Paul Farber Oral History Interviews, October 13, 2014

Title
"One Department Closes, Another is Revitalized"

Date
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Location
Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

Interview 2 begins with Farber's thoughts on two high-profile OSU historians, William Appleman Williams and Bill Robbins, as well as a former OSU President, Robert MacVicar. Farber next describes his early research agenda while an OSU faculty member, including details of his work on the history of ornithology and the research trips that he took to Paris and London in support of the work. In this discussion, Farber emphasizes the importance of identifying a historical problem that needs answering as one develops a focus of their research. He also reflects on the actual writing of history, speaking to the historian's anxiety at having missed something important as well as the difficulties of crafting prose that is a pleasure to read.

The session next shifts its attention to Farber's involvement with the Humanities Development Program at OSU, an experience that helped prompt his later interest in serving as an administrator. He describes the means by which he became chair of General Science and notes a few successes of that period, including the creation of an Environmental Science program. Farber likewise notes the uneasy relationship between History of Science - a component of the General Science department at the time - and the History department during his tenure as chair of General Science.

The dissolution of General Science in the wake of Oregon Ballot Measure 5 is the next major topic of the interview. From there, Farber recounts the circumstances that led to his becoming chair of the History department, and the ways in which the department evolved under his leadership. An important moment in department history came in 1994 with the creation of the Horning Chair, and Farber recalls the recruitment and hiring of a married couple, Mary Jo Nye and Bob Nye to fill the position. He also reflects on the significant impact that the Nyes made during their careers at OSU.

The interview then turns its attention to Farber's book *Finding Order in Nature*, as well as a discussion of his work on evolutionary ethics and race-mixing, both hot button issues in American culture. The session concludes with Farber's thoughts on the current direction of Oregon State University, including the need for improvement in humanities education at the university and the broader imperative for improved funding of higher education state-wide.

Interviewee
Paul Farber

Interviewer
Chris Petersen

Website

http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/farber/

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Okay Paul, as before, if you would introduce yourself with your name and today's date, and our location?

Paul Farber: I'm Paul Farber. I'm in Special Collections of the OSU Library. I'm not quite sure what day it is.

CP: October 13th.

PF: Ah, October 13th, 2014.

CP: Great. I'd like to start today by asking you about a couple of iconic figures from the history of the History Department. The most iconic probably would be William Appleman Williams. If you could share some of your memories of him in your encounters with him over the years?

PF: Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah, he was a charming guy. I'm not the easiest of people to get along with, although the two of us got along very well. I'm not exactly sure why we did. I asked him once to be part of a symposium; I think was the anniversary of Lawrence's, probably Lawrence's death. And he gave a very good talk. Yeah, he was very frustrated with Oregon State. [Laughs] I think he never quite got used to the place. What was good about him was he was very outspoken, and mostly what he had to say was right on, even though people didn't want to hear it. [Laughs] So in that sense, he was actually very—he was an irritant, but a very useful one. And he would irritate the central administration to no end, MacVicar and so on. He would write things to *The Oregonian* and so on that would get people upset, but it was often he was quite right. He was criticizing that the university didn't have higher standards, and so on.

What else was interesting about him? He did have a problem with alcohol, which became increasingly obvious and more difficult as he got along. It was very sad. I always attributed it to his back. He had a chronic back problem, and actually that might go back to the war or something. Anyway, it was something that was there all the time, and I think he—as a lot of people, alcohol was useful as a pain reliever. But of course, it has its downside. [Laughs] And that was very unfortunate. It was very unfortunate; it was a thing that colored his last years here, and I think it gave people an impression of him that wasn't—I wouldn't say it was unfair, because it's who he was, but it overshadowed what an incredible historian he was.

I remember when I came here, he was in the History Department; I was over in General Science. And we were meeting, and I had been very impressed that he was here. And so I hadn't read any of his works. I remember reading them and thinking, "Wow, this is a major American historian!" He really is one of the people who showed how Marx—one could use Marx in a very sophisticated, intelligent way to understand a lot about American history. He did it in a way that wasn't ideological, and wasn't particularly political. It was very illuminating. The whole thing about American foreign policy was really connected deeply, deeply to our economy. And I just had never thought about that. It's sort of obvious, but they're brilliant works.

And one of the things I found frustrating early on was how it seemed like people didn't really get him. They didn't understand what a major person he was. It seems like—I wouldn't say he was wasted on Oregon State, but somehow it does seem like the institution wasn't able to make good use of him. Partly, he came from Wisconsin. It was a school with a major, major graduate program, and his students, of course, are the next generation of American diplomatic historians. And the History Department didn't have a graduate program, so he had no graduate students. I think many of the undergraduates just didn't get [0:05:00]—but maybe that's understandable.

But what's not understandable, and maybe not forgivable, is I think most of the faculty didn't get him either. [Laughs] And they should have. They should have realized what an incredible person he was. Every time I heard him speak publicly it was impressive, and I remember thinking, "Here's a person that, every time he's giving a talk, I will go to because I learn something." And that's saying a lot. I think he was an amazing guy, yeah.

CP: How about Bill Robbins, a guy still around, still very active?

PF: He's still—yeah, I know. That's interesting, Bill. Well yeah, Bill is a friend, and was important in the History Department and its administering of their roles in the College of Liberal Arts. He's, of course, a very active and interesting

Oregon Historian. And I think I've read all of his books. I've enjoyed them very much. What's interesting to me about Bill, it's interesting you asked me about the two people who were underappreciated [laughs] in their time. Bill? I hate to say this on tape, but he was underappreciated by his colleagues all the way through. And I attributed that to two things—one, his degree was from U of O. And so compared to, I won't mention names, but other people in the History Department whose degrees were from Stanford and Harvard, and so on, this was like kind of a joke. I mean, they didn't take it seriously.

The other thing is the kind of history he did was very much narrative. He would go and tell a story about Coos Bay. Nice archival work; he works very well in archives. He's a real archive rat. He can find things. He's good at interviewing people, and he has a knack for telling a story, an engaging story. I've enjoyed his books very much. But the problem, so to speak, with his books—I should say the reason they were criticized locally, and well, locally for sure, maybe even more broadly than that—was that his work wasn't deeply theoretical. It wasn't tied to trying to find—I mean, it's tied to larger themes in western history. It took me a while to get that, mainly because I was coming to it from 18th century France, so [laughs] it was a very different world. But I finally realized he is part of the whole tradition of people who are doing work like that.

But locally, people didn't see that he was grappling with deep historic graphic issues, and so on, and so it seemed superficial; that's how people read it. I think it's a misreading. It's a misreading, and certainly it's a different style of doing history; it's a different set of questions. What's ironic about it is I suspect that it'll be around longer than the other things. The other things get dated fairly quickly. His stuff is a solid narrative history. His stuff is very good. Although I have to confess, when I was reading the first times, the first books I read by him, I thought, "Well, this was a nice story, essentially. Here's Coos Bay. But, so what? How does this tie into the larger picture?" And I think as he developed, as he matured in his later books, he makes more of an effort to tie it into some larger western themes. For a while it seemed he was trying to tie it into a more Marxist theme, which may be partly the influence of William Appleman Williams, with whom he was very close, but I think also it was just him. And I was never convinced that he could make the connection very well. It was a very loose connection. So I mean, that's a technical thing.

The other reason I think he was underappreciated in the department was that he was very much a blue collar kid. He came from Connecticut. He came from a blue collar family. [0:10:00] He worked as a logger for a while, and he didn't have the kind of surface polish. He wasn't an opera-goer, and so on.

CP: [Laughs]

PF: It's amusing to say that. It sounds kind of funny, but in the world of academia, unfortunately, it's very serious. Particularly, these cultural markers are very important. Do you go to the opera? Do you eat French food? Etcetera. And I remember realizing that early on, and thinking, "What a shame. What a shame, because people are overlooking someone who is really quite interesting." He always has interesting things to say, interesting views. Anyway.

CP: Yeah. Well, somebody who was not in the department, but I'm wondering if you had occasion to interact with very often, was Robert MacVicar, President Robert MacVicar. Are there any standout moments from his presidency, or any interactions that you had with him that you want to talk about? [Laughs]

PF: [Laughs] Ah, okay, that's the—yeah. Well, yes, I had an ongoing relationship with MacVicar, and many contacts. We came in '70, and before we left Bloomington, Indiana, where we were graduate students, we visited, on a number of occasions, my wife Vreneli's parents, who were living in Collinsville. They were faculty at Southern Illinois. And Vreneli's parents knew MacVicar when he was at Carbondale, I guess, is now the main campus. And in fact they had each tangled with him on a number of occasions. Laughs] And so I had heard stories about him when I got out here. I think he came the same year that we came. And so I had some—I have to confess, I was prejudiced to begin with. Vreneli's parents thought that he was very narrow, that he didn't get the humanities at all, that he was more of a bureaucrat than an academic leader. I think there was a lot of truth to that, actually.

I came to realize he had some great skills, that he was important for the institution, but I think it is the case that he didn't really get the humanities, or didn't value them. And the first time we met him was at a Christmas party for faculty. It was a president's reception, and we were going through the reception line and we introduced ourselves, and Vreneli said that her parents had known him. And he said, "Well, now, I wouldn't know them under Farber." She said, "No, no, my

maiden name is Marti." He said, "Marti." Then he said, "Oh! Gertrude." [Laughs] He remembered Gertrude. They had tagged along quite a lot. Vreneli's mother was trying to introduce some new programs in French, she wanted basically to develop a program where the entire—a student could go through and get a bachelor's degree, say in Economics, Biology or whatever, and all of the courses, the majority of courses, would be in French. So she was trying to find faculty who would teach sections of courses in French. And she was very successful at it; it's an amazing technique and it's used in a number of schools. But anyway, MacVicar was not supportive of that, and they had clashed on quite a number of occasions.

I met with him on a couple of occasions dealing with the History of Science. In the early years that I was here I felt that the History of Science program was threatened, and wasn't fully appreciated, and that there was a good possibility it might be eliminated. As it turns out it wasn't, and maybe some of my fears were junior faculty paranoia, which is common enough. But I do remember meeting with him on a couple of occasions and trying to make the case of how important History of Science was for the institution. [0:15:00] And I remember thinking to myself, "He really just doesn't get it. He doesn't understand what I'm saying." Because at one point he said, "Well now, I used to teach History of Chemistry." And I was thinking, "Yeah. [Laughs] There are lots of chemists who have taught History of Chemistry, and it wasn't history of chemistry, it was names and dates, and it was boring, and had nothing to do with the larger issues in History of Science." But it was later on that I came to realize that he was an institution leader.

The problem with him, and I think one of his main weaknesses which drove people nuts, was that he was a micromanager. So for example, he would examine travel requests. If I took a professional trip to, say, St. Louis, and turned in my receipts, I might get either a call or a note from MacVicar. [Laughs] "So what's this restaurant deal? Why was it so expensive?" I thought, "The president should be spending his time on other things. This is really a waste of his time." I was right on that; there were other people who said the same thing. But he was a stickler for detail, and that's a strength that also is a weakness, I think.

CP: Well, in our last session we sort of ended up with you telling me that for the first summers, anyway, most of your time during the school year was spent preparing for teaching.

PF: Right.

CP: And the summers were devoted to lecture, and you were able to—

PF: To research.

CP: To research, sorry. And you were able to garner some funding for that?

PF: Right.

CP: Do you want to tell me about those early years, kind of the progression of your research, how that all played out?

PF: [Laughs] Well, so I got here. I think I mentioned that I had no preparation for teaching, and I was very serious about doing research. And the work I was doing back then was 18th Century Natural History. And so I went over to the library and discovered very quickly that, from my point of view, there's nothing here; there are none [laughs] of the books and the journals. And so it was sort of like working in the basement with the lights off. [Laughs] So I realized early on that I would have to be able to go to libraries. I'd have to do that, otherwise I couldn't possibly—couldn't possibly continue doing research.

So back then there still was a lot of money floating around, particularly at the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. And History of Science was a hot field, so I was able to garner a number of grants, travel grants, to be able to go for three months, six months, to Paris, London. They were very generous grants. Back then, they paid for travel. There was a living stipend, and it was really very generous, very generous. And so I benefited from that. I would say I used the money wisely, meaning that I sort of hoarded it and used it for photocopying, and so on. But it was absolutely essential. I think I mentioned last time that I also came to the decision early on not to continue working on the natural side, on my dissertation. And so I expanded it, and again, it sort of—my mother always said I was born under a lucky star. [Laughs]

And I don't believe in such things, but it's sort of true in my case. There's something, I just am lucky; I've fallen into things. You can also, if you want, you can say in my life I took advantage of situations that came my way, but nonetheless I think I've been very, very fortunate. And stop me if I mentioned this last time, in '73 I had a National Science Foundation grant, and I spent the summer in London and then the winter in Paris. [0:20:00] Vreneli had a grant and she was in Moscow during the summer and then joined me for the fall in Paris. It was wonderful.

So in London, I thought, "Okay, I really want to move in a different direction." And I had decided that studying ornithology would be an interesting—I'd done a number of volumes on ornithology, and it seemed like the natural step. And I won't get into all of the—there were questions that seemed to be potentially very historically interesting. So I thought, "Okay, let me work on that." So I went to the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, and they have this zoology library there that's spectacular. And back then, the reading room was actually in the stacks, so I was just sitting there. And again, what luck! Someone had given a collection of books to the Natural History Museum, the Marquess of Tweeddale, and he was an amateur ornithologist. And he had put together a collection of books that literally, literally was everything from the 17th through the 19th century—the whole thing, all of the books done in all of ornithology, in all languages. It was extraordinary! They were in a set of cases, and every time I ordered a book it came from those cases. At one point the librarian got tired of getting up and getting books all the time, and just said, "Here. Here are the keys to the case. You go get your books! I'm tired of getting you a book every half an hour. You seem to be using the collection. Here are the keys." So it was one of those lovely opportunities.

And so I started looking at—I mean, I went and retrieved a few things, and I just started looking at the shelves, and I noticed, there actually are a bunch of books here that I've never heard of, just never heard of them, don't what they are, because there wasn't that much work done on the subject. That's one of the things that's glorious about the history of science, is practically anything is virgin territory; at least certainly back then it was. So I decided I'd better look at this collection. So I literally started at the left and went to the right, and looked at the whole damn collection, and in the process discovered all sorts of things that I don't know that I ever would have gotten to, all sorts of books, and so on.

I also began something that I continued then for the rest of my career. And that also told me something, because I've done that now in other situations, with other contexts. Sometimes looking at a set of shelves very carefully is very instructive. And I don't know what it is about my brain, but I'm able to scan, and just kind of things kind of jump out at me. I don't know how that works, but it somehow works for me. My wife criticizes that, saying, "Yeah, and he also does lots of things," which is true. She's very systematic. We work very differently. But for me it works, anyway. So the other thing I did that summer was started looking at some journals. I don't even know why I started this, but what I decided was—actually, it could have been related to my experience with books. I would find curious articles about birds that no one had referred to. They weren't in the literature; these were just things that weren't discussed. And I thought I'd better go through the journals.

So I started going—I just picked a year that seemed rational, let's say 1750, and just go through everything until 1820, or something like that. Now, that's tedious to say the least, but it doesn't bother me. I can just sit there. I mean, again, it's just, I can do it because I don't sit there and read every page. I look at it, I flip, I look at the index and so on, or the index and table of contents, and then just kind of flip through and see if anything jumps out at me. And you know, so obviously I'm missing things. But on the other hand, there are also things I found, and anyway, I've continued to work that way all through my career.

For example, one of the things I've found was it seemed like in the journals [0:25:03], and also books on the Tweeddale shelves, there were a bunch of books about taxidermy. And then I started looking. Suddenly somewhere, like, starting actually around 1750 or 1760, there are dozens of articles about how to preserve birds. And I was thinking, "Why this preoccupation with how to preserve birds? And I actually talked to a curator at the Natural History Museum about how they took care of birds, and so on. And anyway, I did a bunch of reading, and finally I constructed a story that made sense, and that was that until about 1770, European naturalists did not know how to protect museum specimens. There were insect pests. The most notorious were dermestids beetles, which can reduce a parrot to dust overnight. I mean, it's true; they had these boxes of parrots coming in from South America. People would look at them and they're all excited. They would come back two days later and there was nothing left but a skeleton. [Laughs] And so it was a crisis, it was a real crisis.

And so all of the people, Réaumur, everybody, was trying to figure out ways to do it. And of course they came up with a number of techniques, for example, sulfur fumigation. It works. It kills the bugs; it also destroys the skins. So there's all of these methods were tried out, but they turned out to have very serious downsides. Anyway, come around 1770, 1771, the articles stopped—just no more articles. And of course, what happened was there's a pharmacist, Bécœur, in Metz, who discovered you can make an arsenical soap and paint the inside of birds with this arsenic. It kills the bugs. And it went from being a problem, a question, to being a technique. That's it; end of the story.

So it's a nice little—I actually ended up writing an article about it, and then showing how important it was, because until you could preserve the specimens, you can't really have large naturalistic collections. They're a joke. You can have skeletons, but you can't have large collections. And the sort of work that was done later in the 18th century and the 19th century, Darwin's work, for example, would have been completely and totally impossible without those large bird collections. You look at many specimens of the same species and see variations, and so absolutely essential!

But anyway, I don't know that I would have come across that story, and no one else had come across that story, but it's just from going through the journals that tediously. But then also having a—looking for interesting questions. And again, stop me if I mentioned this last time, but in this period, in the early '70s, I spent a summer at Harvard, working mostly in the Museum of Comparative Zoology or at Widener, two of the greatest libraries in the world. And actually, this is when I was working on sorting out some issues in ornithology, and Roger Hahn, who was an 18th century French historian of science at Berkeley happened to be visiting, and I just remember walking across Harvard Yard with him. I don't know if we'd had lunch, and it doesn't really matter.

We were walking, chatting. He was very nice. He was a very supportive, nurturing fellow. And I must have sent him a copy of my taxidermy paper, an early draft, and he said, "This is really interesting. I like this very much. So what? [Laughs] Why should anybody care?" And I was completely thunderstruck by that! It's an interesting story. And he said, "Yeah, but if you want to publish this in *Isis*, the main journal of the history of science, you have tie it—you have to explain why it is important. It may be obvious to you, or maybe it's not obvious to you, but just the story of how they discovered arsenic kills bugs, like, yeah? [0:30:00] Like, so what? Why should anyone care? Why should anyone read your article?"

And it must have been just the time that I heard this, it just kind of stuck. Like, oh, gosh. Okay, this is the way you do history. The way you do history is you find interesting problems that have historical importance. And sometimes you find a really interesting problem, really interesting, and you find the material, but it actually isn't very important. [Laughs] And so you just have to say, "Well, I'm going to either forget about this, or I'll tuck it away. And if I can find a context for it later on, if something I'm doing later relates to this, I know where this material is. It's actually not worth wasting your time on that now, it's not going to go anywhere." And it was a very valuable lesson, extremely valuable lesson. And then when I planned work in the future, the only way I would typically plan a work is I would finish a project, like a big project or a book, and I would just say, "Okay, for six months I'm just going to read, and just follow my interests." And I kept a notebook and kept notes, and just followed things. But I remember, it was always like, "Okay, what's the problem? What's the interesting historical problem?"

And I think it's been very, very valuable. It's also led me in—well it's really made me work in a certain manner, which I would argue has been good [laughs], but I'm sure other people would argue that it's bad. And that is, it typically has taken about ten years to write a book, so it's a big project over a long time. I finally finished it, and I'm usually exhausted by then, don't want to hear about the subject again ever in my life. And I then just sort of sit down and say, "What do I want to do next?" And usually I don't feel like following—I mean, sometimes initially, initially—for example, when I first finished my book on evolutionary ethics, it's a critique on evolutionary ethics, I basically did the Anglo-American story. And I remember thinking at the time, "This is such an interesting topic, and I can extend this to France and Germany, because if I went—and Russia." In fact, I studied Russian for a couple of years just in preparation of the possibility to do this.

If I took the story there, my hypothesis was that the theory of evolution had a different formulation in those countries. I didn't actually know that from my own teaching. And I had the inkling that the theories of ethics were also different. And I knew they used to—in each of these countries there was the development of an evolutionary ethics. And I had the feeling that the Germans, the French, and the Russians did the same thing that the Brits and the Americans did, that's to say, they read their values into nature, and then discovered them there. And I had the feeling I could take, particularly,

the French story, describe the ethical position, show how they tried to discover that this was natural in their version of the definition. I actually did one paper on that.

Anyway, it seemed like a natural project to then write a book about that comparative study. I've always been convinced that comparative studies are the most revealing. But in the process of doing that, what has happened to me over time is I've discovered some other question, some other problem, that turns out to be, to me, more interesting. Also I think I've never really articulated this before, but I think at some level I was kind of exhausted with the old evolutionary things. I've read so much. I've read every journal [laughs], and a lot of the other things from the 19th century. I was sort of fed up with the topic. And so the new question had to have an appeal to me. So, my point is that after finishing one project, I've moved off into something seemingly completely different. So it hasn't been a straight trajectory, deeper and deeper, or broader and broader, it's been kind of a zig-zag.

Now, for me this meant it's been fascinating that I've never lost my sense of enthusiasm [0:35:02], enthusiasm for my projects. I put a lot of work in, and it's like this is the greatest stuff ever, since the invention of bubble gum or something. But anyway, so I think that accounts for part of my—if you look at my books, it's like, "Did the same guy write these books?" You know, they seem very different. Of course, if you know me you can see the connections, but I don't think they're obvious.

For example, so when I started seriously thinking about evolutionary ethics in France, as I said, I wrote a paper on it, but in the process of doing the work on this, one of the characters, Jean de Lanessan, who was Governor of Indochina for a number of years, I was looking at letters and then articles, and so on, that he wrote. This was mostly the letters, but it doesn't really matter what they were. And there was a sort of throwaway line in there about the colonials who had gone to Southeast Asia and married, or at least had children with native women, and how the children seemed to be superior to either racial stock. It was in 19th century terms. And I was astounded by that, because what I had always assumed and had read—I had reasons to think this—was that theories of racial mixing in the 19th century was any racial mixing would result in some kind of degeneration, that the offspring were always less fit than the parents. And so I thought to myself, "I've not covered a whole—again, I have stumbled into a whole line of thought that historians have missed, that these French actually had a different view of race mixing." And then I was talking to someone else who was saying, "Well, I think the Dutch had the same ideas." And so, "Oh," I thought, "I'm really on to something!"

And so then I started working on race mixing, and of course that ultimately developed into a very different project, and dropped the French altogether. [Laughs] It turns out the American story is really, really interesting, and that's the way—partly because of the questions, and so on. It also turned out that I was wrong, that it was a throwaway line. I read literally everything Lanessan wrote, everything, letters to the editor, and couldn't find anything more, just this one throwaway line.

CP: Huh.

PF: But it started me on a path of investigation that led in a very different direction. I mean, there's a serendipity to history, but it's not completely—I mean, there's sort of serendipity, but it's also looking for the question.

CP: Well, I have a couple of questions about the actual writing of history.

PF: Yeah. Yeah, sure.

CP: And I've often wondered if there is a sense of anxiety within the profession, or within yourself, that you have missed something. Is there a historian's anxiety when you finish something, or spend twelve years writing a book on birds? Do you get to that point and think, "Oh, maybe I've missed something important?"

PF: I can't imagine anyone not thinking that.

CP: Yeah.

PF: There's so much material, and there's only—there's so much material! You can't possibly read everything. And I mean, I try to read very, very widely, but. And then only certain lines come down to us. So you sit in the archive and you read letters. Okay, how many letters are on there? It turns out sometimes there are letters in Philadelphia that you didn't

know about. Or ten years later, you discover, oh, gosh! There are twenty letters somewhere else. That's the type of thought that would occur. So you know the stories aren't complete.

I don't have a problem with that. I really don't; I have a tolerance for that. So this is the best I can do right now with what I have, and given—here's the evidence I have, here's my argument. Five years from now, if someone is looking at other material and they want to modify that story, great. That's fine. I don't have a kind of proprietary sense of my own work. It's sort of like, if it leads to other work that ends up rejecting it and gives a better picture, I've done my work; I've done my job. It's fine. [0:40:00]

And that's an ego issue. I was a very spoiled kid; I was told I was a perfect child. My mother loved me, my father loved me, my teacher loved me. And so I grew up with this [laughs] sense of worth, and so I've never needed external affirmation. If I'm happy with it, that's all I need. And it sounds egotistical, and it is at some level, but it's also just who I am. I'm just comfortable with myself. And if I have an idea and it gets rejected for good reasons, I also have a sense of justice, and if people reject something for invalid reasons, that would drive me nuts.

CP: Yeah.

PF: [Laughs] That elicited a different response.

CP: Well, the other question is, you spend all of this time gathering all of this data and forming an argument. You write something, and you want to write something that actually is a pleasure to read.

PF: Yeah, you do. That's right. Historians are engaged in a form of literature. Yeah, that's true.

CP: Yeah. So I mean, were there any techniques you developed to make your writing more palatable, I suppose?

PF: Yeah, that's been the bane of my existence.

CP: [Laughs]

PF: It's really something I have struggled with from the beginning, and I still struggle with it. I was not a writer. My undergraduate degree, as you know, was in zoology. I had lab courses. I didn't have courses where I wrote papers. When I got to graduate school, I had to do research papers. I was completely flummoxed. I had gotten this—my early, when I got back and read them, I am mortified [laughs] by how sophomoric they are. But that's the way it was. And I benefited —well, so they didn't start off as good writing, and it's always been a struggle. It still is a struggle. I benefited from very good editors. So I would send a manuscript in, and I would get back an edited copy, and I would read it and say, "Wow, this is so much better than I wrote!" They smoothed the sentences out.

Also in graduate school, I had some very good mentors. I spent a lot of time with them pointing out what was wrong with my writing. [Laughs] So it wasn't fun, but it was very, very helpful. Anyway, so I've been through some very good editors, and I paid a lot of attention to corrections they were making. But the other thing is I'm an avid reader, and I always have been, going back to high school or earlier. I'm typically reading three books at a time—one novel, one monograph, one poetry book. I love literature. I love to read, and I like style—I pay attention. I like good writing. I should say I appreciate good writing; I pay attention to it. And so I've had all of these models from—I can recognize good writing; then I look at my stuff and it looks like crap. I can see the distinction. On the other hand, when I work at it for a while, for a long while, I can see improvement. And when I actually go back and read some of my books, I'm actually amazed by how good they are. They are so much better than I think of myself as being able to write.

Now, one of the things that impressed me—I did my dissertation on Buffon, but one of the things that impressed me about his manuscripts was that for every article, say the birds, because that's mostly what survived is his manuscripts on the birds—he burned all of his other ones—was for every article there were at least a dozen drafts. I would look at the different drafts, and there were these minor—I lot of them were just minor stylistic changes. Some of it was content, but a lot of it was just polishing, polishing, polishing, polishing. And in the end, these are great pieces of literature, and they're still in reference for scholars for their literary value. I remember being impressed by that. [0:45:00] Okay, here's one of the great writers of France. He's a member of the Académie Française and so on, and it took him twelve drafts to have an article, so there's nothing wrong with revising.

And I've always done that. Everything I write goes through a zillion drafts. I just keep on going over, and over, and I'm never actually satisfied, but I get to a point where I figure, okay, this is about as good as I'm going to get. So I'm sort of dogged, just like going through journals. It's something—it's not actually—I've come to realize that that's part of my personality. I never would have described myself that way when I was younger, but I think it's true. I really will—now I'm doing a paper for St. Louis. I've probably gone through two dozen drafts. It's just about—it's just about there. When I say it's there, it means it's as good as it's going to get for me. But anyway.

CP: Moving back to the institutional side a little bit, from what I gathered, your first administrative post here was Acting Director of the Humanities Development Program?

PF: Yeah, yeah.

CP: What was the story behind that?

PF: Well, Peter Copek and I were good friends, and at that time he was running a humanities program. This was before the Center for The Humanities. And I think he was going on sabbatical, and so he just asked me if I wouldn't mind, because I was involved with—we talked a lot, and I was very helpful to him. I'm a very good idea person. If someone just kind of runs something by me, ten ideas pop out of my head. So for an administrator, I'm actually a nice person to sit down and have a cup of coffee with, because sometimes I can come up with a solution that they just haven't come up with, and I think Peter used me that way partly. And so he asked me if I would do it. I mean, it's is a long history there, because he didn't trust most of the people in his department, [laughs] but that's Peter's story. Anyway, I was trusted, and he asked me if I would do it. And then later he became one of the Board [?] and so on.

But anyway, Judy Kuipers was the—I don't remember her title, it was something like Vice President of Something, but basically she was in charge of all of the support groups for students, the EOP, Affirmative Action, and so on. It was all under her aegis, and for a reason not clear to me, this program fell under her. And it turned out we worked very closely together, and it was very pleasant. I really enjoyed her. And various decisions had to be made during that year, and I found that they were very easy to make. I mean, I didn't agonize or think; it was clear what would need to be done. And by then I had been here enough, long enough, that I had a sense of the administration, and so I knew which people to approach, which people to avoid, how to approach some people.

And what I discovered in that period of time, which wasn't all that long, was that, one, was I could actually do that. [Laughs] I could do it, which I had no reason to think that I could. And secondly, it was kind of fun, and that was a bit of a shock, because I felt guilty about that. Scholars are not supposed to waste their time on administration, period, and anybody who does is suspect, and loses credibility. It's the worst possible thing you can admit. Actually, I'm not kidding. [Laughs] And so I felt funny about it. I'm not sure that I told anyone other than Vreneli, of course, but this actually was kind of fun. Anyway, that was it for the moment. That ended, but then it had a way—Judy knew who I was, and so suddenly I found myself on committees, or as the chair of something. Peter had me be the chair of the Advisory Committee to this Humanities Program, and then I actually ended up writing the grant that got the Center for The Humanities here. [0:50:02] I don't think anybody knows that.

But again, it was sort of like Peter needs somebody, in me. There was a draft; actually it was more than a draft. There was a grant that had been sent in and was turned down. So he gave it to me, and I said, "Well, I can see why it was turned down. I can do this." And so I rewrote it. And in the process of doing that I had to get to know Nicodemus and the faculty, Carolyn Marsh, who was in the Dean's Office, who was—how do I say this? She knew where every dime in the college was. She was a very, very savvy woman who knew how to get things done. Anyway, I came into contact with a number of people through that, and again, it was pretty fun doing it. We enjoyed doing it; this was a multi-million dollar thing, and it bore fruit, and we have the Center.

And so I thought, "Wow! I know that what I'm doing is sort of like dealing drugs on the side. This is definitely a disreputable activity, but it's sort of fun, and moreover I do have a facility for it. Dealing with drugs would get me more money, but this is something that's legal." And anyway, I learned something about myself that I hadn't known. And then just ultimately I ended up being Chair of the General Science Department, and again that was something I did not seek, did not—but the Dean, Bob Krause, met with me once, or arranged the meeting to see me, and said, "Look, the department you're in is a wreck, and I'm thinking very seriously about eliminating it, because it's really not doing

anything. It's sort of an embarrassment to the college. And what we need is some new leadership and some new direction, and I'd like you to be chair."

I was pretty—I can't remember what year it was, but I was young, and I didn't see myself becoming a chairman. I could see doing something for a few months, and that sort of thing, and I expressed the fact that I didn't go into academia to be an administrator. I come from a business family. There's lots of administrators in my family. I didn't want that life, and I didn't want do to that sort of stuff. I was an egghead. I liked to sit and read books and write books, and that's what—and I loved the classroom. And so why would I give that up to be an administrator? He put it very simply; he said, "Well, if you want your job, you're going to have to do this."

CP: [Laughs]

PF: "Because otherwise you're going to find yourself without a department, without a job." And I found that a compelling argument, [laughs] to be honest.

CP: [Laughs]

PF: I said, "Well, since you put it that way, I guess this is an offer I can't refuse." And so then I became chair, and again, had a retreat, which the department hadn't done before. We took everybody over to the coast for a weekend, and we just sat around, saying, "Okay. What we're doing isn't working, so we're out here to identify what the problems were." And they were sort of like, "So, you've given"—because it was a very diverse faculty of biologists, historians. "Well, what can we do that actually makes sense and that is valuable, and that is true to us, but would be valuable to the institution and is important, is worth doing?"

And we basically just reconceptualized the whole thing. What we came up with was Environmental Science, so we started an Environmental Science program, undergraduate and graduate, and we tied it all to work that was being done to this one project. We hired a few people, Pat Bior, Bruce McCune, Bill Winter. We then brought in some big grants. We worked up a relationship with a PA, which brought in even more money. And suddenly we were doing very interesting things, and the dean was very happy with what we were doing. And also, for me personally it was gratifying [0:55:00], because okay, here's something—this was worth spending some time on. These were interesting programs we were starting. Environmental Science became a very, very popular major in college. And we were doing good things. We were educating students to go out and be experts in Environmental Science, but who would have a strong scientific background.

So U of O had a program in Environmental Science, but it was social science. And so they went out and in many cases they ended up blundering, because they were in an agency, they were dealing with scientists, but they weren't speaking the scientists' language. They didn't fully get the science. And scientists are very picky. If you misuse a term [laughs], like environment, or landscape, or ecology, or species, if you show you don't actually understand what those words mean, you're dead in the water. You're not going to be able to—and so our students, as I remember, they got out; they got jobs. We had like 100 percent employment for our grads, and they did well because they had scientific background as well as the social science, and an understanding of environmental change as opposed to ecological change. Ecological change is long-term; environment is changes in landscape that don't necessarily involve ecological shifts. It's a very different way of approaching the problem, and we do very good. At Oregon State we do great work on that. All of the pieces were here for a very strong program. But anyway, we were the first ones to put that together.

CP: Yeah.

PF: So anyway, so that set me on a path. The other thing for me personally is that I realized I really didn't want to be sort of a full-time administrator. I knew that I love the classroom. I had to continue to be in the classroom because I got a high from being there, and I just loved the research. I just love sitting in an archive; I love reading books. I couldn't give that up, or it would kill me.

So I was able to balance that. I carved out parts of the week where I said, "Okay, Tuesday and Thursday mornings I'm not available, just not available." And I would go work. I had an office in another building, which didn't have a phone. I just disappeared for X amount of hours. And so I remained productive even though I had an administrative career. Still, I'm

not sure I would have published any more books had I not. I would have taught more students, that's true, and had more classes. But I still taught my favorite classes. I never gave those up.

CP: [Laughs] I'm wondering if during the time you were in charge of General Science—?

PF: Oh, there is that one little thing that I—at various points I had opportunities to move up. I always considered it a move down, but that's to say I could move up to the Dean's Office, or become a dean. Iowa State was courting me for that one, to be Dean of Arts and Sciences. And it was just very clear to me. I mean, I figured, okay, I owe it to myself to at least look into this, but it became obvious to me very quickly that these were jobs where there's no time for teaching, there's no time for research. These are full-time commitments, part of which is devoted to fundraising. And the rest is dealing with administrative issues, and interesting as they are—and a historian of science is very well suited to be a dean of Arts and Sciences because we cross so many fields—I just knew it wasn't me, and I wouldn't be happy long-term. And I knew Vreneli would kill me if I moved to Iowa.

CP: [Laughs]

PF: So I quickly terminated all of that, and then turned down any inquiries. I just knew I couldn't do any more administration than I was doing; that was it, even though I would have made a lot more money. I'd make more money but I'd be less happy, so the tradeoff absolutely wasn't—wasn't. [1:00:04]

CP: Did the relationship between History of Science and History change at all while you were in charge of General Science?

PF: There was a sort of low-level warfare [laughs] between History of Science and History Department for quite a number of years. And I think if someone were to look through my letters, many of which are in Special Collections, there was correspondence with Tom McClintock and other people. Tom was the chair. Yeah, the History Department became increasingly alarmed by the growth of the History of Science program and the success of the History of Science program, but also of the ambition of the chair of the General Science Department, who, for example, wanted History of Science courses to count for Humanities credit. It had always counted for Science credit, but they're History courses, and very much Humanities courses. And I was deeply offended that they didn't even count.

Later I was on the Bacc Core Committee, the committee that set up the Bacc Core, and it became part of the Humanities. Tom was on the committee; we argued about that endlessly on that committee, and it was an ongoing argument. [Laughs] Anyway, back when I was chair, I had suggested that History of Science courses count for Humanities, count for History credit, and so on. And boy, that was really—it was probably a misstep on my part. Looking back on it, I should have gone as I usually did. When I think about this, I don't understand why I was so stupid. But my typical way of operating was if I had an idea, I wanted to do something, I would just walk across campus, knock on somebody's door, and introduce myself and say, "Hi. I've been having some ideas, and here they are, and here's how they benefit you. And, what do you think about these ideas? Here's how the benefit us." So I would sort of think this through before I would just go knock on someone's door, cold.

And I had a lot of luck with that, I think. Instead of picking up the phone or writing a letter, or putting in a proposal, I would actually do the face-to-face contact. And I didn't do that with the History Department. I think the only thing I can say in my defense [laugh] is that I'd been naïve. I knew the people in the History Department very well socially. I mean, we're all historians, so we socialized together. And I think somehow I thought, "Well, they just think of me as one of them, and I don't have to explain this." And of course, it was obvious to me, but in retrospect it was a false move. Anyway, History Department was very alarmed by our actions, and so there was this ongoing battle with us. And that persisted all the way until I joined the History Department. When the History of Science program moved into the History Department and that problem was solved, so to speak.

CP: Yeah.

PF: There still were some residual effects of the earlier battles, because I think when I came in, to some of the older faculty I was sort of suspect, part of this, "Here's this subversive, this guy I've been fighting for all of this years and they're going to let him run the department." It was like, this may not be a good idea.

CP: Yeah. In the early '90s as you referenced, a lot happened. General Science went away.

PF: Yeah. I know.

CP: Now, was that Measure Five?

PF: Yeah.

CP: Okay.

PF: We had to. There were budget cuts, and Robert Byrne—

CP: John Byrne.

PF: John Byrne—Robert MacVicar, John Byrne—had to make not only budget cuts, which, my whole history at Oregon State has been a series of budget cuts. I don't know anything else, actually. [Laughs] It taught me something; you can always do with less. I did with less. Anyway, I don't recommend it. John had this horrible situation where he was instructed by the legislature [1:05:00], or at least by the State Board—I don't remember which one, I actually think it was the legislature—they had to cut departments. And he couldn't just do what he did before, ten percent, five percent, like that, or he was selectively prudent. He had to lop off. And he did that; he lopped off at least three departments.

And I remember having a discussion with the dean about this, because the dean was a strong supporter and a person I respected, who got what we were doing in General Science. But basically, he said, "We have to cut something, and General Science is the only department that's not a discipline." How can you have a College of Science without Math, [laughs] or Chemistry, Physics? These are basic disciplines. General Science is interdisciplinary, and we can always move the interdisciplinary programs into the college, just make it a college, or we house it in Botany or something like that. So we can eliminate the department, cut the budget, but salvage the programs. And so it's like the least cost to the institution.

And as painful as that was, because you can see by this point I had a lot invested in the department, as did all of the faculty, I understood. I mean, I understood. I didn't like it, but I couldn't see any way—actually, we talked about some other possibilities involving Geology and Geography, and that would have been another way of sort of combining, or eliminating a department. But that was complicated, because Geography at that point was split between CLA and Science, and the budget wasn't big enough. But I helped explore that [laughs] as an alternative. But even I could see it didn't make any sense to do that. And so we got eliminated.

Most of the positions, the vast majority of the positions, were saved and moved into—I moved into History; Pat and Bruce moved into Botany, and so on. There were two retirements—no, one retirement, at least one retirement. And that's a kind of—I don't know, I'm not sure I want to tell that story, because it's hearsay, but it doesn't make the upper administration look very good. It makes them look like they pushed somebody to retirement for the wrong reasons. And that's one of the very few things that I've never quite forgiven, or things that I think have happened here that still grate on me. I don't like injustice. [Laughs] It's something really deep in me, and I felt this was an injustice. But I don't know that it's true. I mean, I suspect it is, but I wouldn't want to claim it without any evidence. I'm a historian. [Laughs]

CP: Now, did you move directly into the chairmanship of the History Department?

PF: Okay, so—

CP: [Laughs]

PF: [Laughs] The initial—okay, so General Science is going to close. I went out and bought—before the faculty knew about this, I went out and bought small bottles of Johnny Walker, and went around and put a little bottle in every faculty member's office [laughs], with some explanatory. Well, so then the question is, so what do we do with everybody? A lot of people it made sense to do you know, one thing or another. For me, the dean felt that the logical thing for me would be to be the head of the Biology Program, because our department taught the non-majors' course. He knew I was committed to the importance of teaching, particularly non-majors, general courses, general education courses, and I knew all of the people. Yeah, I knew all the people. [1:10:00]

And so I explored that very seriously, very seriously, to the point of talking to faculty. And it seemed like it was sort of in the works to happen. And then out of the blue I got a call from, I think it was Bill Robbins, who said, "So, I hear General Science is being eliminated. We just searched for a chair and it wasn't successful, and so we're looking for a chair. Would you consider being chair of History?" And I remember at the time just bursting out and laughing!

CP: [Laughs]

PF: I said, "You've got to be kidding. You guys are going to ask me? You've been fighting with me for, not ten years, but for a very long time." And I mean, I just felt the irony and humor. I was slayed. And I said, "Well, in point of fact, a historian would make more sense." I mean, I have a Zoology undergraduate degree, but I never thought of myself as a scientist. People in the College of Science are very nice about that, and I think many, many of them, including a couple of deans, thought of me as a scientist. But I wasn't, and I knew that. I wasn't a lab scientist, I just wasn't—I understand science, I think, very well. And I appreciate science, and I taught in the General Biology program for a number of years, but I'm not a scientist.

Anyway, the history seemed to be logical to me. And I said, "Well, basically, if you can run that through, I'd be open to it." I don't know exactly how it transpired. I think some people in History spoke to Wilkins, and then Wilkins spoke to Fred Warren, who was the Dean. I remember as they called me in, the two deans. I thought, "Oh, my God! I'm going to get fired."

CP: [Laughs]

PF: I really thought, this is it, the end of my career. And it was sort of like, "Would you like to be Chairman of History?" I was really—I wasn't surprised by the suggestion because I had already had this conversation, but clearly Wilkins had discussed this with Fred. And I must say, Fred was terrific in all. He basically said to me later, "You do what you want to do. I'll make it happen. I'll make it happen." He said, "I'll work out—" because I was being paid a larger salary than was normally paid in the CLA. And Fred was reluctant to let all of my FTE go; he wanted to hold onto it. And so I maintained a joint appointment in Science and CLA. I was moved into—my FTE was moved into Zoology. I had an office there, and my History of Science courses were part of that, as well as General Education. Anyway, and he ended up paying for part of my salary, Fred did, all the way through, to make this possible. It was very impressive, I think. He was thinking of the institution; he was thinking of me, and it worked out very well.

It was a rocky transition, as you might expect. I was coming into a different culture, and I didn't fully understand that —that CLA was really quite different from Science. I mean, Science was much more autocratic. CLA was much more democratic, and as democratic as I am, it was quite a shock to have the faculty expect to make decisions. [Laughs] I was educated by the faculty very quickly, but I mean, it was an education for both of us, to say the least. Now, some of the older guard, so to speak, never did accept me, and I think part of it is they didn't accept the fact that—well, they didn't accept me. They wanted somebody from the outside, a historian from the outside to come in, and History of Science was suspect to them. So, I knew.

Another reason that I felt the position was attractive to me was I just looked at department and thought about it, and I said, "You know, this is a department that demographically is aging. [1:15:00] What's going to happen in the next decade is over half the people are going to retire, which means the chairman is going to be able to construct a completely different, new department." I thought, "Wow! What an opportunity, an extraordinary opportunity!" And that's exactly what happened. And I remember saying to myself, over and over and over again, the first couple of years, "It's just a matter of outliving these bastards." [Laughs] I mean, there were days when people made my life pretty miserable. I won't mention the particular people, but there were certain people who made my life miserable, and it was just like, "Okay, I'm younger than you are."

CP: [Laughs]

PF: "If I don't have a heart attack and drop dead, I will be here when you are gone." And then one person that actually was younger than I am ended up finally leaving, and that was a relief for both of us, but anyway. But anyway, yeah, it was a rocky start. It was a rocky start. But then part of it was that, yes, I had different style, but I was also about to bring things into the department, a way of thinking, and mostly I think what I was able to do was bring in money. Seriously, when you

are called Science, that's one of the things you do as a chairman. You are always worried. There's never enough money from the state. That just keeps the lights on, but everything else you do is done with grants.

And so that was my culture. I mean, okay, we get this piddling amount from CLA; to me that's not right. And then there was some luck involved. The Horning money I was able to steer into History, which just completely transformed the place. And then we made great, great hires—incredible hires! And then that becomes—it builds on itself, because those people then are making decisions about more people, and so it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think the department turned out to be a really, absolutely terrific department, academically, and in terms of teaching, because that was one of the things I brought from General Science, and which was part of the old History Department. History was taken seriously as a subject for students, for undergraduates; it was important.

And these days, if you recruit faculty from strong graduate programs, a very large percentage of those people are going to be interested in a research career. I remember interviewing some potential candidates; we were in Atlanta at the HAA. And someone came in, and the first thing he asked was, "How much teaching am I going to have to do?"

CP: [Laughs]

PF: And I thought to myself, "Well, he's gone." [Laughs] He's gone! I mean, this is not a guy who's appropriate. So we looked for people who were good researchers, but also were committed to teaching. And I think we were extremely successful in doing that.

CP: Well, you mentioned the Horning chair and hiring good people. I'm interested in knowing the background of the recruiting and the hiring of Bob and Mary Jo Nye, and kind of the uniqueness of filling the chair with a married couple?

PF: Yeah. Well, once the money was there—part of this was Fred, and part of this was—actually a lot of this was Fred [Laughs] just putting me as chair. When I was the chair of the committee that decided what to do with the money, I was chair of the committee to look for filling the chairs. So that was Fred; I mean, it honestly was. And we advertised. We had hundreds of applications, some of them very, very good. I was excited about it when we brought people to campus.

And then I had a call from a friend, this was a mutual friend. I mean, I knew the Nyes. History of Science is a small world, and also we all were working on French History of Science. And we were the same age; Mary Jo and I were born in the same year. They were from Wisconsin, I was from Indiana. Those are like sister schools in terms of History of Science. So, and then we had friends who were good friends. So anyway, there were all sorts of situations where we didn't know them very well; we certainly knew who they were when we met them. But so this mutual friend called me and said, "Would you consider hiring the Nyes?" [1:20:00] And so I said, "Wow, wow! This is money for one chair, so I don't know."

So I went and had a long conversation with Fred. [Laughs] And Fred was amazing. He said, "If this turns out to be the first choice, and if this is the first—" I knew this would be a precondition, because I knew the Nyes had been recruited by a couple of schools. And I knew then the issue was that one of them would be offered the chair, but the other one would be offered a position and not the chair. And for a variety of reasons that I may not go into, I knew that was a precondition with them, that they were equal, which was very smart—but very difficult to pull off, almost impossible, actually. Anyway, in the end, Fred said, "If the committee decides that this is the best choice, there is enough money." [Laughs] "There is enough." There was an enormous amount, it can be done. And so, I went with two chairs. History was a very small department, [laughs] and two people for not a lot of people. So that was a great boon, and we've been able to hold on to the two chairs.

CP: What sort of impact did they make as scholars and people at OSU?

PF: Oh, enormous. I mean, they're both very good; they're both very good scholars, very good teachers. They also—well, they're very good in terms of programs, designing a lecture series, and then also just having contacts, where they pick up the phone, either calls them directly or calls someone to ask, "Who should I call directly?" and that sort of thing. So they're plugged in, in a lot of ways. And then they worked—I worked together with them together very well. So in a way it was sort of a troika, among other things. And I mean, also, for me it was an opportunity to put into place things I could

never have done with the History budget. [Laughs] So that was good. But we just had a wonderful working relationship, so it was never a problem if they wanted to do something or I wanted to do something.

But to their credit, one of the problems with working with an endowed chair is that endowed chairs sometimes either rest on their laurels; they don't do much once they're somewhere, or they're prima donnas. They'll teach a seminar to three students, and go off to Paris for the year for research. It's not clear what the institution gets from that. I've really struggled with that, because I certainly believe in endowed chairs, and at the same time when I think of the ones I know, a lot of the money was wasted for the institutions. It lends prestige to the institution, but to my mind, it comes at a very high price. The money could be better spent to improve the institution.

So, much to my—I wouldn't say surprise, but let's just say it was pleasing, a pleasure. They threw themselves into promoting the History Department, and promoting Oregon State, not just the History Department. And they worked very hard to have programs get national attention. And they brought in people who then other people could meet. There were many, many unanticipated benefits from various programs, a number of publications which then leads to increasing the reputation of the institution, and so on. And they took it very, very seriously. The other thing they did was they took the History Department very seriously. [1:25:00] And Bob just, if we'd have a speaker who's speaking on a very esoteric topic, where we expect maybe three people to show up, he would beat the bushes. [Laughs] And I did that also earlier for the speakers we had, but Bob was really good at this. He really could get out a crowd. And again, that makes the speaker feel good. It makes the series better, and it made the department feel good—suddenly the department was really on the map as doing stuff. And so psychologically it was very, very good.

And then the same thing with the recruiting process. I mean, they were brilliant in terms of how much they were willing to help out and recruit people. I mean, I always use the Horning Endowment as an asset in the department that, of course, wasn't for them to use, but it brought in all this money that allowed the department to do lots of things, some of which if they had not—for example, if a faculty member had an idea for a lecture series, they could come to the three of us, or one of us, and discuss it, and get the money and put together the lecture series, bringing in people from all over the world. It was an amazing asset to have! And Bob and Mary Jo also stressed that. They have a certain charisma that was impressive, too. It's great when you're holding the endowed chair; it automatically asserts you a certain amount, but they were really good at it. And I valued it very much. I could always count on them if I needed a fifth person to go with the dean, recruiting. "Sure, we'll be there." And they would be very positive about the institution to the recruits, they had come here. And so they were great assistance to the institution.

CP: One of the books I don't think we've talked about much is *Finding Order in Nature*, which came out at the same time, more or less, that the Nyes arrived, 1994. Do you want to talk a little about that one?

PF: Oh, I never put that timing together. That's very interesting. Yeah, well, the origin of that book is I wanted to do something—since I was a graduate student, I was interested in natural history, and I have a certain view about what that's all about. I think of natural history as what biology was before the 19th century. In the 19th century physiology emerged in medical schools, and ultimately comes to be a big part of the understanding of life. But it was really very separate; biology was natural history through the later 19th century, particularly in universities where the two subjects come together in departments, and suddenly biology departments are teaching Physiology as well as Zoology.

And ultimately in the 20th century it takes over, the whole biochemistry. It basically dominates biology departments. And people sort of—they think of natural history as sort of old fashioned and suddenly that was replaced by biology, not realizing that no, it was biology [laughs], for most of the history of the subject, and also don't realize that a lot of what's going on right now is actually natural history. Ecology? That's all natural history, what used to be called natural history. Anyway, so at some point I found myself being a sort of defender of the natural history tradition [laughs], and feeling that it just wasn't understood; people didn't understand the history of the life sciences. And this was something I could do that was important, was worth doing, sorting this out.

And so I started; I said, "Okay, I'm going to write a history of natural history." I started with Aristotle. [Laughs] And I quickly realized this is totally impossible—that's to say, not impossible; it's beyond my means, because the way I work, I need enormous amounts of material. Well, I don't read Greek. [Laughs] How am I going to work on Aristotle? It's a joke. I know people who do that, but in terms of what I consider serious scholarship, it wasn't something I could do—it wasn't. And then I started realizing also that the subject was four lifetimes of work [1:30:03]—there weren't enough years left in

my lifetime to do this. So I felt very discouraged, to say the least. So I'm trying to figure out, "What are we going to do? Maybe I can come up with a piece of it, or something."

And also, I had been teaching a course since I came here; it was just called History of Biology, but I came to realize what I was actually doing was teaching history of—I didn't know this, but I was teaching History of Natural History, and then showing how these other traditions, mostly medicine, came into being a part of this, and then sort of merge with the larger study. I had been doing that since I first got here. Well, I had a discussion with Fred Churchill, who was my advisor. At one point he said, "At some point you have to just sit down and start writing." And so I thought, so I'll do that. But I could tell it wasn't—I wasn't happy.

And I sent a proposal off to Johns Hopkins. It was going to be a history, and I kind of figured, okay, if I had a contract, that would stir me, and I would figure out how to do it. Anyway, I got back some very, very detailed criticisms, particularly one from Sharon Kingsley, who was at Hopkins. It was brutal! It was brutal—several pages that just tore my proposal to shreds. And it was just showing how superficially conceived—I mean, I was really devastated, but I sat down and went back to it and realized she is absolutely right. I'm not thinking about this correctly.

Anyway, in the end, what happened was Mott Greene from the University of Puget Sound was editing the series for Hopkins, because he was saying it was a series of books that was intended to be used for instruction purposes, and asked me if I would do something on history of biology. And I thought, "Well, that might be interesting." And so I started thinking about it in terms of that kind of book, as opposed to this German twelve-volume History of Natural History, and I'm leaving pieces out.

Basically, that led me to think about—it led me to realize, and sort of think, just sitting down and thinking about this, it led me to realize that modern life science really emerges—actually, part of this came from my teaching, too—in the early 19th century—18th century, excuse me, and that there were things called Natural History, Aristotle and so on, but their endeavor was a very different endeavor. They were doing—Aristotle was interested in the whole cosmos, and this was a piece of it that he was doing. Pliny also was an encyclopedist for the Romans, working in a certain tradition, etcetera. And then they have all of these herbalists and so on. But then it's really 18th century when suddenly this subject starts to form that becomes what we recognize as Natural History.

And the two main forces in that were Linnaeus and Buffon—by luck, Linnaeus and Buffon, because I had done a lot of work on Buffon. I had done a lot of work on Linnaeus for the bird book. So I had some background, and I suddenly realized that's where the story is: partly, why this emerged then, but then what's the trajectory from there, too? Because I also think that to carry through the 20th century was E. O. Wilson. There's a lovely arc there. And of course, it would make a perfect book for students. [1:35:00] Because I'm telling a big story, so it has to be painted with wide brush strokes a very different kind of book than I had written, in certain ways, although the work that I did with Mike Mix on biology was a little bit like that, but not really. This was really a different category. And I decided, okay, you know, I did that. Yeah, I did an outline, and that was the origin of it, and I got some very good critiques, I must say.

And the editor, Bob Bruegger, who was just—I wanted to strangle him on numerous occasions, because he kept on wanting to, from my point of view, dumb the book down. [Laughs] I'd be talking about Boerhaave in Leiden, and so talk about all of the people of his circle, and he would say, "Who cares? Students, if they see all of those names, they're going to memorize them. What's the point of this? Is it important that they know who these people are?" Well, no, of course it's not. They need to know Boerhaave, and they need to know Linnaeus. No more names; just get rid of them! [Laughs] Footnotes? I practically dream in footnotes.

CP: [Laughs]

PF: And so I started writing the footnotes, and Bob came back and said, "No, the footnotes—students find that intimidating and off-putting. You have to get rid of the footnotes." I said, "How can you go without a footnote?" It was really a reorientation. I wrote the long essay on the back on bibliographic materials, and so on, but it was very difficult of a transition. But in the end, I must say, the book, I think, captures what I think is the story that I've been trying to tell for 40 years, and I think captures it well. And I think when it came out, it really was a different way of looking at natural history, and looking at biology in general. And much to my great satisfaction, it seems to be getting adopted. I see

reference to it more and more, and people sort of take it for granted that that was the story. And so I guess when you—and even if they don't know where it's coming from, they don't care at this point.

I've nudged what I think was a total misreading of history of biology, and reading from the present back. I mean, looking through biochemistry and saying, "So what's the history of biology? Basically, look at the history of biochemistry," which is a very interesting, important subject, but it's not the history of biology. So anyway, so the book got—I had so many arguments with Bob, but in the end, he was the editor, [laughs] so I modified my style. And in the end, I have to say, it reads smoothly; students don't get bogged down with details. The story's there. There's a bibliographic essay in the back if you want to follow it, with references to follow. It still makes me nervous that there isn't a sentence in there that doesn't have five footnotes. Everything is very, very carefully documented, but it's not obvious. I wouldn't say it keeps me up at night, but I'd be happier if—actually, one of the reasons that some of the stuff that's in the special collections here, if one were to look at those manuscripts, much of the bibliographic detail is going to be I suppose, statements, claims, coming from the donor. [Laughs]

CP: Well, we've talked a bit about *Evolutionary Ethics*, and *Race-Mixing* when it first came out in 2000; the second in 2011. These books deal with issues that can, have historically, anyway, been sort of hot-button issues in the culture.

PF: Yeah.

CP: I'm interested in knowing what kind of reaction they received sort of within the profession and maybe elsewhere?

PF: Yeah, that's a very good question. The book has been very well received, and seemingly widely read. [1:40:00] It's generated a certain amount of, I wouldn't say controversy; that's too strong a word. Put it this way: not everyone has agreed with my point of view. [Laughs] Or another way of saying it is everyone doesn't understand why my view is correct, because that's actually how I feel. I think I'm right on stuff. It has surprised me how, when I give talks, and I give quite a number of talks on race, it generates a very heated response. People get very excited, and I've been able to use—particularly if they disagree, I've been able to use those occasions, and this comes out of teaching for many years, constructively. To be able to say, "Now, why do you think that? What is it that's behind your objection?," and sort of explore that, and explain how what I'm doing either threatens them in some way, or more likely is actually just a misreading, their misreading of what I'm doing, or something like that.

So I think it's been, probably of all of the things I've written, it's the one that's gotten me the most engagement with audiences, in a way that I think has been really instructive. Usually it's a matter of clarifying, or showing off, being clever. But there were quite a lot of—and also, I also learned about people, and to say, "Okay, I can see why someone still has very strong feelings about this because of their personal experiences," to at least be able to show them why they feel that way. And it's: okay, your outrage is justified, but it isn't the whole story.

The other thing that came out of that was I found myself, on more than one occasion, sort of if not attacked, at least strongly challenged by anthropologists who really, really don't like some of the implications of the book. And that is, part of what the book tries to show on a long-term scale is that the modern theory of evolution changed the understanding, biological understanding of what race is. That the old 19th century morphological, typological way of thinking about race made no biological sense, that races were populations. They were in constant change, and included enormous variety and enormous variation—[unclear] variation. And in that sense, all of the races we talk about: Negro, Negroid, Caucasian—they have no biological name. They're as much cultural constructions as anything else.

And Dobzhansky fully agreed with Ashley Montagu about this. They argued about race, and they agreed about this aspect of it, and Montagu fully appreciated how much Dobzhansky had done to just completely change the understanding, and hence undercut scientific racism that had been part of this country for a very long time. So I think that story was really important, the evolutionists were important in undercutting racism. There are obviously many other factors involved; the Civil Rights Movement, to name one. But the scientific part was important, because the racists could no longer use biology to justify their positions, as they had in the past.

Anyway, over and over again I encountered anthropologists who said, "Well, now, you claim towards the end," it's not that I claimed; Dobzhansky claimed, "that race has biological meaning, just it's not the ones we talk about." That race is a population [1:45:00], and this population has been isolated for one reason or another for a long period of time, and that

this population has built up certain genetic variations in greater proportion than other populations. And you can study it, and say that's the characteristic of this population. And that's real. That's real. So, it all depends on what you're trying to do, I mean, how you're trying to classify groups as to what criteria you use, what genes you use, and so on. And there's no objective race; it's whatever you're trying to figure out. But it has reality. You can, in fact, define populations.

And the anthropologists, many of the anthropologists, the anthropologists I've met and certainly the ones on this campus, but many, many anthropologists, hold a view that there is no such thing as race, and that the term is so toxic we never want to use it again, and biologists are either mistaken, or crypto-racists, or sort of ignorant but mischievously ignorant, doing a lot of harm. And so that got me interested in how words are used differently in different disciplines. Because you think of scientists as all the same; science is supposed to be universal, and so everybody knows what they mean when they say graph and so on. But I know as a historian that's not true. Science is broken up into communities and disciplines, and within the disciplines there are definitions, and they don't always square up. It's something that historians and scientists haven't really looked at very carefully. It's interesting. And my hunch is that some scientific confusion and some scientific controversies may be generated by this lack of understanding of how people understand terms.

Anyway, I thought for a while that I would pursue that as my next project. And in fact, I just finished a paper on anthropology and zoology that I'm giving in St. Louis on Friday, that starts off with basically Dobzhansky and Montagu. And then I worked at the library here for a year going through journals, all of the journals, issue by issue, and discovered that, indeed, zoologists continue to use race, without any ambiguity, without any problem. In anthropology, the cultural anthropologists have rejected it, but half the physical anthropologists still use race, and it's very useful for understanding historic migration patterns, mixing of groups in time. It's just a useful tool, and helps with physical anthropology, and also with, of course, the discovery of the human genome, or I should say the elucidation of the human genome, a whole new set of tools: [unclear], ancestry, identification markers, are there and people are using them.

The normal anthropologists are livid. They're very, very unhappy; they see this as crypto-racism, and some of their claims are correct. Some of the people are misusing it in a way it was misused in the past. But that's for people to sort out and correct. But anyway, so, I don't know what else I'm—I just said to my wife this morning that I think after I give this paper, I'm going to close the chapter on race and move on. I don't know what I'll do, or whether I'll do another book. I mean, it's a set of—I'll see. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah. Well, the last question I have for you is a broad one, it's one we're asking a lot of people.

PF: Mm-hm.

CP: It's about institutional change. You've been here for a long time. You've seen a lot of change here at OSU, and this is the season of change here at the university.

PF: Yeah.

CP: Things are changing rapidly. I wonder if you could just reflect on what has happened [1:50:00], and what you think, where the university is going right now?

PF: Yeah. Yeah.

CP: Big question. [Laughs]

PF: Well, that's really the question. The short answer for how the university has changed in time, is first of all, when I came here there was a cap on a lot of the state institutions, U of O, Portland State and OSU, of 16,000, that was the cap. And I don't know where the cap got broken, but it was in place for a very long time. And so it was a small campus, and it also was very much an Ag school when I got here. It also was the school that the humanities and the social sciences had just gotten majors, and the lower division for them was strictly service courses. And so this was all new, the development of the humanities and the social sciences at OSU.

So that's really grown in a very impressive way, actually, given that the budget is so pathetic. Not pathetic—it's been a tight budget and there's less money in the humanities. For doing ecological research, there are pools of money you can tap

into, less so in the humanities for sure, a little bit more in the social sciences than the humanities. Anyway, so that's been a change.

There's also been I think just a generational demographic change. I think the faculty who have been hired are of a—I hate to use this term because it sounds sort of elitist, and it's slightly misleading, but I'll say it anyway—sort of a higher caliber. Another way of putting it is, we've been able to attract people to Oregon State due to a not exactly robust job market. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs]

PF: People who would never have formerly considered coming to Oregon State, that's very true. And in a way, that's wonderful. We get these people who come from Harvard and whatever, who not only are really good, but are happy to get here. [Laughs] It's really something! Now, part of it has to do with recruiting. Not all of these hires have been successful, and sometimes it's been a mismatch. I think in History they did it very well, looking for people who sort of fit the culture, but represent a higher caliber.

I remember, I think it was Bob Krause when he was Dean? Yeah, I think one of the things he said in a College of Science meeting was, "Your job is to hire people better than you." He said, "It's not going to be easy for your egos, but that's your job." I remember being very impressed with that, like, saying, thinking to myself, "He's right, because we can do that. We can hire people that we never would have gotten before, people who are better than we are. I mean, have better credentials for sure, and probably are better. So, I've seen a very impressive increase in quality of the institution. I have to say it's been a disappointment to me that the improvement in the research dimension, and certainly the physical plant, with buildings, has not been matched with an increase in the quality of teaching.

I think a lot of the—I really hate to say this. It really pains me, but I think the quality of education, a lot of it, is still abysmal. I mean, it's still, a lot of people think of teaching as something they have to do. It's an obligation; it's better if possible to pawn this off on either adjuncts or graduate students. And it's very sad, and it makes—I think it makes it hard for undergraduates. Serious undergraduates coming here can get a first-rate education, but they really have to work at it. They have to pick the courses very selectively. They need someone they need a mentor to guide them. Students are useful, but sometimes they use peculiar criteria, like: can you get an A in this course without much work? [1:55:00] Which is not the best way to get a good education, [laughs] to say the least.

So, we have a long way to go there, and I'm not sure we'll ever get there, because that's what's disturbing about the way the institution has gone, certainly in the last decade, but I'm sure it goes back farther than that. But it's been more noticeable to me in the last decade, two decades, is that as the institution has become increasingly important in its research and its ties to funding, much of it corporate-based, or at least corporate-connected, there's an inevitable drift towards putting emphasis on the research, particularly pragmatic research, not theoretical research, at the expense of teaching. And I think that's something one would see all over the country. It's not an Oregon State problem; it's a problem with American education.

Part of it also has to do with the way administrators are recruited. Because I don't fully understand—I've observed it—that it's more and more corporate; there are more and more people whose thinking if not their training is more like an MBA. I mean, I don't say that in a derogatory term, because that's very appropriate just with the context, but it's not holding on to these older values that go into an institution, one of which is to educate, not just train, but educate the next generation. More and more we're training people to go out into the workforce, and yeah, it's a job. There's pressure from parents; there's pressure from students. They want to come in here. They're not necessarily interested, offhand, in plumbing the deep questions of philosophy. They want the guarantee: we get out of here we've got the job; we've got a good one.

And I got it. I mean, that's absolutely understandable! But along the way you can do other things. You can make them good citizens. You can make them literate. You can make them be able to understand what a political campaign is all about, and what the heck is going on. That's really important; our democracy depends on it. And it's very depressing to, I think, almost of us who have thought about this in higher ed to see the drift of things. We're running in a different direction. And you think about—when I came here, I don't remember what the percentage was, but the percentage of money in the instruction budget that came from the state was, let's say, 80 percent of the institutional. And I think it's less than fifteen percent now.

So, yeah, where's your money coming from? You know, part of this has to do with the commitment of legislatures and the general public. After all, after the war we were building a new economy. We needed engineers; we needed all of these people. So, sure, there was this great growth during the '60s, and '50s. It happened between the '60s, so there was a ton of money coming in to do important jobs. But things have changed, and the economy's changed. We're in what people think is the digital revolution, which may be the equivalent of the industrial revolution. I'm not sure that's true, but *The Economist* this week has a whole section on that.

Anyway, there are real changes in the economy, and that's having an effect on the institution. So it's kind of depressing to someone who feels that the humanities, that a liberal arts education—because this includes Physics and Biology—that that's part of an education, and it should be an important part of people getting their college degree, if we really want a responsible population that doesn't get—can I make political statements?

CP: [Laughs]

PF: That basically doesn't believe everything they hear on Fox News, that they need to be educated. [2:00:02] They need to at least be able to evaluate, and I'm not saying they need to be liberal. But if you're a conservative, it should because you know what you believe in and why hold that position, not just because that's what you hear on the news, 24/7.

CP: Well, thank you, Paul. This has been very instructive for me and very valuable for our project.

PF: OK, well I hope it doesn't get me or you in trouble.

CP: [Laughs] We'll do our best to make sure that doesn't happen. Thanks.

[2:00:27]