Red Brick in the Land Of Steady Habits: Creating The University of Connecticut, 1881–2006 (review)

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RED BRICK IN THE LAND OF STEADY HABITS: CREATING THE UNIVERISTY OF CONNECTICUT, 1881–2006. By Bruce M. Stave, with Laura Burmeister, Michael Neagle, Leslie Horner Papandrea, and Sondra Astor Stave. Hanover, Germany: University Press of New England, 2006. 355 pp. Softcover, $29.95.

At first blush, the opportunity to read the history of a university from which you did not graduate, for which you do not work, or near which you do not live, may not sound all that appealing. However, to dismiss Bruce M. Stave's *Red Brick in the Land of Steady Habits: Creating the University of Connecticut, 1881–2006* would be a mistake of considerable proportions, for not only is the volume enlightening with regard to higher education in the United States over the course of the twentieth century, it is also the proverbial "good read."

Stave, Director of the University of Connecticut's Center for Oral History and former editor of *The Oral History Review*, picks up his story where Walter Stemmon's fiftieth anniversary retrospective concluded—1931. Accordingly, he traces the history of UConn from its days as a state college—just years removed from its status as the state's agricultural college—to its metamorphosis into a world-class university. Chronologically arranged around the administrations of UConn's thirteen presidents, the volume is lavishly illustrated with both black and white and color photographs and commemorates the institution's 125th anniversary.

Of the most significant interest and depth are Stave's chapters delving into the university at war, specifically World War II and Vietnam. With regard to World War II, Stave and his research team—Laura Burmeister, Michael Neagle, Leslie Horner Papandrea, and Sondra Astor Stave—have discovered and shared the efforts undertaken by President Albert Nels Jorgensen not only to maintain UConn in the absence of so many of its male students and faculty but also to allow it to make significant contributions to the war effort and to maintain the life of the mind. Even before the war commenced, the U.S. military made contact with Jorgensen about billeting air corps recruits, 600 Navy recruits, or providing educational facilities to members of the Advanced Services Training Corps (ASTC). ASTC members were selected to pursue their war-oriented studies—engineering, chemistry, medicine, etc.—with vigor. Some 850 young men participated in the program, simultaneously earning college credit and preparing to serve their nation. Jorgensen turned down the opportunity for UConn to serve as a prophylaxis station for venereal disease, noting the large number of young women on the campus who were devoid of traditional, healthy male attention.

A campus largely devoid of men, however, also provided opportunities for the women of UConn. Not only did they assume a larger role in student affairs but also they spent their leisure hours in support of the war. While some sewed parachutes at the Cheney Silk Mills two or more afternoons per week, others joined the Connecticut Women's Land Army (CWLA). Some women came to UConn specifically to participate in the CWLA. After two weeks of rigorous training, CWLA alumnae took their places in those vacated by male laborers in poultry production, dairying, dairy plant operation, and fruit and vegetable truck farming. An exceptionally limited number of coeds left the campus for service in the U.S. military.

The war transformed UConn in other distinct fashions as well. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's General Order 9066 forced the Nisei, second generation Americans of Japanese descent, from their homes on the west coast. The government allowed selected college students, however, to relocate for the continuation of their studies at eastern colleges and universities. Nearly twenty Nisei continued their education at UConn during the war. Approximately the same number of conscientious objectors did likewise. President Jorgensen had not only preserved UConn during the difficult days of World War II, he actually managed to expand its purpose and move it toward its current status as a world-class university.

Those interested in the impact of the Vietnam War on the nation's campuses will also find considerable fodder for thought in *Red Brick in the Land of Steady Habits*.

As with the impact of World War II, Stave and his cadre of research assistants delved into the archives, poured through stacks of the *Connecticut Daily Campus* and the *Hartford Courant*, explored untold government documents, and conducted over thirty oral history interviews to provide an understanding of the Vietnam War on one large, urban campus.

The picture of Storrs during the Vietnam War and the countercultural movements of the 1960s is a complex one. President Homer Babbidge dealt with relative success with those who sought to eliminate the ROTC from campus and to exclude war-profiting firms from the ranks of recruiters seeking employees among the graduating classes. Along the way, male students and faculty alike burned draft cards, occupied buildings, marched in opposition to the war, and offered teach-ins to educate the uninformed and to rally those already instructed in the war's inherent injustices. Students threatened to strike against the university, leaving administrators to alter the final examination schedule of May 1970 in an effort to defuse the disruptions at UConn. Concurrently, Babbidge faced student and faculty discontent regarding racism and sexism on campus.

Stave's sources are broad: newspapers, government documents, UConn records, Web sites, unpublished manuscripts, secondary sources, and oral history interviews. Of greatest interest to readers of *The Oral History Review* will be the interviews. However, they will be somewhat disappointed should they attempt to explore Stave's oral sources. His text does not reveal by whom the interviews were conducted, how narrators were selected, the methodology employed, or the tapes' ultimate disposition.

This shortcoming, however, should not dissuade potential readers of *Red Brick in the Land of Steady Habits*, for Stave has managed to enliven the experiences of one college/university's march through the twentieth century. Along the way, he has forced us to contemplate the universality of the UConn experience and to wonder how our own universities and colleges navigated the century. Although focused on UConn, the text does not fall prey to parochialism.

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