

**INTERVIEW WITH DONALD COOK AND REUBEN WELTSCH
LIBRARY STAFF**

June 16, 1988

Dr. Hartzell: A joint interview with Donald Cook and Reuben Weltsch in the Melville Library, Thursday, June 16, 1988. All right we'll go as long as that little button there is red. Do you want to start, which one of you would like to start first, who came first. Don, you came first.

Donald Cook: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: And just so that we have things fairly systematic and then we will read the questions and so on.

Donald Cook: Well, my name is Donald Cook and I have worked in the Library since its inception. Came to Stony Brook at Oyster Bay in 1957. I was 25 at the time, in fact this was the first full-time professional position that I had, so I worked all of my professional career at Stony Brook and Oyster Bay. I believe that I would have to say that Leonard Olsen was responsible for my coming to Stony Brook. When I applied for a position with the College at Oyster Bay I was more interested in going through an interview experience and looking for a serious job. I was writing a thesis at the time and expected to continue that, but found the prospects at Oyster Bay, later Stony Brook, so attractive that I decided to postpone completing the thesis until

Dr. Hartzell: This was in what field?

Donald Cook: In library science.

Dr. Hartzell: Library science, Columbia?

Donald Cook: No, Chicago.

Dr. Hartzell: Chicago.

Donald Cook: Yes, the University of Chicago required a thesis at that time, so that's why I am here. I think that the factors that were most impressing and important in the decision was the sense that Olsen gave of this being something, an institution that was

going to be dynamic and an interesting place to work and certainly it has been that. He indicated that the primary goal of the college was to train teachers in science and math, but I think at the back of his mind, even then, he felt that it could evolve into something more, at least that's the impression I got from him. I'm sure he never stated that explicitly, but it seemed to me that he was hoping it would be a kind of experimental school and one that would introduce some of the University of Chicago teaching methodologies.

Dr. Hartzell: He interviewed you at Chicago?

Donald Cook: No, in Albany. I had finished my course work at Chicago, and since I was writing a thesis related to the history of libraries in New York State, I had a part-time job at the New York State Library. His office was there.

Dr. Hartzell: It was with Carlson, was it?

Donald Cook: Yes, he, in fact, he had asked Mason Tolman, who was on the staff at Albany, if Tolman knew any librarians who might be interested in jobs. Tolman knew I was nearly finished with the thesis, so he suggested I might be a candidate, so that's how I came to be here. My impressions of Oyster Bay when I first came were that it was a totally undeveloped and yet an absolutely beautiful place to be working. There was nothing in terms of library. It was an empty building with lots of planning and work to do. And since I had no real experience as a librarian, I'm sure that I knew quite how to start, but start we did. Getting down to the expectations that I had when I came, I think I saw the initial appointment as perhaps a first appointment in a career that might involve moving on to something else somewhere, but obviously that's not happened. The work involved essentially in building the collection and staff and services from nothing and that involved of course primarily work at the Oyster Bay campus and limited work outside the campus.

Dr. Hartzell: What proportion of the acquisition at that time were you providing, what proportions came as suggestions from members of the faculty, how did you go about it?

Donald Cook: Well, the approach I used initially was to ask faculty what their immediate needs were, and those tended to relate to the teaching program. Beyond that I think I tried to identify some rather basic lists that any college library might have. The one that seemed to be most appropriate was the Harvard College catalog, which had been published fairly recently at that time, and that seemed to be a kind of working list. Of course there were the basic reference tools that needed to be bought, and that was at the beginning.

Dr. Hartzell: Incidentally, what is the size of the collection now?

Donald Cook: It's about 1,300,000 volumes.

Dr. Hartzell: Million three, okay, go ahead.

Donald Cook: Well, I think I've covered most of the questions that are here. What do I think I have accomplished at Stony Brook, what I had accomplished at Stony Brook by 1971? I guess the things that have been achieved by 1971 that the basic nucleus of the collection was here. We were on the threshold, I think, of becoming a research library. It was shortly after that that we joined such organizations as the Association for Research Libraries. We shortly after that were involved in the OCLC bibliographic database. The period from 1957 through about 1972 was one of very intensive acquisitions and growth and building. The Library, the first building, the core building was done in about 1962, and then planning for this major extension to the building was being done as late as 1971, completed in the early '70's.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you want to get into the planning of the original library building, the red brick building, your relations with Albany on that.

Donald Cook: I think from my perspective, Reuben was in charge of the Library; Reuben joined the Library in 1958, in August 1958, a year after I, and was Director of the Library for much of the period of time that is covered here. Now, my impression, you can correct me, Reuben, is that the Library staff's involvement in the planning of the old red brick building was rather limited.

Reuben Weltsch: It was quite limited.

Dr. Hartzell: It was limited. Who did it?

Reuben Weltsch: Who did it? Wasn't it Stevens.

Dr. Hartzell: Elwin Stevens.

Reuben Weltsch: Elwin Stevens, he was one of the prime movers. The architect and the Construction Fund

Dr. Hartzell: There was no Construction Fund then.

Reuben Weltsch: No, at that time there wasn't, that's right.

Donald Cook: Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith and Haynes was the architectural firm, the site planners and I guess the firm that did the building plan itself. But I'm not aware that we even did much in terms of the building program for that one.

Reuben Weltsch: I don't recall it either.

Donald Cook: A basic rectangle.

Dr. Hartzell: It was done for us essentially by the people in Albany, and it was their conception of what a library should be for a liberal arts college.

Donald Cook: Yes, it was about 100,000 square feet so that

Reuben Weltsch: But they had experience

Donald Cook: And the conception was that that was to be supplemented at some future time by a tower to the north end of that building in the direction of the Graduate Chemistry Building, and I think they even some had some very premature plans of how that building might look. It would be a tower.

Reuben Weltsch: I think there was one trip, but I can't quite place it, to the University of Toronto to look at their library. I don't know if you are familiar with their building, but it is a library which is well above ground and not a real tower, but in a rather vertical structure, a large library.

Dr. Hartzell: More than five floors in other words, more than what we have now.

Donald Cook: Yes, I don't recall being at that, but there would have been no reason for me to have been.

Reuben Weltsch: It was a friendly exploration, there was nothing official about it.

Dr. Hartzell: Memory begins to fail when it goes into thirty years.

Reuben Weltsch: Right, there is a failure of memory and there may be a certain censorship factor that creeps in, sometimes you don't admit it, but it's probably there.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, can you say much about the budget procedures at that time, how was the budget for the library developed? Did you work with Olsen or did you work with John Lee?

Reuben Weltsch: Usually we worked with the business officer. There were a number of them.

Donald Cook: Frank Conway was the first.

Reuben Weltsch: Frank Conway was the first one.

Donald Cook: And somebody by the name of Cooper.

Reuben Weltsch: Charlie Cooper, and then I think it was gradually Mitch Gerstel who was the liaison man, but it was usually that end of the campus which made me believe, rightly or wrongly, that we were in a way, I don't want to put this wrongly, but that we were in a way kept a few paces away from the chief decision makers and that by the time budget planning got to the Library or budget discussions got to the Library, some other intervening levels had already had their say.

Donald Cook: By the same token I think that the funds available for such things as acquisitions were relatively generous for the most part. In fact oftentimes we had requests for positions that we were given and were never filled. In fact, our vacancies reflected the climate of the period, librarians were in short supply the late '50's and '60's, so that we had great difficulty in recruiting people to come to the area.

Reuben Weltsch: Not everyone has the stomach for something that looks very much like a pioneering situation. The really impressive, nationally known figures generally don't pick that, that's not where they make their name and fame, so it's a difficult thing.

Dr. Hartzell: Librarians are more conservative.

Donald Cook: Some are.

Reuben Weltsch: Possibly, but I think in the case of these greater, established figure I think they're just smart, knocking their heads against the wall and so on, do the difficult work that has to be done fighting for positions and so on and for this and that, while we're they are they can be, well, what you might call statesman in the profession.

Dr. Hartzell: Right. Can you give the approximate size of the budget, the annual budget?

Donald Cook: I have data that I can supply you.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, it's attainable anyway.

Donald Cook: Yes, or certainly the number of volumes that were required per year and that sort of thing, there is some data, not necessarily from year one, but certainly through much of this period.

Dr. Hartzell: The acquisition budget I believe got to be, went over a million, didn't it?

Reuben Weltsch: By 1967, I think by the time Roscoe Rouse was here, it may have reached that level, because we found a way to recruit staff by somewhat less orthodox ways by putting in technical assistants, under a different label, they filled certain roles in processing, in working up all this mass of material.

Donald Cook: I think too one of the dramatic things that happened with the lot purchases which became very much a part of the acquisitions program in the '60's

Dr. Hartzell: By lot, you mean what?

Donald Cook: Well, collections that had been pulled together either by booksellers, by scholars, by anyone who had some either subject interest or just interested in books or what have you. We, for example, bought a collection that was labeled the Lindmark Collection, some over 60,000 items which had been collected by a bookdealer and many very fine things, standard American authors, that sort of thing. Another collection that we got was a gift from, I'm trying to remember, a collection that we picked up in New York

Reuben Weltsch: That was the Kelly?

Donald Cook: The Kelly was a social science one; I was thinking the one where there were publishers standard sets were gotten Do you remember that basement storehouse that he had. I am sure you were there in the process of

Reuben Weltsch: Could be, sometimes we went in with a truck

Donald Cook: About 10,000 volumes and much of the stuff was standard

Dr. Hartzell: Barcele?

Donald Cook: No, Barcele we bought a lot of things from him.

Reuben Weltsch: He wouldn't give it away.

Donald Cook: Nicholas Kelly, the Kelly collection. Kelly was, one of his relatives was a publisher in economics, I believe.

Reuben Weltsch: Cooper Union gave us also some things.

Donald Cook: Right.

Reuben Weltsch: Not always the things that you would go out and look for, but when you have nothing and try to put things together, almost everything comes in handy in some way.

Donald Cook: The Cooper Union collection was primarily government documents. they were cutting back on that.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you educate the faculty gradually to help you in your selection?

Donald Cook: They thought they were already educated.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, I think they were trying to educate us as they saw it. You see when you grow at that rate and have staffing problems of various kinds and the routines are not fully developed, it often happens that you get literally stacks of orders from the faculty, especially new incoming ones, or specialists in certain fields. What then may happen is that a lot of these orders get buried under others. Often a recent flood of orders will cover up an earlier stack. And so I think there were a few misunderstandings from some faculty members who felt they were being slighted.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. Where did you have your appointment bottlenecks, that is your acquisition of staff or were you able to get the number of lines you needed?

Donald Cook: Well, I think, as I said before, we had staff shortages but there was great difficulty in recruiting people in the time that your review covers.

Dr. Hartzell: Not only Oyster Bay, but the first ten years on this campus.

Reuben Weltsch: Even here, not so much because of an absolute scarcity of people because perhaps we couldn't make the positions quite attractive enough

Dr. Hartzell: Financially?

Reuben Weltsch: Even financially. It was less of a high cost area than it is today, but it was already relatively expensive living, and I remember it well in one case, a bright young woman who obviously was not too far along in her career but a professional librarian who lived in a rented little apartment in Port Jefferson, didn't suffer but found it a little hard to make contacts and to get along as a single person. Well, that's the human side of it. You are probably more concerned with the staffing levels and so on. You could argue too that for years we were looking for fairly high level library positions that then didn't materialize, somehow they were pulled back. Of course, at this distance I assume that they were simply taken by the campus rather than by the state. They were in the official budget, but they didn't get to us.

Dr. Hartzell: This is the Stony Brook campus.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, under the assumption, that this is fair I don't know, but perhaps under the assumption that lower level people, down to even the volunteer faculty wife level, could do the job if only

Dr. Hartzell: You had that conception from this local administration here?

Reuben Weltsch: Sometime, yes, sometime.

Donald Cook: One other constraint that we had to deal with was at times a severe shortage of space. I think even though this building was built in 1962, there was so much of it that was taken by the University administration that at a point we had material stored all over campus and inaccessible, just not an efficient operation at all.

Dr. Hartzell: We went through a period of multi-purpose buildings, we had to, we didn't have the

Reuben Weltsch: It was clear enough to us here that the administration would much rather have had a solid place to call their own, but in practice it created points of strain.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember that when I came in 1962, the Library was over in the Humanities buildings and my office was in the Humanities building and the cafeteria was there. And finally I was able to move over to the Library, but not until some time in 1963. Did you have any hand in the planning of the building that went all the way around the old building?

Donald Cook: Yes, there was a different process. The planning for that got underway while Roscoe Rouse was still Director of Libraries in terms of writing the program for the building, and he left and there certainly was much more staff involvement in the process, but it seemed to be very late in the process. Plans were presented to us for reaction, but unless there was something that was just dramatically wrong, very few changes could be made. I think that's one of the reasons why the building is as inefficient as it is. I think that many of us felt that it was just the wrong way to go, a wrong way in terms of building the building around the old building meant that there were compartmentalization of operations that were going to be inefficient but that decision had been made

Reuben Weltsch: Quite early, I think it was already a set idea by the time

Donald Cook: At the time that we were brought into the process, it was just, there was that basic concept, it could not be changed. There were things that were changed but

Dr. Hartzell: Well, do you remember, I'll put it another way. When I came I was surprised to find the Chemistry Building placed next to the Library and very close to the Library.

Donald Cook: You mean the Graduate Chemistry.

Dr. Hartzell: No, no, the old Chemistry Building, which meant that you wouldn't have had space to expand very far to the west.

Donald Cook: I think one of the very real problems this campus faces or has faced is that there have been changes in campus planners. The Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith and Haynes were the first campus planners, had a conception of something that was discarded and somebody else came on board. I think there have been three or four different architectural firms that have been involved in the process, obviously not agreeing with each other and things had to change over the years, and not necessarily in the best possible way.

Dr. Hartzell: Then the Graduate Chemistry Building came along about what time would you say? That closed you in also.

Reuben Weltsch: Before 1970, I forget.

Donald Cook: Certainly the planning for that did impact on what we could do in those directions.

Reuben Weltsch: Sure, what you are pointing to also involves the rather early decision, if you want to call it that, to have a departmental library system, that is, departmental libraries for the sciences. Not that I'm against it, but it developed in such a way that these service points for the sciences were minimally staffed and in professional terms really just outlying parts of the library collection supervised by a clerk and some student assistants and finally we had Ken Furst assigned librarian, but of course he could not be in five places himself. It's a long story and this is only one part of a rather major, in a university that is so ambitious in the sciences, which is in a way a major item, and one that developed piecemeal and almost haphazardly, at the insistence mostly of the science faculties in different departments and before the library really had done any serious planning or any serious long-range planning from the service angle.

Dr. Hartzell: What would you say Roscoe Rouse's contributions were?

Reuben Weltsch: Well, I would say, the first thing that occurs to me is that he was relatively successful in hiring and organizing a sufficiently large work force to cope with the exponential growth, this was something, this was on a scale that hadn't been there before. I think that's the thing that first occurs to me, it is no small matter.

Donald Cook: That certainly is what I would consider his major contribution, bringing a structure to a rather amorphous entity that was here before.

Dr. Hartzell: Let's see, Vasco, when did he

Reuben Weltsch: Gerhard Vasco?

Dr. Hartzell: Yes.

Reuben Weltsch: He was here for a while as a cataloger. When he came back was after Roscoe Rouse.

Donald Cook: It seems to me that the major force in the quality of the collection before 1971 was Reuben. He will not say that for himself, but I think that that was certainly your major contribution, and it is a major one to what is here.

Reuben Weltsch: If that is so, I can only think of something Alexander Herzen once said about kings or crowned heads to recognize the need for progress and not stand in the way of it. From that point of view, I would say yes, but I certainly, but anyway that's minor matter.

Dr. Hartzell: Your field is European history, and it's in the medieval period.

Reuben Weltsch: Well, medieval, renaissance, early modern and in some respects even modern.

Dr. Hartzell: And you have languages, German and French.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, and some of the Slavic ones.

Donald Cook: And a smattering of Italian as well.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, jack of all trades.

Donald Cook: Well, I think that was very, very important at the time this collection was being built.

Reuben Weltsch: Well, before we get off Roscoe Rouse altogether, though some people on campus felt that in many ways he had not been a quote "success" to the extent that they had expected, he really did make a big difference because he was a librarian who came from a fairly large working library into this one and knew what certain standards were, which while Don, he started out as he himself said, I was not that much

better, I was, I had been a staff librarian and not an administrator really, and at that time didn't know clearly enough yet that administrators are born and not made, so it was a good thing in a way that we had for a while someone who set up something of an organization, it had to be constantly improved.

Dr. Hartzell: Where did Rouse come from?

Donald Cook: Waco, no, Baylor.

Reuben Weltsch: Baylor University, then of course from here he went to Oklahoma State, so he was, he identified with

Dr. Hartzell: At Stillwater?

Reuben Weltsch: At Stillwater, yes, I think he retired now.

Dr. Hartzell: Okay.

Donald Cook: Reuben you didn't have your chance to respond to these questions.

Reuben Weltsch: Well, as I respond to them, I probably said some things.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, start at the beginning precisely.

Reuben Weltsch: My name, Reuben Weltsch, Department, retired but working in the Library part-time and now full-time.

Dr. Hartzell: You were also in the History Department.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, I was first a librarian, then an assistant director of collections, then a director of libraries, then

Dr. Hartzell: Give me the years on that, director of libraries.

Reuben Weltsch: I was acting director from 1968 to 1969, then, or was it 1967 to 1968, I'm a little shaky on that; then director from 1968 to 1971, the end of 1971, yeah, I think so.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that when Jack Smith came in?

Reuben Weltsch: That is when we had an acting director for a while, was he acting or

Donald Cook: he was associate and then acting.

Reuben Weltsch: He was associate before I left and was then acting, Gantner from La Jolla I think it was.

Donald Cook: That's correct.

Reuben Weltsch: San Diego.

Dr. Hartzell: San Diego, uh, huh.

Reuben Weltsch: And Jack Smith came in a while later, so, what year did you come, in 1958, just one year after Don. How old was I at the time, 37. From what institution and position did you come, again, something a little quirky, I came out of graduate school. I had been reference librarian for years and went to graduate school at the University of Colorado, initially to get a Master's Degree, then

Dr. Hartzell: In library science?

Reuben Weltsch: In history as something that has now become quite common, librarians now do seek out a second master's, so to speak. One thing led to another and I stayed on for a Ph. D. then, so in a way I came out of a somewhat different environment and perhaps had some mistaken ideas about what was expected on the other side. I too had an interview with Leonard Olsen, but it was only at that time that I discovered that someone was already a librarian and already on the spot, which was a little, it took me aback a little bit, I didn't know that I was going to move in to supervise or be the boss of another professional librarian who was already running the place. Of course, this is on a more, in an older, more settled situation, this of course, the ideal situation for a director to come in, but in this one in a way I felt rather strangely because I realized that the credit for lifting the place literally off the ground, making the first essential moves had already been done.

Donald Cook: And mistakes.

Reuben Weltsch: Well, mistakes, we made plenty.

Dr. Hartzell: I see that you two got along pretty well.

Donald Cook: Oh, yes. In fact, it was made clear to me when I was hired that there were three professional positions, and that I was filling one of the lower level ones

of those three, so I was told that there would be a director or head librarian hired almost immediately. I kept waiting for that to happen, and was very pleased when Reuben did come on board.

Reuben Weltsch: But, I would have to, I don't know if this is the time to inject some realism into this talk.

Dr. Hartzell: Absolutely.

Reuben Weltsch: Because so often it happens that people hear about an institution or opening from some colleague or friend or in some other way that's not on any blueprint or in any conventional situation, and this was the case with me. I had no idea that Oyster Bay or Stony Brook existed until I heard from an old college friend, Ralph Bowen, who was then a full professor here in the social sciences, a historian, and he first told me about this, he said, wouldn't it be great, why don't you apply. And I did this, I also had the possibility of going into teaching at that time. I had an offer just about the same time, and it was a tough decision to make. I could have been a bibliographer, a rather poorly paid bibliographer at Princeton in a library position, I could have been a journeyman starting as professor, assistant professor in Kansas, and there was also this position here.

Dr. Hartzell: What attracted you here?

Reuben Weltsch: Well, perhaps the lure of the unknown, the possibility of building up something from scratch and presumably being in a friendly environment.

Dr. Hartzell: You know, just about everybody that I've interviewed has said the same thing, the possibility of starting something new, starting from scratch.

Reuben Weltsch: Yes, it's fascinating, it's so fascinating that sometimes people may not ask themselves whether they can really do it or whether they are the best people for it.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, anyway, you can grow with the job, and you did.

Reuben Weltsch: Well, we all grow in one way or another.

Donald Cook: Despite the job, maybe.

Reuben Weltsch: Uh, huh, so the, my understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook were perhaps faulty at the time. I thought of this perhaps more

as a potential state university, forgetting that there were a great many rival campuses on the scene and that we were really talking about a big system.

Donald Cook: You came post-Sputnik.

Reuben Weltsch: I came post-Sputnik.

Donald Cook: It's amazing what happened at Stony Brook or at Oyster Bay, I think I was hired before Sputnik and the impact of that on higher education here at Stony Brook I think was amazing. This campus that was supposed to be a rather quiet institution to train teachers for science and math, obviously was going to develop into something much bigger, it just seemed inevitable.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, the Heald Report, let's see, I think the Heald Report was in 1959, at any rate, that was one of the, I think, turning points for the University as such. Heald was president of the Ford Foundation, and what they came up with in terms of the future for Stony Brook became a guide certainly for Rockefeller. He picked that up and ran with it. Well, go ahead Reuben.

Reuben Weltsch: What factors were most important in your decision to come here? Well, at that time we were expecting a baby; we were thinking somewhat about the environment we would be in, and perhaps personal, private reasons, so that in some ways Long Island won out over Kansas also on that account. Not that we couldn't have managed very well in Kansas. The first impression, my understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook as I said were probably incomplete or hazy. The first impressions were curious. You may recall the first year or two and the, well, what you might call the Chicago people, including Leonard Olsen, of course, who tried to raise up the college pretty much in the image of the College of Chicago and tensions that developed around this, I mean this was part of our early history, I am sure something of this you could sense rather soon after getting here. I was always a little farther away. I told you that I was a friend of Ralph Bowen, but I think the tension was far enough advanced to keep me at a certain distance even from Ralph, so that I never quite realized what was cooking until the first, what you might call, the big tenure case that developed

with Bowen, Chill and Fleischer -- that Columbia trio that was let go rather quickly. This had an impact. I don't know if any of your previous interlocutors have mentioned this, but I think that you can't talk about the early years of Stony Brook without digging into this difficulty. Anyway, I think it affected me a little, and along with that very quick discovery of the state bureaucracy and how it worked.

Dr. Hartzell: Or didn't work.

Reuben Weltsch: Or didn't work. I think at one point Don was hoping to write a dissertation in library science on this problem in New York State and its impact on libraries. It would have been a miracle if he had done it. I don't know if anyone can get in there to find out, but it was something a bit of damper.

Dr. Hartzell: Was there any particular person in the central office with whom you as librarians dealt with?

Donald Cook: I can't recall. It really didn't happen before Diley it seems to me.

Dr. Hartzell: Before who?

Donald Cook: Bob Diley was named coordinator of libraries or something in SUNY but that happened

Reuben Weltsch: It was a little later, he was a retired state librarian, one of the staff of the state library. Before that we made contact with people at the division of standards and purchase and people like that.

Dr. Hartzell: Who, of course, knew a lot about libraries.

Donald Cook: Not necessarily, I think that we had book orders being processed by a woman whose past experience was in

[end of side 1 and recorded interview]