



Bob Sivers was the first editor of the WAML Information Bulletin, one of the charter members of WAML, president of WAML, and the first map librarian at University of California, Santa Barbara.

This is the final oral history interview in our 50th anniversary series. The transcription and recording of this interview are in the WAML digital archives at Stanford. It includes information on the student protest movements of the 60s at Berkeley and at Santa Barbara and how they affected the libraries there.

Bob was interviewed by Jon Jablonski at his home in Santa Barbara in July of 2018.

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Summarized by Kathy Rankin



An undated photograph of Bob in his office at the UCSB Library

Bob grew up in a suburb of Denver. He had an undergraduate degree in political science, and he worked on a master's in political science at the University of Colorado. Bob was thinking of going into the Foreign Service with a specialty in French and France, but he decided that was not what he wanted to do with his life.



He worked part time in the social sciences library at the university, and he met a woman named Bonnie who got a degree there in church music and choir. They got married, and they left for Berkeley in 1958. Bob got a job in Circulation at the Berkeley. He started studying philosophy, but he felt he had to play a game with each faculty member to get along with him, so he decided that it was not for him. Bob quit his job and went to work as a library assistant at a branch library of the Berkeley Public Library in the Claremont District. He said that the area was full of moneyed people who could afford to be characters, and they were.

Bob enjoyed his work so much he decided to go to library school at Berkeley. His focus was public librarianship, but he took a course in special libraries, and he chose to write a paper about map librarianship and map libraries. Bob interviewed Sheila Dowd, who was the map librarian at Berkeley and one of the founders of WAML. He said to Sheila that if someone offered him a job as a map librarian, he would probably take it. About two weeks later, before he graduated, the associate university librarian, Katherine McNabb, from the University of California, Santa Barbara [UCSB], came to his desk and told him that they were starting a map and remote sensing library, and it was going to have a separate building and asked him if he wanted to interview for it. His wife had had their first child, so he accepted the interview. Maria Pateman, the head of the sciences library, interviewed him. That was 1966, and they offered him the job then and there.

After Bob graduated in 1967, he took the job and moved to Santa Barbara. The map collection consisted of a bunch of National Geographic maps in one case because the map collection had been part of Special Collections. There was a partial federal depository in the Geology Department, but they collected only topos of California and the surrounding states. Bob's background in map librarianship was he had read a book on it. He ordered every map the USGS had, which got him in trouble with the associate university librarian. University of California, Santa Cruz was going to be the science campus, and UCSB was going to specialize in the liberal arts. There was plenty of money because it was after the Russian had launched Sputnik, and the United States government was pouring money into science. Bob ordered the map cases and folders as well as all the maps he could find. So many maps were coming in so fast he had to hire someone to help him, so Bob hired Larry Carver as a library assistant.

They also had lots of student assistants. Next they hired a cataloger, Barbara Christie, but Library of Congress had not settled on a classification for maps, so they filed the maps first by the large area and then by the name of the country, but they



decided that was too complicated for the students, so they changed to filing by the names of the countries. If the name of a country changed, they put a sheet with a see reference where the old name would file. Library of Congress wanted maps cataloged by subject and not by geographic locations, which Bob did not think would work as he did not think patrons would approach maps that way. The cataloger was caught between Bob and the Library of Congress, so she left and went to work for the Library of Congress.

Bob also collected the aerial photography of Santa Barbara County. The Geography Department went in big for remote sensing. The head of the Science and Engineering Library asked Bob to become the assistant department head while still being in charge of the map library, but he found it hard to do both jobs, so he asked if Larry could be in charge of the map library. The resistance was incredible because Larry was not a librarian. It took two years to achieve that even though Bob had some pull as he was president of the local Libraries Association.

UCLA and Berkeley were the big, older schools, but people at the newer campuses were just starting out, so WAML was founded so that people who worked in map libraries could get together and talk about problems and find solutions. The first meeting was in San Diego, but University of California, San Diego didn't even have a map collection. Bob feels some campuses were sort of dubious about map libraries. They felt their mission was books and journals and maybe pamphlets. Maps were too science for them as they were in liberal arts, but they tolerated it because the universities decreed it, and they were backed up by departments who were going to be the primary users, namely people in the earth sciences.

At WAML meetings people talked about collections, cataloging, staffing, etc. Then they had another meeting in Santa Cruz with Stan Stevens. They also talked about computers. The third meeting must have been at Santa Barbara. Bob did not want to go to ALA meetings because they bored him. WAML was also important because map librarians do not have a lot in common with other librarians. Ed Justice was hired to establish a map collection at University of California, Davis. There was no map librarian for quite a while at University of California at San Diego, Irvine never did collect paper maps, Riverside has a map collection, and Scripps had a big nautical chart collection but did not have their own library. Bob gave a talk at a WAML meeting on how to talk with administration and with faculty. Bob said that the administration looked at map librarians as money grubbers and the faculty looked at them as people who never had what they wanted. He made a matrix to show which maps they had for a particular country, but that concept never took off.



Bob was asked to be president of WAML. He reluctantly accepted. Members said that they wanted something from the organization to read, so he started the Information Bulletin. Bob invited papers from map librarians in other states and reached out with publication exchange programs so it would not just be a University of California club. At that point, he left the map library because he was assistant department head of the Sciences and Engineering Library, and he had Larry Carver, who was very competent, to run the map library. Then Larry was finally allowed to have the title of librarian. Larry used his contacts and obtained a Landsat 1 collection. He had many contacts and was somewhat of a wheeler-dealer, according to Bob. Larry usually got what he wanted. He knew what to say and whom to flatter and did not need to have a lot of credit. Bob bought aerial photography of early Berkeley and early Santa Barbara. Larry saw to it that they had a lot of remote sensing, and he hired Mary Larsgaard. Larry also got a lot of equipment for interpretation, which is why it was called the Map and Imagery Lab.

Bob had many collection strategies, and concentrated on contemporary mapping. He received loose maps from the Asian Library. If there were a serial with a map in the back, such as a publication of the California Institute of Mines and Geology, Bob would buy multiple copies of that issue in case it was discarded in other places. The Geography Department had experts in remote sensing, and the Geology Department had new blood, so they needed remote sensing. The map library was originally on the second floor, but the Map and Imagery Lab was moved to the first floor.

What Bob feels he has gotten out of WAML is learning from each other—solutions to problems, new sources, etc. He was only active in WAML for the three and a half years that he was the head of the map library. Bob said that Larry was superb as head of the Map and Imagery Lab, Mary Larsgaard really admired him, and he was brilliant. The map library had 340,000 maps when Bob left. Bob said that Larry was skittish around librarian organizations because he faced so much snobbery because he was not a librarian (recall Stan Stevens' different feelings about his similar situation). Bob feels that his and Larry's biggest accomplishment is that they learned to be map librarians. He treasures the people he met because they were wonderful companions to talk with and swap stories with, and they were all in the same boat except Sheila. Sheila was very modest and very knowledgeable. Bob said that she was not one of the stars of WAML.

Because the map collection at UCSB is only 60% cataloged, they still arrange the maps according to Bob's classification scheme, with an alphabetical arrangement of



countries inside the continents, and an alphabetical arrangement of states in the United States.

When the UCSB library decided they had to buy a computer, they decided to buy an IBM clone not because they compared its features to Apple, but because “nobody ever got fired going with IBM”. Bob said that going digital is the biggest change to librarianship during his career. He started to learn word processing software, and then librarians were trained to do database searches for patrons with Dialog or SBC, which was a southern California company. It was scary at first because searches cost money, and the money came from grants the faculty had. Bob always talked to the faculty member first about possibilities and emphasized precision versus a search that emphasizes recall. They were thrilled with what was found. The people who picked up the computer really fast usually had science or engineering background or had been associated with the sciences. Some people just froze when they sat down at the keyboard. Some of them did not know how to type. They thought that was what secretaries were for.

Bob thinks that we are headed for antiquarian libraries and for the digital experience because people are very expensive, and most people can do searches for themselves. There are still physical items, but many of them are available online. There are always going to be varying skills, so he can see a librarian helping a person with limited searching skills, or helping people such as new graduate students who are just learning to use databases in their field. The physical collections of material that is not online are more archival. Bob thinks that the era of standard maps is coming to a close, and the era of GIS should be very prominent. Administrators tend to be from humanities, so Bob said that Larry took full advantage of that because they never knew whether to reprimand him or congratulate him, because they did not know anything. There was a sort of hostility from the administration even though Larry brought in National Science Foundation grants, maybe because they felt insecure. They did usually leave the map library alone. Bob thinks that the era of enormous map collections is closing except maybe at the Library of Congress and in special collections. He said that map libraries are still a stepchild whom administrators fear. They’d love to get rid of it. They don’t understand it. It’s always asking for money. And they wonder why.

Bob had been the assistant department head of the science and engineering library, and then he became the head. He went to ALA Annual only once because his boss told him to go and learn about computers. He did, but he had to use technical language to describe what he learned, and the other librarians did not understand



what he was saying. As department head, he concentrated a lot on working with the faculty. He felt they were important because they taught the graduate students, and they made demands of the collection. Bob reserved a class session to give an overview of what the map library could do for the faculty. He tried to have the session in their departments where they felt relaxed and not in the library. Bob felt it gave them a sense that he was interested in them. When he retired, he was the liaison for environmental science, geography, and geology. He sometimes worked with engineering.

Bob's hobby is reading. He is still interested in maps. Bob used to visit the map library, and Larry would show him the latest acquisitions. Bob reads mostly nonfiction and is teaching himself college-level biology by reading a textbook on his Kindle.

Bob says, "I still have a soft spot in my heart for maps and remote sensing as far as it got. I didn't get too far because although Jack Estes used to think I was the center for getting remote sensing, I wasn't. It was Larry Carver. He was the guy, and of course, Mary Larsgaard carried on the mapping collection. So I'm very proud of my time there in the map room. It was a pleasure, and I probably would have remained there, but they wanted me for administrative duties up there, and I said, 'Well, you know I don't have a science background.' 'That's OK.'" Bob liked the sciences, and he did not feel awed by them. He got along, particularly with the people in geology and geography.

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