AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM WEISS

Interviewer: James Taylor

Oral History Project

Endacott Society
University of Kansas
TOM WEISS
Ph.D., University of North Carolina, 1967

Service at the University of Kansas

Assistant Professor, 1967 - 1971
Associate Professor, 1971 -1975
Full professor, 1975 - 2005
AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM WEISS

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Q: We are in Lawrence in the spring of 2005. It’s usually best to start off with a little introductory statement about yourself, university appointment, prior retirement.

A. Okay. I’m Tom Weiss. I’m retiring from the University of Kansas after 37 years or so. I was a full professor at the time of my retirement. I said 37 years or so because I’m never sure how the university counts part-time years. I started in the fall of 1967 and I officially retired on April 1, 2005, so that I could walk in to my chairman and yell, “April’s Fool Day.” Anyway, this was the first job out of graduate school and I was here for my entire career.

Q. Good, okay. And from this point on, it’s kind of free-form although we do generally follow the outline a bit. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to Kansas? Did you grow up here? Were you around here earlier? What happened?

A. No, I was born and raised in upstate New York. I was born in Kingston, New York, and at a very early age, probably age 2 or 3, my family moved to Poughkeepsie, which is just twenty miles down the river on the other side of the Hudson River. I went to undergraduate school at Holy Cross College in Massachusetts, and graduate school in North Carolina. I never imagined I would end up in Kansas. Probably I came out here to practice interviewing and was favorably impressed and ended up staying here.

Q. So you hadn’t intended to be favorably impressed?

A. No. Well, my wife’s from Chicago so she, in a sense, lived closer to Kansas and had some idea of what it was like, more than I did. And she had misgivings, although she had
never seen it. But obviously in the end, we liked the place and stuck around for the entire
time.

Q. So, this was New York and Massachusetts. Did you go to just one or two high schools or
grade schools or how did all that work out for you?

A. Grade school was in Poughkeepsie as we’d already moved by the time I started grade
school. And I went to Catholic grade schools and then at the end of that time, my parents
said I could go to a Catholic High School and then to whatever college I might want to
go, or I could go to the public high school but then I had to go to a Catholic college.
Since the public high school was two blocks away and the Catholic high school was
twenty miles away, I opted for the public high school. At that time, it was a good public
school. So we had, back then, sort of a two-track program; there was a college bound
track and a more vocational kind of track. It was a fine public high school; it prepared us
well for the examinations that the New York state regents required. From there I went on
to Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Q. It sounds like your parents took Catholic education pretty seriously.

A. Yeah, I would think that’s a fair assessment. Of course, ironically, they did not have that
much of an education. My father finally finished high school long after all the kids were
gone. He did it through some kind of correspondence equivalent high school diploma.
My mother never finished high school. But they saw the value of education and there
was no question in their minds that I was going to college. They weren’t necessarily so
committed about my sisters, but my oldest sister ended up getting all kinds of
scholarships and so she went off to college and, by that point, my parents I guess realized
that if the others wanted to go they would be prepared to help them out as well. My
younger sisters weren’t perhaps as eager to go to college as my older sister or I, but they ended up going. So we’ve all completed college and my parents never completed high school for the most part.

Q. That’s good. That’s the kind of story that I think was kind of the immigrant’s dream sort of thing. Was that how it worked or was it different?

A. Well, they weren’t quite the immigrants. They were the first generation born here but it is the immigrant story in the sense that they saw that sequence of events or maybe it was drilled into them at whatever elementary schools they went to.

Q. Where were they from?

A. Well, my grandparents were from, on the one side of the family, Austria and Hungary and my mother’s side of the family was from Poland. But I’ve not been back to those points of origin except that I’ve been back to Vienna. We found the last known address in Vienna for some member of the family but there was nobody there. My sister on the other hand has tracked some of the relatives down in Poland, so she’s much more active at tracing the family history than I am.

Q. So the genealogy goes on. What did your father do?

A. He worked, from my perspective, his entire life for a company called Western Printing and Publishing. He may have done something before he started working there but that’s why we moved from Kingston to Poughkeepsie. Western Publishing was in Poughkeepsie and he had been commuting and you know, in the 40’s it was not an easy commute, 20 miles. He says there were times when he had to walk across the Hudson River when it was frozen to get to work, but I don’t know how much of that to believe. And I don’t think Western Printing and Publishing exists any longer but they used to
publish Dell paperbacks and Dell comic books and a lot of other things, but that was in essence what they were most known for. At one time we could have had a collection of every Dell comic book ever published which today would probably be worth a small fortune. He kept a lot of stuff, but among the things my father threw away, were the comic books. So we’ve lost out on a small fortune.

Q. Oh, dear.

A. We kidded him any number of times, had kidded him, he’s passed on now.

Q. Your mother was a housewife?

A. Yeah. She may have at a very early age worked in a small dressmaking factory in Kingston, New York, but in my lifetime, she was a housewife.

Q. So, you went to a public high school and the public grade school.

A. Catholic grade school.

Q. Catholic grade school, I’m sorry. What was the Catholic grade school like for you?

A. I don’t really have much memory of it. The one I started at was the older Catholic Church and then they built a new one that was sort of closer to our house and so we in a sense became part of that parish and that one was taught by nuns. I guess the first one was, too. I was in about the fifth grade when I started in the second one. The only thing I really remember about it was that the dismissal everyday was sort of a formal affair. Every class would march outside, stand in line, and then the principal would say, “Okay class, grade five can now leave for the busses and those walking can now leave, and so on and so forth. As I recall, from the older one we just sort of all left simultaneously. I’m not sure what the point of that was, other than that perhaps this first school didn’t
have busses. This one did and it was their responsibility to make sure people got on the right busses. But no, I don’t remember much about elementary school really.

Q. How about high school?

A. I might remember more about it but not too much about it. As I said, I took the academic track and did pretty well, I guess. I was in the honor society or whatever. In fact, I did better than I think I realized at the time because when the senior honors assembly, or something, came around, I was told that I would be the one to get up and give a talk and I said I thought that was strange since I wasn’t even in the honor society. Well, they forgot to notify me when I was a junior. Of course as a result, I never put it on my applications to colleges. So I guess I was doing okay academically in high school. Anyway, I enjoyed mathematics in high school and went off to college thinking I was going to study mathematics; but ended up changing my mind in college.

Q. When did you change your mind?

A. I changed my mind after freshman year, actually the first week of sophomore year. I got into the second year of mathematics and had the sort of epitome of the kind of stuffy, arrogant professor who was up there in his tweed jacket and his curved pipe, puffing away, saying he assumed we had all read his book from freshman year and that we knew all that and we would read his book for second year on our own and that he would just sort of come in and talk about things. It didn’t sound like the sort of class I had in mind and, in fact, we had not used his book first year for one thing, so he was a little off the mark on that. But my roommate and I just said, “Let’s see what else is available at this time slot.” All the other courses seemed fine. Being a small liberal arts college, there
wasn’t a lot of choice; one of them happened to be economics, so that’s how I ended up in economics, purely by default.

Q. How do you walk through the door of economics? How did you end up there?

A. You know, I guess I just liked it well enough. It was an interesting subject. We didn’t have business schools and other kinds of professional schools because it’s a small liberal arts college. I suppose I subconsciously thought this would be a better preparation for the real world than Latin or philosophy. And in the end, when I was graduating I had my choice of going to graduate school in economics at the University of North Carolina or Wisconsin or going to work for Frigidaire in Dayton, Ohio, or the Oldsmobile Company somewhere in the Midwest. So, that’s how I decided to enter the door of graduate school because I didn’t feel like entering the door of Frigidaire or Oldsmobile.

Q. What year was this?

A. 1964 when I graduated from Holy Cross College.

Q. College, okay, yeah. Viet Nam had just barely started then, hadn’t it? What are your memories of that?

A. It had started but it was not something people worried about too much. Even the next year, the second year in graduate school, it started to become a bigger issue; that would be ’66, I guess. That’s my recollection. I ended up getting married in 1966. They were already drafting people, I think, in ’65, but not in large numbers. But I had a 2A status because I was in school so that put me in a lower draft status. Then when I got married, it made me 3A or something; I don’t know exactly what the classifications were. Then in July of 1966, a week before my marriage, I got a notice that said I should report to the office for possible drafting or something unless my status had changed and they asked if
my status had changed. So I informed them I was getting married in the next week and then the next year, I told them I had a child. So the director of the draft board in my hometown got that and wrote me a little congratulatory note saying, “Congratulations, that makes you 3A and you are likely never to be called up.”

Q. So, I got sidetracked from the graduate school experience to the draft experience. What would you say about graduate school?

A. What would I say about the graduate school experience? Well, it was certainly different from undergraduate programs. It was more obvious that you were there to learn on your own, you’re expected to be more critical of what you’re reading, and do some original research so it took a little while to get used to. Although I think I probably got used to it fairly quickly. I don’t know whether I’m more critical than most or what but somehow it all worked out well. The Ph.D. program was a fairly structured program so almost all the first year students would go through the same required micro courses, macro courses, statistics, and so on. And I did well in all of those, especially the theory courses. In fact the micro theory person liked the term paper I wrote, and suggested I try to write it and publish it, although I ended up never quite doing that. But in any case, apparently he rarely gave out “A’s” but that year, he gave out two “A’s” and people said they were the first “A’s” he ever gave out. I don’t know if that was true, I never looked up the facts on that matter. But a similar thing happened in macro monetary economics, which was taught by an older faculty member who was steeped in the Chicago tradition of free markets are best for everything. We spent half the semester reading Keynes’ General Theory page by page and he would try to make criticisms of it. And again, this other friend and I put up with it for a little while and then we started arguing with him. And it
was like apparently no one had done this in the past and he loved it; that's what he was
there for. So he was delighted to see us and tried to talk us into majoring in monetary
economics and writing a dissertation under him and so on and so forth. The course I did
the least well in was economic history, but that's what I ended up deciding I wanted to
major in after the first year. So, you can never tell. I ended up with a good summer
assistantship, working full time for David Brown at a big project on how the academic
labour market works. He had an army of us, four or five graduate students, a couple of
undergraduates working for us, and he would just sort of come by periodically to see how
things were going. There was a senior graduate student somewhat in charge of three first
year graduate students and basically they would just give us printouts and say, "Here, you
write the chapter on this, you write the chapter on that." That's the way I recall it, and at
the time I thought, "So this is how research is actually done". And I suppose it is if you
have enough money, and that happened to be a project for which he obviously got a lot of
money. He's turned that into an academic administrative career. I think he's now a
Provost or President at Wake Forest College, I'm not sure. The second year I took more
courses, comprehensive exams, and anyway pretty much went through everything on
schedule or maybe ahead of schedule, I don't know. The biggest hurdle was at that time
we still had language requirements. I had enough French that I could pass the French
exam, so I took that as soon as I got there and I figured I'd put that second language off
as there was talk that they'd change it to a math requirement or something, but they
didn't. At least they didn't in the first two years and then I was awarded a fellowship by
the Richard Irwin Publishing Company; I don't even know if they're still in existence.
Anyway, they gave out a handful of fellowships and I got one but I had to have
everything done by July 1st to actually receive the dissertation fellowship. So I had to take the Spanish exam that summer and that was quite an experience, but somehow I learned enough to get by.

Q. Did they have a German requirement or was that still part of the thing?

A. Just any two languages. So Spanish seemed like the easier language to choose as my second one, and it was, luckily, easier to pass that exam. The French exam was a more formal one that was actually given by the College Board; the Spanish exam was a reading exam. They gave you a sheet of paper with an essay in Spanish, and you could bring a dictionary and you just had to translate it with no more than so many mistakes. I lucked out in that and other things. I mean things just sort of fell into place. When I was trying to decide about writing a dissertation, I remember it was after my third semester and I went in to see the professor in Micro Economic Theory who had liked my term paper and we talked about the possibility of my writing a dissertation and he said, "Yeah, people write dissertations in this area." You know, it seemed as though he could care less whether anybody really did or not, but they do and I think he was probably more enthusiastic than he appeared. But in any case, I wasn't quite as interested as I was when I walked into his office. As I was walking down the hall, I ran into the professor in Economic History, Robert Gallman was his name, and he said, "Oh, what are you doing here over Christmas break?" So I told him that I was trying to decide what I was going to write my dissertation in and he said, "Oh, have you thought about Economic History?" I said that I had thought about it and he said, "Well, come on in and I'll talk to you about it." So we went in and talked about it for an hour and not only did he convince me it would be a great area to write in, he liked my initial ideas which were ideas I had from
the course he had taught. He said, "Not only is that a good idea but the National Bureau of Economic Research is organizing a conference on this in about a year from now so let’s plan on writing a paper for that conference. And the rest is history. So in a sense, you’re almost guaranteed a publication the moment you walk out the door. So, you know, I don’t want to say I’ve lived a charmed life but many things fell into place along the way.

Q. Yeah, but it sounds like you might have been ready for that one as it happened.

A. And certainly he was inspirational in ways, certainly very helpful. I mean, he read the dissertation carefully and quickly. It’s not like some colleagues who may or may not get around to reading the dissertation; and sometimes they don’t read it closely. But he read it carefully and gave me feedback very quickly, so we made rapid progress. Now maybe in part because he was going to be a co-author of the articles, he was in fact paying close attention to it. I think partly because the topic was something he was interested in as well and hoped to get a publication out of it, but it also fit into his grander scheme of research. And one aspect of it involved understanding how some other people had already made some estimates of the labor force in the United States and so he got the university to give me money to fly to the annual meeting of Economic History Association while I was a graduate student to meet one of these people and talk to him about his estimates. So that helped. But then he was very supportive thereafter as well.

Q. Did you keep in contact with him after you left?

A. Oh, yeah, sure. We invited him out here to give a lecture, and I would see him annually at meetings.

Q. What was the topic actually you were working on?
A. My dissertation was basically a quantitative economic history of the service sector. So, I compiled estimates of the labor force, output, capital stock, and productivity in the sector as a whole and the major industries.

Q. During what time period?

A. This was just the nineteenth century. My dissertation advisor’s dissertation advisor had been Simon Kuznets, who’s a very well-known Nobel Prize winner who wrote many things about National Income Accounting. My supervisor, Robert Gallman, is best known for having then extended Kuznets’ work estimating gross national product back into the nineteenth century as far back as 1835. But, in both cases, Kuznets and Gallman, the service sector was something that they were not happy with the way they came up with those figures, and that actually had been obvious to me when I took his course. He’s very honest, even in his published papers, about what the shortcomings are so you can see that there’s work to be done here. And that had clearly struck me that not only was there work to be done on the service sector, but also by that time, the service industries were even more important than they had been when he was writing ten years prior to that. So, it seemed like a topic that should be of interest to me more than just a dissertation. Basically, it filled in that component of gross national product as well as the affiliated labor force and capital stock.

Q. Yeah, yeah. So, at the time you were doing your dissertation, if I’ve followed you correctly and since we go along I’m not always sure that I do, you got married. Was there a child already?

A. The child was born five days after I took my final oral exam, still in North Carolina. She was born July 12th. I had already had a job out here and an apartment rental starting
August 1st. I took the final exam on July 7th, I believe. Maybe it was July 5th and so she was born a week later. And then in those last two weeks I also squeezed in a quick run down to Pinehurst with some friends so I could play golf while I still lived somewhere in the neighborhood of the famous Pinehurst Golf Course. Then I got back, packed up, and moved to Kansas.

Q. There you are, one last little thread. From what you say, it sounds like you had begun to take golf very seriously. Is that fair or is that a leap?

A. No. I had been a much more serious golfer before I went to graduate school. I played on the high school golf team and the college golf team, and I played a lot in amateur tournaments around my hometown. There was one fairly large tournament in New York at the time called the Ike Golf Tournament and I managed to be one of my club’s two representatives to that tournament. Every country club within 50 miles of New York City could send two representatives. I think five hundred people teed off the first day and I managed to make the cut to play the final 36 holes. So that’s how serious a golfer I was. In fact, I thought as well about going on the pro tour, so that was a third alternative to graduate school, I suppose. At the time, Arnold Palmer was already known but just sort of starting his rise to fame, Jack Nicklaus was actually just starting on the tour as he had just graduated from college. Golf was not yet as big money-wise as it is today, so unless you were one of the top ten players, the odds of making a decent living were slim. At least that was my judgment. There were a couple of members in my club that thought I was good enough and they were willing to finance me for a year but I didn’t think the prospects were that good. I didn’t want to be, I guess, beholden to them. I decided to go off to graduate school.
Q. So golf was a road not taken in other words?

A. Right. And in graduate school, I found it took too much time so I took up tennis for a little while. I played golf a couple times just to see what some of the courses there were like, but my fellow classmates were not interested much in playing. One of the funniest episodes was one guy who wore beat up old sneakers everyday, but when we went out to play golf, he wore dress loafers to play golf. But he had never played golf before in his life. So that’s another reason that discouraged me from playing golf in graduate school. Then I came out here and the public course had sand greens and that was not too appealing. And it is too hot to play much of the summer. If you wait until classes are out and start playing in June, it’s already 95 degrees or whatever and it’s not a lot of fun to play and even less enjoyable to practice. So I haven’t played much over the 37 years. But my wife’s urging me to take it up again now that I’m retired, so that’s among my retirement plans. It is ironic that my sisters could never understand why I liked golf so much, but now they play it all the time. They’ve retired and live on golf courses, and I could care less about playing.

Q. So we left you...new baby, an apartment, and coming out to Kansas just after having finished your oral exams. So what did you walk into?

A. Well, I walked into what had attracted me here in the first place; the Economics Department had just kind of been expanded and I was part of the expansion. I think two years before it may have been a department of seven people, when I got here it was a department of more like 15 or 16 people.

Q. What year was this?
A. The Fall of ’67. So, in the fall of ’66, they hired, I think, probably 4 or 5 people and then 2 more people when I came. Anyway, the department about doubled in two years time.

Q. Why?

A. Well I think, many departments may have been growing rapidly at that time but I think the Dean at the time was convinced that Economics was something that any major university ought to try to build up; that’s a core subject and somebody in the department convinced them of that, I guess.

Q. Yes.

A. We’ve not been that fortunate since. Recently, a wealthy alumnus has donated a lot of money, but I would say the college office, otherwise, has not been that supportive, except for Sally Mason. When she was Dean, she was more supportive than her predecessor or her successor.

Q. Yes. Were you at any point involved in having to fight those battles as an administrative person or was your role entirely faculty?

A. Well, some of that I consider being part of the faculty position but I was the assistant chair or associate chair and graduate advisor for some time, I don’t recall how long, five years at least possibly longer, and then I was chairman for five years. And then subsequently filled in another year or semester as a graduate advisor. But yeah, I was certainly involved in those administrative affairs, mostly when Dean Lineberry was the Dean. My hunch is that he had a bad experience with Economics somewhere in the past.

Q. Frightened of it somewhat.

A. Yeah, I mean it was amazing — some of the discussions that we had but I don’t think some of those should be put on record.
Q. I understand. But it sounds like it was not the most pleasant duty in the world to be doing at that time.

A. Well, a chairman’s job can always have its unpleasant aspects. The good part of being chair in my department at the time was that the faculty were still a cohesive collegial group. So there wasn’t strife within the department; it was more a question of contending with the college office and they wanted us to do certain things and ignore the essential parts of Economics. I mean we could tell them, “Look, the most pressing need is someone in a fundamental part of Economics like Micro Economics.” And they say, “Well, that’s all well and good but we need somebody who’s going to do area studies.” And we agreed; if we could find a qualified person in area studies, we’d hire one but that was not going to make it as far as teaching core courses and doing research central to the discipline. It went on and on like that.

Q. This was at a time, if I remember correctly, that there was still a certain amount of ferment going on and the Viet Nam and civil rights here, too.

A. Oh, that was when I first got here. I was not chair until the ‘80’s.

Q. Yeah, much later.

A. The first few years here, there were demonstrations and riots, and I don’t remember exactly which year they cancelled commencement or cancelled final exams, that was ’68 or ’69 I think.

Q. How did that affect you from where you were?

A. Not as much as you might think, although a bomb exploded in Summerfield Hall at the time. In the ’60’s, the computer center was actually housed on the first floor of Summerfield Hall, and the Economics Department and the Business School were on the
second floor. And so there was a bomb that went off in the stairwell just outside the computer center’s office, which was basically just under my office. But it went off at 2 or 3 in the morning so it was more just exciting news in a sense rather than a tragedy. I don’t think anyone was critically injured. There might have been somebody who actually had been out in the vicinity smoking or something and had some ear damage. But it was somebody from the computer center, not from Economics. You know, we had to contend with how do we make up grades for students who don’t want to take the final exams, and things like that, but that did not seem to be a serious problem. I gave enough tests during the year and term papers that I didn’t have any trouble with it. And it didn’t disrupt classes much, it didn’t disrupt research. But there was a lot going on, not all related to Viet Nam. They never found the person who bombed that building. I don’t believe they ever found the person who started the fire in the Union, or if they did, it was a former janitor who had a problem with emotional instability or psychological problems or whatever.

Q. I think people sometimes just react to the threat and do things they might not do at other times.

A. Well, people were warned to stay away from certain parts of the city because there were some problems going on. For some reason or another, I was involved in an issue about traffic movement in my neighborhood and so I ended up going to some city commission meetings at the time and, in the process, got to know one of the commissioners a little bit and he was convinced that some of the problems were not at all what people thought; that it was not a Viet Nam related problem, it wasn’t even black youths rioting from some part of Lawrence because one of them had been shot by the police. He was pretty sure
there were some conservative right-wing militants active around here; that they had pulled him aside one evening and tried to straighten him out. So yeah, there was a lot going on but that was 30 some years ago. I don’t remember all the details that well. As I said, I didn’t make notes about all these things.

Q. Right, right. It doesn’t sound though that within your school department that it had anymore than I would describe as nuisance effect; it didn’t change the nature of the department, the way people thought about anything. Is that fair?

A. For the most part. I would say there were a couple of people who did get sort of wrapped up in some of the protests and movements of the ‘60’s and they became less interested in teaching and research. One of whom, after a while, realized that he was not doing what he was hired to do and decided he would just quit and become a house builder. And he did and he became very successful at that. You may live in one of his homes. Arvid Zarley was the builder; he was well-known around here. So, there was some disruption and I would say it affected their research more than their teaching; they still continued to teach. They would meet their classes. What they taught, I’m not always so sure of.

Q. Okay, so you did this, you taught, you had your administrative things, you for a while served as chair.

A. Right.

Q. During a period when it was a little hard to communicate with the powers that be here.

A. Oh, it was easy to communicate.

Q. Persuade is the word I want.

A. They had other priorities.
Q. Has the department itself changed in its nature, shape, form, views, and so on during the time you were in it?

A. Not to a large extent. There have been some changes. When I first got here, one of the things that was appealing was there were some senior people who were not simply very smart and accomplished in their particular areas of specialization, but they were interested in other areas of economics. There was a general equilibrium theorist, for example, who would happily sit down and read my articles on economic history and he would make comments. He was just sort of interested in almost anything that was going on. Unfortunately he subsequently left town and went to Cal-Tech at some point, and since then he’s even done work consulting with the American Baseball Leagues. I think he represents the players; provides economic expertise for the players’ union or something like that. But anyway, it was that sort of person I would say we looked for whenever we hired new faculty; people who had that sort of additional quality. Not only did we think they were going to publish in their own fields, but that they were bright and interested in other things as well. Somehow over time that fell by the wayside, we tended to focus more on whether somebody was going to publish in a highly specialized area. And those highly specialized areas became even more mathematical. It seems that we had more graduate students whose first language was not English so they were not so interested in other fields outside mathematics. So people, I think, over time were not quite as collegial and interactive as when I first arrived. I think that’s an unfortunate situation, even though some of them are doing good work in their own areas.

Q. I’m having a thought and let me check it with you. Your specialty is in Economic History.
A. Right.

Q. That pretty much means, I would think, that the kind of specializations the other people have would vary from your own -- because I would think Economic History would have a very wide range of possible issues to study -- so that you'd be especially struck by the compartmentalization that you describe going on in your school. Is that a fair assumption?

A. I think that's fair that Economic historians have a broader scope than others. So in essence, because we had to take those other subjects as required courses, we may be more familiar with what they are doing. And Economic History is required in some places, but not required everywhere. It used to be required here. My recollection is we did away with it because we were getting increasing numbers of graduate students from China whose English did not really permit them to read that many texts and write a paper in a semester. So we were then hiring people who went through those kinds of programs and they were uninterested in, not only Economic History, but even the application of some of their own theories to current issues.

Q. Let me also ask one other question. From the title, "Economic History" would sound like a discipline that would have some overlap with other fields of history.

A. Yes, it does.

Q. Did that work out both in terms of your own thinking and career and also in terms of engagements across the boundaries of schools and departments?

A. Yeah, I think it's worked out. My own view of those kinds of interdisciplinary activities is that they should arise out of need for them; not just force them to happen. Over the years I've given some papers at history meetings and for the last five years, have been
involved in a collaborative research project with someone who was in the history department here, Peter Mancall. He’s since gone to the University of Southern California. But my chief professional association is the Economic History Association. I don’t know the exact makeup of it but it’s probably 60% economists, 25-30% historians, and 5 or 10% other sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers. Those proportions may be off but anyway there is a substantial number of historians there. So as I said, I could use one of those old lines, “Some of my best friends are historians.”

Q. Good, good.

A. I have some sort of appointment in the history department, or had. I don’t really remember whether it was called Ad Hoc or Adjunct, but anyway it’s nothing paid for by the history department. The appointment was made so that I could participate on dissertation committees. I’ve served on some of the recruiting committees and I’m still involved very much with one person who’s finishing up her dissertation in history. So yeah, those interdisciplinary things happen.

Q. So we’ve covered your research to the point where you were studying the service industries of the United States during the 1800’s. What happened to that?

A. Well actually, the curious thing, I guess, is that while I was doing that, my dissertation advisor had his own large research project and grant and was supporting 3 or 4 or 5 graduate students studying the South under slavery. And he was studying agricultural growth and productivity in a slave system using U.S. Census records. Many people have studied agriculture and slavery, but Gallman and his assistants were taking census records and taking samples of census records and doing this in a quantitative fashion. I was one of the few graduate students at North Carolina not involved in that. I had a first year
fellowship and a teaching appointment the second year. But I saw this project, and some of the people working on it were friends of mine, so when we got out of school, one of them who ended up at Indiana University and I talked about some extensions of what Gallman was doing; he was studying agricultural, somebody needed to study manufacturing in the South. And we took that up and managed to get NSF funding for, I don’t know, six years probably, to do research on the development of Southern manufacturing under the slave system. So that was my major project and chunk of my time when I was an assistant professor. Meanwhile, I got some things out of the dissertation and wrote stuff on service industries. I guess maybe I should have sat down and thought about the sequence of events, but that went on for quite some time as well, maybe even more than six years, maybe 8 or 9 or 10 years and in fact, in some sense, it hasn’t stopped. There was a third person, Fred Bateman, who became involved in the manufacturing project and when the person I first started with dropped out of academia, Fred and I ended up carrying on the project. He had a graduate student, Jeremy Atach, who got involved, wrote a dissertation in the area, and has kept on working on that topic. Anyway, somewhere along the way, as I said, part of my work on the service industries involved trying to figure out how many people worked in the service industries. When the National Bureau of Economic Research started a program called The Development of the American Economy, the director of that program asked if I’d like to be involved and would I be in charge of trying to develop labor force statistics. So, I did that. That somehow came along about the time that I was chairman so that may have been the late ‘70’s or early ‘80’s. That again involved a long-term project; trying to go back and
reconstruct the labor force for the United States back to 1800, trying to get composition, age and sex composition of the labor force.

Q. How did that lead to your current work on colored economic growth and tourism?

A. That work involved estimating the occupation, distribution, and industrial distribution of the labor force, and then use those statistics to estimate gross national product back to 1800. So I've had a hand in extending basic statistical series for the U.S. economy back to 1800. Some of that still continues and, somewhere along the way, a Colonial historian thought that the people who'd been in that field had been looking at Colonial history long enough without any major breakthroughs. He tried to have a conference where basically he got non-Colonial Economic historians to take a look at Colonial issues. He asked if I'd try to do what I did for the early nineteenth century for the Colonial period. After telling him I didn't think it could be done, he said, "Oh, no, try it anyway. Let's see what happens." So, I did and that's how I got started now on the Colonial economy and that's how I got involved working with Peter Mancall because we tried to incorporate the economic activity of Native Americans into the bigger picture of the economy of the Colonial period. Peter was well-versed in the history of Native Americans. Anyway, Peter and I ended up writing an article that the organizer of the conference wasn't all that keen about but, with some revisions, we ultimately got it published and it was chosen as the best article in 1998 by the Library Company in Philadelphia. So that was a pleasant surprise. That paper was a broad look at colonial growth, and since then we've managed to get some NSF grants and now we're looking at the major colonial regions. We had three or four years of funding for research on the colonies of the lower South, and now we are switching to another grant and looking at the middle colonies; New York, New
Jersey, Pennsylvania. So that’s sort of what I’m still working on and will for the foreseeable future, even in retirement. Then a couple of years ago, I was elected President of the Economic History Association and needed to come up with a Presidential address. Rather than rehash what I had done, I decided I would try something completely different and wrote a paper on trying to sketch out the economic history of tourism in the United States. So, another project for my retirement years is the economic history of tourism wherever I find it.

Q. Okay. I gather retirement means you won’t be teaching.

A. Exactly, no committee work, no teaching.

Q. But it sounds like you have a very productive schedule ahead of you.

A. Yeah, I mean in fact, I’m so busy, I don’t see how I ever had time for teaching and committee work. And that’s partly why I retired, I think, they just weren’t paying me enough to do all these things. So I’ll live on my retirement annuities and do what I want to do.

Q. Kind of like a genius grant.

A. Yeah, one I give to myself.

Q. Okay. So, you’re interested in the economic history of tourism. I gather you’re continuing on the Colonial economic history, correct?

A. Yeah.

Q. What else have you got going for your retirement?

A. Well, in research, there are things you can’t keep away from. I mean stuff you wrote 20 years ago, somebody decides to take another look at and they want to know how you did something. So you’ve got to go back and look up some of that stuff. But other than that,
my wife and I plan to travel, probably in the off season. I will probably take up playing
golf more than I have in the past.

Q. Where do you want to go?

A. Well, we just know we want to go someplace. We've actually been a lot of places; we've
been to Europe a lot, perhaps 30 times or so. We spent the fall semester in Munich and
so right at the moment, I don't want to say we've had our fill of Europe, but we now want
to go see some of the National parks we haven't seen for a while. So those are the things
that have moved highest up our priorities. We haven't been to London or England much
for quite some time. We spent more time in France than elsewhere.

Q. It's not that you're lacking things to do.

A. No, not at all.

Q. Okay. Let me take a look at this official list here. Could you look, too, and see if there's
anything here...? I've not asked about assessment of KU as a university past and present
and hopes for the future of it but I think we may have...Oh, I didn't ask about
outstanding former students who worked or studied with you. What would you like to
tell me of these left out things.

A. The outstanding students? You know, there haven't been that many graduate students
that have written in economic history. One who did was John Ermisch, who has gone on
and done very well. He did well here, in the early '70's, I guess, at the time there were
Woodrow Wilson dissertation fellowships and he got one of those. He subsequently
ended up working for a research organization in London, taught at the University of
Glasgow, and is now a distinguished researcher at Essex University. So he's been the
most successful of the people in Economic History. There's one on the faculty of Texas
Tech that I know of, but I've lost track of what she's done. There is a student at the moment that's a student of history who's very good. I think that she'll end up doing very well in her profession. She's won a Truman award, a Social Science Research Council fellowship, so she's doing very well. You know, there always were a couple of undergraduates but it's easy to lose track of them. I have always been curious to know what happened to some of them. One, for example, graduated, I think, probably in the late '60's or early '70's, so he must have been one of the first students I ever taught. I ran into him two or three years ago and he said I was the one who convinced him to basically not give up and go on, and he's been a very productive professor and publisher in Economics. He teaches at Georgia State University. One of the more interesting or two interesting guys I taught were in an honors course at the Nunemaker Center, one of those no-credit seminars. The students in that class were all bright and interested but there were two guys that stood out. They were both in Physics. It was very interesting because the seminar was on slavery, the history of slavery. And I had them read two books, one a traditional historian's view of slaves and then the controversial book about slavery by Fogel and Engerman. You know, they came in and they did the readings on the traditional historian and we talked about it, but then as soon as we started with the other one, these Physics and Engineering students said, "This is an interesting subject." You can actually sit down and try to calculate things; they hadn't thought about it this way. So you know, they actually kept in touch for a while after they finished that; they were freshman at the time. But I mean they were characters; they would come, they had their chains and tattoos and stuff, and the seminar was at night and we ended about nine and they would be off to the Outhouse or somewhere to listen to some punk rock music. But
the two guys that I talked about were the best students in their class at KU. I would see these memos listing the top “Freshman GPA” or whatever and these guys were there; top student in Physics, top student in the college. So I sort of wondered what happened to them. Somewhere along the way, when they were in their junior or senior year, there was a big beat poetry reunion here and KU brought back all of these beatnik poets, and lo and behold the students from Physics were heavily involved in that, too. In any case, in conjunction with the honor seminar, I managed to talk Bob Fogel into coming down and giving a seminar and then meeting with these students. So, ten years later, Fogel wins the Nobel Prize and out of the blue I get a postcard from this one former student which asks, “Is this the guy that came and talked to our honor seminar our freshman year?” I don’t know where he is; John Beacom is his name. He’s the one I recall the most, the other one was named Andrew, I can’t remember his last name. But anyway, they were a couple of very outstanding students. One other one, very early on, was a woman, Kathy Garnet, who, if it were possible to get 100 on an exam, got 100 on the exam. She asked one question. I mean you teach a large introductory class and there are people who cannot grasp some fundamental things and she would just sit there and put up with all this stuff. She asked one question which had to do with an obscure footnote in Samuelson’s Principles Textbook. I said, “I’d be happy to explain that to you, but the rest of the class is not going to be interested at all.” Again, I saw her name on the board as the best freshman and this was back before grade inflation; she was getting 4.0’s. I never did know what happened to her after graduation.

Q. So there were some people that just struck you as being very, very able and talented and you tend to wonder what they...
A. Right. One, by the way, was this woman who won the first Survivor-like contest on TV, Kathryn Price. I think the show was the Mole, something where you sell out your friends. She was an outstanding student in introductory Economics; one of the best. I think I might have even exempted her from the final exam because she had done so well. So she was apparently smart and devious!

Q. Okay, I guess finally the evaluation piece; assessment of KU as a university, past and present, hopes for the future. And I've discovered doing these interviews that's also a time when people talk about ways that the university's gone they wished it hadn't.

A. Well, I'm sure we all wish it had gone our way. My view is that it's a good university. It's good in the sense that a student can come here and get as fine an education as anywhere else, but it's up to them. They can also come here and get through without much effort, and without learning much, and many of them take that route, and many of them take as long as they can to do that because they're just here enjoying themselves. So, it's a good university, not a great university. Could it be a great university? I would have thought it might have been. You know, when I first came here, I mean you come into a department that's just doubled in size, you think the state and the university are committed to a good university and the university's committed to a good economics department. Then that didn't obviously happen or play out that way over the years. I think when the stock market was booming up through 2000, the state might have at that point decided to pour money into wanting to have a premier university, but they didn't. I think they consciously chose not to for one reason or another. And now it's all downhill in a sense; they're struggling to make revenues to cover what they are agreeing to budget and they're obviously not agreeing to budget enough because the courts have found them
wanting. So, I would say the opportunity has probably passed it by. I guess my impression would be that maybe while it’s a public university, it’s going to be limited to being a good university but no better than many others. If the figures I’ve seen are correct, raising tuition by about $10,000 a year per student could cover what the state now provides. KU could become a private university. If they did that, maybe they could become a great university. That would then require, I think, much better decision making on the part of the administrators than now. I mean now, I think, they just listen too much to what the legislature says and wants or they try to anticipate what the legislature wants and they move in that direction whether it’s going to make the university more productive or not. They’re too heavily influenced by alumni. They all now seem more interested in a big intercollegiate athletic program than the library, so I would not be optimistic that in the future it’s going to become any greater a university than it is now. It’ll probably become bigger and remain about the same quality, you know, it’s not going to fall off the map but it’s just going to go on becoming a bigger state university that offers a lot to students who really want to take advantage of it.

Q. Okay. Any last minute thoughts or words, you know?

A. I just noticed we left out the creative work aspect of it. I, of course, was helping to run the Lawrence Chamber Players which I guess is about as creative as I could get. Although I like to tell people I had a speaking part in the play “Oberammergau”. I yelled, “Free Barabbas” at the right time. And I actually made a short silent movie called, “Dracula Goes To Graduate School”. It’s about six minutes long.

Q. When did you do this?
A. We did it back in, I don’t know, the ‘70’s, 1970, ’75. It was designed to record a Norton motorcycle that a friend was getting rid of before she got rid of it. And so we wanted to get her on film riding this Norton motorcycle and then we sat around drinking wine and talking up the story of how we could do it. We ended up producing a short movie, “Dracula Goes To Graduate School”.

Q. I missed it somehow.

A. No, it was a private showing only; now only for very high fees. Photography is another one of my hobbies. I used to have a dark room and stuff but I gave that up; the chemicals just became intolerable. So anyway, that’s another thing I’ll be doing in retirement, not doing dark room work because I decided I finally had to get away from those chemicals but now you can do it all digitally.

Q. Have you moved over to digitals?

A. Yeah, we just finally bought a digital camera. I mean, we used to just have a CD Rom made of our pictures and then you can do digital stuff with it, but we finally bought a digital camera. We haven’t used it enough yet to know whether we like it or not, but it could be fun. So anyway, it ties in with the travel as well.

Q. Sounds great.
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DATE OF BIRTH: July 21, 1942, Kingston, New York

EDUCATION: BS, Holy Cross College, 1964
Ph.D., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1967

POSITIONS HELD
Part-time Instructor, University of North Carolina, 1965-66
Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Kansas, 1967-71
Associate Professor of Economics, University of Kansas, 1971-75
Professor of Economics, University of Kansas, 1975-2005
Director of Economics Graduate Program and Associate Chairman, 1974-80, 1987-88
Chairman of the Economics Department, 1980-85
Exchange Faculty, Korea University, Seoul, 1989
Visiting Lecturer, Nankai University, Tianjin, PRC, 1993
Exchange Lecturer, Hong Kong University; 1996
Research Associate, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1983 –
Visiting Scholar, Center for Economic Studies. Munich, Fall, 2004
Fellow, CESifo Research Network, 2005-

HONORS, FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS:

Alumni Fellowship, University of North Carolina, 1965-66
University Teaching Fellowship, University of North Carolina, 1965-66
Richard D. Irwin Dissertation Fellowship, 1966-67

National Science Foundation Grants:
"An Analysis of the Manufacturing Sector During the Economic Development of an Agricultural Export Region," (1969-71),
"Collaborative Research on U.S. Manufacturing, 1850-1870" (1971-74)
"Collaborative Research on U.S. Manufacturing, 1850-1870" (1975-77)
"Sources of Productivity Growth in U.S. Agriculture in the 19th Century" with Lee Craig. (1994-97)

Clio Award for "Outstanding Contributions to Cliometrics," 1989
Byron T. Shutz Award for Distinguished Teaching in Economics, 1991
Finalist, Del Shankel Award for Teaching Excellence, 1997
UNIVERSITY SERVICE:
Chairman, Committee to Review the Department of HDFL, 1971-1972.
Committee to Review the Department of Economics, 1970-71.
Board of Directors, K.U. Athletic Association, 1973-76.
Western Civilization Program Advisory Committee, 1977-80.
Chairman, LAS Faculty Seminar Group
Graduate School Task Force on Ph.D. Requirements
Subcommittee to Review the College Core curriculum
University Committee on Promotions and Tenure, 1985-86.
Executive Committee of the Graduate Council 1989-91.
University Committee on Planning and Resources, 1996-99.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIPS
Co-Editor, Journal of Economic History, 1988-92
Vice-President, Economic History Association, 1993
Trustee, ex officio, Economic History Association, 1988-93
Executive Director, Economic History Association, 1994-
President, Economic History Association, 2002-03

Board of Editors: Historical Methods, 1999-2004
Proposal Reviewer: National Science Foundation
Referee: Journal of Economic History; Explorations in Economic History; Business History Review; Southern Economic Journal, Research in Economic History, Historical Methods
Rovensky Fellowship Selection Committee, 1989-1999
Member: Economic History Association, Economic History Society (UK), Cliometrics Society
Conference on Research in Income and Wealth, NBER, Social Science History Association, Business History Conference

Consultant, Midwest Research Institute, "Technological Progress and Aggregate Economic Growth."
Author-Instructor, Extramural Independent Study Center Courses "American Economic Development," 1970;
"Introduction to Economic Analysis," 1974
Instructor, Economic Awareness Program for University of Kansas Faculty.
RESEARCH

BOOKS PUBLISHED


ARTICLES PUBLISHED


"The Participation of Planters in Manufacturing in the Antebellum South," with Fred Bateman and James Foust, Agricultural History, April, 1974.


WORK IN PROGRESS


BOOK REVIEWS:


"Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century Economic History, Economic History Review, 1993


"The Other Side of the Frontier," Economic History Research @EH.NET


"Takes a Licking, but Keeps on Ticking," a Retrospective Review of Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery. Economic History Research @EH.NET

CONFERENCE and SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS (details available on request)

Business History conference, 1970
Southern Historical Association, 1974
 Cliometrics Conference, 1979, 1989
Economic and Business Historical Society Meetings, 1980, 1982
American Economic Association Meetings, 1982
Western Economics Association Meetings, 1992
American Historical Association, 1994, 2001
International Symposium on the Service Sector, 1978
First Annual Sewanee Economics Symposium, 1980
Wesleyan Symposium on American History, Conference in Honor of Stanley Lebergott, 1985
Ohio University Lecture Series on the Bicentennial of the Northwest Ordinance, 1987
Conference on The Standard of Living in Early Nineteenth Century America, 1990
First Annual Dinsmore Homestead Foundation Symposium, Oct., 1992
Conference on The Economy of Early British America; Huntington Library, October 1995
Fulbright Forum (Seoul, Korea) 1989

SEMINARS AT UNIVERSITIES:

Alexander Humboldt University, Berlin 2004
All-Chicago Group in Economic History, Oct., 2000
Dongguk University (Seoul, Korea) 1989
Indiana University, 1973, 1989
Harvard University, 1997
Korea Development Institute (Seoul) 1989
Korea University (Seoul) 1989
Lake Forest College, 1988
McGill University, 1999
Northwestern University, 1988, 1995, 2000
Queen's University, 1999
Stanford University, 1989
University of Arizona, 1991
University of California, Berkeley, 1989, 1997
University of California, Davis 1992, 2005
University of California, Los Angeles 2005
University of Chicago, 1988
University of Hong Kong; 1996
University of North Carolina, 2006: The Robert Gallman Lecture
University of Toronto, 1999
University of Tubingen, Germany 2004
University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse, 1999
USC-Huntington Early Modern Studies Institute, American Origins Seminar 2005