

RANDY SCOTT

March 30, 2001

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Jeff Charnley: Today is Friday the 30th of March, the year 2001. We're in East Lansing at the campus of Michigan State University. I am Jeff Charnley, interviewing Randall W. Scott, for the Michigan State University Oral History Project. The sesquicentennial is coming up in four years, in the year 2005, and that's the purpose of this institutional oral history.

Mr. Scott, you can see we've got a tape recorder. Do you give us permission to record this?

Randy Scott: I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with something about your personal and educational background. Where were you born and raised and where did you go to school before college?

Scott: I was born in Alpena, Michigan, in 1947. Grew up on a farm in Hubbard Lake, Michigan, and went to Alcona High School, which is the first of the eighty-three counties alphabetically, and the last in terms of wealth and population. Came down to college at MSU in 1965.

Charnley: Did you graduate in '65?

Scott: Graduated from high school in '65.

Charnley: What type of farming did you do on your farm?

Scott: We were a beef farm. We were a beef breeder until about 1960. When I was just starting high school, we switched to chickens. So I came from a chicken farm.

Charnley: Did you have contact with Cooperative Extension or any 4-H programs or anything like that, prior to coming as a student?

Scott: I had one in-school experience with 4-H, but other kids were in the Future Farmers and worked a lot in 4-H. They fed cows for the fair and this kind of stuff, but that wasn't how we approached life. We were Future Librarians or something like that, rather than farmers.

Charnley: Books were important.

Scott: Books were very important. My grandfather's house and our house were both full of books.

Charnley: Who would you say had an important influence in your family on shaping you or directing you toward a life of books?

Scott: Both of my grandparents, my father's parents, were big readers and supplied many, many books, and that was real important. I started reading books that were printed in the 1920s, and I was reading all the kids' books, you know, all the way up, six decades' worth or so. Also, my mother, although she never went to college, her sisters became teachers and that was really highly valued in my mother's family.

Charnley: What was your mother's name?

Scott: Bernice Nordstrom.

Charnley: How did you first become interested in coming to Michigan State as a student?

Scott: Well, specifically, when it came time to talk to the guidance counselor about where to apply and things like that, he was looking for ways to get me money, and Michigan State was giving out a lot of National Merit Scholarships, and since I had qualified for one, we just sort of figured this was a good bet. And indeed, there were 250 of us or something when I arrived. So that was the recruiting. That was the basic recruiting. I did see a recruiter who came up there.

Charnley: And that was part of Dr. [Gordon] Sabine's program, I think?

Scott: Exactly.

Charnley: Did you come to meet him or know him at all?

Scott: No. I got letters from him. I'm sure I saw him. We had meetings, actually, that first year, in '65. All the scholars would get together.

Charnley: That's interesting. If we can recruit for football, we can recruit for academics, too.

Scott: I don't know if the university, as a whole, was satisfied with the result or not. This is getting ahead, but when I went to my first all-night demonstration, there was a very high percentage of National Merit Scholars occupying that building. This is what you get. [Laughter]

Charnley: When you came here, did you have an idea in advance, when you came here, of what

you might major in?

Scott: I was told by my guidance counselor in high school that I needed to have a major, so I picked math because I liked math and I got good grades.

Charnley: Did it come easily to you?

Scott: It did through high school, and it did for the first year of college, but then I realized the joy was gone, and so starting my sophomore year I went no preference for a while.

Charnley: How would you describe the campus when you first got here? Any first impressions that stick in your mind?

Scott: I thought it was a great place. I was really impressed, because I was right off the farm and I had never been out of Michigan, or never been any farther south than Central [CMU], before that. It was a big city and it was all new and I thought it was a wonderful place.

Charnley: Did you live in the dorm?

Scott: I lived in Abbot Hall.

Charnley: How would you describe the campus in terms of the climate at the time, when you arrived?

Scott: People were hard-working and serious students, I thought. On the other hand, there was this thing with Paul Schiff. I had no idea of political involvement, radicalism, whatever, but Paul Schiff

was a graduate student. As I remember, his assistantship hadn't been renewed because of some political activity. He had a little paper called *Logos* that he was passing out, and that was mysterious to me, because I was right off the farm and I had no idea. Right away, the underground paper started that same year. The editor, Mike Kindman, walked off the *State News* and started his own paper. This was all sort of interesting.

Charnley: It was called *The Paper*?

Scott. *The Paper*. I had no idea what it was all about, but it was fascinating.

Charnley: So you were reading that right along with the *State News*?

Scott: Along with the *State News*.

Charnley: At least you were reading that. Students now sometimes don't even read the *State News*. How did you get involved in the Paul Schiff--

Scott: I didn't get involved in that. Later on I figured out what was going on, why these tall people in--they seemed like tall people--in beards, were handing out stuff. [Laughter]

Charnley: Let's go back to some of your other undergraduate studies. What are some of the other areas that you took?

Scott: I was in the Honors College, provisionally, right away, so I didn't have to take ATL, but I did. That was a favorite class, actually, it turned out. We read a lot.

Charnley: Who did you have? Do you remember?

Scott: My first teacher was Dr. John Appel, and after that I had a Robert Fogarty, and after that I had another gentleman whose name escapes me, but he has since died. Fogarty, of course, was one of the Orange Horse Three, who were not given tenure by the ATL department. That led to the radicalism because we had a demonstration in support of those guys.

Charnley: You had him while the Orange Horse Three was going on?

Scott: Right.

Charnley: Could you maybe talk about it? I've talked with other people who had knowledge about that, but you're the first student that I've had. Would you talk a little about maybe Fogarty as a teacher or how you got involved in that Orange Horse Three? What was it called at the time? Incident?

Scott: I can't remember. It was named, I think, by *The Paper*. I can't remember why it had an orange horse. It had something to do with the stadium being repainted and they had an undercoat on that was orange, the superstructure of the stadium. Somebody, I think maybe Lawless, wrote a poem about the orange horse, and somehow that caught on. The three guys were Fogarty, Lawless, and Groat. I didn't know anything about the other two.

Fogarty was a normal ATL teacher. I had an honors section, so we had a lot of slack in what we did. I enjoyed it thoroughly. He didn't give me the best grades. I got a B. So I had to go in and talk to him and he borrowed a book of mine. He never gave it back. [Laughter] ATL was kind of a joy because there was so much reading and this is what I'd grown up to want to do.

Charnley: Or to expect at the college level.

Scott: That fulfilled my expectations, no problem.

Charnley: How did the demonstration develop? Was that in Bessey Hall?

Scott: That was in Bessey Hall. We went in there, stayed all night. Gary Snyder, the poet, came and read to us, after he had a reading at the Kellogg Center. There were at least 100 people there. I remember Brad Lang, who did a survey of how many of us were National Merit Scholars, which surprised everybody. That's how I happened to know.

I think I wrote up the experience for the Northwest Complex newsletter, Northeast Complex, Abbot Hall. Mason, Abbot, Snyder, Phillips. I wrote up my experiences in that demonstration. It was a periodical called *Impulse*. Maury Crane was also writing for that, as a young faculty member, at the time. That's when I first heard his name.

Charnley: That was just an in-house newsletter?

Scott: It circulated to all the kids in those four dorms, so, yes, it was. The editor had some literary pretension, so he was always putting poetry in.

Charnley: How would you characterize the administration's response to the whole situation, or incident?

Scott: I didn't see any response. They let us stay there all night. There were no police, no excitement that I remember.

Charnley: This was in '65 when you took ATL?

Scott: This would have been spring '66, if my memory serves me right, that that's when I had Fogarty, winter term.

Charnley: How did the situation of the war and the draft affect your life? It was something that college students had to deal with.

Scott: Right. I had the student deferment--2S, was it? As long as I kept reporting to the draft board, that was not a problem until later on in the story, I dropped out and the draft board made me 1A, and I went for my physical down in Detroit. By then I had joined the IWW because I was working on *The Paper*. In the fourth year of *The Paper*, I was its circulation manager or something like that. We made up titles. There were only about four of us. I also edited the news. I checked, on their list of subversive organizations, Industrial Workers of the World, at my physical, and this apparently required them to do an investigation, which they did.

Charnley: It didn't change your classification?

Scott: No, it didn't, but it delayed it long enough so that the lottery came through.

Charnley: In 1969?

Scott: And I got a good number, so that was that.

Charnley: My number was nineteen.

Scott: So did you have to go?

Charnley: I was at Central Michigan in '68, as a freshman, and then in '69 when the draft came, yet I had the student deferment until the end. I did get drafted in 1972, at the very end. They hadn't eliminated the draft by that time.

Scott: I got a very high number, and by that time I was in SDS [Students for Democratic Society] and I had better things to think about.

Charnley: You mentioned that you dropped out for a while.

Scott: Yes. I think I had less than a year to go when I finally dropped out.

Charnley: But you came back?

Scott: I came back after I met Lynn and we were thinking about getting married and that kind of stuff. I was in jail nine times during that period. The last time I got out, I told the judge--and I meant it--that I would go back to school and I did.

Charnley: What was your wife's maiden name?

Scott: Wasserman.

Charnley: You met on campus?

Scott: Neither of us were students at that time. I think we were technically outside agitators.

Charnley: So the war, obviously, with your draft status and that, you were involved in some of the war protests. Would you like to talk a little bit about that? What was going on, on campus, or how did students respond to the war?

Scott: I joined SDS in 1968. I was kind of late to it and I was starting to finally figure out what was going on, what the protests in Chicago were about and this kind of stuff, because I felt like coming from a chicken farm, this was a whole different culture. It wasn't even so much the facts, it was the culture of protest and urban culture that was sort of difficult for me to catch on to.

MSU at first felt like this institution where I could fit in just fine being a farm person because there were so many rules and everything, that I just had to follow them and everything was cool. But it was about my third year when I finally skipped a class for the first time.

Charnley: Third year? We won't ask you what that class was. [Laughter]

Scott: Well, I'll share the information. It was a German class, because I did get into German right away as a freshman, and studied that really hard and really enjoyed it and that got me my job here, too, partly.

Charnley: Did you ever go to Germany?

Scott: Yes. I went after my sophomore year with the MSU program. AMLEC [American Language and Educational Center], it was called. Spent two months, basically.

Charnley: Has that program still continued?

Scott: I don't know. It might. I've heard about it in the last five or six years, I think. It was basically a language study program, so we had classes all morning and then the afternoon off to go get in trouble. But it was after coming back from that, that I realized that there was something important to this political business, that SDS and the whole idea of Marxism, Leninism, and all these things were worth checking out, because what I got in ATL didn't spell those out in any way. I'm sure you know.

Charnley: So you continued with your reading?

Scott: Yes, I continued reading. We had study groups with SDS. I went off to the summer project. That was in Detroit. The summer of '69. The school was over here and I had already dropped out. I'd missed the spring term, I believe, and the whole business with the lottery hadn't happened yet. The Summer Project was advertised by SDS as a way to seriously study the politics that we were attempting to understand and apply and to try things, to work in factories and try to become revolutionaries, like a school for revolutionaries.

Charnley: How would you characterize your position in terms of leadership of SDS? Was there any organization at all?

Scott: There was a pretty strict organization. By the end of June '69, SDS had split in three parts, and the Summer Project was the core of the weatherman part, so we had our weather bureau attend. You know, highly visible, nationally known radicals like Bernadette Dohrn and these kind of people were the leaders of the Summer Project. It happened both in Columbus and in Detroit. I was not in any leadership role at all, except in karate class. Sometimes I led the exercises. [Laughter] I was in what was called a living room crowd, and graduated to my own bedroom.

Charnley: What was the target? Was it directed toward the draft or was it just the war, the U.S. participation? What would you say was the target by '69?

Scott: Well, antiwar activity and anti-racist activity were always in the background. The ideology we were trying to develop was some kind of a total anti-imperialism ideology, that would include everything else. We had speakers in from the Republic of New Africa and the black workers organizations in Detroit. We sponsored a brigade to cut cane in Cuba, the Venceremos Brigade, this kind of stuff. We were trying to be international. We sent a representative to Ho Chi Minh's funeral from our collective. We got a lot of positive attention from the people around the world who were anti-imperialists. Basically our slogan was, "We're not against the war, we're just on the other side." We were trying to give some shock value to the whole thing.

Charnley: How would you characterize the movement as you were involved? Was there actual discussions of targeting universities like Michigan State or was there any of that, say, to capitalize on the student unrest or student interest in the antiwar movement?

Scott: Most of us had come out of universities, obviously, and part of our understanding was that the motion was in the youth. Other people looked at the workers and other people looked at the minorities, but we were a "youth movement." It seems kind of silly sometimes now. We were after high school kids a lot. We went to a lot of high school kids, leafleting them, trying to talk them into coming to meetings.

After a couple months of pretty serious study groups, where we studied a lot of the standard Marx and Lenin and Fidel and Mao and all kinds of Leftist writers, it sort of, in my opinion, degenerated into this long, and we called it the forced march, this long build-up toward a national action in Chicago that became the Days of Rage. It was later named that.

Charnley: Were you involved in that?

Scott: I was arrested there. That was my biggest arrest, for sure. I spent two weeks in the Cook County Jail and was ultimately sentenced to two years of probation and I reported to my probation officer, and then that was over.

Charnley: Were you living in Michigan at the time?

Scott: I was, although I got permission for the first couple months to move to Boston for the summer, but then I came back.

Charnley: Was that the judge that you told you were going back to school?

Scott: No, that was a judge in Grand Rapids. In my capacity as an outside agitator, let's say, a couple of us went from Detroit to Grand Rapids to support the SDS collective there who wanted to demonstrate against Spiro Agnew, who was dedicating a new city-county building. I think four of us went or something like that, in cooperation with the local radicals, maybe twenty, twenty-five people altogether. We marched around this big crowd, chanting, "Screw you, Agnew. Screw you, Agnew." Well, apparently they heard us, because the police came in great force and arrested everybody they could catch, and I was easily caught. [Laughter] I spent six months, with one month off for good behavior, in the Grand Rapids County Jail, on the charge of attempted resisting arrest.

Charnley: What year was that?

Scott: The arrest was in late '69 and the jail time--I got out May 14, 1971.

Charnley: And there was a lot going on at that time.

Scott: I told the judge during that space that I was going to go back to school, so that's when I did. I went back, I believe, summer term, '71.

Charnley: So you were here summer term of 1970, so just after Kent State, which would have been May 4 of '70.

Scott: I was still on probation, so I decided I wasn't going to go out in front of any cops, so I was a good boy. But other people went to demonstrations all around the country about that time, around Kent State, and there was a lot going on.

Charnley: When you came back, what was the focus of your study on campus?

Scott: I was trying to just put together what I had done before and trying to make a degree out of it. I turned out to be a humanities major, which means that you take three areas, two of them in the humanities and one hopefully out of the humanities, was their thing. My first year in math got me a math concentration. I had to do one more course. And all the German I had studied gave me a German concentration.

The other one was linguistics. I was always interested in languages, so I had taken Spanish and French, too, and Japanese, so linguistics was the third one. Then I used French or Spanish as the language requirement. Since I was in the Honors College for the first two years, although not later, they decided I could waive natural sciences, but I took some of those.

Charnley: Was that in Justin Morrill College?

Scott: No, it was just a regular humanities major, a divisional major.

Charnley: When they had the humanities department?

Scott: No, it was right through the College of Arts and Letters. They probably still have that.

Charnley: Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary.

Scott: Right. And it turns out that's a perfect thing to do if you're going to be a librarian. Some concentration in a couple areas, and go on to library school, which I eventually did.

Charnley: After you came back, so when did you graduate again, in undergraduate?

Scott: '71, I think. I wrote that down. '72. Let's see, after graduation, when I got back from jail the last time, I went to work at Curious Book Shop. That's important, because of the colorful things you see around me here.

Charnley: Was Ray Walsh the owner then?

Scott: Yes. He was the originator of it and I had worked with him as a student in the library. We were students together. He gave me the job, it was a dollar an hour. But I was really doing things I liked, so I really refocused from all the politics, which I don't think really was me in the first place, and got back into science fiction and comics and mysteries and old books.

Charnley: You were interested in that area?

Scott: Yes. I always have been. A lot of the things in my grandmother's house were Tom Swift books, so I was reading kids' books from ages ago. The Rover Boys. I feel sometimes like an anachronism, because I read long lists of all these old series books for kids, from the twenties and thirties. I worked at Curious, then until '73 when the dollar an hour sort of got on my nerves, and I finally got a job here as a clerk.

Charnley: As a clerk in the library?

Scott: As a clerk, yes, as a typist.

Charnley: Where did you ultimately go to grad school?

Scott: At Columbia University in the City of New York, as their letterhead says.

Charnley: At what point did you make the decision you were interested in the library?

Scott: I'd always wanted to move toward books and that's why I'd gone to Curious. Here, what happened was, Russel Nye had donated a collection of, well, almost everything, but especially, in my case, comic books that I was interested in. Somebody had stolen Spider-Man Number One, and it made it to the papers and I was sitting upstairs typing and I said, "Well, I see an opportunity." I went downstairs and offered my help, and the first thing we did, they accepted, was put ownership stamps on all the comic books so that Ray couldn't resell them right away like he had the first Spider-Man.

Charnley: He had sold it?

Scott: Yes. The guy had run straight across the street and sold it for fifty bucks and Ray had resold it for some other amount and it was gone. That was when I realized that, I guess I sort of knew that collection was here because Russel Nye had been a customer at Curious Book Shop, too. He was this cool little guy who came in and bought Joe Palooka comics or whatever.

Charnley: Do you know when he started his collection, or had he always collected as a young man?

Scott: He was writing for a book. He was writing a book called *The Unembarrassed Muse* and this sort of required chapters on all the different genres of popular culture as we still know them. He didn't do things by halves. If he was going to write something about soap operas, he watched soap operas. If he was going to write about comics, he bought a bag of comics and took them home. He gave us his comics and all the other things, too, but he also talked two of his students into giving us their comics.

So about in 1970, somewhere along that time, while I was actually here, the library got 6,000 comic books because of Russel Nye's arm-twisting. So in '73, when I heard about this, I came down here and I had already developed certain skills at the Curious Book Shop for sorting and knowing the subtleties of what were the good ones and what were the tricky parts of organizing this stuff.

Charnley: Were there any other academic institutions that were collecting comic books? Obviously private collections, but after your time?

Scott: Bowling Green [State University] at that time. And Russel Nye had his opposite number, Ray Browne. Actually, Russel Nye used to go down there with shopping bags of stuff, too. He spread it around.

Charnley: Would he donate some stuff down there?

Scott: He was in here every couple days with a shopping bag of stuff that had come from somewhere, that he thought should be in the collection. Because we're talking about mass culture and the word "mass" is to be taken seriously. Not just the mass media, but massive media, or a massive set of media.

Charnley: What do you remember about your graduate work? Did you anticipate that you'd come back here? You were married at that time?

Scott: Yes. The reason I decided to go, and Lynn prompted me by--I was sitting upstairs, still typing, and there were all these great comic books down here, so I had an independent study with Russel Nye, where we worked out together a system for cataloging the comics and a rationale and a plan of what would be acceptable, what would be the useful collection. However, the library wouldn't let me implement it because I wasn't of the right status. To actually touch the typewriters that make the cards you need to have that MLS. You didn't have computers yet.

Charnley: That made the difference.

Scott: I started applying and got a good deal at Columbia. We were gone for a year and a summer, and they had a search committee looking for a--

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: This is side 2 Randy Scott interview were talking about the graduate work at the Columbia University. And you were working in the library.

Scott: Yeah. About the time I was ready to graduate at Columbia they this library was searching for a German cataloger and I sent my resume and instead of flying in to interview the director called me up and said would you like to come back so that was that.

Charnley: That was, who was the director then?

Scott: Richard Chapin. But in Columbia, at Columbia itself my concentration was on cataloging and indexing. Which is not what a lot of library people go to school for. It's more common to want to be an administrator or reference librarian so I had an excellent teacher who'd been the head of a major indexing service before she retired to teach a few classes. And so I took all the, all the state of the art or up to the minute cataloging courses and we had guest lectures and tours and it was really quite a good thing. So I was all set when I came back to do a real special job because, and that works too.

Charnley: Was the library organized when you got back here? Now they are in special collections. Did they have special collections back then? That was a designation?

Scott: Yes. This room was the reading room at that time.

Charnley: And we're located in the MSU Library right now. It's special collections. Who is the director then? Did they have a separate director, a director of special collections?

Scott: The head was Jannette Fiore.

Charnley: Okay.

Scott: And the major clerk and only other staff member was Anne Tracy who's just retired. So I suppose I have seniority right now. Although I didn't move down here right away of course I said I was a German language cataloger so I was up there.

Charnley: Mmhm.

Scott: Cataloging German books for quite awhile. Not only German but whatever else came along.

Charnley: Did you continue with the math. any of the science or I mean, or cataloging of math or was there just German books?

Scott: I did things in German and there could have been some math books involved.

Charnley: But.

Scott: The idea back then and still to some degree is that the catalog department should have a breadth in languages that you can cover most of what the faculty wants to read. So we had to sort of be able, besides German I also had to handle Dutch and Danish too. But I didn't ever after do much with math, just to figure out my statistics at the end of the month.

Charnley: How was it you ultimately came to special collections?

Scott: After Jannette left the job of head of special collections and moved on to be associate director of the library she was the second in command I think for a while. There was a big reorganization going on, this under director Hiram Davis. And I just pitched a proposal to them saying you know, Special collections is not getting its catalog done. And it's true we were this place was always a little less priority because the stuff is paid for. And nobody was asking for it because nobody knew it was here. Whereas the stuff up stairs needs to be catalogued all had order records or had to be paid for and it was in a sense more urgent to the institution. Not necessarily to the users. Once my proposal was accepted and you know there's negotiation. I expected to come down here as a cataloger and catalog all day but turns out I had to do everything too, that everybody else does. It turned out that once we started cataloging at a rapid

rate, something like a thousand books a month sometimes we were doing. Which is unheard of.

Charnley: Yeah.

Scott: In the meantime computers developed at a rapid rate. So there were two or three of us doing a thousand books a month. Immediately our use went up. People discovered the stuff was here and we were getting interlibrary loan requests that we are to this day at a very rapid rate, dozens every day.

Charnley: Are you seeing the effects of the computer catalogs increasing use or increasing dissemination.

Scott: I think so. Yeah, it's undeniable. The stuff that you had to read about it in a directory of specialized libraries to find out we had a comic book collection, beekeeping collection, now every single item is listed in our catalog and in the national library catalogs OCLC.

Charnley: Hmmm.

Scott: In many cases on our website the random searches will find this stuff. So yeah it's made a big difference in access ability and we have had to run to keep up with providing what can be provided. There's our other job to be security people and not providing things that are going to fall apart.

Charnley: Yeah that's true. In the mid seventies did Professor Nye continue to bring material to the to his papers at that time that you had before

Scott: Yes he did.

Charnley: Before his later illness?

Scott: Before he had his stroke he was here constantly and after his retirement. I can't remember how many years that was, it wasn't a long time. But, Yeah, he was very present.

Charnley: After you began working with the comics what did you see with the, what were your main job, was it initially cataloguing organizing or?

Scott: With the comics collection I've always done everything basically. The theory that I work on (besides other stuff which I now have to do because we have so few staff) is if you know what you have, if you can put your finger on a list and say we have this, this, and this but we're missing this and that's what cataloguing is. Then you can do acquisitions intelligently. You can talk to donors and say we need this or you can buy it if it comes up for sale so it to me the cataloging is the first step of collection building. And it's also my job to acquire all the comics.

Charnley: I see.

Scott: And my job to answer all the reference questions.

Charnley: How do you acquire them now?

Scott: Still I would say the majority come through donations. I try to keep my feelers out among people who might be interested in donating things. I do have a fairly small but a real budget now to buy things. It's used up, it's gone for this year but it'll be back in July.

Charnley: So did they ever recover that Spider-Man? Did they get a replacement for it?

Scott: That would not really be cost effective as we have it, we have it in a bound reprint volume and the people who need to read Spider-Man number one can read the facsimile. I'm sorry this is not the kind of library we are, the purpose is democratic dissemination of information rather than building an elite collection. I just spent a week in the Dominican Republic visiting my daughter

and bought four hundred comics in the Spanish language. This is this is what I like to do. I went to France twice last year and filled my backpack. Went to Montreal.

Charnley: You find them, you're actively collecting, going to stores and shows? Is that still or not?

Scott: I don't do that much. The shows exist, the prices tend to be high and I would rather spend money on foreign comics that are not going to show up at the shows, because the collection is international. If I decide, or if some legitimate or let's say interesting user comes along and wants a copy of something that we don't have in English, I will try to buy it. Otherwise, I just beg.

Charnley: You've obviously had some publications also related to your work as a bibliographer. Would you talk a little bit about that? How did you first publish something about cataloging comics and that sort of thing?

Scott: My first "professional" publication was in a journal out of Nevada and it was about a technicality in the OCLC computer system. I was publishing a newsletter for all the people all around the country called *Dead-End Searches*, and in that day of the computer, this was before I went to library school, there was a wall that you could come up against without expecting it, where your search would stop and it could waste you a lot of time, and I published a list of all those so that if you had a suspicious search you could check there first and decide not to do that. Several hundred copies went to libraries all around the country and they were all very appreciative of it.

I wrote up an article and had it accepted in the little journal. Why I say "professional" is because I wasn't professional yet; I was still a typist. That was fun and through that I made some friends in the library world. Specifically one, Sanford Berman from the Hennepin County Library, Minneapolis. He's been a good friend ever since. He sends me care packages on anything about comics or radicalism, every couple days. He's retired and he's still sending care packages.

Charnley: You're responsible for the radical collection also?

Scott: Right now, yes. I'm the selector and the cataloger.

Charnley: How would you describe or how did the collection first get started?

Scott: That is a little lost in antiquity. We did get the SDS office and *The Paper* office, when they closed. All the stuff came over here and that was exchange copies of underground papers from all over the country, and leaflets, this kind of stuff. We didn't get any kind of membership lists or anything like the police would get.

Charnley: And a lot of it must have been mimeographed.

Scott: Mimeographed. Yes, cheap offset printing done by shopping guides and stuff and on the cheap acid paper. They had the cheapest newsprint that could be afforded at the time. We have a fairly massive collection, starting from around--all these things started in '70, '71 or something like that, and it's a fairly comprehensive collection of The New Left kind of radical leaflets and papers. We didn't get so much from the black liberation movement or the women's liberation movement, although there's some pretty good stuff.

My colleague Anne Tracy has just retired, but she was active in soliciting things from especially the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement. I always have to say that Anne Tracy and Jannette built the radicalism collection. Apparently, I've been hearing lately that Beth Shapiro was involved somehow in creating the collection. I kind of suspect maybe it was encouragement that she gave, mostly, but I really don't know.

Charnley: Did you know Beth well?

Scott: Not very well, no. She was a couple years older and when SDS split she went into the farthest away one from me.

Charnley: But she was working at the library, too?

Scott: Yes. Quite a few years before I was.

Charnley: In your work as a reference librarian in popular culture, you got involved in that, also. That obviously was through Professor Nye's collections that he did. Did the university expand its interest in popular culture at that time?

Scott: Yes. Anne and Jannette and Dick Chapin, director when this all started. He was not exactly--he wasn't pushing popular culture but he was not prejudiced against it, which was a positive thing in those days.

Charnley: Yes. As many academic hardheads in libraries would actively not seek it out.

Scott: So actually his tenure was fairly friendly to what we were doing down here, what they were doing. They had quite a bit of leeway to try to buy things, occasionally buy things and accept donations from other organizations and free subscriptions from different organizations.

So the question is--both of the questions, radicalism and popular culture, have grown steadily over the last thirty years, but about ten years ago we got together with Ohio State and Kent State and Bowling Green, the four universities, and formed a "Consortium of Popular Culture Libraries in the Midwest". I may have missed a word.

We spent a lot of time trying to think of a reasonable name. And we sort of divided up popular culture. A couple of the MSU emphases were comic books and Sunday school literature. Ohio State got comic strips and papers of cartoonists and cartooning organizations, so they are the cartoon research library, we are the comic art collection, and there's overlap, obviously, but sometimes it's reasonable to send donors or researchers back and forth from one to the other.

If somebody offers me the papers of a cartoonist, I try to shunt them over to Ohio State, and they will send us people giving away comic books, so that works great. Bowling Green keeps a small collection, a representative collection of comic books, and we went right down the line and tried to divide things up. Ohio State has most of the fiction novels. Bowling Green is collecting in movies, sound recordings, and popular things in those areas. There's a leaflet around here somewhere.

Charnley: Was science fiction here?

Scott: No. Science fiction is mainly at Ohio State. We still have one--I did a directory--one of the twenty best science fiction collections because that was one thing apparently we spent some money on. I helped broker a purchase of 1,700 paperback novels one time when I was working upstairs, so we have a fairly good science fiction collection, but we spend essentially no money on it. That's by decision. None of these fiction collections do we spend money on except Sunday school.

Charnley: That's interesting. Is there much demand, or has there been much demand in that?

Scott: Well, now that it's cataloged.

Charnley: And people are finding it.

Scott: They're finding it. But yes, we've gotten a grant and it's just finishing up now, to scan a lot of these Sunday school books onto the Web. Professor Steve Rachman has been one of the supervisors of that grant and we did it in cooperation with Central Michigan and so they sent a bunch of their books down here and then we got them all scanned up and I assume we sent them back. Because they've always been known for their Sunday school book collection.

Charnley: Is that in the Clarke Library or are they just in the regular?

Scott: No, it's in a special collection. So, yes, the Sunday school books are something that other people in that consortium hadn't thought of so that's one of the reasons we decided to go for it and especially since Anne Tracy was really, really into them and knew a lot about them. We capitalized on that.

Charnley: The library and the library work, obviously, if you were involved in computers even before you became a librarian, how would you say the impact of the computer has been on the business of librarianship?

Scott: I would guess it's changed librarianship more than it's changed a lot of occupations. We've all had to learn about, and early, about searching things on the Web and using databases in different forms that change every couple of years, sometimes radically. And as providers of content for these big databases, we take a book and put it up for the first time for anybody to realize it exists. That's very satisfying.

It used to be that you would type a card, have it reproduced and put in a card catalog and send one copy off to Washington where they would collate it into the national union catalog and then ultimately print it into a book that would be distributed, you know, we're talking fifteen years here, to the other libraries where somebody would see, "Oh, there's a book on that, and it's at Michigan State University." When I started as a cataloger, one book an hour was what was desired, that I should produce that.

Charnley: About 1,200 a month.

Scott: And now, if I'm doing the hard ones, I can still do ten an hour because the intellectual work is still there but the routine is gone. I can knock 'em off. Right now I'm working on the Italian Risorgimento, which--

Charnley: Garibaldi and all that.

Scott: Yes, those guys. We got a grant to do some microfilming for our collection which has been sitting back here, uncataloged, for years and the cataloger that they wrote into the grant has since died, so I've been brushing up on my [unclear] into the Italian history. I use a dictionary for the Italian. No, actually, I read a lot of comics in Italian. Six years ago we bought a collection of European comics that's without peer, without equal. We bought 11,000 all at once.

Charnley: Was that from a private donor? Or not a donor, but a private--

Scott: From a publisher who was in legal trouble in Stockholm and needed some quick cash. We

followed the shipping news and watched the boat as it came over. That was pretty exciting. And they're in all European languages, except very few Finnish or Hungarian, but basically the Germanic and the Romance languages, and we cataloged them all.

I spent a lot of time working on a website about those and I've been meeting people from these different countries and have been to France to a festival where I met a lot of the people I've been corresponding with and it's been really fun, you know, using all the linguistics and stuff that I did as an undergrad.

Charnley: So that preparation did help, ultimately.

Scott: I'll be darned. So we have an international collection that's internationally known and fairly solid in the works of all these several literatures. I just finished writing a book, Thursday before last. Mailed it off just before we left for our vacation, on European comics in English translation. When I got back the publisher said they like it. They want some revision to the introduction but heck, I can do that standing on my head.

Charnley: You got the acceptance letter, that's the key. In some of the other things that you've published, what are some of the more recent things that you've worked on?

Scott: Oh, the last thing I published--not on the Web--was in a magazine called *The Serials Review* which is for serials librarians studying their profession. That's sort of a loose category, a serials librarian, but it's somebody who works with periodicals and the editor thought, comic books, okay, periodicals, give him an article, so I wrote an article about our collection, which went over well.

Before that I did a book that was a catalog of our collection, published with Greenwood, that was like a 1,400-page book. I typed it all myself because they couldn't read my disks. I had to set up all the pages, put all the page numbers on. Before that I did a book called *Comics Librarianship*, which was basically for new librarians in library schools and I get emails every month from people who are reading it. It's still being used. It's not in print but apparently the library schools each bought a copy.

That takes us back to the late eighties or about 1990. Before that I did a book called *Comic*

Books and Strips: An Information Sourcebook. It was just a bibliography of everything about comics that had been written in English, which hadn't been done before. It hasn't been done since. There should be another edition.

Charnley: Have collectors been receptive to the books that you've worked on, or have they used them or has it mostly been librarians?

Scott: Mostly librarians. I've been cited in a few other books about comics but the people who write outside of academia on comics tend to have their own sources, you know, their friends. There is a two-world thing going on between the fandom, as we call it, and people who are working in university jobs, trying to publish or perish.

Charnley: In looking at the library, the Michigan State Library, you've obviously had both a student and also your working experience here. Would you talk a little bit about the automation changes that you've seen here at the university, at the library at MSU?

Scott: Well, the basic thing is the switch from cards to a computer catalog and I was deeply involved in the cards as a librarian, because even though computers had sneaked in for cataloging purposes, by the time I went to library school, the card catalog was still alive and well and we were producing cards by computer.

That seems kind of funny now. Nobody ever imagined that we could afford enough terminals to put them out anywhere. The idea that a personal computer could be a terminal in your house, this was radical. So I was the last filing trainer. I was the person who trained all new employees to file correctly into the card catalog.

They would all be required to go an hour a day and put cards in and put little flags after them, and then I would have to come back after them and check every one that they put in to make sure that they understood what was going on. After a few weeks, I could say, "Okay, you're good enough."

But that was really, really labor intensive for everybody involved. But the head cataloger at that time believed that it was important that the catalogers had their fingers in the catalog and were

seeing--his theory was that you had to sort of live in the catalog in order to produce something sensible, rather than just doing it by rote and throwing it in.

That was an important lesson for me and it's been very hard to try to transfer to the new kind of cataloging, the new computer systems, because for one thing there's no filing. Everything files itself, which is a good thing but sometimes it doesn't quite make sense and you've got to keep watching for ways to make things easier for people.

So the attitude, the desired attitude, as far as I'm concerned, hasn't changed. You know, try to make sure that this makes sense. Not only on the one-card level or the one-screen level but on the index screens and as things relate to each other. That is the professional part of cataloging as far as I'm concerned and that's been hard to work through.

The catalog is sort of now in the hands of systems people, who don't remember the cards because they were educated after the cards, which is fine but the fixes that they make are not what an old-fashioned cataloger would make. If a French title starts with the letter "A"--that's an "A" in English and you disregard it, right? Well, so they have the computer set up to disregard all "A"s at the beginning so you can't find the French title, unless you happened to guess that they decided that that was an article, type it in. Well, that's the kind of thing that I still enjoy struggling with.

Charnley: The students that we see now coming in, do you see any difference from that back in 1965 when you came down from the Alpena area?

Scott: I don't think so. If there is a difference, I wouldn't be able to put my finger on it, except as, in general, things have progressed. These kids are computer literate and I don't really know. From listening to Lynn talk--Lynn's my wife who teaches at ATL--even though they should be connected through the media and through their computers with the world and know a lot more than we did, they don't.

Charnley: No change there. Had you been involved in any political activism since the early seventies, on campus?

Scott: No. Very, very little. I was sort of an observer for an organization called the CIA, Crisis in

America, that a lot of my friends were in. I was involved in the unionization drive for the faculty one time.

Charnley: With the Faculty Associates?

Scott: Faculty Associates, yes. When the CTs went out on strike, I didn't go out with them because I would have lost my job but I would spend all my extra time on the picket line with them. I played the accordion for the CTs often. There were a lot of different picket lines. Because I had just finished being a CT at that time.

Charnley: That was before you became a professional librarian?

Scott: I was a professional at that time and I moved from the CTs to Columbia University and back to the professional.

Charnley: You mentioned your accordion, your music. How has music affected your life? When did you first get interested in music?

Scott: My parents gave me piano lessons, and I'm glad they did, and I did it to all my kids and I hope they're someday glad. Music was always a part of growing up. My dad was a Sunday school song leader and my mom was the assistant organist and when I came down here one of the first things I did was, along with math and German, I took music theory because the whole idea that music had a theory was of interest. I took the first year of music theory and enjoyed it thoroughly. I can't say I ever applied it to anything.

I sort of dropped music for a long time and then about ten years ago I discovered jazz and bought a stand-up bass fiddle from Jannette Fiore's son, and now every week we have a little jam session here in the library.

Charnley: Right in the library?

Scott: Right in the library. Right here. You see the piano? That's Maury's old Wurlitzer electric piano there. That's an accordion. There's two guitars.

Charnley: Who else was in your group, besides, you mentioned Maury Crane.

Scott: Maury Crane and Don Depoorter is an accordion player who was at one time a professional accordion player but now works in the library. Occasionally we've had a guitar player, in which case I play the bass. I just play guitar lately.

Charnley: Have you had any gigs outside the library?

Scott: There were three years in a row when we played for the state library downtown. They had some kind of an open house day. I can't remember the exact name but we'd play for a couple hours to cheer people up and they liked that. We played for a few teas, I think. We played for something at Brody Hall I think, if I remember right.

[Begin Tape 2]

Charnley: This is side two of the interview with Randy Scott.

We were talking about music and your interest in music and love of music and playing. Is there any other aspect about music that you wanted to bring up?

Scott: When I was a student, an undergraduate in Abbot Hall, I used to go to dinner and eat all that wonderful food. I loved dorm food. I was sitting with the other guys one time and we sort of spontaneously struck a barbershop chord. La-da-da-da. Something like that. And we looked at each other and said, "We should start a singing group."

It turned out that the other three guys were evangelical Christians. Pentecostals, as a matter of fact. I was not. I had studied the whole idea during the ATL and decided I was an atheist, by gum. But since I hit the first note. So we started a group, a full gospel quartet called The Abbots, named on our dorm.

For a year and a half, we went to little churches, Assemblies of God, Churches of God, Free Methodists, all over southern Michigan and a few up north. We finally had a grand tour to York, Pennsylvania. That was it. We got blazers that matched and we sang gospel songs. I hope we didn't save too many people.

After the concert we would normally spend the rest of the night arguing about whether God existed, because they wanted to fix me so that they could be a real gospel quartet. But I loved the music and I can do it and I played the classical guitar and the other guy who was the only music major played the twelve-string. We made a joyful noise and that was a very big part of my undergraduate experience.

Charnley: I forgot to ask a question about contact. Did you have contact with any of the people like the group? Have you had any contact with them, subsequent, in recent years?

Scott: No, I haven't. I had a real good friend in the dorm from the Dominican Republic and I looked through all the phone directories last week and he doesn't seem to be there, not even his family.

Charnley: In looking back at your career as a student, did you anticipate that when you came here in 1965 that you'd ultimately be working here and spend a large portion of your life associating with this institution?

Scott: No. That was not in my mind at all. On the other hand, I didn't have that kind of goal in my mind. I didn't know what to expect from life. I knew I pretty much didn't want to be a farmer and spend my days plowing fields and plucking chickens. Because I've seen that, I've seen a lot of that. My brother, on the other hand, likes that. He's a part-time farmer.

Charnley: Did he stay on the family farm, or in that area?

Scott: No. He moved over to Petoskey, to the other side of the state, to Harbor Springs. He runs an accounting service and raises sheep and sings. Every weekend he and his wife, they do jobs. They

do dances or concerts or whatever. They're an old-timey band and he's a songwriter. He was down here at MSU for a while, too, and during that time we had great times. An all-family band.

Charnley: In looking--I say "looking back." You're still working; your career hasn't ended. But is there anything about this institution that you think is worthy of mention? Obviously, you went through the tough times in the sixties and changes. Anything in looking at the future or thinking about the last fifty years, especially.

Scott: Well, I would like to think that our land-grant status or philosophy or history or whatever it is sort of gives us a more democratic way of looking at things or lets us give ourselves permission to collect comic books. Let's get to the bottom line. But those other things besides comic books.

There are people who are very surprised that a university would collect popular culture. It was much more of a surprise in 1970 when Russel Nye sort of popped this on us. I have a friend from Australia who came here to read comics when he was an undergrad and has since gone on to be a Ph.D. and is teaching elsewhere, but he pointed this out, that there was a land-grant college in Australia that was the only one that collected comic books at the time and he was wondering if this was some kind of a pattern.

I think maybe there's a little something to it, that whereas the University of Michigan does not collect comic books, and that's too bad for them, we do. I only wish that we could be a little more, a little prouder of it because I sometimes feel that I just better keep my mouth shut than call it popular culture, which is not an "in" term in terms of the scholars I'm working with. They want to talk about cultural studies or they want to study something specific about what was called popular culture, but there is no definition for popular culture and that's something that Russel Nye's generation brought into academia because it was sort of a noncommittal, inoffensive word that you could also put it at sort of arm's length for people who were not really into it.

Charnley: In disdain.

Scott: In disdain. There's the word. But I have felt basically that this has been a supportive environment for the insanity that I wish to pull forward, which is the world's best comic book

collection. I don't know where else I would have found that. Things lined up, the stars lined up with Russel Nye. He was a Pulitzer Prize winner and he influenced the people in this library to allow this to start.

Now, if we can just get a few more faculty from ATL to come and study this stuff and write stuff about it. It is happening. Paul Somers in ATL, [unclear], who I guess has moved to English, but has used this collection extensively. This is very nice, but even more people come from other universities to use it. It would be nice to have more homeboys use it.

Charnley: Well, I want to thank you on behalf of the project for your insights and I appreciate the time you spent. Thank you.

Scott: You're very welcome. [Tape recorder turned off.]

[End of interview]

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