thing and get him in touch with the people that had it; so, ultimately, we got some very good things that way.

CAC: So, there was a coordination down the road?

JP: There was coordination. There was always rivalry among people needing funds within a university library.

CAC: Sure.

JP: But, I think there was a sense that we were really on a roll here building something mighty, mighty good. There were some problems with it. I'm sure there were personality difficulties with some of the donors, and collectors, and staff members; but, in general, we never thought of going back once we got going on this idea of building special collections at Minnesota.

CAC: You became a publishing scholar yourself out of these materials?

JP: Right. I couldn't be around these things without coveting a few for myself. Of course, when I wrote my doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan, it was in Library Science; but, the subject was English travel and exploration literature up to 1620. In a sense, I established myself with that as sort of a reputation builder for myself and the library as well. The book was published and anybody who saw it knew where it came from really.

CAC: Right.

JP: All the time I was here in the library, I always had something going, I think not only out of a sense of duty so much as a sense of need, that you need to have something of your own. You're spending your days building this collection for the University of Minnesota and that's great; but, there are some times when you need to have something that is your own, your own book, your own article. I've always preached this to librarians. Librarians tend to be, I think, a rather unhappy lot on the whole because they are always giving so darned much to everybody else and don't very often get into doing something for themselves. I've always preached, "Everybody should have a research project. It doesn't matter how big it is or how little it is

. . . just something to go home to at night and fiddle around with." I believe that. I think that it could be the salvation of almost anybody. It's a hobby really. I wrote a book about Jonathan Carver that took me twelve years. I always said, "Jonathan Carver is unlike most of the people I deal with. He doesn't talk back to me."

CAC: [laughter]

JP: "He's always there to be interpreted by me and I don't have to worry about what he thinks." It's kind of nice to deal with materials like that . . . not that I've said all there is to say about . . .

CAC: But, it hones your skills and the other aspects of your career.

JP: Also, it makes you understand the problems of the person who comes in to the library and wants to get going on a research project. If you haven't done it, it's not all that easy to help somebody else do it. So, I started doing it right away. I was writing my dissertation almost from the day I got here. I took seven years, evenings, weekends, because I was working eight hours a day, going to Europe anywhere from three to seven weeks every summer, raising a family, painting my house, mowing the lawn, all these maintenance things.

CAC: Becoming a beekeeper, John.

JP: That came later. [laughter] Keeping bees came with my old age really.

CAC: I see.

JP: The idea of doing research? Yes, I believe in it for librarians.

CAC: Will you say something, in addition, about the relationship of these collections to the university or the faculty generally? I have a sense—I'll tell you where I'm coming from—that the task of publicity within the university is as difficult as trying to reach a scholarly audience nationally.

JP: It is. We did everything we could. There were many years, many years, that we'd issue, what we called, our *Monthly Report*, in which we sent out, to every conceivable faculty member who we thought might be interested, a listing of all the books we bought that month with my annotations as to what the importance of this book is. That helped a lot; but, on the other hand, there were still people, after twenty-five years in this building right here, twenty feet away, you might say, or two minutes away from the library, who didn't know we existed. That's because there is so much clamoring for attention from all sides. If a professor has got his research staked out enough to last him for the next ten, fifteen, twenty years, he's not looking for new things. I have come to accept that that you're not going to draw a crowd with a rare book library. You're going to draw a few really good people over a long period of time and it may sound

snobbish to say so but I've always said, "Superior scholars will require superior resources." There's nothing more superior than a first edition or an unedited manuscript, right? [laughter]

CAC: John—or Jack as most of us would call you— . . .

JP: Sure, you can call me that.

CAC: . . . you were also active, because of your reputation for standards, and for skill, and for diplomacy in library affairs generally. At many junctures, there were very serious, internal problems with the library . . .

JP: Yes.

CAC: . . . and its administration, and its management.

JP: That's right. I was sort of a senior person when I was pretty young. I got promoted fast because I had a Ph.D. and there weren't very many in the library world in those days; so, when we got into the time of bestowing upon librarians faculty status—in some cases it was bestowed; it was kind of a blanketing in—being older and being more advanced in terms of degrees and so forth, yes, I sort of was looked to as a leader in some of these things. I tried my very best to get other librarians to do some of what I was doing, as I've explained, to have research projects. I don't think it worked very well. It worked somewhat. There were people . . . there are people in the library faculty who took Ph.D.s and did good research. I was on the examining committee of several of them and a thesis adviser for one of them that I can think of.

CAC: There are always divisions between . . . I don't want to put words in your mouth; I'm making a statement which has a question mark at the end. There are civil servants. There are professional librarians and, then, there are persons who had academic appointments as well?

JP: Right.

CAC: Then, there are administrators. It's really a kind of hierarchy. Is that an accurate . . . and not always the best of feelings among these different groups?

JP: Right. As it started out though, Clarke, there really were just two classes of people: faculty appointments, which were the administrators, and civil service.

CAC: Okay.

JP: I came here as a civil service person.

CAC: When does this fall apart?

JP: This falls apart in the 1960s, when there was a large push nationally—this was not a local thing really—within the profession to get faculty status for librarians. It was no pleasure for librarians of longstanding and great accomplishment, with civil service ranking, to have to live in the same categorization as the grounds keepers, and the restaurant attendants, and so forth—not that there's anything wrong with those people but there should have been . . .

CAC: They have a different function.

JP: Right. In the normal civil service form for evaluation, all of this, there were some aspects of the evaluation that were sort of insulting to an academically inclined person. I saw this very early. I came in here as a civil servant. My rank was principal librarian, which was sort of at the upper end of the civil service ranking; but, I made it pretty clear pretty soon that I was not going to stay around with a civil service rating because I just felt that this was kind of a dead end and Dr. Stanford could see that right way. After two years, I received a faculty appointment.

CAC: Some did and many did not.

JP: Later on, others got the faculty appointment. Then, there was the problem of how do you promote these people with now assistant professorships and instructorships if they're not doing the same things as people over in the Social Science Tower are doing? This created problems because people who were very worthy were being turned down, at the Morrill Hall end of things, for promotion because they hadn't done the research and they weren't considered teachers. That, of course, was the hardest part to accept. Because we were in the library, you're teaching all the time. You're at the desk. You're teaching every minute of the day.

CAC: Of course.

JP: You're not standing in front of a class giving a lecture; but, you're standing in front of one person. It may be a full professor and you're telling this person how to use or how to find what he or she needs. This movement toward academic rank, which, as I say, was a national thing within the profession and we accepted it here, didn't work out well because it was felt that the librarians weren't meeting the standards that were required of other academic faculty appointments. People got turned down . . . a lot of dissent. It was decided, I think at the Morrill Hall end, to discontinue the faculty appointments and go to this third class, this in-between group. That pleased some people but not everybody. They were not offering us a choice. If we were a new hire, they were not saying, "What kind of an appointment would you like, faculty or professional?" It would have to be professional . . . it could not be faculty, which did not sit well with old guys like me because we had made it the other way. While they couldn't deny us our continued faculty appointment, they, nevertheless, were saying, "Giving it to you was a mistake." If you've ever sat in the front of the bus, you don't want to be moved back to the rear of the bus. That's what it came down to. It was very, very bitter, very, very bitter—and it still is.

CAC: There are difficulties, I would imagine, in almost all libraries because of the divisions that you speak of and other factors of internal governance?

JP: Yes.

CAC: Sometimes in the academy they say, "The Arts College has a constitution, and the Institute of Technology has a constitution, and Biological Sciences has a constitution." Perhaps, the library should have a system of governance. You were part of that?

JP: I was part of that.

CAC: Can you say something about that? I know it's very complicated.

JP: It comes out really of the revolutions that we all experienced back in the 1960s. Authority was denounced in every corner of our society . . .

CAC: I seem to remember that.

JP: . . . whether it was the clergy, or in your own household, or in the schoolrooms. The library had been run as a fairly authoritarian institution. Back in the days of Frank Walter . . . he was an authoritarian person, I'm told. I think [Errett W.] McDiarmid who succeeded him ran it as his show. Ned Stanford did the same thing. The director of the library, it was assumed, would run the library and the other people would do the work and there would be a chain of command.

CAC: It's a hierarchical system.

JP: Right. Hierarchies just were very out of style in the 1960s and early 1970s, as we all know. The people down there in the trenches wanted a voice and the people in the trenches in the library were people with master's degrees, as a rule, people with academic experience, sometimes extending over twenty or thirty years. It's not surprising that some of us would want to have a share in running the show. The constitution was a way of bringing that into being. It worked reasonably well quite a bit of the time.

CAC: Would it be fair to say that not the retirements but the resignations of both Mr. Stanford and Mr. Hopp related to the difficulty of managing this situation?

JP: That might be. I don't know that for sure.

CAC: I don't either.

JP: They were both at an age . . . But, there were turmoils, right, as you can well imagine; although, I didn't sense the turmoil . . . The turmoil that was then was a whisper compared to the turmoil that followed.

CAC: We're speaking of Eldred Smith.

JP: Right. The turmoil during Stanford's and Hopp's days was one, I think, in which there was very little ill will. The hierarchy came into conflict with the people in the trenches. This is like a military organization. You cannot allow the privates and the corporals to run the show; but, it can be run in such a way that the privates and the corporals don't complain a whole lot—at least don't mutiny. [laughter] I think that those troubles of those years . . . yes, there are bound to be when any faculty organization, people want more power than they probably should have in terms of the good of the organization. I can recall very well at one meeting of the drafting the constitution one person saying, "This is a power grab; let's take all we can get." I think that is an unhealthy thing; but, it's understandable in terms of the 1960s.

CAC: Are we into the Eldred Smith regime that you're talking about now?

JP: This was earlier.

CAC: But, it became more intense?

JP: It became very intense.

CAC: Could you say more about that because it's public knowledge; but, it's hard to untangle.

JP: I think what happened is it was determined before Eldred Smith came here that librarians would no longer be given faculty appointments. That was the design of the Morrill Hall people. I heard vice-president [Henry] Koffler say it in no uncertain terms. It hadn't happened yet; but, that was the proposal. That thrust with Eldred coming here made him, in a sense, the person who would bring it about. President [Kenneth] Keller, by that time, left no doubt in our minds as to what he wanted and this was not presented as . . . It didn't come about just as desire to solve that hierarchy problem. It first showed up, I think, in the University Senate when the legislature was asking questions about the faculty/student ratio. The ratio would look better if they could dump a certain number of faculty members who weren't really faculty members, namely librarians, people who worked at KUOM [radio], people in Extension, people in social work, and so on. We saw this coming as strictly a ploy to appease the legislature and we were the ones who were being moved to the back of the bus so they wouldn't count us. That got our ire up and, then of course, it becomes more prominent with the Koffler/Keller period when it really became argued out and voted in the senate that, yes, these people would no longer be able to have faculty appointments for the new hires coming in. That was a tremendous morale destroyer.

CAC: There were other issues?

JP: That was the big issue. Of course, once you bring that in, then, the whole business of the way the library was being reorganized according to geographic patterns and so forth . . . Eldred

Smith sort of created his own organization, brought in a lot of new people, middle management types. That didn't do any good. It did harm, I guess, to be honest about it. It just went from bad to worse. There was a lack of trust between the work-a-day librarians and university administration. The director of libraries was perceived of, and in fact described himself as, a member of the university administration rather than one of us. When you have your director, in a sense, working on behalf of the administration and not on behalf of the librarians, you're not going to get much support from the librarians—and he didn't. Very quickly, that became apparent. The results are still being felt, I think.

CAC: I'm not an investigative reporter. My function is quite a different form. Sometimes, I join the conversation and I can, perhaps, clarify this point. As chairman of the Senate Library Committee for the second time . . . I was first with Ned Stanford on the building of Wilson Library and that was largely a happy, and a fruitful, and a high energy operation.

JP: Ned Stanford is always a high energy operation—and still is.

CAC: The second time around, there were complaints that were brought to the Senate Library Committee. It was not our appropriate function to try to micromanage; but, it was also to identify serious problems. I'll tell you, from the outside, it was extraordinarily difficult to get a clear picture that one could operate from.

JP: Right. I can understand that. During most of those years, I was on the Faculty Personnel Committee. That was the committee that had to deal with these problems of promotions, and advancements, and the evaluation of people who had faculty appointments. It was tough. We brought down stronger and stronger requirements; but still, we were being told. "You are not going to make it. You're not going to stay as members of the faculty." It made some of us pretty bitter against the university administration for defending Eldred Smith's approach to it, for one thing, which was very heavy-handed. I think the results are evident.

CAC: Do you have an evidence or sense of why, particularly with Mr. Keller as you're saying, there was that defense of Eldred Smith on these issues? Central Administration did that for a long time and my memory was that things festered because of that.

JP: Oh, yes. It got worse and worse. No, I don't know what the relationship between those people was. I don't know that that has ever been publicly discussed. It was in a sense that that they had dug in their heels together, as far as we were concerned, against our position and we were powerless. They had all the power. Some of us just hoped to live long enough to survive him and I'm glad to have done that. [laughter] I think neither one of them acquitted themselves. Neither one of them went out in a blaze of glory or approval and I think there's good reason for that.

CAC: I wish to raise these issues because your testimony is one that I've heard from many other persons. What a wonderful reward it was to work these thirty years, thirty-five years, at the university; but then, there are always road blocks. There is always tumult at some time.

JP: Yes.

CAC: By and large, yours was a happy and rewarding career here?

JP: Mine was a happy and rewarding career, in great part, because I had such good support from Mr. Bell in the beginning, from Ned Stanford and Ralph Hopp, and because I was working in an area that was sufficiently obscure, let us put it that way, to anybody who might want to control it that I was kind of left alone. Maybe it was benign neglect, I don't know. I ran my own show pretty much, and Carol Urness and I did about what we wanted to do, and we had a minimum amount of administrative red tape to go through to build the library. It's harder, I think, nowadays to do this just because everything has become more entwined in red tape in the whole world. We had a lot of years of great freedom, complete trust from the James Ford Bell Foundation and the people in the Bell family who were interested . . . no hands-on kind of interest but always supportive. Charles Bell, to this day, when we see each other, is just so happy that I stayed all these years; and I am just so happy that he lived all these years . . . a great friendship.

CAC: Carol Urness who is one of your apprentices really that you brought along . . .

JP: Right.

CAC: . . . became director of the center at your retirement?

JP: Right. She came in way back in 1964 and is still there.

CAC: That continuity counts in that kind of a program, project.

JP: Yes, you've got to have continuity because it takes a long time to learn.

CAC: Yes.

JP: This is world history covering a span of 500 years. It's really world history.

CAC: Sure.

JP: Not many people take that on. None of us are really very expert but you do have to move around quite a bit to feel at home with the Jesuits in China, and Captain Cook in Hawaii, and Jonathan Carver in Minnesota. These are related events but not obviously so.

CAC: It gave you the opportunity to work closely with professors and graduate students who shared your enthusiasm.

JP: I enjoyed the associations with so many people, going way back to Professor [George P.] Conger in Philosophy, who was a book collector.

CAC: Ah, yes.

JP: Mr. Conger would come in and tell me about a book he had bought. He'd ask me about a book I had bought. Dwight Minnick in the Biology Department . . .

CAC: Ohhh.

JP: What a beautiful couple he and Mrs. Minnick were. He would come by and we would natter about a map or something . . . going way back to those years and all through the time . . . teaching with Paul Bamford, and someone like Stuart Schwartz stopping in regularly, and Carla Phillips. It's been very, very good to have had this kind of a relationship.

CAC: You and I were lucky.

JP: I think we were here at a good time.

CAC: Yes.

JP: There were the trials and tribulations of administration and conflict; but, basically, I was a part of the building of a really important research library.

CAC: You bet.

JP: This is lucky; you're exactly right. It all happened quite accidentally really. These things come about for reasons that we cannot devise.

CAC: It wouldn't surprise you how many people talk of chance and luck in the development of their own careers . . . ohhh.

JP: I'll just give you one little anecdote. When I went to the University of Michigan to Library School, I didn't really want to work. I want to get through this school, get done with it. I didn't think I was going to enjoy it. There came a form in the mail, "Would you be interested in student employment?" I thought, God! I can't turn that down without looking at it. So, I said, "Yes." A woman at the Clements Library was going through the people who said, "Yes," of this year's applicants for the Library School. She saw my name. She saw where I went to college, Jamestown College, North Dakota. She had gone there. She said, "Let's offer him a job."

CAC: [laughter]

JP: Without that, none of the rest of this would have happened. I'd have wound up at the Ohio Historical Society or something. [laughter]

CAC: That's a good story to conclude on.

JP: Yes. You have to be lucky. You have to work; but, you have to be lucky, too.

CAC: Yes. Thank you for sharing this, Jack.

JP: I'm glad to have done it. Maybe I rambled on a bit more than you need.

CAC: No. No. It enriches the archives and posterity will be pleased.

JP: I'm glad that you're doing this. I'm sure that you're getting a tremendous lot of narrative.

CAC: Oh, it's just wonderful.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of the Interview]

Transcribed by:

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