Cornell University
ILR School

ILR Memory Book Series

From time to time, on-line memory books are made available on the web site of Cornell University's ILR School as a way for past students, colleagues, and friends to post their recollections of faculty and distinguished staff members.

This series collects the comments left by visitors to these memory books.

Richard Strassberg

Richard Strassberg is retiring from his positions as Associate Director of the Martin P. Catherwood Library and as Director of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives on October 10th, 2007. The Center is the special collection unit of the Catherwood Library, the foremost library of its kind in the United States. He has held the position of the Director of the Archives since 1978 and was appointed Associate Catherwood Director in 1980.

During his thirty-nine year career at Cornell, Rich has had experience in every aspect of archival administration. Following internships at the Colorado State Archives in 1966 and the Colorado State Historical Society in 1967, he was hired as Assistant Archivist for Technical Processes in Cornell's Department of Regional History and University Archives in 1968. In 1970, he was appointed the Technical Processes Coordinator for the department. In 1971, Richard joined the staff of the Labor-Management Documentation Center as its Associate Archivist and moved to his present position as Director of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives in 1977. (The Center was renamed in 1995.) The Kheel Center is among the leading repositories of its kind in North America.

Richard holds an MA, with honors, in Librarianship with a concentration in archival administration and a graduate degree in American history. He is the recipient of the New York State Chancellors Award for Excellence in Librarianship and has been a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists since it was founded. Richard is an active general archival consultant, with a specialization in library and archival security and writes and lectures widely on security as well

as other aspects of archival administration. He is the founder of the Society of American Archivists' Security Roundtable and originated and co-taught the Society's Security Workshop since 1990.

Richard and his wife Marilyn have just celebrated 41 years of marriage. They have two children, Michael and Pamela, and six grandchildren. Marilyn will continue her employment as Director of Residential Services at Longview, a senior residence on South Hill, after Richard's retirement to the status of house husband, home contractor, and occasional archival consultant.

The following submissions were made by visitors to the memory book from August 28, 2007 to December 19, 2007.

I don't know Richard, except from a message he once sent to the Cornell Library listserv, titled "acronymphobia". Here's the conclusion: "Let us all aspire to remain clear thinking, straight talking librarians and archivists who do not obfuscate, dissemble, confuse or coin eminently forgettable acronyms to the infinite pain of all those who must attempt to decipher them." Amen! I keep a print-out of this e-mail in my copy of Richard Mitchell's classic book, "Less than words can say".

- Fellow librarian, Ithaca, NY Aug 28 2007

Forgetting for a moment what your friendship means to me, I can't convey enough how essential the Kheel Archive has been to my students and me when we have done research involving data from NYS teacher contracts. The staff of the archive and you have been fantastic over the years and your file of public contract provisions in NYS is a real externality for researchers.

- Ron Ehrenberg, Ithaca Aug 30 2007

When I heard about Richard's retirement, I had two thoughts: First, is he really retiring? I think I want proof of this. Two, that I will miss his professionalism, his wisdom, and his humor. And, his understanding of the sublime nature of beer. Where I grew-up, we would call someone like Richard a "stand-up guy." It has been my honor to know Richard and I wish him the best. Mike Smith, Director, Walter Reuther Library.

- Mike Smith, Walter Reuther Library Sep 4 2007

I first met Richard professionally long before I ever came to Cornell. My impressions then still hold true today. Richard is a passionate professional, deeply committed to the preservation and dissemination of archival information. His commitment to the historical record also requires that all archivists follow the highest professional ethics, regardless of whether it is ensuring the security of one's facility or respecting the physical and intellectual property rights of donors. Richard's passion for the profession has also led him to constantly explore how new technologies might be able to allow us to do things better. People like Richard are the reason that I am so proud to say that I work at Cornell.

- Peter Hirtle, Ithaca Sep 4 2007

I recall with pleasure our many years of friendship. You have made a significant contribution not only to the ILR school, but also to the archival profession, and to your colleagues in CIRL. Take good care of Shirley's turtle. My very best wishes for a long and rewarding retirement. I'm sure you will know how to make the most of it.

- Margaret Chaplan, Champaign, Illinois Sep 4 2007

Richard Strassberg was literally the first person I met in Ithaca on a cold and dark February weekend when I interviewed for my first position at Cornell nearly 10 years ago. He and Gordon Law took a chance in hiring me, with no background in ILR, as a cataloger for both Catherwood and the Kheel Center. I'll be forever grateful to Rich for that opportunity. Rich's many contributions to the archival profession, to labor and social historians, and to the preservation of the historical record are well-documented. Less often mentioned, but no less important, are his warm personal qualities and genuine concern for others. Those of us who've had the good fortune to work with him over his long career will miss those qualities the most. It is difficult to imagine the ILR School without Rich. I wish him long life and good health with which to enjoy his retirement.

- David Banush, Ithaca, NY Sep 7 2007

I too am a huge fan of Rich's acronymphobia piece. He allowed us to reprint it in the April 2006 issue of Kaleidoscope and it can always be read here: http://www.library.cornell.edu/staffweb/kaleidoscope/volume14/April2006.html. Congratulations and best wishes to Rich on his retirement.

- Elizabeth Teskey, Ithaca Sep 18 2007

Rich, You are one of the few who was already at ILR when I arrived in 1980. Your assistance and advice have been much appreciated over the years. I must say, however, that even more important to me have been our all too infrequent hallway conversations. They have been wide ranging, nearly always focused on contemporary politics or our (usually) shared outrage at some aspect of current events. You have given me pieces to read, websites to visit, and a perspective too often missing from my life. Keep your faith in the future and the inevitable return of the pendulum. Good luck always. Ron

- Ron Seeber, Marcellus, NY Sep 18 2007

Rich, So many changes -- when we started working here the Labor Management Documentation Center site was housed in the library through which the hallway connected the faculty administration building to the tunnel to the Garden Avenue complex. Remember the LMDC flood and your unselfish determination to save all the documents? Oh, what a job you and your staff had and your brilliant, fast acting ideas saved thousands of documents. Can you still picture your shared LMDC space with the displaced Statler staff and students during their building renovation project? What a challenging endeavor. I will always remember the times we worked together and miss your ideas, advice, and good cheer, but especially the hats. You have the neatest hats. I don't know if the new ILR signage will appear prior to your departure, but you certainly put every effort into getting the job done. It will become a reality one of these years! Your accomplishments are many, your deeds admirable, and your kindness profound. The

Kheel Center is magnificent, thank you for leaving ILR, Cornell, and the world a much better place. In this next Chapter of your Book of Life relax, have fun, and take over the house completely before Marilyn retires. It's a man thing, you know! Blessings,

- Ann Herson, Ithaca, NY Sep 18 2007

Rich, Congratulations on a job well done. The Kheel Center along with the Catherwood Library are the "jewels in the crown" of the ILR School. Through your work and initiatives you have helped to make it so. You have made a lasting contribution to the intellectual foundation upon which the reputation of the School rests. I wish you the very best in the years ahead and thanks again for your encouragement and interest in my work. Vernon

- Vernon Briggs, Ithaca, NY Sep 18 2007

It's been a pleasure to work with you over the years in the various capacities. Your work will always be remembered both at ILR and with me personally. Your assistance in my early years of conservation will always be appreciated. You have left "your mark" on all of us who have been fortunate enough to work with you in some manner. I wish you and yours all the best in the future. Joani

- Joan Brink, Freeville Sep 19 2007

I have nothing clever, and very few words, to write. The old place won't be the same without you, Rich, and I hope you find fulfillment in whatever you do now; you certainly deserve it.

- David Block, Ithaca Sep 19 2007

It has truly been a pleasure to work with Rich over the past two years. I have learned so much about the Kheel Center and Archiving. Rich will be greatly missed. Good luck to you and Marilyn as you start this next journey in life. I hope you come back to visit us. Sincerely, Laura Robinson

- Laura Robinson, Sheldrake Point Sep 19 2007

Your impact on the profession will never be forgotten. Keep fighting the good fight. Best wishes, Barbara

- Barbara Berger Eden, Cornell University Library Sep 19 2007

Hi Rich - Sending along my very best wishes for a happy and healthy retirement. It's been a pleasure to know you and work with you, particularly during the time that EDI occupied temporary space in the library. Your patience (when our toaster set off a smoke alarm) and humor (with pizza deliveries at the Circulation Desk) as well as your attentiveness to any and all security and safety questions, added much to a successful and memorable experience. Again, congratulations and best wishes! Sharon

- Sharon VanCampen, Ovid, NY Sep 21 2007

Rich, My memories of Catherwood will always include you. You are very knowledgeable and fun to work with. ILR has been very lucky to have you as the Director of the Kheel Center. Enjoy your retirement and come back often to visit.

- Jean Gustafson, Liverpool, NY Sep 21 2007

Dear Richard, Congratulations on your retirement decision. I know you will enjoy your new adventure as much as I am. You will soon wonder how you found the time to work. Wishing you health and happiness in your retirement. As ever, Fran

- Fran Secord, Burdett Sep 22 2007

Rich, I was beginning to believe that the day of your retirement was never going to arrive. I have so many fond memories of the times we spent together while we were colleagues (can you believe that it was 33 years!) at the Martin P. Catherwood Library. What probably sticks out the most were the adventures we had on our various collecting trips (especially the one to Cincinnati in 1990. As I recall this rather large collection was one floor up from the one where the elevator stopped. And, yes, how can we forget being kept up most of the night by rowdy fans of the Cincinnati Reds who had just won the world series; over "my" Boston Red Sox). Also, clear in my mind is the occasional flooding that occurred in the library, especially the one in room 131, where we spent more than a few hours rescuing as many items as we could that were stored on the lower shelves. Your contributions to the many aspects of archival administration and archival security are certainly well documented and these contributions have made you greatly respected by colleagues far and wide. As you join the "Retirement Fraternity" I just want to add that I have always appreciated the sound advice you had to offer and which you gave so freely. I am also greatly impressed with your generosity, your positive attitude and, perhaps most importantly, your concern for others. You will be greatly missed but, as I quickly learned, it is time now to turn your attention to activities, whatever they may be, that you have managed to put aside or that were given lesser attention. Thank you for the privilege of having been a friend for all these years! Phil

- Phil Dankert, Ithaca, NY Sep 23 2007

Dear Rich, This is proof once again that if you talk about something long enough eventually it will happen. You're finally retiring! I have very few memories of ILR that do not include you. You were sitting there at the table when I interviewed for my first job, and you were part of what made me feel both welcomed and intrigued to join the ILR community. I remember that you made a point in that first interview of telling me that it would not be appreciated if I were to spend my time in the closet that was my first office writing my first novel, and I'm happy to report that I have yet to write it. That office was right across from yours and we had pretty constant interaction. As the years have gone on, we see each other less and less, but your presence is always felt. Your passion for what you do and for all that you have accomplished has been one of the great driving forces behind the ILR culture. Despite your love of a good kvetch, you are at heart one of the most positive, optimistic, and human people I've ever had the pleasure to work with. Good luck with the next set of life projects. Enjoy your freedom and your family. I'm sure you'll come back often. -David

- David DeMello, Ithaca, NY Sep 23 2007

Dear Rich: It is hard to imagine the Archives and ILR School without you. 39 years -- that's impressive!! It has been wonderful to work with you, both as a faculty member and as dean. As a faculty member, I haven't used the archives extensively but when I have had questions, your responsiveness has been truly impressive. With regard to my time as dean, I cannot thank you enough for your vision for the archives, sage advice, and effective work with ILR alumni and other potential sources of materials. Your passion about Catherwood, the Archives, and your deep belief in the school's mission is very, very special. In fact, I don't think anyone believes in the school more than you do -- and also in keeping its history alive. Your perspective and good judgment about what is appropriate for the archives and your careful, sensitive work with potential sources of material has made an enormous difference. I have especially appreciated your counsel on such matters, while I was dean. Finally, your humaneness and cheerful manner is contagious. You are leaving an incredible legacy for your successors to live up to and build on. Best of luck in your future endeavors. Hope you keep in touch. All the best, Ed

- Ed Lawler, Ithaca Sep 24 2007

One time Richard asked me how I would treat an item from the Kheel Center Collection. I explained what I would do and ended by saying, "Of course, I'm "old school". He responded: "But that's the best school!" I appreciated that vote of confidence, but also that really describes his approach, and his commitment to the collections in the Kheel Center. I've always enjoyed his dedication, his passion for the collections, and his wonderful humor. I hope his "occasional archival" consultancies continue to bring him back to Cornell.

- Michele Brown, Department of Preservation and Collection Maintenance Sep 24 2007

Richard, Well, what can I say? We have had our differences over the years. Yet, we also have many similarities and agreements - which surprises many people, including ourselves at times. I respect your sincere dedication to the Kheel Center, Catherwood Library and ILR. I cannot really conceive of this place without you. You are a true professional. And I have learned much from you. I will miss you. Best wishes to you in this next phase of your life. Deb

- Deb Lamb-Deans, Lansing Sep 24 2007

Rich, Thanks for all your support. I consider myself very fortunate to have worked with you and rely on your expertise. Have a wonderful time with your family and especially your grandchildren. Stay healthy and happy. Angie

- Angela Wagner, Groton, NY Sep 24 2007

Hi Rich, I, like so many others, am amazed that the date of your retirement has finally come and horrified (!?!) that I haven't learned all you have to teach! YIKES! It's been great to have your guidance from my early days in circ and reference, up until just last week when we spoke about the best way to manage a planned donation of memorabilia. It has also been more than a little interesting to talk about labor history (yes, I DO know where the bones are buried), hot political topics, and some of the strange and wonderful constructs of popular culture. While I know you are long since due time with your family and

your hobbies, it is hard to imagine the Kheel Center without your insights and driving energy which have lifted it out of the sphere of mere technique and moved it into realm of true service. Best wishes for a wonderful retirement and many happy and healthy years to come, Barb

- Barb Morley, Alpine Sep 24 2007

Dear Richard, It's very difficult to imagine this library without your presence. Our Department would not have existed if not for your initiative to create a preservation program at Cornell. In the history of our department, you will always be remembered as a 'pioneer'/leader in preservation of historic and artistic works. I feel sad that you won't call me about an unusual conservation case...; however, I hope you would visit the lab in the future when you have more free time. Wishing you a great time in doing the things you enjoy. Cordially, Tatyana

- Tatyana Petukhova, 25 Janivar Drive, Ithaca, NY 14850 Sep 24 2007

Dear Rich, Over the years, you've been a colleague, a mentor, and a friend. I've always enjoyed our lively discussions, and I've learned a lot from you about what really matters in being an archivist. While I'll miss you in your role as director of the Kheel Center (you'll be a hard act for someone else to follow!), I'll look forward to working with you to improve our security systems and to a continuing friendship. All my best for happiness and health in your next stage of life's adventures. Elaine

- Elaine Engst, Cornell University Library Sep 24 2007

Richard: Catherwood and the ILR School have benefited from your long term of service - you must have started very young to have been here at Cornell for 39 years!!! Throughout the years of reading about your many contributions to Catherwood and the School, your name has always been associated with "Excellence", "Quality" and "High Standards" - PLUS most importantly, you were always a NICE PERSON!!! The best to the best! Enjoy your retirement but keep wearing those unique hats as only you can!!!! Martha Smith

- Martha Smith, 101 Juniper Drive/Ithaca, NY Sep 24 2007

Shaman of the file boxes, keeper of the secrets, scholar of the nefarious, intellectual of the institutions, guru of the Kheel -- no one soul can fill those voids! Who will know where the bodies are buried now? The Dean will have to authorize five new lines to fill the gaps. I lift a pint to the strong heart, keen mind, and firm hand of Rich Strassberg -- brother historian and co-conspirator in the plot to redirect the loathsome drift of the nation. Congratulations on a job done with good cheer and great humanity.

- Jeff Cowie, Ithaca Sep 24 2007

Rich - I remember long ago going into the dark, dusty archives of LMDC in the basement of Ives to research union constitutions. You were notable among the friendly and helpful staff. Your wisdom and expertise will be missed.

- Claudia Strednak, Newfield NY Sep 25 2007

Hi Rich - Thanks for your career-long interest in preservation, security, and disaster planning -- your commitment to these topics ensured that they remained on SAA's radar. I also am grateful for your support when I first moved to Ithaca without a job. I hope you enjoy this next phase of your life and that you bring to it your signature passion and vitality. Anne

- Anne Kenney, Ithaca, NY Sep 25 2007

Dear Rich, Well, as much as I am going to miss you, I can't say that your impending plunge into the good life is not well deserved. You made an invaluable contribution to CUL, the University and our profession. Please do promise, however, that retirement won't mean a lack of presence in the Library. Pat

- Pat Schafer, Olin Library Sep 25 2007

Rich- Congratulations. It's been an honor to be your assistant. Thank you for all the years of support, countless opportunities and friendship you provided. Enjoy the next stage. Melissa

- Melissa Holland, Brooktondale Sep 25 2007

Dear Rich, "Thank you" doesn't begin to express my feelings as I think about what it has been like working with you at the Kheel Center. The star alignment was just right when I applied for my dream job eight years ago and you hired me. Your support, your passion for truth and justice, and your genuine commitment to the archival profession and the ILR community have truly made my daily work life more full and meaningful. I will miss talking shop and pondering the intricacies of life with you day in and day out. My warmest wishes for a happy, healthy retirement. Patrizia

- Patrizia Sione, Kheel Center Sep 25 2007

Sorry not to be able to make it to your retirement shindig, Rich, but I do want to say "Hail and farewell!" I've really enjoyed our acquaintance, and wish you many years of happy gadding about as an archivist emeritus. The Post-Strassberg period of the Library's history is bound to be dull, but we'll do our best to carry on. Hope you can come back and visit! All the best, Margaret N.

- Margaret Nichols, Ithaca, N.Y. Sep 25 2007

Richard, Thank you for the advice, help, and inspiration you've given me during my time at the Catherwood Library. You will be missed, but your presence will continue to be felt here for many years to come. Best of luck in whatever you choose to pursue next!

- Jim DelRosso, Ithaca, NY Sep 27 2007

Rich - We've worked together a long time and you've been a good friend and mentor through the years. I want you to know how very much I appreciate your knowledge, your support, and your compassion. I believe I acquired much of my sense of duty and stewardship from working with you and Shirley. You were always good at talking me through some of the toughest times in my life, too. For that, I thank you. It's really hard to believe that we've reached retirement age. I hope this phase of your life is everything you and Marilyn deserve. Enjoy those grand babies and may you both remain happy and healthy for many more years. -Your friend, Linda

- Linda Young, Catherwood Library Sep 27 2007

Richard, I really enjoyed our encounters and chats in the ILR hallway, library, at receptions, events, or other places. I will miss that opportunity for a brief informed discussion. I am sure you will easily find new targets for your passion and dedication. Please keep your humor and good spirit, stay healthy and enjoy the next phase of your life. Best wishes, Antonio

- Tony Ruiz, ILR-Extension Sep 28 2007

All the best to you Richard Strassberg! I certainly want to thank you for your kind willingness to archive the Hubert Albertz Papers - the history of a rank & filer's efforts to clean up his racketeering SEIU Local 32E.

- George Albertz, England Oct 6 2007

Richard, You are a scholar in the truest sense - seeking knowledge, engaging in debate, and teaching those around you. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and expertise with me over these last few years, I will miss you. Best wishes to you and your family, Mary

- Mary Newhart, Trumansburg, NY Oct 9 2007

Richard, Now that you have officially retired, and some other commitments are taken care of, I have a few moments to think about what this means to Catherwood, the Kheel Center, and to me personally. As I said at your reception, and at the advisory council meeting earlier this month, I will miss your advice and council which proved nearly always right on the mark. I quoted Shakespeare (with proper attribution, of course) at your party to say that "A friend should bear his friend's infirmities." With great patience, you have borne nearly all of mine over the twenty-five years we have worked together and Cornell is an even greater institution because of your efforts. Your retirement is richly deserved. You have a very keen mind and I know that you will make good use of the time to explore and continue making a significant difference in all of your endeavors. My best wishes.

- Gordon Law, Ithaca, NY Oct 15 2007

Rich, It has been a pleasure working with you and discussing our mutual concerns on various records management issues. To have more time for family, especially grandchildren, is a gift to treasure. Enjoy! Eileen

- Eileen Keating, Ithaca Oct 15 2007

Rich: Of course we'd known one another for some time as colleagues and "friends of a friend," when I came across my stash of materials from the Syracuse University Library strike of the early 1970's. What to do? As a librarian I knew I wasn't doing them justice, keeping them in an unused bedroom in my mid-19th century house. For a number of reasons I wasn't willing to consign them all to SU (who had behaved so badly those many years ago). Then it hit me: Rich would take them! And so you did. So now that my own small part in labor history has been safely consigned to the bosom of the Kheel Center, I can say (as I probably forgot to do before): Thank you, for your professionalism and humor, and willingness to take off my hands the evidence of my historical moment as a labor organizer. And the ties, of course, who could forget those? Diane

- Diane Hillmann, Jacksonville, NY Dec 10 2007

Richard, I am certain the word "retirement" is for you just another expression for a new focus on a new range of activities. Please accept my congratulations on your remarkable achievements in a long and dedicated career. Kind regards, Patrick

- Patrick J. Stevens, Ithaca Dec 10 2007

Rich, While I never had a chance to speak to you about the archives or about history, I enjoyed our hallway conversations and my first fishing lesson! Happy Fishing! Sarosh

- Sarosh Kuruvilla, Ithaca Dec 10 2007

Richard, Congratulations on your retirement. I wish all the best to you always. Your accomplishments here at Cornell have been impressive. Now you can have more time for your family and special projects. Ada

- Ada K. Albright, Ithaca, NY Dec 10 2007

Rich, This comes to extend to you Best Wishes for your next set of activities and also to express sincerest appreciation for your many years of service to the ILR School. Your contributions will be deeply enduring and stay in our memory and gratitude. Susanne

- Susanne Bruyere, Ithaca Dec 10 2007

Hello Richard, Although I only spent four years working at Catherwood, I feel like an alumnus of the ILR school and part of its extended family. I have fond memories of working with you from 1989 to 1993, especially those weekly planning group meetings. A stint cataloging LMDC pamphlets in RLIN cemented my interest in Reference librarianship. You were a wise sage to a novice librarian in her first professional position. As a Canadian working in the US (before NAFTA) you advised me not to gloat about Canadian health care, etc. (where was Michael Moore when I needed him!). Have a wonderful retirement and enjoy those grandchildren! Linda Lowry, Business & Economics Librarian, James A. Gibson Library, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

- Linda Lowry, Stevensville, Ontario (Canada) Dec 10 2007

Rich, Working with a colleague of your extraordinary expertise and exemplary character will always be among my fondest recollections of the ILR School. The invaluable help that you have given to me so readily and generously over the years has benefited me immensely, and I can tell you honestly that I was never unmindful or unappreciative of just how large a debt I owed you. The ILR School is immeasurably richer because of your long, unstinting dedication to the success of its educational mission. I sincerely hope that your retirement is everything you imagined it would be, and more. Clete

– Clete Daniel, ithaca Dec 10 2007

Dear Richard, In addition to your signal achievements in archives management, I will best remember your pioneering work in promoting preservation at Cornell. Long before the establishment of the preservation program in 1985, your often lone voice was heard bringing the preservation message to Cornell, and it seems remarkable that your early efforts resulted in such a strong, healthy and successful program. During the program's formation period, when general support was barely perceptible and negative opposition was strong, your faith and persistence was instrumental in bringing about a gradual acceptance, and it is largely because of your courageous support that the program survived. This support has always been greatly appreciated, as well as your steadfast friendship. I know you will continue to work towards some of the ideals that we share, and wish you a happy and productive retirement. John F. Dean

– John F. Dean, 1433 Coddington Road, Brooktondale Dec 12 2007

Rich, Congratulations on a distinguished career and thank you for your many contributions to Cornell and to the profession. I wish you a long and pleasurable second career. Ed

– Ed Weissman, Cornell University Library Dec 19 2007