Norman Tanis, Track 3

00:00

Tape 2, side 1 begins.

NT: So, in a way, we've been more ambitious than we've been able to fully accomplish in the hanging of these paintings. Once again, educating in a student's space. But, I believe in sort of pushing ahead and then trying to make the thing work as you go along rather than to wait until every single thing is in place and then accomplish something. So, we've done the same thing, also, in the publishing sector of the library with the Santa Susana Press, where we've pushed ahead and we began. We put out some pretty sleazy things at the beginning, facsimiles I'm not very proud of. But little by little we became educated in—or were educated by the printers and book designers. Acquaintances, critics, and faculty. And so now we have a reputation of putting books in [unintelligible], very artistic. I pointed out as an example what a university library can do.

JB: I want to focus on the Santa Susana Press, if you will, because it's very important for the story of this library of this university, it's one more of those nooks that I think a lot of us aren't fully aware of. Why don't we continue back to the art, for a moment, so we can keep these in segments and panel them sequentially. If we may?

NT: Sure.

JB: You mentioned that the art is here to challenge the students more than to please them, that Sears, Roebuck art will not be found here. [unintelligible] they can see those things at Kmart. But instead, whether they like the Burkhardts, they're here to confront them with major art. What has the student response been to the art?

NT: The—a lot of the students that have made themselves vocal have been very opposed to Burkhardt. Which isn't astonishing because a lot of the paintings he gave us were protest art—protests on his part, against the government and against war, against cigarette smoking. He's a very ideational—idio—he's an ideologue. Fortunately, his paintings are better than his ideas. And, that is to say, as an artist, he is far superior to—far superior to his intellectual content. But, because these pictures have been strong, there've been protests, they've gotten a lot of reaction from our students, negative reactions from our students. Over the years. But I think that's perfectly good, we hang them in hallways and they don't have to loiter in the halls, we do have seats for most of the year for the rest of the library. And—but there—I think there are a lot of people also who do enjoy them quietly but don't—don't get back to me and protest about it. So, it's hard to say how the vote exactly goes on that.

JB: Has there ever been any vandalism to any—

NT: There's been some vandalism, but not an extensive amount, but there's been some.

JB: Someone told me a story, in effect, there was once an ersatz Burkhardt on—that someone did a parody of a Burkhardt, hung it, and then wasn't noticed to be a parody until Burkhardt himself—

NT: That's true.

JB: Could you tell—do you feel free to tell that story?

NT: Well, I—some student, apparently, put in—made it—painted a Burkhardt oil painting using one of his themes and pushed some of the other Burkhardts aside and hung it carefully up on the third or fourth floor. And no one said a word, and I'm sure the student was completely frustrated because it was kind of a quiet joke, a silent joke, and I don't get up there all that often on those floors. And so, I think it was Burkhardt himself who discovered it hanging there
5:00 indignantly, told me about it, and so he and I went up there and I took it down. I said, you know, We don't have to have this here. And I think we auctioned it off at some library function once as an ersatz Burkhardt, not as a real one. But, yeah, that really did happen.

JB: Was the student even identified?

NT: No, we never found out who it was. Burkhardt was ex—very annoyed and I was amused and I guess a lot of other people were amused too.

JB: Any idea how long it was hanging there?

NT: No, I don't really know anymore. I expect more.

JB: In a way, the Burkhardts had the effect you wanted. A student, somebody wanted to parody Burkhardt.

NT: Yeah, right, so. Someone was thinking about it, they were talking about it, and we used to have a suggestion box and it was always loaded about two thirds of the suggestions in the box were to get rid of the Burkhardts. Well, that's not quite what I had in mind, but—that's—you know, that's a little too strong negative flavor, but it's not all bad.

JB: Let's do talk about the Santa Susana Press. How did it originate?

NT: Well, it began in 1983 with the opening of this building, oddly enough. Because I wanted to do something very distinctive, and perhaps reproduce an incunabulum. And we did indeed purchase an incunabulum as part of the books that were kind of commemorating the opening of the library, it wasn't a very thick incunabulum, of course. But, and, so I sent it up to Sacramento and told them to put it on good paper and make a facsimile, was little less than half an inch thick. And we did it, it looked very nice, and we distributed it around, sent it around the country, and all that sort of thing. And I thought of other, in fact, similar projects, then from our manu—some of the manuscripts we have here, a cookbook from an 18th century manor house,

and some other items. The quality of the facsimiles weren't very good, but I began to become acquainted with the printers of the area. And I became very interested in printing, so I started bringing printers in to work on pressers, which I had also been collecting, and presses. We have about six or seven different hand presses, that the faculty probably doesn't know about. There are only two or three that are out, very much in the public eye. So, we began first to import printers with their tastes and the instruction they gave us, and then we also started to send some manuscripts out to be designed and printed by the Southern California people. And we were able to sell them, I think marketing is still our weakest link in the organization. We got support, we got started because the president was generous and allowed us the loan of some money, I think from athletics, I'm not quite sure where the money came from, but I think it, oddly enough, the library ground athletics, only for a loan, of course, we had to pay it back, of course, so we got to use some athletic funds to publish books. And we've been publishing from that original start which the president gave us to the present day. I don't even know how many, what I consider, fine books were published. Maybe seventeen, twenty? At most, couple every year? Since '83? And sometime they've only been single pages or they've been what's called a French fold, or they've been a pamphlet, sometimes they've been loose.

JB: Since '83, so it's been going six years? Or since '73?

NT: Oh, I'm s—no, I'm sorry, '73, actually.

JB: '73. It seemed longer in my memory.

NT: Yeah. '73, when this building—

JB: When the building opened, I'm sorry. How does a—how does a fine print press stay afloat? How have you done it?

NT: Well, I can't talk about in any detail because it's been thoroughly dishonest, by moving money around in ways it shouldn't be moved. But we've had—we've had to subsidize it, it is not—it is not paid its way [unintelligible]. We'd made some very substantial charges to its books, but still doesn't pay it. And so, we've had people help us on campus. Money has been moved around to support it.

JB: Has the Northridge Bibliographic Society been helpful?

10:00 NT: And they've been—The Bibliographic Society has been very helpful in this respect. And that's had a steady income which has—which has helped to get us—help us crawl out of potholes and—and ditches that we've fallen into.

JB: Is that society building?

NT: Pardon?

JB: Is it building in its number?

NT: No, it's about—it's about seven hundred fifty members today, and its been between eight hundred and six hundred for a number of years.

JB: When was it established?

NT: About—about '76, I'd say, 1976. The president ordered it one day, said you gotta have a support group here. So, I gave its name, we started out bravely. It became one of the largest library support groups in the country. Not necessarily the best or the most accurate, but it's been a great assistant for publication ventures. And then throwing parties in the library for exhibitions and whatnot. Where we got the reputation for giving the best parties on campus.

JB: The Press has received a number of awards. As it is.

NT: Yes. Yes it has, and a lot of acknowledgements from all over the world. So if you will go to Oxford, you'll find a substantial number of titles of the Press at the library of Oxford. And other places out there, beyond the valley from Santa Susana Press.

JB: You were thinking of the, the half dozen or so volumes that most please you, that most impress you, or that most impress others. Which would be the half dozen or so, in particular, probably very hard to select you make, add whatever you like.

NT: Well, there's the—there's the Ward Ritchie book which came out recently which I thought was one of our most handsome efforts, written by the former librarian of UCLA, Lawrence Clark Powell. And there were photographs of Amanda Blanco, which came out about a year ago, a year or two ago, it's one of our best. It was printed by D'Ambrosio, Joseph D'Ambrosio. He—they also did—also did *The Twilight of Orthodoxy*, which also came out about two years ago. Those were the two of the nicest ones. We got a lot of pleasure out of Bill Everson's book called *Rattlesnake August*, which is a large portfolio. Poems of donors and who we—who I focus in bringing on poets in California. And, trying to think of the others now, I'm not looking backwards, I'm trying to get a couple off the press, I don't know if I can name the rest of them. We did a portfolio, photographs for the text on ah, Norman Corwin, the radio writer and director, which was quite handsome. And we did a fantastic little portfolio on Burkhardt. Illustrated by Burkhardt's prints. And very handsomely printed them in a box, bright red box which, I think that's one of our best productions. So that's the name of, I don't know, five or six. The next one that's gonna come off the press is always the best.

JB: About two a year.

NT: But, yeah. But the two that I mentioned earlier by D'Ambrosio had just been featured in a book of fine printing. They even have pictures of the—both the books themselves, and the posters used to advertise them. Because we're beginning to move over the direction of just

combining them all together and saying, you know, this is a unity of the poster and the blurb and the book itself all have to be designed together and you get one.

15:00

JB: We use a good many Northridge faculty.

NT: Yes. Yes, we did. We used a lot of Burkhardt and then we've used an awful lot of Irving Block's illustrations. Mostly Irving—Irving was our—was our big resource [unintelligible] to illustrate. And we miss him a lot, and we haven't been able to replace him.

JB: Most recently the children's book.

NT: Yes. And we have—I have at least two additional Irving Block illustrated books that we have the illustrations on and I have the concept in my head, so we're not done with Block yet.

JB: One's a Dickens! The Harry Stone Dickens.

NT: That's right. That was a nice book.

JB: Had it ever seen print before, or was that an unpublished manuscript? I'm trying to recall.

NT: It had seen print as a—in a periodical, as was the custom of that day. Most of Dicken's most popular works first appeared in periodicals. And then there was a rare paper edition, kinda looked like a bluebook or something, that was put out on that Silverman story. But it didn't have a line distribution at all. So, it was relatively unknown, and a copy was very difficult to get a hold of. And it was in some of the collected Dickens [unintelligible].

JB: One of the things that I've found over the years is that I keep discovering things about this library. Or about things connecting with the library. And one is the Special Collections.

NT: Yes.

JB: Dennis Bakewell, a founder of that collection for many years, we have many first editions down there.

NT: Yes, and then Dennis did a lot of work on it, although, I have to say that my predecessor here began the collection and there was quite a substantial number of rare books when I arrived here. And we've attempted to hold up our end by building on that. And Dennis worked on it, Don Reed worked on it for a number of years, and now Gardner is working on it. And each of those curators bring their own strengths to the—to the collection, so as the collection becomes more rounded and diverse, and—and I have deflected a few pennies here or there too.

JB: How many volumes are there down in there?

NT: About ten thousand. It's not tremendously large. And a lot—a number of the items down there are gifts. We received a very large gift on contemporary poetry, first edition, signed by the authors, from a Beverly Hills lawyer which we've attempted to keep up so that bibliographers who want to write about or do bibliographies of contemporary poetry come here and sit down in Special Collections. And of course, we recently added another item which I'm not responsible for, except I was responsible for bringing it to the library, but it was on campus, is the collection on women—on women composers, which is unique in the world. And which now rests here in Oviatt. Not very well-known and not very well publicized, and it's better not—they know more about where it is and what it contains in Denmark than our faculty members know about it. It's on the third floor, above our heads, and over a little bit. It's the richest and most detailed collection on women composers in the world.

JB: Is it specially housed? Or is it—

NT: Yeah, it's specially housed.

JB: Specially housed. There's the Bullough collection as well.

NT: And there's the Bullough collection, she gave most of it to us. And we've had the University of Indiana and the University of Washington both have asked us if we are tired of it, would we like to send it over to them.

JB: And we've said no—

NT: And we've said no, but, you know, we can make a common bibliography and share resources. And they're—they weren't interested in that, they thought they could get it away from us.

JB: Are there any other nooks and crannies—I've just been sitting here listening to you, and realized I didn't know about that music collection. Are there any other nooks and crannies that the common user of the library, the ordinary, but untutored as to its specific student or faculty that might not know about it?

NT: Well, there's a collection in the Urban Archives, and the Library used to be a very intimate part of the Urban Archives years ago, there's a Jewish collection on the onslaught of Nazism in America before 1938 in this area. And the Jewish reaction to it in this area, which I think is an important source of documentation about our society in the West during that period which exists in the Urban Archives.

JB: Some students have lined up and used that collection, it was fascinating.

20:00 NT: Yeah, and that's really a world-caliber, it's a limited colle—Well, the collection is huge, but it's a world-caliber important collection. But the emphasis on our collecting here has not been on rare books and manuscripts, although we have examples of it that have been—it's been

establishing a well-rounded solid collection that supports curriculum. I know it sounds a little tottery and overused, but that's actually what we set out to do. We try to do it, because we felt that was really what this university expected of us.

JB: Let me change directions again, if I may. One of the—one of the things I want to include in this book is the human dimension of the university. Because it's altogether too easy to get lost in the institutional dimension, get lost in infrastructure, as it were, or generalities about faculty, librarians, or students as a body, and miss the individual, the human. Are there any particular human interest stories that come to mind, which either are interesting intrinsically to you in their own right, fully apart from anything else, or which tell this tale about this campus?

NT: No, I can't think of anything now that you've asked me bluntly. Except that—that I think this campus has been a—now were going to the general—I'm saying exactly what you didn't want me to say, I think this campus has been a resource and a place of assemblies for the children of blue collar and newly turned white collar people in Southern California here, and its done a tremendous job in its diversity to accommodate the aspirations of these people who have moved into this valley and the neighboring valleys, and given their children higher education and access to better jobs, and knowledge, and learning, and sensibilities about art and poetry that they never would have had, and that most areas of the country don't have for a similar kind of population. So, in that sense, it's delivered a giant gift to the people of this area. And while there are elite colleges and universities in California, that do a lot of things and get a lot of attention, I think that this university has done a very workmanlike job on delivering an education to this sector of society.

JB: Do you think that sector appreciates or understands the bountiful gift they've receiving?

NT: No, I don't think so. I think the students themselves who went through this university, appreciates it—apprec—they appreciated it. It's astonishing the former students that I run into, around Southern California, just accidentally just outside of my role of being a librarian, they're uniformly very, very positive about this place. And their memories are tremendous and even their hardships and their—and their toil and sweat long into the evening, taking night classes and that sort of thing, this place has been a place of joy and giving and upward mobility and expansion of a rise up for these people and they still remember this. I feel very good about it. We've had—sure, we've had stars here, we had a Cambodian boy who—who worked down in government documents on the first floor for us, and went to medicals—finally went to medical school at Harvard, all those scholarships and all that sort of thing. That's very nice, and very important, and we're very proud of him. Very proud that he worked in the library, but we've had an awful lot of people who—who got it all together here, and educated, come from families of—didn't have a lot of higher education and who are making some very substantial contributions.

JB: One term I use for this university is mobility institution. So many students, as you've pointed out, are first generation college students. And they seem to be more appreciative far

25:00

more than our colleagues do. And our colleagues seem to me, and here I'm doing the talking, I don't want to do that, seems to me—

NT: I tend to chat. I pressed your button.

JB: That our—our colleagues have their own class biases.

NT: Yes.

JB: And while many of them consider themselves good, warm-hearted liberals, they express any of the verbal disdain for the students who are as liberal as they ought to cherish. Am I wrong?

NT: No, I think that's right. It probably goes along with us being the kind of institution that we are, that we—part of us hates it because it's not like the institutions that we sprung for. This is not Ann Arbor. This is not a University of Michigan Library, I daresay I'm guilty of trying to make it more like it, and that's probably not all bad, but this is not the University of Michigan, or it's not Berkeley, and Harvard, or Yale. And there is a part of ourselves which hate ourselves for not being able to make it that. And that creates a stress that runs throughout the whole campus. It is one of the most important threads that moves through this campus, and it's a thread that pulls and jerks people around and we live with it daily and I don't think many of us don't identify as such but it is stress of frustration, about not being able to recapitulate or recreate the ideal place that we came from. And we're less than ideal here, but then, we may be—we may be in someone's ideal someday, after all, Harvard university, you know, started in a minister's parlor in his upstairs bedrooms and that isn't such a classic [unintelligible], so, we're at least—we're further along than Harvard was, in its thirtieth birthday. Or thirty-fifth, or whatever it is.

JB: I recall UCLA labored under the shadow of Berkeley decades, decades, still does.

NT: Was a teacher's college.

JB: Teacher's college, not comparable to Berkeley. And there was this kind of shadow that they suffered under all that time, until recent years where [unintelligible], still today to some—

NT: And you go to meetings there, and to parties, and to gatherings, and the whole nature of the speeches and the exchanges would be, you know, how good we are. They went through an adolescent period where they were proving themselves how good they are now, we haven't quite gotten to that yet. It's unfortunate, but we're held back by artificial legislature—legislation which holds back this campus. But I think we have to acknowledge—I would say one of the major themes or threads that runs through this campus is frustration.

JB: I think it's an important motif in this book. I think the book itself could wrongly reflect it in the sense that the theme of the book could be, This isn't Yale, and that's wrong. And that would be the wrong theme for the book. It's doing something that's really very important, but it's only half-spoken, and perhaps only half-understood. I've asked you a lot of questions, and you didn't have to sit there for an hour and a half and answer them. Very responsively, are there any—

NT: And I come back—I come from blue collar people, so I empathize with these students and am very comfortable working with them.

JB: I feel the same, comfortable. And, I feel much more comfortable being here as a consequence, I think, much more ease at myself, in the sense that I began at a community college. I then transferred to Berkeley and was infuriated by the education I was receiving, transferred to UOP [University of the Pacific] which was considered a less prestigious institution, I think, than this one, or maybe I should phrase it differently: I think I would have
30:00 **gotten a better education here than I would have <u>thought (??)</u>. And yet, it labored out of the same sense of inferiority and often reflected here and I—I'm very sensitive of that, cause I hold a degree from there, and it bothers me when colleagues excoriate this institution cause their excoriating the degree and the integrity of the work that their students that they denigrate, have done here, and that bothers me against them.**

NT: But, I had kind of a religious experience at the University of Michigan this past spring because I was brought back there as a distinguished alumni, and I was expected to lecture to these—in front of large groups, which included the faculty of the school. And so, the former director of the University of Michigan library, Richard Dougherty, got up at one point and said, Norman, he knows me very well, he says, Norman, how do you get away with doing all those things you're outlining there. I mean, implying he could never—could never do it on his campus, this is innovation. This is—speaking to innovation. And I said, Well, I think the campus has that freedom and allows that freedom and the faculty [unintelligible] are not that forward looking and secure enough to do—do—allow that sort of thing. And he sat down, shaking his head, now here is one of your prestigious universities, and there isn't as much freedom there as there is here, sometimes, to make innovations, change, try something new. This man was frustrated and completely surprised that I have the kinds of freedoms that I was talking about in the speech, too. To innovate assignment.

JB: How do you account for the existence of that freedom?

NT: I suppose part of it is that everyone has their attention on other matters while I can go ahead with my own—my own interests and innovations. And part of it is, they say, Well, you know, that's Tanis's job over there, let him do it. They go out.

JB: Do you think the—in a way, that this centralized focus here gives in a sense sometimes of almost Brownian motion of the faculty or the students [unintelligible], let's put it that way.

Very. Helps account for that freedom that in a way there may be a kind of underside to this that's golden?

NT: Yes, I—I think there is, there is a certain—

JB: Let's stop, just a second, this is very nice!

NT: Oh, I'm sorry. Let me get this—

Pause in recording as tape 2, side a ends.