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UA68/8/2 Herb Shadowen Oral History

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Lowell Harrison: This is an interview in Cherry Hall, on August 21, 1984, with Herb Shadowen.

Herb, Where were you born?

Herb Shadowen: I was born in Critton County. At the age of 5 I went to Louisville, and I was there until I was 16. I went to the Bureau Foundation my last two years of high school. I went into the Air Force for 2 years, and then returned to Bureau and got my undergraduate training. I went to the University of Kentucky for my masters, and then to the University of Louisiana for my Ph. D.

LH: While you were at Bureau, did they still have all those restrictions? I remember they use to have a lot of them.

HS: Yes, the girls had to be in by 7:30, or by dark. Students were not allowed to have cars. The faculty were not allowed to wear anything pertaining to wealth at all.

LH: That was probably an easy thing to do since none of them had any wealth. Where did you go after you got out of Louisiana?

HS: There was a job opening there, so I stayed at Louisiana Tech. until 1961.

LH: Then you came to Western in 1961.

HS: Right.

LH: Had you had any previous connection with Western, or did you know anyone here?

HS: I knew Mr. Shipley down at the service station. We would come down on campus on occasions and just sit and look it over, but I never thought I would consider taking a job here.

LH: What was the campus like in 1961?

HS: The gym was extremely small, there was an outdoor swimming pool.

LH: About the time you got here in 1961, there was an increase in enrollment, do you remember that?

HS: Yes, but I'm sure that I had nothing to do with that. (Laughter)

LH: What kind of problems did that cause?

HS: Fortunately along with that came the funds that the state was able to come up with. I recall my Zoology class at Western, there were 134 people in that class. That was the most people that I had ever seen in a class.

LH: Herb, who were some of the people in the Biology Department?

HS: Dr. Stevens, who was head of the department, Bill Norris was there for one year, and George Bennett.

LH: Had Dr. Lancaster already retired?

HS: He retired two years before I came.

LH: Did you get to know him?

HS: We spent many afternoons together.

LH: Tell me about Gordon Wilson.

HS: He was a fascinating man. - I served as his driver many times. I was very interested in being with the man.

LH: He gave talks everywhere didn't he?

HS: That he did.

LH: Who were some of the other faculty member that you remember?

HS: At that time the faculty was small. I recall Dr. Thompson making inspirational talks about keeping the campus clean.

LH: Did you have any specific contacts with Kelly Thompson?

HS: Not really, I would see him on campus on some occasions

LH: What opinion did you have about him as president?

HS: I felt that he was excellent in public relations, he made a fine politician. I was not impressed with his academic outlook.

LH: What about Cravens? Did you have any dealings with him?

HS: I don't recall much interaction with any of the administrators. The only thing I didn't like was when I came to Western I wasn't allowed to make motions on the board or anything. The president was the dominant one.

LH: In connection with this, wasn't there a lot of disturbance when some people in your building started naming buildings and rooms?

HS: This came at the time in which that President Thompson stepped down.

LH: Yes, they started naming building after people then.

HS: They usually named them after they died, but then someone said that you should do that while they were still living. So they started naming buildings.

LH: Any other problems during that year?

HS: No, only on the board. I hated not being able to have a vote or be able to say anything. By this time Dr. Downing was president, and I had a great relationship with him. If Western got something then the others had to have it too, like Eastern. I think that the presidents of Western would like to have just broken away from that.

LH: Yes, whatever we had, they wanted. Let's talk about Thompson's resignation and the hiring of Downing. Did you know anything about it?

HS: No, nothing at all. We were having a meeting and discussing matters and later there was a slight apuse. Thompson came in and announced his resignation. It was a complete surprise to me, and also to the board. He recommended Downing to take over.

LH: Did Thompson give any indications of why he was resigning?

HS: No, he said that he felt he had accomplished the things we wanted to do, and it was time for him to resign. We had a meeting on August 22, and voted that Downing would replace Thompson, which I was not opposed to at all. I had a very good relationship with the man.

LH: Is there anything more you want to say about Thompson?

HS: No.

LH: How would you compare Downing to Thompson?

HS: I think he was an excellent president, but he came when the conditions were changing. I think he tried to keep things as Thompson had had them.

LH: Herb, do you think that President Downing really understood the faculty mentality?

HS: I felt that he was a fine person, but he tried to take care of matters the way Thompson had, and it just didn't work.

LH: Had he had any teaching experience?

HS: I don't really know. He had been in the service for many years, but I don't know if he did or not.

LH: Did the resignation of Downing come to you as a surprise?

HS: No, I knew that he was having some health problems. He had a lot of weight to carry as far as being president. It was a wise decision for him to step down when he did.

LH: I have often wondered if Thompson would have remained on during the '70s, if he would have done any better adjusting to the changes.

HS: He was an excellent politician, he might have been able to. I don't know if he would have given the freedom to the faculty.

LH: Wasn't one of the problems for Downing dealing with faculty evaluation

HS: That's right. We were evaluated, but we never saw what the result was. Later they decided that it would be helpful if we saw the evaluation so we could try and improve.

LH: What are some of the major changes that you saw in the faculty?

HS: To me the major change was moving from the family concept and simply following the rules and orders of the President. When I came here we had no voice at all, now I think that has changed.

LH: How would you say the students have changed?

HS: When I first came down here the students were peaceful and obedient, and now they are rowdy and spend less time on their studies.

LH: Herb, what do you see as the major problem for the '80s?

HS: I think the problem is financial. And you're going to see some faculty members leaving.

LH: What about those that can't leave? That's something that bothers me.

HS: I think they're going to find that they are less discontent and less interested in their jobs.

LH: There has also been a decline in enrollment.

HS: We have faced this decline in our department. Overall, with the decline in enrollment and the lack of money, this becomes an important moral thing for the faculty.

LH: I think the campus is changing tremendously.

HS: That's true, it is. One problem is that the citizens don't support their universities.

LH: Herb, I believe I've touched on everything. Is there anything else you want to mention?

HS: No, I can't think of anything else.

LH: Thanks for coming by.

HS: You're welcome, I have enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW