

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Jane Scott Cleary Interview
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Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
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JSC: I am Jane Scott Cleary. I was an associate professor in the library from '78 to 2003, born May 21, 1948.

BC: Affiliation with the University from the beginning.

JSC: I came here in 1978 from New York where I had been working in a school system and I was the instructional materials librarian. And I did that for about half the time while I was here, I was here twenty-five years. The second half of my time at Slippery Rock I was a reference librarian and I was a liaison to the departments in the sciences and the health sciences, and I was also the coordinator of instruction.

BC: Changes from college to university specifically involving you.

JSC: I was here when we were a state teacher's college and then the transformation occurred where the whole system became a university system. It was very simple. I was sort of stunned that it was such a simple transition. My assumption had been that the libraries would have to beef up and do a lot more, but we were all fourteen schools [and] just became universities.

BC: [Was there] cooperation between the different libraries?

JSC: Yes. We . . . by the end of my time we had formed what was called the Keystone Library Network and it was a totally online integrated system where we all had access to one another's catalogs and journal databases. And we had a lot of cooperation among the fourteen schools. I was one of the representatives from Slippery Rock to this statewide consortium. And we do a lot of planning in terms of selection of databases and policies for the state.

BC: [What] significant changes did you see?

JSC: When I first came we had a huge amount of card catalog drawers. They pretty much filled half of the first floor of the reference area. And most of the teaching I did to students was using books and printed material, audio-visually; I was talking about film strips and puppets. By the time I left I was mainly teaching students how to use computerized databases and very little in terms of print material. So it was pretty much [a] change from print to an online situation in the library.

BC: Was that more difficult for you to make the transition?

JSC: Yes, because that wasn't part of my education when I was thinking what profession I was gonna go into. The Internet wasn't even created. And so it certainly was something we all continued to learn about as we progressed.

BC: Did you adjust?

JSC: I guess I adjusted pretty well. It certainly gave everybody greater access so there was a wonderful incentive to learn it. I certainly wasn't one of the slickest when it came to computer technology but it became certainly easier at the end.

BC: What buildings did you work in?

JSC: Bailey Library is the only one.

BC: [Did you have] any previous knowledge of the university before coming here?

JSC: I grew up in Ohio, outside Columbus, and I remember as a child we'd go to the Ohio State football games and at the end of the football game, or at halftime, they would announce all the big ten scores and at the end they would say the score and then they'd say "and Slippery Rock," and the whole stadium would crack up. So I grew up thinking Slippery Rock was some mythological place. It didn't occur to me it was a real place. And when I saw an advertisement for the opening here I applied, but I had no idea where Slippery Rock was or what it was.

BC: What were your first thoughts?

JSC: Two thoughts: I remember being struck by the cement block buildings. Not especially aesthetically pleasing those were. But the other memory was how friendly the students and the faculty all were. Everybody looks you in the eye. I had been in New York City; nobody looks you in the eye there, so that was a really lovely experience to come to such a friendly place.

BC: How did you find out about the opening?

JSC: It was in a professional journal, a library journal. I was looking online, in journals and newspapers, but that particular ad was in a professional library journal.

BC: [On what] committees did you serve?

JSC: Like most faculty I was on a lot of committees. I chaired some of [them]; some of the ones that I did chair and enjoyed included the promotions committee, the Marjorie Stevenson Scholarship committee, Black Action Society. Those were ones that I remember.

BC: [What] accomplishments [did you have] with those committees?

JSC: When I think of my time here, accomplishments that for me were significant, I had done some research looking at the online card catalog. The whole nation was adopting online card catalogs and the statistics other people had found showed that people really liked using the online catalogs but they also showed that people failed to find what they wanted about fifty percent of the time. And I thought that was really strange that people would be so glad to be using this new toy even though they found there was nothing. And so we did a macro-analysis of student and faculty use of the online catalog here to see why they were failing to find things and then we made several alterations to the system and improved the success rate, it was like 64% and we got it up to like 75%. So, that was, that was interesting and fun research to do. I was also involved at the state level in sexual harassment guidelines for the whole state system and I enjoyed working on that.

BC: [Tell us about] instructional teaching; [were you] experienced before Slippery Rock or new when you came here?

JSC: Yes, I started my professional career as an English teacher so I had taught English and then I worked in a public school system teaching elementary, junior high, and high school age students how to use the library. So I had taught for about eight years before coming here.

BC: Was that something you looked forward to?

JSC: I enjoyed it, especially when I first came, the students were so appreciative. That was really fun, because I was teaching somebody to do something. They were very expressive and very appreciative and that was very enjoyable.

BC: [What were your] best and worst moments?

JSC: I think the best would be usually on one to one teaching environment though I did classes and it'd be down in the reference room after helping a student they'd say "Oh thanks so much, that really helped so much, that's what I needed." That was most rewarding.

I'm trying to think of the worst teaching [moment]. I remember I came close to a student, it was through a committee, [the] professional rights and responsibilities committee, and she had come to our committee. She had a lot of problems and we tried to help her and she ended up committing suicide and I always felt like I must have not been very helpful; I mean it wasn't just me, but that was a certainly a disappointing experience.

BC: Leaders on campus

JSC: There were three different directors in the library when I was here. Bill Garton was the first [library director]; he hired me. And then Dr. Barbara Farah and then when I was

leaving Phil Tramdack, the current [library director]. So we had a change in administration there. There were a number of presidents also who came and left during my time. I guess Dr. [Robert] Aebersold who was provost at one time and then president while I was here was the longest-termed president. So there were a lot of changes.

BC: [Was it] significant . . . how the library changed from director to director?

JSC: Yes, I think when I first came, Bill Garton's style was probably more laissez-faire in terms of respecting each librarian in allowing them do what they wanted. Those times were a lot more relaxed I believe. Then I think as we moved along, the campus as well as the library directors, took a more assertive role in terms of seeing the students more as customers, providing services to the customers. And across the campus being held more accountable in terms of assessment of how effective we were serving the students. So things did change during that period.

BC: [Who were the] presidents following Aebersold, and [what was their] relationship with the library?

JSC: Well I remember when Dr. Aebersold was president one of the associate provosts was Lou Razzano, and he had been a librarian, and so he was kind of overseeing our area of the library. Later on we reported directly to Dr. Faust [as] the provost. So that kind of changed I guess throughout the years.

BC: Movers and shakers on campus?

JSC: I was trying to think about that and I remember Bob Macoskey, he was in the philosophy department, I think he might have been a union president when I was here. I think of people like him. Within the library, Leah Brown and Edna King were two librarians who had hired me and certainly had - Leah especially—had a lot of respect across the campus, and they had a lot of impact on my working here.

BC: Anyone you looked up to?

JSC: I would say Edna King and Leah Brown. Other people I remember were Claire Settlemyre. I served on several committees with her. I always appreciated her sense of humor. She was in the history department. Jace Condavy was very influential. I was part of the women's studies committee for a while, [the] women's reading group. And she became union president and she certainly has had a big impact on women throughout the campus. Those were some of the names that come to mind.

BC: Claire Schmeiler was here yesterday; she mentioned you two were close.

JSC: Yeah she was a good friend and mentor also.

BC: [What] major events do you recall?

JSC: Well, towards the end of my time, I remember teaching a group of physical therapy students one morning, an eight o'clock class. And unlike some of the undergraduates they were always very attentive. Sometimes the undergraduates, as soon as the room got dark, everybody was in front of their computer [and] they'd start checking email. But by the end of this class, about 9:30, I could tell there was a rustle in the room and somebody I assumed had found something on the Internet and the lights came up and one of the students told us the World Trade [Center] building[s] had come down.

BC: [Were there] any other memorable events?

JSC: Well during that time, another memorable event: I got married. I married Dr. Michael Cleary in the Allied Health department. I had met him after coming here. So that was sort of the memorable event.

BC: University response to the marriage?

JSC: I'm not sure what the campus response was to that. I think there are guidelines: you're not supposed to work in a department where your spouse would be supervising you, but in terms of that there were no regulations.

BC: So no fruit baskets from the president?

JSC: No, there were no fruit baskets. That's a good idea though.

BC: What do you miss?

JSC: I think I miss lunch most. That was always a great time to stop and talk with friends - continue to solve problems. It was always a good way, too, to meet people across the campus and to find out what was going on in different departments. That was one of the things I missed at the end, it seemed during that twenty-five years the pace really quickened and there was much less time for simple civilities - time to sit down and talk. The last year or so I can remember not having much lunch at all, I'd have a cup of yogurt while I was running upstairs and I was multi tasking and there was never time enough to just sit and listen to what was going on with other people academically.

BC: [Do you have any] words of wisdom?

JSC: I can't think of any words of wisdoms.

BC: Any advice for someone new in the library or overwhelmed with work?

JSC: Well, that's a real good question. I did see many students who were overwhelmed, certainly towards the end, at the massive amount of information that was at their fingertips. And it seems to me the students had a great deal of problem sifting through all that. In terms of research I think it's important for a student to know how to consult the

research tools, the online databases, and start by surveying what's available before they formulate their question, formulate the focus of their research. So that would be, I guess, a suggestion in terms of research skills.

BC: How would you like to be remembered?

JSC: I'd be glad if students remembered me as someone who was helpful and respected them. I think of one of my colleagues, one of the best compliments I ever got was from a colleague here who said I was pithy. I think that would be a good epitaph.