

Interview Log: Janice Comer

Time Code Content

00:00:01	Introduction: Janice Comer. Interviewed September 9, 2017, at Archival Products, Des Moines, IA. Interviewed by Jeanne Drewes, librarian.
00:00:40	History: Comer was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania. She moved to Des Moines in her mid-20s and applied for LBS and began working in January 1983.
00:01:35	Career: Comer's first job was in accounting for two years, then she was a receptionist for the following two years. Originally, she had taken the job in hopes that a customer service position would open up. She filled in for other people in various departments on leave (for maternity leave, conferences, etc.) during this four year process. During her fifth year she took a customer service job and worked in that department until 1992. She was promoted to Manager of Archival Products and worked there for over 24 years.
00:03:24	Mentors: Comer had training from various people due to the different positions she covered. Donna Graham was a detailed instructor who trained her in accounting and purchasing. Inga Koepl was head of accounting, a "stern and exacting person" who taught Comer to be thorough. Chris Sturgil was a mentor to her in customer service. They all taught her how to be thorough, yet to also enjoy what she was doing.
00:05:11	Business: Archival Products provides preservation enclosures for libraries. The department also provides cross trainings to show importance of preservation.
00:08:00	Employees: Comer had a dozen employees when she began, but this number eventually decreased to nine with the introduction of different equipment. Overall personnel doubled in the company when acquiring different divisions, as high as 100 people at one time and leveling off around 80 more recently.
00:09:20	Technology: When Comer began their department used a Manual Foot Round Corner Machine, which was later replaced by a Pneumatic Round Corner Machine. They also began with a Single Board "Sheeter", which could only run one board at a time. It was replaced with a Guillotine Cutter to cut a stack of boards at one time. Her team with a local shop created a Pamphlet Binder Turn-in Machine in 2000. After this they made two machines that were upgrades to accommodate various sizes, up to large academy folder. These devices doubled production time per employee.

00:11:10	Learning the Trade: Comer is a natural organizer and leader, which helped her as a manager. Fritz James influenced her entire career, as he mentored her with customers and exhibits, and taught her management skills. Learned a lot from LBI and its members.
00:12:39	Associations: As well as LBI, Comer attended Music Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries, and American Library Association in various capacities. Through these she got to know preservation and conservation workers to learn what products were needed.
00:14:22	Roles: Wanted to support ALA preservation events. Helpful to people and getting word out about organization.
00:15:44	Change in Business over Time: Budgets changed from larger funds due to need for preservation in mid-80s. The industry later moved from physical to digital preservation, and this changed the budget as more items were digitized.
00:17:30	Associations: For the Music Library Association made music binders with (or without) pockets. Was designed as a variation of the spine wrap pamphlet binder, just made in size needed for music. Cloth pockets originally, then changed to Tyvek pockets.
00:18:40	Interesting Projects: Comer describes working with Nancy Kraft who was working at Czech Museum during flood of 1993 and needed new sleeves for 33.3 RPM records. Comer created a special sleeve with a Mylar face so the case could have a photocopy of original sleeve. Worked with Jeanne Drewes on spine presentation and presentation folders for the Library of Congress to show visitors. Try to make sure that end product was exactly what needed and could be used for fullest extent. Comer worked with Kraft on a special collection that needed individual casing and had to design a way to mass produce it for the size of the collection.
00:22:58	Comer describes working with vendors. She needed strong relationships so they can help her develop new products. She needed specialty products within larger industries that often had to be developed. She sent new products to outside companies for testing. She worked closely with LBS for cloth materials.
00:28:15	Goals: Comer's main goal was to work closely with customers and vendors, especially preservation librarians and conservators. She worked with a preservation publication used for conferences and workshops that described what was happening in the preservation industry. Eventually, they were all put onto Comer's company's website for general public access.
00:31:17	Technological Advances: When Comer started, all reports were typed on typewriters. Email was introduced in the 1990s, but they were charged per email, so they could only send one email per day.

	In the 1990s Comer was also encouraged to build a website for the company. All of these products have evolved over time in both function and cost.
00:32:45	Greatest Achievement: Comer is proud of her role with Archival Products News and the development of new products themselves. She is glad that she was able to work with so many great conservators and able to meet everyone that she did at conferences and in the business itself. The resolution in her honor by the ALA ALCTS Board of Directors for her contributions to preservation also meant a great deal to her.
00:36:05	Technological Advances: Used local machine shop to transition from hand making shop to technology based shop. They showed him how they hand made products to give him ideas on how to make the machine. The first machine had set standard sizes, but this did not always work for their products. Therefore, the second machine did not have standard sizing. The third machine was larger to accommodate for various sizes, and it had belts added to take the product away from machine. They needed these machines for pamphlet making, and they were adapted from bookbinding machines that were not equipped to produce the specific sizes of pamphlets and folders.
00:40:57	Employees: Comer often hired staff based on recommendations of current employees. All of the staff were trained on every step and how to do each job in the department. There were only 6 people on the staff, so if someone was out of the office everyone had to be able to take up other jobs. Comer did cross training of all positions, so it was similar to an apprenticeship program. The staff rotated positions weekly so it allowed people to keep up with every skill. Each month they helped take inventory so that they had this skill as well. This model kept everyone on a working basis with each other.
00:45:30	Business: Marketing was done mostly at conferences at the beginning, and some were very important to teach librarians and other customers about preservation. The marketers presented with a catalogue, but eventually the catalogue was put online and the physical one was discontinued. With the emergence of the internet, there was more email marketing, but Comer also returned to mail marketing with pamphlets promoting certain products. They used to sell products through “bids”, which consisted of a lot of mailed-in paperwork. Now purchases are made through email communication. University libraries will call for pricing and bid via phone. They are able to call directly to customer service or the division manager.
00:51:03	Roles: Comer as manager acted as: production manager, sales marketer, exhibitor, staff manager, and new employee trainer. She was able to do so because she was passionate about what she did and the people she worked with, and she was creative with marketing and product design.
00:52:41	Building and Plant: Comer’s department moved into their current building in 2000. It is designed so that the order goes in at the front, is processed throughout the factory, and is shipped at the back, with

	quality control happening at each step. Flaws are set aside and either recycled or discussed with the producer.
00:55:26	Advice to Next Generation: Learn from everything and from everybody. Don't be afraid to fail, everyone learns from mistakes. Life is full of hills and valleys. Work hard and be ready for change, be open to change, and moved forward.
00:57:33	End of Interview.