Henry Snyder was born in Hayward, California in 1929 and did his undergraduate and graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, receiving his PhD in history in 1963. He has taught and held administrative positions at University of Kansas, Louisiana State University, and University of California, Riverside. He has been director of the North American English Short-Title Catalogue (ESTC) project since 1978. In that time, the project has expanded from its original focus on eighteenth-century imprints to include records for letterpress items in any language printed between 1473 and 1800 in England or any of its dependencies, and works printed elsewhere in English during that same time period. Snyder is also director of the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research at UC, Riverside. In addition to the ESTC, the Center oversees the California Newspaper Project and may soon be expanding to include a database for colonial Latin American imprints. Although originally conceived as an “exit interview,” Henry Snyder’s indefatigable energy is at odds with the term “retirement.”
Let’s begin with your background before ESTC. I am particularly interested in your education, jobs, and other experiences that would eventually relate to your work on the project.

Well, first of all, I guess I always had an interest in books. I mean as a kid, when I was in junior high school, I used to spend half the time in the library and was an assistant to the librarian. I remember I cataloged all my parents’ books—they, maybe, had 15 feet of books. I mean I put pockets and library cards and circulated things in all the books. [laughter] So maybe I should have been a librarian rather than a historian.

And I started buying books early. When I was 14, I bought my first seventeenth-century book, Jeremy Collier’s *A short view of the immorality and profaneness of the English stage*. It was one of the first books sold by Lew Lengfeld at Books Inc. It was in the Fairmont Hotel in Berkeley, and I paid $4.50 for it. And so I was lucky, this was during the war [World War II] and I had lots of money. I had a good part-time job; I earned a lot of money for a kid in those days. And I bought books. And so I knew all of the antiquarian booksellers. I remember going to Holmes Book Company. John Howell, I remember John Howell and all the old-time booksellers and so forth in San Francisco. And that interest continued.

When I went to the university—I went to the University of California—it was the little school up the street in Berkeley—so I went there. All my family had gone there. And I majored in history; that was my primary interest then. I had no idea what I wanted to do. And then when I graduated from college—it was January, 1951,—and I didn’t know what I was going to do. I hadn’t chosen a profession. And I figured I would go into the army because it was Korea, I’d be drafted. I was working in a department store part-time and they said, “Why don’t you stay on and be an assistant buyer?” And I said, “Okay,” because I thought I’d leave in a few months.
Then I decided if I was going to go in the army, I’d want to be an officer. My father talked to a friend of his in the National Guard, and he said, “Do you want to be an officer? Go to the National Guard.” So I did. I got a commission, and my division was never taken. I spent eight, nine very active years in the National Guard in California. It gave me a lot of useful administrative experience. Within a year and a half I was running units and doing all sorts of things and then rehabilitating a unit and taking over new units. I built the only full-strength rifle company in the whole Sixth Army area, the whole western United States in the Army National Guard, 184 men and officers. So I found that was a very useful administrative, political experience. ESTC is administrative and political.

Then after a year as an assistant buyer, I wasn’t taken into the army, they made me assistant buyer in china and glass with no buyer. The buyer had left; so they made me assistant buyer. So I had all the responsibility, but not the salary. I did very well in that job, and in 1956 they made me china, glass, and silver buyer at the main store. So I was china, glass, and silver buyer there for three years.

By ’59, I decided I didn’t want to spend my life that way, I decided I would go back to school. I thought at that time I’d been, I was an administrator in the military and a businessman. I thought, “Well I’ll be a university administrator.” I went and talked to my uncle who was a professor at Berkeley, and he took me in to see one of his former students who was the executive vice-chancellor of the university system. And he said, “Well, if you want to be an administrator, I’ll give you a job. I’ll make you secretary of the chancellor’s council.” But he said, “You won’t get anywhere without a Ph.D.” So I thought, “Okay, I’ll go get a Ph.D. What’ll I get it in?” I thought, “Well, I liked the course I had in British history.”

So I started in January of ’59 and I finished my MA in October [1960]. And this was working full-time most of that period because I wasn’t
allowed to resign from my business firm until six months later, plus running my National Guard unit.

I passed my comps the following April, so I was sort of ready to go. But I really wasn’t ready to go do research, and I didn’t know what I was going to do my research in. I’d read J. H. Plumb’s *Sir Robert Walpole*. He discusses sources, and he mentions the Marlborough archives of Blenheim and the Sunderland papers there. And he said somebody ought to write a dissertation on Sunderland. So I chose Sunderland, the third earl of Sunderland, who was a very prominent politician in the early eighteenth century.

My supervisor said, “Well, okay. Of course, you have to go to England. Everybody goes to England who does their research.” He used to send them all to [Sir Lewis Bernstein] Namier, who was a very famous historian. But he died [in 1960], so he sent me over there really on my own. He said, “Go to England and do your dissertation and come back,” and not really much guidance. In fact, every so often he used to say to me, “Which earl of Sunderland is it you’re working on, is it the second or the third?” He could never remember, you see. I didn’t get a lot of help from him. That was all right. That was the way it was in Berkeley in those days.

I went out to Blenheim [Palace]—it was still a private archive—because that’s where the Sunderland papers were located. And it was the only place in England you had to pay a fee; it was a guinea a day. They opened it to make money. It had never been open before. And I was going so often I got a deal. I got it at three guineas a week because I went up there [so often]. The archives were in a stone vault that had originally been an orangerie. Unheated, there was one light bulb. There was a steel grate door like a prison cell. When I worked up there in winter, it was below freezing. And I was probably the first person to go through all the boxes since [Archdeacon William] Coxe organized it in
about 1800 and [Winston] Churchill’s assistants in the thirties. Nobody had been allowed in until after the war.

So I went through the archives, and I spent a lot of time in them. I hated to waste. Since I was paying a guinea a day, I didn’t take lunch. I’d say to the clerk outside, “I’d like to work through the lunch hour.” He said, “Okay, but I’ll have to lock you in.” So he’d lock this prison cell door. If there had been a fire or anything, I wouldn’t be here today.

And the one thing, I have to tell you about this: I saw the opportunity to publish, among other things, the Marlborough-Queen Anne correspondence. [And] there had been [Sidney] Godolphin, [Earl of Godolphin]. I said to the clerk, “I’d like to take some of this, and I’d like to have it microfilmed.” He said, “Oh, we can’t bother with that.” And I said, “Well, I know you did it for the History of Parliament Trust.” And he said, “Well, they took it down themselves to Bodley.” “Well,” I said, “I’ll take it down myself.” So he said, “Okay, just as long as you don’t bother us.”

I used to take a cardboard box in, and I’d fill it with 500 autographed letters of Queen Anne and 300 of the Duke of Marlborough. I’d say to him as I was going out, “I’m taking some manuscripts down to Bodley.” I’d take them down and I’d drop them off. About two weeks later, they called me. They said they’d made their film, and I’d go pick it up and I’d take it in the door. I said, “I’m putting them back.” And then I’d fill another box. Well, after about five of these trips, they suddenly realized that I was carting off the crown jewels, you know. But, fortunately, I got everything I wanted filmed. [Snyder used this material for his dissertation and a number of other scholarly publications, including The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence, published by Clarendon Press in 1975.]

I went to England in ’61, and I was there 18 months. And while I was there, I’d started buying books heavily. I used to set aside one day a
week, and I went around all over southern England. I'll have to tell you just one story. I wanted a copy of [Philip Yorke] Hardwicke's state papers published in 1778, two volumes in quarto. I was taking my in-laws out for a ride. They were visiting, and we were going to eat. And I remembered a bookseller that I hadn't been to, and I thought, "Just for the hell of it. You don't mind if I stop and I go in and see if they have the Hardwicke state papers?"

And the bookseller said, "I'm not sure." And he said, "I may have one upstairs." And I said, "Well, may I go with you?" And so he took me upstairs, unlocked this door—it had a big padlock. I went in there, and it was a room filled with eighteenth-century books. And he said, "I've been in business 25 years. Anything I've acquired before 1800 has gone up in this room. But," he said, "my heart's going. The doctor tells me I have to quit. So I have to sell all this." He said, "I don't want to sell this. These are my children. But I have to sell this."

So he looked around, and he found a copy in filigreed calf owned by the second Earl of Palmerston. And so he said, "This is all in a catalog—the catalog is being published now. I don't know the price, I'll have to go call the printer." So he said, "We'll have to go out, and I'll have to go use the phone." And I said, "Well, can't I stay?" So he said, "All right, but I'll have to lock you in." [laughter] So he locked me in this room. So he's gone about ten minutes. There were over two thousand books in this room. I went quickly through the whole thing. When he came back, I had a big stack that I pulled out. He said the book was three guineas or something like that. And I said, "I have this ..." "Oh, I don't want to sell these things," he said. "And I'm not going to go call them and get the price and all this stuff." And he looked at them all. I don't know how many things I had there, maybe 20 titles in 30 or 40 volumes. And he says, "Twenty-five pounds, take it or leave it." So I did. Now this had all taken about an hour. So my in-laws were sitting in the car. And I came out of the bookstore followed by three people all
carrying boxes. [laughter] But anyway, I got to know a lot of book dealers, some of them extremely well.

After receiving your Ph.D. in 1963, your first position was at the University of Kansas.

I was hired as a British historian. But I was very active and I did a lot of different kind of things—got involved with the library, got well acquainted with the librarian. So I started buying books. I was one of two faculty members that went through every catalog that came into the rare book department all the 17 years I was there. And I started buying books and building up the collection. In fact, the librarian even gave me a special fund. And I said to him, “There are all these cheap eighteenth-century books, why don’t you buy them? I’ll never spend more than five dollars for a book.” I bought hundreds of things. And so, that was sort of my background there. I got well acquainted with the library. I became secretary of the library committee.

How did you move into administrative work at Kansas?

I got a call from the dean of research administration, who handles all external grants and contracts at Kansas. He said the chairman of the history department recommended me; he wanted somebody in the humanities to come into his office. Well, I almost never turn anything down; I just like to try new things all the time. I said, “Okay, I’ll do that.” So in the fall of ’67, I became associate dean of research administration. I continued to teach and work on my research, and I was administrative almost ever since that time. And I got very involved in humanities things. The executive vice-chancellor of the university called me up, I’d been in the office maybe a year, and he said, “We need to do something for the humanities, Henry.” Do something for the humanities. That was it. “Do something for the humanities.” So I organized a committee. I said, “Let’s create a center.” And we did. We
also created special courses and did a whole series of things. But one of the things, I was there to see that people in the humanities got money. But I took on many other tasks.

**How did you first become involved with ESTC?**

There are two other things I need to mention about Kansas that led to my getting involved in ESTC. I’ve mentioned my close relationship with the library there. The other thing I should mention, a lot of my publications had to do actually with bibliography and book history because I’d find these things in archives. My first period paper was on [Daniel] Defoe, for example. I did a lot of attribution studies ... and I got very interested in political history and [in] particular the press. I found reports of a press buy for Robert Harley who was secretary of state. I also published a list of printers and identified publishers of clandestine works and addresses and printing figures for the *London Gazette*.

So I had that background and the administrative experience and the close work with libraries and working with a lot of librarians. I remember when we first had this crisis about serials. Now this is about 1967, so the crisis has been going on a long time. We still have a crisis about serial prices. I was secretary of the library committee, so I did a study on serial prices. I got involved and wrote a report and a proposal to the university for the library committee. I got pretty much involved in those kinds of activities.

This sort of led into the ESTC. Let me tell you how I got involved and backtrack a little bit on the history. NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] sent out a letter [in the early 1970s] to major scholarly organizations, saying, “What would you like us to do? What are big projects you’d like us to do?” And Paul Korshin, who was executive secretary and founding secretary of the American Society for Eigh-
teenth-Century Studies [ASECS] thought ESTC would be a good idea. He was over in the British Library and talked to Ian Willison, who was also interested in starting something like that and gave him some encouragement to go ahead. Paul got money for a conference to explore it—an Anglo-American conference. And there were two held in ’76, but I was not involved with it at that time.

But in ’77, I read in the proceedings that they made a decision to leave out serials. I thought that was a big mistake, so I wrote them a letter and I said, “This is a mistake.” And I told them why. So I got an invitation to serve on the advisory board.

Can you go back and discuss the original plan for ESTC, describe the state of ESTC prior to your nomination as director, and talk about your early work on the project as well?

ESTC was designed as an Anglo-American project. And I think a lot of the people felt in the beginning, “Well, the money’s going to come from the United States; they’re the ones that have got the big bucks.” But as it happened, the British Library had separated from the British Museum in ’73 and was given a capital sum to help effect the separation. And they brought in somebody from outside as the new director general—as the head, really, of the London branch—Donovan Richnell, who had just retired as the Goldsmith’s Librarian at the University of London. Richnell was behind ESTC and went to the meetings, thought it was a good idea. He put up the money [in 1976] to recatalog their eighteenth-century holdings, which formed the base file. That’s what really made it possible. The British Library invested that hunk and they created records for 150,000 books. That was the base file.

[The following year, in 1977], the North Americans decided first of all to do a pilot project. And what they were going to do was say if you took NUC [National Union Catalog] and a couple of major library
catalogs and culled all the entries and added them to the British Library records, would this suffice? So they ran a six-month project. The first director was Tom Adams, who was then the librarian at the John Carter Brown Library. Terry Belanger, who was an assistant professor at the library school at Columbia, was director of the project. And it was to be carried on at The New York Public Library.

What they basically did was, they took the relevant ESTC materials in The New York Public Library to compare them against both The New York Public Library’s catalog records (to see how accurately it reflected that item) and NUC, which, of course, is an enormous compilation based upon library cards sent in to the Library of Congress by libraries all over North America. Well, of course, they found that NUC didn’t describe the books adequately. The records are often incorrect. Or they certainly don’t reflect the perfect copy or a copy that we can base a proper bibliographic record on. And they came up with a conclusion: it wouldn’t work. They’d have to do fresh cataloging.

At that point, Terry Belanger had to go back to Columbia and Tom Adams couldn’t take any more time on it. So the whole thing was sort of up for grabs and the British Library was very concerned because Richnell had sold it to the chief executive, Sir Harry Hookway, and Harry to the board on the basis that this was going to be a grand Anglo-American project. But the American piece was falling through the cracks—several people on the [North American] committee didn’t approve of what the British Library was doing. And their feeling was that they didn’t want to participate at this stage and wanted to join at a later stage when they could make sure that it met their specifications.

A meeting was held [in New York in the fall of 1978] to determine what course to take and Don Richnell and Robin Alston [of ESTC at the British Library] explained it to me. “The problem is,” they said, “we really need somebody on board now.” And I said, “Well, I’ve got all
these other things to do.” But I said, “Okay. I’ll do it.” I saw this as an important service to my profession, and since I had been elected unanimously by the committee, it looked like I had better acquiesce. So that was September. Well, about that same time, I was nominated to be a dean at LSU—Louisiana State University. That fall, I interviewed and became a finalist. By December, I was offered that job and then moved shortly after that, taking this all along to Louisiana.

So when I took this project on, it was a real political problem. But my feeling was that if it was going to go, we had to buy [in]. We had already made a mistake by not getting starting sooner, and so, by default, we left it to the British to design it. They had a going concern; they were investing a lot of money; there was going to be a product; and we either joined them or we were going to be left out. So I made that as a political decision.

I immediately got the proposal off. I couldn’t have done [it] without the help of Marcus McCorrison [of the American Antiquarian Society] and Bill Matheson at the Library of Congress and Paul Korshin and Terry Belanger. We got the funding, and I immediately started hustling to get libraries to contribute because everyone felt it wasn’t going to work, because libraries didn’t have the resources and weren’t going to cooperate. Tom Adams had actually done a survey, and the responses from two of the major libraries were really rather discouraging. So my big job was to build confidence in people that (a) we were doing the right thing and (b) to get them to contribute at their cost.

I started barnstorming the country. By this time I was dean [of the College of Arts and Sciences] at LSU—I was traveling a fair amount. Every place I went, if there was a library nearby, I went and called on them. So it was peer pressure. Once you get some essential ones in, then the others sort of come along. You know, some of them will take it on faith, others will take it upon proof. The ESTC would not have been possible without a range of
wonderful people—the librarians—throughout this country that were supportive, and they committed resources from their own institutions.

Certainly, there’s a remarkable element to the history of ESTC regarding the continuous funding for over two decades. But another essential element seems to be this cooperative venture. Your background in both retail and administration must have served you well over the years.

It was a sales job. It was a marketing job. I mean, as much as anything is. I’m not a librarian and I’m not a technical person. I know what a 100 field is in a MARC record now, and I know three or four other fields, but beyond that, I don’t know what the dollar signs are [in a MARC record]. That’s not my job. My job was to get the money, manage it efficiently, and get people to cooperate. I think that’s where my administrative background was so important in a variety of fields— in the university, in the military, and in business. And, then fundraising because I was in charge of the office that handled the external grants and contracts at the University of Kansas. I had done that for 11 years, so I knew the funding agencies and the people. And I had to learn how to work with them and how to seek these things out.

Can you talk about the current state of ESTC?

The big thing about the ESTC is, you know, it’s a project that never seems to end. I know NEH feels this way [laughter] because they’ve sort of told me, “We can’t afford to support this forever.” And we have worked out the point at which the major phase is over. But the frustrating thing is, we’re always discovering something new. And particularly in Britain, there are major collections that, because they didn’t have the resources or weren’t contacted, were never surveyed.

In our case, my job was to get American libraries reported. And so I did that, very carefully. I took lists and went around and wrote and did this
systematically and methodically. In Britain, the British Library is not charged with doing that. So Robin Alston went out and got some libraries to participate and really did quite well and got a lot of them to do that. But with one notable exception, the British Library didn’t have money to vet reporting. And, really, there were limits to how much they wanted to get in anyway because then they had to commit labor to processing the stuff. So because (a) there are so many more libraries and (b) it was organized differently over there, there’s a lot unreported or only partially reported.

The Oxford Colleges weren’t reported. I said, “These are too important to leave out. I mean, this is a collective repository. Oxford’s the greatest place in the world after the British Library or any place. We’ve got to get it.” So I got the money for it and went over there and organized the canvass, and funded that and got the colleges in, but I only did the eighteenth century. And one of the librarians said to me, “You should come back and do the seventeenth century.” And I said, “Well, Wing, that’s there.” And she said, “He was here four hours. We have 5,000 books.” [laughter]

This is not intended as a criticism of either the Wing team or Kitzi Pantzer [of STC]. They did what they could, and they did a marvelous job. Kitzi’s is more comprehensive; she had a smaller population to work with. On the other hand, she was one person. And it’s a superb job. The Wing job was a much bigger population, and they simply didn’t have the resources to do all that. So it’s highly selective. So one of the things I’m doing, I have big charts that show every library and what they have, when I have time we go over that. So we’re systematically trying to do that.

The big frustration’s going to be [that] we’re going to run out of the major flow of income, and there won’t be a way to do it. We have to find a way. We’re developing new techniques, and that’s what’s so interesting. We have an in-house version, and we have a skilled pro-
grammer. Now we can get extractions from library catalogs, and we can run that past the file and pull off something like 50 percent of the stuff and match it. We’re always doing something new. And I think we’ve been trailblazers in many ways. And so I guess that’s why after 20 years I’m still excited about it—because it’s light years away from the way it was when we started.

When you think about ESTC today, what has not been accomplished?

In this country, there are many gaps in the Wing and STC records. Rather few in the eighteenth century because we really have practically everything in. Not everything. That would be a misstatement, but practically everything—the most important collections. There is much greater representation.

If I were doing it all over again, I was thrown into this thing without any knowledge, really, of creating bibliographic records, particularly machine-readable ones. I don’t think I would have done it much differently. I don’t think I could have done it much differently because I had to take this step by step. This thing has evolved. We spent an awful lot of time recording stuff manually. And for some years we put this all down on sheets of paper and keyed it in later. Because even though the British Library was building machine-readable files, everything was done manually and sent to a typing service and then keyed in by a typing service. That’s why there are so many, there were tens of thousands of, errors created by that typing service. They’re still in there; we’re still getting them out.

And then the system was a batch-load system, and it was not available online. And I cast about—I even proposed at one time trying to do it on the LSU computer just so we could get access and wouldn’t have to work manually. I did print up, because the British Library, Robin
Exit Interview: Henry Snyder

Alston, had developed this bib slip which we thought was going to be the answer—people would fill in these slips by hand. I had 200,000 printed up! I think I pulped 198,000 [laughter], we probably have half of the other 2,000 still left.

If I’d been there in 1976 and I’d understood what was happening, I would have tried to get, it’s too bad that the Americans who represented this thing weren’t active at that ground level on the design of the file. But then again maybe the British Library would never have put up the money if it hadn’t been according to their design. It worked, and we have to be forever grateful for the fact that they made that enormous investment and time and effort. I don’t fault anybody, really.

Could you explain how the project expanded to its present scope?

It would have helped if we could have integrated it all a little more at the beginning, particularly the serials. Because as I went around the country and talked to people, they’d say, “Well, why don’t you do STC and Wing? We need the machinery to look for those.” And I said, “Well, that’s not our charge.” But then I began to think about it. It has to be done and it will be done. And I said, “Furthermore, it really should be a part of our file. People shouldn’t have to go to three separate files to get this information because there should be a consistent kind of information presented in a consistent format, and beyond that, you know, you don’t stop studying Shakespeare in 1640 and you don’t stop studying Milton in 1700. You trace these things over time. And that’s the importance of understanding the evolution of literature and history and style and interpretation and printing—the whole lot. It’s the continuous stream. And we did do that by taking it up to 1800, we come pretty much to the close of the handpress era which, bibliographically speaking, in terms of physical description, is really separate from the machine presses that follow.
I was at an IFLA [International Federation of Library Associations] meeting in 1987 at Bath. And there was a panel on short-title catalogs. I didn’t deliver a paper; they were all British. And they reported on STC and Wing, and somebody asked that same question again. And they said, “Well, it can’t be done. And has anybody done anything?” And they said, “No.” And then I thought, I got up and I said, “I’d like to suggest that’s not quite true because for access to the UMI microfilm sets actually 40,000 records have been created. And that must be a third or 40 percent of the whole. And actually if they were added to our file, it could be done.”

So when I got back, I thought, “Well, maybe we ought to try this.” I went around to talk to people at MLA [Modern Language Association, publishers of Wing] and Kitzi Pantzer and I said, “Do you object if I try and put this forward?” Kitzi said, “Just as long as you don’t get me involved. I’ve got my pallet full.” And the MLA people were very positive.

The other thing I added was the serials because that’s how I got involved in this in the first place. And I persuaded the committee we should add serials, and we got a separate grant and we are doing that now. That, I think, was a mistake now because we made this massive canvass of the United States, and then we didn’t get serials records. Well, we can’t go back to 900 libraries. They’re not going to go through their shelves again looking for this stuff, so it’s a much harder job to get the records than if we had done this all at one time.

In addition to the ESTC and the Early Serials Projects, Riverside also hosts the California Newspaper Project.

[There were similar projects in other states] and I started inquiring around, and I discovered nobody wanted to do it because it was too big. I went to Berkeley and the California State Library because they were the biggest collections, and they said, “Be our guest.” Then I went to
NEH, and of course they knew me at NEH, I was a known quantity. And they knew I’d run a project successfully. So I took on the California Newspaper Project. So that’s become a twin project. It’s a big project in itself; it’s a major task. We’re going to every repository in the state and inventorying collections, private homes, cataloging, and now preservation.

And that’s been, I’m a native Californian, my family are gold-rush-day Californians, so I have a long history in the state. And I just feel it was a very important thing to do. And it’s been a wonderfully satisfying project. Many librarians have told me that the most-consulted materials in a library are its newspapers, and certainly for public libraries. They’re consulted by lawyers, historians, and genealogists. So we’re in every community in the state of California. It’s been very interesting, and it’s a wonderful venture on the part of NEH.

But now these two projects are beginning to tail down. And eventually they’re going to stop. We’re going to try, I’m trying to create an endowment so there’ll be a permanent presence for the ESTC. There’s always so much to be done—new collections to be added, migration of materials, new information about attributions, and there are always improvements to be made.

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What’s next for the Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research at Riverside? I understand your successor has been appointed, but he isn’t completely on board yet at ESTC.

Thomas Cogswell has been hired and is at Riverside but has still not taken over because he then got sidetracked to take over the chairmanship of the history department. So I agreed to stay on a few more years. But as I interviewed candidates to succeed me, I’d say to them, “One of your jobs will be to find other things to keep the Center going because we have a lot of expertise here and a good reputation.” And so I said to him, “Maybe colonial Latin America because that has much in common with what we do. It’s handpress; it’s a limited thing; and we know how to do this kind of thing. And it needs to be done.” I got to thinking about it. “Well, maybe there’s a way to shortcut it.” There is this marvelous series of bibliographies done by José Toribio Medina at the beginning of the twentieth century, and he’s done half of it. They’re quite good descriptions for the most part. The census has to be improved, but enough is there to create the core of a bibliographic record. So I thought, “Why not key all these things?” I did some studies and decided about two-thirds [of the imprints] were available. If I keyed it and I could do it at a relatively low cost, I’d have it up and running. Given the state of libraries and access to collections and staffing and so forth, what we did for American libraries and British libraries, even, wouldn’t work in Latin America because they don’t have the kind of bibliographic control that we do here. So if I had a ready-made set of records I could check against, it would go much faster and be much more efficient … Actually I’m doing some of them now, testing it, and it’s going to work. And I think it’s a marvelous project. And I think, given the interest in Latin America, I think there’s foundations that will support it. I just think it’s a winner.

You have been a presence at RBMS for many years now. Is there anything else you want to mention regarding your library activities?
Actually, I’ve been going to ALA now for 20 years. I’ve been in IFLA for 12. In fact, I’ve basically stopped going to my own professional meetings and go to librarian meetings. And I’ve been very active in that. I’ve talked at library meetings and I’ve been on panels. So in a sense I’m sort of an honorary librarian. Maybe not honorary, [laughter] but it’s become a very important part of my life. You know, one never knows how one’s life is going to go, but it’s become a fascinating and a wonderful experience for me.

You’ve seen an incredible number of libraries, some amazing collections, and you’ve been able to assist in the documentation of the holdings of these institutions for scholars, librarians, and people in the trade. Looking back on your career in academia and your long tenure at ESTC, do you have any final thoughts?

Well, as I said this earlier in this interview, I always like a challenge and almost any kind. And it seems to me that any task you take on, you can make it interesting if you want to. And so, really, in my whole professional life I’ve sort of taken an opportunity and seized it. I told you I didn’t mean to be in business, but I had an offer and I took it. And I enjoyed that. I did that for eight years. And then I wanted to be a university administrator, and they said, “Get a Ph.D.” So I did. And then I started as a professor, and I found I really loved research and I
was very happy being a professor, so at that point, to hell with administration. Then I got asked to go into administration, so I did that. And so actually I spent most of my career in administration, but I’ve enjoyed that too. And then this library thing came up, so I did that. So if you take opportunities when they come, it makes life very interesting. But you have to be flexible to do that, and I have no regrets whatsoever about that.

Acknowledgements

The interviewer wishes to thank John Bloomberg-Rissman of ESTC at UC-Riverside, Danette R. Pachtner, graduate student in Information Studies, UCLA, and Teresa Barnett and Alva Stevenson of the UCLA Oral History Program for their assistance.