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### Dr. John N. Ingham Interview

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Unidentified Woman 0:02

Okay. So we're just gonna start with some, like more simple questions like what initially drew you into history?

Dr. Ingham 0:20

Well I'm not sure I've always really liked history, I mean, when I was a little kid, I was always attracted to history. And for some reason, I don't know why, but I read a lot of books that had a historical content to it. When I was in high school, I must admit, it was the only topic I was good at. I was not a very good student in high school. And so I really liked history and I got good grades in history, and that helped make me think well history is a good thing. So it was kind of just, it was what I was good at. So I continued doing that as opposed to mathematics or, excuse me, our engineering or something like that, but mechanical drawing something which I was terrible at. I was just it was an attraction to it.

Unidentified Woman 1:06

Why did you decide to do a PhD?

Dr. Ingham 1:11

Well, it's a bit of an extension of the same answer I was when I was an undergraduate. I didn't know what I wanted to be. I don't know, I was not thinking of getting a PhD in history when I went into it. But as I got, and I thought I was just going to go into business, my whole family was in business. They were salesmen and things like that. I thought, well, that's what I'll do. But I didn't really like it. I was working, doing some of that work, summers and so forth and didn't particularly like it. And I liked history again, come back to this. I liked it. And so I went into one of my advisors and I said, I really like history. But what can I do with it? And he said, Well, why don't you go ahead and go get a PhD and I'm like, Who me a PhD. I had a very good marks in university but I just never thought about me. People were professors were gods. And I was like, Really? I could do it. He said, Yeah, you're gonna get it and go to graduate school. So that was what made the decision for me.

Unidentified Woman 2:13

So why did you choose the University of Pittsburgh?

Dr. Ingham 2:19

I applied to a number of different schools. I don't remember how many at this time, but let's say maybe eight or eight or 10 schools. I was married at the time. I had a baby, a small baby at the time. I needed money. Pittsburgh gave me the best deal I could get in terms of a grant and this sort of thing. So it was a it was, I mean, I was attracted to the the department in the school they were changing. They had brought in a new chairman of the Department of the University of Pittsburgh, Sam Hayes, was a rising star in the profession. He was doing some innovative things in terms of quantitative history and social science history at the University of Pittsburgh. So that was an attraction. But I have to admit, also an attraction was the fact that I got a decent teaching assistantship. And number two, I didn't have to pay tuition to go there. I was accepted at Columbia and I had a TA ship at Columbia, but I had to pay tuition at Columbia plus live in New York City, which I couldn't afford to do. So that made it easier to make the decision for Pittsburgh over Columbia, for me.

Unidentified Woman 3:27

And what drew you into social history?

Dr. Ingham 3:30

Well, that was the fact that Sam Hayes was at University of Pittsburgh and he was pioneering that whole field. And so if you were at Pittsburgh, if you weren't social history, you were an orphan. There was nothing more for you to do. If you were in cultural history or something like that. It wouldn't it wouldn't have been a good fit at the University of Pittsburgh. So it was pretty much I mean, I didn't think about it when I went to I mean, I had no idea what it was even to think of what what social history was when I got there. The whole department was really orienting itself in this way. And so I got pulled into it very quickly. And I mean, I thought it was a very interesting and innovative way to approach history. So I was a very attracted to it, but I couldn't avoid it at Pittsburgh.

Unidentified Woman 4:24

How has social history started changing? And was it changing in the 1960s?

Dr. Ingham 4:31

Well, I think the I mean, it's a complicated question and answer, because there are a lot of facets to it. And I'll try to think of it in terms of myself What was the how it was changing and how I was drawn into it. I think that the major thing that Sam Hayes was doing and the social history he was doing at that time, was the whole idea of a more scientific approach to questions what the questions were and how to approach them. And generally developing a hypothesis that could be tested, as scientists do in their experiments in this sort of thing, so you have a hypothesis that is

capable of being tested can get negative or positive results to it. And then you Marshal evidence in order to do this. And this was different from from cultural history approach, which was kind of like you start off with an idea that you're going to write about, and you're going to find the evidence that fits into that idea and you that's what you do. So it was a different sort of approach to things as an offshoot of the social science approach. scientific approach as an offshoot of that was a concept also of using quantitative history of using data using statistics and that sort of thing. Now, what happened with that was that for some people that became what social history was, it became quantitative history became all numbers and so forth. And so there was a split In the social history group that was emerging in the 1960s a split between the people who really were just number manipulators, and that's what they were doing. And the people who said, Well, I will use numbers, but I don't care so much about numbers. And so the people who were numbers, people knew a lot about statistics, they could say all sorts of statistical theorems and that sort of thing. Whereas the other side were more practical people, I would say, use it if I need it, but it's not the endgame. So to me, that was the major elements of the social history. Excuse me, as it was emerging in the in the 1960s, the early 1960s.

Unidentified Woman 6:42

Switching gears a little bit, why did you decide to come to Brockport?

Dr. Ingham 6:48

Well, I got my first teaching job at University of Bridgeport in 1968, which did not turn out very well. University of Bridgeport. I had I knew people who were the University was, was emerging as a kind of an upcoming small university and was doing quite well and getting a reputation for itself. The year I got there, it turned around completely. And it started going the other direction. And so I found myself kind of trapped in what I thought was a bad situation, which was a bad situation actually it continued to go downhill. So I needed to find another university to go to and my officemate in graduate school and neighbor in graduate school was Steve Ireland, Owen Ireland. And he was at Brockport already he had been there. Excuse me for a couple of years. And so I wrote to him and I said, I heard I heard that they were hiring and I said, Well, is this a good place? What's happening there, you know, is this a place that's going to grow and become better and so forth. And he was very excited about the possibilities of it and this was in 1970. He said, Well, I think that's a good, great idea. I think it's, you know, a good place to come. And I think we're really moving in the right direction, so on and so forth. So it was that sense of kind of hooking my wagon to a bowling star that was moving up the ladder rather than going down the ladder, which was the situation in Bridgeport. So it was kind of an exciting place to look to go to and they were hiring. In 1970. When I came, they hired I don't know how many people I don't remember, but there was a kind of class of 1970. Which was a dozen people, 10 people, something like that, that came in at the same time, which overwhelmed the old department that was there in the department that was the teachers college. And they were kind of being pushed

out at that point, and this new group came in. And so it was kind of a revolutionary transformation taking place. I guess.

Unidentified Woman 9:01

How are you described the new social and political history conferences?

Dr. Ingham 9:07

How would I describe them? I'm not sure. Well, this, this was something that Steve Ireland and I came up with. And it's genesis was really as and this goes, I have to really think about this a bit because I haven't thought about it for a while. But at SUNY Cortland. There were a group of professors there who had a conference, basically, social political history conference, brought in some interesting people and so forth. And Steve and I went to the conference. And we talked to the guys who had started this one at Cortland and said, that's a really great idea. You guys should continue it and they said, but no, we did one one. We don't want to do any more at all. So Steve, and I came back and said, well, let's pitch this idea to the administration of Brockport, and see if we can set up an ongoing social history conference. And they said, yes, they'd give us a reasonable amount of money to do it to bring people in as speakers and to help defray the expenses and so forth. And so we started doing it. And it became quite a famous conference in many ways, ultimately became the social science history society. And they their conference kind of evolved out of it, which they've never given us credit for. Ever since. They started with us, they, they kind of forgot about as soon as we got there. But anyway, that was what I remember the genesis of it. And it was just for us. And we worked pretty closely in terms of ideas and so forth with Sam Hayes in Pittsburgh and saying, what should we do, Who should we invite? Because he was very much at the leading edge of this and knew who these people were who were coming up. So he gave us a lot of advice about who to bring in as Speakers what topics to pursue and that sort of thing. And he, I think he came every year that as much as I remember, he came, and a number of other major professors around the around the United States came to participate. So it was kind of an exciting thing to do for a while, but it was hard work. The reason the Cortland people didn't want to it because it was a lot of work. And Steve and I put a lot of time work and effort into it over the years and, and we just got tired of it after a while, too.

Unidentified Woman 11:30

Yeah. So what do you think was some of the biggest successes from this conference?

Dr. Ingham 11:44

It's kind of a hard question to answer, because I mean, I think one of the things was that it gave a platform to this history. That was that didn't really have a specific platform. There was no there

was no journal at that point that was specifically designed to do the social science history later that emerged, but there wasn't at that time, there was no conference that devoted itself to that. So it was the excuse me it was the kind of the major showcase, I guess one would say for this kind of history for for the new ideas that were beginning to emerge at that time for the disputes that developed in certain aspects of it which direction was going to go and this sort of thing you've got looked at this annual conference, as if you wanted to find out what was happening in social and political history. This is where it was happening. And I remember there was one very, or one of the episodes I guess I would say that I remember very clearly was a split between the statistics people and the non statistics people The non statistics people was represented by Sam Hayes again. And statistics people were represented by Richard Jenson was his name. And they had a big argument about the role that mathematics and science and so forth was going to play in this new direction. And it was going to go and it was, I mean, it wasn't like the screaming at each other, but they're really laying out the issues between the two sides. And it made it very clear in terms of what the issues were, what the stakes were involved in this and so forth. And generally, I would say that the the statistical people kind of lost out to the non statistical people at that point. So there were a lot of things like that issues and directions and so forth, and a newly emerging subfield of history of US history, I think that was discussed at the conference and was the only place it was oftentimes discussed. So,

Unidentified Woman 14:03

Um, why did these conferences come to an end?

Dr. Ingham 14:07

We Got tired. I mean, I, Steve and I were ready to, to give it up. I mean, I don't remember how many years we did it. Now, I don't recall how many years it ran. And about that point, if some people who had been coming to the conference over the years, approached us and said, we would like to basically take it over and create the social science history society Association, whatever it was called, and basically take over this conference and have it as part of our and we're going to have a journal and all this sort of stuff. So it's be part of our package that we offer to our people. And at that point, we said you have you can have it and it was just a lot of work and you don't get your own research done. You know, that sort of thing. interferes with some of The other stuff that you're doing so we were just tired of it.

Unidentified Woman 15:06

Can you describe the team taught modern America survey? That you lead?

Dr. Ingham 15:11

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was a lot of fun. That was really a lot of fun. And I don't remember exactly how it emerged at the very beginning in terms of an idea, because there were several of us that, again, I think Steve Ireland, and I were the two major drivers in that, but there were others like Bruce Leslie and Kemp Schell, and Ken O'Brien, who were all, part of the team in the beginning. But I think that Steve and I were kind of organizing it in the first stages of it, first couple of years of it. And I think the unique thing about the team taught course, was what we didn't want it to be was what I called at the time that time a cafeteria course that the students were coming in And they were getting a different Professor each time or for each segment of a different professor. But the professors didn't know what the other professors were talking about. We said, if this is going to work as a team taught course, we all have to come in there and be there at the same time. And so while I'm lecturing, Steve Ireland would be there, and Bruce Leslie would be there and Ken O' Brien would be there and this sort of thing. And then they would sometimes if I'd say something, or they would say something, we'd challenged them from the floor, say, Well, I don't agree with that kind of thing students would look around. professors are disagreeing with each other my god, but it was fun to do. We had a really good time. Again, it was something I think that was a lot of work. One of the problems was we would have was, like two organizers of it. First half, of course, the second half of the course, and then the others who were participating and doing the lecture, but they couldn't get teaching credit for what they were doing. And that was a problem. So they were coming in and they were lecturing for a certain portion of it. But they weren't getting any credit for that in their teaching load. So that made it difficult to do. And I think that was one of the problems that we had with the administration was to say, How can we, how can we compensate these people? We're doing this this is a great idea that we've got it's a team taught course we're all getting involved in and we're doing this. students seem to like the idea. It's a lot of kind of fun and excitement for them. But we're getting screwed So and I'm not sure we ever really worked out how you get teaching credit for people who are coming in and teaching for two weeks or something like that, or series of four or five lectures in the course and they just do it. And it's like, well, you just get brownie points somewhere but you don't really get any teaching credit for so that was the difficulty we had with it, I think.

Unidentified Woman 17:54

Can you describe the history master's program and your role in shaping it?

Dr. Ingham 18:03

Well, can I describe the history master's program? I never really thought about it in that context. How to describe it. Well, I think the master's program, what we were trying to do was to to identify a kind of a unique group of people in the area. In the Rochester metropolitan area, the broader area, not just Brockport itself, but some of the graduates coming out the better graduates that we had in history at Brockport, but also trying to appeal to the broader area of people who didn't really want to go on and get a PhD. They weren't going to go to University of Rochester

and getting their program or buffalo which would get kind of naturally to a PhD but they were looking for something that would give them an advanced degree in their field would be useful for them. Many of them we many of the people we targeted were people who were teachers or wanted to be teachers and they would, would enhance their would enhance their credentials and so forth in that way. So that was, I think, the beginning concept for the program. In terms of the actual how it worked out, we really I think, in the first couple years, we were lucky to get some very, very bright people very, very good people that came into it. One of them that I remember the first group actually did go on and get his PhD. That was Daniel Karin. I don't know if you know who he is, or if that's someone you want to pursue, but he it's last name's K-A-R-I-N and he went on to get a PhD at SUNY Buffalo. And he actually never taught as a full time teacher in university, but he became the city clerk in city of Rochester just retired a couple of years ago. So he got a PhD, but most people did not most of the people went on and did other kinds of things. I think it was a successful program in that way that it was useful for their career development. But they were also very interested in their intellectual development. And that was a strong element of that my role and I Well, I guess I was, I think I was the first coordinator of the graduate program. And I think what I saw my role, as it was kind of twofold one was to try to create a high standard of courses and teaching I guess the various aspects of teaching developing a master's thesis sort of thing about Hi, that's my wife, getting herself ready, a high level of achievement at an intellectual level. But also, I think I tried, I tried very hard to develop a very strong esprit de corps among the students to get them together and to really see themselves as a group that would socialize together and have fun together. And I spent probably more time than I should have having fun with them also going, you know, going to do things and to bars in Rochester and stuff like that, and having swimming parties that somebody had a pool or something like that. So we designed them to make them feel as if they were part of a real group, not just something where they were coming in and taking a course here and there. And I think that was probably the most successful part of it had more trouble sometimes getting what I would call a real graduate level. history courses developed. There were some people Who I could mention that. But I don't know if you want me to. But there were some people kind of in the old group in the department that were not giving courses that were what I considered to be really graduate level courses and we would have arguments with them in order to try to get snuck out the back door. So anyway, I mean, the getting a kind of consistency, I guess, I would say in terms of the intellectual and academic level of the courses was a bit difficult sometimes, but overall, it was quite good.

Unidentified Woman 22:42

So what are your thoughts on how the social history has evolved over the course of your career?

Dr. Ingham 22:47

What history?

Unidentified Woman 22:48

How social history has evolved?

Dr. Ingham 22:50

Okay. Well, I mean, it is well, I think it is. The whole idea of whether it's going to be statistical history or not as was pretty much settled ultimately by the fact that we would use statistics, but it wouldn't be the main driving force in it that this was people were not going to go around with a slide rule. I mean, Richard Jensen, and I talked about who had the argument with Sam Hayes. He always had a slide rule in his pocket, like an engineer, you know, and we were like, no, we're not slide rule people, this is not what we're doing. So, I mean, I think that that aspect of social history has kind of gotten recognizes statistics as a tool to be used and it is used. But it isn't the generator of ideas and that sort of thing in the profession. I think, however, that cultural history has had a huge rebirth, and social history was never able to really overcome the power that cultural history has in the profession in US history but also in other kinds of history so that the I think the major voices in American history, I would say in the last 30 or 40 years have been people that have been more on the cultural side of things than on the social side of things. Which is not necessarily a bad thing. It's just that that's they've won for that. So I'm not sure that the position social history at this point anymore. It's not that it's not the driving force in the profession anymore. The people who are the major scholars in American history, I think are more on the cultural side of things than the social, excuse me, the social history side of things. So that's as much as I know.

Unidentified Woman 24:54

Did your experience at Brockport have any effect on your career at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Ingham 25:02

Yeah, I think it did in a whole lot of ways. Let's see, I want to be as politically correct as I can be in this. During my years in Brockport, Brockport was a very divided department in a number of different ways fractured department, I would say, a lot of arguments, a lot of fights, a lot of wars kind of take place. And I somehow well, so it's not somehow but I was oftentimes in the middle of these wars at Brockport. So when I went to University of Toronto, I didn't want that anymore. I didn't want that kind of fighting. And one of the things that I appreciated about University of Toronto is that we didn't have that everybody was much more civil to one another. Although there were differences of opinion about things I it was just it was handled in a different way. And I would I appreciated the fact that it was a much more much calmer environment, which in a way you would say, well, it would seem like University of Toronto would be the other way. Because it's more high prestige, high status University, the stakes are higher, in many ways. So the arguments should be bigger and tension should be greater and so forth. But I didn't find it that

way. So that was part of it. I think the other side of it was that the good things I've been able to experience at Brockport, which was the team taught courses, the intellectual excitement that we had sometimes in the things that we were doing with the social history conference and with the team taught course and so forth. I was able to bring that some of that into University of Toronto and say, well, let's try this. Let's try that. Let's do this. Let's do that. And they were generally quite receptive to the ideas and say, Oh, this is a good idea and so forth. So it made me appreciate the the quiet to the critics, periods of University of Toronto, but also gave me a lot of ideas about how to be a little more innovative. And 'cause that's one of the things about the University of Toronto it was very much in the British tradition, Oxford Cambridge tradition, which is good in many ways, but it's very high bound, very traditional. And so I kind of came in with ideas that were on the outside of that come from a different environment. So let's try this and they would say, really, okay, we'll try this. So they were very open to trying things ultimately. So it was good.

Unidentified Woman 27:49

And what year did you arrive at the University of Toronto?

Dr. Ingham 27:52

1977.

Unidentified Woman 27:58

Do you have any final thoughts on the department and the College of Brockport in the 1970s?

Dr. Ingham 28:10

Well, it was, final thought. I think it was an exciting place. In many ways. It was an exhausting place. In many ways. I think that we had a lot of fights that we shouldn't have had to have. That I think were not necessarily. Well, as I look back, I'd some sometimes one what were we fighting about, you know, what were the arguments about what was the what were the issues about and that there was a lot of fighting a lot of tension and so forth that went on over things that I look back from this perspective and think that's too bad in a way that I did that because I still to this day, my some of my closest friends are still the people of Brockport I mean, they are I mean, I really, I mean, I'll give you I'll give you an example of this. And Bruce Leslie plays a big role in this. But when I retired from University of Toronto in 2004, six people retired at the same time, it's a big department 70 people. So one person retiring is no big deal. So they had one kind of little party from the department in the department, from the university meeting halls for all six of us who were retiring and said, you know, an hour something, give us a little plaque and said goodbye. And Bruce said, That's not a retirement party. That's no good at all. We're going to

have a retirement party for you here at Brockport. So come down here and he had a big party at his house for me retirement party, all the people from SUNY Brockport came to the party. The Graduate students from his early years came the professors that at the College came. So I had a real retirement party at Brockport, but I was retiring from University of Toronto. So I think so there's a mixture of things in there. And we've talked, we being me with other members of department, and we'll talk about that sometimes, as I said, I said, What were we arguing about? What were we arguing about 50 years ago? And then we kind of look and say, Well, I don't know. It doesn't seem like it was that important now, but I think, I think the situation was that Brockport was a young college in that sense, it was just it would have been a teacher's college and was trying to make a very fast and a very traumatic transition to a more upscale kind of a college not really a research college, but certainly one in which research and academics was different and more highly praised. And I think it just was what someone might called growing pains in the 70s. It was it was a department going through its growing pains, but had a lot of good people in it. And I think I think this and I think also people who are generally very interested in being good teachers. And I think that came through at the department and I think that I would always carry that with me when I went to University of Toronto to try to be a good teacher as much as I could be and care about the students and try to do things with the students. So I guess that's the legacy I carry with me from Brockport.

Unidentified Woman 31:37

That was it.

Dr. Ingham 31:37

Okay, that was easy.

Unidentified Woman 31:39

Yeah. Pretty fast.