Daniel J. Slive

INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN FIERING

Norman Fiering has announced his retirement as director and librarian of the John Carter Brown Library after twenty-two years of service. He has been head of the library, an independently funded and administered research institution located at Brown University, since 1983. During his tenure, the library doubled the size of its building, increased its endowment sevenfold, and established an international research fellowship program that gives awards to as many as thirty scholars a year. More than 5,000 rare books in a dozen different languages have been added to the collection since 1983, all primary sources for the study of the Americas printed prior to circa 1825. Under Dr. Fiering's leadership, the vast majority of the collection has been fully re-cataloged and the records made accessible online. During his tenure, the John Carter Brown Library (JCB) has issued some forty publications, including four collections of essays derived from conferences organized by the library. The library also has sponsored hundreds of lectures and opened five exhibitions in New York City and elsewhere, featuring the holdings of the library. In this interview, conducted on February 26, 2005, Fiering reflects on his experience at the John Carter Brown Library and the development of this unique scholarly resource devoted to the colonial period throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Could you provide an introduction to the John Carter Brown Library? In particular, can you discuss its scope and its history as both a private library and a public institution?

The John Carter Brown Library is a unique, or nearly unique, institution in that it was designed from the beginning to serve historians, and I often remark that it's accidentally a so-called rare book collection. The goal here is to collect primary sources relating to the history of North and South America during the colonial period, roughly before 1825. It happens that those books are rare, but we pay very little attention to some of the criteria that might apply for a person who is interested in rare books per se and focus essentially on content. It's an easy library to work for in that we are so highly focused. Maybe a comparable institution would be the Folger, which is also relatively focused, but most special collections are all over the lot. They have to choose between whether they want to buy James Joyce or a medieval manuscript or something in Chinese or who knows what. At the JCB, we only have to decide whether it's going to be, for example, French, Dutch, Portuguese, German, or Italian, and whether it's going to be printed in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century, and whether it will relate to French Canada or Paraguay or another area of the Americas. The JCB's present strength is a direct result of this wonderful concentration. This is a library where it's possible to achieve an international preeminence whereby we can say that we have the greatest collection in the world of books relating to the Americas during the colonial period, encompassing works in all these different languages, European and indigenous, printed throughout Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

We date the founding of the library from 1846, when John Carter Brown made a definite commitment to Americana. Prior to that, he was collecting much more diversely, but in 1846, he bought 600 Americana items from dealers in Europe. From the very beginning, his goal was to make the library a resource for historians and there are very early records of his lending books to scholars. The most remarkable thing was that in 1865, which is so early, he and John Russell Bartlett, who was the first librarian, published a printed catalog of the collection.[1] The preface for that catalog says that he wanted to make known what is in this library as a service to learning. I think it is the first private library in the United States that openly committed itself to serve scholars from anywhere; and hence its history is different from that of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the American Antiquarian Society, and other institutions that began as private societies essentially serving a membership. When John Carter Brown died in 1874, there was no interruption in the devotion to developing this collection. Both of his sons and his widow continued to build the collection. The sons died very early, by 1900, and at that point there was a kind of family crisis. John Nicholas Brown, the oldest son, already had made plans to establish the library as an institution with its own building, probably in Providence, but not necessarily. When he and his brother died, there were no males to continue the work. In those days, it was assumed that women were incapable of any kind of serious leadership roles and a contract was signed in 1901 to locate the library on the campus of Brown University as a remedy. John Nicholas Brown left a bequest that included $500,000 for an endowment, an incredible amount of money in 1900, and money to construct a building as well. The building opened in 1904 right in the middle of the campus of Brown University. It is the first private, individual collection in the U.S. to become a public, or semipublic, research institution.

---

[1] John Carter Brown, *Bibliotheca Americana: A Catalogue of Books Relating to North and South America in the Library of John Carter Brown of Providence, R.I. with Notes by John Russell Bartlett* (Providence, R.I.: [Printed by H. O. Houghton and Company, Cambridge], 1865–1871).

How would you characterize the relationship between the JCB and Brown University?

I think the JCB has benefited from having this close association with the university. We do have a considerable degree of autonomy because we have a separate endowment and a separate board of governors. On the other hand, we also are immersed in this university setting, which brings some complications occasionally. But by and large, it's been a prosperous and beneficial relationship with Brown University. Rare book libraries, insofar as their goal is to promote scholarship, need academic connections. At the JCB, we reach out far beyond Brown if occasion necessitates, but we also have right here on campus a great faculty upon whom we can draw.

Tell us about the librarians who led the institution prior to your tenure.

The JCB has been blessed in that it has had a series of librarians, only six over more than a century, all of whom have served for a fairly long time. I think this created a certain stability for the institution. John Russell Bartlett [who served as librarian from 1853 until his death in 1886] is a tremendous unheralded figure. There's new material coming out about Bartlett, in fact something we're going to publish, to make better known who he was and how lucky it was that he happened to be in Providence at the right time to be John Carter Brown's librarian while he also served as the secretary of state of Rhode Island. George Parker Winship [who succeeded Bartlett in 1895] of course is legendary and went on to a great career at Harvard after he left the JCB in 1915.[2] Winship was hired by John Nicholas Brown, and after Brown's death, he oversaw the transition of the JCB from a private to an institutional library. Around World War One, there was an interlude of some uncertainty—for five years there was an acting librarian. [Worthington C. Ford, who served from 1917 to 1922. Champlin Burrage also served as librarian in 1916.] Then, in 1923, Lawrence C. Wroth came in, a person of extraordinary capability who became probably the most important rare book librarian in the United States during the height of his powers.[3] [Wroth was librarian from 1923 to 1956.] And then, Thomas R. Adams was here for twenty-five years [1957–1982] and is a marvelous bibliographer.[4] So I would say that each of us has made distinctive contributions, which is what you anticipate with institutions over a period of years. And my presumption is that my successor will offer something altogether different as well.

Let's talk about the current state of the John Carter Brown Library, both as an independent research center and as a rare book library.

---

2. Winship was appointed librarian of the Harry Elkins Widener Collection at Harvard in 1915. He eventually became curator of Harvard's Treasure Room, which housed the institution's rare books and manuscripts. In addition to his curatorial duties, Winship taught a course for student book collectors on the history of book production, Fine Arts 5e, from 1915 through 1932. Winship's publications include *The Coronado Expedition, 1540–1542* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, 1896); *The John Carter Brown Library, a History* (Providence, R.I., 1914); *Printing in the Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940); and *The Cambridge Press, 1638–1692* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945). Winship was also the primary compiler and editor of the first *Census of Fifteenth Century Books Owned in America, Comp. by a Committee of the Bibliographical Society of America* (New York, 1919), precursor to the incunable censuses produced by Margaret Bingham Stillwell and Frederick R. Goff.

[3] Wroth published more than 550 separate writings during a career of sixty-five years. He produced outstanding works that are considered fundamental in the history of printing in the Americas, exploration and discovery, colonial literary and social history, the history of cartography and navigation, and colonial prints and engravings. A short list of his significant works includes *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland* (Baltimore: Typothetae of Baltimore, 1922); *The Colonial Printer* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1931; Portland, Me.: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1938 [second edition revised and enlarged]); *An American Bookshelf, 1755* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934); *The Way of a Ship: An Essay on the Literature of Navigation Science* (Portland, Me.: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1937), and *The Early Cartography of the Pacific* (Issued as vol. 38, no. 2 of the *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, 1944). His work in developing the JCB's holdings is partially documented in the JCB catalog, *In Retrospect, 1923–1949. An Exhibition Commemorating Twenty-Six Years of Service to The John Carter Brown Library by Lawrence C. Wroth, Librarian* (Providence: [John Carter Brown Library], 1949*)*.

[4] Adams's major bibliographic works include *American Independence, The Growth of an Idea: A Bibliographical Study of the American Political Pamphlets Printed between 1764 and 1776 Dealing with the Dispute between Great Britain and Her Colonies* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1965) and *The American Controversy: A Bibliographical Study of the British Pamphlets about the American Disputes, 1764–1783* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press; New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1980). With David W. Waters, Adams co-compiled *English Maritime Books Printed before 1801 Relating to Ships, Their Construction, and Their Operation at Sea* (Providence, R.I.: John Carter Brown Library; Greenwich, England: National Maritime Museum, 1995).

The JCB's endowment now is quite healthy, although if you're totally dependent on endowment, you never have enough. Unlike a museum, we have no cash income from visitation, and unlike an educational institution, we have no tuition income. We try to earn a little bit of money here and there from selling books and facsimile maps, and we're always seeking grants and gifts, but endowment is our lifeblood and even now we've just launched a new endowment campaign to raise $7.5 million for various purposes. One of the things that's grown very, very well is our acquisitions budget. There's more money for acquisitions from different sources, so the collection is growing and deepening. That's the beauty of this place. It's not as though we're expanding into all new areas, but constantly deepening, so that we can achieve a kind of superiority, or near completeness, in our holdings.

I should add that the collection is bifurcated and that roughly half the volumes are European books about the Americas, beginning with the first book, Columbus's printed letter of 1493. The other half is books printed in the Americas, from the beginning of printing in Mexico circa 1540. So in both of these areas [combined], I think the JCB has no rival. Although the Library Company of Philadelphia and the American Antiquarian Society have more colonial British imprints, no one has more colonial Mexican and Peruvian imprints than we do. If you look at the Western Hemisphere as a whole, and the history of printing in the Western Hemisphere, the JCB is unrivaled. This is also true for European books about America up to circa 1800. We're certainly very strong and continue to grow in those directions. The collection now consists of 50,000 rare books, plus maps, prints, and manuscripts.

What about the staffing of the library?

There are approximately twenty-three people working in the building, eight or ten professional librarians and the balance are support staff. Some people are hard to classify. We have people here who have Ph.D.'s who are not working as professional librarians. But the JCB has an excellent staff who know the collection, most of whom have been here for a very long time, twenty years or more. One of the reasons we've done well financially is that the staff has been relatively lean. I myself function not like a president who presides and watches what everybody else does, but I try to do my share. We don't have a development officer like many institutions do, and we don't have a public relations officer [or a research coordinator, or a head of publications]. The consequence is that our endowment is now at $43 million, and we have a budget of $2.5 million dollars and it's balanced.

In addition to increasing the endowment, you also oversaw the physical expansion of the building.

When I came in 1983, you can't imagine how crowded this place was. We were suffering a shortage of space so terribly, and there were many other deficiencies. We had no stack space [for growth of the collection]. There was no place for researchers to have offices, and the administrative people were cheek to jowl. We had to expand. First, we had to hire an architectural firm that was willing to build a classical building, which wasn't easy in itself. [The original 15,000-square-foot building was constructed between 1902 and 1904 in a Beaux-Arts style. The Washington, D.C., firm Hartman-Cox was hired to renovate the original building and design the addition.] Then, there was the process of developing what the architects call "program," that is, what the building is going to consist of in terms of workspace and traffic flow and all those things. We had numerous meetings with the entire staff. I thought it very important that every person have a say, and it often proved its worth. Generally speaking, everyone, I think, is satisfied. [Total public, stack, and office space in the current library, consisting of the original building and the new Caspersen wing is now approximately 30,000 square feet.] I would say it was successful, but, of course, in retrospect you wish you had added twice as much space!

You mentioned the research fellows. Could you talk about the development of the JCB's fellowship program?

The idea of fellowships at research libraries was innovative. I think the Newberry Library under Bill Towner was the first to do this [extensively] and now it's pervasive: every institution wants to have fellows because they realize it's an inducement for the collection to be utilized. Tom Adams began the fellowship program; the first fellows came in 1962, and it lasted ten years. If you look at those years, there were at the most seven fellows every year and some came for fairly short periods of time. There were generous board members and a few other people who contributed the funds. Then it stopped due to a shortage of money. From 1972 to 1982, there were no fellowships available at the JCB. Meanwhile, the idea had caught on and many other rare book libraries had fellowships. When I came here, there was an obvious need to reinstitute the program.

There are two kinds of fellowship programs. One brings people to where the sources are, and it doesn't make any difference if there are one or ten fellows; the researchers are simply engaged with the materials. Another idea is to combine a rare book library with a center for advanced research, in the sense that not only do the researchers have access to the primary sources, but also there will be eight or ten other people present with interests that may intersect with theirs. So there is a double benefit: people around to whom you can talk about your work, who can criticize your work, who can give you new ideas, and at the same time you have the materials. In order to do that, you have to have a critical mass and it's a much more expensive proposition. You want to have at least eight or ten people at the same time, and in order to do that you have to offer fellowships that go on for five months, or ten months. That's what we've tried to build here.

The fellows not only are able to meet each other and talk about their research, but there is also the opportunity for some intriguing interactions between scholars whose research areas may seem very different.

Many fellows comment on that. They come to the JCB, and they have their individual interests and research agendas. In a few weeks here, they discover this whole world of scholarship that relates to their research: problems of labor, economy, race relations, and imperial control were common throughout the Western Hemisphere, problems common to imperial enterprises. Many research fellows have noted that it was a broadening experience to be at the JCB and that they expanded their networks. We facilitate interaction through our regular Wednesday Fellows luncheon. I should say, too, that we're a small enough institution so that JCB staff members can be well acquainted with the researchers. This is healthy for the staff as well. Librarians can easily work alone, they catalog books, for example, but at the JCB they see directly that their work has immediate impact on somebody who's desperately trying to finish a dissertation or get their second book out … . In many of the books and articles we receive from research fellows, our staff is credited for being helpful to the authors. It's a nice circle.

One form of outreach the library has consistently engaged in is exhibitions. Can you talk about the exhibition program?

The library has these wonderful old exhibition cases in our great reading room, and we want to have our holdings on display. It's important because when visitors do wander in, we want them to see something interesting, that occupies them in an edifying way. But to me the most important benefit of these exhibitions is that they are staff exercises. A number of different staff members participate, and it encourages them to learn more about the collection, to define segments of the collection that may be useful for researchers, and then to articulate what it is about these objects that makes them interesting or important. It's always been a great educational experience, and to any library that has the space, I would commend this as something [to pursue], even though it does take up time and you think the staff is too busy. There are few things staff can do that are more useful, both for their own development and for defining parts of the collection. So that's one aspect—to serve the staff, serve researchers, and provide public education.

Exhibitions can also be used as a means of generating interest in the library beyond Providence and Brown. As anybody involved in fundraising knows, the place to go to raise money is New York City, and we've had four exhibitions in New York City in the past twenty years.[5] And always when you do these things, you try to exploit it. You try to have cocktail parties, dinners, receptions. You encourage people to go, and you show your stuff, which we can't do as well in the JCB. We don't have proper museum exhibition space—modular space, bare walls, and an empty room where you can create a setting for an exhibition. For example, "The Book in the Americas" exhibition at the Americas Society was a beautiful show. I still speak to people in New York who remember it because it highlighted the history of printing in Latin America, including both Brazil and Spanish America. That subject was fresh for many people, and even a source of pride. Many people from Spanish America had hardly realized this great legacy of printing that had gone on there from so early [in the colonial period]. The last venture in 2003, the greatest in some respects, was "'The Boundless Deep…': The European Conquest of the Oceans, 1450 to 1840." It was at the Newport Art Museum, and we hired a wonderful designer, Sarah Buie, who transformed that museum space into this magical setting for maritime history. In the end, you always have to calculate the cost-benefit. With traveling exhibitions, you spend a lot of time and money and you raise hundreds of thousands of dollars sometimes, but you have to be sure it's worth the effort. Always you have to calculate the gain.

---

5. The four exhibitions in New York were "Encountering the New World" at the IBM Gallery; "The Book in the Americas: The Role of Books and Printing in the Development of Culture and Society in Colonial Latin America" at the Americas Society; "Scotland and the Americas, 1600 to 1800" at the Forbes Gallery; and "The Dutch in the Americas, 1600–1800" at the Equitable Gallery. During the Columbus Quincentennial, "Encountering the New World" also traveled to the Amon Carter Museum in Forth Worth, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville, and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence.

You mentioned that exhibitions are often curated by JCB librarians. Shows guest-curated by former fellows have also been a part of the exhibition program.

Yes, that's been great. Most recently, we had a conference last year on the Haitian Revolution. It was a wonderful conference and [in advance] I asked a former fellow, Malick Ghachem, to do an exhibition [for the occasion]. He has a Ph.D. from Stanford and his research focused on the Haitian Revolution. Malick was very enthusiastic, and I knew he was the person who could pull together for us an exhibition on this topic. So he spent some more time with our collections and he wrote the text for the show. We published a relatively simple exhibition catalog, but it's a wonderful record. No one on our staff could have done that, certainly in such a short amount of time.[6]

Let's discuss the publication program during your tenure here. In addition to numerous exhibition catalogs, you have overseen the production of conference proceedings, facsimiles, published lectures, translations, and bibliographies.

I mentioned the JCB's first publication was in 1865, and those printed catalogs [of the holdings] continued into the 1970s. But I probably published more than any of my predecessors, partly because my first job after college was in publishing, and I spent eleven years as the editor of publications at the Institute of Early American History of Culture, now called the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. I've always loved to publish, and believe in it, but again, it's another one of these cost-benefit questions. You spend a lot of time and money, you publish this book, and you sell a few hundred copies. Yet, there's nothing like a publication as a concrete embodiment of the work of the library. When you visit somebody, or you want to send somebody a gift, here it is. You hope it's attractive and it has content about the library. I don't know anything else you can do that has this same impact, even though the person receiving it may never read it, it makes no difference. It's an extension of the library out there in the world. It's expensive, but I think it pays you back in various ways. You could spend $20,000 on a publication and you never sell enough copies to make up for it, but someone could give you a gift of $25,000 partly because the publication has impressed him or her.

---

[6] Malick Ghachem, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804:An Exhibition at the John Carter Brown Library (May to September 2004)* (Providence, R.I.: John Carter Brown Library, 2004).

In a sense, the publications are part of a larger picture. The library has a fellowship program, which may lead to an exhibition, or a conference, and then these are documented as publications.

That's right, they tend to be integrated. The conference proceedings, ideally, you do want to sell. If you have a collection of scholarly papers from a conference you've organized, and it's worthwhile, you should be able to find a university press or another press to publish it. That's what we've done now. We have currently in press a collection of essays on Portuguese oceanic expansion, which will be published by Cambridge University Press, and a collection of essays on Simón Bolívar still to come. *America in European Consciousness* [a collection of essays from the JCB's Columbus Quincentennial Conference] was edited by Karen Kupperman and published by the University of North Carolina Press. We also published two books of conference essays with Berghahn: *The Language Encounter in the Americas* and *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West*. In all these instances, the idea was to choose subjects in which the JCB has unique strengths and also subjects that the scholarly world has to some degree neglected and that deserve the attention that we can bring to it. I should mention, too, as you have suggested, that one thing leads to another. All of the books mentioned were edited for the library by former research fellows, and the very concepts behind the books grew out of discussions with fellows.

Nobody again is going to publish a printed catalog of a library's holdings. For years, such publications served their purpose. But we are continuing, and I don't know how far this will go, to publish books that represent a particular segment of the collection in which we have unusual strength, and we hope such books will be of service to libraries around the world, as well as to scholars. In 2006, we will publish *Portuguese and Brazilian Books in the John Carter Brown Library*. The JCB has the best collection of books anywhere about Brazil in the colonial period. When we publish that book, it will be bought by several hundred libraries around the world, scholars can easily study the volume, and it will be a standard against which a library can measure its own collection. Similarly, we have in the works a printed catalog of our books in Indian languages and a catalog of our German books.

Considering all the publications you have overseen that represent various strengths of the JCB, perhaps you could also discuss *European Americana*, the six-volume bibliography recording books printed in Europe between 1493 and 1750 that mention, or are about, the Americas.[7]

My admiration for *European Americana* is boundless, and I am proud of my contribution to it, but that contribution was limited, consisting mainly of my coming up with the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed to keep it going from year to year and encouraging the editor, Dennis Landis, and his staff to drive on, overcoming all obstacles.

The project was initiated by my predecessor, Tom Adams, and the first editor was John Alden. But when I arrived at the JCB in 1983, Alden had retired and there were still four volumes, at least, to be published with no clear prospect of how they were to be paid for. More than once between 1983 and 1997, when the last volume finally appeared, Dennis and I were fearful the work would have to be abandoned in midcourse for lack of funding. Again and again, we were saved by the generosity of one benefactor or another, particularly the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation.

Looking to the future and beyond the printed page, the library has also launched the online visual database entitled *The Archive of Early American Images*.[8]

The most urgent practical problem that became evident for the JCB was having control over images of the Americas. Frequently, researchers would come in, more so in the past ten or fifteen years when images suddenly played more of a role in cultural studies, and would ask to see particular images: pictures of birds in Brazil or slaves in Massachusetts or whatever the case may be. Neither the JCB, nor any other institution in the world, could say, Here's a list with all the images. A reference librarian or curator would have to rely on memory or research what had already been published on this subject. We felt this was an opportunity to create, for the first time, systematic access to virtually every existing image of the Americas in the colonial period. At first, that sounds like a huge undertaking, but the truth is, from the first image in the 1493 Basel Columbus Letter to 1800, I would guess there couldn't be more than 10,000 books containing an image of the Americas. It's really quite a finite number, and we have the largest collection of European books about America. We began going through these books and looking for pictures and scanning them. And we began to create this archive in which the images would be cataloged and there would be subject, geographical, and chronological access. Ultimately, the database will have approximately 6,000 images that can be accessed for commercial as well as scholarly purposes.

---

[7] John Alden and Dennis Landis, *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493–1776* (New York: Readex Books, 1980–1997). The six volumes actually cover the years 1493 to 1750. The bibliography records locations for imprints held by the JCB and numerous other institutions. The first two volumes were coedited by Alden and Landis; Landis was the primary editor for the final four volumes.

[8] *The Archive of Early American Images* is accessible on the JCB library Web site at: http://www.jcbl.org.

Moving away from the JCB for a moment, can you talk about your background and your experience prior to coming to the library?

I was born in the Bronx in New York. My father never went to college, and my mother had a "normal school" teaching degree. We moved from the Bronx at an early age to Mount Vernon, New York, in Westchester County. I went to a secondary school, a military school in Virginia called Staunton Military Academy, and was there for three years. Then I went to Dartmouth and majored in philosophy. One of the transforming experiences of my life there was studying with a professor named Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. He was an immigrant from Germany and a major social philosopher and a historian, a theologian, a lot of different things, and an unclassifiable genius.

After college, I wanted to go into publishing. One of the great figures at the time was Alfred Knopf, an independent publisher who produced these beautifully made books and also published many translations of important twentieth-century European authors. It was easier to start in publishing if you went into book production, rather than editing. So I spent three years doing book production in New York for Rinehart & Company and Henry Holt & Company. In addition to the computer revolution, another revolution that I have witnessed is in book production. In those days, everything was linotype and the whole process of offset printing was not fully developed. One of the nice things about being in book production was that I had company money to spend—thousands of dollars for typesetting, paper, cloth, printing, everything. And the tradition was that the suppliers courted you; almost every day of the week I was invited out to lunch by some printer or typesetter or binder. I often would visit them and I made a lot of visits to plants. Some of the binding, the folding, and gathering was still done by people sitting around a table. There were machines, but there was still a lot of handwork done.

I worked at that from 1957 to 1960, just about three years. Monotype was also coming in, and there were also experiments with cold type. IBM had made these cold-type machines, not using hot lead, and there were also experiments with photographic type. I also took courses in printing and bookbinding in New York, so I actually had some experience typesetting and things like that. I wanted to stay in publishing, but after doing production for several years, I wanted to move into editorial work. When I was twenty-five, I received a small inheritance and decided I'd use it to go to graduate school for a year to get a master's degree. I thought with that degree I'd have a little bit better leverage for getting into editorial work. I went to Columbia to get an MA in history. I liked being in graduate school, and I received a positive response and was encouraged to stay on to get a Ph.D. I was at Columbia from 1960 to 1964, and although I did not yet have a doctorate, I taught Western Civ. there for two years. Then I went to Stanford for five years, also to teach Western Civ., and to finish my dissertation. I was at Stanford until 1969, and then I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg. This is unbelievable, but it was a three-year fellowship; for three years I had the utter luxury of simply reading and writing. I had to teach one course a year at the College of William and Mary, but the rest of the time I had totally to myself.

While I had this fellowship at the Institute, I was looking for a teaching job that would begin after those three years. The Institute has a wonderful, prize-winning book publication program, and Jim Hutson, the editor, decided to leave to go to the Library of Congress. So there was a vacancy to be the editor of publications and I applied. We were happy enough in Williamsburg, and I didn't really have any great teaching job to go to. My wife and I thought, well, just let's stay here if I get this job. I'd already had quite a bit of publishing experience, which helped. They hired me, and I stayed eleven years editing scholarly books at the Institute. We published two or three books a year from 1972 to 1983.

You were also pursuing your own scholarly work during this period?

I was editing books for the Institute between 1972 and 1983, and twice during that time I had year-long fellowships, first an NEH fellowship, and then I also had another year away in 1978–1979 at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, which had just opened. So, while at the Institute, I had two years off and I had the postdoctoral fellowship for three years. I really had five years [after receiving the Ph.D.], which is an extraordinary luxury. During that time, with the benefit of those years off, I was able to write two books. It was supposed to have been one huge book on moral philosophy in colonial British America. The book was too big, so I divided it into two separate volumes, leaving out about a third. That's primarily what I did that year when I was at the National Humanities Center. The first book was called *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition,* and the second was *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*. [Both volumes were published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press in 1981.] They were awarded a prize by the Organization of American Historians.

What else can you tell us about your tenure at the Institute?

The director of the Institute was quite a wonderful person, and I learned a lot from him. He's still alive, Thaddeus Tate, and twice Thad was on leave and I filled in as acting director in his absence, in total for about one and a half years. This gave me administrative experience that I hadn't had before. It's a small place, you know. They had a fellowship program, and they publish the *William and Mary Quarterly*, which is the leading journal for British Early American studies. The focus of the Institute was colonial British America. Before coming to the JCB, my scholarly background was entirely concerned with the British colonies and the intellectual history of New England.

In many ways, then, it was a major change for you to come to the JCB and be concerned with sources documenting the colonial period in the entire Western Hemisphere.

I was open-minded. I came here and I learned as much as I could about the library and I saw the JCB as a kind of prototype for what has become a much larger concept of colonial studies—for studying everything in the Americas in a much broader manner than people had been used to doing.

And as an administrator, rather than a scholar, was it also a big change for you?

I knew nothing about libraries. I'd never had any library training and I'd never worked in a library. I had been to plenty of special collections, including a summer at the Beinecke Library at Yale working on Jonathan Edwards. So I had an understanding of what it's like for researchers coming into the JCB. They know nothing about what goes on in back; they ask for something and work with it and that's all they know. During my first year or two, I visited many other institutions and talked to people and tried to learn a little bit about how institutions run and how rare book libraries operate. I remember that Robert Rosenthal from Special Collections at the University of Chicago came to the JCB to give a lecture. He spent a day or two here, and we had a very good talk. He told me that you need professional librarians and you have to rely on them. On the other hand, they have their own interests and their own concepts about the way things ought to be done. Some of these concepts are important and you have to observe them, and others really are not important. You have to recognize when a librarian is advising you in a way that is obviously sound and necessary, based on good, solid library practice from which you don't want to deviate. But there are other cases when it could simply be some idea that is not essential to the smooth functioning of the library. That was emboldening.

I suppose the initial impact on the JCB staff was that the place became so much busier and immediately they had to make adjustments to the fact that there were a lot more people coming in. When you're trying to energize an institution, everybody's going to work harder. There are more readers, more reference questions, and more demands. The staff will have to judge, but I think we've worked together relatively well with my trying to defer to what they know how to do. I've always tried to work with the JCB staff as though we were equal, equal in the sense that we have a problem or need or goal, and how are we going to reach that goal? I don't know the answer and you may not know the answer either, but together we can work it out. The main thing, though, is that we are going to move ahead.

A large part of your job as director has involved fundraising, and this was another big change from your prior work at the Institute. Can you discuss your experience?

Fundraising is obviously essential in the United States; the way things are organized, we don't have [direct] government support. If you are in a role where you have to raise money for an institution, you have to believe that it's worthy and you have to be able to make clear why you think the institution is important. Then I don't think it's so terribly difficult. It begins with the need: there's this great possibility to do thus-and-so that we should be doing, and we don't have the money. Then, when you feel this inner anxiety and pain, you say I've got to get out there and find somebody to give us the money. I mean the first lesson of fundraising is you have to ask. Nobody ever raises money without asking. It's very rarely volunteered; people like to be asked, expect to be asked. The issue is only whether they are going to give it to the local hospital, or to their alma mater, or to their children.

But in a library like the JCB, you are dealing with materials that might seem very esoteric to many people.

Here you have a good cause, so you have to find the constituency that appreciates that. That's part of the difficulty.

Is there a way you think about bridging that gap, or is it more about finding people who are already open to supporting the JCB?

Both. There are people who just love rare books and rare book libraries, and couldn't think of anything they'd rather do with their charitable giving than to direct it to rare book libraries. Obviously, society has terrible needs: there's poverty, there's suffering, there are health needs, all these kinds of things. Giving has functions on these different levels, and I think people appreciate that. On the one hand, you want to give for social needs, and on the other hand, everyone realizes that there are refinements in life, that high culture is important and enduring.

Why this library and not an art museum? How do you work out that problem?

Again, you have to make a case for it and many people will give to an art museum and also to the JCB. Ninety percent of fundraising is actually about relationships. It takes time to get to know the institution, to appreciate it. Some will feel that this is one good cause among many. Then there are people who will make it their principal interest. That's what you hope for, but it's important not to be discouraged. People get discouraged so easily. You figure you make ten efforts to raise money for a purpose and only one of them may be successful. But that's great! You know, people don't owe you anything and you have to feel enormously grateful for whatever gifts you get.

You've been incredibly productive over the past two decades as director and librarian, overseeing numerous functions of the JCB. What keeps you going after twenty years?

The JCB is a wonderfully stimulating, beautiful place to work. As far as the acquisitions go, we do have this sense of the records of civilization [being preserved]. History is not important until you need it [laughs], and you never know when you're going to need it—when some issue arises and people want to know what really happened. What is the truth, and how do you find it? Well, you can only find it by going back to the sources. I think the discovery of America was the most important secular event in the history of mankind, and it transformed the world in an unprecedented way. The impact was so astonishing with ten million Africans brought to the Americas by the imperial powers and the decimation of the peoples of the Americas. These things occurring on this gigantic scale, it's an imperishable part of human history that will always be studied.

So much of the colonial period is still with us in every way. It may appear to be distant and irrelevant, but the effects of the conquests and injustices of that era, as well as the major positive achievements, are extraordinarily present in this hemisphere right now. The descendants of the indigenous peoples that inhabited the Americas long before the European invasion continue to reside here in large numbers and are an integral part of the politics in the Andes, in Canada, and elsewhere; the descendants of the millions of Africans brought here forcibly to labor as slaves are still here, the source of so much good in our culture and also of difficult issues regarding so-called race; the ideals of the revolutions for independence continue as standards and inspiration for public policy and for social and economic organization. One could go on and on.

Any final reflections on the JCB and your tenure?

I love to pontificate, so don't tempt me any further, although I do feel that I am at the stage in life, unfortunately, when dispensing advice is my strong suit.

The interviewer would like to thank Ann Khaddar for her editorial assistance and Susan Campbell for transcribing the original interview.