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Oral History Interview of Edward Bander (SOH-003)

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Oral History Interview of Edward Bander

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Interview Summary

In this interview, Edward J. Bander, librarian emeritus of Suffolk University Law School, discusses his career as a librarian. He reflects on his educational background, his numerous publications, his work at Suffolk University Law School, and how library research and Suffolk University have changed over the past thirty years.



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Subject Headings

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Bander, Edward J.

Suffolk University.

Suffolk University. Law School

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This interview took place on February 27, 2007, at Suffolk University Law School's
John Joseph Moakley Law Library.

Interview Transcript

REBECCA ANDREWS: Please tell me your name and where you live.

EDWARD BANDER: My name is Edward J. Bander. I live at 93 Longwood Avenue in
Brookline, Massachusetts.

ANDREWS: What is your position at Suffolk?

BANDER: Well, I'm a librarian emeritus right now, but I was the law librarian here from 1978
until 1990.

ANDREWS: What does your job involve?

BANDER: My job involved taking care of the library, the library staff, probably over a quarter
million books, microfiche, library personnel, relations with other libraries, relations with the
faculty—the most important job at the law school.

ANDREWS: Where did you grow up?

BANDER: I grew up in Roxbury, Massachusetts, right here in good old Boston.

ANDREWS: Do you have any siblings?

BANDER: Yes, I have siblings. I have a sister who's still alive. She's in a nursing home in
Middleton, and my brother passed away a number of years ago. Both of them were older than
me.

ANDREWS: What high school did you attend?

BANDER: I attended Roxbury Memorial High School.

ANDREWS: Did you do any extracurricular activities?

BANDER: I belonged to a couple clubs, but athletically I wasn't much.

ANDREWS: What was your role in your household, at home?

BANDER: My role in my household—well, my father passed away when I was eight months old and my mother worked so I had to take care of myself, which I've been doing ever since I've been eight months old.

ANDREWS: Did you have a job while you went to school?

BANDER: While I was in school? Yes. I—let's see—I had a number of jobs. I worked at Howard Johnson's at one time. You mean high school too?

ANDREWS: Yes.

BANDER: I worked in high school. I worked in a junkyard in high school in Chelsea. I worked as a shipper in Davis Sportswear near North Station. While I was in college, I worked at Sears Roebucks and while I was in law school I worked at the Pratt Diagnostic, just taken sort of as a guard, but I used to do all my studying there.

ANDREWS: Where did you go to college?

BANDER: I have a degree at—a bachelor's degree and a law degree at Boston University and a master's degree in library science at Simmons [College].

ANDREWS: Did you have any notable professors?

BANDER: Not in college. I really can't—maybe Professor Alt at liberal arts. In law school I had Lambert,¹ who one of my great experiences of my life was having had him as a professor, and then when I came to Suffolk having him as a colleague. That was quite an experience.

ANDREWS: Did you live on campus?

BANDER: No. I lived at home.

ANDREWS: When did you graduate?

BANDER: I graduated liberal arts in 1949, law school in 1951. I think library was 1955.

ANDREWS: And when did you get married?

BANDER: I got married—nineteen—let's see, I graduated law school in '51 —probably '50, '51, '52, something like that.

ANDREWS: Do you have any kids?

BANDER: I have three children, David, Steven, and Lida.

ANDREWS: What did you do after you graduated from school?

BANDER: I worked for a small law firm for a while; didn't like it. I went to work at the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court in Cleveland for a while. Then I came back home and I had a

¹ Thomas F. Lambert, Jr., (1914-1999) was a torts scholar and law professor at Suffolk University Law School. He taught at Boston University from 1946 to 1955, then taught at Suffolk from 1972 until his death in 1999. The Suffolk University Archives holds the Thomas F. Lambert Papers. (See http://www.suffolk.edu/files/Archives/ms106_findingaid.pdf for a collection finding aid.)

friend who was a librarian and he talked me into becoming a librarian. So I sent letters to all the law schools in the Boston area and Harvard hired me back around, I don't know, 1955.

ANDREWS: Why did you choose this profession?

BANDER: I've always been a reader. I like books. As I said, I had a friend who was a librarian and it was an option that was open to me. It really was not anything that I had planned on, but as it turned out it was a very wise choice.

ANDREWS: What is your favorite book?

BANDER: Oh, I have lots of favorite books: *Huck Finn*, *War and Peace*. I love the *Canterbury Tales*, by Chaucer.

ANDREWS: I just read that.

BANDER: It had a very profound effect on my life, actually.

ANDREWS: Who's your favorite character, out of all the tales?

BANDER: Character? Oh there's lots of them. Once again, Huck Finn is always a favorite character of mine. A lot of characters in Shakespeare. I thought Prince Hal and Falstaff were a wonderful combination. I even got—wrote a book about them. Not about them, but about Shakespeare and the law.²

ANDREWS: What brought you here to Suffolk?

² *The Breath of an Unfee'd Lawyer: Shakespeare on Lawyers and the Law*, edited by Mr. Bander, was published by Catbird Press (North Haven, CT) in 1996.

BANDER: What brought me to Suffolk? Well I was the associate librarian at NYU [New York University] and I got a letter from Louise Weinberg³ who was a professor here at Suffolk Law School. Asked me if I was interested in coming to Suffolk. And I had been an associate law librarian for eighteen years, and I said, “Maybe I should become a librarian.” So I applied for the job, came here, had a wonderful interview with Dean Sargent⁴ and the faculty and here I am.

ANDREWS: What are your feelings on Suffolk’s place in Boston?

BANDER: Very important place. When I first came here it was over on Temple [Street] and I think it has grown enormously and I’m not taking any credit for that, but while I’ve been here I think Suffolk has become a very big influence not only on this city, but on the country.

ANDREWS: What is your favorite part about working here at Suffolk?

BANDER: One thing I enjoyed about Suffolk was the camaraderie. I was at NYU and NYU was—people at—my impression at NYU was a lot of people there would say, When am I going to get an offer at Harvard? And Suffolk people, this is their job and you didn’t have to feel any pressure about whether you were top of the line or bottom of the line. You did your job and everything was fine. People got along well and students got along well. I think students got along better here than I had experienced elsewhere.

ANDREWS: Is there anything you would change about working here?

BANDER: Well, I’ll tell you, I think things have gotten better. I left in 1990 when they were planning to put up this building⁵ and I felt that—I was sixty-five at the time—that I shouldn’t be

³ Louise Weinberg was a member of the Suffolk University Law School faculty from 1974 to 1980.

⁴ David J. Sargent graduated from Suffolk Law School in 1954, then served as a law faculty member from 1956 to 1973, dean of the law school from 1973 to 1989, and has been president of Suffolk University since 1989. OH-016 in the Moakley Oral History Project is an interview with President Sargent.

⁵ David J. Sargent Hall, located at 120 Tremont Street in Boston, Massachusetts, is the home of Suffolk Law School and the Adams Gallery; it was dedicated on September 10, 1999. Featuring cutting-edge technology, including three thousand high-speed Internet connections and moot courtrooms equipped with advanced media capabilities, Sargent Hall ranks as one of the most technologically advanced law school buildings in the United States.

doing this building. They should bring in a new librarian. If they did it my way, I'd be gone and then somebody would come in and say, "What did they do? Why did he do that?" This way here they're new people and I think they've done a great job.

ANDREWS: How were you involved with the planning process of the new library, or were you?

BANDER: I really wasn't. I—as I said, I felt that it was a new generation should be taking over and I think the important part of my being involved was not being involved. Let me put it another way. If I were involved in doing it, I would have done it differently. I have a different concept of not just the library but of the administration as to where—for instance, I would have put a library as you walked into the building. That would have been my preference. I'm not saying it's better or it's worse, but that would have been the way I would have seen this building.

ANDREWS: How many library facilities are there at Suffolk?

BANDER: How many—?

ANDREWS: Library facilities.

BANDER: Facilities are there? I'm not sure I understand that question. I mean, you know, in many ways the library is the backbone of the law school. So that, you know, we have to handle students, you have to handle faculty, you have to interlibrary loan. There are very few areas that the library doesn't get involved in one way or another with the running of the law school and the university. For instance, I used to work with the university librarian. We would consult one another and if he couldn't buy something maybe I could work something out with my budget. So I worked very closely with the university.

ANDREWS: How has researching changed in the past few years?

BANDER: (laughs) Oh, when I got here there was no computer use by students. Can you imagine that situation?

ANDREWS: No.

BANDER: There were no—I started the first computer lab at the law school and I went to the administration and I said, “I want to start a computer lab.” I’m not sure they knew what I was talking about. As a matter of fact, in order for me to get a computer lab, I had to give up my office. And they gave me something like twenty-five thousand [dollars] and I bought a bunch of Leading Edges⁶ and I actually had students help me set it up. Of course it’s so different today that you can’t possibly imagine it.

And by the way, the important thing was I bought ten Leading Edge computers, put them in my office. I got two printers. I had a reference librarian at the university help me set it up. I required students to bring their own paper because I wasn’t having somebody waste my paper. And then I was going to make a big announcement that we had a computer lab, but we never got to make the announcement. The students just walked right in and took it over. Immediately, they knew more about computers than I did.

ANDREWS: How do think studying or researching materials at the library compares to studying and researching online?

BANDER: What?

ANDREWS: How do think studying and researching materials at the library compares and studying and researching online?

BANDER: In—what?

ANDREWS: I’m sorry, how do think studying or researching materials at the library compares with going online to study or research?

⁶ Leading Edge was a Massachusetts-based computer manufacturer that was in operation from 1980 to 1997.

BANDER: Well, you need both. I recall, I think it was Penny Hazelton⁷ making a study that showed a very large percentage of material in the law school are not online, so that the only way you can do research for that material is by using the books. I don't think we're ready to give up books yet. Even today I'm sure you will find people who miss the old card catalogue. Do you know—do you recall the old card catalogue?

ANDREWS: Yeah, I had to learn that.

BANDER: And today nobody knows, you know, you'd thumb through the cards. It's—we need both. I mean, there's no question the Internet is here to stay, but I'm not sure that for the serious researcher it makes a heck of a lot of difference.

ANDREWS: So it depends on the work you put into it?

BANDER: Well I think that somebody who's doing real in-depth research knows when to use the books and when to use the Internet and I have a feeling that in many cases he relies more on the books than he does on the Internet.

ANDREWS: Tell me about the books you've written and edited.

BANDER: The books that I've written? Well I—my being a librarian, I would come in contact with various things and there's a dean of Harvard, whose name was Dean [Roscoe] Pound, and he once quoted someone named Mr. Dooley, which attracted my interest and I looked up Mr. Dooley and I found out that very little of his work had been published in book form. So I proceeded to go into microforms and all of what was ever available and read everything that Mr. Dooley—the author of the Mr. Dooley articles, his name was Finley Peter Dunne and after researching them, I started writing a couple articles and the next thing I know I had a book about

⁷ Penny Hazelton manages the Marian Gould Gallagher Law Library and the Computing Services Department of the University of Washington School of Law.

them.⁸ And then I got interested in Justice [Oliver Wendell] Holmes and I did quite a bit of research on that. I put out a book called *Justice Holmes Ex Cathedra*.⁹

And then I started editing a publication called *Bimonthly Review of Law Books*, and I reviewed a book by—I reviewed a book by this publisher Catbird Press and the publisher came to see me once. We had dinner together and I told him about Shakespeare, my interest in Shakespeare, and I ended up doing a book on Shakespeare and I just finished, matter of fact just today, using Larry Flynn on the library staff, sent a book off to a publisher on legal anecdotes,¹⁰ just this morning.

ANDREWS: Cool. I understand you were awarded with the Edgar Award for Lifetime Achievements from the Law Librarians of New England, which you will receive on April twentieth of this year. How does that feel?

BANDER: Well, I thought that the great experience of my life was when they made me librarian emeritus here at the law school, but this equals it. It's a big honor, something completely unexpected and I'm very grateful to them, and I feel quite good about it.

ANDREWS: So you're saying your biggest accomplishment was becoming the emeritus?

BANDER: Well that was a—emeritus—those two would rank the highest. The highest thing in my life is me. I've enjoyed my stay on this planet, and I've enjoyed working on my material, and I'm a book person.

ANDREWS: How influential would you say Suffolk graduates are and how have they impacted the community?

⁸ *Mr. Dooley on the Choice of Law*, compiled and arranged by Mr. Bander, was published by the Michie Co. (Charlottesville, VA) in 1963. *Mr. Dooley & Mr. Dunne: The Literary Life of a Chicago Catholic*, written by Mr. Bander, was published by the Michie Co. (Charlottesville, VA) in 1981.

⁹ *Justice Holmes, Ex Cathedra*, compiled and arranged by Mr. Bander, was published by the Michie Co. (Charlottesville, VA) in 1966.

¹⁰ *Legal Anecdotes, Wit, and Rejoinder*, compiled by Mr. Bander, was published by Vandeplas Publishing (Lake Mary, FL) in 2007.

BANDER: Well, they're very important. Suffolk graduates are in the legislature. They practice law throughout this community. We're now global. We have a university where we participated in—where was it? Lund [University in Sweden]. It gets more important every year. I think the university—David Sargent, who was formally law dean, and the people that he has around him have done an enormous job in increasing the prestige and predominance of the university. The university has grown I think larger—in many ways larger than the law school. We now have dormitories, which I don't think we had when I was originally here.

ANDREWS: Is there anything else you would like to say that we haven't covered?

BANDER: Oh, I suppose I'd like to say a lot of things. It's been a great experience. My best job. When I came here, Pat Brown¹¹ was the acting librarian, and I met a lot of great people here. The staff, I am very fond of them and a lot of wonderful members of the faculty. I have great friends here and coming back to Boston was a great experience for me because I was born here in Boston and I had to go to New York and watch the Yankees play so coming back has been wonderful. Of course I've stayed here since—now, I came back here in '78 after eighteen years in New York, so I'm home.

END OF INTERVIEW

¹¹ Patricia I. Brown began working at Suffolk University's library in 1953, while she was undergraduate student, and retired in 1992 as associate director of the law library. She held several titles during her career and upon her retirement was named law librarian emeritus. SOH-012 in the Suffolk University Oral History Project is an interview with Ms. Brown.