

Interview with Ted Srygley

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Interviewer: Susan Woods

We're here with Ted Srygley, Director of the University of Florida Health Science Center Library, from 1966 to 1993.

Question: Ted, I know that you weren't involved in Southern Chapter or the Southern group, as it was called at its founding. When did you become involved in the chapter?

Answer: The first meeting I went to was in 1967. I think it was in Augusta. I missed the first wave of, maybe the second wave of great medical librarians.....(unintelligible). They were pretty well gone by the time I got there.....(unintelligible). But I remember the Augusta meeting very well because it was fairly small. There were probably thirty or forty people there and it was held at the library in Augusta and one of the things I remember most was that there was a bright young man there, I believe he was from Nashville, and he sat up in the business meeting and suggested that there was just too much free time in the meetings and that he thought that in the interest of efficiency that they could compress the meeting into about half a day on Saturday....(unintelligible) a full work week and not take up so much time. He was almost booed out of the room by all the people there who gave very impassioned speeches about the purpose of Southern Chapter was not to be efficient but was to socialize and....(unintelligible) and to have fun, so that's the last I ever saw of him. He never came back.

Question: Was that meeting...did it live up to its reputation as a good social meeting? Did you make contacts? Did you have fun with your colleagues? Did you indeed network in the way they used to in those days?

**Answer:** Yeah, I think it was an excellent meeting, and I'd been primed for it because when I was recruited for the position of director, uh, I'd gone up to the National Library of Medicine and spent a few days with Marty Coons who was the Director of NLM then and while I was there I met Mildred Langer who was visiting NLM and who was the current MLA President. So they made sure I was introduced to her and I was flattered and honored to have the chance to meet the President of MLA. So I trying, I was up there trying to get an idea of what medical librarianship was about ...(unintelligible) and Mildred was asking me a few questions and one of the questions she asked me was, "Do you like to party?" And I said "Yes." And she asked me, "Do you like to drink?" I said "Yes." She said, "You'll just love the Medical Library Association." (Laughter) I'll never forget that. And that made a very good impression. That plus the fact that she was an intelligent lady, very articulate, and

**Question:** You knew this was the group for you, then..

**Answer:** I knew that was the group for me.

**Question:** Ted, what can you tell me about the split in the organization which occurred in the 1970's?

**Answer:** Well, I was still relatively new, but I had a person on our staff, Mayo Drake, who was very...(unintelligible)... and I think in Southern Chapter. He has since died, but he was a very prominent librarian, very well liked. And so he colored a lot of the opinions I had about Southern Chapter. He gave me a flavor of what this other group was all about. So, we went to a meeting which I think was in Houston, it was in Texas somewhere. I was pretty much against splitting the group, it was a very large group, composed of the six states that we have now, plus Puerto Rico, plus Texas and

Arkansas, Louisiana...(unintelligible)...New Mexico, so it was a huge group, but there were some very good people in it. So what I remember most, I guess, is the business meeting where people made speeches pro and con, and they were essentially blaming, I believe it was Lee Jones, who proposed the split and, as I recall, the logic behind the split was that we were extremely large. It made more sense to save money so we could travel to meetings if we had a smaller region, plus the fact that NLM was beginning to regionalize, so the idea was to go to this...(unintelligible)...

So it passed, I can't remember what the vote was but there were people very bitter about it and felt that the fabric had been ruined. I didn't feel that strongly about it. It was interesting...(unintelligible).

Question: Ann Macomber has said that she was so upset after that vote that she had to leave the room because she knew she was going to lose contact with many of her friends.

Answer: Well what happened was that people like Mayo Drake who I think had gone to Shreveport by then, and Donna Shay who also used to be on the University of Florida staff...(unintelligible)...director of the LSU library, continued to come to the Southern Chapter meetings...(unintelligible)... We did lose contact with a lot of different...(unintelligible)...I guess I never saw him again.

Question: And where was he from? Out west?

Answer: Yeah, he's out west. One of the...(unintelligible)...

Question: Irene Graham has said that we're the only chapter that no longer has its birthplace as part of the chapter, and she thinks that we ought to have two plaques put on the door of the LSU Library and the door of the Tulane Library saying that these

were the founding libraries of the Southern group.

Answer: That would probably be appropriate. I never got to know Bill Postell Jr. Sr. very well, but I understand he was one of the founding fathers of the chapter. The Southern Chapter has always had a strong sense of history...(unintelligible)...the project that you're working on.

Question: Ted, what role did the Southern Chapter play in your professional development and how have you seen that role evolve over the years in terms of the role that the chapter plays in the professional development of its members?

Answer: I think what the Southern Chapter did for me was to be a way to meet colleagues. Southern Chapter has always been an extremely friendly, outgoing kind of chapter. I know when I was first ...(unintelligible) as director, I made a tour of the South. I met....(unintelligible) and was extremely impressed with ...(unintelligible)...very quiet and very ....(unintelligible)...and I think I hit about three or four different libraries ...but all these people were people that I would later meet in the Southern Chapter meetings. The meetings were an excellent way of ...of developing cooperative relationships. It helped a lot....(unintelligible)...the regional program got started because people were already used to cooperating and they knew each other on a first name basis...I think that we developed some excellent reciprocal kinds of ...(unintelligible). In terms of continuing, the chapter continuing to ...(unintelligible)...with professional development, I think it's gotten much more formal now than it was, it used to be very informal and most of the knowledge and contact ...(unintelligible)...programs and the meetings were usually geared toward the institution, the...(unintelligible) institution so that the people speaking on the program

would be faculty from the host institution. That changed probably ten years ago or so, so that there's now a program committee that has a less institution-oriented kind of a profession...(unintelligible)...I think the chapter has gotten much more involved in the professional development, the general professional life of the medical librarian. When I was president of the chapter sometime in the 70's and we had a meeting at Vanderbilt, for example, about all I did was come to the meeting and chair the business meeting. ...(unintelligible)...didn't even have a meeting of the executive committee. Now the executive committee meets ....((unintelligible) ...three hours for each ...(unintelligible)... we essentially came together for a program and did a lot of socializing. So whether or not it's progressed or not I think a lot of....(unintelligible)...has developed and I think...(unintelligible)...developed and I think...(unintelligible)...

Question: Now University of Florida was the host library for the Southern Chapter meeting in 1975, I believe. What can you tell me about that meeting?

Answer: Well, the highlight of that meeting was the banquet. Jewel Garvin of our staff who'd been there since the beginning of the founding of the University of Florida library put a lot of effort into planning, hosting the meeting and especially a lot of effort into the ...(unintelligible)...of the banquet and I think that's still a highlight, one of the highlights for people who were in the Southern Chapter then. It was sort of a study in contrasts...(unintelligible)...we met at the student union and we had a cracker menu. The cracker menu consisted of fried mullet, cheese grits, swamp cabbage, key lime pie for dessert, I think we had ice cream and ...(unintelligible)...then the entertainment which was the contrast to the cracker meal was roving madrigal Renaissance lute

players wearing 17th and 18th century so it really made an impression on a lot of people. Because a lot of people had never eaten cheese grits, let alone swamp cabbage, but we thought it would be a nice thing to show them some of Florida's, north central Florida's...(unintelligible). In addition, Jewel had developed a very ambitious packet for the registration...(unintelligible)...those were the days when ...(unintelligible)...to the city for all kinds of free handouts. I think that was the meeting where we had one of the doctors hand out awards...(unintelligible) ..some of the local one....(unintelligible) cracker..... Anyway, it was a very interesting meeting.

Question: Do you have any recollection of how many people came to that meeting?

Answer: It seems to me there was on the order of 75 or 100. ...(unintelligible)...but

Actually all I remember really is the banquet. (Laughter) It was the highlight.

Question: What people contributed to your professional development and, in particular, what Southern Chapter people?

Answer: I think they were almost all Southern Chapter people. Miriam Libby as I mentioned before, was one of my idols. She taught a course in medical librarianship. I was very impressed with that. She was always entertaining whenever we went to Atlanta, she had parties at her house. She just seemed to be a ...(unintelligible)... there were a few like Sarah Brown and Mildred Langer who also were the grand ladies of medical librarianship. They had been presidents of MLA. Then on the other side there were male friends, Buzz Sawyer...(unintelligible).....Tom Basler who I guess Tom also....(unintelligible)....Mark Hodges who was parliamentarian, historian,...(unintelligible)....always knew the proper way to do things, could read minutes and make corrections, and sometimes ...(unintelligible). oh people like Tom

Long. The males didn't match the females in terms of ...(unintelligible)...I felt very comfortable with....(unintelligible).

Question: Well, that leads nicely to the next question I wanted to ask. What did it feel like being a man in the library world in those days?

Answer: I enjoyed it. I thoroughly enjoyed being a man there. I saw a definite transition though. In the early days there were very few men at the meetings and whenever we would go say break up and go to lunch, I was always the one holding the door so I was always the one last to lunch. I've paid a lot of bar bills and supper bills, I think. I didn't really need to but I was caught up in the custom that the man pays... but that changed pretty quickly, there were changes as the women's movement...(unintelligible)...prevented being a professional that was caught up in that ...(unintelligible)... went right along with it...(unintelligible)...I guess I guess I was able to make a lot of women friends that I think I would not have been able to make if I had been in a male-dominated profession. It was pretty valuable to me...I had I was able to develop both male and female friends.

Question: How have you seen the profession change over the years?

Answer: I think technology has probably increased over the years that I've been a librarian. I came in at the beginning of the technological age. I started off working at Florida Atlantic University which was on the cutting edge of technology and when I came to the medical library at the University of Florida computers were so new that a reference librarian asked me why we needed computers ...(unintelligible)...we could look it up faster by hand...(unintelligible)...in about five years the environment changed completely...(unintelligible)...I think it was very the technology with technology we

were in danger of losing some of the, the personal interaction with users, but I think the, the service we give is probably greatly increased. I know there's a lot more volume of work turned out and information availability uh has increased even ...(unintelligible)..people wanting more and more information...(unintelligible)...avalanche effect. So in that sense I think our profession has become invaluable because...(unintelligible)...essentially being asked to develop bibliographies...(unintelligible)...So I think I think the time right now is very exciting and it's also critical in terms of new roles...(unintelligible)...but we've been through these kinds of times before, audio visual craze back in the late 60's and times like that when ...(unintelligible)...somethings you...(unintelligible)...swallowed up by another...(unintelligible)...but I think at this point....(unintelligible)...it was very clear...(unintelligible and parts lost)...

Question: Ted, do you have any final comments for us, in particular I'd like to hear some anecdotes about some of those early meetings.

Answer: Well, this, this is an apocryphal story, but I'm pretty sure it happened and I of course was not involved...