

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

University History Series
Department of History at Berkeley

Gene Brucker

HISTORIAN OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, 1954-1991

With an introduction by
Randolph R. Starn

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 2002

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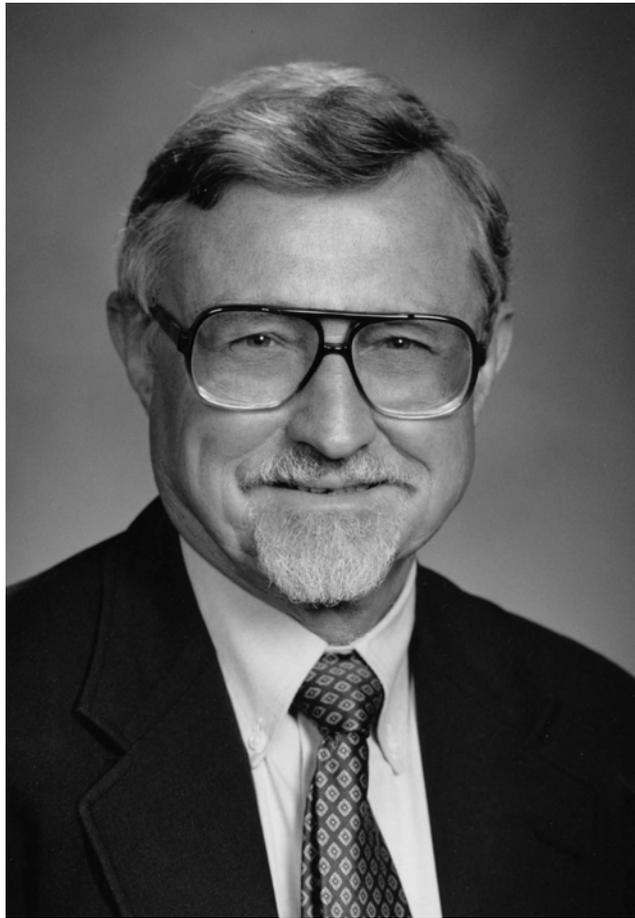
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Gene Brucker
ca. 1990

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PREFACE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AT BERKELEY ORAL HISTORY SERIES

The Department of History at Berkeley oral history series grew out of Gene Brucker's (Professor of History, 1954-1991) 1995 Faculty Research Lecture on "History at Berkeley." In developing his lecture on the transformations in the UC Berkeley Department of History in the latter half of the twentieth century, Brucker, whose tenure as professor of history from 1954 to 1991 spanned most of this period, realized how much of the story was undocumented.

Discussion with Carroll Brentano (M.A. History, 1951, Ph.D. History, 1967), coordinator of the University History Project at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, history department faculty wife, and a former graduate student in history, reinforced his perception that a great deal of the history of the University and its academic culture was not preserved for future generations. The Department of History, where one might expect to find an abiding interest in preserving a historical record, had discarded years of departmental files, and only a fraction of history faculty members had placed their personal papers in the Bancroft Library.¹

Moreover, many of the most interesting aspects of the history--the life experiences, cultural context, and personal perceptions--were only infrequently committed to paper.² They existed for the most part in the memories of the participants.

Carroll Brentano knew of the longtime work of the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) in recording and preserving the memories of participants in the history of California and the West and the special interest of ROHO in the history of the University. She and Gene Brucker then undertook to involve Ann Lage, a ROHO interviewer/editor who had conducted a number of oral histories in the University History Series and was herself a product of Berkeley's history department (B.A. 1963, M.A. 1965). In the course of a series of mutually enjoyable luncheon meetings, the project to document the history of the Department of History at Berkeley evolved.

In initial discussions about the parameters of the project, during which the varied and interesting lives of the history faculty were considered, a crucial decision was made. Rather than conduct a larger set of short oral histories focused on topics limited to departmental history, we determined to work with selected members of the department to conduct more lengthy biographical memoirs. We would record relevant personal background--family, education, career choices, marriage and children, travel and avocations; discuss other institutional affiliations; explore the process of creating their historical works; obtain reflections on their retirement years. A central topic for each would be, of course, the Department of History at Berkeley--its governance, the informal and formal relationships among colleagues, the connections with the broader campus, and curriculum and teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate level.

1. The Bancroft Library holds papers from history professors Walton Bean, Woodbridge Bingham, Herbert Bolton, Woodrow Borah, George Guttridge, John Hicks, Joseph Levenson, Henry May, William Alfred Morris, Frederic Paxson, Herbert Priestley, Engel Sluiter, Raymond Sontag.

2. Two published memoirs recall the Berkeley history department: John D. Hicks, *My Life with History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) recalls his years as professor and dean, 1942-1957; Henry F. May reflects on his years as an undergraduate at Berkeley in the thirties in *Coming to Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Using the Brucker lecture as a point of departure, it was decided to begin to document the group of professors who came to the department in the immediate postwar years, the 1950s, and the early 1960s. Now retired, the younger ones somewhat prematurely because of a university retirement incentive offer in the early nineties, this group was the one whose distinguished teaching and publications initially earned the Department of History its high national rating. They made the crucial hiring and promotion decisions that cemented the department's strength and expanded and adapted the curriculum to meet new academic interests.

At the same time, they participated in campus governing bodies as the university dealt with central social, political, and cultural issues of our times, including challenges to civil liberties and academic freedom, the response to tumultuous student protests over free speech, civil rights and the Vietnam War, and the demands for equality of opportunity for women and minorities. And they benefitted from the postwar years of demographic and economic growth in California accompanied for the most part through the 1980s with expanding budgets for higher education. Clearly, comprehensive oral histories discussing the lives and work of this group of professors would produce narratives of interest to researchers studying the developments in the discipline of history, higher education in the modern research university, and postwar California, as well as the institutional history of the University of California.

Carroll Brentano and Gene Brucker committed themselves to facilitate the funding of the oral history project, as well as to enlist the interest of potential memoirists in participating in the process. Many members of the department responded with interest, joined the periodic lunch confabs, offered advice in planning, and helped find funding to support the project. In the spring of 1996, the interest of the department in its own history led to an afternoon symposium, organized by Brentano and Professor of History Sheldon Rothblatt and titled "Play It Again, Sam." There, Gene Brucker restaged his Faculty Research Lecture. Professor Henry F. May responded with his own perceptions of events, followed by comments on the Brucker and May theses from other history faculty, all videotaped for posterity and the Bancroft Library.¹

Meanwhile, the oral history project got underway with interviews with Delmer Brown, professor of Japanese history; Nicholas Riasanovsky, Russian and European intellectual history; and Kenneth Stampf, American history. A previously conducted oral history with Woodrow Borah, Latin American history, was uncovered and placed in The Bancroft Library. An oral history with Carl Schorske, European intellectual history, is in process at the time of this writing, and more are in the works. The selection of memoirists for the project is determined not only by the high regard in which they are held by their colleagues, because that would surely overwhelm us with candidates, but also by their willingness to commit the substantial amount of time and thought to the oral history process. Age, availability of funding, and some attention to a balance in historical specialties also play a role in the selection order.

The enthusiastic response of early readers has reaffirmed for the organizers of this project that departmental histories and personal memoirs are essential to the unraveling of some knotty puzzles: What kind of a place is this University of California, Berkeley, to which we have committed much of our lives? What is this academic culture in which we are enmeshed? And what is this enterprise History, in which we

1. The Brucker lecture and May response, with an afterword by David Hollinger, are published in *History at Berkeley: A Dialog in Three Parts* (Chapters in the History of the University of California, Number Seven), Carroll Brentano and Sheldon Rothblatt, editors [Center for Studies in Higher Education and Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1998].

all engage? As one of the project instigators reflected, "Knowing what was is essential; and as historians we know the value of sources, even if they are ourselves." The beginnings are here in these oral histories.

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University History Project
Center for Studies in Higher Education

Gene Brucker
Shepard Professor of History Emeritus

Ann Lage, Principal Editor
Regional Oral History Office

Berkeley, California
January 1998

December 2005

**University History Series, Department of History at Berkeley
Series List**

- Brown, Delmer M. *Professor of Japanese History, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1977*. 2000, 410 pp.
- Brentano, Robert. *Scholar and Teacher of Medieval History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-2002*. 2005, 370 pp.
- Brucker, Gene. *Historian of Renaissance Florence, University of California, Berkeley, 1954-1991*. 2005, 211 pp.
- Keightley, David N. *Historian of Early China, University of California, Berkeley, 1969-1998*. 2003, 163 pp.
- May, Henry F. *Professor of American Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-1980*. 1999, 218 pp.
- Malia, Martin Edward. *Historian of Russian and European Intellectual History*. 2005, 229 pp.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *Professor of Russian and European Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1957-1997*. 1998, 310 pp.
- Schorske, Carl E. *Intellectual Life, Civil Libertarian Issues, and the Student Movement at the University of California, Berkeley, 1960-1969*. 2000, 203 pp.
- Stamp, Kenneth M. *Historian of Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1983*. 1998, 310 pp.

In process:

- Bouwsma, William J., European cultural history
- Bouwsma, Beverly, faculty wife.
- Davis, Natalie, Early Modern Europe
- Jordan, Winthrop, United States colonial history
- Levine, Lawrence, United States cultural history
- Litwack, Leon, United States history, African American history
- Wakeman, Fred, Historian of China

INTRODUCTION by Randolph R. Starn

Just about the time, in the mid-1950s, that Gene Brucker was heading West to his new job in Berkeley, the hero of Bernard Malamud's baseball novel *The Natural* was heading East to try out for the Chicago Cubs. Brucker might rather have followed Roy Hobbs; little as he knew about Berkeley, as a diehard fan he certainly knew far more about the Cubs than the novelist, who put night lights on Wrigley Field, the only ballpark in the major leagues that famously held out against them. Both young men had left the farm for the wider world, as heroes do in old tales and their American retelling; both were amazed by their luck—prematurely as it turned out in Hobbs's hard-luck case. But luck was only part of the story. Both Hobbs and Brucker worked hard at rising to unexpectedly great expectations. The fictional character speaks well enough for the real one of this oral history. Though Roy Hobbs, like Gene Brucker, doesn't like talking about himself, he does admit to "the fun and satisfaction you get of playing the best way you know how." Both are "naturals" who "do it all."

I first met Gene in Florence in the spring of 1965, in the Brucker apartment on the Viale Michelangelo as it winds its way up to one of those heart-stopping views of the city. He had been on leave four years earlier when my wife Frances and I had come to Berkeley after graduating from Stanford to see whether I would take to being a history graduate student. I was drawn to European history, with a budding interest in the Renaissance and Italy. By one of those cross-cultural misunderstandings in which America excels, Renaissance Florence had already come into the Western Civ syllabus as a beacon of republican values, a proof that culture was compatible with capital, a brave new world of hardboiled individualism redeemed by civic commitment. At least as improbable as the morphing of a Catholic, oligarchical, and patriarchal Mediterranean society into an avatar of American democracy, German-Jewish refugee scholars from the Nazis were largely responsible for making the Renaissance a cosmopolitan and professional field of studies in the New World. The fascination of Americans with things Italian went back to the Founding Fathers, the Grand Tour, and Gilded Age expatriates. In the aftermath of World War II a new wave of eager students set out for Italy, resolved not to be ugly Americans despite a nearly extortionate exchange rate for the dollar and government funding from the G.I. Bill and the Fulbright Program. As it happened, I decided to accept an offer to go to Harvard after a Berkeley year. I can't say I regretted the move, though I could see from Cambridge, then from Italy, where I went to work on my dissertation, that Berkeley was the place I wanted to be all along. When, in the spring of 1966, an invitation that Gene and Bill Bouwsma had steered through the History Department arrived in Florence, I jumped at the chance to return to Berkeley with hardly a decent interval to make it look like I might be hard to get.

By that time the larger story of the rise of Italian Renaissance studies in America was in full swing. Until fairly recently, however, Renaissance historians were interested in doing history, not in reflecting on their own histories. Gene Brucker's interviews convey some of that reluctance, but they also make a point of complicating the easy inevitability of the big picture in keeping with his own conviction that history works by accident and happenstance. Who would have imagined, least of all the young Brucker, going from the farm to Big U at Champaign-Urbana and the twists of fortune that followed? When Pearl Harbor came three months after he had enrolled at the University of Illinois, he enlisted in the army but, as it turned out, was not called up for a year and even then shuttled from one training spot to another before shipping out with his small transport-and-supply outfit in the summer of 1944. It was the first time he had been in New York, let alone in Europe where he spent the months until V-E day stationed near Marseille. After that his unit headed for Japan in the unlikely conveyance of the SS *Lurline* only to hear the news of Hiroshima and Nagasaki en route. The future historian probably knew more about truck parts than he did

about history at that point. He admits to a weakness for Napoleon. He clearly had more than an inkling that nothing was going to keep him down on the farm after Paris.

Had the muse of history played straight, Brucker might have become a French or a British historian. After returning from the war, he wrote his M.A. thesis at the University of Illinois on the first revolutionary mayor of Paris; French history was relatively well developed in this country and contrary to what he thought at the time, the history of early modern France and the Revolution was on the verge of becoming a headily productive field. He had already met a mentor in Professor Ray Stearns—another stroke of good fortune—who encouraged him to apply for Rhodes Scholarship, which, to his astonishment, he won in 1948. As a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, Brucker should have studied British history. When he got some mildly inexperienced encouragement for turning to Italy, he had no Italian and no teachers, either; to his surprise and surely to hers, he was directed to Miss Cecilia Ady, D. Phil, by then in her seventies and the last of those spirited bluestockings who had cultivated Italian history while the dons attended self-importantly to more serious matters. He eventually found, as a graduate student at Princeton, a mentor in Theodore Mommsen, who actually knew late medieval Italy and could advise him to begin in the 1340s where the great German historian of Florence Robert Davidsohn had left off. Even so, Brucker arrived in Florence in the American tradition of innocence abroad, with fairly rudimentary language skills and hardly enough paleography to read the inventories and the more formal chancellery records, let alone crabbed merchant script or feathery notarial hands.

There is an insider's joke that Renaissance historians are like medievalists with insufficient training. We were mostly like that—more than ten years after Gene began working in the Florentine archives I was still woefully unprepared for my rite of passage there. Ignorance may not be bliss, but it's one reason why American scholars were so transfixed by that documentary dreadnaught. No one put it this way—we were too self-consciously edgy about being Americans—but archival research fit the American grain. The sheer size and scale of the Florentine archives challenged the national bravado (and myth) that calls for overcoming nearly insurmountable obstacles; this scholars' Mission Apollo still shocks most European historians. Our attraction to the new is one of our oldest traditions, and partly for that reason, we have no immunity to the spell of the old: the look, the feel, the smell of age were palpably present, a kind of drug, in the archives. It suited a practical, anti-speculative streak to suppose that the facts were there for the taking—and a good thing too since we might otherwise have been humbled by the sophistication and exquisite erudition of the grand traditions of European scholarship. The theory of it all was nothing to worry about. Thomas Alva Edison scoffed that he didn't have time for theoretical nonsense, and it was theory enough, though we hardly recognized it as such, to imagine that Florentine history mirrored our own, as a case study in the vicissitudes of republican liberty.

Gene cheerfully confesses to being an archive addict, but his oral history shows that he did not indulge his habit as frequently as one might suppose or, for that matter, as he might have liked. He was not, like Nicolai Rubinstein, the continental outsider who had preceded the young Anglo-Americans in the Florentine archives already before the war, a grimly obsessive archive wraith; Rubinstein would drive overnight across half of Europe from his base at Westfield College in London to be at the archives the next morning, sometimes just to check footnotes. When on one occasion I asked Gene's close contemporary David Herlihy, the pioneering regional and quantitative historian of Florence and Tuscany, to go to the *Latteria* where, down a narrow street from the archives, scholars met on coffee breaks, Herlihy was reluctant to leave his documents, and when he finally joined me, he had to ask what a *cappuccino* was. Anyone who has seen Gene at work in the archives, or has only read him, knows that he was not an archival ascetic because he didn't need to be. As if born for the job, he had an unerring nose for archival truffles and the utter concentration to mine whole series of documents, the mere contemplation of which would have struck terror in other hearts; and when it came to "writing up," his aim was usually as straight and true as a Roy Hobbs homer.

But perhaps the most important reason why he did not spend more time in the archives is that he took on the civic responsibilities that he found so compelling in his Florentines. As they might have put it, he committed himself to the "active life" of his Berkeley department, his university, and his profession together with the "contemplative life" of his scholarship. A good third of his oral history concerns the many offices and honors he has held, and one gem among his shorter pieces is not about Florence but about an academic insurgency that brought about a kind "Renaissance" in the Berkeley History Department shortly after his arrival in 1954. As he tells it, the *Baroni*, the old "baronial" guard of favoritism and inertia, were overthrown by a forward-looking cohort of bright young citizen-historians like himself. In Florentine terms these *huomini nuovi*, "new men," became powers in their own right—if not *Baroni*, then at least *Senatori*, "senators." Certainly they were democratic and meritocratic in ways than the old guard could hardly imagine. They were open to the new waves of thinking and research that were sweeping the historical profession; keenly aware of being in a public university, albeit it a privileged one, they set about turning their department into a community of historians that soon became the most versatile and congenial in the country. Like the senators they became (and unlike our politicians today), and like the Florentine patricians whose transformation into a political elite Gene traced in *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence*, they preferred to work by consultation, negotiation, and consensus. Like the Florentines too, they remained citizen-amateurs who held office without turning into time-serving administrators and bureaucrats. Unfortunately, unlike the Florentines, they also preferred to work unencumbered by written rules, or even written minutes, one reason why the series of which this oral history is a part is an especially important source for the history of history at Berkeley and the wider world.

Roy Hobbs's undoing was not having true friends when he needed them, but the gift of friendship is as natural to Gene as his other talents. It is like him to deflect attention in his oral history from himself to the networks of friends—*amici*, he would surely say—who have sustained him over time and who have known the steady assurance of his own friendship and support. In April of this year, while on a fellowship at the National Humanities Center, I attended an informal conference at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill with some twenty-five historians brought together to talk about the past and present of Italian Renaissance history in Anglo-American scholarship. Some of the participants were Gene's former students; all of us counted him as a treasured friend and colleague. At the end of the day, after a discussion airing quite different, sometimes sharply divergent views, a large greeting card addressed to Gene made the rounds for everyone's signature and message. It was such a natural thing to do, and perhaps the tribute that Gene would have appreciated best from his fellow citizens in that republic of historians.

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Berkeley, California
 July 2005

INTERVIEW HISTORY—Gene Brucker

The oral history with Gene Brucker, historian of Renaissance Florence, is one of a series with faculty in the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley, all of whom came to Berkeley in the twenty years following World War II and participated in its development into one of the foremost history departments in the country. Professor Brucker focused his historian's eye on the evolution of the Berkeley Department of History when he was asked to give the Faculty Research Lecture for 1995. Rather than turning to matters Florentine, he delivered the lecture "History at Berkeley" that became the impetus for this oral history series, as described more fully in the series preface in this volume. Now he joins some fourteen of his colleagues who have recorded interviews in the series.

Gene Brucker came to Berkeley in 1954, his first job after obtaining his PhD under Theodor Mommsen at Princeton. He taught at Berkeley until his retirement in 1991, served as department chair from 1969 to 1972, three tumultuous years on campus, and was an active member of the Academic Senate, and its chair from 1984 to 1986.

During all of these years, he was one of the leading scholars of late medieval and early modern Florence. As noted in the Citation awarded Gene Brucker by the Society for Italian Historical Studies in 1989, his book, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378* (1962) "signalled the entry of American historiography in the field of Italian medieval history and set the standard against which all other American scholars [of the field] have measured themselves." And, the Citation continues, this was only the first of Brucker's many scholarly contributions and intellectual leadership over a fifty-year period. His subsequent works included *Renaissance Florence* (1969), *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (1977), *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (1986), the lushly illustrated large-format *Florence, the Golden Age, 1138-1737* (1984, 1998), and many essays over many years, a collection of which was published in 1994 as *Renaissance Florence: Society, Culture, and Religion*. In 2000, Gene Brucker received the Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award of the Renaissance Society of America. In 2005, UC Press published his selected essays in *Living on the Edge in Leonardo's Florence*.

In beginning this project, I consulted with a number of Gene Brucker's colleagues and former students, all of whom attest to his generous spirit as well as his immense contributions to the field. Their suggestions on avenues of inquiry were of immeasurable help in planning the oral history sessions. Thanks are due to William Connell, Dale Kent, Lauro Martines, and David Peterson, as well as to Berkeley friends and colleagues, including Bob and Carroll Brentano, Irwin Scheiner, Reginald Zelnik, and Randy Starn, who also wrote the thoughtful introduction to this volume.

The oral history records the story of Gene Brucker's evolution from a farm boy in Cropsey, Illinois, to a distinguished Berkeley scholar; his reflections on his research, writing, and teaching and on historiography in his field; and his observations and experiences of the department at Berkeley and faculty governance in the university. It was recorded in eleven interview sessions, conducted from August to December 2002. We met weekly or biweekly at his home in north Berkeley, a reasonable walking distance from the campus and within the range of its Campanile bells.

At each session, Gene would usher me down to his study where a bottle of Perrier awaited us. He cordially addressed our planned topics for the day, but his internal timer seemed to be finely tuned to the fifty-minute lecture hour to which he was bound for so many years. Typically, after about forty-five minutes into our interview, he would display subtle signs of restlessness and quickly wind things up, "That's the story of Oxford." Or more to the point, "Okay, Ann, I think I've had it!" Also typically, I would begin each session with a further delving into events and issues that he had thought he had dispensed with in the previous session, but which seemed to me to need further exploration. He submitted to this exercise patiently but it

was clear that talking about himself just wasn't fun for Gene Brucker, and while he wouldn't go so far as to describe the oral history process as an ordeal, his final recorded words were, "I'm glad it's over."

In his typical workmanlike fashion, Gene read and reviewed his transcribed oral history quickly and carefully, making only a few changes for clarification or accuracy, so that the transcript is a faithful record of the eleven conversations we had in 2002. Like his colleagues who have also participated in this oral history series, Gene Brucker is to be congratulated for allowing his own life and career to become source material for future historians.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to record the lives of persons who have contributed significantly to the history of California and the West. A major focus of the office since its inception has been university history. The series list of completed oral histories documenting the history of the University of California is included in this volume. The Regional Oral History Office is a division of The Bancroft Library and is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith.

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The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Berkeley, California
July 2005

I. PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION TO 1943

[Interview 1: August 21, 2002] ##¹

Childhood on the Farm in Cropsey, Illinois

00:00:14

Lage: Today is August 21, 2002. This is the first interview in an oral history with Gene Brucker, and I'm Ann Lage for the Oral History Office of Berkeley. Gene, we've talked about doing this for a long time.

00:00:29

Brucker: Yes, we've talked about it because of our involvement with the whole history enterprise.

00:00:35

Lage: And now you're the subject.

00:00:35

Brucker: And now I'm the subject, yes. Somewhat apprehensive, but I think I can probably survive.

00:00:42

Lage: Good. Let's just begin at the beginning. Your parents, your background--

00:00:48

Brucker: Well, I grew up in a very rural part of Illinois, on the prairie, about a hundred miles south of Chicago. My parents were both descended from German immigrants who came to this country. On my father's side they're pretty precise--that my great-grandfather whose name was Gottlieb came over in 1352, no, 1852.

00:01:22

Lage: I noticed you slipped there with 1352 [laughter], your field of study.

00:01:25

Brucker: And he settled in Illinois just about the time of the Civil War--got married at the time of it. He had come from Württemberg in Southwest Germany near Stuttgart. My mother's family came over somewhat later and I know less about them. They came from what would have been--my great grandfather, whose name was Ferdinand, came over probably in the 1870s from Saxony in what is now, or what was eastern Germany--so this *ambiente* that I grew up in was rural and Germanic. There were--I would say ninety percent of the population was engaged in farming. My father had inherited land from his father, and he bought more land. So I lived on a farm of about 240 acres, which was close to standard at that time. I have to say that my childhood was really very happy. Happy may not be the

1. This symbol indicates that an tape or tape segment has begun.

right word, but there's a lot about life on the farm that I enjoyed. I certainly learned the work ethic at a very early age.

00:02:46

Lage: Give me an example of how you learned the work ethic.

00:02:49

Brucker: Well, being told to get up at six o'clock in the morning to go milk the cows--because farming was--a lot of it was just hard work, and obviously seasonal. We worked harder in summer--spring, and summer, and fall--than we did in winter.

00:03:05

Lage: What did the farm produce?

00:03:07

Brucker: Corn, and oats, and soybeans, and cattle, and pigs, and chickens. That was it.

00:03:15

Lage: Cattle and pigs to sell?

00:03:18

Brucker: To sell, right. Yes. Cows to milk. Cattle to sell at the Chicago market.

00:03:30

Lage: You must follow the discussions of corn-fed hogs with interest.

00:03:35

Brucker: Less, and less, Ann. I must say, having left the farm when I did, I left farming when I went to the university; it's a been a subject of some interest, but not intense interest.

00:03:50

Lage: Was there an expectation that you would continue in the farming?

00:03:54

Brucker: No, because my father, very early on, discovered that I had no aptitude for farming. He was very skilled, both mechanically and, I would say, biologically. He had wanted to be a doctor or a surgeon, but he had no schooling, because in those days boys went to work on the farm and stayed on the farm. I had no mechanical skills, none. He discovered that very soon. I loved to read, and so I was already classified as a reader and someone who-- I mean I did the work, but I wasn't good at it. I wasn't good with machinery.

00:04:41

Lage: And that, then, was essential.

00:04:42

Brucker: That really was a prerequisite. That meant that my father was not opposed to the idea of me going on to the university. I had a model. My mother's younger brother was the first member of either side of the family--my maternal and paternal--to go to the University of Illinois. He went in the early 1930s, and became a high school teacher. He taught agriculture. So that basically was the path that had already been plowed, and I was able to follow it.

00:05:20

Lage: So from an early age did your parents sort of give you the expectation that that's what you could do?

00:05:26

Brucker: No. I mean we literally didn't talk much about it. You know, I can't even recall conversations in which it was decided I was going to go to the university. My sister, who's older than I by two years, had gone off to business school, and then gone to Chicago. She also had left the nest, and decided to live in the city. She tells the story still that when she was lying in bed at night she would hear the trains--trains going from Chicago to St. Louis, and she told herself "Someday I'm going to get on that train and go to Chicago." She was determined not to be a farmer's wife. I didn't have any opposition to being a farmer. I think if I had had the aptitude--and I simply didn't. I did enjoy reading, and the life of books, even though we had very few books that I could peruse. The school, the one-room country school that I went to, had a library of maybe fifty books, and I read every one of them before I graduated and then went to my high school.

00:06:34

Lage: So the one-room school was up through the eighth grade?

00:06:37

Brucker: Through the eighth grade, yes. The high school in the nearby village of Cropsey, which was a mile and a half away from my farm, had forty students and four teachers, but a bigger library, and I read all the books in that library. So I read everything I could. We subscribed to local newspapers, and the radio was an important part of information and also a part of our entertainment on the farm.

Family Life and Early Education

00:07:10

Lage: Did your parents get in--was there a civic life to get involved in? I was going to say, did they get involved in civic life?

00:07:17

Brucker: I would say not really. Beyond the family was the church. My parents were Lutherans, and we went to a local Lutheran church, and that was the one dimension beyond the farm and the family. My father was mildly interested in politics, but not intensely. He certainly never thought of running for office. I think he was on the school board of the one-room country school--he and two other farmers who made decisions about who to hire among the teachers. I had four teachers in the school. One teacher, particularly influential, her name was Beryl Thomas; she was a country girl, and from a farm family. She taught me in my last years in grade school, in the mid-1930s. I learned an awful lot from her. In fact she's still alive and I saw her just a few years ago. About ten years ago, at my mother's ninetieth birthday party, she came. So we had quite a reunion, talking about school days. The high school was--it widened my horizons. I took courses in Latin, in history, in algebra and geometry, sort of the basic courses that it offered. It was not an elaborate curriculum, but basic stuff. Reading, and writing, and arithmetic, and that was largely it.

- 00:09:01
Lage: I would think you as a reader would have just been starved for things to read. Did your family have any kind of library?
- 00:09:07
Brucker: No. we--as I recall the family library consisted of a medical book and The Bible. That was basically it.
- 00:09:16
Lage: Were you a Bible reader?
- 00:09:17
Brucker: I read the Bible, yes. I read it all the way through, I mean there's some pages to read. I read farm magazines, I read advertisements, you know, I can't explain it. Reading was--obviously in my case, while I don't idealize--or idolize the farming life, it had its great attractions. I think the greatest attraction was the freedom to wander around the farm. With 240 acres you can really get lost and escape control to a degree. But it was also boring. I mean I really do recall being bored. Doing the same thing day after day, month after month, year after year. I was very interested in sports. I was passionately interested in sports even though I am a very bad athlete, or was a very bad athlete. I became a passionate follower of the Chicago Cubs, and I still am.
- 00:10:21
Lage: This is via the radio?
- 00:10:22
Brucker: Right, the radio, exactly.
- 00:10:24
Lage: And you still follow them.
- 00:10:25
Brucker: And I still follow them. But I mean, that's pathetic. The Cubs, who have never won a pennant in--or never won the World Series since 1907, I believe. I liked to compete in sports and played basketball, baseball--
- 00:10:42
Lage: Was this in high school?
- 00:10:42
Brucker: In high school. We even played some softball in grade school. So I've always had that. I was very competitive, even though as I say, I was not a good athlete, but I loved to compete in sports.
- 00:10:57
Lage: And were there--was there a society of boys in the area that got together?
- 00:11:03
Brucker: The society was largely my cousins. That is to say, my father had four of his siblings that had farms adjacent to ours and so I became--my brother and I, my younger brother and I, Perry, who's now visiting us, he's a plastic surgeon. So he did what my father wanted to do, he became a doctor. We had very close cousins who lived just a mile away. Some of

the moments, the greatest pleasure I recall was going with our cousins to the local swimming hole where we learned to swim. That was basically family but it was--we were very, very close.

00:11:46

Lage: You weren't out on your own?

00:11:47

Brucker: No, and of course classmates, schoolmates--you know, we played ball together. That was another important part of growing up.

Economics and Politics in the Depression

00:12:01

Lage: How about economically, how did your family fare in those years on the farm?

00:12:05

Brucker: Well, it's like everybody was poor. Nobody--I think that society--and I'm talking now not just about the farm and the family, but the community--was the most egalitarian society I've ever lived in. Nobody was rich, and nobody was starving. There was literally no unemployment. There was always enough work on the farms, and just about everybody worked on the farms. When I was growing up, there was very little migration from the farm to the city. In that sense, my--I and my brother, and sister were exceptions rather than the rule.

00:12:43

Lage: I don't think we put on this tape that you were born in 1924.

00:12:47

Brucker: Right. But growing up in the 1930s, it was the Depression, but we always had enough to eat because we grew our own food. There was always enough money to pay the taxes, and that was one of my father's concerns; to have enough cash to get the tax collector off his back. He even made enough money in the 1930s to buy eighty acres of land. Enlarge the farm from the quarter section, 160 acres, to 240. So we were--but, for example, there was no economic difference between people like my father, who owned their land, and tenant farmers. My grandfather, who lived on a farm very close to us, but he was a tenant farmer practically all his life, and his standard of living was no different than the rest of us. To retire, he bought a farm of eighty acres and moved some distance away from us. Basically to work the eighty acres, and he never--my grandfather, who was probably the biggest role model of my youth, more important in a sense than my father. A very gentle man. A very humane man. I admired him enormously, and he, like myself, had no mechanical aptitudes and he always farmed with horses. He would not ever buy a tractor. He never made the mechanical leap from horses to tractors.

00:14:24

Lage: Was this your father's father, or your mother's?

00:14:26

Brucker: My mother's father. We were closer to--my father had eight siblings, and that's a rather large and also rather contentious family. Lots of quarrels among the brothers. There were five brothers living in close proximity to each other, and the women, the girls--the sisters had got married and moved out. We were closest--my mother had a sister and a younger brother who went off to the university. So our closest family ties were with my mother's family. At least until 1935 when my grandparents lived so close, we were almost like an extended family.

00:15:11

Lage: Why was your grandfather a role model?

00:15:16

Brucker: Well, my father was a very austere, difficult, autocratic parent. I mean he didn't brook any opposition or resistance from his children, certainly. He was not a very warm person, and that was perhaps part of his upbringing. I think the critical event in my father's life was the fact that his mother died when he was eleven. In a way, I think he never got over that. The fact that he was distant, I think, and not demonstrative in terms of affection, was the fact that he was terrified that if he showed affection, he would lose the object of his affection. My mother was much warmer. Mothers tend to be. But my grandfather was like my mother. He was warm, and tolerant, calm, humorous--he even had a sense of humor, which my father didn't. So I think I just--I saw the way children can--this is someone that I admire, and I'd like to be like.

00:16:31

Lage: And he wasn't mechanical either, so that could make your--

00:16:34

Brucker: That's right. He was a very good farmer, but he loved horses and he loved animals. I can't say that my father loved animals. He used them and exploited them, but loving them--no. My father was not much into--I think he certainly loved my mother dearly and he loved his children but he found it very hard to show it.

00:16:58

Lage: Now it's interesting that you said that your family, the three children, were the only ones that left the area. Do you have a sense of why that was?

00:17:06

Brucker: It's hard to explain. I think it may be that my peers always found the life on the farm, life as farmers, and farmers' lives quite satisfying. There was no great demand to leave and there were jobs and opportunities. What happened was that boys grew up, worked for their fathers, then at a certain point, would get married and start their own farm.

00:17:43

Lage: They'd have to have some cash to buy or--

00:17:45

Brucker: Or usually with support from their parents. Sometimes the parents might-- I mean a lot of the farms, a lot of the land, was rented, and there were tenant farmers. Then there was always some movement, so there were opportunities. There were opportunities--I would say that the migration really started after World War II. That's when, in fact, there were too many bodies for the local economy. On the other hand, an interesting thing--when my

father retired from the farm just after World War II, he hired as a tenant farmer someone that he knew from the local church. This man and his son have taken over and lived on our farm for fifty years. The son, who's now just bought the farm from us, from my siblings and myself, had four sons and they all want to be farmers. They're all working basically as farmers.

00:18:48

Lage: In the same mold--

100:18:49

Brucker: In the same area. They all live very close together, which suggests that there are attractions. But by the 1960s in particular it became clear that a lot of children were going to have to get jobs elsewhere. So they had moved to Chicago, or to Bloomington, or whatever. To nearby towns, or far away--one of my cousins--would be my second cousin, the son of my first cousin--became an airline pilot. That's the sort of thing that people were doing.

00:19:28

Lage: Were there people in the high school that encouraged you to go to college--teachers?

00:19:33

Brucker: You know I do not recall that any of my teachers urged me to go to college.

00:19:39

Lage: They must have recognized that you had a little different bent than--

00:19:43

Brucker: If they recognized it they certainly to my knowledge did not articulate it. I don't recall--I mean I knew them, I admired them, I learned a lot from them. There were two, three men in particular--three of my male teachers, and two female teachers that, certainly, I admired and learned from. I do not recall any of them ever saying--they must have asked, "What are you going to do?" when I graduated. And I'm sure I said, "I'm going to the university." The university was only fifty miles away. So that was, in a sense, close enough that it wasn't as though I was going into another world. But I do not recall any specific encouragement to say, "Go, you have a future out there."

00:20:31

Lage: And you don't recall that your parents pushed--

00:20:34

Brucker: I don't recall that my parents pushed, no. In fact I give them enormous credit for that. They never suggested how I should live my life. That was true of their relations with my siblings. I think my father was particularly pleased that my brother went to medical school, because he did admire physicians and surgeons. I mean he regarded those people as quite special. He certainly admired them more than he admired ministers, or than he admired bankers, or shopkeepers. Also because of his own yearning, which he never articulated. He never said, "God, I wish I could have gone to medical school."

00:21:16

Lage: How did you know all that?

00:21:18

Brucker: The way he--he liked to operate on us. [laughter] He loved to operate on farm animals. He was very good at curing their--at curing them. But he just made it very clear that he was comfortable with knives and tweezers, and that he was good at it. He also was a self-taught musician. He taught himself to play the violin and the banjo. He was good with his hands. There's no question, I know that listening to him talk about my brother, after my brother had gone to medical school. He had gone to see--when he became a plastic surgeon, my brother would show him before and after. After he had repaired a cleft palate, or after he had repaired some problem with hands, or the kind of surgery that he did. My father would just take enormous pride in that.

00:22:25

Lage: To get back more into the Depression era, did your family--were they political, did they have opinions--

00:22:33

Brucker: They certainly had. I know that my father voted for Roosevelt in 1932 and again in 1936. He was, my father, politically very conservative. He never voted for Roosevelt after 1936. I think he thought a third term was bad, and his politics became quite conservative, unlike my own, which were then--Franklin Roosevelt was my hero in 1932 and I've been essentially in that persuasion ever since. But my father, no.

00:23:10

Lage: But he did vote for him the first two terms?

00:23:11

Brucker: He did vote for him. I still remember--it's one of the fragments of conversation that one remembers as a child, in 1936--I remember walking with my grandmother, my mother's mother, and she said that she was going to vote for Roosevelt because she said she thought he tried to do something for the farmers. In that sense, she had a good sense that Roosevelt was pro-farmer to the degree that the Republicans were not. Of course, that's been true ever since.

00:23:50

Lage: Was your father a Republican who voted for Roosevelt twice?

00:23:52

Brucker: You know, I'm not sure. He never talked about who he voted for in the 1920s. I suspect he probably voted Republican, but then the Depression came and by 1932 he just thought that we needed some change. He was generally supportive of--he favored, for example, the Roosevelt administration's plan to fix the price of corn at thirty-five cents, which was about ten cents more than the market price. He was quite happy to take the extra ten cents, and he was not at all unhappy about getting payments for not growing crops. He supported that program.

00:24:37

Lage: And how about your mother? You haven't mentioned her political views.

00:24:39

Brucker: She was totally apolitical. My mother was a very pious woman. She was a devout Lutheran, and that, for her, was what mattered. Politics was something she accepted. I do remember one case when she and my father--my father used to tell my mother how to

vote, but on one issue they voted differently. That was whether or not the local town of Cropsey could have a tavern or not. My father favored that because he said, "If they don't drink in Cropsey they're going to go to Fairbury or they're going to go to Colfax and drink." My mother was really so opposed to alcohol and she was such a Prohibitionist that she voted against it. Her side won. Cropsey never had a tavern.

Life in Rural Illinois

00:25:30

Lage: How many people lived in Cropsey?

00:25:31

Brucker: Two hundred twenty, two hundred fifty. It was a tiny little village. It had a railroad, which was the reason for its existence. It had a barbershop, a hotel, when I was growing up, two grocery stores, a bank, a meat market, and a kind of place where you could go get ice cream, candy bars, and a garage. The big item in the town was a grain elevator. It was a place where the farmers brought their grain to sell.

00:26:04

Lage: The railroad picked it up?

00:26:05

Brucker: The railroad took it away. But now it's a sad commentary that Cropsey is a dying village. The schools have moved away. The high school is abandoned because of consolidation. There's almost nothing there. It's really very sad, and that's the fate of so many small towns throughout the Middle West and, I would say, the Great Plains as well. It's a tragedy because those towns were viable communities when I was growing up, but they are no longer.

00:26:41

Lage: Somewhere I read that Cropsey was near Normal. What is Normal?

00:26:46

Brucker: Well, Normal is the town--there are twin cities--the county seat of our county. We were on the extreme eastern edge of our county, so to get to the county seat, which was Bloomington, a town of about 30,000, it was on the main Chicago-to-St. Louis railroad. Normal was a twin city because Normal was the site of a normal school, a teacher's college. So they named--because the normal school was established there in the late nineteenth century, they called the town Normal. So Bloomington-Normal are essentially the twin cities.

00:27:22

Lage: So that was your closest metropolitan--

00:27:25

Brucker: Right, and we would go there not only if my father had legal business, or had to pay his taxes, but we would go there to shop. Then my father and mother moved to Normal when my father retired from the farm in 1946. That's where they lived from the mid-1940s until

my father died 1979, and my mother died in 1995, I believe. So they were there, they lived together another thirty years.

00:28:02

Lage: Your mother almost another fifty years. What did your father do all that time?

00:28:04

Brucker: Well, he had a garden. He liked to do a little carpentry. He would make wooden necklaces, and he would carve up human figures or animal figures. He contracted Alzheimer's in his last years, but while he was still both sentient and able to move, he would go down to his little workshop and work for a couple of hours. He was content. He made it clear that he never really enjoyed farming. I think he thought the work was too hard, and it was too unrewarding. Again perhaps because of his dreams of what he would have liked to have been. So he didn't mind retirement. In fact, he retired in 1946, when he was only in his late fifties. But my mother always wanted him to retire. My father had had several heart attacks and she was concerned that if he kept on working--and also the fact that she just wanted him to relax and take life more easily.

00:29:20

Lage: Which doesn't sound like the farmer ethics somehow. So maybe he didn't quite ever fit.

00:29:25

Brucker: I think that there was something that didn't fit between my father and the farm and the labor of the farm. He was very skilled--I mean he would invent things to improve things on the farm. I can't go into any details, but I remember that he would think about--"Well, we need to do that"--and he would build something, some contraption that would get something done. He was always the first to buy a tractor and to use mechanical stuff for the farm. He was one of the first--even before we got rural electrification, he had bought a windmill to generate electricity. So we had electricity before the RFA came through with rural electrification. So he was always eager to exploit new technology.

00:30:22

Lage: Was he early to get a car?

00:30:24

Brucker: He was very early to get a car, and to learn to drive. Early to get a tractor, and to use tractors.

00:30:31

Lage: What kind of a car did your family have?

00:30:34

Brucker: Well, I remember we had a Dodge, and we had a Plymouth. Those are the two cars I remember growing up with.

00:30:42

Lage: You got to drive them.

00:30:44

Brucker: We got to learn to drive. I learned to drive by driving our truck, which was a Ford truck, around the farm. Just practicing on the roads that led to our farm. I got my driver's license I guess, before I went off to college.

Mother's Lutheran Beliefs

00:31:02

Lage: Now just one more and maybe we'll get you off to college. You mentioned your mother was a devout Lutheran. What does that entail?

00:31:09

Brucker: Well, it meant she went to church and she prayed. She was a true believer. She was quite distressed when she realized that I was not of her persuasion. After I went off to college I did what so many young men do, I think: I abandoned my faith. Although I never made a point of talking to her about it, she realized that this had happened. I know it upset her, but she didn't ever discuss it with me. I know she talked to my sister about it. My sister is a serious Christian, and while she grew up as a Lutheran, she is now a Seventh Day Adventist. She switched denominations to a degree, although still accepting Christianity. She's still very serious about it. I don't think my brother is a--he may be a believer, we don't talk about it, I could ask. I know he did put his children into Christian schools. So that would suggest, or perhaps it was his wife who insisted on it.

00:32:29

Lage: As long as you were at home though, did you go to church?

00:32:33

Brucker: When I was at home I went to church, and indeed whenever I visited my mother after she moved to the city I would go to church with her on Sundays. You know, the amenities.

00:32:47

Lage: Did you question, as an adolescent at home?

00:32:50

Brucker: I don't think I did, and I really can't explain the process. I would like to say this about my non-conversion: that it was practically painless in the sense I did not agonize over the loss of faith as a lot of people do. It was partly, I think, being introduced to--when I was in college--being introduced to students who had abandoned their faith and become very secular, and I think just doing a lot of reading, but without deep thought.

00:33:31

Lage: You didn't agonize--

00:33:33

Brucker: I didn't agonize. No. That may be a flaw in my character. I will accept that.

00:33:38

Lage: All right. [laughter] Did your mother, she didn't believe in drinking it sounds like--these taverns--

00:33:44

Brucker: No she didn't believe in drinking. She told stories about her mother--my grandmother's father ran a boarding house in a mining town not too far from where we lived. My poor grandmother had to go to the local tavern to get buckets of beer for the miners back at the boarding house. You could imagine, my grandmother really was a Prohibitionist and my mother simply bought that. Also, it wasn't that there was much drunkenness in that

society as there was almost no crime. But there were always stories about a farmer who drank too much and neglected his farming duties and neglected his family. These would be tales--and I remember my mother and her sister would talk about so-and-so, these things happening, isn't it horrible. She did allow, I mean my father used to make wine out of the grapes that he grew, and as he got older, he would have a small glass of whiskey at night to help him sleep. This didn't bother my mother.

00:34:56

Lage: Medicinal.

00:34:58

Brucker: Medicinal. Exactly. I remember when she was a widow I would go visit her. I would always take her out to a restaurant, and I would say, "Mom, would you like a glass of wine?" She would say, "Yes, I'd like a glass of wine." So her opposition had melted over the years. She was willing to accept the fact that drinking wine was pleasurable. When we were growing up, we never had any alcohol in the house, except my father would have a bottle of whiskey so that whenever he got a cold he would drink some of it. There was no cocktail hour *Chez Brucker*.

00:35:34

Lage: [laughter] What about keeping the Sabbath?

00:35:40

Brucker: We certainly didn't work except for taking care of the livestock. I don't even recall that we ever--some of the farmers would work during the harvest season, getting the harvest before rain, they worked on Sunday, but I don't recall that we ever did. Sunday was the day of rest.

00:36:04

Lage: Could you do things like play cards on Sunday?

00:36:07

Brucker: The Lutherans were not opposed to alcohol, they didn't oppose beer drinking, obviously not in excess. They had no, unlike so many Christian sects, they had no opposition to going to movies on Sunday or playing cards. In fact, we played a lot of cards. I remember there would be church socials where there would be card playing. This was something that nobody had any opposition--I mean the preachers didn't--it was something that was just accepted. There's not a--unlike, I think the Methodists, and certainly some of the fundamentalist sects that are really rigid about this. The Mormons too, I believe.

00:36:50

Lage: Was the community mostly of German descent and Lutheran?

00:36:53

Brucker: Mostly. There were some, there was a tiny minority of Swedes, and there was a contingent of Anglos--of English settlers who had obviously probably moved from the New England states as a general migration to the West. I would say that of our neighbors, about seventy percent were German, and about thirty percent were Anglos. There was an Amish community near us. The Amish of course, were Mennonites. They were--I mean the serious Amish wouldn't ride cars, or use electricity, but this Amish community was not--how should I say it? They fell by the wayside. They were seduced by the trappings

of modernity. The young men drank, and the elders would buy cars and tractors, and do all those sort of things that the Amish--the serious Amish--say in Pennsylvania or in Indiana, for example, would not do. There are very serious Amish communities, serious in the sense that they really do oppose all the trappings of modernity. Won't drive cars, use horses, won't use electricity, won't have radios, that sort of thing.

00:38:22

Lage: [laughter] But your Amish were not that much different--

00:38:25

Brucker: You know I'm not even sure that the Amish church in Cropsey exists anymore. I think the congregation just disintegrated.

Prelude to World War II

00:38:31

Lage: Well, is there more to say about that kind of upbringing and background, and how it might have affected you?

00:38:40

Brucker: No, I would just try to summarize by saying that it was a mix--I really did have a happy childhood. I was certainly--I felt secure in my family, and in the community. I was also eager to leave. So for me, 1941, and going to the university was a very big step, and a new life.

00:39:06

Lage: And you went in the fall of 1941?

00:39:07

Brucker: 1941, just three months before Pearl Harbor.

00:39:11

Lage: Was the community, and were you yourself, aware of the war brewing?

00:39:15

Brucker: Very much so. I remember, and this is something my father--who generally had opposed America going into World War I--my father, and I remember listening to the radio, and he would hear shortwave from Germany of Hitler's speeches, and my father understood enough German, and he would say, "That man is scary." He really accepted the fact that this was a very dangerous man. So he was not opposed to going into World War II.

00:39:52

Lage: He was opposed to World War I.

00:39:54

Brucker: He was, I think he thought, as a lot of German-Americans thought, that the United States had been manipulated into helping Britain, and he was never very fond of the British. I think he thought--then, there was a lot of anti-German sentiment in that area. There were people--people were hostile to the Germans because they thought the Germans were loyal

to the Kaiser. But World War II was just totally different. I mean there wasn't really any opposition. I think there probably was some opposition, but once the war began, once Pearl Harbor, you know, then my father was certainly a strong supporter of the war. He didn't object when I enlisted.

00:40:38

Lage: So you heard these shortwave--

00:40:40

Brucker: Yeah, I remember hearing that shortwave, that you would sort of get sound, then fade out and then it would come back again. They would broadcast Hitler's speeches in German. Then William L. Shirer would interpret what Hitler was saying.

Early Intellectual Interests and Influences

00:41:01

Lage: Did you feel much identity as a German-American?

00:41:05

Brucker: I felt almost none. It's funny, my heroes were--growing up and reading history--I had a passion for the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. I really enjoyed reading about them. Also World War I. For me the British and the French were the heroes and the enemies were the Germans because of World War I. I had absolutely no--in fact I learned some German in college, but I never really enjoyed the language. I never was very good at it. I didn't really read it easily. I never had any sympathy for the Germans, particularly under the Nazis. That certainly reinforced my anti-German feeling. No, the Germans were not--they were on my bad list. [laughter]

00:42:07

Lage: I read--you mentioned the Civil War--I read the freshman paper you gave me about Beauregard being your hero, now did that--this was a Confederate general. What kind of book was this?

00:42:19

Brucker: It was the name that attracted me: Pierre Gustave Toussaint Beauregard. The only thing I can think of. I mean it's so absurd. Why not Robert E. Lee? Now there's a heroic figure, if I wanted to go for the Confederates, but I read a lot of history growing up--

00:42:39

Lage: What kind of books were in your library?

00:42:43

Brucker: There were the histories of the Revolutionary War, histories of the Civil War. I read as much as I could get my hands on of American history. Then I started to read European history, and I remember that as a freshman in high school we took a world history course, from the Near Eastern civilizations to the twentieth century. I remember that this was the course that really interested me. When I went to the university, the course that I most remember was, again my first semester, the course in modern European history. It was

taught by a man who became a very close friend and mentor. His name was Raymond Stearns. He was a Harvard PhD who taught at the University of Illinois for many years. He was probably one of the most influential figures in my professional life because he gave me advice, and he also suggested that I apply for a Rhodes Scholarship which was another big moment--because had he not done so I would never have thought of applying. My life would have been very, very different.

00:44:00

Lage: That was a key thing, a big thing. But you connected with Raymond Stearns early in your freshman year.

00:44:08

Brucker: My freshman year, and then when I came back to the university after the war, he was still there, and we got to know each other and we became very close. I took his courses. He advised me about the Rhodes. So, he was a very important influence. I also wrote a Master's thesis under his supervision.

00:44:32

Lage: He was a Harvard PhD?

00:44:33

Brucker: He was a Harvard PhD. His interests actually were not continental European history, it was in English history. He wrote his doctoral thesis on a Puritan preacher named Hugh Peter. Then he got interested in the history of American science. His last book was a history of science in America, of colonial science. Very nice man.

00:44:54

Lage: Was he much older?

00:44:56

Brucker: Well yeah. Let's see, he was probably in his mid-thirties when I first knew him, perhaps even forty, and I was twenty. So twenty years difference.

00:45:09

Lage: He was still a young professor.

00:45:10

Brucker: But he was still a young professor; a generation of difference.

University of Illinois, 1941-1943, Influential Professors and Courses

00:45:14

Lage: Tell me about the University of Illinois, 1941.

00:45:19

Brucker: Well, it was a large university, had about 14,000 students. It was the only state university. Since then there have been branches in Chicago, Carbondale, and other places. It was for me, a totally new world. It was urban, it was academic, it was intellectual. Champaign-Urbana, the town was, I mean the city--again twin cities--was not much different in terms

of size and amenities than, say, Bloomington-Normal. But it was the university, and that made a big difference. I just loved it. I found that this was the life I wanted. It made it very clear--

00:46:06

Lage: It didn't take you long to think about this as a freshman?

00:46:08

Brucker: It didn't take me long to think that this is the world that I want to be a part of.

00:46:16

Lage: Was it a traditional college? Like I think of it being now: Big Ten sports, and fraternities.

00:46:26

Brucker: Yeah it was in that sense. Fraternities, sororities, which I never joined even though I was invited once. Football, basketball, these were big things. Also, the agricultural school was the large, most, the biggest I think in terms--because it was essentially there to train high school teachers in agriculture; to promote agriculture in the state. It had a respectable law school. It had some very, very good people in the sciences, in physics and chemistry. In the humanities, I would say that it was not all that distinguished. The history department --even though I took a lot of courses from a lot of professors, I would have to say that they were, as a group, not brilliant scholars. In fact, not many of them were scholars. Most of them had decided that just keeping up and doing their teaching was sufficient. There was no need to extend their minds and go out and struggle to write a book. I certainly learned a lot from them. I'm very, extremely grateful particularly to Ray Stearns because he was a very important person in my life. I really admired him and I enjoyed working with him.

00:47:56

Lage: Bill Bouwsma had rather strong opinions about the University of Illinois, that would be postwar--

00:48:02

Brucker: That was postwar, and he, of course, I think he would agree with me about the general quality of the faculty. He was, of course, happy to have any job, as we all were.

00:48:22

Lage: He was looking at it as a young professor, and you as a young student.

00:48:25

Brucker: I was a student, exactly. But I realized the difference between the faculty at the University of Illinois and a faculty where intellectual activity was intense and competitive. When I went to Oxford, I could see the differences between the motivation and drive and the demands of a world-class university. Illinois, at least in history, was not a world-class department. Although it certainly had some very fine scholars. I think today, it is considerably better than it was then. There were professors in their fifties and sixties that had gotten tenure and life was comfortable; there just didn't seem to be any spark or any drive in them.

00:49:17

Lage: They didn't publish much?

00:49:18

Brucker: And they didn't publish much.

00:49:20

Lage: Now was Raymond Stearns an exception?

00:49:22

Brucker: He was an exception, yeah. He was a serious scholar. There was an ancient historian named Joseph Ward Swain who was certainly very, very talented. A medievalist named Charles Odegaard who actually didn't publish very much because he got into administration and became--but he was also a good friend. He later became president of the University of Washington. So he left intellectual pursuits for administration. A very fine Latin American scholar named Charles Nowell who was actually a Berkeley PhD. He got his PhD with Bolton. He was an active scholar and a fine scholar. But I would say, and I won't name names, but there were not many like that. [laughter] I understood that when I went to Oxford and I really got a sense of the difference.

00:50:20

Lage: This is different.

00:50:22

I remember going to a lecture. A young scholar was giving a lecture on Napoleon. He'd just come back from Paris, and he had the newest book, the ink was scarcely dry. He was waving this book around saying that we all had to read this new book on Napoleon. You could see, okay, this guy is really into it. That's what scholarship's about.

00:50:47

Lage: This was at Oxford.

00:50:47

Brucker: This was at Oxford, yes.

Enlistment in the Army and Military Training at the University of Alabama

00:50:49

Lage: Now, let's just look at those undergraduate years. Did you get involved? The war came so quickly, that must have really affected--

00:50:55

Brucker: The war came, right. I spent that first year as a freshman, and then I went back for the fall semester of 1942 and had actually started a second semester when I was called to service.

00:51:14

Lage: So there were no student deferments?

00:51:16

Brucker: Well, I had enlisted. Soon after Pearl Harbor, I just went down and enlisted. I then waited for about a year and a half before I was called up. I was called up in the spring of 1943.

00:51:32

Lage: Did most of your fellows go down and enlist?

00:51:35

Brucker: Most of my fellows did not. Of course, eventually, they were all drafted. There were no student deferments. Unless you were in medical school, or some graduate students in physics who could help with the atomic bomb, there might have been some deferments in those areas. Certainly not where I was.

00:51:55

Lage: You were unique in going right down and enlisting?

00:51:59

Brucker: I don't think so. I think that there were a lot of students who did that. Most of my friends did not. They waited to be drafted, and we all went into the service at roughly the same time. So it would not have made much difference whether you enlisted or not. But all of my fellow students that I knew at Illinois, all of them, I think without any exceptions were in the army, or the navy, or the air force. Anybody who could walk.

00:52:25

Lage: And male.

00:52:27

Brucker: And male, right. [laughter] Well, even female, you know, WACs. That was not a big thing.

00:52:34

Lage: Was the student body fairly balanced male and female?

00:52:38

Brucker: No, I think it was more like 2:1, there wasn't--I think this probably had to do with society, and who would go off to the university. The pressures for men to go off so that they would get training were certainly greater than for women. At least in those years. The war made a difference, of course, and everything since the war has made a big difference. Now it must be 50-50. It certainly wasn't then. Maybe even more like 3:1.

00:53:15

Lage: Did the war change things on campus immediately?

00:53:18

Brucker: The first thing I remember was daylight saving time, so to get up for an eight o'clock class you got up in the middle of night. Otherwise, I would say, at least I didn't get a sense--I think the changes occurred after I left when practically there were no more males around. Then, of course, the army used the universities to take the men that they had drafted, or who had enlisted, and sent them back to these colleges to get more training while they waited for the second front to open. That was what happened in my case. After I was sent into the military, I was sent to a training camp in Alabama. Went there, and then was sent to the University of Alabama to take courses for the summer and fall and winter of 1943. Then we weren't kicked out of the bosom of the university until early 1944 when the second front was going to be opened. I was then sent to a camp in Louisiana and put into the Corps of Engineers.

00:54:29

Lage: Hmm, because of your mechanical ability?

00:54:32

Brucker: Not at all. [laughter] The whole plan was that the army wanted to have us have basic training and get us ready to shove us overseas for the second front. They weren't ready in 1943, they were getting ready in 1944. The whole plan was basically to put us in these cradles at the university, and also to help the universities by getting federal money to teach us basic things.

00:55:02

Lage: Was this something you learned later, or did you even realize it then?

00:55:04

Brucker: Oh, I learned this later. Then, of course, once the whole plan for the second front, already early in 1944, some of my colleagues at the University of Alabama were sent up into an infantry division to be trained. They were sent overseas, and they were at the Battle of the Bulge. Fortunately I was in an engineering unit and while I went overseas, I was certainly not in the Battle of the Bulge. So those months at the University of Alabama were basically--we were just treading water. I took courses in algebra, and geometry, and calculus, and American history. These were all courses that were supposed to teach us something so that we'd be better soldiers, but of course it was simply ludicrous. But it gave us something to do; I mean they couldn't have us just sitting around doing nothing. We had our basic training. The whole idea was that we have these guys and we'll just shunt them off into various units and various branches of the military as we think we need to.

00:56:21

Lage: Now what do you remember about Alabama? Was that a culture shock?

00:56:25

Brucker: Well, the South was a culture shock, yeah. This was my first exposure with blacks, and my first exposure with segregation. I don't recall that I was particularly upset by it, and I think we just weren't sensitized to the problems--that there weren't civil rights problems.

00:56:43

Lage: You really hadn't had much exposure to African Americans?

00:56:46

Brucker: I had literally never known a black, or met a black.

00:56:50

Lage: Even at the university?

00:56:52

Brucker: The university, there were so few of them, that I don't recall ever see--I mean there were a few, most of them were athletes. There were some few blacks who were at the university. So coming to Alabama was my first exposure to that world.

00:57:11

Lage: The student world was primarily white?

00:57:13

Brucker: Yeah, almost exclusively white. I mean I don't know what the statistics were but if the blacks had as many as one or two percent of student population at Urbana I would be surprised.

00:57:24

Lage: But, I mean at Alabama.

00:57:26

Brucker: At Alabama, of course the university was segregated. There were no blacks. We took courses, and we were all white. There were no blacks in our units because it was still a segregated army until Truman had changed that after World War II. There were no black units being trained there, they were all white. There were air corps personnel, they had a unit, but the rest of us were all in the army. We lived in fraternity houses, sorority houses, and ate in mess halls. Went to class, did physical exercise, some calisthenics, that sort of thing. That was our life. From, it was probably June, or July of 1943, until we went to Camp Claibonne, I think in March of 1944. So it was nine months of Alabama, not doing very much.

00:58:25

Lage: And Corps of Engineers, so what kind of duties did you have to perform?

00:58:30

Brucker: Well, we were sent to this unit which was a small unit of, I think, about seventy enlisted men and about ten officers. We were to be a headquarters of an engineering depot. That was our designation. We were a small unit, so we were being trained to run a depot. We didn't do very much in Camp Claibonne. In the summer of 1944, it was after the second front, we were sent to an engineering depot in Granite City, Illinois, where we were supposed to learn how depots ran. We didn't learn very much. I was assigned to the motor pool. I was driving trucks. That was my--truck driver. So I learned how to drive big, big, big army trucks.

00:59:27

Lage: You weren't using your intellectual abilities.

00:59:30

Brucker: The army didn't think really in those terms. They really didn't. So we were there in Granite City, and this is of course close to my family. So I wound up getting one leave in June, I believe it was. Actually between Camp Claibonne, on our way to Granite City, we were given leave to go see our families. So I went back to the farm. Is that right? Yeah, I went back to my father's farm. I met my sister, and my brother, and my cousins. I had about, I guess, two weeks of leave, and then I went back to Granite City. We were there from June until late September. Then we were sent to New York to Camp Shanks where we embarked to go overseas.

01:00:28

Lage: Had you been to New York before?

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Brucker: Never been to New York.

01:00:31

Lage: Did you have time to be on the town?

01:00:33

Brucker: No, the only thing I saw in New York were the wharves, the port. No, we didn't have any opportunity to explore the Big Apple. Then we got on this transport and sailed across the ocean to Scotland. To a port called Greenock, which is the port for Glasgow. We were put on a train, as soon as we embarked, down to Southampton and got on a small boat to cross the channel.

01:01:15

Lage: With great trepidation, or great anticipation?

01:01:18

Brucker: A combination of the two. I remember in my diary I wrote--I wish this would stop, to take a breather. Maybe this is a good time to stop, huh?

01:01:30

Lage: Do you think we're at a point where you've said enough?

01:01:33

Brucker: I think I've said enough about this and next we can get into the war.

01:01:38

Lage: Okay, we've built up to it.

II. MILITARY SERVICE IN EUROPE AND THE PACIFIC, MASTERS AT ILLINOIS

[Interview 2: August 28, 2002] ##

Arrival in Paris, October 1944

00:00:03

Lage: Today is August 28, 2002. This is our second session with Gene Brucker. Do you have any thoughts on our last session?

00:00:15

Brucker: No. But that's because I can't really remember what we talked about.

00:00:20

Lage: [laughter]

00:00:22

Brucker: All I remember is chronologically we covered my youth, and my adolescence, and didn't we get down to World War II?

00:00:31

Lage: We did, we had you in fact--

00:00:34

Brucker: In the army right?

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Lage: In the army on a ship going to Europe. We talked about your various posts here in training and truck driving. That's what it sounded like.

00:00:47

Brucker: [laughter] So going to Europe on a troop ship.

00:00:49

Lage: So shall pick up with that and get the war story?

00:00:51

Brucker: Let's get the war, yes. Well, my unit--was a small unit, it was only about a hundred soldiers--had been trained to organize and run an engineering depot somewhere. We weren't told where. Our ship landed in Scotland at a port town called Greenock, near Glasgow. We got off the ship, and immediately got on to a train. It took us down to Southampton, in England, traveling all night. I remember getting off the train and walking through the streets of Southampton, which had been badly bombed during the war, and saw, for the first time, the ravages of war through the port. Then we got on a small boat which took us across the channel to Utah Beach. This was in October, so it was three months after the troubles.

00:01:50

Lage: October; give me the year again.

00:01:54

Brucker: This would have been October of 1944. So, three months after the invasion, when everything was quiet in Normandy except a lot of damage we could see. I think we spent maybe two or three days camped out, and then we were given transportation to go to Paris where somebody would decide where we were to go ultimately. We traveled by night to Paris in our little convoy. We got to Paris and were put up in hotels in downtown Paris. That was my first experience with a European city, and it was just, it was a tremendous experience.

00:02:41

Lage: Even in the midst of this war?

00:02:43

Brucker: Yes, I mean there was no heat in our hotel. There was no hot running water; none of the amenities. We couldn't eat in restaurants, and that was the norm in France. You didn't eat in restaurants because there wasn't enough food for the civilians. But you could go and drink and buy wine. They had plenty of wine. So I remember going out at night with friends to cafes, and sitting around drinking bad red wine. Also just walking around the city. We were in Paris, and then we moved to one of the suburbs, where we were bivouacked. We were there altogether I think about three weeks. It gave me and some of my friends time to walk around the city.

00:03:27

Lage: How did it strike you?

00:03:29

Brucker: Well, I was just overwhelmed by it. I remember being in Notre Dame cathedral. At that time I had a great love for Napoleon, I have since regarded him as a monster, almost the equal of Hitler; but in those days I thought he was great. I remember walking through Notre Dame, and touching the pillars, and saying to myself that Napoleon could have touched this pillar. I went to the Eiffel Tower, walked around. Walked all over the city. Walked to the Marais. Again, we couldn't eat, but we could certainly drink and it was a wonderful experience. Paris remains one of my favorite cities. I'll just never forget that first impact.

Establishing Supply Depot in Marseille

00:04:12

Lage: These were things you'd read about?

00:04:14

Brucker: Yeah, read about and never seen or experienced. Then after--this was in early November of 1944--we got into a convoy again and drove down with all of our baggage and equipment to Marseille. Driving all night along route 7, which took us through Lyon and Avignon. We got into Marseille, where we--I can't remember, we spent a night I think in

some kind of--it wasn't a hotel but I think we had--in some kind of area where we had bunks and could sleep, but no amenities. Then the next day we were taken to our depot which was about ten miles north of Marseille near the Marseille airport. A town called Marignane. That was our home for the next nine months; through the winter of 1944-spring of 1945; through the Battle of Bulge, which of course we read about and heard about but didn't experience. And we were running this depot.

00:05:25

Lage: And what were you--what was the purpose of depot running? What were you supporting?

00:05:29

Brucker: We were sending engineering supplies to the Seventh Army, which was the southernmost American army. Basically, I would say its base, I believe, was not too far from Basel, on the Swiss border. That was the southern anchoring. This army was not as deeply involved in the fighting as the First and Third Armies under General Bradley and General Patton. They were farther north, and they were fighting the Germans. I think the Seventh Army didn't do very much. It just held the line of the southern anchor of the front--and of course there wasn't any invasion of Switzerland. You stopped there. So it was basically stationed along the Rhine. We sent everything we had. Lots of Bailey bridge parts, cement, and nails, electric wire. We sent them a lot of pierced steel plank, which was used to lay down the steel net for small airplanes in meadows so that the planes didn't get stuck in the mud.

00:06:37

Lage: What's the Bailey bridge?

00:06:38

Brucker: The Bailey bridge were these bridges that were assembled. Basically it was a sort pre-fab bridge, and they would be used to throw a bridge across a river if the old bridges were knocked down. They were all over Europe. I remember seeing Bailey bridges in Tuscany when I came to Italy six or seven years later. I spent a good deal of the time in the railroad terminal where the stuff would be shipped from America to Marseille to the port, and then put on rail cars and sent up to our depot. I had a job for several months to go and look at all of the stuff in the railway cars--instead of having stuff that was going to be sent forward land at the depot and then moved out again--my job was to say, "Take this right up to Vesoul," because we would get a requisition from the army base there that they needed so many things. I did that for several months, and then I was assigned to the motor pool where we were responsible for all the truck transportation. I was doing that through the spring of 1945 and the announcement--first of Roosevelt's death, which I remember was a big shock; and then the end of the war, which was a cause for celebration.

00:07:57

Lage: Was that something you saw coming?

00:07:58

Brucker: Oh yeah, we knew we were winning the war. It was just a question of when. I do remember, also, getting the news of Hitler's suicide; when he self-destructed. We were there through the spring of 1945 and then we were told that our unit was going to go to fight the war against Japan. This was not great news, but that's what you do.

End of War in Europe, Travel to South Pacific on *Lurline*

00:08:25

Lage: Did you think that this might be the end for you?

00:08:28

Brucker: No, I thought that, ok we had beaten the Germans, but that there were still the Japanese. So we were placed--it must have been in June of 1945--we were sent to a replacement depot, which was just a huge encampment of tents, an encampment that had been scraped out of the desert. Not really desert, but certainly dry terrain. We were there for about a month and a half I think, and then got on--of all ships, the Matson liner *Lurline*. You remember the *Lurline*? That was in July, or maybe late June or July, 1945.

00:09:11

Lage: It had been fitted into a troop ship?

00:09:13

Brucker: It had been made into a troop ship, which meant that a cabin that was supposed to hold two people, held fifteen. [laughter] We had bunks lined up--stacked up, you'd have five bunks going up to the ceiling. We sailed off on the *Lurline* through the Mediterranean, crossed the Atlantic. We spent one night in the Canal Zone. We were able to get off the ship and have showers and eat some good American food. Then got back on the ship again, and sailed off to Hawaii, where the boat stopped, but we were not allowed to get off because they were fearful that if we did, we would run away and never be found again. Then, got on the ship again and sailed out into the Pacific, heading for the Philippines, and halfway there, we received news of the dropping of the atom bomb. Our boat, the *Lurline*, simply stopped in the water; didn't move for about two days, waiting for orders, not knowing what to do. Finally, we moved again. We then sailed to Manila. This would have been in the late summer of 1945. We sailed into Manila Bay and saw the devastation of Manila during the fight in that whole zone. We were then sent, again, to another replacement depot. These were depots where soldiers were sent while people decided what to do with them.

00:10:48

Lage: What were the living conditions like?

00:10:50

Brucker: Well, they weren't bad. After all, we had tents and of course the Philippine summer was--well, I mean it rained quite a bit, but it was not uncomfortable. We played volleyball, and we had our three meals, and we would play softball. We would wander into the city of Angeles, a nearby town. Our depot was near Clark Field, so there was a big air force base there. I remember going with one of my friends to the air force base to see if we might be able to get on a plane and fly to China, which had just been liberated. But just as we were trying to see if we could negotiate a deal, the word went out that our unit was moving up to Yokohama. So we go to Subic Bay, get on another boat--it was an LST ["large slow target"], one of the flat-bottomed ships that were used to land in very, very shallow water, and then they could roll tanks and trucks right off. We sailed up to Yokohama. Meanwhile, we were hit by the tail end of a typhoon, and I remember our boat was really rocking in the very rough seas. I have memories of that. We eventually ended up in Yokohama. It must have been early October of 1945. We got off our boat,

and we were located then at a wharf right on the pier. Right on Yokohama Bay. We stayed in this wharf, in bunks, until we were able to build our own huts, which we did within a few a weeks.

Army Experiences in Postwar Yokohama. Interactions with Japanese

00:12:29

Lage: So you would take part in building--

00:12:31

Brucker: Yeah, and then we were involved in that. In Yokohama, the only job that I remember having--which was to go with a surveyor and we went out around the depot to survey terrain that had been literally devastated by the American bombing. Sort of miles and miles of burnt-out houses, factories--

00:12:57

Lage: Conventional bombing?

00:12:59

Brucker: That's right, this was part of--the air attack on Tokyo and Yokohama was devastating. Large hunks of that whole metropolitan area were simply flattened by fire. Could you imagine Japanese houses made out of wood and paper, how easily they would be burned? And they would be. I remember taking a Jeep one day, driving out into the center of this--getting out, stopping the Jeep, and as far as my eye could see in every direction, there were just nothing but piles of ash. That whole zone had been burnt.

00:13:33

Lage: Did this leave an impact on you?

00:13:36

Brucker: Well, I guess only in the sense that, well, we sure did a lot of damage here. [laughter] You know, we had the feeling then, as you could imagine, that we were, you know, that our cause was just, and that the Japanese were our enemies, and that they were very bad people. Although, I must say, that was certainly my attitude--when we first landed I was indoctrinated to a degree that the Japanese were sub-human. They had done all of those horrible things: massacred people, treated prisoners very badly. Within a week or so, I began to realize that these poor people were--that they had no responsibility for the war, and they were just trying to survive. They were so downtrodden, and so beaten, and their spirits were so--I mean the morale, you could imagine. On the other hand, they were human, and we worked with them. We hired ex-soldiers to do menial tasks in our depot. I won't say I got to know the Japanese at all well, but we certainly got a sense of them as human beings, as miserable as they could be. They were not, if they weren't innocent, they certainly were not war criminals. I can't say that I made friends with any Japanese.

00:14:55

Lage: You didn't have the language?

00:14:57

Brucker: Not at all. I do remember going into Tokyo on leave on some days and walking around Hibiya Park, which is right near the royal palace, and encountering elderly, well-dressed Japanese gentlemen, dressed in immaculate English clothes, who could speak English. Probably they had been educated at least partly in England or in America. I do remember one conversation with this man impeccably clad, with shining brown oxford shoes, immaculate shirt, immaculate--talking to me about how he had always opposed the war and he was so devastated by what had happened to Japan, but admitting that it was the fault of the military, and that sort of thing. I'm not sure I believed everything he said, but it's possible that he was telling the truth. That's one of my few contacts with Japanese. It was--I mean we quickly realized that these people were not going to rebel against us; they were not going to kill us. They recognized defeat, and accepted it; however grudgingly. The war was over.

00:16:16

I was in Japan, I guess about four months. I did a little traveling with one of my army friends. We went up to Nikko, which is a resort up in the mountains with shrines, many shrines. That's one of the sacred places for the Japanese. I remember taking a truck--we had a man, a German-Jewish migrant who had escaped from Austria, when Hitler had occupied Austria, and escaped to Russia with his family, a son and a daughter. He traveled all the way across Russia, and ended up, somehow, in Japan where he and his son and daughter had been interned in a camp up in the mountains where the Japanese basically interned foreigners. I remember there were some Russians in this camp. I was ordered by my lieutenant to take a truck up with the young man who worked at the depot to a place where his sister was still staying, and bring back all of their household belongings to where they were living in Yokohama. Both the son and the daughter spoke excellent English, they spoke Japanese, they spoke Russian, they spoke German; it was incredible.

00:17:46

So I went up--it was a dramatic trip because it was through the mountains and the roads were icy, but I had an army truck, and lots of gasoline, so we made it up there. I remember we loaded the truck up. I remember having breakfast that the sister provided. Then we drove back down to Yokohama and I found the place where the father had rented and then deposited all their belongings. That was an excursion which I still remember. Then in February, or perhaps it was late January, the news came--I was going to be sent home and demobilized. So, a very very brief trip in Japan, just enough to get some sense of an Oriental society. I got on another troop ship--

Soldiers' Reactions to News of Atomic Bombs

00:18:34

Lage: Let me just ask you, how did your shipmates and yourself greet the news about the dropping of the bomb?

00:18:42

Brucker: Jubilation. There were no qualms about this being a bad thing to do. One, we didn't know what an atomic bomb was. I remember it was a--we got the news on a broad sheet, just

two pages of news. One of our officers had a shortwave radio, so he heard the radio reports. But, again, the information about--this was just called a very devastating bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Nobody was saying what a bad thing to do. We all said "hoo-rah hoo-rah!" Then of course within a week there was a second bomb at Nagasaki, then the news that the war was over. This was all the information we got while we were still at sea. There was no qualms, no wondering about the opening up of an atomic age and what this might signify. This was just--we knew the war was over and that we would be going home soon. We knew also that we wouldn't be landing--we were told that we were going to land with the invading force on the shores of Japan, which we really didn't look forward to with any great delight, I tell you. [laughter].

Experience in Southern France

00:19:58

Lage: When you were in Europe, were you close to the fighting?

00:20:01

Brucker: No, we were far, far away from the fighting. I remember when we drove down from Paris to Marseille, I remember that looking off to the east, and we could see what seemed like flashes of artillery fire. In Marseille, the only sign of enemy action was a German plane that would fly up at night--I don't know where it was based, it might been in northern Italy--and fly around Marseille and attract anti-aircraft fire. It never did any damage, it never dropped a bomb, and was never shot down as far as I know. So that was the only sign. I guess the one moment that was dramatic and did somehow suggest that we were at war was while we were at Paris an ammunition train blew up and the sky was littered with fireworks. I mean it was quite dramatic. There were some of us who thought that the Germans had launched an air attack on the city, but it turned out to be just an ammunition train that had exploded.

00:21:08

Lage: Was communication good? How did you hear about the end of the war in Europe?

00:21:11

Brucker: By radio.

00:21:14

Lage: So you were getting--

00:21:15

Brucker: We knew it, yeah. I mean there was--the armed forces had radio connections from the very beginning, and people would tune in to hear what was going on. There was this one story that I remember. In our headquarters building--I wasn't based there--but our headquarters building where essentially all the paperwork was being done, and all the soldiers there had a map of Europe and they would have colored pins to indicate where the front was, and of course, it kept moving. We had German POWs who worked on the base. They were our prisoners and they did a lot of labor. At least one, or perhaps more, of the German soldiers refused to believe as the line kept moving ever eastward and then it crossed the Rhine into Germany--I remember that some of my comrades would say that

Hans or Fritz just simply doesn't believe that the war is being lost. Until, of course, it did end. In that depot we had German prisoners of war; in the beginning of our stay there we had Italian prisoners of war and they were finally released. We had Vietnamese and Senegalese French colonial soldiers as guards for our depot. We had a melange of cultures.

00:22:39

Lage: Diversity, more diversity than you'd had in Illinois?

00:22:44

Brucker: That's quite different. I remember a Vietnamese, these poor guys, these Vietnamese--I don't how they got to France, but eventually they did--and there they were. Also Senegalese troops who I do know suffered very much from the winter. Even though a Marseille winter is not an Illinois winter, still it is very chilly. You could see these poor, miserable guys in their uniforms freezing to death, or so it would seem. So we got a glimpse of many, many cultures.

00:23:22

Lage: So did that have an impact on you? That kind of, the whole experience--you haven't talked about your experience of southern France.

00:23:31

Brucker: Well, it did, certainly. Looking back, I would say that it certainly made me aware of the diversity of humanity. It made me aware of French--I mean I really got some sense of French culture. I learned to speak some French, although certainly I was not fluent. I had some French acquaintances that I would talk to. I got some sense of Catholicism, which I had never really had in America because my world there was practically all Protestant. I remember going to churches and seeing people at mass. I had a sense of the ancientness of French culture. I remember, right near our depot there were the ruins of an old feudal castle that had been built, God knows how many hundreds of years ago. It had fallen down and I was wondering whether the castle had suffered its damage during the French revolution. Whether the local peasants went with pickaxes, or axes and pitchforks to kill the lord, and tear down his castle. [laughter] I never did find out from the natives the history of that. You know it provided a sense--I remember seeing castles, and of course we had the opportunity in France to go to cities like Arles, and Nîmes, and Avignon; getting some sense again of the richness of that southern French culture.

00:25:10

Lage: So you did that when you were on leave?

00:25:11

Brucker: Yes, we'd always have days off, and since I was in the motor pool, that means I could take a Jeep whenever I wanted to wander off, and I used to do that quite a bit, and sometimes with friends. I remember going up with my lieutenant, who was the boss of the motor pool, a very nice man, and another comrade of mine. I remember driving up in a Jeep through Arles, to Nîmes, to Avignon for a day. Just visiting the palace of the Popes, which made an impact on my memory.

00:25:40

Lage: Did you get to eat in the local restaurants then?

00:25:43

Brucker: No, you couldn't have any food. Well, we did have--when we were at the replacement depot outside Marseille, waiting to go to Japan--we would go to a little seaport right on the Mediterranean called Niolon. We would go there and we would swim, and there was a local bar run by a Frenchwoman. We would bring our C rations and our food from our depot, and she would cook it or heat it up for us and provide the wine, so we would have nice meals. But, again, the food was ours and not theirs because the French were hungry. In fact I don't recall even--I remember drinking in cafes, but I don't even recall seeing Frenchmen having meals in cafes. There must have been, I just don't remember it.

00:26:41

Lage: Did you have people you were writing to at home?

00:26:46

Brucker: My parents, my sister, a girlfriend... actually two girlfriends. [laughter].

00:26:54

Lage: [laughter]. Did they know about it?

00:26:56

Brucker: I don't recall being in touch with people that I went to the university with. I may or may not have, I don't really recall. I made very good friends, close friends in my unit. People that I saw after the war; in fact I still see one of my army buddies who lives in Chicago. I've known him now for close to sixty years, and we still meet. In fact my unit still has reunions. In fact, next week, they're having a reunion in New Orleans, which I have decided not to go to. So the survivors still meet together, and we still have very close relations.

00:27:37

Lage: You said there are about a hundred--

00:27:38

Brucker: There were a hundred in our unit. I think now the numbers have shrunk to maybe forty. It's still a--

00:27:48

Lage: So you were able to develop real bonds?

00:27:50

Brucker: Yeah, exactly.

00:27:52

Lage: Did you get to read?

00:27:53

Brucker: I read a lot. Remember that the army provided free books. Not that we had a library, but somehow, I guess that it was our headquarters, would get books. Novels, paperbacks, history books. Overseas, there were no formal libraries that one could go to, but they, as I say, they had these caches of paperback books that I remember reading all the time. Yeah, we had plenty of reading matter. Onboard ship of course, we read, and read, and read. So yeah, I did a lot of reading. Pretty scattered; it wasn't that I was focusing on history, or

history of France, or history of Japan, or anything like that. That was not a problem. We had reading matter.

Leaving the Army and Reentering College, Master's Thesis, Rhodes Scholarship

00:28:40

Lage: Did you do much thinking about what you were going to do--

00:28:44

Brucker: Very little. [laughter] I'm sure I did some, and talking to army friends about what their plans were, but I had no clear idea, no clear agenda. As soon as I was demobilized, my parents were still living on the farm where I grew up. Although within a year my father retired and they moved to a nearby town. So I went home in, this would have been in March of 1946, and I remember driving down to the university just to see when I might be able to reenroll. I was told that the university had postponed the beginning of its spring semester so that GIs coming back would have a chance to go right back to school. So I did. I found a place to live, and within weeks of having been demobilized, I was going to class, and taking courses, and enjoying college life.

00:29:51

Lage: Was it a different experience for you now?

00:29:52

Brucker: I guess different in the sense that I could drink beer, and have girlfriends. [laughter] I had a girlfriend who lived in the nearby town. She was actually from the village that I grew up in, but she was working at an air force base near Urbana. I had more money.

00:30:14

Lage: The GI bill?

00:30:15

Brucker: Exactly, the GI bill. I still didn't have a car because you weren't allowed to have cars at the university. So I spent the next--from the spring of 1946--I got my BA in the summer of 1947, just a year and a half. I was taking courses all through the summer and the fall.

00:30:41

Lage: Did you change your focus or anything? You had already picked a major?

00:30:43

Brucker: I had picked a major in history, right. Then when I got my BA, I decided to stay on in graduate school and work for a Master's degree.

00:30:53

Lage: Thinking that you would go on for the PhD?

00:30:56

Brucker: I was thinking that probably I would. Actually my thoughts were that I was probably going to stay at Illinois. I had this very--a former professor of mine, Ray Stearns, whom I had known before I went into the army, was still there. I went back to see him and to talk

to him about my plans and my future. I took courses with him and with other professors there. I worked on my languages. I remember taking German, and I took one semester of French. I knew enough French from my experience in France that I only needed the sort of basic grammar. I spent more time taking German. I also did some work with Latin with my professors. Basically I took tutorials to work on my pretty primitive Latin. For my Master's degree I wrote a thesis on a French astronomer by the name of Bailly; Jean-Sylvain Bailly. It's a little like Pierre Gustave Toussaint Beaugard [laughter].

00:32:12

Lage: Was it his name that attracted you? [laughter]

00:32:15

Brucker: He was a distinguished astronomer who participated in the early stages of the revolution, and was chosen to be the first revolutionary mayor of Paris. So he had an administrative job. He had left a diary, which was really the basic source for my researches. I read through all the material that I could get my hands on, including some French newspapers.

00:32:41

Lage: Was his diary published?

00:32:43

Brucker: The diary had been published, yeah. I was working entirely with published material. I got my degree, my Master's degree, in the spring of 1948. Before that, in the fall of 1947, I had gone in to see my professor, Stearns, and he suggested to me that I apply for a Rhodes Scholarship. That had never occurred to me. I really didn't know what it was, what it signified. He said that he thought that I would stand a chance of winning this.

00:33:22

Lage: Had he been one?

00:33:24

Brucker: No he had not. But he knew about them. I guess I was easily persuaded because I remember applying, filling out the forms; and you needed to get letters of recommendation, and I remember I got them from my professors that I was taking courses with, from my old army commander, Colonel Woods, and from my local pastor, Reverend Grosz.

00:33:49

Lage: He didn't realize that you had left the faith?

00:33:51

Brucker: He had not, and I didn't tell him. I remember, this was what would have been in the fall of 1947 when I was in the Master's program, I took a trip up to Chicago for the state competition. It was organized--that the Rhodes district, in which they'd selected their finalists consisted of six midwestern states, and each state could send three nominees to the final competition. To my great surprise I was selected one of three candidates from Illinois. I didn't think I did at all that well--it was all oral interviews--I didn't think I did all that well.

00:34:39

Lage: Were they asking you questions about your scholarship, or--

00:34:42

Brucker: My scholarship; not too much about my character. They didn't ask me at all about my athletic prowess because I had none.

00:34:50

Lage: I thought that at that time--

00:34:53

Brucker: That's what I assumed, and I thought this would disqualify me immediately because--I could say I played high school baseball and basketball, but I was always on the second team. I think it was because of the war. They thought that if you fought in the army, that that was enough athleticism for us. I think they were really trying to find people that they thought would do well scholastically. The final competition was in Indianapolis. I was competing then. I think the district sent, I believe, six because I know that they had increased the number of Rhodes Scholarships to make up for the years of the war in which there were none at all. I think there were six from our--yeah there were six, out of the eighteen that had been assembled. So one out of three--to my great surprise, I won a Rhodes Scholarship. I was very pleased.

00:35:59

Lage: Did you have occasions like dinners?

00:36:03

Brucker: No, we had breakfast in both--I guess we must have had lunch too--both in Chicago and in Indianapolis. There was no banquet afterwards. I remember going back to Urbana and calling up my friends, and calling up my parents, and taking my college roommates all out to a steak dinner. That was my celebration.

00:36:29

Lage: That must have been quite an exciting turn of events.

00:36:33

Brucker: It really was. Of course I knew very little about Oxford as an educational institution except that it had this reputation. I did meet two faculty members at the university, one a chemist and another an engineer, who had both been Rhodes Scholars. I had dinner with both of them, and they basically instructed me on the whole system, that Oxford was really based not on the university, but on colleges. You would basically join a college, and the college takes care of you and controls your life and your fortunes.

00:37:09

Lage: Did you pick your college?

00:37:11

Brucker: You at least apply, and they suggested--I can't remember by what process--they suggested that I should apply to Wadham College, which I'd never heard of. I said okay, and I did, and I was accepted.

00:37:28

Lage: Why did they suggest Wadham?

00:37:30

Brucker: I don't know. I really don't remember. I'm not even sure that they had been to Wadham. That would make sense that they could say, "I was at this college, Oriel, or All Souls, or Christ Church, or Balliol." It could have been roulette, just spin the wheel. It was a good choice, because through a series of circumstances it got me into my career as a historian of the Italian Renaissance. That's another complicated tale.

Role of Fortune in Human Affairs

00:38:03

Lage: Let's stop just for a second. You don't want to stop altogether do you? I just see that the battery is low. [pause]

00:38:14

Brucker: I'm prepared to stop. It's a quarter to two, it's a good break--the odd conversation that led me into Italian Renaissance history. It's peculiar.

00:38:24

Lage: I'm going to repeat the statement that you just made [during the pause] that "I would be surprised at the role of fortune in determining a career." Keeping this in mind, has it affected how you write history, this belief in the role of fortune?

00:38:34

Brucker: Yes. I had written an article about three years ago for the Renaissance Society meeting in Florence specifically on the role of fortune in Italian Renaissance history, which is to say my sense of the importance of fortune in all human affairs. We float from accident to accident.

00:38:58

Lage: Maybe some people live their life more purposefully than others?

00:39:02

Brucker: I am prepared to believe that, but I would also argue that even those people who think that they're controlling their lives, don't always. That accident and contingency intervene even in the best-laid plans.

00:39:21

Lage: So next time we'll explore that and Oxford.

00:39:23

Brucker: We can talk about that and about Oxford.

00:39:24

Lage: Okay.

III. OXFORD, 1948-1950, AND PRINCETON, 1950-1952, FULBRIGHT IN FLORENCE

[Interview 3: September 04, 2002] ##

More on Master's Thesis about Jean-Sylvain Bailly

00:00:04

Lage: Today is September 4, 2002. This is the third session of our oral history with Gene Brucker. Now Gene, we had talked about Illinois last time, the war and then Illinois, and you mentioned your thesis, but I don't think we really talked about how you got into the French revolution and what kind of history were you writing at that time?

00:00:30

Brucker: Again, this thesis, which was my Master's thesis, was suggested by my mentor and good friend Ray Stearns. I took a seminar with him, a research seminar. He gave me a volume of Jean-Sylvain Bailly's memoirs that he had written at the time of the revolution. He found it to be a very useful source for understanding what was going on in those tumultuous days of 1789. I found it very interesting and Ray suggested that I use--write a biography of Bailly during his time as mayor of Paris. He was a distinguished astronomer, a member of the French academy, and was highly regarded by the monarchy. He also was elected as one of the representatives to go to the national assembly. There he got caught up in all the revolutionary fervor and became very much an advocate of the reformers who wanted to create a new regime. After the Bastille, and the creation, essentially, of a revolutionary government he was selected--I don't even remember whether he was elected or just chosen to be mayor of Paris. He was in that position for two years. His diary talked about all the problems which were manifold in Paris. There were problems with food supply, there were problems of order, problems with how to get along with the monarchy, and he described all of those; a very, very interesting man.

So I got into that and in addition to reading his diary I read all of the other sources I could find: newspapers, and diaries of other revolutionary figures. In 1791, he was expelled from office because he was not revolutionary enough. He was not radical enough for the Parisian, I guess I would call them the left-wing--the people who became Jacobins. In 1791, so he was out of office, that's when he wrote his memoirs, while he was out of office. Then he got caught up in the fervor of the revolutionaries, the extreme revolutionaries: the Jacobin terror of 1793-1794. He was a victim of the terror and was in fact executed in the fall of 1793. So I wrote this thesis, and my mentor, Ray Stearns, who was the supervisor, thought it could be published. He said that he would try to arrange for the University of Illinois Press to publish it, which in fact they did. So that was my first major publication.

00:04:11

Lage: And that must not have been too standard to have your Master's thesis published?

00:04:15
 Brucker: I think not, so I was very pleased. It came out while I was in England studying at Oxford; it was published then.

00:04:25
 Lage: Was that a usual thing for the professor to, more or less, not assign, but suggest your topic?

00:04:32
 Brucker: It was quite common, yes. I mean to say that they would ask if you were interested in this subject or if you have become interested in it. I became interested in it up to a degree but as I will talk about--when I was at Oxford I expressed my discontent with the history of the French Revolution. But that's the story of going to Oxford.

00:04:57
 Lage: Well, let's go to that. Because that's what we were going to do today, but I'm glad that we went back and got a little bit more about your Master's thesis.

Oxford Tutorials with F. W. Deakin and Cecilia Ady, Thesis on Machiavelli

00:05:04
 Brucker: Oxford was an educational experience for me. It was a totally different kind of environment by comparison to my experience, my undergraduate and graduate experience at the University of Illinois. The emphasis at Oxford in history was on British history and the undergraduate course was about three-quarters studying English history. I had no interest in studying English history. So I decided that I would not take an undergraduate course, that I would work for an advanced degree, a research degree.

00:05:43
 Lage: What was the standard thing? I mean, here you had an advanced degree already. Would it have been ordinary for you--

00:05:49
 Brucker: A lot of American students who became Rhodes Scholars, even though they had BAs from an American university, often took the Oxford Bachelor's degree because it was considered more advanced, more sophisticated, and more intensive. So I decided that since I was not going to work in English history, I would have to choose to do a research degree, and there was an intermediate research degree called a Bachelor of Letters. It was between getting a BA and getting a DPhil, which was a doctorate. I chose not to do a DPhil because I didn't think that I knew enough or that I was advanced enough.

00:06:29
 So I chose this medium degree, and I think that was a decision that was taken when I went to Oxford. My first encounter with Oxford dons was a man named William Deakin [F. W. Deakin], who had a very interesting career. He had gotten a BA at Oxford and was actually working on doing a research degree when the war came and he ended up a much-decorated military figure. He had parachuted down in Yugoslavia to be the liaison between the British government and Marshall Tito, and that was very exciting. When I

was at Oxford, he was also working with Winston Churchill, helping him write his memoirs: his history of World War II. A very interesting man, and he became a specialist in modern Italian history. He wrote a biography on Mussolini.

00:07:29

When I met him, I hadn't decided what I really wanted to do and he said, "Well, let's just do some reading." And he gave me assigned books that I had not read, books that I might have read, that I should have read. For example, books by Marc Bloch, a distinguished French medievalist and I, for some reason, I had never encountered his work. So for several weeks we just did reading and I would come and see him. An Oxford tutorial is basically where you sit down with your tutor, and you talk about what you had read. He didn't ask me to do any writing, which is probably just as well. Sometime during, I think, the fall term, I expressed my dissatisfaction with French history. That I didn't really find it all that exciting. He said, "When I was--after I got my BA at Oxford--I was going to write a thesis on Cesare Borgia. My mentor at that time was a woman named Cecilia Ady who was a fellow at one of the few women's colleges." And he said, "Why don't you go talk to her about possibly doing something with Italian history?" I said to Deakin, "But sir, I don't read Italian."

00:08:52

Lage: [laughter]

00:08:53

Brucker: He said, "But you read French don't you?" And I said, "Yes, I read French." And he said, "Well, you can master Italian in a few weeks." So it took much longer.

00:09:01

Lage: [laughter]

00:09:02

Brucker: But at that time I was malleable. I was willing to listen to my mentors, so I went to see Dr. Ady who was, at that time, retired. She was an elderly woman; very, very nice. She had been studying Italian medieval and Renaissance history for many decades and had published several books including a biography of Pope Pius II. She had written a book on the Bentivoglio family of Bologna. She'd written chapters for Cambridge Modern History. So we began to talk and I'm sure she found me, as an American, woefully unprepared and lacking knowledge and lacking linguistic skills. But she was very tolerant. Perhaps I was the first American that she ever studied with. So she was flexible, and accommodating, and generous, and supportive, and suggested that I write a thesis on the diplomatic career of Niccoló Machiavelli.

00:10:15

Lage: Now was this the standard? That you would have a thesis project?

00:10:18

Brucker: Yes, you needed a thesis project if you were a BLitt degree or a DPhil degree. And so I began reading the published letters of Machiavelli and I found them interesting enough. I remember that I didn't go down to Italy while I was in--or did I? No, I didn't? Yes, I did? I did go. [laughter] During one spring holiday I went down to Italy. I went to Florence, went to Rome, to Venice. So I had a very brief glimpse of Florence, and I did finish my dissertation in the spring of 1950.

While I was in Oxford, I met a girl who I fell in love with, and we got married. My first year, I had lived in an Oxford college, in Wadham, in a collegial environment. In my second year, my wife and I rented an apartment in the city, and actually, we had a baby: a son that was born during that second year.

00:11:26

Lage: Your wife's name, and your son's?

00:11:31

Brucker: Patricia and Mark. Yes, in the spring of 1950 I decided--you know, I was getting my degree--I realized that I was not going to be able to get a job in America with a degree that they'd never heard of. That I was going to have to go back to some American university and get a PhD if I expected to get a job at an American college or university. Once again, I turned to my old friend and mentor, Ray Stearns, who was that year on sabbatical, living and working in London. So I went down to see him, and said, "Give me some advice on what school I should apply to now that I'm working in this field of Renaissance Italian history." And he gave me excellent advice. He said, "The place for you to go is Princeton; they have the best people in the field." So I applied to be accepted at Princeton. This was in the spring of 1950. I was accepted. After finishing my thesis and having it examined by distinguished Oxford scholars, two men with Italian names--not that they matter--but they were very, very supportive. One was a distinguished historian named Bueno de Mesquita.

00:12:56

Lage: Had he been long in England?

00:12:59

Brucker: He lived in England--actually he had come from a Jewish family that had lived in Florence. His roots were there. I mean basically his family were Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century and came to Italy. Then, of course, during the Mussolini period--I don't know really the history of Bueno de Mesquita when he came to Oxford but he was a fellow at Christ Church College, and very knowledgeable about Italian history. He approved my thesis. The second reader was a political scientist, a political theorist, named Passerin d'Entreves. He came from Piedmont, so his family name really was French but he was--he studied Italian political theory. So they approved the thesis--

00:13:48

Lage: Did this involve an oral exam?

00:13:51

Brucker: It involved an oral exam. I had to wear my gown and cap and go in to meet these two distinguished scholars. We sat around and talked about my thesis for an hour or so--

00:14:03

Lage: And they both read it carefully?

00:14:04

Brucker: And they both read it, and discussed it. In some cases they disagreed with my interpretation but not to the point where they said that this was bad.

00:14:14

Lage: What was the attitude of the dons towards this young American from Illinois?

00:14:19

Brucker: Always, I would say, tolerance. Realizing that we Americans, by and large, did not have the academic or educational backgrounds of, say, most of the students who had gone to Eton or Winchester or, you know, good schools. I mean, there is no question that my academic training was inferior to that of the majority of the Oxford students that I knew.

00:14:47

Lage: In what respect?

00:14:49

Brucker: Particularly in that their knowledge of classical languages, particularly Latin, was so much better than mine.

00:14:54

Lage: You had studied it?

00:14:56

Brucker: I had studied it but certainly not to the degree that they had. They had to literally--I mean they absorbed Latin from the time they went to school.

00:15:05

Lage: Did you need Latin to study Renaissance--

00:15:06

Brucker: I needed Latin. It would have helped if my Latin were better.

00:15:09

Lage: Now what did you need it for?

00:15:12

Brucker: Well, because some of the documents, when I was reading Machiavelli, were in Latin. I had to work my way through, with a good deal of difficulty, this material. When I wrote my PhD thesis--that's a later story--almost all the documentation was in Latin. It would have helped if I had had several more years of training in Latin.

00:15:38

Lage: Did you feel that there was an attitude that might be a bit snobbish as well?

00:15:44

Brucker: Not really, no. It may again be because Americans were, after all, by Englishmen regarded as--we were their saviors. We had come to help them in their direst straits. Also, I mean, just an acceptance because Oxford was a cosmopolitan school in the sense that students came from all over, not just from America. Students from India, from South Africa, from Germany--well, not so many from Germany, but from European countries. Actually, there were a few German students. So they had had a lot of experience with dealing with foreign students and making allowances without diminishing their standards. So my sense of all of the historians that I met, and the students, were welcoming, tolerant, accepting, interesting. So I never felt, in any sense, that I was being looked down upon, or as someone inferior.

My mentor, Cecilia Ady--when I came to Berkeley and published some articles, I sent her offprints of my articles, and just a few months before she died--she was very old--she wrote back a very nice letter saying how pleased she was to get them. She said she lived through the achievements of her students. I thought that was a very nice thing to say and I really appreciated her sentiments. I still have the letter. It's a very moving document, she was already making references to old age, and I wouldn't say looking forward, but understanding that she didn't have long to live. A very, very nice woman.

Discipline of History at Oxford

00:17:35

Lage: Now what kind of history was being done at Oxford? What were these dons themselves producing?

00:17:41

Brucker: They were all, I mean the vast majority, were working, I would say, at the forefront of the discipline. Saying that, I would say still, that Oxford--that historians were aware of what was going on in the continent if they were studying--um--but of course English history was so much the important thing, I would say probably eighty percent of all the history fellows--history dons--were students of English history, medieval history in particular, but covering the whole spectrum. So they had their own historiographical and ideological battles that were fought. They were very active, very dynamic. It was a dynamic field. The historians of European societies--European countries--also were absolutely first rate. For example, Isaiah Berlin was a very distinguished fellow, a don, and a specialist in Russian history. Basil Sumner was another Russian historian. There were some very good French historians that I could have worked with had I decided to pursue French history. German historians, yes--so they were--and the difference, I just noted, dramatic difference between the fact that Oxford dons kept up in their field and read everything that was being published; by contrast most of the teachers that I knew at Illinois were not that eager to read and digest stuff, material that was just coming out.

00:19:15

Lage: Did they have an interest in social history and intellectual history as well as political?

00:19:19

Brucker: I would say less so; more in political and institutional history. The studies of the Civil War, I would say, medieval history was still largely administrative and institutional. There was some very good work being done in religious history, and history of medieval Christianity, by Oxford dons. My colleague Bob Brentano--who had a very distinguished career at Oxford--he came a year after I did. I never met him there. I met him when I came to Berkeley. He worked very, very closely--wrote his DPhil thesis--he became very close to one of the giants of medieval history, a man named [Frederick] Maurice Powicke. He wrote his thesis under another man whose name I don't remember now, but Bob was very close to all the medievalists there. He worked very closely with them, to a degree that I did not because I was doing something very different. I mean there were not that many historians at Oxford who were interested in Italian history.

00:20:27

Lage: What about in Renaissance history?

00:20:29

Brucker: Or in Renaissance--in fact there was literally no one. Soon after I left Oxford, Oxford appointed John Hale who became a very distinguished historian of Renaissance history. He died quite recently. We became good friends but I didn't know him there, I knew him later. He came and taught here in Berkeley for a couple of years in the early 1970s.

Interest in Renaissance Italy

00:20:57

Lage: Was Cecilia Ady one of the few Renaissance--

00:21:00

Brucker: She was, but had then retired even though she gave some lectures in Italian Renaissance history. She had a course, a special course, with a series of lectures, which I attended dutifully and took notes on. Italy and the Italian Renaissance were not high on Oxford's agenda.

00:21:17

Lage: What led you towards the Renaissance? I know your professor suggested "why not Italy?" But how did you happen to take him up on it?

00:21:26

Brucker: Because I did what my professors told me to do, or what they suggested. [laughter] I was very, the word I use is malleable. Like a lump of dough that is willing to be pushed in any direction. Beyond that I really can't say. I did get interested once I had mastered Italian and once I had become involved in Machiavelli's letters. I became very interested in the chaos, I would say the political chaos that was in Renaissance Italy. I was interested in Florence, interested in Florence's republican government and its history. That interest became even more intense once I went to Italy--to Florence--to work in the archives.

00:22:19

Lage: Now what about that trip that you took that you've almost forgotten about [laughter] in 1949 or 1950?

00:22:25

Brucker: It was a very quick trip. It was between terms at Oxford. It was actually my first year--between terms in Oxford. I had gone to Paris where--my first break I had spent in Paris which allowed me to go back and revisit that city that I was very fond of. My second break was in the spring of 1949 and I decided to go down to Italy. By this time I already had my thesis topic. So I took a train down to--I actually went down to visit my old haunts in Marseille where I had been during the war. Then I went down to Italy. I remember taking a train to Florence, and Florence was the first city that I experienced. It was May and the weather was glorious. I still have my diary of my first exposure to Florence. I spent a lot of time going to museums, and enjoying the food. Then I went down to Rome for a few days to see Rome just to get some feel of the city. I remember

that on the way back to England I went to Venice, spent some days there, and to Milan. I remember my last night in Italy I spent in Milan and then took the train back to England.

00:23:45

Lage: Did you do some language studies at that time?

00:23:47

Brucker: No, I was just a sightseer.

00:23:49

Lage: But you'd picked your topic by then?

00:23:52

Brucker: Yes, by that time I'd picked my topic. I still couldn't really speak Italian, although I could read Italian. The only foreign language that I felt I had any talent for speaking was French. But I have very, very pleasant memories of Italy. I must say that my few days in Florence when the weather was ideal, I thought this is a place that I could very happily spend some time in.

Return to US, Enrollment at Princeton, Work with Theodor Mommsen

00:24:18

Lage: That's important. Now what about the other British university, Cambridge? Did you have any ties--

00:24:27

Brucker: I had no contact whatsoever there, and no particular interest in going over to see it. I did go back to Cambridge after the war when my wife and I went back to England to see her family.

00:24:40

Lage: She was British?

00:24:42

Brucker: She was British, yes. I remember that we did do some touring of England just when I had finished my thesis and before our boat was sailing back to America. We borrowed my father-in-law's car and drove around southern England. We went to Winchester, and Salisbury; drove around through the southern counties. Had a very pleasant time then. Then we got on a boat and came back to America. We landed in New York in what would have been August of 1950. Before enrolling in Princeton, we went back to Illinois to see my family; I introduced my wife and baby son to my parents and my siblings.

00:25:29

Lage: There's a meeting of two cultures. How did that work?

00:25:33

Brucker: Well, I think my ex-wife--she's now my ex-wife--Patricia would have some thoughts about that. Her feeling was that it was something akin to terror. Coming to this strange

world and meeting people who spoke this strange American English. But she did very, very well, and we did fine.

00:25:56

Lage: What was your son's name?

00:25:56

Brucker: Mark. He lives here in Berkeley, and works for the Environmental Protection Agency. We then drove from Illinois to Princeton and were established in student housing in Princeton in the fall of 1950. I enrolled in courses with the man who was to become my mentor there, Theodor Mommsen, who had been hired at Princeton. He had been a refugee from Nazi Germany, even though he was not Jewish. But his family, his grandfather was a very distinguished Roman historian, Theodor Mommsen, a world-renowned historian of ancient Rome.

00:26:47

Lage: He won a Nobel Prize.

00:26:48

Brucker: I think he may have, yes. [Mommsen won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1902.] His grandson, Theodor, was one of my--well, I really came to love him. He was such a warm, friendly, supportive man. He also had had training in the ancient languages, in Greek and Latin, which is so far superior to mine. He tolerated my bad Latin. But I think there were times when he wondered how in the world this student had ever chosen to work in this field in which his languages are so poor.

00:27:27

Lage: Did you take more Latin?

00:27:28

Brucker: I never took any more formal Latin, no. It would probably have helped. By this time I had become more or less comfortable with reading, I would say, medieval Latin, which is much simpler than classical Latin. It's a lot easier to read. The syntax is simpler. The vocabulary is simpler. I mean the Latin of say, Italian notaries and political figures, which is something like the language that you read in the minutes of the debates in Congress. Not eloquent, just straightforward about "we should do this, we should do that." This was Latin that I could pretty much handle.

00:28:10

But back to Princeton; in fall I enrolled in courses. I took a seminar with Theodor Mommsen, I took a course in American colonial history, because the PhD program at Princeton insisted that you have a very broad range of courses in not only European, but also in American history. So I took American history. I took courses in seventeenth century Europe. Later on I took a course with a very distinguished medievalist, Joe [Joseph Reese] Strayer, who became, I won't say a friend--we were never friends, but he was a very good mentor, teacher; and I got to know the fellow graduate students. Princeton at that time was still overwhelmingly an undergraduate college with the emphasis on teaching undergraduates. It, of course, was all male. There were no women around anywhere except in the library. There were a few women serving on the staff of the library. [laughter]

Women in Academia in 1950s

00:29:10

Lage: No faculty women?

00:29:14

Brucker: No, I don't think there was a single woman in the Princeton faculty; there may have been.

00:29:17

Lage: Now what about at Oxford? Were there woman students?

00:29:20

Brucker: There were women students at Oxford, and there were Oxford [women's] colleges, but they were certainly in the minority, I would say perhaps ten or fifteen percent, because so many of the colleges were all male, and only women were allowed in women's colleges. There were four or five women's colleges to perhaps twenty or twenty-five male colleges.

00:29:41

Lage: Was Cecilia Ady an unusual--

00:29:44

Brucker: She was a fellow of the woman's college.

00:29:46

Lage: And were there many other women?

00:29:48

Brucker: There was a goodly number. For example, a very distinguished paleographer named Kathleen Major. Marjorie Reeves was a very distinguished medievalist. So there were--the barriers had been broken, I would say broken more effectively in England than they were in America. More scholars, certainly in history, who had academic posts. Princeton was all male.

00:30:16

Lage: And that struck you at the time, it sounds like.

00:30:18

Brucker: Well, it struck me in the fact that, you know, when I was at Illinois there were women students that one got to know, and there were women on the faculty too. But I had two very good, very pleasant years at Princeton.

PhD Dissertation Research under Mommsen and Joseph Strayer

00:30:40

After my first year I took my PhD exams, and I passed them. My second year at Princeton, I spent doing research on a thesis topic that Theodor Mommsen again had suggested to me. When he was a student--this was in the 1930s--he had gone down to Italy to work as a research scholar in medieval German-Italian relations because he was

working for the Monumenta, which was a great historical--*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* was the great medieval German foundation that sponsored research and did a lot of publication. So he then went down to Italy to collect documents in late medieval history of the German emperor Charles IV, particularly Charles IV who had twice come down to Italy in the mid decades of the fourteenth century. So he made an excursion there because he was technically the sovereign of much of northern and central Italy, because that was still part of the empire.

00:31:46

So Mommsen had gotten to know the archives in Florence and in other cities of central Italy, Siena, Viterbo. We talked about the subject, you know, the fact that I had written a thesis on Machiavelli. But he thought--again, I just simply followed his counsel and advice, and it was a very good thing that I did because he gave me a topic that I fell in love with. It was working on Florentine politics in the middle decades of the fourteenth century, at the time of the Black Death. So my second year, I was working through all of the printed material. Getting ready to go and research in Italy. The plan was that I would go in 1952, and I applied for a Fulbright scholarship, and I still remember the acknowledgement that I had been accepted. I remember going out and buying a bottle of wine to celebrate this great achievement because it meant that I, and my wife, and our son would go and live in Italy for at least a year, and hopefully for two years.

00:33:00

Lage: I want to cover a little bit more about Princeton. Is that ok?

00:33:05

Brucker: That's fine, sure.

00:33:07

Lage: About your mentor there, his style of teaching, how he ran his seminar--

00:33:13

Brucker: He had been, of course, trained in Germany.

00:33:16

Lage: What were the implications of that?

00:33:18

Brucker: It meant that he understood the seminar system, which the Germans had invented in the nineteenth century, which was something that [Leopold von] Ranke, you know, had created. So he was very familiar with sitting down with students, assigning books, and then having intense discussions about the text that we were reading. So that was--I was familiar with that because of my, actually my seminars I had taken at Illinois and then my tutorial experience at Oxford.

00:33:46

Lage: Did the Oxford system have anything comparable to a seminar?

00:33:50

Brucker: Not in the same way, no. There were some courses that one could--I know Bob Brentano did work like that with Kathleen Major studying paleography; studying basically again, how to read medieval texts. But I think this is basically--by this time the research seminar had been established in all major American universities, all borrowed from Germany. So

this was a comfortable ambiente for us, and I spent not only time with Mommsen but also with Joe Strayer in medieval seminars.

00:34:26

Lage: The same approach?

00:34:27

Brucker: The same kind of approach, we would have documents and we would read them and try to describe them and analyze them. He would sit there smoking his cigar, telling us when we were right and telling us when we were wrong.

00:34:40

Lage: Which one did that?

00:34:42

Brucker: That was Joe. Joe Strayer used to smoke cigars during his seminar. He was an interesting man. As I say, I never got close to him, but he was a very, very learned man and he was chairman of the department during those years. He was also spending a good deal of time down in Washington where he had a job working in the State Department working on the origins of the Cold War, basically giving advice to the secretary of state and the men down there. I remember he once complained about the flood of paperwork that he had to fight his way through. He understood about bureaucracies because he had studied them back in medieval France but he said you can't believe the mountains that bureaucrats have to fight their way through.

00:35:25

Lage: And his field was medieval France, but he was advising--

00:35:28

Brucker: His field was medieval France. He was the--because he had a very, very good knowledge of European history, and he had been actually in Washington during the war working certainly in one capacity or another. I also took courses from a man named Jinx [E. Harris] Harbison, who was a Reformation specialist. He was a Princeton man. He was called Jinx because that was nickname that he got when he was an undergraduate at Princeton. He was still being called Jinx thirty years later. Very, very nice man; warm, serious Christian. I've never encountered too many serious Christians among the historians in my acquaintance. He was one, and he actually brought his faith into his study, into his research.

00:36:19

Lage: Into his seminar also?

00:36:21

Brucker: Well, yes, but always in the sense of let's work on trying to understand Luther and the Reformation of the Reformers, and let's try to understand the Catholic position, the Popes, the theologians. These were subjects that interested him very, very much.

Fulbright Scholarship, Entering the Florentine Archives, 1952

00:36:50

Brucker: So I took courses from all these men, and then, as I said, my second year I was working on the printed documentation for my thesis on the Florentine Republic in the mid-fourteenth century. Then, when I knew that I had the Fulbright, I was very, very pleased, and my wife and I made plans for our trip to Italy. We decided that she and my son would go first to England while I was still working--I had a job, a summertime job at Princeton. She would go first to England to see her family, and then come down to Florence when I was established there.

00:37:27

Actually she came down to Perugia, where all the Fulbright students--before they were sent off to the various cities where they were going to work--spent a month in Perugia. Perugia had a university for foreign students. It was called the Università per Stranieri, and I took courses then--working on my Italian so that I could speak, if not fluently, at least enough that I could order a meal.

00:37:59

Lage: At this university.

00:38:00

Brucker: Right. That was a very pleasurable experience. We lived in a pensione with an Italian family, and got to know other fellow Fulbright students there, and became good friends with some of the people who were in our pensione. Then my wife and son joined us there, and we spent about two weeks in Perugia before we moved back to Florence. Then we found the apartment, actually outside the city on the road to Fiesole, a very, very attractive, I guess I would say, a villa area: an area that was not congested but was out almost on the edge of the built-up areas. We had an apartment where we got established.

00:38:54

Then I began the ordeal of my entrance into the archives, which I still remember--the anxiety that confronted me, because I had no idea what I was getting into. I had some idea of what documentation I was going to look at, but since I had never touched a parchment--I had certainly seen copies of documents that I knew I was going to have to work on. That first day, I remember, I ordered two volumes, and then I started turning the pages to see if I could make any sense out of the documents, and this was a problem. However, I got enormous help from a distinguished historian of Renaissance Florence. His name was Felix Gilbert and he was a very good friend of Theodor Mommsen. They had actually had a friendship that had gone back decades. Felix was teaching at Bryn Mawr and in fact he sat in on my PhD orals.

00:40:00

Lage: Which we didn't talk about and we should have.

00:40:02

Brucker: I got to meet him and to know him. He was then in Florence on sabbatical leave working in the archives. Since I had met him through Theodor, he was very, very helpful because he was working on Machiavelli. He was writing a book on Machiavelli. A book I might or might not have written. He was very, very helpful, and I remember going to him and

saying, "Sir, what is that word?" And he would tell me, he knew enough. His Latin was far better than mine was because he had the same classical education that Theodor had had. So my early weeks in the archives--this would have been in November and December of 1952--an unheated archive, there was no heat whatsoever. We would come in in our overcoats, scarves, and sit down in this very frigid air pouring over documents in a small, small room that had perhaps no more than, at most, a dozen people there working. Now the contrast with that, and my last years in the archives when there might have been a hundred and fifty people working was dramatic, but those early years--

00:41:12

Lage: And were the twelve people from all over the world, or Italian scholars?

00:41:15

Brucker: They were mostly Italian. There were a handful of foreigners. Felix Gilbert was there. Another American historian named Raymond de Roover was also on leave working there. These were the two foreigners. I got to know some English scholars who came to work. A man named Louis Marks who I still am in touch with, and Philip Jones. They were young English scholars, both of whom were working with Cecilia Ady. She had been their thesis advisor, and they had come down to work in Florence. I didn't get to know Italian scholars until somewhat later, but there were two young--one quite young--archivists whom I got to know, one named Roberto Abbondanza and he was very--

00:42:05

Lage: And did he work there?

00:42:06

Brucker: He had a job as an archivist, yes. He was a very attractive, young Italian whom I got to know and became very close friends with. He, unlike most--I would say that most Italian scholars and archivists were not eager to become acquainted with *stranieri*: with foreigners.

00:42:27

Lage: Of any stripe? Or particularly Americans?

00:42:28

Brucker: I would say of any stripe. There was just that reserve which was somewhat hard to break. The one exception was Abbondanza, and another exception was a very, very fine man and scholar named Guido Pampaloni, who was somewhat older. He belonged to an older generation, but he also was quite open to *stranieri* and quite eager to help them. Those were the two archivists that I remember with affection and warmth. Abbondanza is still alive. Guido Pampaloni died about ten years ago, but I became very good friends with both of them. I met one Italian whom I became very close too, although again his initial reserve was quite interesting. His name was Elio Conti, and he was one of the most learned and erudite historians in Florence. I think he probably knew more, had read more Florentine documents, and knew more documents than anybody in the world. I mean he was just awesome.

Attraction of the Italian Renaissance to Historians

00:43:30

Lage: So there had been people delving into these archives?

00:43:33

Brucker: Yes. Elio was certainly the most serious, and the most dedicated of Italian scholars then working in the archives. The striking thing about it was that there were so few. This was partly due to the history of twentieth-century Italy. During the Fascist period, the Renaissance was not a subject that the Fascist government was particularly interested in or concerned about. It didn't promote it. It was much more interested in medieval history and the communal period, and the--and in modern Italy. Somehow the Renaissance was just a period--I think it was because the Renaissance was connected with the subjugation of Italy after the foreign invasions of 1494, and Italians always regarded that period as not a particularly great period in Italian history. I mean they would see the Renaissance in terms of its cultural achievements, but that its political history was pretty desolate.

00:44:36

So it did not receive much support from the government, and that would mean that since the government had a hand in all academic appointments that the professors that were appointed were not particularly interested in the Renaissance. The University of Florence had a very distinguished historian named Delio Cantimori who was interested in sixteenth century religious history, and it had a distinguished medievalist named Ernesto Sestan, but he was primarily a medievalist and was not particularly interested in the Renaissance. So this I think was, for Americans like myself, a golden opportunity. We had no competition, or almost no competition from Italians. I once described it as like a child being introduced to a candy store in which he is allowed to go into the store and grab whatever he wants. Florence was certainly attracting the interest of foreign scholars, not only myself, but during the two years that I was working in Florence, other Americans came. There was Marvin [B.] Becker, who became a good friend; Donald Weinstein came--he was working on Savonarola--and later on, of course, other Americans were coming to work as well along with other English scholars and one or two French scholars.

00:46:13

Lage: Was there something about the Italian Renaissance or Florence that attracted people at that time?

00:46:18

Brucker: I would say that there was something about the Italian Renaissance that attracted interest all over the world. I would suppose the supreme example that I would cite would be my two dear friends from Australia, Bill and Dale Kent, whom I met somewhat later in the late 1960s. Back in Australia--feeling as all Australians do as though they're literally outside the universe--they are so far away, but obviously getting interested in Italy and Renaissance Italy. Having teachers who sparked their interest, their goal was to come somehow to Florence. They made it. It was just a dream for them. I remember meeting Bill and Dale. It was in the summer of 1969 when I was going over to Italy for a short time after having spent a year at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and met them. I had been in correspondence with both of them. I had a whole file of letters that they wrote to me, so I knew who they were, it's just that I had never met them. They were

still just so excited about being in Italy that they could hardly breathe. It was something for them that was like being in paradise.

00:47:35

Lage: Now what do you attribute that too? Because often, historical interests are related to the times; what about the times made--

00:47:46

Brucker: You know if you were to ask Bill and Dale--again I take them as examples--they would say that they yearned to know more about their historical past--that is to say, their European ancestry. Italy was--I mean I would say that probably most Australian historians would turn to England, obviously since the vast majority were emigrants from England. For them it added the dimension of something exotic. Something that was not part of their English inheritance, it was distant from it, even though geographically not so distant. Then I think the spark of meeting a teacher. I know that they both had a professor at Melbourne University named Ian Robertson, who had been a specialist in the Italian Renaissance, and obviously he must have been a very charismatic teacher because he inspired both of these young Australian children to dream about, and learn Italian and then formulate a proposal where they could go. Both Bill and Dale went to London to work with Nicolai Rubinstein, who was a very distinguished historian of medieval and Renaissance Florence. That was their ticket to Italy, by way of London. Do you think this is the time to stop, Ann? I even forgot to bring the Perrier.

00:49:16

Lage: No, I think it's time to stop. I don't think we're through with this topic but we can regroup.

00:49:25

Brucker: We can go back to Florence for sure.

**IV. FURTHER THOUGHTS ON OXFORD, GRADUATE STUDIES AT
PRINCETON, AND RENAISSANCE SCHOLARSHIP**

[Interview 4: October 09, 2002] ##

More about Work on Machiavelli with Cecilia Ady at Oxford

00:00:04

Lage: Today is October 9, 2002. This is our fourth session, believe it or not, but they're all brief so we really haven't run on too long. I wanted to just double back a little bit to pick up things that maybe I should have asked you about at Oxford. In fact, some of your colleagues have asked me to ask you about this. A little bit more about Ms. Cecilia Ady and what your relationship was like with her.

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Brucker: She was my thesis supervisor because I was writing a thesis for this degree called Bachelor of Letters, which was an intermediate degree between a BA and a PhD, and I'd been sent to her by Bill Deakin--who was my tutor for my first term--when it was decided that I might get into Italian Renaissance history. She was then retired. She had taught at Oxford for many years. She was a spinster. A very, very nice woman. We got along very well.

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Lage: How did you get along? I mean what kind of relationship was it?

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Brucker: I would say it was warm, and friendly. She was quite tolerant of the fact that my languages were really not very good. Certainly my Latin, and of course, I knew no Italian. So I had to learn Italian very quickly.

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Lage: Was she at all scornful?

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Brucker: No, never. I think, one, because of her nature and two, because she recognized that my training had not been as thorough as she would have expected from someone who had gone to an English public school. We got along well. She suggested my thesis topic, which was on Machiavelli's diplomatic career. All of his letters, his correspondence as a diplomat had been published, so I didn't have to go to the archives to find them. So I labored on those.

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Lage: Did she direct reading in Renaissance studies?

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Brucker: Oh yeah, she would suggest, "read this, read that."

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Lage: I mean she really went back to the Edwardian times it seems. I think her first publication I saw was in 1907.

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Brucker: Yes, she went back a long time. Her mother was a historian. I've even forgotten her mother's name. She had written several books, and they're really quite good books, and produced some really fine students. Philip Jones is certainly one of her most distinguished students who's perhaps the leading historian of the economy and the politics of medieval Italy. He is still alive, and still working. It was a very pleasant experience with her, and I enjoyed it. Writing a thesis was just another exercise. I had written a thesis for my master's degree, so I at least knew how to go about it. But it's a thesis that will never be published because it just isn't of sufficient quality.

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Lage: Even though your master's was published.

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Brucker: My master's was published. But it taught me how to work with Italian materials, and I had to read quite a bit of secondary material. But yes, it was a useful--

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Lage: So no more about her and her character and her approach to Renaissance studies--

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Brucker: She was politically very conservative. She was also a very serious Anglican. She took her religion seriously. I do remember once she said--this was in the 1950s, just after Mussolini--she said, "The Italians can never govern themselves, they are always going to need someone like Mussolini." Thank God she was wrong about that. That was her view and obviously an educated, upper-class English woman going to Italy--as she had gone, from the beginning of the century, and that including the Fascist period--there was something about her that recognized that maybe she found the Fascist Italy quieter, and more tranquil, and a more orderly place.

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Lage: And here you were back from fighting the war.

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Brucker: Right. [laughter]

Social Life at Oxford, English In-Laws, Wife's Adjustment to America

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Lage: We didn't--this is to get off Ms. Cecilia Ady--we hardly talked at all about the social life side of Oxford. Your first year you lived with other students?

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Brucker: My first year I lived in college. I made friends there. My second year--

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Lage: Were they other Americans or were they--

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Brucker: Somehow I think I knew all the Americans. There were about five or six Americans in the college. I also met English, and I remember one South African colleague of mine. I got to know them and found them certainly interesting and lively. We discussed politics at length, and the war, and various other matters. My second year I was, by that time, married. My wife was having a baby, and we lived in a flat right on the river; on the River Cherwell. On an island in the river, in fact, it was a lovely spot. A place called Folly Bridge, which was on the road leading south out of Oxford down to Abingdon. In that year, I was writing my thesis, taking care of a pregnant wife, and then a baby.

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Lage: That was a change of life.

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Brucker: Oh, that was a change of life. But we still had friends, Oxford friends. Of course, I got to know her family. Her father was a bureaucrat. He was working for a government ministry. Quite conservative politically, but a very nice man.

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Lage: Did they accept you well?

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Brucker: Yes, they did. My wife's mother was a rather quiet woman, but very nice, and they were very pleased about the baby: a son named Mark. Then we came back to America just as the Korean War was starting. I remember that.

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Lage: Oh! What was that like?

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Brucker: It was a little disconcerting. Then, coming back, I went home to visit my parents, and introduce my wife and child to them. Then we moved to Princeton, where I spent the next two years.

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Lage: And you said that melding your wife in with your parents was harder than the reverse.

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Brucker: I think so, yeah. She found it really quite difficult, I think, adjusting to America. It took her time, but eventually she did.

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Lage: Did she feel better at Princeton than in the farmland?

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Brucker: I think she did at Princeton, because she got to know the wives of my fellow graduate students, and we formed a really quite pleasant community there. We made good friends.

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Lage: Did you go to school with any colleagues that you've kept in touch with over the years?

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Brucker: I've kept in touch with, in fact one of my good friends was a fellow graduate student at Princeton. His name was Bill [William M.] Bowsky, and he taught at UC Davis.

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Lage: In what field?

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Brucker: He was a medieval Italian historian too. He was, like myself, a student of Theodor Mommsen. So yeah, I've kept in touch with some of my Princeton colleagues.

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Lage: That was just two years too?

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Brucker: Just two years, yes.

More about Theodor Mommsen, and Ernst Kantorowicz and Felix Gilbert

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Lage: You really moved right through. Anything else to say about Mommsen? I came across the book about German refugee historians, and--

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Brucker: He was a refugee. He came from a very distinguished academic family. His grandfather was probably the most renowned historian of ancient Rome. He, himself, was a medievalist who worked primarily in Italian medieval history. He had come to America to escape Nazi Germany.

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Lage: And he wasn't Jewish?

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Brucker: He wasn't Jewish, but the Mommsen family had been very liberal and hostile to the monarchy; to the Hohenzollern monarchy. With that tradition, and the fact that he had some sense of where Germany was going, he was able to get out, again because of connections his family had. He came to America. He taught at Groton, a public school for boys, and he also taught at Yale before he came down to Princeton. He was a very fine man. Sadly, committed suicide. I think I may have mentioned this in the last session.

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Lage: I don't think you mentioned it on the tape. You talked to me about it. Do you have a sense of what was the problem?

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Brucker: Yeah, he was, I think, bearing the guilt of Nazi Germany. He just found it very hard to--he was also a man who I think lacked self-confidence. Being the grandson of a very distinguished historian, he always found that to be a burden. He was a bachelor, living

alone. He didn't live alone at Princeton, he lived with two other scholars. I think, basically, a lonely man, and a troubled man.

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Lage: Did you pick this up in your relationship with him?

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Brucker: No, it was much, much later, and after I talked to some of his other students, and people who knew him well. He was much loved by his colleagues and by his students, but that wasn't enough for him. I mean he didn't, I think, feel that he had achieved much, although he was a very fine scholar.

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Lage: Was he well respected in the field?

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Brucker: Certainly in the field he was, even though he published relatively little, but what he did publish was excellent.

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Lage: What kind of relationship did you have with your close professors?

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Brucker: Well, you know, it was both formal in the sense that they were teachers, but also social in the sense that we had parties together. I know that Mommsen used to invite myself and other graduate students over to his house for drinks. He wasn't a cook, so he wasn't going to feed us, but we would sit around and talk. He would always invite us to meet his friends. I remember a very distinguished medievalist who was a friend of his, Ernst Kantorowicz, who had actually taught at Berkeley.

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Lage: So you met him there?

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Brucker: I met him through Mommsen at the Institute for Advanced Study.

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Lage: He had left Berkeley by then, of course, over the loyalty oath.

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Brucker: That's right, he left Berkeley. This would have been in 1952, 1953, 1954, I guess.

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Lage: So they were friends?

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Brucker: They were friends. I met Felix Gilbert, who was another very close friend who became a very good friend of mine because we were both working in Florence. In fact, my first year in the archives in Florence, Felix was also there, and he was extremely helpful. I met just a number of scholars whom I might ordinarily not have met, because Mommsen was always interested in having his students meet senior professors. He was thinking particularly about jobs. He was always concerned that we get jobs. He worked very, very

hard to see that. I remember he insisted that I go up with him to the American Historical Association Convention in New York for one of their sessions.

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Lage: Was that different from other professors at the time?

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Brucker: I would say it was different. I don't think many professors there at Princeton, or perhaps anywhere else, were that solicitous and concerned about the fate of their students as Theodor was.

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Lage: Do you have any impression of Kantorowicz?

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Brucker: Very limited because I saw him rarely. He was one of these European academics who had gone through, as Mommsen had, one of the most rigorous programs of education that the world has ever known. These scholars who came out of the German universities, they had all of the languages. Latin and Greek they had been taught since they were three years old. They were cosmopolitan. They were knowledgeable. They were erudite. They were also sophisticated. These were all people whom--I rarely met people like that before. Kantorowicz was absolutely in that tradition. In his field he knew everyone. He knew everything, and read everything. A remarkable scholar. He too had his coterie of disciples who adored him. Here at Berkeley, as well as at the Institute. Remarkable man.

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Lage: This learning, and tremendous high standards, how did that come across in what they expected of you?

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Brucker: Well, it's interesting, the fact that they had such high standards. Being which, of course, ingrained through their university education. They were very tolerant of the less--I mean just in terms of our background, I certainly didn't learn Latin the way that Theodor had learned it. He had Latin from childhood until he was in the university. But remarkably tolerant, I still have the thesis I wrote with Theodor--

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Lage: Your doctoral thesis?

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Brucker: My doctoral thesis, where he, in the margins, corrects my Latin. He just does that to say--he understood that, I think, I had two years of high school Latin. That was the only formal training I had in that language. I shouldn't have been working in this field without much better Latin, and they accepted it. The other professors did too. Kantorowicz had the same experience, but instead of saying to his students who didn't know languages well that "You're an idiot, you're a dummkopf," he was tolerant, and would make the student work and learn and master it. But not berate them, because they had not had the educational training that he had had, or that would have been normal in Germany. He would not have been so tolerant of a German student.

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Lage: But they did understand that the educational system--

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Brucker: They did understand. I think they remarkably adapted to new standards, and a degree of tolerance. But they were always seeking to motivate students to be as good as they were.

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Lage: I'm just thinking what the influence of these German refugees were on the universities here. Quite a few of them came in at that time.

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Brucker: Certainly in our field, they had an enormous influence. I mean basically what they did is they created, I would say for Italy at least, they created in this country, medieval and Renaissance history. One, because they knew it, and two, because there had been very, very little in that field. American universities in the field of medieval history, the primary focus was England, of course, because of the connections between England and our own system. Or, if not England, France; to a lesser degree Germany. But Italy was--I mean you could count on the fingers of one hand the historians of medieval and Renaissance Italy in this country before World War II. Then, after the war, with people like Mommsen, and Felix Gilbert, and other scholars working in the field and also in art history, which was another field literally created by the refugees in this country. They attracted students, and their students produced scholarly work. But there's a good deal written about that. I can't cite any particular bibliographic work but it's just well known that these refugees made the field. They made the field in America.

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Lage: So this is a big part of the explanation of why there was such an interest in Italian Renaissance after the war.

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Brucker: Uh-huh, and how it burgeoned back then.

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Lage: Now what kind of history was it that they were focusing on? Was it intellectual history, political history?

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Brucker: I would say those two fields; either political or intellectual. They were not interested in, and they did not promote the kind of social history or cultural history, as we would say it. They were either pursuing ideas or they were pursuing political structures and institutions.

Brucker's Shift from Political to Social History

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Lage: Where did you see yourself fitting in?

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Brucker: Well, I was essentially a political historian. It was just that seemed to me both important, I mean in that sense I was accepting a traditional attitude. My interest in social history came much later and came as a result of working in the archives, and that's where my

interest did shift. I mean my two books, my two big, heavy, unreadable tomes were on Florentine politics. But everything I've done since that, you might say, is social history, and also religious history.

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Lage: So that came later?

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Brucker: And that came later. And the social history, my focus, my interest was from reading documents that I was reading for my political books, and taking as an example working on criminal court records where I was reading them to find out information about conspiracies, rebellions--any evidence of conspiratorial efforts primarily. While I was reading that, I would encounter criminals that had been convicted of a whole range of crimes, and all of the conflicts and all of the discords that one finds in an urban and also in a rural society. I became attracted--began copying, making notes about these cases. And eventually from that comes a more sustained interest in social history, and some of my later articles and books which are focused primarily on that. An example was, I began to find cases of sorcery in Florence. Looking through all of the criminal court records, I came up with thirteen or fourteen cases over a hundred years, but I thought they were interesting enough that I could write an article about them. I did; it's called "Sorcery in Early Renaissance Florence." This is social history, it's also religious history, or you might call it cultural history. So the shift was my own shift, but initially I was programmed to be a political historian, and reading basically documents that had to do with politics.

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Lage: Was there social history at Princeton?

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Brucker: I would say not. I'm trying to think of anybody that could even be vaguely regarded as a social historian. Certainly not in European history. The leading medievalist was Joe Strayer, who was just strictly a political and institutional historian. Jinx Harbison, who taught the Reformation, was more interested in religious history, and that was considered legitimate. But almost all the historians there in both European and American history were political historians.

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Lage: Were you ever attracted by the intellectual history?

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Brucker: Not really. No. It's just not something that I--I won't say that ideas bore me, they just don't grab me. They never have [laughter]. So I find it almost impossible to read books or anything relating to theory. I'm just turned off by it, I just don't relate to it. Not my bag.

Doctoral Oral Exam and Committee

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Lage: You skipped over the experience that most PhDs remember vividly: the doctoral exam. What was that like?

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Brucker: Well, for one thing, I had only one year to prepare for it at Princeton because my advisor was a very fine historian named Robert Palmer, a French historian, brilliant historian. He just died a few months ago. He died at the age of 93. I liked him a lot. He was a very crusty, acerbic type. I found him very attractive. So he looked at my record and the fact that I spent two years at Oxford, and he just considered that as part of graduate training, which indeed it was. He said, "Well, Brucker, you should take your exams after this year. We need to get you out of here. We need to get you a job before you're thirty, and if you are going to do that, you're going to take your exams, and then you can do your research and write your thesis in a hurry. We don't dawdle here." So after one year, and I remember it was a very hot night in June in Princeton--June of 1952, or maybe June of 1951--it was in the evening and I had gone into the chapel, the Princeton chapel, to cool off before going to the exam. Joe Strayer, one of my examiners said something like, "Brucker, I saw that you were in the chapel. I hope you don't think that praying is going to do you any good today."

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Lage: [laughter].

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Brucker: The exam went ok. It wasn't brilliant, but it was adequate.

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Lage: Were they hard on you?

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Brucker: They were--I don't think they were very hard on me. I think they'd seen enough that they thought that I was okay, and they certainly didn't want to torpedo me.

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Lage: And who was on your committee?

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Brucker: Well, Mommsen--who was my mentor--was my supervisor, and Joe Strayer. An American historian named Frank Craven, a very nice man, and I think Jinx Harbison, who was the Reformation scholar. I believe that was it.

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Lage: So they examined you on American history also?

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Brucker: I was examined on American history, because that was another requirement that the Princeton people thought that you should not only know something about American history, but be examined on it. I think they were quite tolerant, but beyond that I couldn't

give you any--except I think I mopped my brow a lot because it was hot and we didn't have air conditioning in Dickinson Hall.

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Lage: Had you gone to the chapel just for the--

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Brucker: To cool off, because it was cool there. I was not praying, or asking for any help from angelic sources.

Renaissance Scholarship after World War II

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Lage: Before we go back to the archives and everything, would it be good to talk about what the state of Renaissance scholarship was? Who you read; you've written about Burckhardt's influence but you have not mentioned him.

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Brucker: I would say that the literature was, by comparison to what it is today, quite skimpy. We read--or I read--the classic works like Burckhardt. I read some of Ludwig Pastor, who was a great historian of the papacy. I did do some reading for Joe Strayer in French medieval history, but that was really a separate field. In the Renaissance, you know I can't remember that I read any book, I must have read a lot more than I recall. I would again say that it was limited. I had to read volumes of a German historian of Florence named Robert Davidsohn, who was the great Florentine medievalist.

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He was a German--beyond going through the Gymnasium, I'm not even sure that he went to a university--he made money as a publisher in Berlin, and I think at the age of about forty he decided that he had enough money. He was interested in scholarship, and he went down to Florence as an outsider and began to do research in the archives on Florence's medieval past, and he wrote the great three or four volumes of *Geschichte von Florenz* and the early years. In fact it was his work that Mommsen thought I should continue, because he died in 1940. Interestingly enough, being a Jew he hadn't been harassed by--at least I don't think he was harassed by the Italian authorities, one, because he was so distinguished, and two, because he was very old. So he died in Florence before the really bad times came. I read my way through his works. That was an ordeal for me because my German was never very good. So I remember reading him. I read all of the Italian historians. There was a French historian named Henri Pirenne, an Italian historian named [Romolo] Caggese; so I read as much as I could. An Italian historian named [Niccoló] Rodolico; so I did do some reading. This is reading primarily for my thesis.

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Lage: Were they people who worked in the archives?

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Brucker: Yes, some of them. Certainly Davidsohn had spent his life in the archives, as some of the other historians had done as well. But it was limited, again I would say primarily political

or literary, that is, of course, a great deal of work had been scholarly work on Dante and Petrarch, people like that. Very little social history.

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Lage: What was the thinking about Burckhardt among your professors?

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Brucker: Well, he was regarded as--he was literally the founder of the idea of the Renaissance. So he was always treated with great respect. I read him. I almost say that I read him and re-read him to try to understand him. I came only, much later, to developing a critical response to Burckhardt, which I have done.

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Lage: At the time, were you attracted by his thesis?

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Brucker: I guess I accepted it, really almost without thinking about it critically. That came much, much later, after I had done my own work and had read much more widely. The point to be made about the literature then in the field was it was--remarkably on Florence--so much of the work had been done by foreign scholars, mostly German.

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Lage: What about [Gaetano] Salvemini?

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Brucker: Salvemini, he was an exception. He had come to America as an exile. He taught at Harvard, and then went back to Florence, to the university and taught. I never met him, which was one of my mistakes. I should have gone to see him. He was still alive when I was there in the early 1950s, but I never made the effort to go meet him. But he was very distinguished. I read his work. I read the work of a Russian historian named [Nicola] Ottokar, who had come as a refugee from the Russian revolution and was teaching in Florence at the university.

Influence of Nationality on Historiography

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Lage: A lot of exiles.

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Brucker: A lot of foreign work, in fact the Italians on Florentine history really didn't become a major force in working on Florentine historiography until I would say the 1960s. Now there's a very large contingent of very fine scholars. Many of them teaching at the University of Florence or teaching at Siena or Pisa, who are writing their historiography, which differs quite significantly from what Anglo-Americans are doing. So it's a very different perspective, and that, of course, enriches the historiography because you now have a whole range of perspectives. People working on Florentine history, there are Russians, there are Japanese--the Japanese contingent is really quite interesting--but it's very cosmopolitan now.

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Lage: Do you see the connection between the perspective and the nationality? How does that work?

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Brucker: I would say that the Russian historians working were almost exclusively interested in economic history, and to a degree political history, but more economic history. The same is true of the Japanese historians. They are economic historians interested in the Florentine economy. Interested I think, in this pre-capitalist or proto-capitalist society because they can see some parallels between the Florentine economy as it developed in these centuries and the Japanese economy as it developed in the eighteenth century, before the Industrial Revolution.

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Lage: Do they make those comparisons in their work? Or is it behind the scenes?

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Brucker: I think it's simply that is one way to try to explain their motivation. In the case of the Russians, it's very clear because Marxist historiography is primarily economic. They certainly weren't very interested, at least, in cultural history or intellectual history.

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Lage: What about the Italians? What perspective did they bring?

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Brucker: Here again, I think it's interesting that Renaissance history during Fascism did not flourish. It was not promoted by the regime. The regime was more interested either in medieval history and in guilds and guild history because of their own concept of developing a corporate economy as opposed to a capitalist economy, or in the Risorgimento in the nineteenth and twentieth century. So I would say that there wasn't a great deal of significant work done in the 1920s and 1930s by Italians on Renaissance history. They basically left the field to the foreigners. It took a long time before the Italians really were able to develop their own historiography. I knew one young historian, who was a disciple of Salvemini--his name was Elio Conti--who was working in the archives when I arrived there. He certainly was one of the most learned and erudite students of medieval and Renaissance Florence. But he was just beginning, and it wasn't until he got a post at the university and then began to develop and get students to work on various projects that he was interested in, that you began to get what might be called a Florentine school, or an Italian school of Florentine history.

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Lage: What was their interest?

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Brucker: Their interest was much more economic and social than it was political. They were interested in the economy, primarily, I would say. But now they have expanded their horizons, so they do a lot of work in religious history and cultural history. I mean they are all over the map. They are doing every kind of history. They've been strongly influenced, I think, by French historiography. The so-called *Annales* School has made a big impact. They've also--one has to say this about Italian historiography--they are the biggest promoters of microhistory. It's the very narrowly focused history on a particular village,

or on a particular community, or a particular menage. So that's one of their great strong points.

Richness and Diversity of Florentine Archives

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Lage: Are there conflicts between the different groups?

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Brucker: I wouldn't say so, no. I think again that it's a very tolerant atmosphere. You know, do whatever history you enjoy. I think it's still probably true to a greater degree in Italy than here that professors dictate what they want their students to work on. That whole attitude of the professor being the knowledgeable one, and he will assign the tasks, where I think in American universities, students are given much more freedom to choose what they want to do. Although that may be lessening there too, it's--I mean Florentine historiography today--it's very large. There must be a couple hundred practitioners working on every conceivable theme, topic imaginable. The Florentine archives have material for just about every aspect of the human experience. There's been a large, important book on homosexuality in Florence written by a young American scholar, who worked his way through the records of a magistracy that was concerned with controlling homosexuality. Controlling and punishing it. These records exist for several decades in the fifteenth century, and he has written this very interesting book on the phenomenon.

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Lage: These are court records?

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Brucker: These are basically records not of the official courts, although you do find some cases of prosecutions of homosexuals, but mostly it's a special office. It would be, let's see; what do we have that's comparable? If the city of Berkeley were to decide that it was going to try to do something about the homeless, they would appoint a commission. (Perhaps it does.) This commission then might have some powers of enforcement; powers to penalize. That would be the equivalent. You know, a special problem, a special office or commission. Like rent control, if you want another example. So the Florentines, in addition to having their regular offices, they had their executive offices and their legislative counsels, and their judicial offices. They had judicial courts with major judges and they had their police office. They would appoint commissions to take care of orphans. They would appoint commissions to take care of inheritance. They would appoint commissions, obviously, to take care of taxes. And they appointed a commission to take care of homosexuality. They appointed a commission to take care of the convents to see that the nunneries were not being invaded by young Florentines trying to seduce nuns.

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Lage: You're not making this up? [laughter]

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Brucker: I'm not making it up, the records are there.

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Lage: And they all kept records?

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Brucker: They all kept records. Some of the records were lost, but this is one of the reasons that the Florentine archives are so incredibly rich, that these records have survived. As I was saying, if you take any aspect of human experience, there will be some record in Florence. It's another reason that it's such a desirable archive to work in.

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Lage: Has anyone just studied the whole scene as a record of bureaucracy?

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Brucker: Yes, people have done that too. There's been a book on the Florentine bureaucracy by Burr Litchfield. I've written an article on the Florentine bureaucracy. Yeah, it's a fascinating study. Who gets chosen, and how do they function, and how are they paid?

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Lage: How well do they keep their records?

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Brucker: Yeah, how they keep their records. There's also a book on corruption.

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Lage: Across all these commissions.

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Brucker: You can imagine--not corruption actually, the book on corruption, written by a French scholar whose name I can't remember right now--it was for the period of the Grand Duchy after 1530, but he's gone into office records and looked at people that were caught embezzling. You could imagine that's a rich field.

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Lage: Are there other, this is kind of off our topic, but are there other cities in Europe that have a similar set of records?

00:39:03

Brucker: Not outside of Italy. I think even in Italy, I think Venice perhaps comes closest to having this broad range of--again because the republic survived on to the late eighteenth century, and because they were a record-keeping community, a record-keeping governing class. Even with all the floods, their records have pretty much all survived. Cities like--interesting, a city like Siena has the best record of wills over time. And Sam Cohn has exploited that rich source. He's written a history of testaments and what people leave when they bequeath property to their heirs, from the thirteenth century down to the eighteenth century. So I would say, almost every Italian city is going to have some of this. Again, because of the record-keeping orientation of these societies, although I don't--I think if you were trying to make comparisons, there is no archive that is so rich and has such a broad scope of human activity.

00:40:19

Lage: But did the French and the Germans keep records like this?

00:40:22

Brucker: Nothing, no. Well, no they didn't, or they did, but only later. That is to say the French bureaucracy really kicks in, I would say in the seventeenth century, perhaps the eighteenth century. That is also a very rich source, but not for the earlier centuries. There just isn't anything like--their records are not so comprehensive, and not so extensive. The same would be true of the German states or the German cities; you just don't get record keeping. In part because Italy is a society in which the notaries play a very important part, and north of the Alps, outside of Italian or Mediterranean influence, notaries aren't nearly so prominent. In fact, they're not prominent at all. You don't find notaries for example, in England. You do find records in England, but not notarial records. It's just not part of their culture.

00:41:19

Lage: So it must affect the kind of history that's written.

00:41:21

Brucker: Exactly, it affects the kind of history that can be written.

00:41:27

Lage: Now, we haven't even gotten yet to Florence.

00:41:30

Brucker: Well, maybe we should stop and start--I've got a luncheon appointment down on campus, so why don't we break off here and do the archives next Wednesday.

00:41:38

Lage: We'll start up with the archives, which we covered some last time, but I don't think in the kind of depth--the archives and the living in Florence in the early 1950s.

00:41:45

Brucker: The whole Florentine experience, we can focus on that.

V. FLORENCE AND THE FLORENTINE ARCHIVES, 1952-1954

[Interview 5: October 16, 2002] ##

Rhodes Scholarship in 1948; Meeting Albert Einstein and John von Neumann

00:00:06

Lage: Today is October 16th, 2002. And we're on session five with Gene Brucker. Gene we're going back in time here to pick up something--

00:00:15

Brucker: In the fall of 1948, the Rhodes Scholars had assembled in New York City, and we were going to board a ship for England. But before we left America, we were invited down to Princeton, by, actually, the head of the American Rhodes Scholars, a man named, Frank Aydelotte, who was also head of the Institute for Advanced Study. So he invited us down to his house. Very genial, elderly man, who had been a Rhodes Scholar himself. He invited us to meet some of the distinguished luminaries of the institute, and that included Albert Einstein and John von Neumann. My only memory of that meeting was--we were all assembled in the living room, I guess drinking wine or something, and Einstein came in and he sat down by himself dressed in sneakers, and sweatshirt, and sweatpants, and was obviously not at all interested in meeting these young characters. So Aydelotte asked him, "Dr. Einstein, what advice would you give to these young men as they embark on this great enterprise?" And he says, "Don't believe anything you read in the newspapers or hear on the radio." [laughter]. That was it. That was his advice, I'll never forget it. I think it had to do with the whole business of the Cold War and his sense, I think, of as a pacifist, and as someone who'd been involved in the making of the atom bomb. A feeling that our government was manipulating the evidence, and manipulating the news, which I'm sure is true. So he was warning us to be very cynical and very suspicious about what we were being fed by the press and by radio.

00:02:22

Lage: Were you of a mind to hear that message? Did it fit with your own--

00:02:24

Brucker: I was, it did.

00:02:29

Lage: Did you also meet Oppenheimer?

00:02:31

Brucker: He was there too, yes. He was then, I believe--he replaced Aydelotte as director, but he was at that time just one of the distinguished scientists.

00:02:44

Lage: He replaced him as director of...?

00:02:46
 Brucker: Of the Institute for Advanced Study. I do remember that von Neumann invited the Rhodes Scholars who were scientists to come with him the next morning to the Institute because he wanted to show them a new computer. He wanted to show them--obviously the Institute had some computer model. Obviously one of the very early ones, and von Neumann was very excited about it. I didn't even know what a computer was.

00:03:13
 Lage: Of course, who had heard of a computer then?

00:03:16
 Brucker: The scientists certainly did. Then we--I think it must have been the next day--we went back to New York, stayed in a hotel, and that next day we got aboard ship to England.

Witnessing the Italian Election of 1953

00:03:27
 Lage: Now is there any segue from that into the Florentine archives, which seems a long way from the Cold War?

00:03:36
 Brucker: Except that the early 1950s were still very--the tensions in Europe were very strong, and I was certainly involved later in--I mean participating--witnessed the Italian election of 1953, which was a huge battle. The Americans were funding the Christian Democrats, and the Russians were funding the Communists for basically the direction of Italy. I heard [Alcide] De Gasperi, who was the head of the Christian Democrats. There were huge rallies in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. I heard De Gasperi speaking for the Christian Democrats. I heard [Palmiro] Togliatti, who was the Communist leader, and [Pietro] Nenni, who was the Socialist leader. They were all--Nenni was the greatest orator of the three. He was just eloquent. De Gasperi was not a particularly articulate or eloquent man, he was very quiet and subdued. Togliatti was also a good speaker, a very passionate speaker. I witnessed that whole campaign. It was fascinating. The Democristiani [Christian Democrats] maintained control of the government, but the Left had a very strong showing. So yes, I was certainly involved in--

00:05:01
 Lage: And how as an American did you take part in that?

00:05:04
 Brucker: I'm not sure. I had some sympathy--certainly not a Communist--I had some sympathy with the Socialists and with Nenni, although I certainly didn't--and this of course was the first year of the Eisenhower administration and the American government was, certainly, very anti-Communist. As certainly as Truman's administration had been, but I think even more pronounced and somewhat more ideological. Clare Boothe Luce was the American ambassador, and she was a very outspoken critic of the Left, and a very passionate supporter for Christian Democrats.

00:05:47

Lage: Was this all covered in the newspapers?

00:05:50

Brucker: All of the newspapers, yes.

00:05:50

Lage: The US role was very prominent?

00:05:52

Brucker: Oh yes. All of the papers covered this, and I would read the local conservative paper, the *Nazione*, and I would also read--I didn't read *l'Unità*, which was a Communist paper, but I certainly paid attention to the Left, and what they were arguing.

00:06:12

Lage: And how did it impact you there? Your reception? Your work?

00:06:17

Brucker: I don't think--Americans were viewed, certainly by--I had friends of the Left, I had friends, archival friends and friends, students, who were certainly left wing. They seemed not to be bothered by the fact I was an American, and they didn't blame me for the American campaign in support of the Democristiani. I don't even remember, particularly, talking politics at great length with my Socialist friends.

00:06:52

Lage: Your Socialist Italian friends?

00:06:53

Brucker: My Socialist Italian friends, right. I did learn what party they supported. I did know a Communist. A man by the name of Giuliano Procacci who was a friend of a friend whom I met. We would have dinner together, but I don't remember talking politics with him. I just knew--in fact he became a very leading member of the party and ended up as a senator. He was also a good historian. He was both a professor at the University of Rome, and also a senator in the Italian Senate from the Left. As far as I know, he is still there.

Pensione in Perugia, Italian Political Views

00:07:37

Lage: You were telling me, after we turned off the tape a couple times ago, about the family that ran the pensione in Perugia.

00:07:50

Brucker: Oh yes. This was a Fascist family, Tiberi. It was my first social encounter with Italians. We lived in the pensione, and we had our meals with the members of the family.

00:08:02

Lage: That was not with your family? Just with other students?

00:08:05

Brucker: Other students, but my wife and son came when I was--I went alone, because my wife, who's British, went to visit her family in England, with our son, Mark. Then Patricia and Mark came down to Florence and I met them and took them back to Perugia. Then they lived in the pensione with us. So we were there all together. The Tiberi family--it was sort of classical bourgeoisie. They were bourgeois. They were very conservative politically. We didn't talk politics because we were told--by again I don't know by whom--that the Tiberi family had been Fascist, and that Signor Tiberi had been an official, I believe in a Fascist insurance company. There they were without--he didn't have a job. Obviously because Perugia, by this time, had become very left-wing, so there wasn't anything for him to do. On the other hand, they weren't put in jail or anything like that, but they did have this house, which was their property. I got to know them and, I guess I would say, appreciate them in a sense of understanding where they came from, what their politics were, even though I didn't agree with them. They were very civil, and nice, and pleasant. Obviously we were clients and we paid them money, so they wanted to be nice to us. So that was my first experience with what might be called Italian family life. It was clear--one of the things I certainly grasped was the close bonds between family members; I mean how important family was in that domestic world.

00:09:43

Lage: What about the role of the father in the family?

00:09:46

Brucker: He was paterfamilias. It was clear that he was in control. Although Signora Tiberi obviously did the cooking. She did the cooking and fed us, and we ate very well. It was a good introduction to the Italian domestic world.

00:10:08

Lage: You mentioned something about a story about Toscanini.

00:10:11

Brucker: Oh yes, this was really quite interesting. On one of the occasions when politics did intrude in our dinner conversation, one of the Tiberi, it might have been Signora Tiberi or the Signor, mentioned the fact that Toscanini--the story that they had heard (obviously had been in the Fascist press) that Toscanini had--when he organized rallies against the Fascists and against the Nazis--said that he wanted to raise the money to build bombs to drop on Italy, or drop on Italians. And we all said there's no way that Toscanini would ever have said that. This was clearly just Fascist propoganda. I do remember there was that tension between what they really still believed--that Toscanini was a traitor, because here he was wanting to drop bombs on us, to kill us. We said that Toscanini was certainly anti-Fascist, and opposed the Fascist government, opposed Mussolini, but he would never have ever said anything like, "I want to raise money to build bombs to drop on Italians." He may have said something about, "I hope these bombs destroy the Fascist government." So that was one moment of tension that I remember--

00:11:26

Lage: You didn't convince--

00:11:28
 Brucker: I don't think we convinced the Tiberis. I have no idea what happened to them. They had two young sons who were at the University of Perugia, and they are probably now still alive and flourishing with families.

00:11:41
 Lage: Who knows what their politics are?

00:11:42
 Brucker: Yes.

Life in Florence: Dealing with Italian Bureaucracy

00:11:44
 Lage: So from there you went to Florence, and you did talk a little bit about discovering the archives. It seems like there are two stories: discovering the city, and discovering the archives.

00:11:55
 Brucker: In a sense, there were two dimensions of our life there. One was my work in the archives, and writing a thesis, and getting to know Italian scholars. The other dimension was learning to live in Italy, and both enjoying the parts that we really did like, like the food and the wine, and the city and its beauty. We went to the opera in Florence. We met Italian friends, got to know, become acquainted with Italian students, for the most part. And then also dealing with the other side of Italian life; like its bureaucracy, which is really a third-world bureaucracy. Totally, I still get annoyed whenever I have to deal with an Italian bureaucrat because they are so unresponsive to their clients. Whether it's a foreigner or a native, and that just hasn't changed. Maybe it's changed a bit, but I still remember occasions in the office of the Questura which was the police office that handed out permits for residency to foreigners, and spending hours in that office in which the officials simply ignored us. They sat back and read newspapers and drank coffee; paid no attention to the huge line of clients trying to get their papers. Eventually you got them, but it took such a long time.

00:13:26
 Lage: Now what did you need papers for?

00:13:28
 Brucker: To get what they called a *permesso di soggiorno* which was a permit to be like our--for foreigners who come here and get a visa--it wasn't a visa, but essentially it was a document that allowed us to be a resident in Italy even though we weren't citizens.

00:13:46
 Lage: I see, and that wasn't taken care of before?

00:13:48
 Brucker: That was not taken care of, and you had to get it renewed every six months or so, and that meant another wasted day down in the office of the Questura.

00:13:58

Lage: Did they ever turn their attention to the lines?

00:14:00

Brucker: Oh, eventually they did, but slowly and grudgingly. This same attitude is so characteristic of the whole Italian bureaucracy. Whether it's the post office, whether it's the police. I mean it's one of Italy's, I think, most serious problems that they've never developed what might be called a government, an administration or a bureaucracy that was user-friendly. It's always that the bureaucrat feels that he's in power and he doesn't have to do anything to help. To help clients, and that remains a big problem in Italy today. The difference between when we go to a municipal office, or a government office, we expect to be treated civilly, and we usually are, and we're expected to be helped by the bureaucrats, and we usually are.

00:14:50

Lage: We feel entitled.

00:14:51

Brucker: It's our entitlement, yes. Poor Italians have never gotten that feeling. I mean they do, and they grumble and they complain, but they just accept that it's not going to change. Of course it's deeply rooted in their past history, which is an authoritarian government where the officials simply have never bothered to respond to the people under them. They just feel that they have a right to get their stipends, their salaries, and their pensions, without doing very much for their office.

00:15:23

Lage: Could you trace it all the way back to these records you were looking at?

00:15:27

Brucker: I would say--you could certainly trace it back to, I would say, to the authoritarian governments in Italy after the Renaissance. From the 1500s on: sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth centuries, from when Italy was a cluster of Italian states all governed by authoritarian rulers, whether princes or oligarchies. The mentality that developed out of that kind of administration--

00:15:58

Lage: At least you had that historical perspective.

00:16:00

Brucker: Yeah, I knew where it came from [laughter], and I had written about where it came from. I had written an article talking about this. The history of the Italian bureaucracy and its defects, but believe me, my views are not solely mine as a foreigner, but Italian historians have come to the same conclusion. I mean they see it too; they understand it.

00:16:30

Lage: But Florence wasn't yet a sort of museum city. Was it?

00:16:34

Brucker: It wasn't. Well, it was in the sense that it was still the favored city of foreigners to come and particularly Germans. The Germans would come down en masse to Italy beginning with Easter. We had the city to ourselves--we, I mean not only the Florentines but the *stranieri* who were living there or residing there--from November until April. That was

our town. There were very few tourists at all. Then, in April, the Germans would come down. Then, somewhat later, the English and the French would come down. Then the Americans, when summer came. So it was in that sense a tourist city, but it just was not the overwhelming mass tourism that we experience today.

00:17:23

Lage: That seems to be the only activity.

00:17:25

Brucker: It seems to be. It just dominates the whole city, exactly. But I can remember walking the streets of Florence in winter and being practically alone by myself. The Florentines obviously were there going out and doing their shopping. But no, it was--we did notice the difference when the tourists came--but they're nothing like the crowds--I mean you could always get into the Uffizi [Gallery] back in those days, and now you have to stand in line for hours.

00:17:53

Lage: And then walk through with the mob of people.

00:17:55

Brucker: Right.

Domestic and Social Life in Florence

00:17:57

Lage: What about your apartment, what was that like? The amenities?

00:18:01

Brucker: The amenities, well, we had a very nice apartment. Out of the city, it was on Via Camerata, and it was on the road to Fiesole, which is north of Florence. We took a bus that took us right, not to our apartment, but close to it. So we were out of the city, and therefore really out in the countryside, and it was really lovely to watch the seasons. We rented the top story of a house that was owned by another signora, a contessa. I can't remember her name. This is interesting. I remember the Tiberis, but I don't remember this contessa's name. I must ask my ex-wife if she remembers. She was an elderly woman, a widow, who the story was, had actually had a German officer lover during the war. I don't know whether that was true or not. I think her family also was very supportive of the Fascists. She was a contessa. I don't know who she had married. She actually was a native of the town of Forli. She lived with her son, who a student of medicine, and her daughter, who was married to an air force pilot in the Italian air force. They all lived in the same house, and they had one elderly maid whose name was Caterina, who did cooking for them, and who actually died while we were there. Our relations with the contessa were usually fairly cordial, although not warm. We were living in the same house, so we did have connections.

00:19:43

Lage: Did you have your own kitchen--

00:19:45

Brucker: We had our own kitchen, own living room and bedroom. It was really quite pleasant. Again it was rather quite chilly in winter because our heating system was pretty primitive. But spring was glorious and summer was fine. A lot of being out in the country, I mean it just was a good living experience. Of course we indulged in Italian food and Italian wine. In fact, when I had been in England, wine was so expensive that you could drink only a little bit to celebrate something, but here where wine was so cheap, that I would carry up two or three fiaschi of wine from the wine shop down in the city and bring it up on the bus. Whenever friends came--my wife's parents came, for example, came to visit us--my father-in-law was delighted at all the cheap Chianti because he loved to drink. It was festive occasions, and of course my wife learned to cook all the dishes; the pasta--

00:20:49

Lage: How did she know? Did you have a cook?

00:20:51

Brucker: We didn't have a cook, but we had friends. I remember we were taught how to cook risotto, or she was taught how to cook risotto. Of course the food was good, and plentiful, and not too expensive.

00:21:05

Lage: Had you been a wine drinker at home?

00:21:07

Brucker: No, no wine at all. Literally no wine at all. Not where I grew up. It wasn't part of our culture at all. When I was in the war, in France, I learned to enjoy wine. I remember when we were in Princeton as graduate students, again wine was very expensive and you only bought it when--it was one of the reasons I fell in love with California was the cheap wine when we came here. Not only cheap wine [laughter] but you could go into a grocery store and buy wine on Sundays, or buy everything. That was a big plus for me.

00:21:42

Lage: This is sounding like quite a binge over there.

00:21:45

Brucker: Well, it was not that--we did have a social life with friends, some of them dear friends, who were fellow Fulbright students. One student in particular, whom I'm still very close to, an art historian named Eve Borsook, who was actually a Californian--her father was a professor at Cal Tech. She decided to stay in Italy and live there as an art historian earning her living doing guide books and various things like that.

00:22:19

Lage: Were you telling me she was a Fulbright student?

00:22:21

Brucker: She was a Fulbright student with me. So I had met her back in--and she still lives in Florence; still there.

00:22:27

Lage: Was that unusual to have someone really become kind of an exile?

00:22:31

Brucker: It was quite unusual. I think it was extremely rare. I doubt very much if any other member of our group--I think there were a hundred and fifty Fulbrights, of course they were scattered all over, and one of our fellow Fulbrights was the conductor Loren Maazel, certainly our most famous member of the group, but Eve Borsook has a very respected reputation as an art historian.

00:23:01

Lage: Well, I have heard you and Carroll [Brentano] talk about Eve.

00:23:03

Brucker: Yes, they are dear friends too.

00:23:07

Lage: Is there any more to say about her? Did she become an Italian?

00:23:12

Brucker: Not really, no. One, her parents were Austrian Jewish, so she is trilingual. She speaks German, she speaks Italian, and she speaks English. I don't know if her French is particularly good. But she has very close friends in Austria, near Vienna, where her father came from. I think both of her--I'm not sure about her mother--but we got to know her parents because they were actually living in Berkeley. When her father retired from Cal Tech, he moved up to Berkeley. Very, very nice couple. He was a scientist, his wife, I'm not sure. We got to know them because they lived actually not too far away from here.

Working in the Archives

00:23:56

Lage: Shall we go to a little a bit more about the archives and who you were working with there? What was it like? Were you working with your friends?

00:24:09

Brucker: I have written about the terror at my first entry into the archives. I had postponed going there for some time and finally realized that I just had to go, so one day--

00:24:24

Lage: Now when you say you postponed, what else did you have to do?

00:24:26

Brucker: Well, I went and did some work in the national library. So, anyway, I decided that this had to be done. It was November. It was cold and raining, and I remember just trudging up the steps being just terrified. One, my spoken Italian was not good. I was not fluent, and that troubled me, but also I didn't know what I was going to expect. Finally I went again through the bureaucracy of filling out forms and showing my passport, and being taken to a tiny little room not much bigger actually than this room here. This was the reading room of the archive at that time. It had benches and seats for maybe twenty-five people. Usually there were never more than about ten or twelve scholars. There was just a tiny contingent of scholars. There was a professor at Bryn Mawr, Felix Gilbert, who was a German refugee scholar, and a good friend of my teacher, Theodor Mommsen, who was

there on sabbatical leave. He, of course, was very familiar with the archives. He was very, very helpful. When I had trouble deciphering a passage, I remember I would take it to him, and he was very tolerant. So I sat down and just struggled with the script. It was--at that time, my documents were all in Latin; in notarial Latin, and I just worked, and worked, and worked, until I could finally begin to read and make sense of it. I still have my notes, which were pretty chaotic as I tried to read the script, and worked my way through the sources, which at that time basic sources were political. They were the laws, the legislation, and the debates of the council meetings, which became my most important source for my research for my book.

00:26:21

Lage: Were you going after certain things? Were you looking for certain things?

00:26:26

Brucker: Yes, I was looking for certain kinds of information about the government, the administration, the legislation that they were passing and what it all meant. I was interested in foreign relations, and politics. I was interested also in political conflict within the government, of which there was plenty. For example, I was interested in the government's response to the Black Death, which occurred on my watch, since my study began in 1343. Then gradually I widened my horizons, in the sense of I began to learn about other sources, other documents, and that led me into the criminal court records, which became a very important source for my work.

00:27:12

Lage: Was this all in the 1950s? In that first trip?

00:27:15

Brucker: All in that first trip. I began to get into touch with some private documents. That is, private letters, private diaries--

00:27:23

Lage: That were also in the archives?

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Brucker: That were also in the archives, right. Some of the material I also found in the National Library. They have their archive too; in addition to all the books they also have an important segment of archival material. So as time went on, I became more familiar with the documentation, more familiar with the handwriting, more confident that I could read. Since the official documents were written by notaries who tended to write carefully and clearly, although they did use a lot of abbreviations that I had to master, I would say by the spring of the next year--by April or May--I was feeling really quite confident. One, that I could read, and two, that I could understand, I could make sense out of what was going on. So I began collecting lots of notes, and then, fortunately, I got a renewal of my Fulbright. I had to go down to Rome to make my case for a second year, which I got, which was very crucial for me. So we had a second year in Florence when I essentially wrote my dissertation. So I would go in the mornings to the archives because the archives were only open from 8:30 to 1:30 and closed in the afternoon.

00:28:37

Lage: Unbelievably short schedule.

00:28:38

Brucker: Yeah, but that again was the bureaucracy and its sense of--also the feeling that there were so few of us that we really weren't going to go to the mayor or to the government and say that we needed longer hours. I would spend my morning in the archives collecting material and then in the afternoon I would come back after lunch and I would write on my thesis. That's how I got it done.

Handwritten Notes, and Help from Gino Corti

00:29:02

Lage: You were collecting with handwritten notes?

00:29:05

Brucker: Handwritten notes, yes.

00:29:06

Lage: I'm sure that graduate students today would not be able to believe that you could do this without a computer.

00:29:12

Brucker: I'm sure they would. That's how they would believe you. But they don't understand how we worked in those days. I had a typewriter; I had a manual typewriter, but I didn't take it into the archives. I copied everything.

00:29:23

Lage: Was it not allowed in the archives?

00:29:25

Brucker: It would not have been allowed, no. I mean now I'm sure that every student of the archives goes in with his little thing, his little portable computer, right. I didn't do very much, in fact I did very little Xeroxing of material, which later on I used to great extent. Reams of Xerox material.

00:29:50

Lage: They must not even have had Xerox then?

00:29:53

Brucker: They didn't have Xerox. But they did have--you could photograph material. You could hire a photographer. When I went back in 1960, I did hire a photographer. I also had a very dear friend, or a man who became a very dear friend. He was a paleographer. A private--because he was teaching at a grammar school when I got to know him. He had gotten his doctorate from the university. He made a living as a paleographer, copying documents for Americans. Literally every book on Florentine history and almost every book on Florentine art history will have a reference to Gino Corti for "helping me decipher and copy." He is still going. He is still copying, he is in his eighties now, and still working. But he was enormously useful.

00:30:45

Lage: So what would you have him do?

00:30:47

Brucker: Well, if I couldn't read a document or a passage that I couldn't read, I would ask him to copy it. And you could make sense of it. And sometimes, I sent him, for example, to Prato to work through a very large mercantile cache of documents by a merchant of Prato named Francesco Datini--this was my second book, not my first book--and I was looking for information in this mercantile correspondence about business affairs. So I sent Gino up and said "Look through the stuff, copy down what you think." You know, I gave him the questions that interested me. Anything about Florentine politics, anything about the state of the economy, anything about wars, and that sort of thing--just copy them for me, and he did. So he was enormously useful, in a real sense.

00:31:36

Lage: So this was much better than a Xerox machine, because he was deciphering?

00:31:38

Brucker: Right, if I had had to do what he did for me, it would have taken my research another two, three, or four, or five years.

00:31:50

Lage: And you say others were using him as well?

00:31:52

Brucker: Every American. I could show you on my list of Florentine books every preface, every introduction, "and my dear friend Gino Corti without whose help I could not have..." [laughter] That was absolutely the case.

00:32:06

Lage: Was it expensive?

00:32:08

Brucker: Not in the beginning, it wasn't very expensive, but as time went on and prices rose, Gino's rates went up and I used him, and of course I got some money from the university to subsidize this kind of research assistance, which paid the bills.

Framing the Problems, Vetting the Documents

00:32:26

Lage: I would think that entering into this archive and having to decipher the language and the handwriting, you would have had many kind of false starts in how to organize and pick--how did you manage?

00:32:42

Brucker: I think it was, eventually, you read through an awful lot of material, maybe ninety percent of which is not of interest, or doesn't deal with what you're interested in. You learn to pick out the parts that are significant. Of course you have a framework for problems. You talk about studying political conflict. Let's say that that's going to be a main issue. Any piece of evidence that suggests conflict: ideological differences, class differences, factional disputes. You would copy that material. In the case of legislation, you would copy the significant laws that were passed that indicated everything from the problem of

raising taxes to the problem of starting a war or ending a war. So eventually, you do learn--and you learn to separate the wheat from the chaff. You can read through the chaff, and I think I also mentioned that I began however--whenever I found things that interested me even though they weren't particularly germane to my work, I would just jot down, and make a reference.

00:33:57

Lage: And were they organized in such a way that you could find them again?

00:34:00

Brucker: Not really. I put them in a file called miscellaneous, "miscellana." Then I would go over them, and I could see patterns. I think that, for example, whenever I encountered a sorcery case in the criminal court records I would copy it down, and make a reference to it. Eventually I think I decided that I had twelve sorcery cases over a hundred years, which is not a very big sample but it's still--I went back then and looked up the reference. Copied the documents, or maybe I had Gino copy the documents, and wrote an article about sorcery. I still have a file of miscellaneous stuff that is interesting.

00:34:39

Lage: The archives themselves then helped shape some of the problems.

00:34:42

Brucker: Yeah, that's certainly true. The archives, in a way, dictate your work. If there's no documentation about the problem, then all you can do is say, "Well, this is the problem, but I can't deal with it because I don't have any evidence."

00:35:02

Lage: I'm thinking about something, for instance, Ken Stamp pointed out how, when he was doing his work, I'm trying to think--

00:35:09

Brucker: On slavery, on *The Peculiar Institution*.

00:35:12

Lage: No, no, no.

00:35:14

Brucker: No? Later on then?

00:35:14

Lage: No, earlier.

00:35:16

Brucker: Oh really? But he wrote his thesis--

00:35:19

Lage: He overlooked the racism in the North.

00:35:23

Brucker: Yes.

00:35:25

Lage: And he was finding economic reasons, because that was his bent.

00:35:28

Brucker: Yes.

00:35:32

Lage: Now, in later years, he went back to his sources and realized what he missed. He missed this because it wasn't--the times weren't focusing on that [racism]. He was--has anything like that occurred?

00:35:44

Brucker: No, I can't say that--I mean I have missed problems, and in fact, one of the most interesting cases, a good friend of mine, Sam Cohn, has recently written a book on conflict. Peasant rebellions, out on the countryside, which he has made a very plausible case for a very significant development in the formation of the Florentine territorial state. He looked through the same documents I looked through, and I looked through them and I just didn't pay attention or I didn't regard them as important, whereas he has written a whole book now. Basically using material that I read but paid no attention to, so in that sense, yes, you do miss things. And it's a question I suppose, of either orientation, or interest, or you just don't see that it's important.

00:36:44

Lage: Did you have to judge the validity of these documents?

00:36:47

Brucker: Yes. And that raises some very serious problems, particularly when you're reading, I would say, in the debates, where the debates--you would have to ask yourself, "if so-and-so makes a statement, is he really articulating his own views? Is he articulating the views of his party or his faction, or is he lying?" These are questions that historians have to deal with all the time.

00:37:20

Lage: Even when they look at oral history.

00:37:22

Brucker: Even when they look at oral history, exactly [laughter].

00:37:25

Lage: But it's true that the documents need to be asked these same questions.

00:37:30

Brucker: Yeah. I think you get a sense, again, if you work through a body of material for any length of time. You get a sense of whom you can trust and what you can trust, and whom you have to be very suspicious of. I think when you're dealing in diplomacy, and you read diplomatic documents and letters that the government sent out, then you have to be really careful about--are these documents just propaganda? Are they concealing, lying, and trying to deceive? Of course, in diplomacy, that's the name of the game, isn't it? What if the diplomats are hired by their governments to lie for their country? That hasn't changed.

Other Scholars in the Archives: Lauro Martines, Donald Weinstein, Marvin Becker, Philip Jones, Nicolai Rubinstein

00:38:14

Lage: [laughter] Right. Tell me more about your other fellow Americans doing work there.

00:38:21

Brucker: I got to know, literally, all of the foreign--I think without exception, all of the foreign scholars, mostly American and British. Not too many in that--in the early 1950s, but a very dear friend of mine, Lauro Martines, whom I'd actually met in Princeton, came over to Florence and he was interested in doing art history, and was going to write a grand book on European culture, in a Marxist vein. And one day, I took him to the archives. So he was interested in Florentine painters. He thought the Florentine Renaissance painters would be a chapter in his grand book. I said, "Well you're interested in these painters, why don't you come with me to the archives and we'll find some stuff for you to read." He had had no training in paleography; no training in Latin. He didn't know any Latin. So I took him into the archives and ordered a couple of things for him. I ordered a diary of a Florentine painter, Neri di Bicci; and he'd never read the stuff, never read the scripts. So he sits down, and this guy is so intense, and so determined to master whatever he--he becomes fluent in the script. He met Felix Gilbert, who was immediately attracted to him because of his intelligence and his passion, and recommended him to Harvard to go back and get a degree in history. He got his PhD at Harvard, and had a distinguished academic career. He lives in London now, with his wife, who's Irish.

00:39:57

Lage: Now, what did you say his field had been?

00:39:59

Brucker: He wanted to write a grand cultural history of Europe.

00:40:04

Lage: But he wasn't a historian?

00:40:05

Brucker: He had actually gotten a degree in En--no, not a historian, never made it in history. He got his degree in English, and he was going to write a grand book basically explaining European culture in terms of class, Marxist style.

00:40:19

Lage: What was his background?

00:40:21

Brucker: He was a Latino from--father and mother were Mexican, they came to America--his father worked in a steel mill in Gary, Indiana, I believe. And Lauro went to high school in Chicago, then went to Drake University, where he got his degree. I met him in Princeton where his wife was working for George Gallup at George Gallup Enterprises. He was basically going to be a scholar. They'd saved enough money to come to Europe, and they were going to visit all the places, and they came to stay with us in Florence. They just decided to stay there. They stayed there for several months, and then Lauro went back to

America, entered Harvard, got his degree, taught at Reed College, then at UCLA where he finished his career.

00:41:13

Lage: Did he continue with his Marxist--

00:41:15

Brucker: No, he abandoned--I would say his interest in class certainly did not diminish, but he realized that what he was hoping to do was not feasible, and he became a historian, you know, with all the training about working with documents and that sort of thing.

00:41:33

Lage: And he did he focus on Florence then?

00:41:34

Brucker: He focused on Florence, although he's also written a book about English poetry, which I think was going to be one of his chapters of his grand vision--but nearly--

00:41:43

Lage: It's quite a switch.

00:41:45

Brucker: Quite a switch. Nearly all of his books have been on Florentine history. His latest book, however, is the study of Italian vernacular poetry in the Renaissance. So he is a man of broad interests and concerns; still a dear friend.

00:41:58

Lage: Now, who else was there?

00:41:59

Brucker: Well, Donald Weinstein who became a great authority on Savonarola. I met him in my second year. We'd become, and still are very good friends. He was teaching at Rutgers, and then at Arizona. He's now retired.

His last book, a wonderful book, called *The Captain's Concubine*, which I won't go into detail, but his great book, his capolavoro was his book called *Savonarola and Florence*, which is a classic. Marvin Becker was another friend who was working roughly in the same area that I was, and has written books that are interested in similar problems in Florentine history. He taught in several schools, at Rochester, and then the University of Michigan, and he's retired now.

00:42:52

Lage: And did he come wanting to use the archives?

00:42:56

Brucker: Yeah, he came with a specific archival intent, so I didn't have to tell him about the archives. But he did shift his focus. He was going to do a biography of a French nobleman who was the ruler of Florence for a few months in 1342-1343, then he got much more interested in Florentine fiscal matters, and Florentine taxation, and Florentine finances. That became one of his core concerns, but he wrote a book, a general history of late medieval and Renaissance Florence in two volumes, and since then has been working on other aspects of Florentine history.

00:43:46

Let's see, beyond that, among the Americans, I met a very--met an English scholar, Philip Jones, who is still writing very actively, and I guess I would say is the world's authority on the Italian medieval economy. He has written huge books, huge tomes, on that. He's written a massive tome on the history of Italian city-states in the medieval period. Probably the most distinguished historian of medieval Italy. I met a senior scholar, Nicolai Rubinstein, who just died a few weeks ago at the age of 92. He was a German-Jewish refugee scholar who came to England in the late 1930s and specialized on Florence in the fifteenth century; the Florentine government under the Medici. A very, very distinguished historian who's published a number of books and articles, mostly on Florence. He was the last historian who knew the giants, the Florentine historians of the 1930s: Davidsohn and Doren, people like that.

00:45:10

Lage: Was he considered an elder, or--

00:45:12

Brucker: He was an elder, and I would say to a degree a mentor. I remember I first met him when I was working on my thesis and I showed him some of my early chapters which he criticized. So, yes, he was very helpful that way.

00:45:24

Lage: When you say criticized--

Brucker:00:45:25 You know, read them and said do this, change that, revise this, you got this wrong. Things like that. The way elders do to their charges, their clients.

American Influence on Revitalizing Florentine History

00:45:38

Lage: It appears from retrospect that this group that you were involved with, and yourself, were sort of creating a whole new field that became very important.

00:45:51

Brucker: I think we had--because Florentine had--or Florentine medieval and Renaissance history had really experienced a bad time in the sense of not many scholars were pursuing it or working on it. The giants had died, like Davidsohn had died, and Salvemini had not died, he was actually still teaching, but he had really abandoned his interest in the archives. There was a lively field in Florentine economic history with people like--historians like [Armando] Saponi, but I would say in terms of the interest in politics and in society there just weren't many Italian scholars working on it, and not many foreigners. It has to be said that the, I think the great event that made it possible for Americans to go, was the Fulbright Act. I mean the fact that it was--the Fulbright fellows really were the ones who, shall I say, revitalized Florentine medieval and Renaissance history.

00:47:05

Lage: Making it possible--

00:47:07

Brucker: By making it possible to go and work there, yeah. And I think it's fair to say that the foreigners did, I would say Anglo--the Anglo, I mean English, American, and Australian historians are certainly major players in this, but of course there have been others from--not from Germany. It's interesting that the Germans never came down to recapture the dominance in the field that they'd had with people like Davidsohn and Doren. Some French historians--French interest certainly, Russian interest; there were two or three Russian historians who came to work in the archives. Japanese historians interested, just a few, but I mean important people making important contributions. But I would say the Anglo-American dimension was critical for the 1950s and 1960s, and then now, in the last twenty years or so, Italian historians have moved back to reclaim their patrimony, in a sense. Led by Elio Conti, who's a very distinguished historian of agrarian Florence; of the countryside around the city. But other historians too. Chittoline, well he actually works in the North, I was thinking of Giuliano Pinto and of Giovanni Cherubini. These are a younger generation of historians who have really taken over and made significant contributions, and there are now a whole cluster of them. There's close relationships between American historians, English historians, and Italian historians, which used to not be the case. So there's now an integration of interests, and we go to meetings, and we go to conferences, and colloquia together, and talk--

00:48:56

Lage: And that had not been the case before?

00:48:58

Brucker: And that had not been the case at all.

00:49:00

Lage: Was there tension?

00:49:01

Brucker: I think it was indifference. I think the Italians were not interested in the *stranieri*, and the *stranieri* didn't find many Italians to talk to. But that all changed, has changed now.

00:49:12

Lage: Did you have a sense that you were creating something new?

00:49:17

Brucker: No, I don't think we did until much later. I think we were all so interested in writing our thesis, getting a job, getting our book published, that we didn't worry too much about being part of an avant garde. On my sense, I suppose it's something that I've been asked to write. I've given papers--a conference honoring Marvin Becker; my friend Marvin Becker. I gave a paper on--I wrote a paper for delivery there--it hasn't been published--on the Florentine archives in the 1950s: The Golden Age. I regarded that as the great age where there weren't too many competitors. We had the field to ourselves. Since then, now, when I talked about ten or twelve *studiosi* in the little reading room of the Uffizi, now of course, there is a new archive some distance away from the center, and you go in and there may be a hundred and fifty students there from all over the world.

00:50:14

Lage: Now, was there a reason why the American and the British were so attracted to Florence? I mean here's Florence, really a very small place.

00:50:21

Brucker: Well, I think it's partly a result, again, of our mentors who were for the most--refugee German-Jewish scholars who had had that interest, and they conveyed it to us. My teacher, Theodor Mommsen, while he was not specifically a Florentine historian, had worked in Florence. Felix Gilbert was a man whose whole life was dedicated to Florence, so was Nicolai Rubinstein. There were these people who were very influential. And also German art historians who did the same thing for their students.

00:51:00

Lage: What was the relationship between the people who were doing social and political history and the ones doing the intellectual history and art history?

00:51:10

Brucker: I think we certainly had contacts, and exchanged ideas and exchanged documents. I mean if I, for example, ran into a document about a chapel that my dear friend, Eve Borsook, was working on, I would certainly tell her about it. I would say, "Here, you should go look at this thing." We were always interested in what other people were doing. Even if they were in other fields, and if we found something that we knew would attract them, we would say, "Here, you should go look at this."

Hans Baron: Controversial Personality and Work

00:51:40

Lage: Now I heard Hans Baron had a certain disagreeable personality.

00:51:48

Brucker: Well, Hans Baron is a very peculiar case in that he never worked in the archives. He was another German-Jewish refugee. He came to America, I think around 1940. He could not get a teaching job in part because he had a hearing problem, and in part because he had a very irascible personality. He was a small man, very arrogant; very erudite and very arrogant. So he was never able to get a job. He did get a job at the Newberry Library as a bibliographer, somebody, you know, working with material. He became probably the most influential historian with his book, which was published in the early 1950s, which became a classic. Very controversial book, but a book that attracted historians. We all read it, all discussed it, debated it.

00:52:41

Lage: Why was it controversial?

00:52:43

Brucker: Because of his thesis, and I won't go into it except to say that he regarded a particular moment in Florentine history around 1400, when the Florentines were fighting a Milanese tyrant by the name of Gian Galeazzo Visconti. They got into a war with him, and it looked as though--according to Baron--Baron interpreted this conflict as between republicanism and despotism. Two ideological and politically conflicted--struggling for a domination of Italy, and he believed that Gian Galeazzo was about ready to pounce on Florence when he died [of the plague, in 1402]. Fortuitously died, but Baron made out of this a great ideological conflict, which he somehow also managed to link between World

War II and the fight between the democracies, representing the Florentine republic, and Hitler's Germany, which was the totalitarian regime that he saw back in the government of the Visconti. So he made the connection. But you could imagine how this would create a lot of interest and conflict and controversy. It still goes on. But there's no question that his book, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, is the most significant book written by any historian of the postwar period, by a man who never entered the archives.

00:54:14

Lage: Now are you saying it's the most significant book written by someone who never entered the archives, or it's the most significant book--

00:54:19

Brucker: It's the most significant book *period*. Absolutely, yes, it is.

00:54:23

Lage: Why is it the most significant book when you seem to think that the thesis doesn't hold much weight?

00:54:28

Brucker: Well, even though I'm critical of it, a lot of people found in it inspiration for their work, and debating it, discussing it, it's a--very recently there's been a conference on Baron and his book. From the moment it came out, it attracted a great deal of attention.

00:54:49

Lage: Was this part of the attraction of Florence, that it was kind of in this Cold War setting?

00:54:53

Brucker: Partly that, but I think more the weight that he gave--the ideological dimension that he gave to it with this whole business about the republican tradition.

00:55:06

Lage: Is that republican tradition part of what attracted the Anglo-Americans to study Florence?

00:55:10

Brucker: I think so. I think that there's no question that it did. I won't even say in my case--I think in my case I too was attracted to the idea of--I was watching a--not a democracy, but a republic at work and looking at how the problems were dealt with, and while not making a conscious link to the American republic of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, I could see parallels and similarities. People arguing, people debating, people voting; you know, voting mattered a great deal. The way in which office holders were selected, who was in the government, and who was excluded, and the issues they faced: everything from war to taxation to morality to building a territorial state. These were all issues that clearly had resonance for anyone living in America. So I think there is certain--

00:56:03

Lage: Even where you didn't make the connections as strongly--

00:56:05

Brucker: Well, not as strongly as Baron did. Certainly not, but I don't think that there would be any disagreement with my statement that Baron's book is the most important postwar book on medieval and Renaissance Florence.

00:56:21

Lage: Now, one more question. I'd heard mention of the conflict between Baron and Felix Gilbert; what was that all about?

00:56:28

Brucker: That was--I just don't know all the details, but they were not friends. I think Hans Baron was jealous of Felix because when he got a job at Bryn Mawr and then he got a job at the Institute for Advanced Study, I think in Baron's case he felt that he deserved these honors, which he never got. Certainly Felix was skeptical of Baron's thesis, and I think wrote some criticism about it. One of the first sort of frontal attacks against Baron's thesis was made by a young scholar named Jerrold Seigel, who was a protégé of Felix Gilbert; he was teaching at Princeton at that time. Baron thought that Felix had encouraged Seigel to go after Baron, something he did not choose to do himself. So that built into the animosity. I don't know the whole history of their relationship; whether they communicated, whether they wrote letters to each other, or whether their hostility was so intense. I do know that Baron was a man who bore grudges and who could get furious at people who criticized him. I'm sure that played a part in the relationship, but who knows? Perhaps they'd reconciled. They're both dead now. I just don't know.

00:57:52

Lage: Did it affect the field in any way?

00:57:55

Brucker: I think it affected it only in the sense that people read the criticism and read the disputes, and decided what they thought was correct.

00:58:05

Lage: Did most of the group you were working with in the archives, kind of reject the Baron thesis?

00:58:11

Brucker: I would say it divided pretty equally. It had some very strong supporters and admirers. Tony Molho, who was a student of Marvin Becker's, was very close to him. A lot of people--John Najemy was close to him. But there were also people who were quite critical.

00:58:28

Lage: Bill Bouwsma mentioned him in his oral history as being somebody who--

00:58:32

Brucker: He regarded Baron as giving him the inspiration for his Venice book. That it was reading Baron on Florence that motivated Bill in a very strong and direct way to try to do something similar for Venice. Okay Ann, I think I've had it!

00:58:49

Lage: See, I've pushed you to the limit.

VI. COMPLETING THE DISSERTATION, FIRST BOOK, AND EARLY YEARS AT BERKELEY

[Interview 6: October 23, 2002] ##

Social Life of Archive Scholars. the *Latteria*

00:01:17

Lage: Today is--

00:01:21

Brucker: The twenty-third?

00:01:22

Lage: [Laughter] --of October 2002, and this is our sixth session with Gene Brucker. So we're going to go back to Florence and talk about some of the social life that revolved around the archives.

00:01:37

Brucker: The ritual to which I became a part was that working in the archives, you got to know people, not only foreigners, but also Italian scholars, at least some of them. The ritual was that mid-morning, we would all troop out of the archive and go to a local café, or *latteria*, which in addition to providing coffee, and cappuccino, and café latte, and things to eat, it also sold milk to the neighborhood. It was called the *latteria*. This was a place where we would sit and eat and talk to our friends about what we were doing, and what they were doing. It became an institution. The *latteria* was sort of the focal point of social life where friendships were made, and acquaintances were made, and ideas exchanged. It's something that those of us who participated still remember with great pleasure and warmth. It was really a kind of--it was a gathering place, and we would go there to meet new people, or be introduced to new people.

00:03:00

Lage: Was it mainly this group that made up the *latteria* or was there other--

00:03:03

Brucker: We came in, and we were certainly known by--actually a very nice couple, Roberto and Luisa. Roberto had inherited the *latteria* from his father, whom I had known back in the early 1950s when he was running it. Roberto, then a young man, married this sweet woman, Luisa, and they ran the *latteria* for years until they finally retired. They became, I won't say friends in the sense that we socialized with them, but we certainly got to know them well. They were the patrons, really, of this café. You know, I mean the equivalent is some of the cafés, you know in Paris or London, where people would meet and talk.

00:03:51

Lage: Had anybody been accustomed to having cappuccino or café latte?

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Brucker: I think we all became accustomed to that quite early.
- 00:04:02
Lage: But it wasn't like every street corner in the US had such things.
- 00:04:05
Brucker: No. Anyway, it was certainly a very pleasant dimension of both socializing--getting to know people--and also finding out what other people were doing.
- 00:04:16
Lage: How did the scholars share their findings, and thoughts?
- 00:04:21
Brucker: We would usually say something, "I just found this wonderful document, you can't believe what I just saw this morning." Then your coffee mate would say "Well you should have seen what I saw yesterday," or something like that. That was the kind of thing that went on, and we were always eager to tell about our discoveries and what we were finding. This was also one way to find out something about the resources of the archive, because it's so immense, so huge. People would say, "Well I've just been looking through some letters, and I found these letters in the *Conventi Soppressi*," which were the records of convents that had been suppressed at one time or another, and they were a rich source of all kinds of information. It's just a very useful way of finding out information, and whenever you read almost any book on Florence--on Renaissance or medieval Renaissance Florence--in the introduction there will be a reference to Gino Corti, the great paleographer, who helped us all, and usually a reference to the *latteria* as a wonderful place where so much information was absorbed. That just became standard practice.
- 00:05:34
Lage: Was this a multinational gathering place?
- 00:05:38
Brucker: Absolutely, yeah. Mostly Americans, English, and Italians. There were French scholars who came down. The occasional Russian, and the occasional Japanese.
- 00:05:48
Lage: And they all went to this *latteria*.
- 00:05:51
Brucker: And they would go to the *latteria*. Sort of our standard meeting place.
- 00:05:55
Lage: Was there any discussion or "arm waving" or anything about theoretical approaches?
- 00:06:01
Brucker: No, it was mostly just about what we were doing; the nitty-gritty, and the nuggets that we were looking for and finding in our own research. Not too much about theory, or about say a Marxist approach versus a French approach, or an American approach. It was just the rich mines that we were all engaged in working.

00:06:30

Lage: It sounds like everyone was really excited by it.

00:06:32

Brucker: They were, that's true.

00:06:35

Lage: No wonder you call it the golden age.

00:06:36

Brucker: Yeah, it was the golden age.

00:06:38

Lage: Did you have a sense that people were competitive?

00:06:42

Brucker: What I think I would say is that Italian scholars tended to be cautious. I think they were somewhat, at least many of them, were not all that enthusiastic about having these foreigners come in and take over their turf. But certainly among the exiles, among the foreigners, I don't think there was much sense of competition. We really helped each other. We would provide each other information. So if I find something, and I recall on some occasions I'd find a document pertaining to a subject that I knew a friend of mine or a colleague was interested in, I would say, "You should check this reference, because there's this document you ought to look at." Elio Conti was one of the earliest Italian scholars whom I became quite friendly with, but he had some reserve. I think he was also feeling he didn't want to share much of his information with his colleagues. It was his, you know, he'd found it, and he was going to use it. I thought it was perhaps a more general attitude, but generally it was pretty convivial.

00:07:59

Lage: Ok, any more you want to say about that topic?

00:08:03

Brucker: Not really, no.

00:08:05

Lage: It was a short time that we're talking about; two years. It seemed [inaudible].

00:08:06

Brucker: It was a very crucial period in my life. It sort of made my career. Absolutely did, no question.

Writing Dissertation under Theodor Mommsen

Lage: So you wrote your dissertation, seems like in record time to me.

00:08:20

Brucker: I wrote it fast because Theodor Mommsen, my teacher, was passionate about his students finishing their degrees and getting jobs. He really worried about our situation. I mean he

knew that we were penniless, starving students, and he wanted us to get through--he didn't want us to dawdle. So I was always getting letters from him saying--and I would send him a chapter as I finished it, and he would write back with criticisms and comments. But I did finish on time. I got the last chapter in to him, and he was responsible for getting my thesis typed up in Princeton. When we came back in, I think it was June of 1954, we spent a couple of weeks in Princeton, and staying with friends. I defended my thesis before--well let's see, Theodor was there, Joe Strayer, Bob Palmer, and Felix Gilbert had come up from Bryn Mawr where he was teaching then, and they approved the thesis. I got my PhD.

00:09:33

Lage: How does that go? What's it like to defend your thesis?

00:09:36

Brucker: Well, basically you're being interrogated about something you know a lot about. So you tend to feel pretty confident. I do remember that Bob Palmer asked a question about whether Florentines engaged in much theorizing. He, who was a student of the French revolution, thought that ideas about politics and the state and government mattered a lot. He didn't see much evidence in my dissertation that there was a great deal of theory, and he was correct. I explained to him why that was so, that the sources I was using, the minutes of council debates, really didn't go into theory. Although, I found out much later in the fifteenth century, the Florentines did begin to think more theoretically about their government, and did develop coherent arguments defending what their political state was.

00:10:37

Lage: But you didn't think it was a result of the documents you were looking at, but simply that they didn't theorize this early?

00:10:44

Brucker: They weren't as interested in theory, or the evidence that I had from the debates simply didn't develop that, but by the early fifteenth century, which was another generation of Florentines, they were more comfortable about talking about ideas about government.

00:11:08

Lage: What was the title of your dissertation?

00:11:13

Brucker: The title of the book was *Florentine Politics and Society*, but the dissertation I would have to go get. I could go get it.

00:11:19

Lage: Oh you don't have to. Is it the same topic as--

00:11:22

Brucker: It's the same topic, yeah.

Further Research, Book Publication of Dissertation

00:11:24

Lage: It was quite a bit later though that the book was published.

00:11:26

Brucker: It came out because when I came to Berkeley, I had basically two tasks. One was to learn how to teach, which I was an apprentice at that, and the other was revising my dissertation for publication, which was a primary concern. It took me about five years to do that because I went back and reread all of the documents, and reread my notes, and got some new material and added two chapters that had not appeared--in my dissertation I had focused almost exclusively on politics, and Joe Strayer had urged me--one of my readers, and one of my mentors--had urged me to develop social and economic contexts. He really believed that you needed to know something about this society, and something about its economic foundations to make sense out of its politics. I agreed with him, and I did do that.

00:12:21

Lage: So this required going back to more sources?

00:12:23

Brucker: It was basically going--I didn't ever go back to Florence, but I did get some archival material from friends of mine who had gone there, and I would ask to check out on some things. I remember I sent my dear friend Lauro Martines on a trip to Siena to explore a source there that I had not had time when I was a Fulbright student, I had not had time to explore. He went down and got some very interesting information for me. My friend Gino Corti, the paleographer, I also asked him to do some research and look for things, and he would send me stuff. So I had new material, but most of the revision was based on what I'd found from 1952 to 1954.

00:13:17

I got a fellowship in 1960 to go back to Florence to begin research on my second book, and on my way back to catch a boat to Italy, I dropped off my revised manuscript at Princeton University Press. A very nice woman, an editor named Miriam Brokaw, was the history editor then, and she shepherded it through the press, and while I was in Florence the second time--when we were there with my family--I got the notice, I think just before Christmas, that the press had accepted the manuscript for publication, which was cause for celebration as you can imagine. Breaking out the champagne; but maybe we should go back to Berkeley--

00:14:12

Lage: --And what happened in the meantime.

00:14:13

Brucker: What happened in the meantime, those six years. [laughter].

Job Offer as Instructor at Berkeley, 1954

00:14:16

Lage: But it's interesting to know what you have to do from the dissertation to publish a book. Not all that easy, obviously. So how did the move to Berkeley occur?

00:14:27

Brucker: I got a letter--this was the illustration of the way in which jobs were obtained in those years before all the changes that have occurred. It was basically historians writing to other historians whom they knew, "Do you have someone?" You know, no national searches; no searches at all. It was all done privately, and was done from friend to friend, colleague to colleague. A professor here at Berkeley, Ray Sontag, had written to a friend of his at Princeton--one of my teachers, E.H. Harbison--and said, "You know, we've got an opening here for a young scholar in late medieval, early modern Renaissance history. Do you have any candidates?" Jinx Harbison said, "Yes, there's this kid, Brucker, who's now in Florence doing a thesis. I'm told that it's pretty good." So I got a letter from the chairman of the Berkeley history department, Jim King, sometime that spring offering me a one-year job as an instructor at Berkeley.

00:15:36

Lage: So they were going to look you over?

00:15:38

Brucker: Oh yes, they were making no commitments beyond one year. Not even two years, just one year. Princely salary of \$4300. I was very excited because I had no other prospects. Although later on--when I was back at Princeton--Bob Palmer did say that Princeton would give me an instructorship, but the salary was \$3500.

00:16:06

Lage: So Berkeley was paying top dollar?

00:16:08

Brucker: Berkeley was paying more than Princeton, and I could see that there was no future for me in Princeton. I mean they simply don't promote--or didn't then, still don't I think largely--promote their junior professors to tenure.

00:16:20

Lage: I see, they hire senior--

00:16:22

Brucker: They hire senior people, right.

00:16:24

Lage: Did you know Berkeley's reputation at the time?

00:16:27

Brucker: I had almost no knowledge of Berkeley, beyond--I had heard about the loyalty oath, which I won't say it troubled me very much. I was interested in getting a job and earning a living for my family. I was told that I'd have to sign something, but it wasn't the hated loyalty oath of--which had already been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court--but there was another thing that everybody had to sign about, "I promise to uphold

the principle of the Constitution” or something like that. But no references to communism or communist parties or anything like that, which I signed, as did everyone else.

00:17:08

Lage: What did you know about the area of Berkeley and the--

00:17:12

Brucker: Nothing.

00:17:13

Lage: --reputation of the campus?

00:17:14

Brucker: Nothing, literally nothing. I knew nothing about the university, and I knew nothing about this world. I had met, let's see, a couple of people whom I'd known from Princeton. Kantorowicz for example, who taught here, but he didn't say too much about Berkeley. Then, a graduate student whom I did know, Bob Benson, who came in my second year in Princeton, had been a student here in Berkeley, and he gave me some information, but this is very fragmented material. It was really just a new experience. The only time I had actually seen the Bay Area was on a troop ship coming back from Japan in 1945, but we were here--in Camp Stoneman--for about two or three days. So all I knew was that the climate was supposed to be benign.

00:18:05

Lage: It was a leap of faith. But then you had a year--

00:18:08

Brucker: It was a leap of faith, but when one is young and willing to take chances--I realized that I could be fired after one year, and I guess I relied on my mentors at Princeton that they'd find me some kind of job, or that they would help me find a job.

00:18:26

Lage: Was it known that Berkeley did promote from below?

00:18:30

Brucker: Certainly it was--although this was, I guess, something that I learned when I came here--that the assumption was that particularly when you got on the tenure track--an instructorship was not even tenure track, and you weren't members of the senate, for example, as instructors--you really were regarded as employees, but you had no claim to any benefits beyond your salary. After two years--I was an instructor here for two years--then I got into the tenure track as an assistant professor step one--

Promotion to Assistant Professor

00:19:06

Lage: Do you remember that grand salary?

- 00:19:08
Brucker: I just remember getting a letter saying, "You've been promoted to assistant professor step one, and a salary of..." whatever it was. Maybe by that time, \$5000. Maybe even \$6000.
- 00:19:20
Lage: Was there a process of maybe sort of looking you over in a formal way?
- 00:19:25
Brucker: No, I mean they hadn't even seen me before making me an offer.
- 00:19:28
Lage: But I mean when you came here.
- 00:19:30
Brucker: When I came here, obviously, I think everyone in the lower ranks was looked at as a possible, without making any commitments. They wouldn't make any commitment because the administration wouldn't permit them to make commitments. After one was here for a while, you began to get the feeling people were looking at you, and sometimes you would hear reports that so-and-so thought you were doing okay. Of course, a lot of that was, again, just gossip, rumor; nothing concrete. So you would get the formal letter appointing you--usually late in the spring--saying you have been reappointed as an instructor, or appointed as assistant professor--
- 00:20:14
Lage: So that came as a surprise when you got the letter that you're appointed as an assistant professor?
- 00:20:17
Brucker: Well, I think we expected it, but it wasn't until--you know--until you got the letter you weren't sure that you really had a job.
- 00:20:24
Lage: You weren't told by the department chair?
- 00:20:26
Brucker: No, there would be none of that. No, no, because they were very, very cautious. They didn't want to make promises that they couldn't fulfill. Until the administration--of course all of these things went through the budget committee. Until the administration gave its approval, they couldn't really tell you what your situation was.

Teaching, Quality of Students

- 00:20:44
Lage: Did you have a lecture to give that was sort of a high-pressure event?
- 00:20:48
Brucker: My first course was a lecture on Renaissance Europe, yes. Eight o'clock in the morning, and I had to prepare lectures for that. Also, I was given a seminar--a research seminar--to teach, and I had just one student, so that was quite easy.

00:21:05

Lage: One student [laughter]. So they would hold a course for one student?

00:21:08

Brucker: This was one of the things that I really appreciated about, certainly our department, and Berkeley, was that they gave you advanced courses from the very beginning. They just assumed--I mean you're a PhD, you can do this--so I was teaching graduate courses from my first semester here. Then, each semester--I taught a Reformation course in the spring of 1955. I was teaching something that the department had just initiated, the proseminars for undergraduates. This was something that I made the point in my lecture here, that most of the courses at Berkeley were lecture courses, and that was sort of the standard pattern, but there were ideas about developing new kinds of courses, giving undergraduates a chance to enroll in a small course. I remember teaching one of the first proseminars for freshmen. That was a good experience for me. I learned gradually how to operate in a seminar environment. Not just with advanced graduate students, but also with undergraduates.

00:22:32

Lage: How did you find the undergraduate students?

00:22:35

Brucker: My memory, Ann, my memories are dim. I think I found them placid, quiet, obedient, certainly not radical. This accords with the whole FSM, the whole argument about Berkeley in the 1950s, was a very quiet--I mean the campus was quiet, conservative, just very, very faint glimmers of more radical thought and participation, which of course does develop by the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s. That's a very slow process, and it involved only a small minority of students. The vast majority of students were white males and females, more males than females. Middle-class, quiet, tranquil.

00:23:37

Lage: Well, what about intellectual curiosity?

00:23:39

Brucker: It was not--certainly a few students, obviously, that one got a sense--but I think they were mostly absorbing this because it was a requirement, and I can't say that I found a great deal of intellectual stimulation among the students. This is something that came later, the whole process.

00:24:00

Lage: It came with more radicalization?

00:24:02

Brucker: Well, no. I think it came, well, it came on both graduate and undergraduate levels, that is, just a gradual improvement in the intellectual quality of students. That was also a significant development among our graduate students. I would place that sometime in the mid-1960s again, when we began to get, for the first time almost, undergraduates from prestigious Eastern universities, from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Chicago. These were students who, a lot of them, came with Ford or Rockefeller Fellowships. These were fellowships awarded to bright, talented undergraduates who were given a fellowship, a couple of years of fellowships, for graduate study at any school that they could get into. I remember noticing, in the late 1960s in particular, while the turmoil was going on, a very

distinct improvement in the quality of beginning graduate students. I remember some of my students who wrote theses with me, some came from Swarthmore, some came from Chicago, some came from Harvard and Princeton. This was something that--when I first came, the graduate students here were largely Californian, and they were largely products of either Berkeley, or UCLA, or some of them came from some of the state colleges. It was largely a California contingent. By the end of the 1960s, it was a national contingent.

00:25:35

Lage: Do you think that was--I mean there's so many reasons this could be--the fellowships certainly facilitated it.

00:25:41

Brucker: That was a factor, I think also the revolution was a factor. It attracted students who were excited by the idea of coming to Berkeley because it was a place of ferment and excitement.

00:25:52

Lage: Then this whole--the traditional thing would have been for the brighter students maybe to go east. Now you're getting some brighter students coming west.

00:26:01

Brucker: Coming west, that's right, and bright California students staying here rather than going to other places. I mean certainly by the 1960s--this has been much talked about, the quality of the faculty of the history department had also risen to the point where we could certainly compete with any other university in the country in terms of our offerings.

Berkeley Atmosphere

00:26:28

Lage: Well, let's look back to when you first got here, and get some first impressions. Now, since you've written about this, it's hard--

00:26:36

Brucker: To find new things to say, well--

00:26:38

Lage: Not just to find new things to say, but to get back to your own first impressions. Do you have any recollections--

Brucker: Well, it was--I mean the things that I liked about Berkeley, it was certainly a very attractive town to live in. We lived in apartments on the south side on Derby Street, and then on Ashby. I certainly liked the community, not only the academic community, but I remember our neighbors--we had some neighbors who became very dear friends, graduate students who were working on their degrees. Just the general atmosphere of Berkeley--

00:27:12

Lage: What was it like?

00:27:13

Brucker: Very pleasant place to live, and certainly a very pleasant place to educate our kids. The schools then were really very good, and the public schools were very good. The climate was great, and we began to explore around, to go the beach. I had never grown up near an ocean, so this was all very exciting. One of the attractive dimensions of our social life was that we got to meet a couple who rented us a cabin on Clear Lake, up in Lake County, and they became very close friends of ours, the Durdalls. We used to go up and spend two or three weeks every summer at Clear Lake in their cabin, and that's where the kids learned to swim, and we had very, very pleasant times. So that dimension, and going to Lake Tahoe, and going to Yosemite, going up to Napa in the Napa Valley and tasting the wine, and that was all great, great fun.

00:28:17

Lage: Napa wasn't as much of a destination as it is now.

00:28:21

Brucker: No, it wasn't. It was actually quite delightful then. I can't say that I really find Napa Valley today all that attractive, but back in the 1950s and 1960s, it was truly a very delightful place.

00:28:36

Lage: Was it [Berkeley] a quiet town?

00:28:40

Brucker: It was, it was quiet and peaceful before 1964. It was just a good place, certainly, to raise a family, I'd reiterate that point.

History Department: Academic Politics, Social Life

00:28:53

Lage: Now, what about the department?

00:28:55

Brucker: The department, which I've talked about¹, so I really don't want to repeat myself, I did enjoy companionship with the younger faculty. Some of my dearest and best friends, like Bob Brentano, who's still teaching, and Bill Bouwsma, Dick Herr, Larry Levine, Irv Scheiner, these were all very close and dear friends of mine. I have written and talked about--written or talked about the, I won't say difficulties I had, but my resentment of the *baroni* because I just felt that they were primarily concerned with their own egos and with their reputation and their own power--

00:29:41

Lage: But what personal--now you've written about it, but you haven't written about any personal encounters, or how you developed this name for them?

1. In *History at Berkeley: a Dialog in Three Parts*, by Gene A Brucker, Henry F. May, and David A. Hollinger (Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley, 1998, based on Brucker's Faculty Research Lecture in 1995).

00:29:49

Brucker: It was just, I don't think I want to go into--I don't want to name people, but I was aware of how some of these elders, for example, would arrange to fight for getting favored positions for their students, for their graduate students, in terms of fellowships, TA-ships, that sort of thing. Even in terms of passing exams. I remember one case where a senior colleague was determined to get one of his marginal students through a written exam, and I remember that I opposed it, but in the end I had to accept his position so that the students who did well would also pass. It was one of these situations, and that's the kind of thing where you want to call it cronyism, you want to call it patron-client relationships, which has no place certainly in a university, no place in a department. I can say with total confidence that that kind of thing has simply disappeared. I mean it disappeared by the 1960s when this contingent of elders retired. I mean they were gone, and the people who replaced them obviously did not engage in this kind of activity. If they had they would have been boycotted or criticized or maybe even fired.

00:31:15

Lage: Who were the people in your area of study when you got here?

00:31:20

Brucker: At that time, a good friend, Gordon Griffiths, who later on was terminated, became a good friend. Bill Bouwsma came, and of course he was one of my closest friends. Bob Brentano, a medievalist, certainly, whom I got to know and became very fond of. Dick Herr came from, I believe from Yale, working in early modern French and Spanish history. These were my close colleagues with whom I worked, and of course then--

00:31:52

Lage: Were there any of this older group who were in your field?

00:31:55

Brucker: No, they were all--the elders, there were none in my field. Not even--well, there was a very nice medievalist named Paul Schaeffer whom I was very fond of, and he was certainly a good person who did not indulge in the tricks that I've described. I wouldn't say that we were ever close, but we were good friends and good colleagues. That was basically the--I made friends not just among people that I worked with professionally, but also in American history. Larry Levine was certainly a very close friend. Irv Scheiner, one of my oldest and dearest friends, in Japanese history. These were all--and I became good friends too with Joe Levenson, who was one of the intellectual giants of the department. I would have to say Henry May, and Ken Stamp were friends, even though outside my field.

00:32:59

Lage: When what seems to be the turning point in this struggle occurred, which I guess was over hiring Bill Bouwsma, you didn't even attend the department meeting at that time?

00:33:12

Brucker: No, I was not on the tenure committee; I was an assistant professor. I was asked by Ken Stamp to read Bill's book and to write an evaluation, which I did with great pleasure. I was very strongly--I thought it was a brilliant book, and I know that Ken used that letter for his campaign. He and his colleagues, the rebels, the Young Turks, certainly used my letter to say, "Look, here's Brucker saying that Bouwsma is a very good scholar." So that was my only involvement. I certainly was not involved in the negotiations, or in all of the

things that I guess David Hollinger has described in more detail than I did [in *History at Berkeley*], because I really didn't want to get involved in that issue in much detail, although I certainly agree with David, and Henry [May], and others--Delmer Brown--that it was a turning point in the history of the department. That it was the decisive event that literally transformed the department. So in that sense, it was a big deal.

00:34:22

Lage: Was there a buzz about it around then?

00:34:25

Brucker: I think there was, but you know, Ann, I simply don't remember now. I heard about it. I was obviously told about it. Of course, with getting to know Bill and Beverly, they certainly knew about it, but I must say that some of the details about the negotiations that went on, that appear--for example, I think that David talks about it--Ken Stamp's discussion of a trade that went on to facilitate this development was quite interesting. I didn't know about that at all.

00:34:57

Lage: Now you called [this group of elders] the *baroni*. Were you the one who coined that term?

00:35:02

Brucker: I think I was. I think called them the *baroni*, the Barons, and that of course is a reference to powerful, pre-potent--Italians have a word *prepotenza*, which is a characteristic certainly of Italians who are men of influence and power. They like to show off their power, and make it very clear to their underlings and their subordinates how powerful they are as a way of getting them to submit, and as a way of getting their support.

00:35:35

Lage: So you kind of recognized the--

00:35:38

Brucker: I recognized the type [laughter] right. I recognized the type, yeah.

00:35:43

Lage: [Laughter] Well that's kind of interesting. Any more about the social life among this younger group?

00:35:52

Brucker: In those days, I would have to say, much more--and this a point I think that Beverly Bouwsma made in her interview--much more socializing not only among the young, we certainly did, but also we were invited to parties and dinner parties given by our seniors. It was a very social department. Much more so then than now. I think this is an interesting development that I know Beverly has touched upon, and I believe others as well. So there were a lot of cocktail parties, and dinner parties. All very pleasant.

00:36:31

Lage: Henry May remembers the parties given by the older crowd--he didn't make it sound as if he looked forward to them too much. [Laughter] Do you remember, were they kind of stiff occasions?

00:36:48

Brucker: I certainly don't have a feeling of--the seniors who invited us to dinner were very cordial. I remember John Hicks, who at that time was still a member of the department, and of course was certainly the wealthiest member of the department because of the proceeds of his textbook, and he used to give quite fine cocktail parties. I still remember an occasion when a colleague of mine, John Snyder--we were all invited to the Hicks' house, up on Northampton--and John just used to bring around trays of martinis and manhattans, those were his drinks. He brought around a tray of drinks, and my friend John Snyder said, "Thanks but no thanks, I don't drink alcohol," and I thought John Hicks was going to drop the tray.

00:37:36

Lage: [Laughter] It just wasn't done.

00:37:38

Brucker: It was unusual, because mostly young scholars would grab for the drinks because they were--not that one drank all that much perhaps--but to be invited to drink as much as you wanted was fun.

Teaching with Faculty in Other Departments

00:37:56

Lage: What about getting to know people in other departments?

00:38:02

Brucker: There was less of that, but certainly I got to know people--this was part of an experimental course that I participated in when I was invited by Joe Kerman of the music department and Jim Ackerman of the art history department to participate in a team-teaching course. We called it *Italy from the Renaissance to the Baroque*. It was basically a cultural history of Italy, and I was asked to do some of the lecturing and attend the sections. I got to know them both quite well, and I learned an awful lot from them about things I knew very little about. I knew nothing about Renaissance music, so Joe gave me a primer course, and Jim, of course, was a superb historian of Italian Renaissance art. So that was an occasion to get to know people outside my department. Beyond those, I don't recall that I got to know too many people until the 1960s, when I had tenure and would be appointed to committees. To senate committees, and that's really how you get to know your colleagues outside your own discipline, at least I did. I got to know people in the Italian department. Arnolfo Ferruolo was a very fine scholar, and very delightful human being. We became very good friends, but it was mostly through senate committees that I became acquainted with the larger community.

00:39:31

Then in the 1960s again, I was at one time an assistant dean for Bill Fretter, who was then dean of the College [of Letters and Science], and I was one of his subordinates who had responsibility for some kind of appointments. I think it had to do with temporary appointments, visiting appointments. My job was to screen these, and there I got to know also a number of people. I got to know Bill, who was a very fine man. Bob Connick, I remember, who was an associate dean working in the office, and people like that. Walter

Knight, in physics, who later became dean of the college. I got to know those people quite well. That's just part of the general process by which the longer you stay here, the more committees you attend, or are appointed to, the wider your acquaintance is. That culminated, and I had four years on the budget committee, when I not only got to know some of the really fine people in other departments chosen because of their qualities, but also looking at all the dossiers of an awful lot of people, becoming aware of their records and their achievements.

Service on the Budget Committee, 1974-1978; Its Role in Appointments and Promotions

00:40:47

Lage: The budget committee is pretty powerful.

00:40:50

Brucker: Yeah, it was--was and is. It's remarkable--

00:40:53

Lage: How does one get appointed to that?

00:40:55

Brucker: The Committee on Committees, which is a senate committee, chooses who gets on to it.

00:41:02

Lage: And what kind of power does it [the budget committee] exercise?

00:41:04

Brucker: Well, its power is as an advisory committee. That is, it doesn't have authority, but it's a committee--when it makes a judgment on, say, a promotion or an appointment, it's a judgment that the chancellor, the deans, and the vice-chancellors almost always accept. That is, in a way, it's for them useful to say--if somebody is denied tenure, say--well, the budget committee is opposed to it, and I just don't feel like I can override the budget committee. So that's a way of diverting heat and hostility from an executive to a collective body.

00:41:48

Lage: But don't they rely pretty heavily on it?

00:41:50

Brucker: They do, that is they have to trust the budget committee, and if there is ever an occasion in which the chancellor or a dean did not trust the budget committee, then there would be a really serious problem. So they choose people with great care on the committee, and the committee works very conscientiously to be fair and equitable in its judgement.

00:42:13

Lage: It reviews every recommendation for hire or promotion?

00:42:18

Brucker: Certainly to tenure rank, yes. Every merit increase, it also looks at those. I think it still does. Departments from outside, senior professors, are obviously scrutinized with particular care. It looks at all of the personnel cases.

00:42:36

Lage: Does it assign a special committee to--

00:42:38

Brucker: No, basically it assigns members of the committee to be sort of the person who looks initially at the case and makes the report then to the whole committee, and then there's discussion, and then sometimes members of the committee will demur. There are cases in which votes are not unanimous, but if there's a substantial majority then the committee makes its recommendation--in a written recommendation--basically to the chancellor.

00:43:12

Lage: Are you relying on the work of the department in preparing?

00:43:15

Brucker: Partly that. Also external letters, and also there is also--the budget committee appoints for, say, a promotion, appoints a special ad hoc committee of some members of the department of the individual being considered for promotion, and then external people. That's a very important part of the budget committee. That is, we would appoint--I think they were five-person committees, ad hoc committees, to look at every case of promotion and senior appointment, and rely quite heavily on the judgement of that, which is not to say that sometimes we didn't overrule.

00:43:59

Lage: This committee?

00:44:00

Brucker: This committee, but rarely. Yes, rarely.

00:44:03

Lage: Based on what would you overrule it?

00:44:05

Brucker: If we just thought that the committee had made a mistake. [Laughter].

00:44:12

Lage: [Laughter] Does it work? Does this system work?

00:44:14

Brucker: I think it works. David Hollinger who was one of the co-authors of that pamphlet [*History at Berkeley*] has served on the budget committee, and he's written an article, not so much defending, but as saying that one of the reasons that Berkeley has a good personnel system is that the faculty has a much larger role in making appointments and promotions than do the administrators. Whereas in many other universities, the administrators are decisive and rely either not at all or only marginally on their faculty to give them information or input about their appointments and their promotions.

- 00:45:01
Lage: Did you run into--I'm trying to think of the years when you were on the budget committee--I know you can't talk about specific cases, but were there--
- 00:45:10
Brucker: Let's see it would be--
- 00:45:11
Lage: 1974 to 1978, we're jumping way ahead. You must have had some cases there, controversial--
- 00:45:20
Brucker: We certainly did. One cases in particular, Harry Edwards, the--is he in sociology? I believe he is. That was a very controversial case.
- 00:45:34
Lage: And was that a promotion?
- 00:45:35
Brucker: It was a promotion case, right.
- 00:45:39
Lage: How do you handle the controversy? Do you try to set that aside?
- 00:45:43
Brucker: In that case, it was so controversial that we actually appointed an external committee of people from outside the university to report, and they did. And the budget committee accepted their report, which was positive, and the chancellor accepted our recommendation, so he was promoted.
- 00:46:04
Lage: Then was there flack from within his department, or from whoever was responsible--
- 00:46:08
Brucker: I don't recall. There may have been angry letters for the chancellor, but I don't recall that part at all.

Increase of Women on Faculty

- 00:46:15
Lage: Do you run into other [controversies], you know, promotion of women...?
- 00:46:20
Brucker: Yeah, that was--I would have to say that the surge in the number of women on the faculty really occurred after my service on the budget committee. Already there were pressures to increase and expand the number of women, obviously, but I would say that the 1980s was the decade in which women, significant numbers of women, came onto the faculty.
- 00:46:48
Lage: Was there any pressure from above? From the chancellor [inaudible]

00:46:52

Brucker: Yeah, from--I would say it was female affirmative action. The university, of course, was getting pressured. All very legitimate because women had been woefully underrepresented. No question that they had been discriminated against, certainly in our department. The first woman to be hired who stayed was Natalie Davis; well, she didn't stay for long, but she did come. Henry May talks about Adrienne Koch having gotten tenure, but then she left. Natalie Davis was then the first woman in the department when I was chairman, and that was one of my achievements that I'm most proud of, that I persuaded her to come. When she came, she also took the lead in trying to get more women hired, and she was quite good at that and quite effective. But now, when at least a third of the department is female, the difference between then and now is quite dramatic.

00:47:56

Lage: I'll say. Well, we skipped way over a lot of things, and we'll have to go back. The whole 1960s, and your chairmanship and all that. Should we do that now, or should we--

00:48:08

Brucker: Why don't we just stop now and we could do that next week. We can talk about my chairmanship. That'll be a good focus. Okay.

00:48:17

Lage: Your chairmanship and also how you experienced the 1960s from a distance. Okay.

**VII. BERKELEY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY IN THE SIXTIES
AND SEVENTIES**

[Interview 7: October 30, 2002] ##

Correspondence with Friends at Berkeley while in Florence, 1964-65 and 1968-69

00:00:02

Lage: Today is October 30, 2002. As you said, a beautiful Indian summer day in Berkeley. You were telling me how you reviewed your correspondence from the 1960s. Let's start with that.

00:00:16

Brucker: Yes, since I've kept nearly all the letters that were sent to me, and no copies of letters that I wrote, this is sort of input from friends responding sometimes, often to my own letters. Also giving me a sense of how people were viewing the university during those turbulent times.

00:00:38

Lage: And you were away when?--

00:00:41

Brucker: 1964-65, I was in Italy in Florence, and again in 1968-69, I was at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for a year, and those, of course, were two of the most turbulent years that I missed. I guess I still would say, "Thank God I missed them." [laughter]

00:00:58

Lage: Well, what impressions did you get from reading the letters? Tell us, to start off.

00:01:03

Brucker: Well, I think that the impression of the atmosphere as it became--well the atmosphere certainly in 1964--the letters I was getting in Italy from friends about everything that was happening, and a variety of responses from exultation to deep pessimism, depending upon the perspective of my correspondents. [Interruption in recording]

00:01:41

Lage: Okay, now we're starting up again after having a small breakdown. We're on auxiliary battery. I think we're going, I'll watch it more carefully.

00:01:51

Brucker: Okay.

00:01:52

Lage: So we were talking about--

00:01:53

Brucker: The mood, the moods--

00:01:55

Lage: The difference between the mood in 1964-65--

00:01:59

Brucker: Right, the contrast. By 1969--1968-69--which of course was one of the really bad years with the campus being occupied by National Guard troops and tear gas floating around. I think people were inured in part to the problems, and I think some of the enthusiasm and euphoria certainly had evaporated. It was a much more realistic and perhaps a more somber response.

00:02:37

Lage: They were different kinds of protests.

00:02:39

Brucker: Yeah, and the protests were more violent and nastier, and of course there was the young man who got killed on College Avenue [James Rector, not a student, was shot and killed by an Alameda County deputy sheriff during a demonstration on Telegraph Avenue in May 1969]. I was here actually for that. I had come back in the spring of 1969. I was sitting in on at least one PhD exam, and also I wanted to talk to Nick Riasanovsky, who was the chairman whom I was succeeding. I wanted to talk to him about personnel problems, and just generally the departmental problems. I stayed with the Bouwsmas, and I remember how depressed they were, because I arrived just as the National Guard had moved in to occupy the campus after the killing.

00:03:24

Lage: Bill Bouwsma was vice chancellor at that time?

00:03:26

Brucker: And he was still vice chancellor although he was going to go to Harvard. I mean I knew he was leaving, so it was pretty gloomy. In fact, that may have been one of the low points, just in terms of morale on the part of everyone because of the death of the young man, and the occupation. I mean the campus occupation, and the sense that Reagan was so hostile to the university, and using the university for his own political ends. It really is true, I think, as some often have said, that the Berkeley situation made Reagan governor and president.

00:04:04

Lage: Were some of your colleagues ready to have a little order restored?

00:04:08

Brucker: Yes, certainly there was that. I mean probably half the faculty, probably even more, had become law and order types. We had to really crack down.

00:04:22

Lage: Are you talking about the history department?

00:04:25

Brucker: No, I'm talking about the whole campus. I think the department was just divided. I mean there was certainly a conservative faction who were all for law and order and restoration

of the status quo, and there were a substantial number of--what do you want to call them? Colleagues who were sympathetic to FSM, who were troubled by the violence, but who still believed that some of the protests, as long as they were peaceful, were legitimate; that there were still problems facing the university.

00:04:58

Lage: But you know, FSM was back in 1964-65, and then 1968-69 we were getting anti-war--

00:05:03

Brucker: It was all about the war.

00:05:04

Lage: --and the third world liberation movement.

Roger Heyns and William Bouwsma as Administrators

00:05:05

Brucker: And third world liberation, exactly. Those issues dominated the headlines, and dominated thoughts. I guess Roger Heyns was still chancellor then. I can't--I'm sure he was.

00:05:16

Lage: Yeah, until 1971.

00:05:17

Brucker: Yeah, he was chancellor during most of my--I must say I admired him enormously. I thought he got a rough deal from some of the faculty, and I think he was a very honorable man, who did as much as he could to deal with all sides of the issue equitably. But certainly the Vietnam War made it much, much more difficult.

00:05:44

Lage: He got criticized from both sides.

00:05:45

Brucker: From both sides, absolutely, yeah.

00:05:48

Lage: Now, how did Bill Bouwsma feel about the way Roger Heyns handled the problems?

00:05:53

Brucker: Oh, they were very close. They were relatives, actually; they were cousins. Bill also liked Roger very much, and admired him, and thought he did a superb job. He was also distressed at all the criticism that Roger was getting. Of course, Bill was about to leave. In a way he was feeling somewhat guilty that he was leaving the campus in such a mess, but also looking forward just to getting out.

00:06:18

Lage: Do you think that's one of the reasons he decided to go to Harvard?

00:06:20

Brucker: Oh, I'm sure it was. I think he was just drained by his experiences as vice chancellor. He really found it just very, very difficult. Bill is not, I think, by temperament an administrator. That's not really what he was [laughter] put on this earth to do.

00:06:42

Lage: He made the statement in his oral history that he had thought at one time of becoming an administrator, that maybe that's the route he would take.

00:06:50

Brucker: Well, I think he was disabused of that by his experiences. I certainly never recall in our conversations after he returned that he missed that life. I think he got, even in those years, a call--he was invited by some liberal arts college, I've even forgotten where, if he would consider being a candidate for president. I'm sure he just said, "No, no way."

00:07:18

Lage: It wasn't good years for campus administrators.

00:07:21

Brucker: The years were of my chairmanship--

Changing Faculty Attitudes and Teaching after the Free Speech Movement

00:07:23

Lage: Well, let's go back, I don't want to get to your chairmanship yet. I think part maybe of what was erased--part of what we missed, was when you mentioned--I had asked you whether your colleagues recognized the kind of discomfort about the university that was expressed by the students in the Free Speech Movement.

00:07:53

Brucker: I think they came too--I think this was a process in educating the faculty. Bill Bouwsma in one of his letters, I think, laid out the problem beautifully when he talked about the fact that the faculty was pretty self-confident, even arrogant about its mission, and about its role, and about its privileges, and this attitude had to be demolished, and an awareness of some of the problems and the reasons and the sources of the discontent among the students. Particularly that they were being short-changed, I mean this is a point that Clark Kerr had made in his famous lectures at Harvard about the multi-university and its problems. I mean he saw it quite clearly, although the way in which he might resolve those problems could be called into question, but he clearly did see. The faculty did not see. The faculty just saw, "Here we are, great university, getting better every day. We win Nobel prizes. We get national ranking. We're a world-class university." And the chutzpah, the arrogance that goes with that, that was certainly one of the casualties of the troubles.

00:09:20

Lage: And that was sort of a consciousness-raising experience.

00:09:22

Brucker: Absolutely. I think anyone with any sensitivity, on the faculty--there is a category who simply ignored this, but the vast majority of my colleagues not only in history, but elsewhere, were aware that there were some real problems that had to be addressed, most specifically about doing something about our teaching and about the students.

00:09:47

Lage: Was it like curricular changes?

00:09:50

Brucker: That was certainly--and the efforts I think to provide alternatives, the special courses that people were organizing were all attempts--I was thinking of Joe Tussman's program, certainly. People who were very, very strong in favor of providing students with a broader variety of courses, and paying more attention to them, and establishing closer relations between faculty and students. These were all efforts sparked by the troubles, no question. They were legitimate, and they were durable. They're changes we're still living with. The fact, it has to be said I think, that the university, or the faculty--I'll talk about the faculty now--and the administration did work very hard to respond to student needs, which were legitimate.

00:10:49

Lage: Did you change personally any of your teaching styles?

00:10:52

Brucker: I certainly paid more attention to--I taught a range of undergraduate proseminars, which I enjoyed very much. I tried hard to make my lectures in my huge lecture courses--what shall I say--more user-friendly. I really tried to urge students to come and see me in my office hours, and I made a very serious effort to be in my office when I said I would be. Talk to students about their problems, and--

00:11:25

Lage: What about relating to TAs? Were TAs part of your courses?

00:11:29

Brucker: Yeah, that was another part of the mission, and working hard with TAs to see how they were doing, and to give them a sense of trying to help them, as they were fledgling teachers. How they would deal with problems? That was a big part of teaching, say, History 5 or History 4A-4B, and I can't say whether my enhanced sensitivity really paid off in that area, but certainly, I think, we tried. A lot of us tried. Bob Brentano, I suppose, is a classic example of someone perhaps who didn't need to try, that he was always doing what he's been doing for fifty years, and doing it extremely well. But, I mean, that's the sort of thing, the kind of teacher he is. I suppose we all--that's what we want to become to the degree that we can.

Plan to Donate Correspondence to Bancroft

00:12:20

Lage: You mentioned, and I don't know if this got on the tape, that you have this group of letters that you received when you were away in 1964-65, and then again in 1968-69. Now, this was the kind of thing that someone like myself would like to see put right in the Bancroft Library. Even if it's sealed.

00:12:40

Brucker: It would be a problem how to organize it. I could try to do it chronologically, but you know I think rather than giving the Bancroft a huge pile of undigested letters, it might just be better to if I transcribe Bill Bouwsma letters, type them up, make Xeroxes, and present that to the Bancroft as a testimonial of some of the very best insights, and maybe expand it to two or three other colleagues just as a collection. The Bancroft could not make any sense out of it. It's a huge box of letters. There are a thousand letters there.

00:13:25

Lage: Now wait a minute, Gene, as someone who's worked in the archives yourself--I was thinking this morning while I was walking up here--someday will there be attention paid to Los Angeles or the Bay Area the way you've paid attention to Florence? Will it be seen as an emblematic place?

00:13:46

Brucker: I have no idea.

00:13:47

Lage: And if it is, won't they love to get these letters?

00:13:51

Brucker: Well, I tell you what, you certainly have encouraged me to start with Bill Bouwsma. I think that is a start, and then when I do it, I will show you--I'll Xerox it and give you a copy and you can see what I'm talking about.

00:14:04

Lage: I would love to.

00:14:05

Brucker: Whether or not the whole mess--I mean the letters are arranged, everything--I got hundreds of letters from graduate students working on their theses abroad. The largest compilation of these I have returned to the authors: my former students. In some cases, as many as a hundred letters from abroad, as they write back to me about what they're doing.

00:14:28

Lage: What a record of how you work with graduate students.

00:14:30

Brucker: Well, yes, it's a perspective. It is perspective. So--but let's start with Bill Bouwsma on that.

00:14:39

Lage: That sounds good. [laughter] I didn't mean to make such a plea--

00:14:40

Brucker: I think of all my correspondence, his--[recording stops]

00:14:48

Lage: Ok, here we are again, after that--pushing the wrong button. Now, we didn't miss a thing Gene.

Appointed Chair of History Department, 1969-1972

00:15:00

Brucker: Ok. Well when I came back after my year in Italy in 1964-65, I was asked by two chairmen, Carl Schorske and Henry May, to be vice chairman for curriculum. So I worked with them in those, the mid-sixties, also obviously concerned with things going on on the campus, and also getting some experience about how the department was run--how it should be run--from two very wise and very, very gifted chairmen.

00:15:33

Lage: May and Schorske, you said?

00:15:34

Brucker: Schorske, yeah. So I'd had some sense of problems that chairmen face, and so when I came back after 1968-69, when I agreed to become chairman, I'd had quite a bit of experience.

00:15:51

Lage: And how does one get appointed chairman?

00:15:54

Brucker: There is a vote by the department. I should say, faculty are asked their preference for chairman, and the current chair sends these to the dean. The dean looks them over, and while the dean has discretion, I think largely deans follow--they really almost have a vote who got the highest number--also with some sense that the dean might have of people. So it's departmental judgment followed by the dean's judgment.

00:16:34

Lage: Does anyone ever--

00:16:37

Brucker: --turn down?

00:16:39

Lage: No, does anyone ever lobby for the job?

00:16:43

Brucker: Certainly not in the history department. No one that I know--well, that's perhaps not true, it's certainly something one would not do in a very public way. Certainly the people that I

know who have been chair, none of them really were eager to do it because it's a lot of work.

Recruiting Scholars: Martin Jay, Tulio Halperin, Thomas Smith, and the REturn of Bill Bouwsma

00:17:10

Lage: Do you do less teaching during that time?

00:17:15

Brucker: I'm sorry, did I--

00:17:16

Lage: Do you get off your teaching--

00:17:18

Brucker: You get one-half off. So instead of teaching two courses a semester, you taught just one, so you do get course relief, that's right. But I mean it's just an enormous amount of labor having to do with the whole personnel business, finding candidates for jobs, soliciting letters, talking to colleagues about the fields that need to be replenished. While I was chairman--these were some of the most difficult times on campus--we were actively recruiting, and in fact I have to say with some pride, that we collected a group of stellar scholars to come during those very rough years. We got Bill Bouwsma back. We got Tom Smith, we got Marty Jay, we got Tulio Halperin, we got Jan de Vries.

00:18:10

Lage: Tulio came as a full professor.

00:18:12

Brucker: He came as a full professor.

00:18:13

Lage: And where did he come from?

00:18:14

Brucker: He was then teaching at Oxford, in England. We got one of our greatest catches, Jan de Vries as an economic historian, who I think was maybe the best European economic historian in the country.

00:18:30

Lage: Did he come as a senior scholar?

00:18:32

Brucker: He came with tenure. We also got Tom Smith, whom you know is a Japanese historian with great distinction. So we were busy, and that of course is also very time-consuming. We also got Natalie Davis, you know.

00:18:45

Lage: You were very busy.

00:18:47

Brucker: We were very, very busy.

00:18:48

Lage: Now, tell me if you can talk about any of these specifically. I don't know about confidences, but was it difficult to persuade them to come during this time?

00:18:58

Brucker: I would say not. In most cases, I think they were eager to come to Berkeley. In some cases, it was a question of--apparently Tulio Halperin was not happy about his situation at Oxford, so he was quite willing to come. He was a great acquisition. I'm trying to think of--Marty Jay was a young scholar at Harvard, just getting his PhD, so for him, it was just a job, and he was also very excited about coming because one of his great--one of the people he admired most, Leo Lowenthal, was in sociology. So he was eager to come. Tom Smith, very interesting, we invited Tom Smith to come. He came into my office and said, you know, described what a wonderful place Berkeley was--he was then teaching at Stanford--what a wonderful place Berkeley was, but he said he had to refuse the offer. So I said, "Well, I understand." Within the week all sorts of things happened, and he was persuaded to accept the offer. Don't tell me how it happened.

00:20:17

Lage: You don't know?

00:20:19

Brucker: Well, I know that he talked to some colleagues. He talked to Irv Scheiner, he talked to Fred Wakeman, I think he talked to his wife. I think his initial reason for not coming was he thought his wife didn't want to come, and I think she made it very clear that she did. So--

00:20:36

Lage: Well, Delmer Brown tells about calling him from Japan.

00:20:38

Brucker: Yeah, so it may be, I think it is that. But also, I have a feeling that it was his--that he had misread his wife's desires. So anyway, that was a great achievement, a great acquisition. But the crowning jewel was getting Bill Bouwsma back.

00:20:54

Lage: Now, tell me about that.

00:20:55

Brucker: Well, it was one of these very strange things. Except for a lunch that I had with a book publisher, Herb Mann, none of this would have happened; he would never have come back. Well, there was also the fact that we had a vacant chair with the tragic death of Joe Levenson. We had the Sather chair that was vacant. I had gone to see the Bouwsmas because the American Historical Association was meeting in Boston, and I went out, spent some time with them. We never talked about anything about coming back to Berkeley. A few weeks after that, I had lunch with Herb Mann, who had just seen the Bouwsmas, and I said, "You know, when I saw the Bouwsmas, they seemed to be quite content with life in Cambridge," and Herb Mann said, "They're miserable." [laughter] My ears pricked up, and I said, "Miserable?" And he said, "They're really very unhappy.

They just don't like it there. Beverly doesn't like it. Bill is not happy. The kids don't like it." And I said, "Huh?"

00:21:59

The next morning I called my vice chairman, Bob Middlekauff, and I talked to chair professors like Henry May, and I said, "I have heard that Bill Bouwsma is really unhappy at Cambridge; shall we go for getting him the Sather chair?" And they all said, "Yes."

So then I had to talk to the dean, who was very excited. He said, "Let's go."

00:22:25

Lage: Who was this dean?

00:22:26

Brucker: The dean was Walter Knight at that time. He was ecstatic about the prospect. He said, "I'll take care of the budget committee." That is to say, we wouldn't have to have the whole business of a review because he'd been on the faculty; he'd had a chair. Sometime in late-February, when the weather was delightful here, I called Bill in Cambridge and said, "Are you sitting down? You'll need to sit down to hear this news." And it was just a shock. I mean he was stunned. Beverly was stunned.

00:22:57

Lage: They didn't think that having left, that they would be invited back?

00:23:00

Brucker: They didn't think so, no.

00:23:02

Lage: Was that unusual to--

00:23:04

Brucker: Well, it is most unusual. It's extremely rare. Of course he'd only been at Cambridge two years, so it did seem circumstances were tricky. But within forty-eight hours he'd made up his mind, and was willing to face the anger of his Harvard colleagues to come back, and I know that neither he nor Beverly ever regretted that decision. But I was really pleased, but I also tell this story often as an example of *fortuna*. I mean without that conversation with Herb Mann I would never have thought of, "Let's try to get Bill." I doubt very much if he would have had the opportunity to come.

00:23:50

Lage: It's interesting that he--you'd just had been with them, and you were good friends, and you didn't get the--

00:23:55

Brucker: And I got no sense, and that may be my insensitivity, but I think also they were very reluctant; Bill and Beverly. Beverly could have said--you know, poured her heart out--and said, "I'm so miserable here." I may be exaggerating the degree of *miseria*, but I think they thought it out that it would not be proper for them to talk about what their mood was. It was cold, it was bleak, snow was on the ground, it was freezing--

00:24:21

Lage: So climate does have something to do it.

00:24:23

Brucker: I think climate does. It was so clear though that, when the opportunity arose, they jumped at it. They didn't dither. Bill said, I remember he wrote, that "if this were to be done, t'were best to be done right away." [misquote from *Macbeth*] [phone rings]

00:24:40

Lage: That's right, the longer you stay--

00:24:42

Brucker: So that was the jewel in the crown; I mean that made up for an awful lot. And of course we'd had the tragedy of Joe Levenson's death, which was such a horrible shock to us all.

00:24:51

Lage: When did that happen? Were you here?

00:24:53

Brucker: That happened while I was in--in the spring of 1969, while I was still in Princeton. I got a phone call from Janet Purcell who was in the--you know, our administrative assistant--telling this horrible news of the boating accident at the Russian River. It was just horrible.

So Bill's coming back--I won't say it made up for Joe's loss--it didn't--but it certainly was a big boost to morale. Everyone was feeling--we got him back from Harvard, and Harvard was outraged, and that didn't annoy us at all.

00:25:30

Lage: So there was that competition with Harvard.

00:25:32

Brucker: Oh sure, of course there was.

00:25:35

Lage: A coup.

00:25:35

Brucker: It was a coup, exactly.

Other Appointments in History

00:25:37

Lage: Now you've talked--let's see if there's anybody you missed that I picked up as having come. Gerry Caspary, did he--

00:25:45

Brucker: Gerry Caspary had come before. He'd already come I think before I was chairman, yeah. And Tom Bisson had come before I was chairman, so they were two very, very fine additions to medieval studies.

00:26:01

Lage: How about David Keightley?

00:26:02

Brucker: He came during my chairmanship--he still remembers that I took him to meet the dean. He was a new appointment, and a very, very fine appointment. I should have added him to the list of our stars that we managed to attract. He was a graduate student at Columbia. An older student, but working in this arcane field of ancient Chinese history and oracle bones, but he was a great catch. So we got young people, and we got senior people.

00:26:31

Lage: There are two other young people here. Segal as assistant. E. Segal, I didn't write down the first name.

00:26:40

Brucker: Ed Segal, he was a junior faculty member, and he accepted a job at Reed College because he was having difficulty getting a book published. Raph [Raphael] Sealey had come a couple of years earlier in ancient history, so we had--

00:27:00

Lage: Is Raph Sealey the one that I'd noticed I was looking at the catalog, in earlier years he's written down as a PhD, and then later years an MA.

00:27:16

Brucker: You know I'm not sure that Raph ever got a PhD because English scholars as a rule never did. They got their BA from either Oxford or Cambridge or London or wherever, and that was usually it. Now I think more and more English historians need to get a PhD before they can really feel they're qualified for a job. But in those years it wasn't required or mandatory, and you know, very fine scholars like Raph and others never bothered to get a DPhil after they did well in getting their BA.

00:27:55

Lage: And that worked in the American system?

00:27:56

Brucker: And we worked them into our system, exactly.

00:28:00

Lage: And what about Wei-Ming Tu?

00:28:04

Brucker: Now he--Wei-Ming may have come during my time, I just don't remember. He was here only a few years, and he went to Harvard. He was certainly a very fine scholar, but he didn't stay long, and I have only the vaguest memories of him, and I don't remember whether he came while I was here or not. I just don't remember.

Process of Searching and Recruitment, Role of Tenure Committee

00:28:29

Lage: Tell me a little bit more about the role of the chairman in these--in recruiting. You make it sound as if you see a really fine scholar and go after him regardless of field. Is that accurate enough?

00:28:42

Brucker: Well, the first--no--I think first of all, the chairman is responsible for getting a departmental consensus of needs; of where we have holes. Sometimes replacements. People resign or retire, and then so the chairman's job is to solicit opinions from his colleagues about the priorities of need. Then when it's established that there is a need in a particular field, the chairman--consulting again with colleagues, and he has a vice chairman for personnel--I had two fine, superb vice chairmen, first Gerry Feldman, and then Bob Middlekauff served in that role for me, so I relied on their judgment--appoints a committee of three colleagues to do a search, and to advertise that there is a position, and then to report to the tenure committee on who they have chosen, and why they have chosen.

00:29:49

Lage: And they choose one person?

00:29:51

Brucker: Usually just one person, yeah. Sometimes there will be choice number one and choice number two, if we can't get number one.

00:29:58

Lage: Would the field be as narrow as "Ancient Japanese History" or would it be "Asian History?"

00:30:04

Brucker: It could be "Japanese History" with an emphasis on, say ancient history, or Tokugawa history, or Meiji history, yes. That's usually decided by the people in the field about where they want to pick. You have to negotiate with the administration about whether it's non-tenure or tenure. Whether the administration will consider senior people for these positions--

00:30:31

Lage: When you say administration, is that L&S [College of Letters and Science]?

00:30:33

Brucker: That's the dean, right, exactly. So that was the job always to--sometimes these positions would be advertised to be recruited at any level, sometimes specifically junior faculty, and more and more had become the case, as the university headed into a budget crisis, of the dean saying, "No, you can't have a full professor for this, it's got to be somebody at the junior rank."

00:30:58

Lage: During your period, were there budgetary concerns?

00:31:00

Brucker: It was just starting toward the end of my period. The glory days of expansion and growth were coming to an end, and the university was getting its budget trimmed under Reagan.

00:31:15

Lage: And salaries were falling, it sounds like in relation to--

00:31:20

Brucker: Well, it may have been, I'm just not sure. Certainly there were no cuts in salaries, but it may be that there was--

00:31:26

Lage: I have read that sometime by 1971 or 1972,--

00:31:29

Brucker: --the university was falling behind.

00:31:31

Lage: They were thirteen percent under comparable--

00:31:32

Brucker: That could well be. So what chairmen also had to negotiate--that with the administration--so then these appointments, these recommendations, the tenured faculty was to meet and to read the works of these scholars, to read the letters of recommendation, and then we'd have a tenure committee meeting, which I was having, it seemed to me, just about every week. Either a tenure committee meeting on an appointment, or a promotion committee meeting to promote one of our colleagues. We were promoting everybody--very active in that area. The tenure committee then meets--

00:32:14

Lage: That's a big committee.

00:32:16

Brucker: --Yeah, that's a big committee, twenty, twenty-five, thirty people, yeah--debates, discusses, and makes their recommendation.

00:32:24

Lage: What's the tenor of the discussion in the tenure committee?

00:32:28

Brucker: Well, it's usually quite lively and sometimes controversial. I mean people have different judgments. At tenure committee meetings people could vote yes or no. Since we tend to trust our colleagues who make recommendations, I would say the majority--I'm trying to remember if while I was chairman any of the recommendations of the subcommittee was ever rejected, and I don't believe it ever was.

00:32:57

Lage: What did recommendation--

00:32:58

Brucker: That is a recommendation. If three colleagues recommended "X" in my three years as chairman, I don't believe any of those recommendations were ever turned down. We did have one of our recommendations turned down by the administration. He would have

been a tenured colleague, and the administration in this case said, “you can’t have “X” because we are not going to give you permission to make a tenured appointment; it has to be somebody at the junior level.”

00:33:27

Lage: Was it a budgetary decision?

00:33:28

Brucker: Yeah, it was strictly budget concerns.

00:33:32

Lage: Now, were these discussions over at all the type of history being written by the candidates?

00:33:40

Brucker: It was, well sometimes it would be--people would say that they thought the particular kind of history being written was not what they preferred, but usually it was about the quality of the scholarship, and the debates could be quite intense.

00:33:57

Lage: Did most of the people on the tenure committee read the--

00:34:00

Brucker: Most of the people did, and if they didn’t read, they wouldn’t come to the meeting. One of the things that I have to say about my colleagues during these years was how admirable their participation in works like this [was], and willingness to accept departmental appointments, or willingness to accept membership of a difficult promotion case. I just don’t recall ever being turned down if I asked someone, “Please serve on this committee. Will you serve this...” There may have been cases, but very, very few. So I regarded then, and I still regard, my colleagues as collegial in their willingness to accept responsibility and work.

00:34:47

Lage: Now, you got to choose these subcommittees whose recommendation was never turned down.

00:34:52

Brucker: Right, but I would consult with my vice chairman, and I would often consult with the people in the field. That is to say, if it’s an appointment in French history I would talk to French historians for their thoughts on who should be on the committee.

00:35:10

Lage: And would one of them be on the committee plus people from other areas?

00:35:13

Brucker: Sometimes they might be, yes. We’d always try to get at least one member, maybe even two, who were knowledgeable about the field, and then usually a third member would be someone who wasn’t particularly knowledgeable, but would be regarded as sensible and sane and balanced in his judgment. In those years it was nearly always *his* until--

Appointment of Natalie Davis to the History Faculty

00:35:35

Lage: It sounds like maybe it's the time to talk about Natalie Davis.

00:35:38

Brucker: Well yeah, we can talk about Natalie.

00:35:39

Lage: Getting her to come, how did--

00:35:41

Brucker: Well, that was, I was in fact--this was ironic and rare because this normally doesn't happen--I was, as chairman of the department, also chairman of the search committee. This was a departmental--I think the vice chairman, I think at that case it was either Gerry Feldman or Bob Middlekauff. I think it was Gerry, who said, "Well, you're the person who knows this field best, and even though you're chairman, we think you should be the chair of the committee searching the field."

00:36:07

Lage: For what specific position?

00:36:09

Brucker: To replace Bill Bouwsma. This was after he'd gone to Harvard. So, indeed--I can't remember who my colleagues on that appointment committee were, and I can't even remember, probably I have it on file, the report on Bouwsma. I do remember it was very short.

00:36:27

Lage: On Bouwsma or on Davis?

00:36:30

Brucker: On Davis--for Davis I had to write a very extensive evaluation of her scholarship. She had not published a book. She had published several articles, and we had a big part of a manuscript, so we had a substantial block of information, and I got letters of recommendation from scholars in the field who knew her work. We had the discussion; I don't believe there were any negative votes. I can't remember; if there were, it would only have been one or two. Then of course the case--this the administration was very, very eager to get women faculty. I won't say that they lowered their standards. I don't think they did. In the case of Natalie her credentials were impeccable.

00:37:17

Lage: But she was appointed at full professor, and without a lot--I would think--it's not a lot of publishing.

00:37:22

Brucker: That was perhaps a bit unusual, yes. I think in this case the feeling that the quality of her scholarship and the manuscript--we did think the manuscript was really very, very good.

00:37:36

Lage: Where did she come from?

00:37:37

Brucker: She was teaching at Toronto, University of Toronto. One of her very close friends was a scholar in her field named Rosalie Colie, who was teaching at Brown, and I remember I have correspondence from Rosalie writing at great length about Natalie's merits and her strengths. But she was widely regarded as a--she had actually come to Berkeley and taught as a visitor a few years before. So we knew her, and that I think also helped. I certainly remember she taught me an awful lot about early modern French history, and recommended books that I should have read and hadn't read, because she was very much in touch with leading scholars over in France.

00:38:24

Lage: Did she bring a new style of history to the field?

00:38:28

Brucker: I think--she was strongly influenced by *Annaliste* history. She was interested in women's history. She was interested in religious history, and she was a very successful teacher here. Of course, you can imagine how her appointment was greeted with applause by women graduate students. I remember talking to them about how excited they were that she was coming, and then, of course, to say "Okay you got one; now we need to go out and get more women." Which, of course, the department did.

00:38:58

Lage: Was that on your mind as chair, "What are we doing here with no women on the faculty?"

00:39:05

Brucker: That it would be a very, very good thing to start getting some women, yes.

00:39:10

Lage: Were there many women graduate students?

00:39:12

Brucker: There were a substantial number, certainly not as--I would say the percentage then was not as high as it is now. I think now it must be fifty percent, it must be just about even. In those years, perhaps a third of our graduate students were women.

00:39:25

Lage: And not one woman professor?

00:39:26

Brucker: And not one woman professor, yes.

00:39:30

Lage: Amazing. How did Natalie feel about coming to a department that was completely male?

00:39:36

Brucker: Well, I think she accepted this. She accepted the fact that her role was not only to do well, obviously, but also to be the first of many women to come. Because she did talk about the need, and I remember she talked about "critical mass." She said one person isn't going to do it here; if we're going to change the department, we need more women. Of course this is precisely what the administration was pushing for, and what I would say the department accepted. That it's true we need to do this, and we did--the department did over the years. Now I don't know, we must have one-third of the faculty as female.

00:40:20

Lage: Was her incorporation into the department smooth?

00:40:27

Brucker: You know, I can't really speak to that. I think it was. But I think Natalie herself would have to talk about that, if we could persuade her to come and be interviewed about her Berkeley years. I suspect there may have been some tension. I do know that one of my colleagues had a reputation for being a misogynist, but I won't name names. But I don't think there was any outward or public or visible signs of displeasure about her appointment. So that's about as much as I can say about that.

The History Department and the Antiwar Movement

00:41:03

Lage: Okay, interesting. I forget what burning question I had to ask you about all that. [pause] Let's just pause a moment. [recorder shut off] Okay, we're back on here and we're going to talk about what the other roles of the chair were besides recruiting.

00:41:32

Brucker: I think I saw my job as doing everything I could to keep the department together, to keep collegiality, and I think that did happen. I won't say that I was--played a particularly important role in that, but I talked about the willingness of my colleagues to do all the jobs that needed to be done. The sense that when we met together, even though there were political divisions, or divisions about the problems of the campus, when it came to scholarship and making appointments, these divisions simply didn't matter. Everything was then focused upon getting the best people that we could get for our colleagues.

00:42:15

Lage: Did you have a new generation of Young Turks who maybe were very involved in the antiwar or that [inaudible]

00:42:27

Brucker: I think there wasn't really a division in that sense. There wasn't a Young Turk movement because the new appointments--the younger people coming in--were not unanimous in one side or the other. There were divisions among them. They didn't all agree on a particular political position. I was concerned after the Cambodian crisis in particular--which was perhaps one of the most serious moments, when it did look as though the campus was going to shut down--to try to keep colleagues talking to each other, and we managed to succeed in that, I think.

00:43:09

Lage: How did you--what did you do?

00:43:11

Brucker: Well, we had meetings. We certainly had departmental meetings during the crisis about what our response should be; what we could do. I went to numerous meetings with administrators, with deans, and with other department chairs. I remember spending a lot of time going to these meetings. The history department stood out in the fact that it was

not as divided or as fragmented as, say, a department like sociology, which was almost--or anthropology, and political science--they were so fragmented by disagreements that they really found it difficult to function, and history did function through all this time. Of course, then we had to deal with political pressures. When the question--and I do remember the question of faculty members not teaching their courses, we got--the administration sent down questionnaires. We had to pass them around and have everybody describe what he or she--he again--was doing, what courses--of course, a number of people during that time taught courses off-campus, refusing to come to campus. So they were asked to record them, and of course, if there was a question of the colleagues refusing to teach, then the administration wanted to know what was going on. You could imagine the pressure from Sacramento--

00:44:35

Lage: The governor's office.

00:44:36

Brucker: Exactly, if you have people who refuse to teach, then we have to dock their salaries, and that was a big, big issue. I'm not sure any salaries were ever docked--

00:44:44

Lage: Did you have many people who did refuse? I think we're talking about after Cambodia?

00:44:48

Brucker: That was after Cambodia.

00:44:50

Lage: There was some reconstitution of the campus.

00:44:53

Brucker: That was after Cambodia, yeah. I don't think any of my colleagues wrote or reported that they refused to teach. A number of them said they chose not to teach on campus, and they had their classes off campus.

00:45:05

Lage: And that was acceptable?

00:45:07

Brucker: I think the administration regarded that as legitimate, but I mean, again, they were getting such heavy pressure from Sacramento. So that was my, I would say that was my main job.

00:45:19

Lage: Did the faculty resent having to fill out these forms?

:00:45:22

Brucker: If they resented it, they didn't take their resentment out on me. They just scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it in, which I then handed over to the dean's office.

00:45:34

Lage: Were the feelings divided over the war at all?

00:45:39

Brucker: I would say there was a majority of my colleagues opposed to the war, and a very small minority still favored the war, although I'm not sure by 1970 how much support the war was getting from anybody. There may have been a few who still thought it was a legitimate enterprise, but the vast majority of my history colleagues were opposed. But their opposition, again, varied from really intense, to moderate, to passive. I marched in peace marches, as did many of my colleagues, but not all. There certainly were some who didn't. Okay, let's stop it here.

VIII. HISTORY AT BERKELEY

[Interview 8: November, 13, 2002] ##

The Cohort of Historians Hired in the 1960s

00:00:02

Lage: Okay, we are now recording and today is November 13, 2002. This is our eighth session with Gene Brucker, and Gene, once again I'm going to ask you to backtrack a little bit. Thinking about this wonderful book, *History at Berkeley*, and David Hollinger's contribution in particular; we've talked about the cohort of about twenty-four men who were hired between 1961 and 1967, and sort of became the stalwarts of the department. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about those people. I have a list if you wish to look.

00:00:38

Brucker: I'd like to have a list to just refresh my memory, yes.

00:00:42

Lage: Also, what did this mean for the department? What types of historians were these people?

00:00:47

Brucker: There were two groups. Senior scholars and young fledgling PhDs came in large numbers. David Hollinger said there were as many as twenty-four? Well, looking over the list, I see many of my colleagues with whom I worked for the next twenty, twenty-five years. I mean it starts with--I think the younger cohort is really the interesting group. We did get some senior scholars, some very important ones. I think of Woodrow Borah who came, who was actually already here in Berkeley. I think of Jan De Vries who came in those years. But the key were the young men--

00:01:45

Lage: Hired as assistants?

00:01:47

Brucker: Hired as assistant professors. Bob Paxton in modern French history, Dick Webster in Italian history, George Stocking in American history, Larry Levine came in 1962 along with Bob Middlekauff, and those two young scholars became giants here. Gunther Barth, actually an older scholar, but he was still an assistant professor. Gerry Feldman in German history. Bill Slottman in Hapsburg history. Win Jordan in American history. The list goes on. Reggie Zelnik came in 1964 just as the "troubles" began. Ira Lapidus came in 1965, who's our mideastern historian. Fred Wakeman, a superb scholar in Chinese history. Erich Gruen, a classical scholar of antiquity. A remarkable group.

00:02:45

Lage: Is there something that characterizes them? Is there a Berkeley school of history?

00:02:51

Brucker: No, there is no Berkeley school of history. [laughter] All one can say is that these people were all fine scholars, fine teachers, and they became integrated into the community and became a critical part of the community. I recall when I interviewed a number of these people for my history lecture, some of them--I think in particular David Keightley made this point. He'd come from, I believe Columbia, I think that's where he got his PhD. He talked about what he found as the refreshing attitude of freedom and of a department that was not dominated by an old guard or by rigid hierarchy. He found that very, very attractive. I think most of them did. That it was--

00:03:41

Lage: Freedom to teach--

00:03:42

Brucker: Freedom to teach what they want. Freedom to experiment, to explore, teach new courses, join up with other scholars to do team teaching, that sort of thing. Feeling, again, free. There was not a hierarchy of *baroni* who ran the place. It was really a department run by the tenured faculty.

00:04:08

Lage: Was there any ideological slant at Berkeley?

00:04:11

Brucker: I would say not. I think one could say that there was a shift, perhaps, to social history, but that was not anything that we looked for specifically. It was just that so many of the best young scholars were working in that field: social history, cultural history. Which is not to say that we didn't hire people who did very traditional kinds of history. I think of Raph Sealey in ancient history--certainly a very traditional historian, but a very fine one. So, no, there was no--

00:04:48

Lage: Would you have hired a Marxist historian?

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Brucker: We would have hired a Marxist if we thought he was the best, absolutely. We never did hire a Marxist because there weren't that many good ones. Certainly not in this country. In England we could have hired, I suppose, E. P. Thompson or people of that stature, but no. No, there was no ideological bias or orientation, and the range of interest--I mean, some historians who politically were quite conservative, and some who were quite liberal, but we didn't have any ex-Fascists, and we didn't have any ex-Communists.

00:05:28

Lage: Down the middle.

00:05:29

Brucker: Yeah, down the middle.

Criteria for Evaluating Work of Prospective Faculty

00:05:31

Lage: We talked a lot about recruitment and evaluating work, but we didn't talk about the criteria for evaluating somebody's work.

00:05:41

Brucker: Well, the criteria, and this has to be fuzzy, was quality. We would first read the works of people that we were considering hiring. If it was a young fledgling PhD, we would read his thesis. If it's a senior scholar, obviously there would be more work to read, and we would read and then we would have a departmental meeting. We always had this system of a subcommittee of three of our colleagues who would make the recommendation if it were a senior scholar. Or a junior scholar. It didn't matter. Then there was a departmental meeting, and we would discuss it. I do remember lengthy discussions for trying to hire people to fill our chairs. I think of a lengthy discussion of Jack Hexter, who was then at Yale; John Pocock, who was then at Johns Hopkins; David Brion Davis, who was at Yale, a historian of slavery. These were people that we tried to persuade to come to Berkeley and fill our chairs. They all declined, but we spent a lot of time reading their work and discussing their merits.

00:07:07

Lage: So all that would go before any offer to them?

00:07:09

Brucker: Before any offer. I know in the case of both Hexter and Pocock, and Davis too, I think; all three went through the whole budget process, including the budget committee, and formal offers were made, and they declined to come.

00:07:26

Lage: Do you first ascertain that they have some interest?

00:07:29

Brucker: Well, yes, and they would come and give lectures. Another senior scholar that we tried to get was Benjamin Schwarz from Harvard in Chinese history, who also declined.

00:07:41

Lage: Do you know why they declined?

00:07:43

Brucker: Well, some of them were just very comfortable where they were. I don't think in many cases it would be that they were frightened of the turbulent politics here. I think they were quite content to stay where they were, and they probably got raises from their departments, their universities. Another case in point was Rudolph Binion, who was a modern European cultural historian at Brandeis, and when I was first chairman, he had been offered a job. A senior professorship, and he politely declined, obviously, for whatever reason; I didn't ask. I didn't go into that, but we did okay.

Endowed Professorships

00:08:26

Lage: Well, it's interesting to know who didn't come as well as who did come. Were the chair positions used to attract people from other places?

00:08:36

Brucker: Right. That is, an endowed chair meant that the holder would have, in addition to his salary, he would have money for his research, the income from the chair fund. There was, in a sense, a feeling that the chair holders were a special breed. Although they certainly did not dominate--they didn't become *baroni*--but they were regarded as--I mean think of the people who filled our chairs: Bill Bouwsma, Joe Levenson, Henry May, Ken Stamp, and now in more recent times Larry Levine, Leon Litwack--

00:09:16

Lage: Don't forget yourself.

00:09:16

Brucker: Well, myself, yes. So it's--

00:09:19

Lage: Now, those people were within the department.

00:09:24

Brucker: They were within the department, yes. Because what usually happened, Ann, was that we failed to attract outsiders and we, *faut de mieux*, we chose our own colleagues, which was not necessarily a decline in quality. It just meant--the feeling was that if we could get a really outstanding scholar from outside, it was good for the department to have new blood come in.

00:09:47

Lage: But surely the people who were already here must have liked getting the chairs, also.

00:09:51

Brucker: Well, yes, no one certainly--but I think the department, my colleagues, handled this problem quite well. I mean the most recent case where we filled a chair was Bill Taylor in Latin American history, whom we attracted from Southern Methodist University. You're right, most of the filling of the chairs has been our own people.

00:10:17

Lage: And the history department has quite a number of chairs.

00:10:19

Brucker: We have. I think there must be about ten by now.

00:10:23

Lage: Isn't that unusual on the campus?

00:10:24

Brucker: It's most unusual. The only other department that has a comparable number of chairs is probably the law school. I think history has more chairs than any other Letters and Science department.

00:10:42

Lage: Does that play a role, do you think, in keeping the department strong?

00:10:44

Brucker: Well, I think it certainly helps. People who get chairs, as a rule, don't leave. They're quite content.

History Faculty Who Left Berkeley

00:10:53

Lage: Now you mentioned the word "leave." Let's look at some people who did leave during those years.

00:10:57

Brucker: And that's a distinguished list too. It began with David Landes who left. Tom Kuhn--Tom Kuhn and David Landes left before the troubles.

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Lage: We kind of have the story of why Tom Kuhn left.

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Brucker: Yeah, we had that story.

00:11:14

Lage: Do you have anything to add to David Hollinger's essay in *History at Berkeley*?

00:11:18

Brucker: No. About the Kuhn case, no. I found David's piece very, very revealing because he got access to the whole question about the philosophy department and Tom Kuhn, which was quite interesting. In the end I think Tom was attracted to the East and he thought it was better for him in terms of his own career, his own interest.

00:11:44

Lage: Did he express that kind of thing to you?

00:11:46

Brucker: Yeah, he wrote a lengthy letter to his colleagues in which he tried to explain why he was leaving. David Landes didn't bother. He just said, "I've got an offer of a professorship at Harvard, and I'm going." That was just that. Other people who left of course included Carl Schorske, and that was a serious loss. Here again, he's written in his interview about his reasons and what a difficult decision it was. Natalie Davis left us, and that was also a loss.

00:12:16

Lage: Now, why did Natalie Davis leave?

00:12:18

Brucker: I think it was--you know her husband, Chan [Chandler Davis], is teaching at Toronto, and she just found this gap of three thousand miles between Berkeley and Toronto just too much. Also, she was attracted by Princeton and her colleagues there. Certainly I don't think she felt that there was any reason for leaving Berkeley because she didn't like it here, because I think she enjoyed it very much. And also, I think Natalie was interested in taking on new scenarios. Let's see who else. Bryce Lyon left, and I think, certainly, in part for the troubles. He was a very conservative man, and I think he just found the turmoil here in the mid-sixties just too much for him.

00:13:02

Lage: He went to Brown?

00:13:03

Brucker: He went to Brown.

00:13:04

Lage: Along with [Carl] Bridenbaugh?

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Brucker: Along with Bridenbaugh, but Bridenbaugh left before the troubles. Another loss, in that we lost Henry Rosovsky and I think possibly that too, Henry might have felt that he didn't want to deal with all the *Sturm und Drang* here.

00:13:23

Lage: Now was it just the upset, or was there a political conflict?

00:13:26

Brucker: No, I don't think there was a political conflict. I think it was the people who left by reason of the troubles because they hoped to find a place where there would not be troubles. They were, of course, all wrong, but then in 1964 the feeling I think generally was--and here's a point that Bill makes in his correspondence--the particular pressures in a public university from the public and also from the state government. That is a problem that Harvard, Yale, Princeton simply do not have. I mean, they may troubles with their alumni, but they don't have troubles with their state government.

00:14:07

Lage: So that would be an attraction for some of these people. What about George Stocking?

00:14:12

Brucker: Yeah, he left. Certainly not because he disliked Berkeley; I think he thought for professional reasons Chicago was a better place for him. He was always--he was really a historian of anthropology, and I think he found the Chicago anthropology department more congenial than--I don't recall talking to George about--I don't think, he certainly didn't leave because of the troubles. He was a fine colleague and a superb scholar, but he also, I think there were some personal reasons for his decision to leave. I know he's been very happy at Chicago. I think that's about the list. Bob Paxton left, and that was another serious loss. He left because I think he didn't find the West Coast congenial. He's an easterner. He came from Virginia, and I think he just felt he wanted to go back to a world

that he was more familiar with. A very, very fine scholar. A superb human being, and I really regretted his decision, but I accepted it.

00:15:19

Lage: Well, what can you do?

00:15:21

Brucker: Yeah, what can you do?

00:15:22

Lage: Do you make a lot of effort, or does the department make a lot effort to counter offers?

00:15:26

Brucker: Well, certainly the department. In some cases the department will go to the administration and ask for a salary increase, promotion, whatever it takes. In some cases the person who leaves is not interested in that. He says, "I've made up my mind." I know that was the case with David Landes. It was the case, I know, with Bob Paxton. He just didn't go to the chairman and say, "Well, if you can match this offer, I'll stay." None of that, no. "I want to go, I've decided to go, and that's it, that's over."

00:15:54

Lage: This reminds me of something I read in Bob Brentano's letter where he was considering leaving the history department for another department because of some rule they made about a leave. Not granting him a leave.

00:16:10

Brucker: Bob was certainly seriously tempted to leave, and he could get quite angry with what he regarded as departmental stupidity or administrative stupidity. There were certainly at least two serious opportunities for him to shake the dust off his feet. Thank God, he chose not to. But yes, Bob is the mercurial type who can get quite annoyed with things that he dislikes. But of course in the end, we find him not only staying but also becoming the head of--the chair of the Academic Senate. According to his own report, getting into constant fights with Chancellor Berdahl, and enjoying them.

00:17:03

Lage: And having the longest tenure of any faculty member ever.

00:17:04

Brucker: Exactly.

00:17:07

Lage: In that case it sounded like he was going to leave the department for another department at Berkeley.

00:17:12

Brucker: It's possible. Could have been possibly the English department, I don't know.

00:17:19

Lage: Did you have to smooth that one over?

00:17:20

Brucker: No, I had nothing to do with any—Bob would have to be interrogated about that, and if he wasn't in his oral history maybe Francie Starn could throw some light on it. I simply don't remember.

00:17:38

Lage: Are you good at calming people down?

00:17:41

Brucker: Not particularly, I think. My feeling always was, it's your life, it's your career. I remember when Tom Smith, who we tried to attract, and did ultimately attract from Stanford; he came in to say what a wonderful department it was but he was leaving to go back to Stanford, and I said "Okay, Tom, good luck, we really have enjoyed your stay here." Two weeks later he comes back and says, "I've changed my mind and I want to stay." That was a scenario that left me breathless, but I was delighted at its outcome.[laughter]

00:18:15

Lage: That's very funny. So you were chair when that happened?

00:18:18

Brucker: I was chair when that happened. I never made importuning phone calls to people. I never called Ben Schwarz, I never called Rudolph Binion, and they were two people whose appointments were hanging fire when I became chairman. These are adults; they don't need any pressure from me. They know what we have here, and they both decided not to come. But I'm sure that if I had called them I would have just annoyed them. It's not a scenario in which, I think, that kind of pressure helps. You just have to let them decide.

00:18:54

Lage: Were you yourself ever tempted to leave?

00:18:56

Brucker: Yes, I was. Only once was I sufficiently tempted. I got an offer in 1963, just before the troubles, from Cornell, and I went east and visited Cornell and had a very good time there and met some very fine people; and after coming back to Berkeley, after several weeks of agonizing about it I decided to stay in Berkeley--which was a very sensible choice, even though the next year all hell broke loose here. [laughter]

00:19:30

Lage: What was the attraction at Cornell?

00:19:32

Brucker: I think I was feeling, I don't know, I think the sort of feeling Bill Bouwsma had about, "You know, I've been here a long time." The excitement of another place, but in the end I realized that I had so many friends here and I enjoyed Berkeley. I also began to think about the climate in Cornell, which is very icy in winter and why would I give up this climate for that. But I think in the end I realized--it took me a while, but I realized that I really wanted to stay here, that I liked this place, I liked my friends, I liked the community, and I liked the department, and my colleagues in the department.

00:20:15

Lage: Also, in Bob Brentano's letters [to Brucker], one of his notations--I think this was in 1965--he said, "Don't go to Harvard."

00:20:22

Brucker: I was never offered the job at Harvard, but I taught in the summer school there, I think it was summer of 1964, to get some sense of the place. Had I received an offer I would have had to have taken it very seriously, but I didn't. So that's not an issue, as it became an issue for Bill Bouwsma, a very serious issue, as the letters I've given you will indicate.

Faculty Not Granted Tenure

00:20:54

Lage: I can't wait to read those letters. We also didn't talk about people who were not promoted to tenure.

00:21:03

Brucker: Yes, and that was during my chairmanship one of my most difficult tasks was to tell junior colleagues that the department and the tenure committee had voted against them. It's very painful, but in those cases, the one positive aspect of that is that they all got jobs elsewhere. People who were turned down here got quite good jobs and stayed in the profession, did very good work, published scholars.

00:21:37

Lage: Did they do work that might have cast into question the decision on tenure?

00:21:43

Brucker: I think in a couple of cases. Certainly, one might have thought of the case of David Brading in Mexican History. Certainly he has a fine reputation; serious, superb scholar. That's perhaps the one case that I would think might have called into question our collective judgment. But it is a collective judgment.

00:22:16

Lage: In the earlier period, there are cases that always come up. Some of these you really were not involved in; obviously, you weren't tenured yourself. Gordon Griffiths in 1955.

00:22:28

Brucker: That was a painful case for me, because I became very good friends with Gordon, and he was fired by the department. In a sense I was seen as the person who was going to replace him, but--

00:22:41

Lage: Now, why? You were already here.

00:22:43

Brucker: I was already here, but I had been recruited, in a sense, by people who were not happy with Gordon's career, his publication record.

00:22:53

Lage: He was in what field?

00:22:55

Brucker: He was in my field, Renaissance/Reformation field, absolutely. It has to be said to Gordon's credit that he never blamed me. He saw me, in a sense, as the innocent--not the sacrificial lamb but somebody who came wandering into the maelstrom, and we remained very good friends ever since then, and we've had good times together. He, too, I would have to say, his publication record suggested that the vote against him was perhaps mistaken, because he became a publishing scholar and a very good one, in my field, right in Florentine history.

00:23:36

Lage: Did you feel at the time, or did he feel, that politics was a part of this?

00:23:41

Brucker: I had no sense of it. I think he knew politics was a part of it.

00:23:49

Lage: Give a little background on the politics.

00:23:51

Brucker: I think it was not so much politics--I think there were people who regarded Gordon as politically of the Left, and in fact it's now been shown that he was a member of the Communist party, although that was not known at the time. But he was certainly a man of the Left, both he and his wife Mary were, and I think that did influence some of the opposition to him.

00:24:13

Lage: And his father was a regent.

00:24:15

Brucker: And his father was a regent, and I think that was a problem for him. The fact that his doctoral dissertation, which was published by UC Press, was not regarded as a very substantial piece of work, and I would have to agree with that. On the other hand, he was a very good historian. Fine historian, fine intellect, and a fine human being. I don't know all the history of the--I do know that one of his very good friends, Henry May, admitted that he voted against Gordon even though they had been friends back in Harvard. There were problems.

00:24:50

Lage: Complicated.

00:24:51

Brucker: It's a very complicated story.

00:24:53

Lage: Did he work in the archives?

00:24:55

Brucker: No, he did do some work, but he came to his archival work in Florence much later. He became interested in Leonardo Bruni, who was a Florentine humanist, and published

some very useful stuff about Bruni. He went to Lawrence College from Berkeley and then he went to the University of Washington, where he spent his career, which was a very distinguished one.

00:25:19

Lage: And then he wrote a memoir--

00:25:21

Brucker: And then he wrote a memoir, right.

00:25:23

Lage: Who knows where--it's not published, is it.?

00:25:25

Brucker: I think it's not published and I'm not--I know that Carroll [Brentano] has seen it, and I don't know what the status of that manuscript is, whether--

00:25:34

Lage: We wanted at least to get it for the Bancroft Library. Another one, is it Richard Drinnon?

00:25:44

Brucker: Dick Drinnon, yes. He was a very, very close friend of mine. He was turned down by the department, and I was very distressed by that, because we were such close friends and it was hard to live through that. Another close friend was Tom Angress, who was also turned down by the department. Some of my very close friends got the hatchet.

00:26:18

Lage: And in those cases, say Angress--I know that was kind of a controversial decision.

00:26:23

Brucker: It was controversial, and at that time I was on the tenure committee, and I remember making a passionate speech in favor of Tom and saying that his record as scholar and teacher was as good as that of most members of the tenure committee. To say, "If you're voting against him, you better look at yourself in the mirror," essentially that, but I lost.

00:26:46

Lage: What do you think the problem was?

00:26:48

Brucker: I think a substantial number of European historians agreed with the report, which was negative. They didn't think Tom's scholarship was up to their standards.

00:27:02

Lage: He was a great teacher.

00:27:05

Brucker: Yeah, he was. And a fine person. I still stay in touch with him. When he comes out to Berkeley, as he does because he has relatives in the area, I see him. Saw him just a year or two ago.

00:27:18

Lage: Did he go on to--

00:27:20

Brucker: He went on to Stony Brook [State University of New York] and has a very fine career, working primarily in the history of the Jews in Germany. That was his strong interest.

Attempts to Recruit Minority Historians

00:27:33

Lage: Another area where we didn't venture. We talked about hiring women, or not hiring women. We didn't talk about not hiring minorities, or the attempt or non-attempt to do so.

00:27:55

Brucker: The issue was particularly hiring black historians.

00:28:02

Lage: When did it raise its head?

00:28:04

Brucker: It had already raised its head certainly in the 1960s. It was a dimension of the whole time of troubles. Blacks were demanding more representation, both as students and as faculty. I'm trying to think of who--we hired a black historian, a specialist in Saharan Africa. His name was Richard Willis, but before--this is while I was chairman, I had already appointed a committee to review his work for departmental decision and before that was done he accepted an offer at Princeton. So he left without being judged here.

00:28:56

Lage: You mean he came and taught, but before he was--

00:28:58

Brucker: He came and taught as assistant professor, right. Before a tenure decision were made here, he decided to go to Princeton. Who was the first--I should know this. A very fine scholar, a black historian of black America--what is his name, I simply don't remember his name. [referring to list of professors] I don't even think he's here.

00:29:24

Lage: That just goes through 1969.

00:29:26

Brucker: Yeah, this happened later in the seventies. I can't remember his name, but he taught with us. I think he had a joint appointment with Afro-American Studies, and he also went to Princeton, I think to the theological seminary, because he was interested in religious history of American blacks. A good scholar, and certainly, I'm sure he would have stayed.

00:29:53

Lage: He would have gotten tenure.

00:29:55

Brucker: I know he would have gotten tenure. What was our first success? I guess it was somebody who stayed, Waldo Martin, and that was really quite late. So during my chairmanship there were so few black scholars. I think we would have offered a job to John Hope

Franklin, who was at the time at the University of Chicago, if he would have given any indication that he would be interested in coming, and I know that he was a good friend of Ken Stamp, and I'm sure Ken talked to him, but I'm sure that John Hope Franklin said he was quite happy in Chicago. There were so few, the pool was so small, and not just black history, but Chicano history, even Asian American history that there wasn't a large pool. Also, I don't think our department was particularly passionate about hiring people of color. It was not, I think, that there was any overt prejudice. I think it was a general feeling that there aren't many of them, and they're not very good. I may be unfair with that characterization.

00:31:13

Lage: And the competition must have been--

00:31:15

Brucker: And the competition, exactly. So it was really not until--

00:31:18

Lage: What makes you give that characterization?

00:31:21

Brucker: I can't recall, for example, that when we had departmental meetings about personnel, that there were any voices raised for "We have to do this." I mean, we did get Natalie Davis, and she certainly very quietly, and persistently, and effectively, campaigned to get more women into the department, and we certainly were responsive to that. But I think in the area of--it might be called "minority history," the feeling is--and I hope I'm not mischaracterizing my colleagues' attitude--was that the pool was so tiny that it didn't repay much of an effort to try to go out and find people. I could talk to my colleagues. For example, I do remember having a conversation with Bob Middlekauff, who is a distinguished colonial historian, when the question of hiring women came up. He made the point that there was a very fine woman scholar in colonial history in the East; her name was Pauline Maier. She taught, I think, at MIT, and he said, "There's no way we can persuade her to come to Berkeley because her husband, Charlie Maier, is a professor at Harvard. So forget about Pauline Maier." I mean, he was making the point that again, it's a small pool and the number of people who we would consider qualified are just so small that we would be defeated. Now, that attitude did change because as the number of women scholars grew, obviously we had a larger pool to look at.

00:32:59

Lage: Did anybody--maybe this is where the passion comes in, but did anybody work to get more minority graduate students, or women?

00:33:08

Brucker: I know that there was certainly--and I don't think we had to worry about women, they came in. I know that Larry Levine and Leon Litwack--and so did Win Jordan--worked hard to try to attract black graduate students in the field, and they were generally successful in doing that. So our one black historian now, Waldo Martin, is a Berkeley PhD, got his degree with Leon Litwack.

00:33:38

Lage: What about Win Jordan? We didn't talk about why he left.

00:33:41

Brucker: That had to do with personal matters, had to do with his divorce and his feeling that he just wanted to get out of Berkeley. Not, I think, again, because he was unhappy with the department. He had personal problems. The issue of divorce was sometimes a key element in people deciding to leave, and that was certainly true in his case.

00:34:05

Lage: It's not always an intellectual decision or a political decision.

00:34:08

Brucker: I know that Ken Stamp once said that in his experience, when historians--he might have said just generally scholars--when they go through a midlife crisis in their forties, they either get a divorce or they leave their department to go somewhere else.

00:34:29

Lage: There are probably more midlife crises in that time than before or after, I would guess. Did you get pressure from above, from the chancellor's office, to get more women and minorities later?

00:34:49

Brucker: We did. There may have been memos sent around, I'm not sure, but certainly in conversations with the dean, in this case it was Walter Knight, the subject became one that they really put--I wouldn't say pressure, they just urged us to do what we could to find [minority faculty], because they were under pressure.

00:35:10

Lage: They had the HEW [US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] investigation.

00:35:12

Brucker: Exactly. Right.

00:35:14

Lage: Did they offer extra positions?

00:35:19

Brucker: I can't remember, Ann, whether it came down to that. I have the feeling there certainly was an implicit understanding that if you could come up with someone really qualified whom your department wants we will find a position for that individual, yeah. But my memory's not good enough to know whether there was actually anything in writing on that or whether it was just understood.

Thoughts on the Quarter System

00:35:46

Lage: Okay. Well, those are tricky issues. Okay, one more wrap-up thing, going back to the sixties. You had said that when you were vice-chair you were vice-chair for curriculum. I notice that was at the same time there was a switch to the quarter system. Did you have anything--

- 00:36:02
Brucker: You know, I don't remember, Ann, did the quarter system come in before the troubles? In 1964?
- 00:36:09
Lage: No, in the middle. 1966.
- 00:36:11
Brucker: 1966. Then I was--was I?
- 00:36:15
Lage: Well, you were vice chair 1965 to 1966.
- 00:36:17
Brucker: I was vice chair. I must have been involved, I simply don't remember.
- 00:36:21
Lage: It wasn't a big thing. I was wondering if this was the time when the department said, "Oh here, we're having all this push for educational reform, and now the quarter system, let's remake our course structure?"
- 00:36:30
Brucker: Obviously we had to restructure all our courses, and I must have been involved. I just don't remember. [laughter]
- 00:36:36
Lage: Do you remember people's feelings about the quarter system?
- 00:36:39
Brucker: I think generally we were opposed to it. The case we always made was that history is a ruminative discipline, and you need a long time in a course, and we just thought that ten weeks was much too short, and that fifteen weeks was better, and of course, eventually the campus was able to persuade the higher authorities that we wanted to go back. That was in the eighties, I think.
- 00:37:04
Lage: That's quite a coup, really, there's only one UC campus on the semester system.
- 00:37:10
Brucker: Exactly.
- 00:37:10
Lage: I don't know what they see in the quarter system, frankly.
- 00:37:14
Brucker: Well, I don't either.[laughter] I suppose the only rationale for the quarter system is that if you're teaching a bad class it gets over more quickly.
- 00:37:25
Lage: From the faculty position. Now, let's see. Let's take a break here.
- 00:37:29
Brucker: Okay.

**IX. MORE ON CHAIRING THE DEPARTMENT AND SERVICE ON THE
ACADEMIC SENATE**

[Interview 9: November 20, 2002] ##

Controversy over Reginald Zelnik's Promotion to Tenure

00:00:01

Lage: And here we are recording, and today is November 20, 2002. That buzz you hear in the background is a neighbor cleaning up--

00:00:11

Brucker: Something. [laughter]

00:00:13

Lage: We're not sure what. This is our ninth session with Gene Brucker. So Gene, again we're backtracking to talk about old times.

00:00:22

Brucker: Right, back to my chairmanship.

00:00:24

Lage: Your chairmanship. One thing that I was reminded of by Bill Bouwsma's letters was the flap over Reggie Zelnik's promotion to tenure. Could you give some context?

00:00:35

Brucker: Right. This came up during my chairmanship and I'm a little hazy about the details, but I do know that there was some question of whether or not the regents would veto Reggie's promotion to tenure. Our department got very exercised by that, and I remember going to a meeting with then president Charles Hitch with some of my colleagues to make a very strong protest against any regential action denying Reggie tenure, because he'd gone through the process, he'd been recommended for promotion by all the committees, I think our departmental vote was unanimous for his promotion, and we made the case. I remember Ken Stampp was certainly one of the colleagues who went with me and we pointed out to Hitch that if the regents did act to deny Reggie tenure that this would have a very deleterious effect on not only morale in our department, but I think, throughout the university.

00:01:55

Lage: What were the issues, just to give background?

00:01:58

Brucker: Well, the issues were, there were some regents who thought Reggie had been very active in the FSM [Free Speech Movement] and they suggested--again, I'm not clear what their specific charges were, but there were some very conservative regents who thought that

the FSM was a disaster and that it was a Communist plot, and that Reggie was a Communist or a Marxist; I mean these were all charges thrown around.

00:02:25

Lage: After all, he taught Russian history.

00:02:26

Brucker: He did teach Russian history. [laughter] I don't ever remember which of the regents were agitating, but they certainly went to the press and started to complain about this case.

00:02:39

Lage: So you heard about it from public press.

00:02:42

Brucker: Yes, it was certainly publicized. Yeah, it was in the newspapers, in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

00:02:45

Lage: I think it was Regent [Glenn] Campbell and maybe [Catherine] Hearst.

00:02:49

Brucker: Could have been. In any event, this threat by some of the regents to deny Reggie tenure was averted, I'm not quite sure how. Perhaps it's possible that President Hitch actually took a strong line to defend the system and defend the procedures.

00:03:10

Lage: How did Hitch respond in your meeting with him?

00:03:13

Brucker: He didn't say a word, or he said almost nothing. He just looked like an--I was gonna say, an owl-face, but not showing any response one way or the other, basically he said, "I hear you," to our presentations.

00:03:28

Lage: Would this have gone up through the Academic Senate to the Academic Council?

00:03:34

Brucker: You know, it might have. If Reggie had been denied tenure it's very possible it would have.

00:03:42

Lage: I don't think the regents vote on tenure anymore.

00:03:45

Brucker: I don't think so either. They don't, they don't. I think it wouldn't be--perhaps that issue, which is what persuaded them. It was a very dangerous route for them to take. So that was one of the exciting moments of my chairmanship, and it worked for us.

Private Lives of Faculty: Divorces

00:04:04

Lage: Good. Well, that's interesting. Then the other thing came up, looking at Bill Bouwsma's letters, it reminded me that your chairmanship was a period when your family life took a turn--

00:04:16

Brucker: My private life. Yes, my wife and I separated at the beginning of my chairmanship, and we were divorced, and then I remarried my current wife, Marion, I think that was February, 1972. So in addition to trying to run the department, I did have this private dimension of my life, which was--it was probably a good thing I was chairman, because I do have to say that I didn't do very much scholarly work during my chairmanship. The only thing I managed to do was to complete work on a collection of documents that I had translated, and which were later published by Harper and Row, *The Society of Renaissance Florence*. It's a kind of work that did not require much intense intellectual labor. It was just basically selecting documents and translating them, and that came out in 1971.

00:05:19

Lage: Sounds almost like good therapy.

00:05:21

Brucker: That's a good way to put it, Ann, yes. And that book is still in print!

00:05:25

Lage: Yeah, I checked it out and took a look at it. Ken Stampp talks about how the department colleagues kind of reacted to his divorce, which was the first, I guess.

00:05:37

Brucker: His was the first, and he was in that sense the pioneer, so that with my news to the department there was no negative reaction and a lot of sympathy and support. Certainly no one reacting the way they did with Ken, and I remember receiving a note from Ken saying "You know, I sympathize with you, but it was a lot tougher for me," or something like that. He really caught a lot of flak, unfairly.

00:06:13

Lage: Well, that's the sign of the times, I guess.

00:06:15

Brucker: Yeah, exactly.

00:06:16

Lage: This was the 1960s, after all.

00:06:17

Brucker: Right.

00:06:18

Lage: Or the 1970s, after all.

00:06:19

Brucker: That's true, it was into the 1970s.

00:06:20

Lage: And did you have any custody of your children, or--

00:06:24

Brucker: No, my ex-wife and I had a very rational and civil agreement that--there was never any problem about my being able to see them, I came over and had dinner with them often, took them out to movies and things like that. That part worked quite well, I think.

00:06:49

Lage: Okay, well, we won't intrude in your private life anymore now. I thought that we should get it on the record.

00:06:4

Brucker: Yeah.

Colleagues and Collegiality on the Budget Committee, Faculty Roles in Personnel Decisions

00:06:55

Lage: We were going to talk about Academic Senate matters.

00:06:58

Brucker: Right. From when I resigned the chairmanship, which I think must have been--was it 1972?

00:07:06

Lage: 1972, right.

00:07:09

Brucker: I had a year's leave that enabled me to go back to Florence to do some more research on my book *Civic World* [*The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence*, Princeton: 1977)] and then in 1974 I accepted appointment to the budget committee and spent four years on the budget committee. In fact, for about the next ten years half of my professional life was working on the senate: first on the budget committee, then on the policy committee, then finally in the early 1980s--now, I have to even check my own notes--in 1984 I became chairman of the Berkeley division of the senate, so I spent two years engaged in that activity, which was certainly burdensome and time-consuming, but also rewarding. But I really would have to say that my years on the budget committee were, in terms of university service, the most satisfying and rewarding of my Berkeley career. I really enjoyed that work with my colleagues who were all very distinguished scholars, got to know them as friends, enjoyed working with them discussing personnel matters. Of course, we were responsible for academic personnel throughout the campus and I was particularly, I would have to say, very impressed with my colleagues in the sciences.

00:08:44

Lage: Who were they?

00:08:46

Brucker: Well, I think of Bill Fretter [Physics] who was the chairman of the budget committee when I first began to serve, Norman Phillips [Chemistry], I remember him in particular as a very, very excellent colleague, and now that you ask me I can't remember any more. But I suppose we can come back to that if I think--

00:09:07

Lage: We can add that. But tell me why you choose the sciences particularly to talk about.

00:09:12

Brucker: Well, because I'd had so little contact with the scientists. I had sort of done some senate committees with them, but I just appreciated the way in which they approached personnel problems, and the way in which they made their judgments, and the way in which they argued for their judgments in these matters. I'm not saying that the social sciences and the humanities weren't equally, because there were some excellent people, Dick Bridgman from the English department, Louise Clubb from comparative literature, I certainly enjoyed working with them. Larry Sullivan from the law school was an excellent colleague, really just fine people.

00:09:57

Lage: Did the people from the sciences sit in judgment on people from the humanities?

00:10:04

Brucker: Oh yes. They were right in there if they had questions or reservations, and sometimes we had disputes, and sometimes we had votes in which there were negative and positive votes on a particular case, but my impression was that it was the collegiality of our discussion, the fact we got along together, that we knew what we were doing was very serious business because careers were at stake, and judgments. It was the collegiality that I found both impressive and also comforting. The fact that, unlike a chancellor, or a dean, it wasn't an individual decision, it was a collective, collaborative decision on all of these personnel cases.

00:10:52

Lage: Were there any special problems of judging people from the professional schools?

00:11:00

Brucker: I don't think so. I think we all came to have judgments about the quality of the various schools, professional schools, but I won't go into that.

00:11:12

Lage: Why not?

00:11:13

Brucker: [laughter] I think it's probably just as well I didn't. But it's a university and the role of the senate in personnel matters, I think, is so crucial it really does set the University of California off from most other schools where the faculty, my understanding is, the faculty has little or no role in personnel matters, and that the administrators do all the judging, and the faculty, the role of faculty--in fact David Hollinger has written an article in, I believe it's in--I don't remember, but his experience at the University of Michigan compared to his experience here at Berkeley, and he did serve on the budget committee, and he also made the case that he thought that our system was superior and much

healthier way in which in fact, the faculty does have a voice, a very, very prominent voice in decisions about promotion and tenure.

00:12:17

Lage: I understand you would appoint--we talked a little bit about this before--the committee would appoint an ad hoc committee to look at each case.

00:12:28

Brucker: Right, the budget committee--actually, each member of the committee had certain departments under his--I won't say control, but under his purview, and so I would be responsible naturally for departments that I knew most about, such as the social science departments, some humanities departments--no, I guess I was primarily responsible for social sciences, so if a case came up in one of my departments: political science, or sociology, or anthropology, I would look over the particular focus and expertise of the candidate and try to find colleagues who would know something about the work. I would then submit three names and sometimes these names would go back to deans and sometimes the deans would protest, or suggest changes. But by and large it was a three-person committee and they were basically given all the documentation, which would include the reports from the department, the dean's recommendation--the dean's recommendation was a very important part of this--and then the three members would write a report, make a recommendation.

00:13:57

Lage: But the deans did get to weigh in.

00:13:59

Brucker: The deans got--absolutely, got the--

00:14:00

Lage: on the committee, and on the--

00:14:01

Brucker: That's right. Then the budget committee would look at this report and, in most cases, would support it, in a few cases would reject it. But our recommendation was to the chancellor and again, it was a recommendation. The chancellor, in 99.4 percent of the cases, would agree with us. In a few cases he would dissent, and if he dissented, if he disagreed, he would come down and talk to the budget committee about his reasons, and we would listen. We might demur, but it was his decision. He didn't want to come down too often. I'm thinking of Chancellor [Albert] Bowker, who was chancellor during my service on the budget committee. The idea--because all of this was reported to the senate, about how many times the chancellor overruled the budget committee--

00:14:55

Lage: So that's all on the record.

00:14:56

Brucker: That's all on the record. And clearly, chancellors did not want to be seen as overruling the budget committee too often.

00:15:03

Lage: Did he overrule during this period?

00:15:07

Brucker: Oh, yes.

00:15:08

Lage: I'm just trying to think what kind of a case would he turn against all this body of work that had been done.

00:15:16

Brucker: It was his prerogative. The chancellor does have the final decision, and it could be on the basis of he thought that perhaps the reviewers had not paid adequate attention either to scholarship, or to teaching, or to public service, or he would feel that the interests of the university were best served if a case were--it was usually, in most cases, where the budget committee would recommend rejection, say, of a promotion or of a--not only a promotion to tenure--but, say, moving from associate professor to full professor. In most cases--I can't think of any other, in most cases it was that the chancellor would decide in favor of the candidate rather than in--

00:16:04

Lage: Well, that's interesting. And for what kinds of reasons?

00:16:08

Brucker: The reasons were usually about the chancellor's feeling that the budget committee, not only the budget committee, sometimes the budget committee would recommend a denial of promotion that had been approved by the reviewers, and so he might say that he agreed with those bodies that supported, against our judgment. That was his prerogative. The point is this happened so very, very rarely.

00:16:40

Lage: And you told me about the Harry Edwards case.

00:16:43

Brucker: Yeah.

00:16:45

Lage: Since that was a social science, were you the one responsible for getting the committee together?

00:16:50

Brucker: Because that case had so much publicity, a special review committee of outside scholars was appointed to review the case, and my recollection is that it reviewed the case and recommended promotion to tenure. I have to confess I don't remember what the budget committee's view was, but Harry Edwards did get tenure.

00:17:16

Lage: You mean, you don't know if you agreed?

00:17:18

Brucker: I simply don't remember whether the budget committee agreed or disagreed. And that, of course, is not part of the public record. I just don't remember what we did. You would think I would, but I don't. I simply don't.

- 00:17:31
Lage: But if you did not agree, then the chancellor must have overridden you.
- 00:17:35
Brucker: The chancellor could say, "I support the special review committee of outsiders."
- 00:17:43
Lage: Did you get some help picking the special review committee of outsiders, or did you do it all on your lonesome?
- 00:17:50
Brucker: [sighs] I can't remember. I simply can't remember. This may be denial that I don't remember how that worked out. [laughter]
- 00:17:59
Lage: That's such an interesting case.
- 00:18:01
Brucker: That was an interesting case. And I think Harry Edwards is still a member of the faculty, as far as I know. So, anyway, this service on the budget committee, I found it satisfying, demanding for sure, but also quite rewarding and it gave me a view of the way the university functions that I would not have had otherwise, and of course that view got enlarged by my service on the policy committee and as chair of the senate.

Secrecy of Budget Committee Proceedings

- 00:18:34
Lage: Let me ask you one more thing on the budget committee. I know that later there was a challenge to the secrecy of the proceedings, the whole review proceedings from the departmental level on up. Was that an issue during your time period?
- 00:18:48
Brucker: It certainly came up, and I do believe--here again, my memory may be failing me, that we, the committee was instructed to prepare a statement--now here, I'm just again, vague about...it does seem to me that individuals who were denied tenure got a statement from the budget committee about our decision, but again I'm just very fuzzy about that.
- 00:19:23
Lage: I have my notes here. In the late seventies, faculty under review were given summaries of comments about them.
- 00:19:32
Brucker: I think that's what happened, yeah.
- 00:19:34
Lage: But then later there was an actual court case.

00:19:37

Brucker: And I believe that the university won. That is, the court decided that our secrecy was appropriate. And I've forgotten--but I do know, yeah. That was--but I think that was decided after I left the budget committee.

00:19:52

Lage: But is that something that you felt comfortable with? The secrecy?

00:19:56

Brucker: I think we felt that we needed secrecy; we needed it to do our job properly, yeah. And I think that would still be the feeling of the members of the budget committee. There have been cases, I think in Oregon there was a very messy case involving a promotion in which the state insisted on the records and the discussion being public. I'm trying to remember what the case was. I simply don't. Again, my memory is failing me here.

Role of Policy Committee

00:20:33

Lage: Let's go on to the policy committee. Tell me what that is. It's sort of a mystery.

00:20:38

Brucker: Well, it's basically--and again, boy, you need someone to fill in the gaps here--it was selected, I think sometime during the troubles of the sixties, and it was a committee that worked with the chair of the division to consider the most important issues facing the university, facing the faculty, and we would talk about--again, my memory of what we talked about is fuzzy. But I do remember issues such as apartheid and divestment, the issue of the Lawrence Livermore lab certainly came up, and we discussed that. We also discussed issues of the senate's policy on admissions. It was usually a question of looking over the various committees of the senate to see how they were doing and if any committee came to us with a problem, a problem of jurisdiction or some problem of a very sticky issue, then we would talk about it and discuss it. But we worked closely with the chair of the senate. I remember when I was on the policy committee the chair of the senate was Martin Trow, of sociology, and this was still a time where there were reverberations from the sixties and the troubles, so that we did have discussions, and I do remember that Mike Heyman was then chancellor, he'd replaced Bowker, and we used to have regular meetings with him. The policy committee and the chair of the senate would come and discuss problems with Mike Heyman, who was a very open and forthright chancellor. He was willing to talk about why he took a position, why he did this, why he did that, and sometimes our discussions got rather lively, but I always appreciated the fact that he was very open and candid. He didn't try to hide anything.

00:23:01

Lage: I think he'd been on the policy committee, at one time in his life.

00:23:03

Brucker: I'm sure he had been, yeah. And he understood also how the university worked. And it worked--he got very good background information from the way the place operates.

- 00:23:16
Lage: That's a interesting kind of connection, where the chief administrative officer comes and reports to a faculty senate committee.
- 00:23:25
Brucker: I think it's not so much, well, reporting for sure, but also just discussing problems, discussing the issues of the budget and discussing issues of allocation of resources. These things were obviously something that the senate was very concerned with, and then sometimes there would be universitywide issues that we would talk about: educational policy, that sort of thing.
- 00:23:54
Lage: Even though there were these other committees in the senate, like the committee on educational policy, committee on admissions...
- 00:24:00
Brucker: Right. And we would have regular meetings when I was on the policy committee, and also when I was chair of the senate, we would have regular meetings in which the chairs of all the committees would come, and we would all have lunch together. We'd find out what the various committees were doing, and whether they were having particular problems. It was really a way of trying to keep in touch with how the senate committees were working, how effectively they were working, and whether there were particular problems that needed sort of general discussion.
- 00:24:30
Lage: What is the representative assembly?
- 00:24:34
Brucker: [Laughter] Oh, dear.
- 00:24:39
Lage: Look at this--"Minutes of the Representative Assembly."
- 00:24:45
Brucker: Could I take a look at it?
- 00:24:47
Lage: It has even the membership here.
- 00:24:49
Brucker: [reading paper] Yes. Now, this is 1984, 1985. These were all senate committees.
- 00:24:59
Lage: So maybe that was the senate committees...
- 00:25:05
Brucker: Yeah, this was the committee on committees. The committee on committees, of course, chose and still chooses all of the committee members and it reports to the representative assembly. If you were to ask me what the representative assembly does, here's a statement on laboratory animal care. These are issues that--but if you were to ask me what the representative assembly, what its authority was, I confess I could not tell you. [laughter]

00:25:36

Lage: I wonder if anyone really knows what all these things are?

00:25:39

Brucker: If you were to call the current head of the Academic Senate, who was Bob Brentano a few years ago. You could call Bob Brentano and I'm sure he would tell you what he would know. But I am so far out of the loop now and it's been so long, I have not kept up with how the senate operates. Of course, there have been changes.

00:26:00

Lage: I know, but this is right from your time period.

00:26:03

Brucker: I should remember, but I don't.

Service as Chair of Berkeley Division of Academic Senate, 1984-1986; Controversies over Relationship with Lawrence Laboratories, Divestment from South Africa

00:26:07

Lage: So the senate itself meets twice a year?

00:26:10

Brucker: I think there are two regular meetings, one at the beginning of the academic year and then there is a second meeting, and sometimes there is a special meeting for some particular problem. And the problem, when I was chair of the division, the problem always was to get a quorum, because the senate is not always, shall I say--I believe the quorum, you had to get fifty bodies together, and there was some time when Pat Seawell, who was the head administrative assistant, who was in charge and ran the Senate office very, very efficiently, but she would come over and she'd make phone calls to senate members to say, you know, "Please come on Tuesday, we do need a quorum," and we would eventually get a quorum to transact senate business, because there were things that the senate had to decide, like approving recommendations for this or that. But these senate meetings I always found pretty stressful, because I never knew how things were going to come out, or whether there was going to be some issue that would rouse the members--those who attended. It was mostly routine business, and of course the chancellor would come and make a report to the division about his view of the state of affairs on campus. I cannot recall any big issues that--well, certainly the issue of the labs was something that we were concerned with, and it was a very divisive issue. The faculty was divided on it, and apartheid was another issue.

00:28:00

Lage: And those both came up while you were chair.

00:28:01

Brucker: They both came up when I was chair. I do remember, on the apartheid issue, there was a special meeting of the division, and I believe we held it up in the Lawrence Hall of Science, I don't know why. Perhaps because they had a big auditorium, because that did attract a large number. No, it was a meeting of the Board of Regents that was held up

there and members of substantial--I went up to that meeting too, just to watch the regents in action.

00:28:36

Lage: Because that was a secure spot.

00:28:37

Brucker: I think that's why they held it there, they were concerned about if they held it on campus there were going to be demonstrations. There were demonstrations, but I think the--I remember, we had to walk up, because I believe they had the roads blocked so to try to deter the demonstrators.

00:28:56

Lage: That was not really apartheid, but divestment.

00:29:00

Brucker: That was divestment, right.

00:29:01

Lage: And you had a lot of protests on campus.

00:29:05

Brucker: There was a lot of agitation about divestment.

00:29:08

Lage: In fact, in this record of the representative assembly, Heyman comes and talks about his view. Which is interesting, because he had been involved in FSM, and here he is chancellor during the divestment. How did the faculty--was there a strong majority either way concerning divestment?

00:29:34

Brucker: You mean concerning divestment? I would have to say I don't think the faculty was that concerned about it. I suspect that if a vote had been taken--perhaps there was a vote--that divestment would have gained a majority. I don't think there was a strong anti-divestment movement. I suspect it was either being strongly in favor of divestment or indifference, would be my sense of how the faculty would respond to it.

00:30:02

Lage: Were the faculty upset with police on campus again? Because they did arrest demonstrators.

00:30:06

Brucker: No, I don't recall that there was any strong views. Perhaps there were, I just don't remember. My memory, Ann, on this, as you can see, is not helpful. [laughter]

00:30:21

Lage: That's okay, I still have to ask you anyway. If it turns out not to be worth anything, we'll just take it out. Then we have management of the labs, you mentioned that. And that comes up periodically.

00:30:33

Brucker: I do remember. Here, I must give credit to my dear friend, David Littlejohn, who was, when I was chair of the senate he was chair of the policy committee, and sort of number two. He has the remarkable ability to organize an enormous amount of information and put it into a coherent package, and so he really organized the meeting. It was a special meeting of the senate to discuss the lab issue. We had representatives from the lab, and we had people who were opposed to the university's tie with the lab. And it was basically a debate. I don't think it was actually a formal meeting of the senate, it was just a debate that we organized, and we got both sides to come together.

00:31:16

Lage: And did you get good attendance at that?

00:31:17

Brucker: And we had very good attendance. That really turned out a lot of people, because, of course, there were strong supporters of the university's tie with the labs, people who had worked there or at least had connections there. There were also very strong views from people who were opposed to the connection. So that was a very lively debate, but a very useful one. David really did an excellent job in organizing that.

00:31:44

Lage: And then would you have--

00:31:48

Brucker: And I do believe there was a ballot, I think there was a ballot for faculty opinion about the lab, and if my memory serves me correctly--and I'm not sure it does--I believe the faculty vote was against the ties. I think so, perhaps you can check the record to see if that was the case. I'm sure there was a ballot.

00:32:07

Lage: I think that it came out slightly in favor.

00:32:14

Brucker: Really? You could be right.

00:32:15

Lage: And later, at some later vote the faculty went against it.

00:32:21

Brucker: Went against it. So, did that suggest that the faculty really was divided.

00:32:24

Lage: It was very close, very evenly divided.

00:32:28

Brucker: And I think we still have a connection with them. I mean, the university is still running the labs, right? Fifteen years later.

00:32:34

Lage: Right. We're still running them.

00:32:36

Brucker: So much for change, eh?

00:32:39

Lage: Now being chair, how did you get chosen as chair of the senate? How does that happen? Is that the Committee on Committees?

00:32:47

Brucker: I was in Florence at that time. I was acting director of I Tatti [Villa I Tatti, the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies]; it was in 1983. I had a semester's leave, and I had been asked to be acting head of I Tatti while the director of I Tatti, Craig Smyth, was on leave. I accepted that, it gave me an opportunity to go back to a place that I was very fond of.

00:33:15

Lage: We'll talk about that more later.

00:33:18

Brucker: I got a phone call from Norman Phillips, who was chairman of the committee on committees, and he said, "Would you be willing to serve as chair of the division?" and I remember at that time, Bill and Beverly Bouwsma were visiting us over at I Tatti. They'd come to Europe, and so they came down to I Tatti, and we put them up. I got this phone call, and I remember talking to Bill about--and Bill, of course, who'd had a lot of experience with the senate and the administration, he said, "Well, I think you'd enjoy doing it, but you need to be prepared for crises." He, of course was referring to his time as vice-chancellor. Anyway, I accepted the job, and I came back and I was chair from 1984 to 1986, and I had my stalwart colleague, David Littlejohn, as my second in command, and he was enormously useful in steering me in the right direction and giving me good advice about how to handle sticky problems.

Role of Chair of the Academic Senate; Service on Academic Council

00:34:27

Lage: Is there any general thing about being chair? Aside from handling these big controversies, what does the chair do?

00:34:37

Brucker: Well, the chair is basically responsible for--he's the voice of the senate, and that means, in addition to being involved in local campus affairs he also goes to the meetings of all the chairs of the senate, meeting regularly with the president. In that year it was David--

00:34:56

Lage: The Academic Council?

00:34:57

Brucker: The academic council. This was David Gardner, who was president during my service. The academic council would get the perspective of the university administration about the problems facing the whole university which included, of course, budget and included any particular problems that concerned the university. David Gardner would report on how the regents were feeling about this issue or that issue. He was always concerned to have good relations with the regents, and I think he did. And he also reported to us about

the problems that the president's office saw and the regents saw, about--I guess, as I recall it was mostly about money, getting money from the state. [laughter]

00:35:51

Lage: Were the concerns weighted towards faculty salaries and benefits? Or towards issues?

00:35:58

Brucker: I think it was issues about funding faculty and funding departments, and funding research programs. Certainly there was an interest in faculty salaries, but there were also larger interests in how the university was going to get the money to do what its job was.

00:36:17

Lage: What did you think about the way Gardner related to the faculty?

00:36:22

Brucker: I thought he was an excellent president. Again, accessible, articulate; he didn't hide the problems that he saw facing the university and he was very open with us about his concerns, or the concerns of his administration.

00:36:44

Lage: Did he listen, did the faculty challenge a direction?

00:36:48

Brucker: There were sometimes cases in which he would be queried about a particular position that he took or a particular view that he expressed, yeah. I can't remember any specific details. I did find those meetings useful. The council would meet either here in Berkeley or down in Los Angeles, and they would alternate back and forth. I think we met just about every month. We'd have a meeting with the council. Maybe not every month, perhaps every other month, something like that. But we were in constant touch with the president and the university administration.

00:37:20

Lage: Did it give you any view of the university that you hadn't had before?

00:37:24

Brucker: It did in the sense that I became aware of problems that other campuses had, and also, I would have to say, I would sense the--there was always some resentment about Berkeley as the jewel in the crown. It was as though they were saying, I mean some felt and sometimes they would express this feeling that "You in Berkeley think you're so great, but we're doing our job too." But yeah, I was certainly aware of that. But also, I remember being very impressed by the representatives from campuses--I remember in particular meeting a man who won a Nobel prize, I think his name was Sherry [Sherwood] Rowland, and I'm not sure, I think he may have been at Irvine, who was a very distinguished scientist and who had done some research on global warming. I don't know why, but I was just particularly impressed by his intelligence, his knowledge, his judgement. A very, very fine scholar and a very fine servant of the university.

00:38:32

Lage: I was interested the other day in a editorial in the [San Francisco] *Chronicle*. "Why do we need a president?" Did you see that? In light of recent events.

00:38:46

Brucker: I may have seen it.

00:38:49

Lage: Are there feelings like that on the Berkeley campus, do you think?

00:38:54

Brucker: I doubt it. I think the feeling is, I think there's always some sense of the regents being outsiders and not scholars, many of whom were chosen for political reasons and not for any other reasons, and that the regents need educating about what a university is and how it functions. There's always concern, I think, on the part of the faculty that economic interests, business interests, are sometimes allowed to intrude in what we regard as our inner sanctum, where we're all supposed to be pure scholars without any interest in or concern about business or money. That's an idea that's perhaps passé now. I think we're all aware that it's not possible to separate these two realms. But no, I think I really can't speak for the faculty now, since I've been retired for ten years. But I don't think that attitudes have changed, they just accept the fact that there is a bureaucracy and the bureaucracy might seem, at some time, cumbersome and perhaps inefficient and perhaps not as intelligent as it might be, but then all bureaucracies have these flaws. But that somebody needs to be the spokesman for the university, to deal with the regents. I think the feeling that was certainly very strong in the 1960s that the regents were playing an inappropriate role in interfering in the university during our troubles. I suspect now that that's not a strong feeling, although I do think there was a lot of opposition and resentment of the regents' position on affirmative action when they took that at the behest of that regent whose name now escapes me.

00:41:07

Lage: Ward Connerly.

00:41:09

Brucker: Mr. Connerly. I think that really did arouse a lot of hostility on the faculty. But that seems to have subsided now.

00:41:16

Lage: But what about hostility towards the president's office, or feeling lack of understanding.

00:41:20

Brucker: I don't detect there is, but that's just because I've been away for so long, I really don't know.

00:41:26

Lage: I am also interested in the feeling towards the other campuses. I know that that sense exists, that Berkeley is the kind of the jewel.

00:41:37

Brucker: Yeah, and that we get favored treatment, and we get our prestige in a way, in a sense the fact that our prestige is at that level diminishes them. Certainly there's resentment and jealousy.

00:41:53

Lage: Did you change at all? You mentioned Sherry Rowland, but did you get more of a sense of the other campuses?

00:42:00

Brucker: I got more of a sense of the particular problems that campuses face, and some sympathy for their problems, the difficulties that they might have, say, in recruiting. Yeah, because the people who were chosen to be members of the Academic Council were almost always first-rate people, first-rate scholars, first-rate members of the academic community. They didn't send any idiots to the Academic Council. [laughter]

00:42:37

Lage: Well, that's good.

00:42:39

Brucker: No hacks.

00:42:42

Lage: Did you have a lot to do with [Academic Vice President] Bill Fretter? The Academic Council?

00:42:46

Brucker: Had something to do with Bill Fretter, yes. I came to admire his--he was a very effective bureaucrat, very effective administrator.

00:42:53

Lage: And a scientist, was he not?

00:42:55

Brucker: And he was a scientist, yeah.

Scholars as Administrators

00:42:58

Lage: That whole question of scholars ending up as administrators is an interesting one.

00:43:06

Brucker: It is an interesting one.

00:43:08

Lage: There's a certain amount of administrative business in being so involved in the Academic Senate. Did you ever want to go a step further?

00:43:16

Brucker: No, Ann, and I can tell you a story that illustrates the point. I have no idea how this idea ever arose in the minds of--but Mike Heyman, when he was chancellor, called me in and asked me if I would be willing to be a candidate for dean of the Graduate Division. And I almost laughed, and I said, "Mike, I don't really--I'm not a good administrator, I'm too impatient, I don't like to sit through long meetings, you don't want me." [laughter] He nodded as though he agreed with me, but someone had suggested that I at least be--no, it is not my bag.

- 00:44:04
Lage: You don't seem like a meeting sort of person.
- 00:44:07
Brucker: No, I am not. I truly am not.
- 00:44:09
Lage: How did you deal with long meetings?
- 00:44:11
Brucker: You have to suffer them. If you're chair of the senate, you have to sit through some meetings. I mean, if you're departmental chairman you have to sit through some meetings.
- 00:44:19
Lage: But did you expedite them? Were your meetings shorter than other people's meetings?
- 00:44:23
Brucker: I don't think so, no. I think on the departmental level meetings are really important because you need just to keep a sense of collegiality, and a sense of people being involved, and ideas being exchanged. Higher up the hierarchy, I think meetings tend to become--what shall I say, pro forma, and it's one way of occupying your time if you have to go to meetings.
- 00:44:55
Lage: Like show-and-tell.
- 00:44:57
Brucker: Exactly. I have talked to Bill Bouwsma about how he survived when he was vice-chancellor, and he has the same feeling that I do about meetings being depressing experiences. Of course, he had to sit in on lots of them, and chancellors have to sit in on lots of them, and I've never really understood. I do think some people just enjoy that kind of work. And, you know, they become chancellors. And presidents.
- 00:45:29
Lage: Right. And you don't.
- 00:45:31
Brucker: And I don't.
- 00:45:33
Lage: Well, I think it's time, unless there's more to say about this phase of your life?
- 00:45:36
Brucker: No, I think this is fine.
- 00:45:37
Lage: Okay. Then next time we'll get maybe to what you do enjoy more. Research and writing and teaching.
- 00:45:44
Brucker: Maybe we can wrap it up next time, what do you think?

00:45:46

Lage: You think so?

00:45:48

Brucker: I think we can do that, yeah.

00:45:49

Lage: I don't know, you have an awful lot of books we haven't talked about.

00:45:52

Brucker: Let's just focus on that part and think about that as a final scenario, okay?

00:45:58

Lage: But we'll see. I think its going to take a couple more.

00:46:01

Brucker: [laughter] Okay, we'll see how it--

X. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

[Interview 10: December 4, 2002] ##

Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378 and The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence

00:00:01

Lage: Okay, now we're going. Here we are, December 4, we just tried to have a fire in the fireplace and had to move outside. December 4, 2002, tenth session. We're going to talk about your *oeuvre*.

00:00:25

Brucker: My *oeuvre*. Okay.

00:00:27

Lage: You have a better pronunciation of that than I. We have talked about your master's thesis, and we talked about your first book, which came out of your doctoral thesis, although you didn't really say that much about it, you just kind of tossed it off.

00:00:49

Brucker: Well, it was a work of apprenticeship.

00:00:51

Lage: That first book?

00:00:53

Brucker: The first book was. And my first exploration into Florentine archival records, since the book was based largely on archival research, which I did in the early fifties. The thesis needed a lot of work and I spent from 1954, when I came to Berkeley until, I guess, the spring of 1960, when I sent the manuscript to Princeton Press. The editor, a woman named Miriam Brokaw was the history editor at Princeton, a very, very intelligent, very nice woman. At the same time, I had a sabbatical leave to go back to Florence and start my second book.

00:01:54

Lage: At the same time that you were working on the first?

00:01:56

Brucker: Right. Well, actually I was wrapping up the first, and then I did get a fellowship to go back to Florence in the fall of 1960. While working then in Florence on the second book, which was essentially a continuation of the first I was going to continue--

00:02:18

Lage: In time.

00:02:19

Brucker: In time, chronologically, from the late 1370s. I was planning to write a book to carry the political story down to 1434, when the Medici regime began. A large slice of about eighty years of Florentine history, and again, basically writing political history from the archival sources. While we were in Florence, I got the news that Princeton had accepted the first book, and also the very pleasant news that I was going to get tenure at Berkeley.

00:03:02

Lage: That goes nicely together.

00:03:04

Brucker: So this was all very celebratory material, yeah.

00:03:05

Lage: Was one a necessity for the other?

00:03:07

Brucker: I don't think it was a necessity, but I do know that the department had learned that the book had been accepted for publication and that was a factor in favoring my promotion. So I spent that year starting research, working through basically the same kinds of material I had worked in for my thesis, and three years later I got another leave, in 1964, which of course was the time when the troubles began and I was away in Florence. So I had two solid years of research, which really was the research that got the book that eventually became *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* [1977].

00:03:52

Lage: And how did that differ from your previous--

00:03:55

Brucker: It differed in the sense that it was very different structuring of the book. Instead of being chronological, I structured this around themes: internal politics, foreign affairs. Although it was chronological, too, but I divided up, basically, internal politics and all the conflicts that were involved in that, and then foreign affairs is a separate theme. I had finished the basic research by the spring of 1965 and we came back to Berkeley, and I had started writing. I began writing the book while I was at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1968, 1969. But I didn't get a great deal accomplished. And then during my chairmanship I got very, very little done, but really I wrote the book from the time I left the chairmanship in, I guess it was 1972. I had a year's leave in the early seventies, most of which I spent in Berkeley writing, although Marion and I did make a brief trip in the fall of 1973 to Italy to pick up--I did some more research then, finished it off. So the book was done, the manuscript was done by 1975, and Princeton accepted it again. It came out in 1977, so that was the second book.

00:05:27

Lage: There's a lot of writing. I mean, you've done heavy, heavy research, and then it sounds like you spend years in pulling it together.

Renaissance Florence and a Coffee Table Book on Florence

00:05:33

Brucker: I spent at least two calendar years doing the writing. Now, while I was doing that, in the 1960s, I had also been asked by a friend of mine, Norman Cantor, to do a popular book on Florence, which I did write in the 1960s, while doing research. That book was finished by the time I had gone to the Institute in 1968 and it came out in 1969. The book's still in print.

00:06:06

Lage: *Renaissance Florence*.

00:06:07

Brucker: *Renaissance Florence*, right.

00:06:08

Lage: I notice that when you talk about your books in the seventies, you say you've written two books, as if you hadn't written *Renaissance Florence*.

00:06:18

Brucker: Well, two scholarly books, and then of course the survey is essentially using the material that I'd been collecting from the other books by putting it in a different format, basically for students.

00:06:32

Lage: Right, but not really popular, it seems to me.

00:06:34

Brucker: I guess. Let's say, then, it's a student handbook.

00:06:38

Lage: Okay. And still in print.

00:06:40

Brucker: It's still in print. The original publisher was a commercial publisher, John Wiley, and around, I guess it must have been 1980, they decided that it wasn't selling enough so they were going to terminate it, and my good friend Jim Clark at the University of California Press said, "Well, we'd like to republish it." And they did. So the UC Press published it, a second edition, in 1983. I didn't rewrite any part of the text, but I did add bibliographical materials that had come out since the book was initially published.

00:07:26

Lage: I hear it was adopted as official guidebook by the city of Florence. Is that correct?

00:07:31

Brucker: I don't know whether that's correct or not.

00:07:34

Lage: I saw it in writing somewhere.

00:07:35

Brucker: [laughter] Who knows. It was translated into Italian, as was *Civic World* translated into Italian. *Civic World* is still being used as a textbook in Italian schools, because when I was at a conference in San Miniato, a scholarly conference, I was accosted by some students who had copies of the Italian translation and wanted me to autograph it. It's still being used in at least some of the *lycees*.

00:08:16

Lage: That's very gratifying, I would think.

00:08:17

Brucker: Well, yes. Then I was asked in about 1980 by Mondadori, which is an Italian publishing house, if I would do a coffee table book on Florence. I did do that. It was essentially rewriting *Renaissance Florence*, although in much larger chronological scope from the twelfth century to the eighteenth century, so I had to cover a much wider spectrum of time. That book has done well, too, and I think it's certainly aesthetically the most attractive of my books. A lot of it I didn't do myself. That is to say, the staff at Mondadori--which I think is the most professional staff I've ever worked with, they really were very, very good--they chose all the illustrations, and also the little inserts, which spreckle, if that's the word, the book.

00:09:16

Lage: Inserts?

00:09:16

Brucker: Inserts, basically defining certain themes.

00:09:19

Lage: And did they choose those? And have you write them?

00:09:20

Brucker: And they chose them and they wrote them.

00:09:22

Lage: And they wrote them too?

00:09:23

Brucker: So I'm given credit for material that I really had nothing to do with.

00:09:27

Lage: Did they let you read them to see if this met your...

00:09:29

Brucker: I did go up to Milan; this would have been in 1983. I went up to Milan to basically look over what they were doing and the translation, because of course I had it in the English version and they had to have it translated, but I really was impressed with the professionalism of that group. It came out and was published by Mondadori in Italian, then picked up by an English publisher and an American publisher, but they just did a single printing and it was soon out of print. There again, my friend Jim Clark comes to my rescue. I think in the 1990s, he'd asked me if I would do another kind of *Renaissance Florence* with pictures, and I said, "Well, it really is already done," so I showed him that

and he said, "Okay, I'll go and work with Mondadori." And they did. It's come out again with UC Press.

00:10:28

Lage: And going back to your original text, not translating you from Italian.

00:10:30

Brucker: That's right, going back to the original text. So they didn't retranslate it. That would have been too much.

00:10:37

Lage: And how has that sold?

00:10:39

Brucker: It's done moderately well. It's the kind of book that I think people buy to give to elderly aunts or for Christmas, you know.

00:10:48

Lage: Or someone who's going to Florence.

00:10:50

Brucker: Or somebody going to Florence.

00:10:53

Lage: Elderly aunts, for Christmas. [laughter]

00:10:55

Brucker: You know what the market for coffee table books is? You give them to people that you can't think of what else to give them.

Popular and Scholarly Writing, and Different Approaches to Historical Writing

00:11:02

Lage: What's it like as a scholar to write a coffee table book?

00:11:06

Brucker: It's a different audience, obviously. I mean, when you're writing scholarly stuff, you're writing for a small group of people who are knowledgeable about the subject, but when you're writing a popular book you really have to be careful to keep the--it's not that you lower the discourse, but that you have to be careful to identify concepts and themes that people don't know about. If they have no background in, say, Italian Renaissance history, they have to be instructed. You have to be careful that you don't use phrases, words, concepts that make no sense today.

00:11:54

Lage: Do you think of the level of the audience that you are writing for--?

00:11:58

Brucker: I've always strived for clarity and simplicity, in the sense that I try to boil down an historical problem in a way that, for example, my dear friend Bob Brentano has said that he abhors, because he is so determined not to simplify. He wants the history he writes to be complex and complicated and difficult. He keeps insisting that he wants to write so that people who read understand just how difficult and complex and ambiguous real history is. I certainly sympathize with that, except that I do it differently. I write to clarify and simplify.

00:12:43

Lage: Even in your scholarly books.

00:12:45

Brucker: Even in my scholarly books, yes. To try to make it comprehensible. Bob and I have never talked about--I've told him I admire the way he writes, and he certainly suggested that he has enjoyed reading my books, but it is ironic, given the way in which his own vision is different. He does write not to simplify and not to make things "pretty." He once said in one of his introductions to one of his books that he wanted history to be pebbly and rough, and not simple. Not a flat surface, but a pebbled surface, that was his goal. And I think in his work, he's achieved that.

00:13:41

Lage: It's interesting that two people, both with very high scholarly standards, both wonderful historians, would take such a different tack.

00:13:50

Brucker: Yeah, but that's the nature of our discipline, and why I think our discipline still--I won't say prospers, but it still functions. Because it does embrace the whole range of approaches, attitudes, methodologies, focuses, and is one of the joys of our discipline, one of the talking points for history.

00:14:16

Lage: It wouldn't be something that you and your colleagues would get into conflict over, it sounds.

00:14:21

Brucker: No, I think that there has been a tendency among some of my colleagues to be wary of historical writing that seems too simplistic and too pretty, too neat. There have been arguments over the appointment and promotion of certain people in which that issue has come to the fore. But by and large, we accept the diversity of our approaches--we have to, because if you look at our department now, the range of the way in which people approach history is vast. We cater to all.

00:15:09

Lage: Is your work ever described as too simplistic? It doesn't strike me as being so.

00:15:15

Brucker: My work has been described as having no theory, and I accept that and even favor that, because I don't believe in theory, I never have. I think it's largely wasted in our discipline and I think it can be very destructive, because if you start to think, "Well, I'm just going to see the past through a particular lens and that's because the lens strikes me as being the

valid lens,” I think you can write distorted history. I just simply am not interested in reading about theory or to try to practice it.

00:15:53

Lage: And it doesn’t necessarily complicate the history or make it pebbly, as Bob said.

00:15:56

Brucker: No, it doesn’t. In fact, I think it tends to make it too simplistic.

00:16:03

Lage: Are there underlying theories? I think some would say that people without theories actually have some unrecognized theory.

00:16:13

Brucker: I guess what I would say that what I try to do is study the sources, study the evidence, try to make as much sense out of it as I can, being always aware of the distance between myself and my world and the world five hundred years ago. To try to avoid anachronism is something we should do, we historians. And we do, I think, by and large. Not always successfully, but we certainly try. And we’re aware that we are bringing our own perspectives and our own values to what we study, there’s no question of that. All one can do is try to be aware of that, and to try to see that it doesn’t distort our vision.

Giovanni and Lusanna, a Microhistory

00:17:06

Lage: You immersed yourself in these voluminous archives. How did you go about, just physically, organizing, keeping track of all this data?

00:17:20

Brucker: I would usually explore a source, just focus on one source at a particular time when I was working there and pursue that, usually chronologically. In some of my most recent work, I spent an awful lot of time with notarial records. I would basically identify all the notaries who I thought would be useful for the material I was looking for. Their records were always chronological.

00:17:53

Lage: Each notary kept a separate set of records.

00:17:56

Brucker: Each notary has a separate set of his records, which were basically copies of the records that he redacted for clients. So I would sit in the archives, day after day after day, going through those series of notarial records and then, of course, I might be interested in pursuing another. When I was working on *Giovanni and Lusanna* [*Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (1986)] of course the basic source was the transcript of the trial record of this dispute over marriage, but that led me [on] when I was trying to tell the story. I had to go to tax records to get information about the protagonists of the litigation, and I did some searching. For example, I wanted to find out my major heroine, Lusanna--I had found out from tax records when she was born, when

she was married, but I could not ever find when she died. That meant searching. I searched through a source called the *Libro di Morti*, the book of the dead, because Florentine bureaucracy had a particular office that identified people who died, and sometimes what they died of and when they died, and where they died, what parish. I was hoping to find Lusanna's death date, but I never did find it.

00:19:28

Lage: And you would expect to find it.

00:19:29

Brucker: And I expected to find it. But it just was not there, which led me to suspect that she--since we simply don't know what happened to her after the trial, in the mid 1450s--I suspected that she married somebody out in the *contado*, out in the territory around Florence. Remarried, I'm pretty sure, because she had a dowry and didn't die in the place where she was living with, I assume, her second or third husband, depending on whether Giovanni was a legitimate spouse or not.

00:20:08

Lage: Would she have been shamed by this loss in the trial?

00:20:11

Brucker: She certainly was the target of negative gossip, no question. She was accused in the testimony of having sexual affairs with other men.

00:20:26

Lage: Even while she was married.

00:20:27

Brucker: And of course, she had a sexual affair with Giovanni. Even though she was a widow, that was a sexual liaison that was not permitted by the Church. Her neighbors talked about her character, and there was always a dimension of regarding her as profligate and of loose sexual mores. Whether or not she felt shamed by that, I just don't know, and there is no evidence to tell me. I think she was a pretty high spirited woman.

00:21:08

Lage: She seems it.

00:21:09

Brucker: She probably just shrugged her shoulders and said, "This is my life."

00:21:12

Lage: Did you get a sense of her, [whether] this life she led was very different from other women?

00:21:17

Brucker: I think only in the sense that she clearly was attractive to men, and attracted to men, at least that's the suggestion. Whereas I think in her class, the artisan class, women simply did not, by and large, do that. They were not promiscuous. They got married, they stayed married, again because this was a society in which everybody's watching you.

00:21:52

Lage: Obviously.

00:21:57

Brucker: So in that sense I think she was different, and also, being very attractive, clearly both did attract the attentions of men and enjoyed being attractive.

00:22:07

Lage: How did you come across her story?

00:22:10

Brucker: By accident. I was looking through notarial records to find things about the Florentine church, and I stumbled across this notary, Filippo Mazzei who recorded in his protocols parts of the testimony. At first I couldn't piece it together, I had to work my way through an awful lot of material. Then I realized because his protocols contained, I think I estimated something like three hundred pages of testimonies, I was really struck by it and absorbed by it, even obsessed by it. I spent the late spring of 1980--I stumbled across it toward the end of my year of doing research in Florence; it must have been perhaps February or March of 1980.

00:23:05

Lage: You were working on the Church.

00:23:06

Brucker: And I was working on the Church. And then I got so hooked by Giovanni and Lusanna that I just threw everything else aside and focused on finding more material about her. So by the end of that year, when we left--I forgot, perhaps that summer--I think I had copied much of the transcript. I went back later on in 1983.

00:23:30

Lage: The three hundred pages?

00:23:31

Brucker: Yeah, I still have them here in my files.

00:23:34

Lage: Copied into English.

00:23:36

Brucker: I had. I didn't Xerox any of it, I wanted to copy it. And then when I went back in 1983, I did find some more material in other sources and other notarial records, and it was by that year I'd actually given a public lecture here in Berkeley about Giovanni and Lusanna and a large crowd came. I remember my then colleague Win Jordan said, "You'd better hire yourself a agent, because Hollywood's going to want the story." Then I gave that lecture based on the book, really it was a summary; I gave the lecture in Chicago, I gave a lecture in Edinburgh, I gave a lecture in Florence, I gave a lecture in New York, basically this same lecture, you know, that sort of thing. And then I wrote it up.

00:24:26

Lage: So the lectures came first.

00:24:28

Brucker: I wrote the lecture first, based on the material I had collected. Then sometime in the mid-eighties I sat down and wrote the book again for my dear friend Jim Clark. He was very enthusiastic.

- 00:24:40
Lage: I have to find out more about your dear friend Jim Clark, but when you were working on this, or starting on this, was microhistory an interest in the profession?
- :00:24:53
Brucker: Microhistory, by that time, had become a very big historiographical topic. Again, Italian scholars had taken the lead in developing microhistory. Carlo Ginzburg--his book on *The Cheese and the Worms* [1980] on Menocchio, and Natalie Davis with her book on Martin Guerre [*The Return of Martin Guerre*, 1983]. These books had already come out, and they'd attracted a great deal of attention, and there were people writing about what this new form of history was.
- 00:25:26
Lage: But *Martin Guerre* was 1983, and you started on this in 1980.
- 00:25:32
Brucker: Did *Martin Guerre* come out in 1983? I always thought it was before.
- 00:25:36
Lage: Maybe it was before and I was looking at a later edition.
- 00:25:39
Brucker: Anyway, by the time I was writing, in fact I remember that Jim asked me, after I'd sent the manuscript to him, to the press, he wanted me to write an introduction in which I did talk about microhistory. Specifically, to try to place *Giovanni and Lusanna* in the context of microhistory. That meant that I had to do some reading in--I won't say the theory, but at least the practice.
- 00:26:02
Lage: Well, what is the theory?
- 00:26:04
Brucker: Well, the theory is that this is an important way to get at historical reality, to focus on a very small, limited topic, a village, or an individual, or a trial, or something quite specific, a riot, a food riot. I think *Montaillou* perhaps was the supreme example of the book on a village in the [French] Pyrenees that Le Roy Ladurie, the great French historian wrote, which was one of the earliest and perhaps, I think, still one of the very best. It's basically a story based on Inquisition records of people who'd been haled before the Inquisition on charges of heresy, in this mountain village in the Pyrenees. Le Roy Ladurie exploited that to write *Montaillou*. It's really a beautiful, even though it's been highly criticized, but it's still a splendid work of history focusing on a village of say, two or three hundred people.
- 00:27:14
Lage: Can you do that if you don't know the civic world of Renaissance Florence, for instance?
- 00:27:18
Brucker: No, you need some background, sure. You need some background so you can provide context. You have to provide context, you just can't write out of "this is a nice story."
- 00:27:28
Lage: Not just provide it, but understand it.

00:27:30

Brucker: Yeah, exactly. So the best microhistory is microhistory written by people who have immersed themselves in the larger picture, for sure.

Methods of Research and Writing, and Evocative Sources

00:27:43

Lage: Very interesting. Let me take you back to how you managed all this. You say you read through the records. Does this mean you took notes on all the records, and how did you take them?

00:27:55

Brucker: Actually, I copied the records. I copied the trials.

00:27:57

Lage: Not just this, but for *The Civic World*.

00:28:00

Brucker: Oh, *Civic World*. There, a lot of note-taking and a lot of Xeroxing. I Xeroxed a lot of material which still lies here in my study. Obviously Xeroxing means you don't have to spend a lot of time copying. I would take notes. Sometimes my notes would be writing a brief description of whatever I was studying or reading and then saying, "I may have to go back and look at this more carefully again." Yeah, I have piles, and piles, and piles of notes.

00:28:37

Lage: I would think it'd be so easy to kind of get lost in the data, and how do you get the relationships, the themes that you want?

00:28:44

Brucker: That's the work. That's what's in your writing. When you're writing it up, that's when you basically make decisions about what's important, what's not, what matters, what doesn't, what themes you want to stress and what themes you can forget about. That's part of the trade, part of the discipline.

00:29:06

Lage: That's why it takes so long to write it.

00:29:08

Brucker: I agonized. The hardest piece of writing I think I've ever done was writing an introduction to *Civic World* when I was trying to situate the book into the, by that time, very large historiography on Florentine history, and not just Florentine history but the history of Italian cities in the medieval and earlier Renaissance period. I sweated blood over that. [laughter] I'm pretty satisfied that I had described as accurately as I think can be described the historiography that I was adding to and where I fit it in to the larger issues and themes. But that really--I remember when I say blood, it was blood. I have less difficulty writing sort of political summaries, or summaries of political developments and events and I have less difficulty writing narrative, writing for example, the trial of

Giovanni and Lusanna. That was not all that difficult to do. I found that--I won't say easy, but it flowed.

00:30:31

Lage: People say that you can inhabit the place that you're writing about. You can get right into it because of your detail and everything that you bring.

00:30:41

Brucker: I think that's true. One of the sources that I have found most revealing are the letters of a woman named Alessandra Strozzi who lived in the fifteenth century. She left seventy letters that she'd written to her sons who were in exile, living down in Naples. She was a very remarkable woman; in fact I've written a lecture about her which I think will probably be published. She wrote so openly and so passionately and so poignantly about herself and her condition and her concerns about her sons. I think it's just one of the most revealing sources on Florentine history that I've read.

00:31:35

Lage: Just a private, family kind--

00:31:37

Brucker: Private letters. Seventy letters. She's describing how she feels, how she thinks, what she's done, her problems, her difficulties, her illnesses, her passions. It's a great life.

00:31:54

Lage: How did her letters happen to be saved?

00:31:56

Brucker: By accident, as often happens. The letters were sent down to her son Filippo in Naples, and when he came back to Florence--he was in exile, but eventually his exile was cancelled--he came back to Florence, married a Florentine woman, brought all of his documents back with him. They were in the Strozzi Palace and were discovered in the middle of the nineteenth century by an Italian archivist named Cesare Guasti. He published the originals in the 1880s. Since then, I persuaded a Australian scholar, Heather Gregory, to translate a selection of those letters which, again, the UC Press has published. Again, it was a very, very revealing source because I thought it was just such a good source for understanding that world, and particularly from a feminine perspective, which was very, very rare. You just don't get many women whose letters have survived. Very, very few.

00:32:58

Lage: They may have written them.

00:32:59

Brucker: They may have written them, but again there are very few women who were literate. I mean, we're talking about a small handful of upper-class women, and of course the nuns. Nuns would be like the letters Galileo's daughter, the nun, wrote to her father, Galileo, much, much later. But again, I think that is another source that is very, very evocative, very rich.

Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence

00:33:30

Lage: You brought out some documentary sources. I guess we talked about that a little bit.

00:33:35

Brucker: Yeah, I published a collection in the sixties when I was working in all these things [*Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence*, 1967]. I contacted a publisher at Harper and Row named Hugh van Dusen who edited a series called Harper Torchbooks, which is a really quite successful series. I wrote him and said, "I'd like to publish a translation of two Florentine diaries. Are you interested?" and he said he was, and so I arranged to have a friend of mine, Julia Martines--

00:34:10

Lage: Is she related to Lauro Martines?

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Brucker: Lauro's wife. She's also the daughter of the Irish writer Sean O'Faoláin and very, very knowledgeable in Italian and French as well as in Irish and English. So he agreed to publish these, and they again, are still in print.

00:34:28

Lage: How did you pick those two?

00:34:30

Brucker: Well, I just liked them. The two Florentine merchants, one was really upper-class, Buonaccorso Pitti, and one was almost an artisan, his name was Gregorio Dati. He was a new man--he was not as socially exalted as Pitti, but again I wanted to juxtapose two perspectives: one a more aristocratic, elitist perspective, and one, somebody from farther down the social scale. Julia did a fine job of translating. Hugh published that, came out in 1967, then I suggested to him that I'd like to publish a collection of documents on Florentine society, a range of things, some published, but mostly unpublished. He agreed to do that. Published it in 1971, and it is still in print. Harper and Row has relinquished the publishing rights to both of them, one was picked up by a commercial publisher and the second by the Renaissance Society of America, and they published a new edition with the University of Toronto, which has just been out about two or three years.

00:35:49

Lage: Are these still used in university classes?

00:35:52

Brucker: In university courses, yeah.

00:35:54

Lage: That's something. That's thirty-some plus years.

00:35:58

Brucker: Thirty years they've been in print, you're right.

00:36:02

Lage: In that documentary study, the selection of documents, you talk about all the filters distorting reality. How do you get through them?

00:36:13

Brucker: Well, you can never be sure you get through them entirely, of course, because the filters are first the language, and then the translation and what have you changed in terms of meaning and understanding, and then how you read them. How does a twenty-first century person read a document six hundred years old? How do you understand, or try to understand, what the document's telling you? That's basically what we historians try to do. You can never fully succeed, obviously, but to try as hard as we can to make as much sense out of it as our skills permit.

00:36:54

Lage: Does it make you stop and think about your own preconceptions and values and society?

00:37:02

Brucker: I do that less, perhaps, than I should. [laughter] Again, my aversion to theory, and I suppose you might say a lack of introspection. I'm not a deeply introspective person. I don't spend a great deal of time worrying about who I am. I mean, I do have some sense of background, and why my particular background leads me to think a particular way, or to be interested in certain things and not in others, like why I'm not interested in theory. I don't think I can relate that to my childhood.

00:37:40

Lage: You do think or you don't?

00:37:42

Brucker: I don't. No. So, there is the corpus.

Scholarly Criticism of Brucker's Work

00:37:48

Lage: Now wait, let's see what we've missed, Gene. I know you're famous for skipping over things. One thing that we have missed, not a book but a question: how these major books--let's take the ones you call your "two books"--were received by scholars at the time.

00:38:09

Brucker: By and large, the reviews were favorable. Some criticism, but that's to be expected. I would say that the reviews were positive, and sometimes very positive, some critical. You can't please everybody in this business, but then that's not the point. So yes, I'd have to say that I've noted and I've been criticized not only for my lack of theory but a very good friend of mine, John Najemy has charged me, I think with some accuracy, that I've been too sympathetic to my Florentine politicians and too eager to accept their rationale for how they behave and how they function and the kind of political system that they've created. John, I would say, favors a more radical approach, in the sense that he's much more critical of the government that I described. Critical, I mean, they are, after all, an

elite that's governing Florence, dominates Florence. He wrote a book about guildsmen, and so he has stressed more of the view of the guilds, which of course are people who are the artisans, shopkeepers, from the somewhat different mentality who--and of course the fact that in Florence, if you did not belong to a guild you had no political power, you played no role.

00:39:58

Lage: So they were not lower-class people. They were already of some substance.

00:40:06

Brucker: Well, the artisans certainly had some status, and they had a stake in the polity. That is to say, they had a share of the offices. But if you were not a guildsman, if you were a cloth worker, for example, you had no stake, no political voice whatsoever. Of course, that sometimes did occasionally lead to revolution, as it did in the case of the *ciompi* [wool carders] in 1378, when the underprivileged or the subordinate groups in society rose up in rebellion.

00:40:39

Lage: And you've written about that.

00:40:40

Brucker: And I've written about that, yeah. But John's point and I think it has some merit, that I was too willing to accept the rationale that you find in their discourse, rather than to see the dimension of exploitation and exclusion. To see them as, in fact, intelligent, rational, even concerned about the public welfare rather than being concerned about their privileges and their power.

00:41:19

Lage: Because as they wrote, they talked about--

00:41:21

Brucker: As they wrote, they justified their policies in terms of the general welfare, just as our politicians today always speak in terms of their concern about protecting and preserving Americans and American interests.

00:41:41

Lage: And the tax cut for the wealthy will help all.

00:41:44

Brucker: For the general well-being of all. That's a criticism that I accept. It doesn't mean I'm going to back and try to rewrite it, no. That would be too much work.

00:41:55

Lage: If you were doing it today, would you accept it?

00:41:59

Brucker: I would probably write with a somewhat more skeptical perspective and somewhat more critical perspective, yeah. Although I did try hard to describe the conflicts within the political class. God knows, they were intense and sharp enough.

00:42:18

Lage: You were writing *Civic World* during the time when our own society was really questioning and had a lot of skepticism towards power.

00:42:26

Brucker: Right. You would have thought that I would have adopted that more critical role, but I can't say that I did.

00:42:37

Lage: Did John Najemy use a different set of sources?

00:42:41

Brucker: No, he used the same sources that I did. He just read them differently and focused on--I won't say different things, because obviously the two of us, we're old, old friends. I've known him since the 1960s. We agree on much. But there are different emphases given his particular interests and mine. He was reading through guild records, where you do get--he does develop, I think, very cogently and intelligently what might be called a "guild mentality," which is corporate and collective and to a degree, egalitarian. That is to say, every guildsman is equal to every other guildsman. And I was reading the public discourse of the elite, the guys at the top, who were justifying their policies of--to a degree--suppressing the guildsmen and keeping them under control and limiting their authority. And then rationalizing why they did it.

00:43:43

Lage: For the good of all.

00:43:44

Brucker: So you do get a different perspective.

Opinion of Marxist and Postmodernist Historians

00:43:45

Lage: Well, that's what it's all about, after all. What were my brilliant questions for you? Oh, I know. This is one from--I had a nice talk with Dale Kent the other day. She wanted to help out a little bit. Anyway, she said that you're known for embracing different approaches and being open to lots of ideas. Now, have there been some approaches and ideas that you just couldn't accept?

00:44:26

Brucker: I certainly--I suppose--I'm trying hard to think of what I would regard as out-of-bounds. I can't think of a particular approach that I would find offensive, or that I would say is ahistorical. I have written critically about works where I thought the authors were too reductionist and again, too focused on a particular way of looking at things. I've been critical of Marxist historians, whose view of the *ciompi* revolution I thought were too ideological. I don't like ideology. I think that's destructive in our discipline.

00:45:25

Lage: That it distorts the reality?

00:45:27

Brucker: But that's not to say that I regard all of Marxist historiography as bad or inferior, it's just that I have been critical of an excessively ideological approach. For example, to try to see modern class conflict in fourteenth-century social relationships, I just don't believe in it. I don't think it's true. I don't think it's valid.

00:45:53

Lage: How about some of the newer approaches, the sort of postmodern?

00:45:57

Brucker: Postmodernism. Well, to the degree that I understand postmodernism, I don't have any sympathy for it. I think again, it's ahistorical and it's trying to present a particular perspective. I suppose what I really object to is the suggestion, or the suggestion that there can be no truth in history, truth is so relative as to be irrelevant. I just deny that completely. I think you can understand the past, and it's not just a reflection of one's own world, or one's own perspective, or one's own culture.

00:46:40

Lage: Have there been postmodernist treatments of Renaissance Florence?

00:46:45

Brucker: Not really, no. There have been sociological treatments that, I think, have been reductionist and based excessively on social theory. That just doesn't--

00:47:01

Lage: Like what?

00:47:03

Brucker: Well, there was a work--one of Dale's critics, a sociologist whose name I don't remember right now, was trying to understand Florentine or the Medici--trying to understand Florentine marriages in terms of a particular sociological concept which I cannot now remember. I know Dale took exception to it because the sociologist had used her data, but she thought, and I think correctly, that they had distorted her data, and simply didn't understand it because they didn't understand the history.

00:47:45

Lage: Did you get involved in the journal *Representations* or the effort for this interdisciplinary--

00:47:52

Brucker: Not at all, because that again is something that does not have any attraction for me or any interest. I can't say that I read *Representations*, I don't. My good friend Randy Starn is, of course, one of the major figures in it. We are very, very good friends even though our approaches to history are quite different, which is legitimate. But no, I am not.

00:48:14

Lage: What does *Representations* represent in the history department, say?

00:48:19

Brucker: I think it's, again, it's an attachment to a certain kind of theory, but you shouldn't ask me to try to understand it because I don't. [laughs] I am simply not interested.

00:48:34
Lage: It described itself as interdisciplinary and doesn't talk quite so much about theory. What interdisciplines are they talking about, particularly? Is it social sciences?

00:48:46
Brucker: Social studies and also some literary studies. Stephen Greenblatt, certainly is one of the promoters of what does he call it, the new history? Or is it? And I have taught with Steve-.

00:49:03
Lage: You taught a course with him; how did that go?

00:49:05
Brucker: --and I like him very much, and we got along very, very well. Team teaching. I certainly didn't feel that he was distorting historical reality when he was lecturing on Petrarch or Thomas More or Machiavelli or Shakespeare. I thought he was brilliant. I've read his work and I like it a lot. I haven't read all of it, but certainly I've read a great deal of it. But *Representations*, I think is probably too theoretical for my taste.

00:49:38
Lage: Would Leon Litwack agree with you, do you think?

00:49:41
Brucker: He might well. [laughter]

Accident and Contingency in Human Affairs

00:49:45
Lage: Well, that's very interesting. What have we missed about history and the way you work?

00:49:55
Brucker: I don't think we've missed very much, I think we've covered just about all the bases I had. I have no prologomena to add to this. I wrote an introduction to a collection of articles that Jim Clark, again, is interested in publishing. I said, "I don't believe in historical laws, except there are two--" see if I can remember what they were. One was that--oh dear.

00:50:38
Lage: This was something well thought out.

00:50:41
Brucker: I stressed the role of accident and contingency in human affairs, and I said that the role of accident and contingency was as important as human design in how the past evolves. That was rule number two.

00:51:00
Lage: That's one of your laws.

00:51:02
Brucker: That was rule number two, but I can't remember rule number one.

Other Works, Works in Progress

00:51:05
Lage: Well, let's add rule number one in at some point, maybe next time, because I'd like to know what your rules are. You had another collection of articles.

00:51:13
Brucker: Well, they're right now being put together and reviewed. I think Jim Clark, who is one of my dear friends, he is eager to put together a collection of essays. I did publish, or had reprinted a collection of essays by a German publisher. This was about ten years ago. [*Renaissance Florence: Society, Culture and Religion*, Goldbach: Verlag Keip, 1994] But these are essays and papers that I have written since then, some published, three unpublished.

00:51:45
Lage: A different collection.

00:51:46
Brucker: A different collection. Which is my most recent writing, obviously.

00:51:52
Lage: Now, Jim Clark has left the [University of California] Press.

00:51:55
Brucker: He's left the Press but he still has a role in the Press, and he's still working on certain projects. I gave him the collection, some very rough things. Then he asked me to write a mini-autobiography which I reluctantly did, and that's where I ended up with my two rules, except I don't remember one of them. He sent it out to review, and it was reviewed favorably, so now I have to work on adding footnotes and doing some revisions, and it may come out before I'm eighty-five. [laughter]

00:52:41
Lage: That's quite a while.

00:52:42
Brucker: Well, sometime in the next couple of years, I imagine.

00:52:44
Lage: Oh, good. So you wrote a mini-autobiography?

00:52:47
Brucker: Yes.

00:52:48
Lage: How long a mini-autobiography?

00:52:52

Brucker: [laughter] Well, it's about ten pages.

00:52:54

Lage: Oh, not as long as this.

00:52:57

Brucker: Basically, what I did in that is basically repeat what I've said to you in this interview.

00:53:02

Lage: But in ten pages.

00:53:04

Brucker: Well, in ten pages, but basically covering the trajectory from birth to where I am now. But nothing new. Except for those two rules, one of which I can't remember. [laughter]

00:53:20

Lage: Makes me question how well you followed those two rules.

00:53:24

Brucker: Well, when I go over this, I will add the first rule, okay? ["Everything pertaining to our species is in constant flux," *Living on the Edge in Leonardo's Florence* (UC Press, 2005, xxv.)]

00:53:27

Lage: Good, good. Now what was *People and Communities in the Western World* [Dorsey Press, 1979] in 1979?

00:53:32

Brucker: I was working for a--I became an editor. The only time I've done this, and it was not a great experience, not a very successful experience. Dorsey Press asked me to be history editor, and in the course of that, they wanted me to put together a textbook that they thought would sell in the Western Civ [Civilization] courses. I persuaded some of my friends to write, again, a kind of series of microhistories in specific, starting with the Greeks and ending with the twentieth century. It came out in two volumes. It was not commercially very successful, and it's now out of print.

00:54:15

Lage: Sounds like an interesting approach to a textbook.

00:54:17

Brucker: Well, it was interesting, but in the end I think not successful for reasons that--perhaps my choice of themes, or perhaps it was not the best way to introduce beginning students to the past. I think some of the essays were quite good, others were not so good. In the end, Dorsey decided that my efforts on their behalf were not really very successful. I won't say I was fired, but my contract was terminated, and to my great relief, because I really wasn't very comfortable doing this.

00:55:00

Lage: Sounds like that could be a distraction from other things.

00:55:01

Brucker: Yeah, it was a distraction, definitely.

Other Historians' Work on the Florentine Church

00:55:03

Lage: Whatever happened to the book about the church? That you had said you were going to turn to next.

00:55:08

Brucker: The answer to that is quite simple, because when I started working on the church--that was after *Civic World* came out--I was persuaded that it was the one dimension of Florentine experience and Italian experience that had been neglected, and it had. And so I thought, "Okay, I'm gonna move into this, I'm gonna develop this." I mean, I certainly encountered enough information that I realized it was a very rich field. I began collecting material and I have a lot of material, and I published a number of articles, but as soon as I decided this was an important field, so did a number of other scholars, young scholars, all of them whom I admire. I can name them: David Peterson has written essentially the book that I might have written. He's written a much better book, because he knows more than I do, and he's going to publish a two-volume history of the Florentine Church. Then other scholars: there have been two historians of Florentine confraternities that have come out, one by one of my students, Ron Weissman, and one by an English scholar, John Henderson. Excellent studies.

It's a field that's attracted a great deal of interest. It's a very lively field, very rich field. One of my students, Sharon Strocchia, is working on Florentine convents and nunneries, and doing very, very interesting work. It's a field that was neglected and ignored for so long, in part because the Italian university system did not have a place for church history, by and large. It was because of the whole conflict with the papacy and the church in the nineteenth century. And since almost all Italian universities are public universities, state universities, they didn't feel any need or desire to work in church history. So it was left to the clergy to do it, and they wrote a particular kind of history. But in the last twenty years it's one of the most dynamic and interesting fields. It's just an awful lot of work that's been done.

00:57:34

Lage: Americans and Italians?

00:57:35

Brucker: Americans, Italians. I would say Italians have taken the lead, but Americans to a degree. We have a number. David Peterson, who teaches at Washington and Lee; there's Daniel Bornstein, who teaches in Texas. Sharon teaches at Emory University. So it's a rich field. So there's no need for me to publish it.

00:58:01

Lage: You've published articles.

00:58:02

Brucker: I have published articles, yeah. And I may still publish some more articles. Right now I'm reading with a student. I'm reading visitation records, of visitations by clerical officials doing a tour of all of the churches in the Archdiocese of Florence. It makes for fascinating reading.

- 00:58:25
Lage: So they would take these tours, and then write up?
- 00:58:28
Brucker: They would write up their reports. Essentially, this is a report of the condition of the churches, identifying the parish priest and his education, to see if--check out on who had mistresses or concubines--
- 00:58:45
Lage: Oh, they did look at that?
- 00:58:48
Brucker: --what priest might have had women in their households that shouldn't be there, that sort of thing.
- 00:58:53
Lage: That must be fascinating.
- 00:58:54
Brucker: It is interesting, yeah.
- 00:58:56
Lage: And you're doing this with a student, you say?
- 00:58:58
Brucker: I'm doing this with a student. We're reading it together. She's working basically not only to understand, but also the study of paleography to read the script, which of course is demanding.
- 00:59:12
Lage: Is it the same script you're accustomed to reading? Or is it different, being church?
- 00:59:17
Brucker: No, it's the same.
- 00:59:20
Lage: Is this a student who's actually studying with you, even though you're retired? Does that happen?
- 00:59:23
Brucker: Yeah.
- 00:59:25
Lage: So you might supervise a doctoral student?
- 00:59:27
Brucker: No, I don't think so, no. That's beyond my interest, no. But I've been working with her for a number of years and she's a very intelligent and very imaginative student, who's going to do a fine thesis.

Influence of Intellectual Atmosphere at Berkeley on Brucker's Work

00:59:44

Lage: Interesting. Now here's a question for you. You must have thought of this, but how has being at Berkeley, both the institutional connection and all the social connections and intellectual connections with your friends influenced your work? Would it have been different if you'd been at Harvard or at Illinois?

01:00:06

Brucker: I think there's no question it would have been different, because I have a group of colleagues that are enormously stimulating, creative, dynamic, just outstanding historians. I've read a lot of their work, and obviously I've been influenced by what they have written and influenced by the community and the communications, which as I pointed out in my lecture on the department, I just think one of the great qualities of Berkeley is the community. The sense of community that we developed. So yes, no question.

01:00:58

Lage: Can you pinpoint at all?

01:01:00

Brucker: Well, I can imagine myself in a small liberal arts college where perhaps the stress would be on teaching instead of research. Where I would feel isolated. I've talked to friends and colleagues who do teach in other institutions who do complain about intellectual isolation, the fact that they're out of the loop, that they feel out of the loop. They recognize that there is such a difference between where they are and a place like Berkeley because some of them, of course, were students here. Berkeley is just brimming with intellectual and psychic energy. It is a different atmosphere. Also I think, I just can't measure or be specific about it because that's not really how it works. It works by osmosis. The process, over the years, of developing friendships and reading each other's work and being critical of each other's work, getting inspiration, I could give you a specific example. My good friend Randy Starn, who at that time did not have tenure--I gave him the first chapter of *Renaissance Florence*, to read and comment on. His comment was, "This chapter is a near disaster." Now, that's the kind of criticism that you *want* to get. I was so impressed that Randy, who did not have tenure, was willing to say that to a senior colleague. He said, "Look, you've gotta do this over again."

01:02:42

Lage: This must have been heartfelt.

01:02:45

Brucker: And I did do it over again. I mean, that's the sort of thing that can happen here.

01:02:50

Lage: Interesting. What about influences or inspiration from colleagues who aren't in your field? Someone like Irv Scheiner?

01:03:01

Brucker: There's no question, yes. I remember one of the first books of a Berkeley colleague that I read when I came here was Ken Stamp's book on slavery, a book I found enormously

impressive. I remember reading Carl Schorske's articles. I mean, I could just name a litany of colleagues whose work I found very, very interesting, although it would be difficult for me to say "Well, I read this work and it immediately made me think about my work in a different way." That would be rather hard to pinpoint.

01:03:39

Lage: More subtle than that. Would your work have been different if you'd been someplace like Harvard?

01:03:44

Brucker: Possibly. My sense of Harvard is that it is not a very user-friendly place. Colleagues like Bill Bouwsma who taught there describe it as something in which there is very little collegiality. So I think probably there I would have been working on my own, and not having much intellectual contact with colleagues. I may be wrong about that, but it could well be.

01:04:18

Lage: Does the intellectual contact take place in social occasions?

01:04:22

Brucker: It can. Of course, in seminars and going to hear lectures together and listening to colleagues ask questions and then talking about what one's heard. I just heard a lecture by another friend here in Berkeley, John O'Malley, who's a Jesuit. He gave a lecture on the Council of Trent just a few days ago. It was a brilliant lecture, and it made me start to think about my sense of the counterreformation church in Italy, and how his ideas really changed my sense of what was going on.

01:04:55

Lage: Well, there's a good example.

01:04:57

Brucker: It is, yeah.

01:04:59

Lage: Should we pause for a minute here, or even for longer?

01:05:02

Brucker: I think we should, yeah.

**XI. LIFE IN FLORENCE AND THE VILLA I TATTI, TEACHING AT
BERKELEY, RETIREMENT**

[Interview 11: December 11, 2002] ##

00:00:02

Lage: We're recording now, good. Today's December 11, 2002. We're doing the last session with Gene Brucker. Gene, are you here?

00:00:13

Brucker: I am here. I am ready.

00:00:15

Lage: Great! Did you have any further thoughts about the body of your work after we finished last week?

00:00:23

Brucker: No, not really. I think I've said about as much as I can perceive.

00:00:32

Lage: Do you think about this after I leave?

00:00:34

Brucker: Not much.

00:00:35

Lage: Or before I come?

00:00:37

Brucker: I confess I haven't thought much about it.

00:00:41

Lage: Some people apparently get very wrapped up in their oral history and they trouble over things...

00:00:47

Brucker: No, I don't. I mean, I will look at the transcription and there will probably be some emendations, but no, I don't have any afterthoughts or any additional thoughts.

Evaluating Florentine Historiography, Writing Book Reviews

00:01:00

Lage: Okay, that's good. I just had one question that I don't think I followed up on, and that was you mentioned that introduction to *Civic World*, which really is a wonderful piece, was so hard to write. Why do you think it was so hard to write?

00:01:15

Brucker: Well, it's the kind of problem that I don't spend much time--in fact, very little time--on historical theory, or how to write history, or why history gets written. To write that introduction, I really was forced to think about the Florentine historiography, which is complex, and to write about something that was difficult and, for me, hard.

00:01:55

Lage: You put everybody in a context.

00:01:56

Brucker: I tried to construct a pattern and possibly a bit too reductionist, I'm not sure, to identify the major approaches and try to fit myself in that context. It was really a blood and sweat and tears affair. But I was pleased with it when it was done. The only other time I've done that was writing a brief introduction for *Giovanni and Lusanna*, and Jim Clark asked me to try to put my microhistory into the history of microhistory. That was not so difficult, one because I think I was able to write about the genre to describe it. It's something that I don't enjoy doing, don't find much interest in doing. It's just my nature not to.

00:03:09

Lage: It's such a useful introduction for someone like myself, to come in and see where these different people--

00:03:16

Brucker: I'll take that as a compliment.

00:03:18

Lage: Surprised it was so hard. Was it hard to kind of comment on your colleagues and how they approached things?

00:03:25

Brucker: Only in the sense of trying to be as clear as I could about their approach and method. Again, it does not come easily for me to summarize another historian's work although I do write reviews, god knows, of books, dozens of them. I've gotten fairly comfortable with that. I suppose I've written maybe fifty book reviews in my career, something like that.

00:03:51

Lage: Do you ever write really critical book reviews?

00:03:54

Brucker: Oh, yes. Sometimes I will recommend if I'm reading a manuscript that it not be published. That's part of one's job, too.

00:04:05

Lage: You've done that for the UC Press, haven't you.

00:04:07

Brucker: I've written many, many evaluations for mostly UC Press, but for other presses as well.

00:04:14

Lage: But what about published reviews? Is it difficult to get your criticism in without being too cutting, or is that a consideration?

00:04:21

Brucker: I don't find that painful, I don't. I do remember I wrote a review for a manuscript for UC Press which I had to be negative about, and I remember that I wrote to the editor who'd asked me to do the work. I wrote that it gives me no pleasure to write this negative review, because the author who had written the manuscript was clearly a very serious scholar, worked very hard. I think she received bad advice on how to approach this particular problem. I don't want to identify the work. It was not published and won't be. I could respect the work and the labor and the pain and also the misery when the author is told, "No, this won't do." And the editor wrote back and said that she appreciated my comments. She was going to have to tell the author "no." And that's also hard to do.

00:05:22

Lage: That must be very hard. Oh, my. Well, should we move on to teaching?

Sabbatical at Villa I Tatti, 1983

00:05:32

Brucker: Do you want to talk about I Tatti [The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies] first?

00:05:33

Lage: Whichever you think fits. Yeah, if you're ready for I Tatti, let's talk about I Tatti.

00:05:38

Brucker: My memories of the four months that Marion and I spent in I Tatti were very positive, very pleasant. We had a very good time.

00:05:47

Lage: First, tell what is "I Tatti".

00:05:50

Brucker: This was in the fall of 1983. The director of I Tatti, an old friend, Craig Smyth, was taking a sabbatical and he asked me if I would be acting director of I Tatti for the fall semester of 1983. Since I was going to have some sabbatical leave anyway, I said yes, I'd be willing to do it. So Marion and I--I think we spent the spring and summer in the Villino, which is a part of the I Tatti complex, and then in September we moved down to what I call "the Big House," which was [Bernard] Berenson's villa.

00:06:32

Lage: Tell what I Tatti is, because I don't know exactly.

00:06:34

Brucker: I Tatti is the villa that was owned and occupied by Bernard Berenson, who was an American, actually an immigrant American who went to Harvard, got his degree, went to Italy, and established himself as an art critic and a scholar, working on Italian Renaissance art. Around 1900, he and his wife bought this villa some distance outside of Florence, out in the villa country, and pursued his career there for the next sixty years. He died, I think, in 1959. He was very, very old; he was ninety years old when he died. But he lived there all these years, collected books, collected paintings, and became famous as

a connoisseur and an appraiser, a connoisseur of Italian Renaissance art. Enjoyed a world-renowned reputation, and he left his villa to Harvard, because he'd gotten his degree at Harvard. Harvard accepted the gift, I think with some reluctance, because it's something the university doesn't do too often; it's always a problem. But the villa was renovated and refurbished and fixed up, and became a center. It offered ten or fifteen postdoctoral fellowships for scholars working the Italian Renaissance, not just in art history, but history, music, philosophy, science. So when we went there in 1983, it was already well established and was running very, very well. It has an excellent, excellent staff, staff of librarians, staff of administrators, staff of gardeners and farmers, because it's an estate. It's a hundred and sixty acres of land.

00:08:35

Lage: So it has a farm element.

00:08:38

Brucker: It has a farm dimension to it, too. I must say of all the people that we got to know, Marion and I enjoyed most our relations with the farmers because they were there working--including at the Villino, where we stayed--establishing a garden to provide produce for I Tatti, including wine, and olives and olive oil. Wonderful, wonderful--.

00:09:03

Lage: So you had all the fresh produce?

00:09:04

Brucker: That's right. So the routine at I Tatti was, I would go down and work in the archives in the morning and then come back for lunch, because lunch is a big meal because most of the fellows come, and we all have lunch together, twenty, twenty-five people for lunch. Then I would come in the afternoon and play the role of *padrone* of the villa.

00:09:30

Lage: And what did that involve?

00:09:31

Brucker: It didn't really involve anything, because the staff, a very, very efficient staff, particularly Nelda Ferace, who's actually Italo-American. Her father was Italian, but he had come to America to flee the fascists, so she grew up in America, but obviously her Italian was excellent. She moved back, married an Italian, and became essentially the executive director of the villa, which she still is. Extremely efficient and very, very intelligent woman, and a very nice person. So, basically, I had no difficult decisions to make. I sort of sat and listened and talked to people, of course. There are a constant stream of visitors from all over the world who come stay. Some stay at I Tatti, some visit, some come for dinner. The pleasurable parts for Marion and myself was that we didn't have to do any work, any cooking. Marion didn't have to cook for three months.

00:10:34

Lage: It must have been delicious food.

00:10:36

Brucker: She'd go out and consult with the cooks about what would be on the menu. Our evenings were usually hours we were free, but we would occasionally invite guests, because again,

since we didn't have to do the work, it was very pleasant to invite our friends to come and have dinner with us. So that part was very pleasant.

00:10:52

Lage: Did you have dinner alone, then? Or within this group?

00:10:55

Brucker: Sometimes alone, and sometimes with guests, and occasionally we would have a formal dinner for--I invited all of my scholarly Italian friends from the archives whom I'd known. And if Americans came through, we'd invite them to dinner.

00:11:11

Lage: So it's not very far from Florence proper.

00:11:13

Brucker: No, it's about a twenty-minute bus ride or fifteen-minute drive by car. So yeah, it's quite convenient in that sense.

00:11:23

Lage: It sounds like a lovely interlude.

00:11:27

Brucker: It was. Marion and I then had to decide whether--because Craig was retiring shortly thereafter, and whether or not I would want to be considered to be the next director. Since we enjoyed our stay there, I remember we thought about it and talked about it, and it happened that we were in New Orleans. I'd gone to Baton Rouge, to Louisiana State to give a lecture, and we were in New Orleans just to enjoy the pleasures of that village. We were having dinner, and I said, "You know, we have to decide on how we should respond, when we are asked if we are interested in being considered." And we decided no. It was mutual. The decision was really based on the fact that we felt we would just give up too much of our privacy, because you are in a fishbowl, if you're the director. While we enjoyed it for three months, we didn't want to spend the rest of our life in the fishbowl.

00:12:33

Lage: Would that have meant leaving Berkeley and being there long term?

00:12:36

Brucker: Leaving Berkeley, exactly.

00:12:39

Lage: Not just for a couple of years.

00:12:40

Brucker: Not just for a couple of years, but you know. Let's see, 1983, I retired in 1991--at least seven or eight years.

00:12:51

Lage: So who was picked to take over?

00:12:53

Brucker: A colleague from Berkeley, Louise Clubb, was chosen as the next director.

00:12:57

Lage: Was she a Berkeley history professor?

00:12:59

Brucker: She was in comparative literature, yes. She decided to come back to Berkeley, and the next executive director was a Harvard professor named Walter Kaiser, who just retired recently and was replaced by an art historian, Joseph Connors from Columbia, who was an excellent choice for director. So I Tatti's in very good hands.

00:13:26

Lage: How does it get funded?

00:13:28

Brucker: The funding is really--Harvard University doesn't fund its satellites. It insists, basically, that the directors--and this is another reason why I wasn't eager to take on that job--the directors get out and scramble for money. That's the job they've had to do. They've been quite successful to build up the endowment so that they're able to award fellowships, keep the place running, and that's a big job.

00:13:59

Lage: Did Berenson leave an endowment?

00:14:01

Brucker: I think he left almost no money. He left the villa.

00:14:05

Lage: Which had to be renovated.

00:14:06

Brucker: Which had to be renovated, yes. Recently, a lot of money has to be spent on getting the villa to meet the standards of the European Community because there has to be certain standards for electricity, and gas, and whatever. So that's been an expensive undertaking. But my sense is that the villa is financially doing okay.

00:14:31

Lage: Did you have much relationship with Harvard as you were running it?

00:14:37

Brucker: Relatively little.

00:14:39

Lage: You were on the advisory committee for a time.

00:14:41

Brucker: I served on the advisory committee, so I had some sense of how the place operated.

00:14:44

Lage: So people from Harvard don't reach in and suggest directions.

00:14:51

Brucker: The president--at that time was Derek Bok--was certainly interested, and I had close relations with the chief counsel of Harvard, a man named Dan Steiner whom I got to know. We became good friends. So there was scrutiny, and they were always concerned

about money and finances, and seeing that the money was coming in and the endowment was growing.

00:15:19

Lage: Would you have offered any new directions if you were director, long-term?

00:15:25

Brucker: I doubt very much if I would have. I think I would have been a very passive director and told Nelda, "You run the place for me." [laughter]

00:15:30

Lage: "Run the farm."

00:15:32

Brucker: I will go out and enjoy the vendemmia and the olive, and the picking of the olives, and the good food and the wine. But being the director of an institution like that does require some qualities which I certainly don't think I would have enjoyed, for very long.

00:15:57

Lage: Is there any relationship with Italians? Do they get Italians involved in I Tatti? Are they on the advisory committee?

00:16:06

Brucker: There are some Italian scholars on the advisory committee. Certainly it's the director's job to maintain contact and good relations with the university of Florence and the university faculty, and the whole belle arte organizations. That is to say, the directors and the curators of all the museums. That is certainly one of the director's jobs is to maintain relations with these people, and there are lectures and there are conferences. The conferences occasionally involve relations with the municipality of Florence and with the museums and some of the other institutions.

00:16:50

Lage: I can see why you say your life wouldn't be your own. A lot of entertaining I would think.

00:16:52

Brucker: Lot of entertaining. For which I have limited capacity. [laughter] So it was fun for three months, four months, but not permanently.

00:17:05

Lage: Is there more to say about I Tatti?

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Brucker: I don't think so.

00:17:09

Lage: It sounds like a wonderful place, at least to visit.

00:17:11

Brucker: So you've never visited, then?

00:17:13

Lage: No. Can people just go and visit?

00:17:15

Brucker: I will write a letter and when you and your husband, if you decide to leave Spain, should make a trip to I Tatti and you decide to visit Florence, just let me know and I will write a letter to Joe Connors, whom I've never met, but I know that he would be quite willing to invite you and your husband to lunch at I Tatti, and give you a tour.

00:17:33

Lage: Oh, that would be wonderful. That's reason enough to go to Florence!

00:17:36

Brucker: Keep that in mind.

Life in Florence, Change in City's Economic Base, Tourism

00:17:38

Lage: I won't forget--we have it down on tape. We haven't talked also about Florence, living there in your later years. We talked about the fifties. How did it change over time?

00:17:54

Brucker: Our first three times when we were in Florence as a family together, in 1952-1954, in 1960-61, 1964-65, we were living in the city. We had to find places to rent. We had neighbors, we had landladies, and we were plunged into living in the city, living in a foreign country, which had its pleasures and also had its drawbacks. I've always deplored the Italian bureaucracy. I think it's a third-world bureaucracy. That is, it might be similar to what goes on in Uganda. [laughter]

00:18:46

Lage: That's pretty condemning, I would say.

00:18:48

Brucker: The mentality of Italian bureaucrats is, "I don't need to do anything to serve you. I have a job, I can't be fired, and so, what do you want from me? And I will make it as difficult for you as I can, and as little effort for myself as I can." That is the mentality. I don't think it's changed at all in three hundred years.

00:19:12

Lage: So that affects you when you're renting, then.

00:19:15

Brucker: Having delivered myself of that tirade, let me say there were certainly pleasures of living on one's own in the city. But then after 1979, Marion and I had a year in Florence in the gift of I Tatti. We stayed at the Villino for a whole year. Basically, we didn't have to worry about landlords, landladies, paying taxes. I did have to go to the police to get a permit to stay in Florence, which is always an ordeal, but that was my only contact with the bureaucracy.

00:19:51

Lage: So you had stayed at this Villino before.

00:19:53

Brucker: We stayed at the Villino in 1979-80, for a whole year. We stayed there in the spring of 1983, just before we went down to the Villa. We stayed again in the spring-summer of 1987. We had a wonderful time there.

00:20:11

Lage: Were your children grown by then?

00:20:14

Brucker: By that time they were grown up, but of course they came to visit us because they knew they had free lodging and free food. So they all came over, which was fine. It was good to see them. I remember when we were there in 1987, my daughter Wendy, the chef, came with her boyfriend Roscoe and stayed with us. Wendy had been there before. She'd come on previous occasions, but this time she came with her new boyfriend who became her husband. Roscoe was so enchanted. They came in June, just a perfect spring. I remember Roscoe getting up one morning, going outside, and at the top of his voice yelling "This is great!" So he had a great time there. But anyway, my point was that we didn't have to get involved. Of course, all the negative things happening in Florence as it becomes more polluted and more crowded, the whole environment in the city is--I would have to say, depressing. It's become a mass tourist--I don't know how to describe it, but it's been taken over really, by tourism, and that's really deplorable. I guess one might almost say inevitable given that every city needs an economic base, and for Florence an economic base is having several million tourists come every year.

00:21:44

Lage: Has it lost its previous economic base?

00:21:48

Brucker: In a sense, it never really had much. There are people working in gold and jewelry, for the tourist market, and people working in leather, but these are pretty small enterprises.

00:22:04

Lage: And tourists generate it too.

00:22:05

Brucker: There's no big industry in Florence, or in Tuscany. That's not entirely true, because actually the industry has moved out of the city out into the countryside, into the surrounding territory. So you find the factories and the warehouses scattered throughout the countryside which is another, I think, negative dimension, because I remember Florence when it was simpler and more tranquil and more rustic, more bucolic, perhaps. At least the countryside was beautiful. Now there's still areas where one can go and enjoy the beauty of the landscape and the villages and towns, out in the Chianti, for example. That's been kept pretty, shall I say, "unsullied", if that's the word, but the city itself--there's some days that the quality of the air is worse than Los Angeles.

Brucker Children's Education in Italy

00:23:02

Lage: That's very sad. When you did live there in the earlier years, and the children were younger, where did they go to school?

00:23:11

Brucker: I remember Mark and Francesca went to an Italian school run by Irish nuns, one year we were there. Another year we were there they went to a school run by an American headmaster, I think it was St. Michael's School. Those were the two years that we had children. Wendy, my daughter, who went to a little English kindergarten one year. They still remember those experiences with great pleasure.

00:23:45

Lage: They enjoyed themselves.

00:23:46

Brucker: They enjoyed it.

00:23:47

Lage: They must have learned Italian very well.

00:23:49

Brucker: And they learned some Italian.

00:23:49

Lage: Just some?

00:23:51

Brucker: I would have to qualify it as some. I don't think it could be said that any are fluent.

00:23:55

Lage: So their schooling was in English?

00:23:57

Brucker: Mostly, yes.

00:23:59

Lage: Did Wendy and Roscoe--when did they get the idea for the restaurant? Was it that time in the Villino?

00:24:05

Brucker: No, I don't think so. That was a story of [when] they were both down in Los Angeles, and then Wendy was invited to come up to the Shattuck Hotel to be the chef when the hotel had a restaurant. I've even forgotten what it was called. This was in the early nineties. While they were working there, Roscoe actually had a job as a bartender in the City [San Francisco]. Wendy was the head chef at the Shattuck Hotel when the owner of the Shattuck Hotel declared bankruptcy and closed down the restaurant. So there was Wendy without a job, and that's when they had the idea of trying to find a restaurant which they could run on their own, which they did.

- 00:24:48
Lage: And Rivoli is the answer.
- 00:24:49
Brucker: Rivoli was the answer.
- 00:24:51
Lage: But how did Wendy get interested in cooking?
- 00:24:53
Brucker: That's a complicated story, and I could give you one of several versions that I've heard, but I don't think I get into that. [laughter]
- 00:24:59
Lage: Okay, we don't have to. I had just thought it was natural; it must have come from living in Florence, but we don't have to go into it.
- 00:25:06
Brucker: There's a whole mythology about Wendy's...that's another complicated story.
- 00:25:13
Lage: We'll interview her sometime for our food project.
- 00:25:15
Brucker: You can interview Wendy sometime, right. And she, by that time, may have seized upon the correct myth.
- 00:25:21
Lage: Okay, that's good. I like the way you put that. Is history a myth, after all? [laughter]
- 00:25:27
Brucker: Right.

Flood of 1966 in Florence

- 00:25:30
Lage: So that's interesting. What about the flood? Everybody talks about the floods in Florence. Is there anything to say about that?
- 00:25:37
Brucker: That was truly a disaster. We were away. We'd been there in 1965 and the flood was during the following November 1966. And I had a student, Sam Berner who was in Florence, doing research on his thesis, so I got a lot of information about the horrors of the flood and the disasters, and the damage. Damage, of course, to artworks, but also damage to the archives. The basement was flooded and a lot of archival material was lost, as was the case of the main library, the Biblioteca Nazionale.
- 00:26:14
Lage: They weren't able to restore that?

00:26:15

Brucker: They were able to restore some of it. It took an awful lot of work, though. A lot of it was just lost. It was a tragedy. And of course, people died. An awful lot of horror connected to that. We were in touch with the people who were trying to organize--an organization called Cria was established, essentially foreign scholars banding together to collect money and to send specialists over to help in resuscitation of it. That went on for a number of years.

00:26:55

Lage: I know that restoring water-damaged archives is a big chore.

00:26:59

Brucker: It is a real problem, yes. They were sending some of the archival material, some of the books to Umbria, to tobacco-drying factories, because Umbria has a tobacco industry and they have the warehouses and these drying operations. So this was one of the thoughts they had: "If we can get this stuff dry, so the mold doesn't develop."

00:27:29

Lage: So they spread it out on the tobacco racks. Now they freeze-dry it, but they probably didn't have that technology. Interesting. Now, where are we, Gene?

00:27:42

Brucker: Do you want to talk about teaching?

Renaissance Society of America; Presidency, Awards

00:27:43

Lage: Teaching? One other thing maybe fits here first. Your presidency of the Renaissance Society of America, and what is the Renaissance Society? What role does it play?

00:27:55

Brucker: It's the national organization which was begun by professors at Columbia University right after the war. It has become now a large enterprise that embraces scholars in a whole range of fields: history, art history, music, literature, science, philosophy. I was chosen to be president--I've even forgotten the year. I think it was in the late 1980s. I spent two years in the organization, going to the annual meetings, which moves from city to city. The last meeting--actually that's not true--I attended a recent meeting which was held down in Scottsdale, Arizona, just this last spring. But there was a big meeting in the year 2000, which was held in Florence. I gave a lecture about the--I've even forgotten. I mean, I know the lecture material, I had to write it up. But that was a big occasion, a quite exciting occasion.

00:29:04

Lage: Did you get honored at that occasion?

00:29:06

Brucker: I was honored, yes. I was given the Paul Oskar Kristeller Award for Lifetime Achievement in Renaissance Studies, which is a very nice honor. [coughs] Got to drink some water after that.

00:29:16
Lage: Right, that's a long award. You're so modest about your achievements. Now, I'm--

00:29:24
Brucker: Appropriately so. Appropriately so.

Other Major Florentine Historians

00:29:26
Lage: I'm going to ask you a question from the grave. Bob Brentano said to ask you this: What do you think about being *the* major Florentine historian in the world?

00:29:42
Brucker: Well, one, I think that's not accurate. There are a number of scholars who could claim that. I guess I could say I feel a little embarrassed whenever people say things like that. One, because I think there are a substantial number of scholars who could lay claim to that title, if they so desired. I'm really embarrassed. I'll just name some people who are more deserving. One is a dear friend from England, Alison Brown, who I think is very, very talented. My dear friend Dale Kent, who just, by the way, her book on Cosimo di Medici just got a very favorable review in the *New York Review of Books*. Very pleased to see that.

00:30:42
Lage: And what about Alison Brown?

00:30:44
Brucker: She has published books and many articles on the fifteenth century. Nicolai Rubinstein, I think, did deserve the title of doyen of Florentine Renaissance. Sadly, he died just a few months ago, at the age of ninety-two. He was a giant in the field. Of the historians working in the Italian Renaissance today, Edward Muir is one of my favorites. I think he's just a remarkable--

00:31:16
Lage: What is his approach, or interest?

00:31:17
Brucker: He is interested most in Venetian history. When I say "everyone," of course I know all these people. And they're all friends; I don't have any enemies. [laughter] Well, maybe I have some. It's possible. Anyway, so that question is misapplied.

00:31:36
Lage: Okay.

00:31:38
Brucker: There are a group of us who collectively have rewritten the history of late medieval and Renaissance Florence. I would say that. But that has happened since World War II. I'm part of that--what I'd call a group. The Italians have a word, *brigata*, which is simply a gang.

00:31:59

Lage: Like a brigade?

00:32:00

Brucker: A brigade, yeah. A *brigata*. So I think there's enough of that. Let's talk briefly about teaching.

00:32:09

Lage: I just thought I should ask you that, since Bob has specifically said "Ask Gene." He probably knew it would embarrass you.

00:32:18

Brucker: Yes, I think he did. With some malice. [laughter]

00:32:20

Lage: Oh, dear. [laughter]

Difficulties and Stress of Teaching

00:32:21

Brucker: So let's say a few words about teaching.

00:32:23

Lage: Okay, I think that's a good idea. After all, that's part of this enterprise.

00:32:27

Brucker: I did say before that I found teaching stressful, and I don't revise that judgement.

00:32:35

Lage: You didn't really say it on the tape, though. So maybe you should say it.

00:32:39

Brucker: I just found it not really hard work, but demanding and it was the sort of thing that kept me awake at night.

00:32:47

Lage: Are you talking about undergraduate teaching, or both graduate and undergraduate?

00:32:50

Brucker: At any level, you name it.

00:32:51

Lage: Seminar versus lectures?

00:32:53

Brucker: No difference, in terms of the stress, the anxiety. Waking up in the middle of the night and thinking, "Do I have a lesson plan? Does the lecture make sense? Is it going to put them to sleep?" Or a small seminar, the same level of anxiety close to panic, sometimes. Occasionally, rarely, after a seminar or a lecture, I would feel, "That went really well." But it wasn't anything that I could say, "Okay, now I know how to do it," because the next

lecture might have been a bust, or the next seminar I might have been faced with a dozen silent students, who just looked glumly at each other, or at the floor, or at the table. They're not willing to say anything, and you say, "Now how the hell--how do I spark?"

By contrast, Bob Brentano, who I think was a brilliant teacher, an effervescent teacher, if he had any anxiety about it, I certainly never saw it. And he was just so successful, at whatever level lecturing. I have a student who's working with me now, a graduate student, and she remembers taking Bob's survey course in Western Civilization as a freshman at Berkeley back in the early 1970s. She says she was simply bowled over by his performance. And she still remembers it, thirty years later, she remembers it. He was that good. I was never able to get over the stress, and one of the reasons I retired when I did was I just wanted to have that end. Thank God, it's ended. I don't have to worry. Occasionally now I still have to give lectures. I have to give a lecture at the Faculty Club in January, and I'll probably sweat that one, too. But that's just one occasion, instead--

00:34:46

Lage: But you seem relaxed. I've only seen you lecture twice, at the Retirees' Association.

00:34:53

Brucker: The relaxation is a scam. [laughter]

00:34:55

Lage: Well, this is revealing. It appears that you haven't figured out a methodology or a trick.

00:35:06

Brucker: No, I haven't. As I say, when I was teaching courses that involved teaching assistants--TAs--they would come to me in despair sometimes and say, "I have two sections. One section works wonderfully; the students are bright, they respond, do their work, they react to each other, they relate to each other, it's just exciting. The second section is just a dud, and I've tried everything to make it work, and nothing works." And all I could do is say, "I've had the same experience. I don't know what to tell you."

00:35:39

Lage: It must have something to do with those students. The chemistry.

00:35:41

Brucker: It must have something to do with the students, and that's just the luck of the draw. I've always thought that the first session is always critical in somehow getting their anxieties calmed, getting them to feel, "This could be fun. This could be interesting." Or, if their attitude is "I'm not going to like this, and so I'm going to do as little as possible, and I'm never going to say anything, even if I'm asked."

00:36:08

Lage: Most of them are not taking your class because they have to.

00:36:12

Brucker: Well, some did. Of course, the Western Civ course, History 5, which was the course I taught--Modern European History--

00:36:19

Lage: It used to be 4.

00:36:20

Brucker: I was asked, and agreed to teach that course for the last three years of my teaching career. I mean, it's a very demanding course, and I worked very hard. I think it was moderately successful, at least I recall reading the evaluations. I used more slides and illustrations than I've ever done before, I remember that worked. At least some students, I think, really learned something. But again, the stress was truly there.

00:36:50

Lage: In general, how much value on teaching does the department put in hiring and promotion?

00:36:59

Brucker: Oh, it puts an awful lot. It really insists on performance, on effective performance.

00:37:07

Lage: In what way?

00:37:09

Brucker: I think in terms of whenever a decision is made about who to hire, we always have people come and give lectures. We try to get as much information--now, of course I'm talking about the past, because in the last ten years I don't know. But I can't believe that that's changed. And prizing our really first rate teachers--Bob Brentano certainly a prime example, Leon Litwack, but that's just two of the whole cadre of really superb teachers. I don't know whether history is special in that regard. I do know that we've always taken pride in making the major a very demanding major. History 101 is the supreme example of our insistence that students do hard work writing a research paper. I've taught sections of that course a couple of times, and I remember again reading the evaluations where the students would talk about "this is the hardest course I've ever done, and I'm so pleased that I was able to write a decent paper, and I really felt good about myself because I did it." But always saying "it was such hard work." I mean, a demanding course, which it is.

00:38:31

Lage: So the design of the major is part of the concern of teaching.

00:38:34

Brucker: Yeah, design of the major. And that, of course, is something that the department is always checking out to see whether changes could be made. We insist in the major on students taking a number of proseminars, small courses in addition to lecture courses, and that's a big change from when I first came to Berkeley. When I first came to Berkeley, everything was lecture on the undergraduate level. There were no proseminars for students. They just went from one lecture course to another, sat down in their chairs, took notes--

00:39:08

Lage: Or read the Fybate notes.

00:39:10

Brucker: So that's changed, certainly for the better.

00:39:13

Lage: So you're satisfied that history majors are getting a good education, in this big university.

00:39:19
Brucker: Yeah.

Working with Graduate Students; Dissertations

00:39:21
Lage: What about the other type of teaching, which is guiding your graduate students that work with you specifically? How did you like that, and how did you do it?

00:39:31
Brucker: I find that hard, demanding. It meant, of course, evaluating performance, and the students who decided to write their doctoral dissertations under me meant a lot of hard work with them, going over their drafts. Then being pleased if they wrote a good thesis and if they got a good job. Then getting letters from my students who wrote their thesis with me, and who achieved success in the profession, and writing back to say, "I remember what you did for me" or "I remember how much help you gave me in revising a badly written dissertation." So that's okay. That's good.

00:40:23
Lage: So you must have done a good job with that, because people do comment on that.

00:40:26
Brucker: With some, yes.

00:40:30
Lage: Did you have a particular approach?

00:40:32
Brucker: No. I never tried to suggest to a student what topic to select for writing a dissertation. I wanted to give them all the freedom I could to try to choose a topic. I would comment on it if I thought the topic was feasible or not, or suggest, "Look, why don't you do this or that." I gave them freedom.

00:40:59
Lage: So you mainly commented on their work as it came in.

00:41:01
Brucker: Commented on their work, and commented on their proposals. I had one student who I'm very fond of. Her name is Barbara [Beckerman] Davis. It took her seventeen years to write her dissertation from the time she went off to Toulouse to start her project until she handed in her dissertation. Seventeen years. That's a record.

00:41:25
Lage: Is that allowed? I guess it is allowed.

00:41:28
Brucker: Well, now it probably wouldn't be allowed.

00:41:32

Lage: Did she have to stay enrolled all those years?

00:41:34

Brucker: She was in Toulouse and lived there, got married there, earned a living teaching English to French--the Concorde airplane was built essentially in Toulouse, and so there were a lot of--and of course it was a joint British-French enterprise, so a lot of aeronautical engineers had to learn some English, and she would teach them. Scraped out a living. She's also a very meticulous scholar. She insisted that every line of her dissertation was correct, polished, and that she got the documents right.

00:42:11

Lage: Was she doing research in Toulouse?

00:42:13

Brucker: She was doing research in Toulouse. She is teaching now in Antioch College in Ohio. She's made a career, but I must say it took her an awfully long time. [laughter]

00:42:27

Lage: Any other graduate students you want to mention?

00:42:31

Brucker: I would say one thing. One of my graduate students is a black historian named John Brackett, and he's the only black historian in Italian Renaissance history. I take great pride in working with him. He's a very, very fine person. I just got a letter from him. I'd sent him the obituary of Bob Brentano and I got a letter from him bringing me up to date. He married an Italian girl, so he has very close ties with Florence, with Tuscany. It gave me great pleasure and pride to steer him through the ordeal of getting a dissertation written and then getting a job.

00:43:18

Lage: How did he get interested in Florence? Do you know?

00:43:20

Brucker: He took my Renaissance course, and then he took a proseminar with me. Then he came to me in my office one day and said he was going to apply for graduate study at Berkeley, and he wanted to work with me. And I was very pleased.

00:43:35

Lage: Wonderful.

00:43:36

Brucker: He was a Vietnam veteran. He lived through that ordeal. Very, very tough, but extremely nice person. I'm very fond of him.

00:43:46

Lage: Where does he teach?

00:43:48

Brucker: He teaches at the University of Cincinnati.

Finding Jobs for Graduates

00:43:51

Lage: Is part of your job, or your responsibility--at least one that you feel--finding a place for your students?

00:43:58

Brucker: It is. It's part of the instructor's job to help his student get a job, which means writing a careful evaluation of his or her work and writing, if necessary, contacting friends or colleagues who might--you know, at the university where he may be applying--to do what you can to promote his or her career. Sometimes the suggestion that he or she give a paper at a conference, at a symposium to get something for their CVs.

00:44:36

Lage: Is the field as easy to place people in as it once was? The field of Renaissance, that is?

00:44:42

Brucker: No, no. The great years were in my early years as a teacher of graduate students. In the 1960s, I could have placed a rhinoceros. [laughter] But that's long since ended.

00:44:59

Lage: What do you attribute that to?

00:45:03

Brucker: It's just that the job market just fluctuates, and there have been good years. The 1960s and the early 1970s.

00:45:08

Lage: But is this historians in general, or Renaissance?

00:45:11

Brucker: General. Basically. Of course, there are differences among fields, and differences among disciplines. My colleague in Japanese history, Irv Scheiner, says he never has any difficulty placing his students, because there are more jobs than there are qualified students. It's now hard, and it's been hard for a long time. I don't see it getting any better.

00:45:36

Lage: Did you notice any change in the interests of your students over time?

00:45:43

Brucker: I think the changes are basically following the changes in the disciplines, being more interested, perhaps, in social history than in political history or institutional history. Being interested in women's history, gender history, cultural history; I can see that development. A lot of women are very well read in all the recent historical theory, including postmodernism. So that's one of the changes. They do follow the trends, I mean, what's "in."

00:46:25

Lage: Are they as interested in archival research? Does that combine with postmodernism?

00:46:29

Brucker: They still are, at least that's my sense. They still are. My last students--I think of Bill Connell, who's at Seton Hall, my last student to get a PhD.

00:46:43

Lage: He was your last student.

00:46:44

Brucker: My last student. He is absolutely an archival historian. Burrowed himself into the Tuscan archives and wrote a very fine book.

Women PhD Students

00:46:53

Lage: Did you have more women as time went on, or did you always have a fair number?

00:46:57

Brucker: Yes. Let's see--I guess Barbara Beckerman--Barbara Davis may have been my first woman PhD. Sharon Strocchia, who teaches at Emory--I'm trying to think if there's anyone else who--oh, I had Cynthia Polcritti, who teaches at UC Santa Cruz.

00:47:31

Lage: I have Karen Scott down here.

00:47:33

Brucker: And Karen Scott teaches at Loyola in Chicago, yes. So you're right. I've had more women coming along, whereas initially my first half-dozen PhDs were all men.

00:47:47

Lage: Now here's a couple names--I found these on your bio bib. Kathleen Casey?

00:47:54

Brucker: She was actually Bob Brentano's student, and I was the second reader on her dissertation. She got a PhD, taught, and then came back to Berkeley and dropped out of academe.

00:48:10

Lage: And Helen Nader?

00:48:11

Brucker: Helen Nader was Bill Bouwsma's student. I've been in touch with her, because I was the second reader on her dissertation. She's had a very successful career. She's now, or has been, the chairman of the department at the University of Arizona. Very, very fine scholar.

00:48:27

Lage: Did these women bring a different slant? Is that where the gender came in?

00:48:32

Brucker: I think, to some degree. But I would say that they didn't all go into women's history. I think of Sharon Strocchia, who published a very good book on death practices in

Renaissance Florence and is now working on a subject, which I supposed was influenced by her gender, and that is she's doing a study of nuns in fifteenth century Florence.

00:49:09

Lage: It all sounds so interesting. Maybe I'll change my field and go to the Villino.

00:49:14

Brucker: Go to the Villino. You would enjoy that. You and your husband would have a very good time there, particularly if you were there in spring or fall.

00:49:23

Lage: Yeah, that's always the best time.

00:49:23

Brucker: Summers tend to be hot, and winters tend to be chilly.

00:49:27

Lage: Right. Is the heating good?

00:49:30

Brucker: When we first went there, it was not good, but I'm told it's improved.

Research Lecture on History at Berkeley

00:49:34

Lage: Hopefully. A couple of questions about your retirement years. Your faculty research lecture; why did you pick the topic of history at Berkeley?

00:49:50

Brucker: I can't give you an answer. It just occurred to me that it might be interesting, and I tried the idea out with colleagues, to see what sort of response I would get. The colleagues were generally enthusiastic. Then I began to interview specific colleagues and older colleagues who had memories of Berkeley before I came here. I realized that this was going to be an interesting theme. Of course, I had no idea what the reverberations would be--

00:50:32

Lage: This whole project.

00:50:34

Brucker: --where we are now. It was based primarily--as I think I said in my lecture--not on documentation, I didn't go back and look in the records, but on memories. My memories, and the memories of others.

00:50:49

Lage: There's not a lot of record to look at, unless people put their papers in the archive.

00:50:53
 Brucker: There really isn't. I'm told David Hollinger has done some exploration of budget committee records, which were housed up in the attic apparently at California--is it California Hall where the budget committee meets? I think it is. The chancellor's office?

00:51:08
 Lage: Uh huh.

00:51:10
 Brucker: Yeah. Apparently they're up in the attic, and he went up and browsed around to find stuff concerning Thomas Kuhn. So there are records, I just didn't want to look at them.

00:51:21
 Lage: I think you're not supposed to look at those records.

00:51:26
 Brucker: But David got permission to go in. That was interesting.

00:51:35
 Lage: I remember at that colloquium about "Play it Again, Sam," about the history department, Reggie Zelnik, I think, said something that the taboos in the story will prevent the full story from ever being told.

00:51:52
 Brucker: That could be to write a secret history of the history department. Well, it won't be written; one, because I think a lot of the evidence has disappeared with the death of so many of our colleagues. And also, people just forget.

00:52:11
 Lage: They forget, yeah. And then there are things that you don't say.

00:52:14
 Brucker: And after all, would it really be much of a contribution to find out the all the dirty linen? I think not.

Importance of Correspondence

00:52:29
 Lage: I have two more questions. You're such a correspondent. You have all the letters--

00:52:40
 Brucker: Sent to me, yeah.

00:52:42
 Lage: This is not the norm. This is not what everybody did, I'm assuming. Why is correspondence so important?

00:52:48
 Brucker: I don't remember why I started, and once I started, it just became habit. I had a file--

00:52:53

Lage: Not just saving it, but writing so much. Keeping in touch.

00:52:58

Brucker: Well, that's part of the job. Almost all of my correspondence is professional, in the sense that I'm writing to colleagues, and writing to students, and having students write back to me. So that doesn't surprise me and I think every professor, at least if he's doing his job, will have all that.

00:53:22

Lage: So maybe you don't think you're a more devoted correspondent. I've seen several mentions of it.

00:53:29

Brucker: I think perhaps because I tend to respond to them as soon as I get them, because my theory for that is then I don't have to do my own work, which is so painful and difficult. [laughter]

00:53:41

Lage: Oh, I see. There. Now we have the reason. But you're still doing this on your manual typewriter.

00:53:46

Brucker: Well, it's electric.

00:53:48

Lage: You're on to a electric typewriter now?

00:53:49

Brucker: I'm on an electric typewriter.

00:53:50

Lage: But you haven't thought about moving towards the computer.

00:53:52

Brucker: No, I actually tried out one, and it just didn't have any appeal for me. And I know that if I were to start over again I would have to master the computer, but since I'm not starting all over again, I think I will slide peacefully into the last stages of my life and career with the skills and the equipment I have. That's all I use.

00:54:17

Lage: It's such a different way of writing, really, because the ease of revising and all on the computer.

00:54:22

Brucker: That's true. I understand that. But I have a lot of time. It's a commodity I have in ample supply.

Gift of Books to Valente Library at Seton Hall

00:54:32

Lage: That sounds very nice. Now the other thing that somebody mentioned to me, that you've given parts of your library to the Valente Italian Library?

00:54:42

Brucker: Right. This is in Seton Hall, and as my student Bill Connell, who has the endowed chair-- Seton Hall is a Catholic university in New Jersey, East Orange, I believe. New Jersey has a very large Italian immigrant population. Bill wanted to build the library for Italian material, and he's been very, very successful. He's published items in the *New York Review of Books* inviting people to send stuff, and of course you get a tax reduction. So I looked at my library and realized there's an awful lot of books that I would not look at again, or read again, or if I did I could go down to the library. So I've been sending books to Bill to build up the Valente collection. He's now very proud that his library is the third biggest library in the state of New Jersey with Italian historical material, after Princeton and Rutgers. He's feeling very pleased, and he should be. This is a useful way to make sure that books that I used and bought and read have a home.

00:55:55

Lage: And they're already in the Berkeley library.

00:55:57

Brucker: And they're already in the Berkeley library, yeah.

00:56:01

Lage: Okay, well, I think we've pretty well finished. I know you'll be pleased with that.

00:56:05

Brucker: I am pleased. I won't say this has been an ordeal, in the end, because talking to you is not an ordeal, but still--I'm glad it's over.

00:56:13

Lage: Okay. That's a nice way to end.

ANN LAGE

Ann Lage is a principal interviewer for the Regional Oral History Office, UC Berkeley, in the fields of natural resources and the environment, University of California history, state government, and social movements. She has directed major projects on the Sierra Club since 1978 and on the disability rights movement since 1995. Since 1996 she has directed a project on the Department of History at UC Berkeley. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Chronicle of the University of California*, a journal of university history, and chairs the Sierra Club library and history committee. Ann holds a B.A. and M.A. in history from Berkeley.

Editor's note:

Lauro Martines, Professor of History at UCLA from 1966-1992, requested that we add this addendum to Professor Brucker's oral history.

"On page 83 of his memoir, Professor Brucker remarks on my family background. Over the course of more than fifty years, the long memory of this dear friend made changes. We know how unreliable memory can be.

For the record then:

My mother was a Jew who converted to Catholicism to marry my father, whose ancestry was Portuguese. Her family disowned her totally. For them she was dead, with the result that she became a fervent Catholic, not a rare occurrence in Jewish converts to 'the Church.' I went to Bowen High School on the far south side of Chicago, an excellent school in the 1940s, and there I had three years of Latin with a Mr. Bengston, who had an M. A. from the University of Chicago. My father was 'a builder and decorator,' as they say here in England. Most of his work took him into middle-class houses. At the height of the depression in the 1930s, living not far from the steel mills of South Chicago, he often hired Mexican immigrant workers who had lost their jobs in the local mills. In an early conversation with Brucker back in 1953 – by that time we were close friends – I brought out some of the preceding details. And there was no reason for the subject ever to come up again, above all because I found it too painful to talk about my childhood. It had been too painful. There were appalling tensions between my parents, owing primarily to the fact that my father lost his faith and became an anti-Catholic. They later divorced. More than enough said."