

Oral History Interview with Dr. Andrew T. Seaman
Conducted by Angela Baker, 1993
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Position: Professor of English; Senate, Board of Governors; Acting VP Academic and Research;
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Dates associated with Saint Mary's: 1966-2005

Scope and Content: Major topics include: Educational and research background, maritime literature, changes in the English Department, co-education, changes in the student population, financing the University.

Transcript:

AB: Ok. Well, let's start with a little bit of background information. Could you state your full name please.

AS: Andrew Thompson Seaman.

AB: And your date and place of birth.

AS: Well, I was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia in 1941.

AB: And what was, could you describe your educational background?

AS: Well, my family moved to Sackville New Brunswick actually when I was 2 years old and I grew up in Sackville and I went to the Sackville High School and Mount Allison for an undergraduate degree and I taught school in Ontario for a year and came back to Dal to do a Masters and then I got a lecturing job at Saint Mary's immediately after that, which was in 1966 and then Saint Mary's gave me a leave of absence and a little bit of financial aid to go and do my Ph.D. and I did the residency, for the Ph.D., 1970-72 in Dublin at the University College Dublin and then eventually went back for a sabbatical and finished up the thesis a little bit later.

AB: Oh yes, so what have your research interests been?

AS: Well, I did my Masters in modern poetry and the actually I wrote a thesis on Dylan Thomas and when I was looking for a place to go for a Ph.D., and of course there's some difficulty in getting into a Ph.D. program unless you're absolutely brilliant of course, and then they come looking for you. (laughs) I applied to a number of places, one was in the

British Isles and I applied to a number of places, with some projects based on the MA thesis on Dylan Thomas and also WB Yeats whom I had an interest in at the time, and University College Dublin picked up the Yeats, thing, wrote me back and said they were interested in getting students into their doctoral program in Anglo-Irish studies, but they had too many people interested in WB Yeats and would I be interested in doing one of a number of projects that they had available that they wanted researched? And in a way it was too good an opportunity to pass up and I was interested in the idea of getting to Ireland itself. Anyway, so I wrote back and told them, sure I'll do anything you want, so we settled on a project eventually on the 19th century Anglo-Irish romantics - the background to the Celtic Twilight Movement, WB Yeats and that group.- They were strongly influenced by a man by the name of Standish James O'Grady who had popularized a good deal of the Celtic mythological background. He had popularized a good deal of the Celtic mythological background he had picked up from the literal translations that a number of his scholarly friends were doing. He didn't actually read Gaelic himself but he would take the scholarly translations and rewrite them in a popular style, actually he transformed them quite basically into the 19th century fairy-tales in a sense, with a Victorian morality and all the rest of it, you know, so they were really quite different but he re-wrote them and was one of the primary influences on the turn of the century generation of Irish poets. So, I did a thesis on him and it proved to be a very interesting, and filled in a lot of material on 19th century Anglo-Irish background. I wouldn't have known otherwise but I haven't been able to teach that very often.

I've taught a couple of courses related to it since I came here, I mean since I returned but what they needed taught here in our English department was primarily Modern poetry which I taught for a number of years and then partly because of my connection with the Romantics through the Anglo-Irish, I began to teach a course on English Romanticism. I've taught that quite consistently ever since, then also we got very interested in Maritime literature several years ago in the department here and Ken McKinnon and I got a course going here in Maritime literature and I've taught that off and on ever since and most of the material I've published has actually been in that area, so that really, my research that resulted in the publication was almost entirely on Maritime literature.

AB: So when did that trend towards Maritime literature start taking place?

AS: Well, there was a great deal of interest developing amongst the Maritime universities in the 70's. You might say that the Canadian Studies generally came of age in the 70's. In the 60's it was difficult to be taken seriously if you were offering a course even in Canadian literature at large. Some of the bigger centers like Toronto had courses in Canadian literature, but very few of the smaller universities didn't and uh all that changed quite radically through the 60's right into the 70's. So that, by the time that I came back

from doing my Ph.D. studies in Ireland, there was certainly emerging an interest on the part of students particularly in taking a course that had to do with the literature of the area. Terry Whalen in the English Department began an enterprise that that became the Atlantic Provinces Book Review, and it was published originally through Saint Mary's out of the English Department. It was later became an independently funded publication and he became the editor of it as an independently funded publication for quite a few years and several of us who were interested in Maritime literature got to write reviews for that publication and that sort of encouraged us and gave us a bit of an outlet and then.. oh, I wrote a review article or two for *Acadiensis*, after that and I submitted an article to the *Canadian Literature Quarterly* which was accepted and so on so gradually it simply it seemed a worthwhile area to get involved in research and publication in, because it hadn't been done to death by anybody. It was sort of fresh and a chance to get in on the ground for something.

We were of course encouraged to publish. Saint Mary's had never been a "publish or perish" institution really except that in recent years it's been very difficult to get promoted unless you have a pretty good publishing record. But I felt at the time that there really wasn't much point in trying to get into the very strenuous competition to publish in the area of English Romantics for instance, to get an article on Keats published in one of the leading British periodicals is an uphill battle, you know. However, this was something we felt was worth doing, you know because, there wasn't, there hadn't been any research done on Maritime literature. A lot of the authors were almost totally unknown, you know authors like Thomas Radall were not very well known and he, has an international reputation but wasn't much thought of, or spoken very highly of locally. So to get some of these, some of these authors into a better public view seemed worth doing.

Allan Bevin had in the 70's, got the University of Toronto press for instance to publish, re-publish Frank Parker Day's novel, 'Rockbound', wrote an introduction for it and so on, a number of these reprints were being done which was getting some of the literature into into print again, so it could be used in courses and so one could actually acquire some of the texts and the Canadian, what's it called, the series, the Canadian Library series from McLelland and Stewart was also increasingly putting more Maritime material into publication and generally speaking through the 70's and into the 80's the whole thing began to take on the feeling of a legitimate area of scholarly studies, prior to that you were really looked upon as somebody who was trying to escape from the academic grind if you indulged in such frivolous sorts of things as local literature, but, you know it's come onto its own subsequently.

AB: So what changes have you noticed in the English department since 1966?

AS: Well, I was the fifth member of the department or David Picket and I were the fourth and fifth members of the department in 1966 and there are now 18, that's quite a change. In the early 70's it was an entirely different scene from anything in the 80's, certainly the 90's, the university was expanding so rapidly I think that we hired 4 people, another year we hired 3, another year we hired 2 and so on, nowadays or subsequently, in the 80's the only hiring that was ever done was to replace somebody retired or, or well actually I guess Mike Larsen ... when he became Dean of Arts was really in the I guess in 1990 was the only case we had of somebody actually moving into administration and had had to be replaced for that reason and there hadn't been that many retirements. Actually, through the 80's we virtually hired no-one, so that rapid period of expansion in the 70's was quite exciting in a way and of course it was a period of very rapid inflation as well. So that salaries went up very rapidly and the cost of living went up simultaneously at the same rate, but it meant that a considerable amount of negotiation was required to keep salaries abreast of the cost of living and also we formed a union, a faculty union, in the mid 70's which became necessary because of inequalities in the pay structure. It was getting to the point where people who had, well, there was a real disadvantage to have been here for a long time. 'Cause you kept getting pay increases, you know 4% of your salary, 5% of your salary but when your salary was only \$6000 in the first place that didn't amount to much you see, and of course they were having to bring in people at higher levels subsequently so sometimes we had a situation in which, actually a younger person without the same experience would be making a significant amount more than one of the older members of the faculty and in order to try to straighten this whole thing out we, some of us decided there should be a union here.

It was a big decision because academics generally speaking don't like unions in a general sense or at least they don't like to become unionized themselves and there was a strong feeling that it ought to be done through the Canadian University Teachers Association, but there was also a reluctance on the part of the CAUT to do that, to get into the business of legal negotiation and bargaining and that sort of thing, so, we devised a strategy here at Saint Mary's and called in the Canadian Union of Public Employees, to unionize the faculty because in fact the salaries are paid substantially by government grants there was a case to be made that we were public employees of a kind, of course, CUPE was very anxious to get a foothold on campuses, prestigious for one thing and it was an expansion of their territory, so they were gung-ho about that and they came on campus and began to organize for a union and that really got the CAUT up and going and in response to us bringing the Canadian Union of Public Employees on the scene. They sort of quickly got organized and countered that with a campaign of their own and eventually they won out over CUPE on campus, so that in fact the Canadian Association of University Teachers did organize the first union on campus here and it was one of the first unions here in the Maritimes. But, in a sense it was all a plot. We didn't really care whether it was CUPE or

the CAUT that did it and we would have preferred the CAUT because it was out professional association so it was a bit of a trick, but it worked anyway and we got organized at that point and negotiated a salary scale and because I had been here since 1966 myself I was also suffering from this 6% of nothing is nothing, syndrome. I got a large raise out of the contract, about 25% of my salary at the time which was probably only \$3000 but still, (laughs) a lot of money at the time. And of course the unions played a fairly important role at Saint Mary's ever since. I was president of the union in the 70's for a couple of years ,which was interesting to say the least. I found it very strenuous - had several, several significant cases - the Peter March tenure case came up during my period as President of the union and that was a long difficult fight. As President of the union I defended him and it was more or less in the same sense as a lawyer taking on a client. If you are a lawyer for the defense, you defend your client to the best of your abilities: got nothing to do with what you think about the case -there were certainly two sides to the March case all right, but, we supported him to the best of our ability and we eventually won out in that one as well. But it went on for a long time and even came down to a Board of Inquiry being set up, composed of experts from outside that university, who decided the question, provided the final analysis.. I don't know.

AB: Ok, you were, you were here when women first were admitted as a, full time students to the university.

AS: Yeah, that's true.

AB: What effect did that have on the school?

AS: Oh, it was without a question a positive influence. There was no other way that Saint Mary's could have gone, I mean, there was no real possibility you know, in retrospect once use, there was no real possibility or reason for Saint Mary's to remain a male college. There are virtually no such things as male colleges now, or women's colleges for that matter, I mean Mount St. Vincent had gone equally the other way admitting male students. Segregated education was simply a thing of the past by that time. Probably Saint Mary's hung on longer than it should have but that was partly due to the fact that it was administered by the Jesuits when I first came to Saint Mary's in 66 Father Fischer was the President, I forget whether there was another one between Fischer and Labelle or not. I guess not. I didn't follow Labelle, I followed Father Fischer and the Father Labelle years were quite fun, a lot of action. It was the beginning of that big expansion period. The high-rises went up at that time, I think, - got my chronology straight -, and Father Labelle regime was known for its lavish faculty dinner dances and parties and things like that. He was he liked to put on a bit of a show in that way, as a matter of fact we had a lot of faculty parties as well. And a number of the Jesuits particularly in the administration quite

frequently came to faculty social functions and were very much a part of the gang in a sense (chuckle) but they had seen the writing was on the wall sort of thing, with regard to co-education and I don't think there was any real opposition to the idea, mind you, when, you've probably heard this story from other people but when the first female student registered at St. Mary's it was actually done as part of a stunt and the girl actually had a boy's name, or a name that could equally apply to either sex, like Francis or something and I forget exactly what her name was, but anyway she simply registered and nobody at the time caught onto the fact that this was the girl who was registering and of course there was never anything of what shall we say a legal nature that prevented women from registering at Saint Mary's university, so there was actually nothing that needed to be done in order to admit them in a way. It was just a matter of convention and the fact that Saint Mary's was a male institution. It began as a boys high-school of course and gradually sort of made the transition to a college and well, I think up until the point at which women started to register here, it had just been accepted that it was a male institution.

Now somebody may contradict me about that, it may have been that some, some official step was taken by the Board of Governors, by the Senate but I rather doubt that anything official was ever done 'cause there was no reason why they couldn't have registered anyway, except that they would have been turned down by the Admissions Department on the grounds that they were female and if anybody had chosen to fight it legally, probably they would have won. I really don't know, but it happened rather gradually, wish I could remember that first girls' name. She was actually in my English 200 course at that time and there wasn't a great stir made about it either, there was no reason why she shouldn't be there ever then, so there were probably some of the old guard who raised their eyebrows a bit, but honestly I would say that the actuality really came after everybody was mentally prepared for it in 68, I think it was 68 when we had the first girl register. I can't imagine even in 68 that anyone would have dared pretend that there was something essentially wrong with this, I mean it was a silly idea really to say, goodness you can't have women here of all things, I mean why not? Nobody could have given a sensible rational answer to the question why not so they just shut up about it you know. Certainly we weren't the slightest bit surprised or concerned. When I first come in 66 there were actually quite a few professors who wore black gowns to teach, yep, I don't think I ever saw one on a mortar board but they wore black gowns and of course the argument was well it may as well keep the chalk off your suit, I never did myself but well, why no, that's not true. I wore a black gown myself the first year. Yeah I did. It's hard to remember way back then but I had a huge class in Theater A would have been built then, though the rest of the building was a library at that time. yeah, I had a huge class in Theater A with nearly 200 students and um, yeah, I can remember whisking in there in my black gown, lecturing away in the front of the room on the history of English Literature with Chaucer... wasn't a bad idea really I mean, there's almost a movement to go back to the historical survey approach to introduce,

see because you sorta feel that somewhere along the line student ought to come across authors like Chaucer and Milton and so on, but they generally don't get unless they become English majors that, you know a full Majors course and then it's possible to avoid some of them even then.

AB: What difference have you noticed in the setup of the academic program since 66... The courses offered and the requirements and that kind of thing?

AS: Well, there was very much a tendency in the 70's to move towards this schmorgasborg kind of program in which students simply selected whatever they wanted to study and yet take so many courses in English to make up a major and that was about that. But people became rather concerned, I think fairly soon about the possibility of graduating presumably an expert in English literature and really know nothing about anything excepts 20th century literature or perhaps 20th century Commonwealth Literature, maybe Canadian or something like that it didn't - so we began to um, to introduce requirements such as the English 400 course, the course in poetry which is intended to make sure that everybody who takes an English Major has become acquainted with the major poets of the tradition and knows certainly a certain amount about the terminology of criticism and that sort of thing um and I think increasingly there's a concern for putting together more programs with a little more integrity to them, we talk quite a bit in our policy sessions and occasionally the English Department will get together for an evening a bash ideas about and talk about what we ought to be doing and so on.

I notice an increasing tendency for people to talk about the necessity of offering, let's say, instead of offering a fairly open system with one or two required courses at English 400, perhaps a variety of half a dozen programs, a complete set of courses mapped out in each one, the student can choose one of these six programs but at least they get in a well-integrated program in the end. I think that this is a good idea, one of the differences is that nobody can know what they want to take before they've taken it in a very detailed way because you're bound to make discoveries, let's hope! And you're more likely to get a good cross-sectional view of the area you what to concentrate on, somebody who really knows the material set this up, an integrated program for you. Of course, one attempts to do this through the advising system but it's never worked that well, It's very spotty. It really depends and has always depended upon how interested the student is on getting advice and even though each student is appointed an advisor, its a rare prof. who will chase all the students that are designated and spend time on them and make sure that they have really looked into the program they're taking and all the rest of it. If the student doesn't make any move to do so and I found that most students don't really. So, I guess they feel that they know what they want to take. So long as they check it against the calendar so that's legit

they let it go at that. So I think there is a tendency in recent years to tighten up the programs somewhat.

AB: Ok, what differences have you noticed in the actual student population besides that changes in gender ... say in terms of age or ethnic origin.

AS: Well, just in recent years we are getting a lot more Middle-Eastern students particularly in Science and Engineering and the Continuing Education branch of the university has expanded rapidly and in the last 10 years and pulls in a lot of mature students who are generally very good students, I find. I've taught Maritime literature in Continuing Education, off and on for a long time. I taught it in Truro, for quite a while and, always found that I got a very good group of students interested, dedicated, always ready to do their reading that kind of thing. I myself feel looking back on my own career probably the ages between 17 and 21 are the worst possible time in your life to get an education adults who go back and sort of work through subject over a longer period of time tend to take a great deal more seriously and have a broader basis of experience upon which to base their thinking and their reflections and so on. The student who is a really good student in their late teens is either very bright or very ambitious and I think that a lot of others are just involved in so many things, you know sports and student activities and all that sort of thing that it's difficult to concentrate, study so, I view the development of Adult Studies as a very good thing for education generally really. I've always taken the attitude by no means unique to me that it's not so much in actuality what you learn in university that matters as learning to value education and how to acquire information when you need it and so on so that really university education ought to be a basis for continuing a sort of lifestyle that is centered around development of the life of the mind throughout life and if it's not that's so much university education as much as a some kind of job qualification. (chuckle)

AB: So, do you feel that that's changed over the years what students expect to receive from their university education?

AS: I think they're more demanding. They've become more demanding over the years. And it's certainly become more acceptable and more the general practice for people of all ages to attend university. I know when I was in university in the late 50's and early 60's, the presence of an older student in class was really very unusual and a bit startling. Perhaps a bit disconcerting to some people but one thinks nothing of it at all I'm sure. I don't anyway but I don't see any indication that that students notice or care what the students age is anymore, but, and certainly, it always makes a contribution to have some older members in the group.

AB: So the numbers of students going through the university has greatly increased as well during all these years.

AS: Oh yeah.

AB: What effect do you think that's had on your relationship with your students?

AS: Well, it's bound to be detrimental and there's no way to get around that. I remember I think it was the second year that I was here, I had, yeah it would have been in 68 or 69, probably 69, I had a group of about a dozen students in class. We formed a very sort of close unit over the year and a couple of those students I'm still in touch with on a sort of a Christmas card and drop in basis if you happen to be in the area. One of them lives in Manchester, Vermont. I drop in and see him and his wife anytime we're going through Vermont and so on. You know I remember all their names to this day and we had a very sort of productive and friendly sort of relationship. I conducted this as a seminar exclusively and the students did all the work, which you know I directed and gave them projects to look into and so on but I didn't lecture in that course at all and it was a really nice atmosphere now I kind of look back on it as the best possible class you could have and from there on the classes gradually got bigger so that anytime I've taught English 416 recently I've had 45 to 55 students which creates an entirely different situation and about all you can do is lecture, though one attempts to develop as much of a rapport as you can but certainly there's some danger, the Saint Mary's attitude of being a personalized university, a university where you student faculty relation are good is in danger of becoming something of a myth. And of course it's entirely economic, student numbers at university have doubled what in the last 10 or 12 years?

AB: Yeah, easily.

AS: And the faculty certainly hasn't (chuckle) increased by maybe 20%. Those figures are available somewhere, the result is that we all have at least .. well close to twice as many students as we used to and in some cases a great deal more than that. For some reason the English Department seems to be a larger percentage of student taking it, English Majors which is a very large group, that's happening there, exactly why its happening, it's not exactly job oriented uh course. Commerce has a big following because it's more likely to result in employment. But, I think students who are taking General Arts generally tend to opt for English because it's a familiar subject and broad in a sense and likely to bring them into contact with quite a wide variety of writing experience and it's attractive for that reason. So the percentages of students taking English has steadily risen as well so that some of our classes are getting unmanageably big as well. Which is kind of too bad. I don't know what you can do about it. We have still, some of the biggest department in the

university to make it a lot bigger yet is still a political and economic impossibility. you know when you ask for another 3 or 4 profs people look at you're already the biggest department in the university. Also the government support for students, the per capita grants and so on haven't gone up anything like the rate salaries and cost of running the university have gone up so that Saint Mary's has had to expand without increasing its facility a great deal in order to simply keep level to balance the books.

Mind you St. Mary's has managed to balance the books all these years, even built the Tower. I was on the building committee. I was a member of the Board of Governors at the time, I was on the building committee for the Tower, I think that a really good job was done on that. We had some pretty informed members of the Board who were pretty shrewd about getting the right architect and getting the company and the rest of it, we built it for a good price and, at the time had to borrow some money in order to complete it. But, they knew where the money was going to come from, pledges on the financial campaign and so on. The money did materialize and that small deficit was paid off again so really Saint Mary's has no capital debt and I think it is one of the few universities to come close to that. It's been fairly shrewdly administered financially and a lot of the credit goes to Guy Noel. We, love to thank Guy of course, when I was President of the union and negotiating with Guy on the other side of the table, you know things come to the point of mild insults at times everybody didn't really mean them you know Guy and I always remained on the best of terms really and I've always had a considerable amount of respect for the way he's sort of headed up the financial end of the university and he has some tricks by which he does that no question about it but you have to, you have to maintain control over a budget if you are going to keep it in the black because if you start doing all the things you are supposed to be doing, you'll be going into the red for sure. No alternative and I don't believe Saint Mary's has done all the things that it should do but I think it's done possibly most of what it could do, by way of increasing faculty and yeah, improving facilities - it's a good little university.

I've been quite attached to it over the years. Took a while to develop a sense of belonging to Saint Mary's. Even the name was foreign to me in a sense because I was brought up Protestant and this was a very Catholic institution. It surprised me where I was hired in 1966 that nobody even asked me what my religion was. It was true. They didn't by that point the Jesuits had come to realize that a university couldn't remain strictly Catholic in any way, in that sense at any rate and that in order to keep abreast of the times and get in the find of faculty they wanted they would simply hire on the basis of academic qualifications. So it wasn't even an issue back in 1966, of course since the faculty has become predominantly lay, well it's become entirely lay really, except for 3 or 4 individuals and I would say predominantly agnostic rather than any particularly religious at all for that matter though there is certainly a core of specifically Catholic profs, still something of an old guard around.

AB: Well, that's about all I have to cover is there anything else?

AS: Well, I don't know, if I offered you anything you could use but, no. I don't know. Things have come to me that I've no doubt told you I don't know - if you interview enough people you are bound to ...

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