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Georg Kleine oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, June 19, 2003

Georg H. Kleine (Interviewee)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

In 1968 Dr. Kleine came to USF as an assistant professor of history.

An interesting arrival to America

Dr. Kleine arrived in Tampa in America on August 30, 1968. That was the day of the Chicago Convention. He came by boat, on a phosphate freighter. He was an immigrant at the time. He was raised and educated in Germany. He looked at an issue of the *Tampa Times* on the ship. The newspaper was covered with pictures of Chicago riots and of the police beating up on protestors. "It was a fascinating entry and introduction into America," he states.

Adjusting to a new country and job

He says the adjustment to a new country, university, and job was made easy by a very congenial department, specifically by the then chair of the history department, Bob Hilliard.

What did the campus and the surrounding area look like in the early years?

"It was as bare as everyone says," states Dr. Kleine. He remembers one restaurant, the University Restaurant. There was no mall. He says the barren and bare campus really continued until Betty Castor brought about that kind of change. He regrets that USF never got the Picasso statue. He says that would have made a big difference.

How did Dr. Kleine get the job at USF?

He never interviewed for the job. He got the job by submitting a resume. This could be because Dr. Hilliard had been educated in Vienna and had a weakness for native German speakers.

What was Dr. Kleine hired to teach

Dr. Hilliard hired Dr. Kleine to teach medieval history. A year later, during a hiking accident in New Mexico, Dr. Hilliard lost his life. Dr. Kleine took over the German history slot.

What was the history department like?

The department was small. It was very congenial and friendly. “I was greatly impressed by the fact that an assistant professor from far away without any experience in the American system - I didn’t get my Ph.D. from an American institution - would be involved in the decision-making processes from the start,” he says.

A different course taught by the history department

The department taught a course called History 100, which was an attempt to introduce the campus population at large to the field of history. The course was taught by a team; all members of the department gave lectures. The course eventually fell through. “It was the only non-traditional course that we have ever taught,” he says.

Faculty members

Dr. Kleine says he had interesting and fascinating colleagues. One faculty member, Jim Silver, was a remarkable scholar. He was involved with the civil rights fight at the University of Mississippi. He wrote a book about it. “We all benefited from his presence,” he says. Dr. Kleine says there was one colleague who turned out not to have a Ph.D. after pretending to have one. The department had at least one case where tenure was denied. From the start, the history department has attracted very strong researchers. Dr. Kleine says one of the department’s flaws is that it has been a nursery of highly talented faculty members, who after establishing themselves at USF, disappear to bigger and better places. He says there have been quite a few members who are treated royally, and given all the opportunities to advance their careers, and then they leave.

Why did faculty members leave?

He thinks it had to do with the fact that faculty members are pretty isolated in Tampa. “The colleagues maybe felt that they didn’t have like-minded individuals in the same or similar field with whom they could interact. There are other parts of the country where there is more of your kind and where interaction is easier,” he states. Dr. Kleine does not believe the reasons for moving were financial reasons or because working conditions were not good. The teaching responsibilities for strong research were reduced to a very bearable level. He thinks those individuals were looking for more of the famous name and collegial environment.

Research versus teaching in the history department

Dr. Kleine says the history department is experiencing the same tension between research and teaching as the university is as a whole. “In our department I think that tension was particularly pronounced,” he says. Dr. Kleine says the tension between research and teaching has had a way of splitting the department. The researchers were always in the majority in the history department. At one time the leading group chair and executive council consisted of people who pushed research very strongly. Dr. Kleine says it was always said that the history department was able to have a strong teaching department while having a strong research department. He is not sure that was always the case. “Due to the preponderance of strong researchers, I think we have always had a strong reputation on campus as a strong [research] department,” he says. Dr. Kleine says for

most of his tenure the department has been a very peaceful one where the tension really took place under the surface.

How has the research focus of USF affected the history department?

“This department was ahead of [the research focus] or in step with it from the start because we were always considered a strong research department,” he states.

Dr. Kleine was an advocate of teaching since his research did not receive much attention

He was an advocate of teaching for the most part. Dr. Kleine believes that if he had received encouragement, he could have been a considerable researcher. The research he published in 1978 has founded a school and produced several dissertations in Germany, twenty-five years after its publication. His research focused on the social history of the German nobility. Young doctors of history write him as the founding father of the field. The field of German history is represented at the University of Central Florida and UF, but both individuals he knew at the schools were not interested in his field of research, the social history of the German nobility. At the time he did not receive an echo about his publication. Dr. Kleine says that after the article came out there was silence because people did not quite understand him yet. So he turned back to teaching as his major occupational interest. Now his article is being praised as the foundation of the field of the social history of the German nobility.

Dr. Kleine becomes history advisor

Dr. Kleine made up for his lack of responses to his research publication by becoming departmental advisor. He expanded and redefined advising. He stopped being advisor only when he was appointed to the Honors College.

Changes Dr. Kleine made in advising

“By simply spending more time with a student you already change the quality of the advising process,” he says. When Dr. Kleine became the history undergraduate advisor the computerized student records became available so it was relatively short time spent telling the student what he or she needed to take. He says he does not think he ever spent less than thirty minutes with a student. Before he became advisor, Dr. Kleine met with every one of his students in his classes. For many years he kept that up, and from there, having gained that reputation for being student-friendly, he was the natural successor when the then undergraduate advisor died. He simply spent time with the students and allowed the personal angle to enter in to the conversation. He remembers one time when the university administration discouraged advisors or faculty members from talking to students about personal issues. They received stern memos stating that USF has a professional counseling staff and as soon as there appears to be an issue of the staff’s responsibility, the faculty should send the student over. The memo said the faculty’s job was to be strictly academic in their conversations.

Freedom faculty members have at USF

He has heard from colleagues who have taught at other universities that the big plus at USF is that there is no tradition. Faculty members can create their own tradition. “No

one supervises you closely, and if they do so, by sending a memo or something, half a year later it is forgotten again because the issue has left already,” he states.

Dr. Kleine travels back to Germany and then returns to USF

After being at USF for five years and receiving tenure, Dr. Kleine got an offer to teach at a German university. He and his wife packed up their stuff and traveled back to Germany. After a few months at the German university he knew the place was not right because he had been treated so well at USF. A year later he returned to USF. His real time at USF started in the fall of 1974, going uninterrupted to the present.

Interactions with USF presidents

In 1984 Dr. Kleine interacted on a small scale with President John Lott Brown because Dr. Kleine was the commencement speaker for that year. His interaction with President Castor was more intense. President Castor knew Dr. Kleine because he was for many years the longest serving commencement marshal. Also, Dr. Kleine served on the mace committee. He was part of a group of professors who facilitated the design and production of the mace. President Castor was excited about the mace. She wanted the mace in her office.

Student and faculty demonstrations

He says that Vietnam is the only protest he really remembers. He says that some professors who were activists were not popular with the administration for speaking out.

What is Dr. Kleine appreciative of at USF

Dr. Kleine says USF really gave him the freedom to do what he wanted. “Decision making and the ability to do everything and anything you wanted to do was indeed crucial,” he says. Dr. Kleine is appreciative of USF for allowing him the ability and opportunity to use Chinsegut Hill as an extension of his classroom. Dr. Kleine says that what he has done on Chinsegut Hill has been going on for thirty-five years and is rather unique in any setting. He was given full and free range and freedom to use the place creatively.

Lack of social opportunities for students on campus

In the early days, as well as today, Dr. Kleine believes there is a major deficiency on campus of opportunities for students to socialize. There have been efforts to create a pub in the Marshall Center. To this day, Dr. Kleine feels that even with basketball and football there are insufficient opportunities and facilities for the students of a largely commuter university to interact with one another. Dr. Kleine says he is used to Europe where campuses are surrounded by pubs and where students interact and socialize quite a bit more. “This is something that we have always lacked and to the extent that I was able to counteract it, I’ve tried to do it,” he says.

Dr. Kleine provides socializing opportunities for students at Chinsegut Hill

Dr. Kleine says that to him and his students Chinsegut Hill filled that socializing void. He made use of Chinsegut for both academic and social reasons. He says student

socialization has been a focus of his both with Chinsegut Hill and in encouraging his students to go out together after class.

How did Dr. Kleine first hear about Chinsegut Hill?

He first came to Chinsegut Hill as part of a faculty group that dean Russell Cooper took there. Dean Cooper had identified the place as an opportunity where faculty could gather for day meetings. At the time, Dr. Kleine was not aware that Chinsegut was used for overnight stays.

Where did the idea to use Chinsegut for classes stem from?

The idea to use it for classes and to stay overnight stemmed from something that he used to do at his German university. Students at the German university went to an old castle for class. He brought the idea with him that one needs to extend the classroom to a more picturesque and congenial environment.

Accommodations at Chinsegut

Chinsegut at the time was a wild place in that there were no cabins. The manor house alone was where people stayed. Dr. Kleine says the manor house could accommodate nineteen students. He says that some of the students would have to share a bed, which in the 1960s was not a problem. Today Chinsegut Hill has cabins of motel quality, which provide the accommodations. The manor house still reminds him of the old days, when students would stay in the house.

Students at Chinsegut stage a protest

There were no coke machines at Chinsegut Hill. When the first coke machine was installed on the porch of the manor house, Dr. Kleine and his students staged a protest and pretended that they wanted to destroy the coke machine. He says the place was truly away from everyone and everything so students saw the installing of a coke machine as taking away Chinsegut's uniqueness.

Food at Chinsegut Hill

Dr. Kleine says that in the early days food was provided for them. The caterers were local women, and they caught mullet in Chesawicksca. The caterers would serve dinner to people in the evening. For many years Dr. Kleine and students brought and grilled chicken.

What does Dr. Kleine do at Chinsegut Hill?

Students drive and carpool to Chinsegut Hill. They arrive on Friday evening. On Friday night everyone gets to know one another. Students sit in a circle and talk about each other. Then on Saturday, Dr. Kleine's class starts discussing a book that he gave them to read in advance. The students are divided into groups. On Saturday night the groups come together and discuss and debate the book. After the official activities are over on Friday and Saturday nights, students have free time to get together.

The importance of Chinsegut to Dr. Kleine and his students

“It has turned out to be the single most significant, lasting benefit because so many friendships have been made. I have gotten to know so many students so much better because of it. Chinsegut to many of my students is truly a magical word,” states Dr. Kleine. When many of Dr. Kleine’s former students call or e-mail him, the first question they ask is if he still goes to Chinsegut. “It probably is to me the most significant place of all of USF. The opportunity to use it as freely as I have wanted to has been a major bonus for being here and teaching here,” he states.

Do other professors use Chinsegut Hill?

Dr. Kleine says using Chinsegut Hill has not caught on. It is a secret to most people at USF. The university does not use it in any official capacity. Dr. Kleine says that for faculty members to find out about Chinsegut would be by accident. Dr. Kleine says that with the exception of Dr. Mormino, who has taken his classes to Chinsegut a few times because Dr. Kleine’s students ask Dr. Mormino to take them, no one else really uses Chinsegut. He says that Chinsegut has not become something that anyone else outside of the history department uses. Dr. Kleine says that occasionally someone in the music department goes there with a group of students.

How often does Dr. Kleine take students to Chinsegut?

He and his students have gone to Chinsegut every single semester or quarter, depending on which schedule USF was on at the time. Dr. Kleine has taken students to Chinsegut uninterrupted for thirty-five years.

As associate dean in the honors college, Dr. Kleine still takes students to Chinsegut

Even after Dr. Kleine left the history department for the honors college, he still takes students to Chinsegut Hill. He takes the honors students.

Dr. Kleine’s last outings to Chinsegut Hill

Dr. Kleine will take one group in August of 2003 and in February of 2004. Those two groups will be the last ones he takes to Chinsegut Hill because he is retiring. Chinsegut Hill is what Dr. Kleine will miss the most when he retires

After Dr. Kleine retires, will anyone follow in his path and take students to Chinsegut?

Dr. Kleine says he is working on preserving his tradition of taking students to Chinsegut. He is working on getting people interested in establishing a special relationship between the Honors College and Chinsegut. One justification for that would be that honors classes are already small in size and of a different nature. He does not want to leave Chinsegut abandoned, but to establish some tie that will last. He had an opportunity to get President Genshaft interested in establishing permanent ties with Chinsegut. She will come to Chinsegut when they celebrate the entry of Chinsegut in to the national register of historic places. Dr. Kleine says that President Genshaft is committed to keeping Chinsegut. Dr. Kleine says he does not want to have Chinsegut just as a motel for any and all groups, but to keep the ties and tighten the ties to the academic community.

Why and when did Dr. Kleine leave the history department?

He left in the summer of 2002 because Stuart Silverman asked him to become interim associate dean for the recently established honors college. Once Stuart was appointed dean in December of 2002 Dr. Kleine's title changed from interim associate dean to associate dean. He has not taught in the history department since 2002.

What interested him in working in the honors college?

Acquaintance with the honors college happened through teaching honors courses before he became affiliated with it. Before working in the honors college, Dr. Kleine taught honors courses for five years. When the honors college position was offered to Dr. Kleine he knew the caliber of students and the size of the classes were going to be very attractive features.

Dr. Kleine and undergraduate research

Stuart hired Dr. Kleine a few years before he became interim associate dean as the coordinator of undergraduate research. The office of undergraduate research is located in the honors college. Undergraduate research has since become a primary occupation and interest of his. "We had our first great undergraduate research symposium in April of 2003. Undergraduate research has become a signature activity of USF. We are in the process of being reaffirmed, which will happen in 2005," says Dr. Kleine. He has been involved with establishing undergraduate research and changing the culture to view undergraduate research as an important feature of the undergraduate curriculum.

Why is undergraduate research important?

"It is probably the single most important and exciting new initiative in undergraduate education in the country over the last five or so years. In some ways we are catching up with what is already happening on the national level," he says.

Primary responsibilities as associate dean of the honors college

He oversees the hiring of the faculty and the composition of each semester's roster.

Why is having an honors college important to USF?

"If we don't have an honors college our bright students will leave the state. We know some of them cannot leave the state, or don't want to leave the state, so we owe them. We owe them a first class education. We think that we are offering them that," he says.

Changes Dr. Kleine would like to see at USF

He has not seen enough changes, or the kinds of changes he wishes to see. He is still waiting to see changes in the quality of leadership on the provost and dean levels. "We have a new force that may turn things around," he says. What Dr. Kleine has seen is what he says a falling behind of USF where it should have advanced.

What is Dr. Kleine most proud of in his tenure at USF?

He is most proud of his work with students, which has taken place in his classes, at Chinsegut, and in his office hours. There is one feature of Dr. Kleine's work with students that he would like to single out as his signature and that is his strong fondness

and support of student travel. He has particularly advocated one type of travel and that is backpacking in Europe. Students have come back changed. He is proud of encouraging student interaction.

Final statement of Dr. Kleine

“Don’t be discouraged by the absence of strong leadership, direction, facilities, and the kinds of things that would be desirable in order to make this a perfect experience. Work against the trend. Go against the grain because this is a place that lets you do it, at least once you’re tenured,” he states. He was very grateful for being able to have so much freedom. Dr. Kleine says the faculty needs to make more active use of the freedom the university gives them. Faculty members need to interact more with each other.

Where does Dr. Kleine see USF in the next decade?

“We need to stop kidding ourselves about where we are, and telling ourselves how wonderful we are. We need to look very closely at where our deficiencies are. Only then can we catch up and maybe outpace Central Florida again,” he states. Dr. Kleine says USF is deficient in the area of student recruitment. “Be more realistic about who we are and thus be better able to chart the course that we need to take in order to regain what I hope at least is spot number three in the state,” he says.

End of Interview