

PRESERVING MEMORY: NEWARK AND RUTGERS  
IN THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

An Interview with

VIRGINIA ELLIS

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

AUGUST 13, 1991

INTERVIEW: Virginia Ellis

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GILBERT COHEN: This is Gil Cohen. It is August 13, 1991—Tuesday, August 13, 1991. I am meeting with Mrs. Virginia Ellis at her home in Iselin, New Jersey, and her husband, Bob, is in attendance. [Break in recording] We're back with Mrs. Ellis. Mrs. Virginia Ellis was at Rutgers in Newark between 1950 and 1980 when she retired as technical services supervisor.

VIRGINIA ELLIS: 'Eighty-one.

COHEN: Nineteen eighty-one, Virginia tells me. Nineteen fifty to 1981, at which point she retired as technical services supervisor. Ginny, you've mentioned to me— [Break in recording] I wanted to ask, you worked for General Electric before you came to Rutgers. And what did you do at General Electric?

ELLIS: Did secretarial work, and I was in the order department. Secretarial work.

COHEN: And when you came to.... Well, what did Rutgers offer to you that GE didn't? What career opportunities did you see at Rutgers?

ELLIS: I wanted to get in something besides big business because it was getting a little rough there. And I wanted to do something more relaxing, I thought. So the position that was advertised was secretarial assistant at Rutgers, Dana Library. And I applied for that. And that's what I started under Mr. Richard Shoemaker as the secretarial assistant. But then we did the ordering the books, and it got bigger and bigger after that.

COHEN: Could you speak about Mr. Shoemaker?

ELLIS: Yes. He had just returned not too long ago from a heart attack. But I found him to be a gentleman and a very gentle man. He was very understanding, and I really got along very well with him. And I enjoyed working with him for eight—he was there eight years. And when they were talking about building a new building, for the library, where the campus was moving, he did not want to get involved with that, and he went to the library school in New Brunswick.

COHEN: In those days, what was it like working in that building on the old campus?

ELLIS: It was a former brewery, you know, the building. And we were up on the top floor. Had no elevator. We had to walk up and down, as you remember. And we became, I think, a family. We were very close to one another because it was all on one floor. And, you know, we really got to know one another. And also the professors because they came in, and they talked to us, and we got to know what they ordered and things like that, you know. And that was very interesting, too.

COHEN: What was the best part of the job?

ELLIS: The best part of the job? For me it was meeting people from different cultures, which I had never had an opportunity before. And I was fascinated by them, and I learned a lot from them. Although I'm not a college graduate, I really thought that was an education.

COHEN: Did you have similar opportunities when you worked for GE?

ELLIS: No way.

COHEN: Why?

ELLIS: Well, it was all business, and you didn't operate this way. In the first place, I'd never worked with a black person before because they just did not hire them in those days. And I did in the Dana library, and I learned a lot from them. You judge people differently when you know their backgrounds.

COHEN: Yes. When we moved to the new campus and affirmative action was even more aggressively pursued, did that give you an opportunity to meet more people from other cultures, minority people, black people?

ELLIS: Yes, I think so, because I met people from Thailand and Hong Kong because the workforce grew, and they hired more people and more minorities.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: And it was okay. But we were separated from the reference and the checkout. So we did not get to see the professors as we did before because they had no reason to come downstairs. They put their orders in through the mail or sent them upstairs, and they came down to us. So we did not get to see them very often.

COHEN: When you were on the job in, particularly in the late seventies and early eighties, were you in any way affected by the computerization on the job? How did that impact, if at all?

ELLIS: Not too much because it was just starting, and people had to be trained because, you know, it was very new. And I think they had it in New Brunswick, and we got things for the computer from them. But it was just new, and we didn't have the computer there at that time.

COHEN: Another change at the time that you mentioned to me were changes in the community, historical changes in Newark. And one of your great pleasures, you've always mentioned to me, was going to Hahne's. And you showed me a letter which I thought really should be, if you will, read it into the record, as an indication of the times, of how it tied in with the job and the community and the changes that were occurring. And if you could maybe explain the circumstances under which you wrote the letter to begin with.

ELLIS: Yes, because Hahne's was always the quality store of Newark. And as Newark started to change, so did Hahne's, and it upset me very much because I thought that was the place to shop, and I shopped there almost every day, working then. So I got very upset about it, and I wrote a letter to Mr. Yayoff [sp], who was the president in 1976. Do you want me to read it?

COHEN: Yes, if you would read the letter.

ELLIS: This is:

Dear Mr. Yayoff [sp],

What is happening to my nice Hahne's, Newark? But the store looks like Bam's? Why is all the quality merchandise being sent to the branches? Why has all the ADG junk been brought in? Where have all the polite, interested, and beautiful salespeople gone? The new salespeople seem to be not interested, not polite, and very noisy. Why all the empty shelves in the gift shop on the third floor? Why can't the beautiful gifts be kept in Newark? Why is the toy department shrinking? Why is Trim-the-Tree shop now in the basement? For many years it was a fairyland on the third floor during the holiday season, and it was adjacent to the gift shop, a good selling point. Why am I now embarrassed to take my friends in the Pine Room? Miniscule portions and skyrocketing prices now. I have been a charge customer for 25 years. And up to the present time Hahne's Newark was a dignified, pleasant, and comfortable store for shopping. Since I am proud to work and shop in Newark, why must I now flee to the suburbs and noisy malls? Shame, shame, Mr. Yayoff.

COHEN: And do you have Mr. Yayoff's response?

ELLIS: I have Mr.— It's right here. A few days later I received a reply from Mr. Yayoff.

Mr. Herbert Yayoff reviewed your recent letter with several of us. We are most anxious to maintain a serviceable, quality store. We will be doing many things in the coming months to improve our Newark store, including new carpeting and decorating for our Pine Room. We are considering adding a salad bar and/or soup bar to that room. You are a highly-valued customer, and we appreciate your patronage.

COHEN: Okay. That's his signature. Yes. Now talking about changes in the community, you know, in 1967, July of 1967, the Newark riots. And what impact did that have upon you? Were you there?

ELLIS: Yes. Well, the library and I don't know, not the campus, was closed for a day or so because they had guardsmen on the roofs of the buildings around.

COHEN: The new Dana Library.

ELLIS: The new Dana Library.

COHEN: On the new campus, yes.

ELLIS: On the new campus, oh, yes. The new campus. And then students with the I think it was Vietnam War.

COHEN: Yes, their activism.

ELLIS: Yes. And they paraded through the library and all places with animal blood on their faces, which they had gone to a slaughter house and gotten all this blood. It was a very scary thing, I'll say that.

COHEN: But after the Newark riots, I mean how did you feel about the city and about shopping and being there?

ELLIS: Well, let me think. I was more cautious on the street. And I guess I didn't stay as long in the Hahne's because I wanted to come with the crowd that was coming back from lunch because it was not too wise to be alone on the street.

COHEN: But going back to the job again, I think in 1970 or thereabouts, the office workers were unionized, if you remember, into the COLT union, the Clerical, Office, and Laboratory Technical Workers. Why did unionism occur, do you think, at that time? Do you have any perceptions on that?

ELLIS: Not really. But I didn't think it was that popular. It really wasn't. I'm surprised that it had gone through. Most of us who had been here for a while were surprised, too; I think so. Because we seemed to be doing all right, and, you know, it was a pleasant but then the union had there ways of doing things.

COHEN: Did you feel there was any benefit in the years that you were there of having a collective bargaining agent?

ELLIS: Well, I think we got more perks. We got a lot of perks. We got dentist and eyeglasses and what else? I know most things.

COHEN: Well, medical. I mean the medical I think was always there. I think.

ELLIS: Dentist and eyeglasses. And you could buy other things like cars if you wanted to. We got something, you know because... the union representative. We had a lot of things that you could purchase if you wished at that time. It was great for the things that I needed like the glasses and the dentist because it gave good breaks on that, too, at that time.

COHEN: After the move to the new campus, what changes did you see in working conditions, number one?

ELLIS: Well, as I say, we didn't have, with the main office, we didn't have too much contact because we were isolated in one room at one time, which is now the viewing room. And then they built this addition, and we moved to facing Academy street is that?

COHEN: Bleeker.

ELLIS: Bleeker, Bleeker.

COHEN: Bleeker on the lower level, yes.

ELLIS: And so we were kind of isolated there, too. But let's see. We had a periodical room there, too. It got to be big business then there.

COHEN: Big business. How did it change? You say it got to be big business. What do you mean by that?

ELLIS: Well, for instance, I no longer did secretarial work. There was a secretary upstairs in the main office.

COHEN: Oh.

ELLIS: And we just didn't have to do things like that anymore, you know. Then we got to do all this ordering and checking up on, you know, getting these books and checking. Oh, then we filed in the catalog; which it was our place to do it, too. We did a big filing. And it was really mixed up because they had changed it a couple of times. LC did. LC updated. I can't remember the dates, but we had to remove from the cards because they had changed their way of doing things, the LC did.

COHEN: What year was that, Ginny?

ELLIS: well, I can...

COHEN: Well, that's back then. What changes? I mean you're talking—you're not talking about the conversion from Dewey to LC, are you?

ELLIS: Oh, no. No, when I first got there in '50, they were changing at that time from Dewey to LC.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: But LC updated their things, too. I can't remember what dates like 19—

COHEN: Was that after the move to the new campus, do you recall?

ELLIS: Yes, it was.

COHEN: As I recall what went on....

ELLIS: Because there were duplicate things in the file because LC had updated that particular book or information. And so we were getting—those things had to be sorted out. And that took quite a bit of our time to put that in the catalog.

COHEN: How did your responsibilities change? For instance when you were in the old building on Rector Street, you were—what was your title then?

ELLIS: Oh, I was secretarial assistant then.

COHEN: Secretarial assistant.

ELLIS: I was the only secretary there. But then, oh, then we got to be just Technical Services, and they had someone in...I was supervisor of that. But then we had a director over us there, too, because Stan came in. Do you remember?

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes. Librarian.

ELLIS: A librarian.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: And upstairs, when we were upstairs—when we moved to the new building, we were upstairs, and the director's office was just the other side of us. And when we came upstairs.... Donald Ryan came over, and then he left and went—he left to go to New Foundland.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: Then we had interim.... Ed Paassen [sp] came and Gil Cohen took over it. Jim Merritt took over it. And then Jacob, Dr. Jacob.

COHEN: Emerson Jacob . Yes, he was appointed after Ryan left.

ELLIS: Yes, yes. He was after Donald Ryan. And then he left and went to Harrisburg. And then we got Tom Shaughnessy. And he was there a few years. And then Mrs. Hamlen [sp] came at that— By that time they had done the reorganizing upstairs and put offices, and the office was put upstairs on the upper lever. And Hamlen [sp] and then who else? I remember we had Gene Neilen [sp].

COHEN: I was interested in what you said, to go back again, what you said before about it's coming sort of like big business.

ELLIS: Well....

COHEN: Again, could you go into.... What does that mean? I mean the contrast between what you had before and what you had when it became, as you say, big business.

ELLIS: As I said, we had many things to do now where we didn't have a family atmosphere that we yacked with one another. Now, we all had our things to do: We had filing to do, we had the orders to get out, mailing to do. And it was just—there was no time for all this other stuff, insignificant stuff. We just had a day's work to do, and we did it because there was so much to be done. And we did have a good budget in those days, too, so we did order many, many, many things. And it was—we did. And then we had to make sure there was no duplicates, the shelves had to be checked, and the files had to be checked. So it was big— And then we didn't have government documents, too, in the old building. We didn't have anything like that.

COHEN: That's right. Yes.

ELLIS: And we had a very—we didn't have many periodicals either. I think we had just a little—maybe 12 or dozens. But now we have hundreds which we have. We did. So that was separated because before we ordered the periodicals with the books, you know. And then the newspapers. But we couldn't do it there after that because it was a big, big thing. It was a thing in itself, periodicals.

COHEN: Oh, it still is!

ELLIS: And interlibrary loans was a big thing, too. That became separated from us, too. And then the business—we had a business.... Wasn't Bernice Jones the business person?

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: That was all.... So it was changed then as a business really.

COHEN: Yes. I mean how did the job then, as it changed, compare to the job at GE?

ELLIS: [Laughs] GE. Well, you had to produce a certain on the day under GE. They gave you work, and you had to do it that day. You just did not.... And you were very...very close to the next person, and you had to do your job because you were holding up somebody else. They had to take over from what you did. It was that kind of a thing. And it was—it was just, you know, they had rules and regulations. You took a break, you took it at that time, and you didn't take it any other time. And you took your lunch hour. And if you said you were going at twelve, you'd better go at twelve and you come back at one, you know. You had to...they couldn't afford to do that. This is a big organization. If you slip down, they're not going to tolerate your being late. No place will, but I mean some places.... They would just take it out of your salary if you kept doing this. So that's the kind of business it was. It was a manufacturing business.

COHEN: Were there time cards at GE?

ELLIS: Yes, yes. Absolutely.



COHEN: Okay. Did they have a timecard at Rutgers for salaried people like yourself?

ELLIS: I don't remember having a timecard, no. No. There was a timecard; that's what we used in General Electric.

COHEN: How do you feel if you had to compare the productivity of the work at GE, your work and other people's work at GE, compared to the productivity at Rutgers, okay? If you can—do you have any feeling for that? At GE you had all these—this discipline. And my question is do you feel like the discipline led to productivity compared to Rutgers?

ELLIS: Well, at GE we had to do it or we wouldn't have a job. Or they'd just replace you immediately. But in academic places it's smoother and, you know, you had work. But if you couldn't do it then, then you would do it the next day. You did what you could, but it flowed all right. We didn't have no backups or anything. But it was just a different atmosphere, absolutely. And a different feeling there. And the people were different.

COHEN: How were the people different; aside from the cultural and ethnic mix, how were the people different in that respect?

ELLIS: Well, bosses were bosses at the GE, and they did not associate with the workers and that sort of thing. And you just didn't go around talking to the big-shots because you would never do that. Never. You had a place to be, and that's where you were. And the factory downstairs, those people never associated with the office workers ever. Never, never. Never doing that. To me it was a very nice place to be, and we certainly learned a lot there. And I really had happy times there. Well, we had some dissension. That's why I took the Mayhards [sp] because we had some dissension when I was supervisor. And because of it, I don't think we had the proper supervision at that time, you know? It was all mixed up, and people were telling you what to do, but they didn't know what to do. But it worked out, and I think things were much better.

COHEN: How would you compare, looking back, you know, stress levels in GE, or other jobs you may have had, in GE compared to the stress level—if you can do such a thing—working at Rutgers?

ELLIS: Well, I think if you had a problem in Rutgers, you could certainly go to the librarian or your immediate director and talk it over with him. And they would certainly listen to you. But you'd have to go through the union at GE. And, you know, you'd report it to the union, and they would go to bat for you then. But, no, we talked it over, and, you know, if you had something you didn't like, you went and talked about it. And it seemed to work out all right.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes, yes.

ELLIS: And it really worked all right.

COHEN: There was no direct contact at GE between you and the direct supervisor?

ELLIS: Not really. Not really. No, no. Because he had his things to do, too. And so you had to do it because then, after all, he had to make a report at the end of the month, too, what was going on.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

ELLIS: No, I was glad to leave there. [Laughter]

COHEN: Okay. I just want to check your voice. [Break in recording] Okay, we're back again with Mrs. Ellis. I wanted to go back again to conditions on the Newark campus? You recall in 1969 there were students in the Black Organization of Students took over Conklin Hall? What was your reaction to that?

ELLIS: Oh, yes.

COHEN: What was, if you recall, what did you recall, what was your reaction to that event?

ELLIS: Oh, let me think now. I remember that, and I think some of us thought that was a little much, that it was out of line, and they just didn't—it was not necessary. They didn't need to go that distance, it was uncalled for, we thought. Many of us thought that.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

ELLIS: Well, who did they think they are? That was the attitude in those days; it was.

COHEN: Did you have any sense at the time of what their grievance was?

ELLIS: Oh, I really don't remember. But they were still very much a minority. They really were. And I just felt that if they're qualified, they should have a better job. If they're qualified. But they would have to show that they could do it. Just because you're a different color doesn't mean they can step in and get the job. Anybody—I don't care what color you are, if you can do the job, you're qualified, that's it. Right.

COHEN: During that period, did you see any changes, were you aware of changes in the composition of the student body on campus?

ELLIS: Yes. There was the— [Break in recording] Nursing? Nursing. And Mrs. Justice, she was in the library, and I think she did periodicals perhaps. But anyway, she was there. And then there was Barbara Nugent. Barbara Nugent had been there before Mr. Shoemaker was made director. And I think she was very put out about it. I think she became reference. I think she was reference. Nice people. And there was the, we got to know.... The professors came in and talked to you and say they want this order. And so you really got to know them as humans, you know, as people that you could talk to. That was very nice, I thought. So I have nice memories of these people.

COHEN: Do you remember any of the...after the move to the new campus, the University Heights campus, do you remember, did you have any contacts at that point with any of the faculty that you recall?

ELLIS: Well, I was used to seeing Dr. Greenfield, Mr. Botany, because he was always concerned about the water and the things on the campus. He always wanted to—he didn't like all the cement around. [Laughter]

COHEN: Yes. Right. He knew the difference.

ELLIS: He surely did.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: And Dr. Pine I used to see was a very nice guy, too. And occasionally we'd see them on the campus. More so I did in the old building. Our building, the library, became too big to...you know it was a big place after a while. But I have nice memories. I worked with nice people. I keep in touch with many of them. And we had a librarian from—she was Korean. It was Kathy Chung. And we had from India. That was Roz Madan[sp]. I keep in touch with her. And I kept in touch with some of the students like Bob Leiderstern [sp] and Henry Parker. And we had one from Hawaii who was Alan Kamieter [sp]. So I keep in touch with them, too. I think I'm very fortunate to be able to be friends with these people.

COHEN: How was it working under the—you mentioned before Richard Shoemaker. How was it working under his successors? I mean after Richard Shoemaker there was Donald Ryan.

ELLIS: Well, of course he—

COHEN: And what can you say about his administration?

ELLIS: Well, he was a young man, Donald Ryan was, and he had a lot to learn. And he did say, when he came, in their fuss of him—and of course we had a party for him in the library to greet him. He did say—he thanked everybody because he said when he left Michigan, nobody said goodbye to him. [Laughter] Anyway.... I tolerated Donald Ryan. But when somebody met him a few years ago, and it was Roz Madden, at a library meeting in New York, he did ask about me. And I thought that was quite good of him.

COHEN: How could he not? [Laughter]

ELLIS: And then after Donald Ryan was the head, Dr. Jacobs, and I still hear from him at Christmastime. And Tom Shaughnessy, I have a letter here from him.

COHEN: What can you say about Jacob's administration?

ELLIS: Well, he was—let me see. He spoke proper English, I must say. He was very concerned about people speaking correctly. And he was—how can I say? Very academic. Everything, you

know, everything had to be just so. He loved books, and he really—I felt no fussing around. He was all—he wanted the library to be a good reference library, too. Did you know him?

COHEN: I worked under him. Yes.

ELLIS: Didn't you think so?

COHEN: Pardon? Oh, he was a real scholarly type.

ELLIS: Yes, scholarly. That's what I'm saying, very scholarly. And then came Tom Shaughnessy, and he— We were having a little dissension then—I think I was supervisor then—with the periodical people. And I started to take Maalox...and Tom Shaughnessy one day came to my desk and said, "How are you doing?" And I opened the desk drawer and pulled out a bottle. And he was a little startled. And I think he thought—as in the letter he wrote to me—he thought it was liquor. It was Maalox. I said, "Now I can throw this—now I don't need this anymore." But he was a very nice guy to work with, I think. Didn't you think so?

COHEN: I got along with him fine.

ELLIS: We did. And then Mrs. Hammond came.

COHEN: How did that work out, that administration, working with her?

ELLIS: No, I did not take to her too much. I don't think I was alone. But anyway, no. And then Gene Gilly, I thought he was okay. He was very pleasant to work with. And you could go and talk to him. So I have pleasant memories of Dana Library.

COHEN: Who was your favorite among the directors that you worked under?

ELLIS: My favorite? I think Mr. Shoemaker because he was.... I don't know. I was new there, and he made me feel comfortable. And I really liked him very much.

COHEN: I'm talking about personalities, other people who have been in administrative positions. For instance, when you came there, ooh, was it Clothier who was the president of the university?

ELLIS: Yes, yes. It was Clothier.

COHEN: Then I was Lewis Webster Jones, if I remember.

ELLIS: And then it was Mason Gross.

COHEN: Yes. What was your—did you have any feeling at all, I mean, working away in the old brewery on Rector Street, any feeling at all about that big name Clothier in New Brunswick as the president of the university? Any sense of....

ELLIS: Well, no. I thought they got the best of everything in New Brunswick. [Laughter] I'm sure everything went to Alexander. And Mason Gross did come up to Newark campus. Were you there when he came?

COHEN: Once I remember him.... I remember coming up the steps and his coming down the steps, this big six foot-something, six foot six or something, guy. And I recall that very clearly.

ELLIS: But we did go to his ordination[??].

COHEN: Oh, you—

ELLIS: We were there. We were all invited from Dana Library, and most of us went.

COHEN: That was held in where, Ginny?

ELLIS: On the Neilson campus.

COHEN: Oh, in New Brunswick.

ELLIS: Yes, in New Brunswick.

COHEN: What do you remember about that, that event?

ELLIS: Well, I just know many of the Dana Library people and Newark people came, Newark campus people came. And I know we had a—I think we had to bring our own lunch or something like that. [Laughter] I think something like that. But anyway. No, it was okay. And he seemed to be an okay man. And wasn't he on some TV program?

COHEN: Yes, yes.

ELLIS: Or something?

COHEN: Yes, I forget the title of it.

ELLIS: Steiner, wasn't it? Steiner was the guy who...I can't remember. But it was a TV program anyway. Something to do with words, wasn't it?

COHEN: Well, Gross was the—something. He was the moderator or something of—I should, but I don't remember the name of the show. Yes, he was a national TV figure.

ELLIS: Sure. That's right. That's right.

COHEN: Yes, yes, yes.

ELLIS: But he was pleasant, I think, from what we saw of him. It's like any other president of some big company. I wasn't in awe of him, but he seemed pleasant.

COHEN: Now, after Clothier, there was Lewis Webster Jones.

ELLIS: I did not know him.

COHEN: Did you have any sense of his—

ELLIS: No, I don't even remember seeing him.

COHEN: None at all?

ELLIS: I don't think he was there very long.

COHEN: Never,...

ELLIS: And then after Gross came, it was, the man that passed away?

COHEN: Oh, Bloustein came.

ELLIS: He came. Because he was one of the youngest presidents, college presidents, I think, at that time.

COHEN: One of them—yes. Yes.

ELLIS: Yes, I think so. He came up to Newark campus one time, didn't he?

COHEN: Oh, he was in Newark many times, when he first started out. I remember meeting with a group of us. I don't remember who was there. But he—

ELLIS: I went to see him, too, when he came up here.

COHEN: He may have been there at the time. Maybe we met with him in the Special Collections Room.

ELLIS: I remember him coming up to the room.

COHEN: Did the people and yourself have any sense of what his administration, what he did for the university? Was there any conversation there?

ELLIS: No, but I thought since he was a young man that he would change some things probably to the best. Because, you know, you can't say, well, we did this 50 years ago, so we're going to do it today. I think he had things. I don't know what he changed, but I thought he was a good choice.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. His successor was Norman Samuels.

ELLIS: I don't think it was Norman Samuels.

COHEN: I'm sorry. I'm going back to what's—let's cross that out. I'm thinking ahead. Of course Bloustein's successor was the present president, Lawrence.

ELLIS: Lawrence, yes.

COHEN: But that was of course after he--

ELLIS: He died.

COHEN: Your time there.

ELLIS: Oh, yes, yes.

COHEN: When I mentioned Norman Samuels, what I actually was thinking of, the head position in Newark. You recall Malcolm Talbott who was the vice president from 1965 to 1972.

ELLIS: I remember Talbott.

COHEN: Do you have any recollections of him and what he did?

ELLIS: No, no. I just remember the name.

COHEN: Just remember the name. Any sense of what his involvement was, let's say, during the takeover of Conklin Hall or anything like that?

ELLIS: I don't remember, no. I don't remember that. No, no.

COHEN: Do you recall Talbott's— Well, Talbott was vice president. But then the first provost in Newark in 1973, I guess, was James Young. Does that mean anything, his position?

ELLIS: No, no. I remember the name, but I didn't have any connection with him.

COHEN: You were there during a succession of deans. Do you remember Herbert Woodward?

ELLIS: I remember the name.

COHEN: Dean of the college?

ELLIS: I remember the name, but I don't.... But we had really no connection with them.

COHEN: Uh-huh. Yes. I was just curious. Sometimes certain things come out.

ELLIS: No, I don't remember.

COHEN: And then after Herbert Woodward there was James Gilliland—William Gilliland.

ELLIS: No. I don't remember him.

COHEN: After Gilliland, during that time, well, probably when he was acting dean, do you remember Henry Blumenthal?

ELLIS: Oh, yes, yes.

COHEN: Okay. He was a dean.

ELLIS: Oh, yes.

COHEN: He was a dean for two years, yes.

ELLIS: Yes, I remember Blumenthal.

COHEN: Okay. What can you say about him? You say you remember him. What can you say about him?

ELLIS: Well, he was always a pleasant man when he used to come to the library, yes. I do remember him. He always talked to us.

COHEN: When the library moved to the new campus, did you see anything of Henry Blumenthal at that time or—

ELLIS: Yes, I kind of think so. Because I remember, I think, talking to him, not— Upstairs, I'd meet him upstairs, I think, when I used to be at the cataloging. He'd be around. I think so. He was very pleasant. I remember him. And, yes, because—I do remember him.

COHEN: Do you remember his successor, well, acting dean, was Gilbert Panson, the chemist?

ELLIS: Aaah.

COHEN: Do you remember him?

ELLIS: Yes, I do. But I don't remember much about him.

COHEN: Just the name?

ELLIS: Just the name.

COHEN: And then his successor was Richard Robie, who was there for about, I guess, four years.

ELLIS: No. I don't know Richard Robie.



COHEN: Didn't know Richard Robie?

ELLIS: No, no.

COHEN: And then his successor as dean was Norman Samuels.

ELLIS: Is that rather recent?

COHEN: Yes. Well, Samuels is now the provost.

ELLIS: Oh.

COHEN: I said before successor, I was thinking ahead. But Norman Samuels became the head man on campus after James Young went back to teaching.

ELLIS: Oh.

COHEN: And I that was in 1982, if I'm not mistaken.

ELLIS: Oh, that was after I left. Mm-hmm.

COHEN: Yes. So you have no recollection of that.

ELLIS: No. No, no.

COHEN: You know in the years that you were there, what are some of the things that, you know, other than what we've talked about, you know, the things that really stick out in your mind about the years that you spent on the campus here?

ELLIS: Let me see. We did a lot of—not a lot—but we were close enough that we had birthday parties for people. I mean I'll say little gatherings. We always acknowledged the birthdays or weddings or whatever it was. And we got this closeness there. And, let me see, what else do I remember? Oh, there's another person in the old building that I became friendly with and I'd like to mention: Ari Young. She was....

COHEN: Yes, we were talking about, the last time I was here, we were talking about Ari Young. And you had some interesting and very touching things to say about her.

ELLIS: She was the matron. And when I first got friendly with her, someone said, "She cleans toilets. What are you bothering with her for?" I said, "Well, someone has to do it. She does a good job. So she cleans toilets. So and I don't." But she was there a long time, and she talked about things. And told me about things that she did. She was a religious woman, too. And then she was diabetic, and she had her leg off. And then she had the second leg off. And then she died—recently. About two years ago. But I treasured her friendship, became friendly. And she was a very nice person to know. She was a black person, and that doesn't bother me.

COHEN: Did you ever have discussions with her about the question of race? Or was it—

ELLIS: Well, not to the point. But I remember one time, I guess I told you, she was already—she needed a piece of furniture, and I had suggested Koos. And she said, “I don’t think I can go there.” And I said, “Why not?” She said, “Well, I did order something one time, and it never came. And it turned out they don’t really cherish blacks.” And I said, “Well, then I’m going to put them on my list. Because,” I said, “that I do not tolerate.” And she had a son, and he became a teacher at Burton Street School. And she was a very pleasant person to know.

COHEN: When did she die, Ginny?

ELLIS: About two years ago? When did Ari die? It was about—almost two years, isn’t it?

BOB ELLIS: Two years.

ELLIS: About two years ago because we went to see her. I missed her because we kept in touch, and I called her, and she came here, and we’d take her out to lunch and so on. You know it was a nice friendship. It really was.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

ELLIS: But I keep in touch with these girls. So I don’t miss them a lot because I invite them here, and they come here. Several of these girls I never worked with, but I got to know them going back and saying hello. And they come with their husbands and their children. And once or twice a year I have them here. And it’s very pleasant.

COHEN: In the beginning you had talked about one of the things that interested you a lot which was the fact that you had an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds.

ELLIS: Yes.

COHEN: Could you sort of elaborate on that as an experience? I mean what it meant to you?

ELLIS: Well, for instance, I got to know Roz Madan, and Roz Madan was from India. And she was in library school. And I don’t think she—when I got to know her, I invited her here for one Thanksgiving, and she had never had an American Thanksgiving dinner. And my family were here, and we thought she was great. And she went on...because she was a minority and she was so different, when she first came she wore her sari. Do you remember that?

COHEN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ELLIS: I remember that.

COHEN: They were beautiful.

ELLIS: And she finally found this weather did not cooperate with saris. But she went on from Rutgers, and she went up to Brockport, New York, and now she's the director of the library that's part of the SUNY system up there. And I hear from her, and I was fascinated by her because she was a very intelligent woman, young woman, and I thought, well, she tolerates me. [Laughter] I really did. Because these people, they don't have to. But she did. And like Kathy Chung came to see me last summer. And she's from Korea. And I keep in touch with her. And she has two children. And the daughter, who's now 15, she was Carolyn, Bob? We correspond, and she writes the most beautiful letters. And Bob gets such a kick reading these letters that she writes. And I just feel most fascinated that she would even correspond with me. But that's what I like about it. Alan Kumita[??] I keep in touch with because he's Japanese, and some people, you know, from the Second World War, they think, oh, he's Japanese, you know. But he's a fine fellow, I think, very nice fellow. We saw him just last year, I think. Yes, when we went to Evan's christening. And we met him at the train here, and we went out to dinner. So that was fascinating. And of course Leslie Ota was another charmer.

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: And I'm so happy to think they would even accept me, you know, because what have I got to offer them? Just friendship.

COHEN: What kind of...?

ELLIS: Friendship. And I think it's so fascinating. Mabel Williams, and she's a black girl—some are—and I find her very interesting. I find her interesting because she's done a lot for herself. She went and got an education and, you know, I think that's great. You should never let an opportunity go by. I think it was very good, I really do. I just think these people.... I think, oh, I can't believe that they wanted to go with me.

COHEN: Did you find any interesting non-minority Americans? [Laughter]

ELLIS: Yes. I kind of like them, too. [Laughter] I find people are interesting, I really do, because everybody's got something to offer. They really do. You can't put people in a pocket and say, well, you fit in there. No. Everybody's got something to offer. For me anyway. I can't say I don't like you because, because maybe they don't like me because of that, too. Right? You can't do that.

COHEN: Is there anything we talked about that you'd like to go back to and maybe elaborate on, that we've maybe touched on but that I may have forgotten or that you may have forgotten?

ELLIS: No. When I retired, I was overwhelmed. I had a nice going-away party, and I was overwhelmed by the people that came from like Bernice Jones; she was a matron, too. And she came to my going-away party, and I.... Oh, yes, when I retired, they gave me this chair.

COHEN: Oh, yes, the Rutgers chair over there. Yes. There you see it, the Rutgers chair.

ELLIS: And that overwhelmed me. And I'll never forget, one of our— One of the things, Henry Anderson is a student now. He came as a student, didn't he?

COHEN: Well, he was a student, and then he graduated. And now he works there. Yes.

ELLIS: When I retired, he gave me a rose, just one rose. And he said, "I want you to have this." I thought that was—that was.... I saved it. I thought what a nice thing to do.

COHEN: Yes. Henry is... a nice touch.

ELLIS: It is. I was really impressed. I thought, oh, isn't that.... I thought he was a real nice guy. And I always try to see him when I go over there.

COHEN: A very gentle gentleman.

ELLIS: He is. He is, too. And Gene Bishop, he is a nice guy, too.

COHEN: He retired, you know.

ELLIS: Yes. He remarried, too, they say.

COHEN: I believe so, yes.

ELLIS: Yes, he retired. I remember. And I keep in touch with Bea [??]...in New Brunswick.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

ELLIS: Because she had a similar job as I did. So I feel very fortunate to have all these people around.

COHEN: Did you have much contact with...with any of the people, or any contact at all other than Bea and with the people in New Brunswick? Especially after we moved to the new campus?

ELLIS: No, not really. No, not really. But I used to go down there for meetings.

COHEN: Yes, I wanted to—I mean to what extent, going back again? To what extent—

ELLIS: So I would see....

COHEN: When did that come about? When did the meetings start that you were going to?

ELLIS: When I was a supervisor, I went down once a month down there. I got to see—who was in there? Maurice?

COHEN: Maurice Paone, probably.

ELLIS: Yes. And Iona Caborosi [sp].

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm. Yes.

ELLIS: And I used to see Helen Holderman [sp].

COHEN: Holderman, yes. She just retired.

ELLIS: Did she just retire now?

COHEN: Yes.

ELLIS: And Peggy Wall was there. I don't know where she is. She's still there.

COHEN: I think Peg—the last I saw she was still at ...the old....

ELLIS: And Ed Paassen [sp] I used to see. And I just saw Donaldson Sinclair as I told you. I remember him from.... So that's very pleasant.

COHEN: Yes. What kind of experience was that, being pretty much confined to Newark and then finding that you were obligated to go down to New Brunswick to these meetings and meet these other people? What did that do for the job and for your own development?

ELLIS: Well, let me see. They suggested...we made suggestions to one another, you know, about maybe we should do it this way or do it this way. But I always found that anything we suggested didn't quite go over with the last director—not the director, the head of the department. She has retired now.

COHEN: In Dana you mean?

ELLIS: Mmm.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Okay.

ELLIS: I'm not going to mention her name.

COHEN: Uh-huh.

ELLIS: And she just, you know, it was going to be her way and didn't care what we said. But it was all right. We got to know what they did down there, too. We talked about things and straightened some things out. So I got to know those people ok.

COHEN: You thought it was a worthwhile experience?

ELLIS: Yes, yes.

COHEN: I mean for your functioning on the job?

ELLIS: Yes, because they were just voices over the phone.

COHEN: Yes, yes. I got that same feeling.

ELLIS: Yes. And so there they are, and we could talk about things. And, you know, why did this happen or why did that happen? And, yes, I thought it was worthwhile.

COHEN: Okay. Anything that, again, that I haven't brought up that you'd like to say as a wrap-up statement?

ELLIS: I think.. No. Well, I thank you for the—I feel very honored that you would...

COHEN: I *thank you*. Oh, oh, oh.

ELLIS: I'm honored that you would come out and ...with my memory.

[End of Interview]

Edited by Gideon Thompson