



John F. Germany

Hillsborough Remembers

JOHN F. GERMANY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. Germany earned his B.A., with honors, in 1944 from the University of Florida and his LL.B. in 1950 from Harvard Law School. After graduating from Harvard, he practiced law in Tampa for nine years before being appointed a Circuit Judge for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit. In 1960, with the formation of the Friends of the Library, plans developed to build a new, larger library downtown. John Germany, then a Tampa judge, was elected president of the group the following year and headed up the effort to fund and build the new library. On November 1, 1999, the library he helped build was renamed in his honor.

[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

This is an interview [Tape skips] to gather information about his involvement in the library system, particularly in the 1960s. The interview is taking place on August 1, 2002 in the office of Holland and Knight, the Tampa law firm for which Judge Germany was a founding partner. In 1999, the downtown library was renamed the John F. Germany Public Library to honor Judge Germany for his involvement and support in the building of the library, and his work with the Friends of the Library. The downtown library originally opened in 1968.

The interviewer is Patrice Koerper, (PK) Public Relations & Partnerships Coordinator for the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

This interview is being conducted at the request of the current library director, Joe Stines, to preserve the library system's history. Similar, similar interviews will be conducted with each individual for whom a library has been named.

“John, if you can find a way that we can fund this library,” he said, “we’ll get it done.”

John F. Germany: I believe the new main library [Tape skips]. The library that we had, which was the main library, was actually built with Carnegie funds back in the late-- I guess late 1918, somewhere around there. It was located in an area that had a changing population and a changing business structure. [Tape skips] It was a good library, but it was relatively small. And when they asked me to become involved in it, I went and looked at this library, and there were students from all the high schools on the floor because of the fact there was not enough room. They had been assigned these, these, these subjects to do, do at the library and there wasn't enough room to do them. So I said, by all means we should get a new, larger, main library.

At that time, the Friends of the Library, they were very active. They were people like Charlie Fendig, like Na Levinson, like Elaine Neumann, and others that-- Well, Quintilla Bruton, by the way, from Plant City was, was very, very heavily involved in the state library system. And they were women who would not take “No” for an answer. So we decided, we discussed how we

were going to get this done. Where was the funding going to come from?

And at that time, Julian Lane was the mayor of the city of Tampa. And I went to the mayor and I said, “Mayor, I’ve laid out a program with which a new library could be built and the needs for it and all.” And Julian was a good friend of mine. And he said, “John,” he said, “you know I appreciate the need for libraries, but,” he said, “I have so many other needs for the city, that is just not priority for me.” And as a consequence, we didn’t get any, anything done.

Mayor Lane ran for re-election and was defeated by Nick Nuccio. And I said, “Well, you know, we’ll try again.” And I had worked with Mayor Nuccio. He was not necessarily a friend of mine, but I had worked with him as an assistant county attorney. He had been a county commissioner. And he was very receptive to the idea. He said, “John, if you can find a way that we can fund this library,” he said, “we’ll get it done.” Well, I did some research and found that there was a part of a cigarette tax that had not

been fully used by the city. And I was helped in that by the city finance director, who w--, who was very cooperative. And I took that back to the mayor, and the mayor said, “We’ll get it done.”

We needed to have the community to be involved and I asked-- Jimmie Clendenin was the editor of the Tampa Tribune. And he became a member of the Friends of the Library, and started writing very good editorials for the need of the library. Another friend of mine was Curry Witt, who also became a member of the Friends of the Library, and was very helpful in making financial contributions.

But getting back to the funding of the library itself, the mayor took, took us on a trip to New York to see the bond people, and we told them what could be done. And they agreed. And it looked like everything was fine. And then for entertainment at night, the mayor took us to the Latin Quarter. Now this is the way to go to the Latin Quarter. I had never been, but we walked in, and everybody immediately knew Mayor Nuccio; they knew the big cigars he smoked,

and we had a front row seat. I was excited, and it was something that was a story that I could tell my family when I came back home.

The, the bond issue went well. I think we raised \$7 million-- something like that-- to build the library. The location was where it is now sited. () one thing that the mayor said, he said, "John, I must select--, I must choose the architects." So you know, I said, "That's no problem, Mr. Mayor." And he chose the McElvy, Jennewein firm to do the architectural work.

We said what we'd like to do is to go to cities who have built libraries recently. Take a look at them, and then bring back good ideas back to the city to, to draft the plans for the new library here. It was difficult to get them to go along. But finally they did, and a group of us went to Dallas, New Orleans, Orlando, who had just built new libraries. The nice thing about it is, you know, when you asked somebody to help, they really knocked themselves out to help. And those people in those cities were most gracious in showing us the things that they had done and pointing out the, the faults and the good points. If you will notice, the library as it exists today is still, I think, a very handsome building. But it is very similar to the library in New Orleans.

One of the mistakes, in my opinion, was the fact that they we were sold the idea that an urban library does not need parking. And to this day, I think that that's one of the biggest mistakes we made, was not to have parking available for the people coming to the library. Now, of course, that was alleviated somewhat when the Poe Garage was built. But up until that time, it was very difficult to find a place to let your children off to go in the library to get their work done, and then pick them up. But they said urban libraries didn't need that. I think that idea has changed now. The--. It was a great pleasure when, with--, when the dedication was made in 1968, and it was open to the community. The community accepted it with great glee, and of course, [Tape skips].

Patrice Koerper: *I have a question. What you said about the parking- that's always interesting to us. Do you remember what the mindset was? Was it that the other libraries didn't think that it was needed? Was it architecturally or, or, or land use-wise?*

JFG: No, it was the other libraries. It was, it was the, the, the, it was the philosophy that an urban library did not need parking.

PK: *That's an interesting tidbit to add to all of this. Now you mentioned too, that you had visited the libraries and that it most looked like New Orleans. Do you remember any particular ideas you received from the different locations that you integrated into our library?*

JFG: Well, I'm going to have to think about that one. [Chuckle]

PK: *Well, that's OK.*

JFG: Not at the present time.

PK: *And your trip to--. Do you remember how long it was from the beginning of the time when you started working with the group of women until the time when you secured the bond funding? I mean, is this a matter of months, or is it years?*

JFG: No, no, no, no. See, what you had, you had, you had an election of mayor, for mayor, at the change of, of mayors from Julian Lane to Nick Nuccio. So we're talking about maybe three or four years.

PK: *Oh, it was that. OK, that's good to know. Tell me a little bit about the dedication. I had read somewhere that there was actually a "fly-over" of jets! Do you remember any of that or what led up to this?*

JFG: I, I, I don't think so. The thing that was, that was, you know, very touching to me is the fact that Clendenin, who was kind of the, the master of ceremonies for the dedication. They gave me-- the Friends gave me-- a gold watch, in which they had inscribed on it the date and their appreciation on it. And I lost it, or it was stolen from me. It hurt very badly. But I will say this: that my law firm at the second dedication, [Chuckle] in 1999 replaced it with another watch.

PK: ().

JFG: And this is it.

PK: *And this is it. We'll have to get a photo of that [Laughter] to go with the, the archive. The dedication- now, was there a lot of community support?*

JFG: Yes.

PK: *Was that happening, or was this something that you had to convince the community of?*

JFG: No, no, there was a lot, a lot of support. What caused this, as I said, was Clendenin would keep writing the editorials.

PK: OK.

JFG: Very important to get the media behind this situation. And it was, it was well-received.

PK: *Did you do individual fundraising, or did the funds all come through the, the bonds?*

JFG: Well we did--. [Sigh] My friend Curry Witt came on board, he was a very successful business person, and he helped fund some things in a quiet way, anonymous way that was never, you know, brought to light. But you had to--.

As you well know, Patrice, anything that you do is going to cost money. And there was no budget for this. The Friends of the Library didn't have any money. And we were very fortunate that so many of the Friends were independently wealthy at the time, so that there was no need to call on--. They could fund their own, their own project and all, rather than calling on a central location for funds. So as I said, there was no budget. We just had to raise the money on our own.

PK: *I know that you worked with a lot of different people, and you've mentioned some of them. Does anybody stick out in particular? Any memories of dealing with individuals on the Friends Board? Someone had told us that Na Levinson hosted a lot of activities in her home--*

JFG: In her home.

PK: *--to encourage participation.*

JFG: She did, and was most gracious in it. I always remember Ed Hirshberg, that I liked very much. He just recently died. He was a poet. He was a, a very outspoken individual that was extremely helpful. There was Elaine Neumann, but as I said, it was very important for my friends Jimmy Clendenin and Curry Witt to be on there, too. See, I brought some men on it. Up to that

time, there were mainly, mainly women. Now, Charlie Fendig was there. It was mainly a woman's organization. And so we, we broadened it, by putting a few men on it.

PK: *Do you remember--. I believe you worked with two library directors through this process. Can you tell me a little bit about that?*

JFG: Yes. The--. Of course, Cecil Beach was the last one. And he--. It was so wonderful. He came up for the, for the dedication-- in November of '99-- of the library. And I was delighted to see him. But, but, the, the, the library director before that was a wonderful kind of curmudgeon. He, he smoked a pipe, and I think he just recently died.

PK: *Bill Frieze.*

JFG: Bill Frieze. But--. And he did not have a lot to say. But he was so pleased to have a new library to work with, because he had practically-- . You know, he had limited funds and limited space and all. This made all the difference for him.

PK: *Wasn't there at the time in 1968--. Tell me a little bit about what Ashley looked like and the library's place on Ashley at that time. Now, there are many big buildings downtown today. What did, what did downtown Tampa look like then, and how much of a presence did the library have?*

JFG: Well, it's, it was-- , it's a tremendous presence, as you know, even today. As you come off the expressway, it's, it's the, really the first main building you see. While there are some buildings in the back: the Performing Arts Center and the, and the Times building over there. But the main, first main building is the downtown library.

And it's 1968; you've got to understand that we had just taken off the, the old railroad tracks, came down, and were on Ashley Street between Ashley and the river. Jackson Grain Company was there. You had big rats that ate the grain and would be running around. And we finally got those out of, out of the city. And the Ashley Street was just beginning to, to be rejuvenated. And of course, the library was the cornerstone of that rejuvenation.

See the, the, building that we're stand--, we're sitting in now, which is the--. This is the Bank of America building or whatever the () plaza street; they keep changing the name. The garage had not been built. So all those buildings came later.

PK: *Were those--, was that vacant land or just other uses?*

JFG: Well, other uses.

PK: OK.

JFG: Other uses that got finally cleared; got cleaned up.

PK: *So in 1968, this was a new building, amongst some older structures at that time.*

JFG: Right.

PK: *Well, it must have had a huge presence.*

JFG: It did.

PK: *It certainly did. We have lots of newspaper articles and pictures of the dedication in 1968. And I think--. Who was mayor when the building was dedicated?*

JFG: Nuccio.

PK: *Nuccio was, was still mayor.*

JFG: He was still the mayor.

PK: *And then Greco followed him sometime right in that period.*

JFG: Right. Right.

PK: *Now Greco was also in office when it, it was named in your honor.*

JFG: [Chuckle] And he spoke.

PK: [Laughter] *He had a--. He was--. He did have a long tenure.*

JFG: It was, it was interrupted with several things. [Laughter]

PK: *But he was back there again.*

JFG: He was.

PK: *Now, do you have any particular memorable experiences during that time period? Was there anything that really stands out in your mind either as a, a moment of great triumph- maybe it was when you secured the funding? Or just a, a particular memory that you have of that period?*

JFG: Well, let me give you a little background. I have always been interested in books. One of the things that stands out in my mind very clearly is the fact that when I was about seven years old, my older brother, who was eighteen years older than I, brought his fiancée to our house. And being a gracious Southern lady, she brought gifts. And to me she brought the gift of a book. It's the first time I had ever had my own book. And I cherished that.

And that started my desire to read. And I read everything I could get my hands on. You know, you knew the *Tom Swift* series-- you knew at that time it was the *Bobbsey Twins*, the *Tom Swift* series-- then you'd work up to all the more daredevil books. And it, it--, something [Tape skips] built my--, bought my home.

And oh, let's see- about 1962 on Morrison Avenue, I had a library. I would not let it be called it a den. In those days, it was very popular () dens. I would not let them call it a den. I had a library. I would not allow loud music in there. There was only a place where you could read and enjoy good conversation. And one of the things that we would do is the fact that we had a group of men who would come, and I would read aloud. I would read such things as Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, much to my wife's chagrin. Also I used that library that--.

I have three daughters. And when the young men would come to date my daughters, I'd bring them in the library and quiz them. And, and, I will tell you right now, it was the only time that they were ever on time, to try to relieve their poor date from having to sit with me in the library. So this is something that I've enjoyed all my life.

When you say there was any moment of triumph: it was a continuing--, it was a flow of, of triumph, of, of having--, of being able to read and discern. For instance, I'm what you could call almost a scatological reader. I read maybe three books at one time. And right now, I've just

been given the third volume of Mars's biography of Lyndon Johnson. It weighs five pounds! And I'm reading that, along with Theodore Rex's The Life of Theodore Roosevelt. So I do all these things at kind of one time, and it sounds like maybe that's not the best way to do it. But that's the way I do it.

PK: *So the library has a place both in your community spirit and in your home. You have your special place.*

JFG: And in my office! You have seen--

PK: *That's true.*

JFG: --the library in the office. And we have, we have one of the--. One of the rooms in our office that I'm most proud of is the library. And I don't think I've taken you in that. But what we do, we have a section in that library in which lawyers will bring books that they've read, that they don't want to keep. And so it's kind of a revolving library, lending library: all the staff and lawyers in the office. I'll take you there when we've finished this.

PK: *Thank you. I'd enjoy that. Tell me a little bit about the Friends of the Library. Now I know you said it was a group of women who first came to you and got you involved. Were the Friends doing--. I'm, I'm sure they had a lot on their plate, trying to get these libraries open. But were they doing other activities, or was their main goal to get new libraries built?*

JFG: Patrice, in all fairness, I focused on building the main library. And I did not get involved in, in other projects that they might have. So I'm not the best one to talk about that.

PK: *Well, that's OK. You've certainly contributed highly by getting this building placed. [Chuckle] We just touched on briefly the location. Do you remember how that was selected? Was it, was it an issue, or was that just where the library was going to be and everybody agreed on it?*

JFG: No. I think it was, it was, I think it was city land that was available.

PK: *OK, that would ().*

JFG: It did.

PK: *That would make sense.*

JFG: What it was, it was very important to bring it back downtown. The other one had been out some distance.

PK: *Right. And that was the goal: a real downtown location. And at this time, as you mentioned, that was the center of what was happening. Ashley was beginning to grow up.*

JFG: It wasn't the center then, but it was beginning, beginning to grow up. You're right.

PK: *Tell me a little bit too about--. We've talked about the past, and I know that you're involved in a lot of activities right now. And--. But--*

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PK: *OK, we've changed the tape, and we were talking a little bit about the fact that we've gone over some of the history of the library and your involvement in the library system. And I know that you are currently involved in a number of projects. Let's cover that a little bit, because someday that'll be history as well. What are you currently working on with the library system?*

JFG: The American Bar Association met in Chicago two years ago. At the time, I always liked to read the local newspapers. The Chicago Tribune was carrying a front, front page articles about how that the mayor, who was Daly-- Richard Daly-- had chosen a book and was asking the community-- all the community-- to read the same book. Now, this was not original with Chicago. Seattle had done it and been very successful. But it became extremely successful in Chicago. They chose the book to k--, To Kill a Mockingbird. We--. I said, "You know, if Chicago can do it, why can't Tampa?" So I came back to Tampa and got you, Patrice, and we tried to get the mayor involved. It's taken us a little time, but once again, we got a Greco in (). [Laughter]

PK: *That's true!*

JFG: And he has now given the green light. And we are working on a project in which we hopefully can select a good, generic book which will appeal to the community, be--, have a good story to it, have good lessons in it. And

hopefully, the people will latch on to it, and read it and discuss it throughout the whole community.

PK: *So your goal again is, is, is to be able to share reading and, and the importance of reading and the love of reading with the whole community?*

JFG: This is why--. And as you know, that Holland & Knight, my law firm, we sponsor a reading program at the library with the Head Start children. And it's so encouraging. The lawyers and staff go over there, and will--. The Head Start children are brought in, and we read to them. Now these children range in age from four to seven or eight, something like that. And what we do, we, we read; we let them select a book to read. And then at the conclusion, we give them a book so that they can take home with-- like somebody gave me a book-- that could make all the difference in the world to that child.

It was just wonderful, and he read with great enthusiasm. And I said, "I want to follow the career of that young boy, because I think that he's going to go a long way."

The last time

I was over there, about a month ago, I had, I first had a young child to read to, and then I read to this seven-year old child. I didn't read to him; he read to me. It was just wonderful, and he read with great enthusiasm. And I said, "I want to follow the career of that young boy, because I think that he's going to go a long way."

PK: *That's exciting. So you're still involved with the library, and the firm is involved in libraries. What do you see; do you have future projects? When you look at our library downtown, do you have any visions of what else you'd like to see there?*

JFG: Well, you know, I've got to--. Not off the top of my head. You have to give me some time to think about that one, because I, I wouldn't want to say something that I couldn't follow through on.

PK: *That's OK. I know you've been involved with our enhancing the Popular Library Department. And we talked about making that sort of a mini-downtown area where the kids--. That's where our Children's Department is downtown.*

JFG: Right.

PK: *And we're working with you on that as well ().*

JFG: And the thing about it is now, you know, that the school system is having a downtown school system for, for workers in the community so that they can bring their children, and have them educated downtown, and go and visit them when they have time off at lunch and things like that. So that gives us an opportunity to bring them to the library- gives a greater group of people to, to kind of spread our message to.

PK: *That's great! I would like to ask if there is anything that we haven't asked you about that I should have? And anything you want to share with us that we might have skipped over about your past involvement?*

JFG: Well, let's see. You know it's interesting- I'm on a, on a committee to select a replacement minister for our church. And we do telephone interviews with the applicants. And we wound up with that same question: "Is there anything [Chuckle] that we haven't asked you?" You think--. Ministers have done a better job of answering than I have. [Laughter] The--.

No, the thing about it is where, where are, where are libraries going to go? I mean, is the communication system such that lib--, books will be obsolete? I don't think so. But maybe I'm too old not to, not to think--. For instance, I don't like to read e-mails. I like to have something in my hand. And I appreciate you bringing me this book, A Land Remembered. Hard copy is very important to me. That's not going to be true with these younger people because they don't know what hard copy is. And we, we may have to change our whole system. It may be completely computerized.

But one of the things that we have to worry about also is the fact that the, the public may try to impinge on the freedom of access to books. This is a, this is a continuing struggle of

ensorship, potential censorship. And the library has to sometimes be in--, take a strong stand against that because of the freedom that they have to read those books. I'm a big believer that they should be able to read, [Chuckle] regardless of what it is. The reading will help make them a better person.

***PK:** Well, thank you. I appreciate that. I'm glad that question was asked and you answered it quite well. [Chuckle] Well, I want to thank you for being so kind to let us interview you. The past is important to our current library director, and you've added a lot to our knowledge base. And we really appreciate that. So thank you.*

JFG: Well, thank you for asking me to do it. It was my pleasure.

***PK:** Well, thank you very much.*

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[END OF INTERVIEW]