7-27-2005

UA1B2/1/8 Oral History Part I

Paula Trafton
*Western Kentucky University*

Owen Lawson
*Western Kentucky University*

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Western Kentucky University
University Wide Committees / Events
Series 2/1 Anniversaries Western Kentucky University
Item 8 Owen Lawson Oral History Interview, Part I

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Biographical/Historical Note:
Records regarding anniversaries celebrated by the university includes founders day, 75th and centennial celebrations.

Description: Interview conducted by Paula Trafton with Owen Lawson former WKU Physical Plant director.

Dates: July 27, 2005

Formats: 2 audiotapes, 1 wav file, 1 mp3 file

Subject Analytics:
African Americans
Agricultural Pavilion (WKU)
Agriculture (WKU)
Anniversaries
Arrasmith, W.S.
Audio recording
Baptist Student Union (WKU)
Bates-Runner Hall (WKU)
Blacks
Cabell Hall (WKU)
Cedar House (WKU)
Centennial celebrations
Cherry Hall (WKU)
Cherryton (WKU)
Construction
Diddle Arena (WKU)
Dormitories
East Hall (WKU)
Facilities & Campus Services (WKU)
Farms
Gordon Wilson Hall (WKU)
Hardin Planetarium (WKU)
Helm-Cravens Library (WKU)
Home Economics Building (WKU)
Industrial Education & Technology (WKU)
Master Plan (WKU)
McLean Hall (WKU)
Minton Hall (WKU)
Music Hall (WKU)
North Hall (WKU)
Ogden College (Bowling Green, KY)
Ogden Hall (WKU)
Old Fort Bridge (WKU)
Pearce-Ford Tower (WKU)
Poland Hall (WKU)
Residential facilities
Rural Training School (WKU)
Snell Hall (WKU)
Taylor Agricultural Center (WKU)
Thompson Complex (WKU)
Thompson, E. Kelly, 1909-1993
Van Meter Hall (WKU)
Veterans
Water Tower (WKU)
Western Kentucky University
Wetherby Hall (WKU)

Accession Information: These records were transferred to the WKU Archives upon creation.
Access Restrictions: none

Preferred Citation: UA1B2/1/8 Owen Lawson Oral History Part I, Transcription, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA.

Processing Information: Transcription by Suellyn Lathrop, 2013.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media ID</th>
<th>Side</th>
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<th>Subject</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tape 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>00:00:00</td>
<td>PT: Today is Wednesday July 27th, 2005. This is Paula Trafton instructor in the History Department at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Today I will be interviewing Owen Lawson as part of an oral history project for Western's centennial celebration in 2006. This project focuses on those persons who have a special knowledge of the growth and changes Western Kentucky has experienced since the 1930's. Owen Lawson and I are sitting in the Seminar Room on the second floor of Cherry Hall on the campus of Western Kentucky University.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tape 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>00:00:43</td>
<td>PT: Good afternoon Owen. It's nice to see you here today.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>OL: Nice to be here.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PT: What a pleasure it is to interview a person who has such a rich history here at Western.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>OL: Thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tape 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>00:00:56</td>
<td>PT: And I'd like to first start off with where were you born and how did you become associated with Western?</td>
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<td>OL: Born in Elizabethtown, Kentucky 16 October 1927, grew up there, left there when I was 18 to go in the military in World War II. Came back from World War II, came to Western. Met my wife to be didn’t know it at the time of course. I met her in 223 right down the hall.</td>
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<td>PT: In a class here?</td>
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</table>
|          |      |            | OL: Well I was sitting in a classroom with a bunch of my buddies and she came in selling tickets to some kind of a play on the campus and we got acquainted at that time. And she worked in the library for 15 cents an hour at the time. She was working on a library science major and that’s how I met her here. Where was I? Came to Western I stayed that first trip I stayed until we decided to get married and we took off to Detroit, Michigan and were married in Lincoln Park or Dearborn, Michigan. And we had we always intended to come back to school come back to Western because she had not graduated and I had just started. But we came back I believe in ’50 and I got called back for the Korean War when it started and I had, I had gone to school here I believe one I had gone the summer term of ’50 and I had enrolled in the fall term and I got called back to the military. I was a staff sergeant when I was 18 years old back in during World War II and I had a pretty good rank so I stayed in the Reserves, so I was a Reservist, so I got called back. I stayed back in the military about a little over a year. Returned in 1951 I returned to Western in the spring semester of ’52. I graduated in ’54 because back then you could take a lot more hours and if you were an ex-GI and made good grades they didn’t look at you too hard. So I graduated with above a B average. I didn’t have to take final test I recall. All the time I was here during that period of time I worked for the university as a student when I came back from the Korean War I worked as a student and we had thirteen buildings on this campus. I maintained the key room for all those buildings. I had all the keys to those buildings. I was a student. I was what was called a shop foreman in those days which ran the maintenance and operation with student help and a few people who were professionals. We ran the campus, the
everyday operations of the campus during those years. The first buildings I built, helped build was North and East Hall which was 1952 the old dormitories. I helped to tear down the Rural School. I helped to tear down the old Music Building. I remodeled the Faculty House which is now the Cedar was the Cedar House in those days. I personally took the wood flooring out of the old gym after we built the [Diddle] arena. I mean before we built the arena we put a new floor in the old gym which was the library now built in 1937. We took the floor up from that building and as a student I managed that and we put a new floor in and we saved the old flooring and during . . .

**Tape 1  1  00:05:20**

**PT:** Whose idea was it to save the flooring?

**OL:** Well I think it was a combination of people down in the Industrial Arts Department for whom I was connected with. Mr. L.T. Smith who came here in 1920 was the he not only taught industrial arts but he also managed the building of the buildings during that period of time from 1920 on. I have, when I came back to do that at Western, I managed the maintenance of all the buildings and then I got my degree in ’54 and I went to Martinsville, Virginia to teach school. I taught school there and came back each summer to work on my master’s degree here. That’s alright.

[tape stopped and restarted]

**Tape 1  1  00:06:19**

**PT:** Okay.

**OL:** We came back each summer to work on my master’s degree and I went back to work for the university running the buildings, maintaining the buildings and managing their building program during the summer months and then I would go back and teach in Virginia during the school year. At that time there were 25 graduates of the university teaching in Virginia, this university of the college, university, Western. They were all industrial arts teachers that we had given we had passed on trained here. All the department heads for all the state universities were department heads from this institution, graduates of this institution. So I knew all of the older [?] that came up through our program had been in the Industrial Arts Department. I taught for a man in Virginia who had graduated in 1939 I believe he graduated but I was socially connected with the university all the people all during those years.

During my student days I worked for Kelly Thompson was the president, not the president he was assistant to the president. Dr. Garrett knew me by my first name. And I knew Dr. Garrett, Mrs. Garrett, his sons the ones that lived and came back. Mrs. Garrett was a very good friend. She worked on our doing our landscaping back in those days, the president’s wife. That was kind of interesting. Anyhow I was connected with Western in some way and I’d come back each summer working on my master’s degree and I would work for the university. And then the last summer I was here in ’56 or ’57 for my master’s, I got my master’s degree in ’57 I believe. I came back that summer and President Thompson, Dr. Garrett had died and Dr. Thompson had taken over as president and Dr. Thompson called me into my office that year and asked me what my plans were. We knew each other personally when we built the Downing, the Garrett Center because that was the only new building that was built while I was in college here was Garrett Center. We did do some other building, McLean Hall was one built in ’48. But anyhow he wanted to know what I was going to do and I said, “We’re going back to teach.” He said, “Well, watch your mailbox.” And I didn’t know what that meant you know I didn’t, I didn’t know, just, nice guy, I knew him well, we worked together. After about I came back to get my master’s when I came for my master’s degree the day we graduated he said, “I want you to go to work September the first ‘cause we’re
developing a physical, I want you to teach, but we’re developing a physical facilities program and the head of the industrial arts department, L.T. Smith is going to take it over.” He’d been here since 1920. And I said, “Well I don’t know whether I can get out of the contract or not. I’ve already signed the contract.” He said, “Well, get out of it.” I said, “Well, Dr. Thompson, what are you going to pay?” He said, “Well, we’ll pay you $4400 a year.” I think it was $350 a month. I said, “Well, sir I’m making about $6000 right now teaching.” And he said, “Well you got to get out of it.” So I went back to Martinsville. I sold my new house that I had just built and I showed up here on September first 1957 and went to work. Went to teaching and taught a full load that year but then . . .

Tape 1 1 00:10:46

PT: What was a full load? Sorry.

OL: Hmm?

PT: What was a full load? Four classes or five?

OL: I think I taught 15 or 16 hours that summer. Four or five, four or five classes I don’t remember. I had a lot of the local people here in town who are famous people in my classes. I taught College High classes too. I came back as a teacher and I also handled the student teaching responsibilities. Then the student teachers took all their training at the Training School and so I did that.

And then in 1960 we began a big building program when the first building that I helped to manage and build was Regents Hall [Bates-Runner Hall] which is a dorm across, down Russellville Road, I believe it’s Regents Hall. And from then on I handled all the coordination and building and design of all the buildings up through 1986. I chaired most of the committees in fact I think I chaired more than half of those building committees on those fifty buildings that we remodeled or built. The last building I did was the Ag Center. I was chairman of that committee at the farm. And then when I retired, you’ll read my resume I took over and I have been managing, I have been managing all of teachers retirement’s rental property they own all over the United States. I do all of their trouble shooting for all of the Walgreens. We own forty or fifty Walgreens and Walmarts and K-Marts and we own buildings the teachers’ retirement system. I am still doing that today. My wife is after me to quit, but I probably know more about all the buildings from Texas to east coast to Canada to Florida and Texas. I know all of the buildings. And of course we have, I have internet connections with and you know have all the electronics to keep up with them and still do. Still, and I for a while you’ll notice on my resume I did consulting and well I’ve done consulting at the Division of Energy. I did the energy program for the State Council on Higher Education. I did that for oh, two years. I did all of the Jefferson County work their thinking up there, architects. I did, I worked all the way to England to China in my expertise as a building specialist. And still do. Our teacher retirement, are you a teacher?

Tape 1 1 00:14:16

PT: Yes.

OL: Okay. Then you’re under our teacher retirement program. Alright, I do all the trouble shooting for all the rental properties they own and you probably don’t know this, but we own over a hundred. We own 40 Walgreens or 45, CVS’s and K-Marts and Walmarts and Lowe’s and Kohl’s department store. We started to buy Kohl’s. And I do that yet today. My wife is after me to quit, but once you get in the building business it’s all the same. I mean there’s not anything new.
Okay. Back to when I came back here. I came back as a teacher. Immediately Dr. Thompson, we were beginning to get big enough. We had twelve or thirteen buildings. We remodeled all of the existing buildings. Everyone you see, I did, remodeled or managed it. I didn’t do it. Many of them I did. I did as a student. I did the Faculty House, the Cedar House. I rebuilt it. Took the old floor out of the gym and put it in the Faculty House and the late people have put a bunch of glue down things over that beautiful maple floor. That’s a beautiful maple floor. I laid that myself personally. A student named Bill Tapscott a retired person and a graduate of Western and I built laid the floor in that during the Christmas holidays. We took the old floor out of the gym and laid it in there. I did the P.A. system in the old gym for all the ballgames back in the ‘50s and up until we built the arena. And when we built the arena I, I had become so involved in the building of buildings I didn’t have time to do that. I was teaching part time teaching some drafting classes and then I taught I was building our physical facilities program where we could manage all the building construction. I did all the architectural connections and all the Frankfort, you know, things that had to be done to work out our building the buildings under the supervision of the state. I did all that. The last building I built as I said was the Ag Center which is a real interesting building. It only cost a couple million dollars nowadays it would cost $25 million. The stadium cost $2,240,000 [?] base bid. I think today we’ve spent $30 million on it. Served on the Athletic Committee and served on all the building committees, chaired the Parking & Traffic Committee, all those things.

**Tape 1 1 00:17:21**

**PT:** Was the Faculty House here when you got here? Or was it built during the time you were here?

**OL:** The Faculty House was built by students. T.O. Hall was a faculty member now been retired many, many years. Dr. Hall and Dr. [J.R.] Whitmer these were old people who retired from Western many years ago. All of the teachers and students built the Faculty House I believe in the year about 1919 or ’20. What happened to the Faculty House what we called the Cedar House back in those days was that on this hillside, on this campus when Van Meter was built in 1910 this campus was covered and Cabell Hall stood where Cherry Hall is now. Where we are now, Cabell Hall stood here the original buildings. This whole area was covered by cedar, cedar trees. They cut the cedar trees off, I think in 1915 or ’16 and stacked them, trimmed them and stacked them. And the students in 1920 or ’21 built the Faculty House out of those cedar logs. And of course the first time I saw those cedar logs was 1944, 1945 when I came here to visit my girlfriend. It was already here when I graduated high school. But we remodeled the Faculty House. And the day that we had the dedication of the Faculty House in ’57 or ’58 President Thompson asked me to buy or we were going to buy chairs, folding chairs and have the first faculty meeting in the Faculty House. What we know as the Faculty House now was the Cedar House but we converted it to the Faculty House. And I said how many, we had to have chairs and I think some of the wooden chairs wood folding chairs are still there but we had 110 chairs and it seated every person who worked for Western. Every person who worked for Western was seated in that Faculty House that day in 1957, 110 people.
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:19:42 | PT: Did it have that kitchen area?  
OL: We built the kitchen area and yes.  
PT: And it’s still being used today.  
OL: That’s right, still in use. I did the work in there. Paul Cook one of our former presidents you may have known Paul, he worked for me for about 75 cents an hour that summer. And he was the guy who helped clean the logs. [He] used a brush to clean all the bark off the logs. The barks had never been cleaned off the logs in 1957 and ’58. So Paul Cook, Dr. Cook he wasn’t Dr. Cook then, just old Paul, he worked for I think less than a dollar an hour. And I did it in my spare time when I was teaching a full load management. |
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:20:37 | PT: Did you build the kitchen area there?  
OL: There was a bedroom.  
PT: Where was the bedroom?  
OL: It was up on in the attic. It was the first person caretaker of the building after we built it was Miss Waltz, W-A-L-T-Z. She was an older lady and she came in, lived there and managed the house and kept the coffee pots hot. And we had a fellow there, Guy Woods a black guy who is dead now, has been dead for a number of years he lived to be ninety some years old he was kind of the white shelf the white dress shelf and he did a lot of the president’s home. Fine guy, knew him until he died in fact he was in a nursing home with my mother when she died. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tape 1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>00:21:35</th>
<th>PT: Now when the Faculty House was built, the Cedar House was built was Cherry Hall here?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>OL: Was what?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>PT: Cherry Hall here?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>OL: Cherry Hall, no Cherry Hall was built in ’37.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PT: So it was the Cabell House?</td>
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<td>OL: The Cabell Hall was here.</td>
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<td>PT: [unintelligible]</td>
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<td>OL: Okay we tore Cabell Hall down, I did not do this, but Cabell Hall was torn down and the rock in it was used to build the Home Economics Building which is down the hill where the big wall is. I retained that wall. That building burned and we tore the building down, but I talked Dr. Thompson into retaining the wall and that wall stands today. Those rock and that wall came out of Cabell Hall that was here and a lot of folks don’t know that. Dr. Thompson knows that but he’s gone. But the rock out of that building was used to build that and then we built a Music Building down where East Hall is now, just this side of that and many of the rocks were used in that building. Now I later tore that building down to build Grise Hall. The Rural School they had a rural school have you seen a picture of that?</td>
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<td>Tape 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>00:23:00</td>
<td>PT: Yes.</td>
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<td>OL: Okay the Rural School I helped tear down. It was built it was about where the big tree is the big tree in the parking lot. It was just this side of that. That’s where the Rural School was. I think it had two rooms didn’t it? I think it was two rooms. I don’t know. I tore it down to build North and East Hall at that time. Those were the first two buildings I built. I tore down the Quonset huts where the North Hall now stands. We had two Quonset huts. I spent the night in one in 19 in one of those in 19 and 40, I guess it would be ’45-6-7, ’47 I guess. A friend of mine lived there in a Quonset hut so we spent the night. The original Pavilion set sat where the parking lot for Poland Hall is now. Right in the middle of that street as you look down there. We had a we called it a barn but it was a teaching facility for milking cows and butchering cattle, hogs and cows and when I lived in Vets Village, you’ve seen a picture of Vets Village?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>PT: No.</td>
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<td>OL: You haven’t? There’s a ‘48 Talisman right here I’ve got it, but anyhow, it was, that’s 1921. I’m in this book because I was ’48. My wife’s in this book. She was a queen. That’s me, standing under the water tower, the old water tower on a big freezing night.</td>
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<td>[The tape recorder was moved]</td>
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PT: [unintelligible]

OL: I was old then I was 20 back in the military. I just did these just so you could look at them. It is kind of interesting. This one has to do with [unintelligible].

[Tape recorder moved again.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tape 1</th>
<th>00:25:08</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>Anyhow that was our star basketball player Odie Spears. Let me see if I can get my bearings here. That’s John Oldham.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>Asleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>Do you know John?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>Well he’s our coach and he’s retired now Athletic Director. That’s John Oldham when he was a student he lived down in the Village. I guess that’s why I had that there. I don’t know.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>Which yearbook is this?</td>
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<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>This is ’48.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>’48.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>That is me under the water tower you saw that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>The water tower?</td>
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<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>Was over my head. Was right over where the bridge is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL:</td>
<td>The trench.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>Tape 1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> I built that bridge that’s there now.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> You did?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> Yes. That’s not the original one. The original one was cedar all the way. And it rotted out while I was in the Physical Plant sometime in the ‘60s. And I built the concrete abutments and did the bridge. I think . . .</td>
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<td><strong>PT:</strong> That’s the kissing bridge.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> Hmm?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> That’s the kissing bridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> Yes, yes. Oh, yes. Kissed my wife there two or three times.</td>
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<td><strong>PT:</strong> There was a water tower . . . ?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> On the old bridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> [unintelligible]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> We made the bridge squeak.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> There was a water tower there?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> The water tower was there. I had the water tower taken down.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> Oh, goodness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> We’d been trying to get the water tower down for many years. And now [Gary] Ransdell has gone and built another one on the campus. Which I think is ugly. It’s the ugliest thing that’s ever been put on campus, but that’s me.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> You were gone by that time.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OL:</strong> I usually can say that because I built all the rest.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PT:</strong> Yes.</td>
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**OL:** Rhea Lazarus was very prominent in here. That is my wife right there. She was a who’s who in the something, queens or something. And let’s see I had that there for you to see. That’s me right there I’m in the Veterans Club. That’s our Veterans Club in those days. All guys ex-GIs. Many of them.

**PT:** And formed a group here on campus?

**OL:** Yes. There was it was a veterans group on campus. Many of these guys have become really famous guys. Norman Cohen became a great lawyer up in New York. Lynn Waller is a big real estate guy over in east Kentucky. Oh gosh, all these guys [John] Sklepovitch is a football player dead. I knew a lot of them. C.A. Loudermilk his son, his dad taught here and retired here. Bartley Hagerman downtown, you don’t know him? He’s in the radio business. He’s in here. Jack Baskett’s dead all these kids are my friends and most of them are dead. David Bryant’s a lawyer here and he’s dead though. Bob Simmons is still living. He’s still here. Some of them are gone. Morris Hardwick is dead. David Ransom I’ve lost I don’t know where he is. But I did this just to kind of remind me what you might want.
VETERANS

OFFICERS

TALMADGE ALLEN ................................................................. President
GLENN HOLLINGSWORTH ........................................... Vice-President
LYNN WALLER ...................................................................... Secretary
DAVID BAKER ...................................................................... Treasurer
NORMAN K. COHEN ................................................................ Sergeant-at-Arms

ROLL

Talmadge Allen
Glenn Hollingsworth
Lynn Waller
David Baker
Norman K. Cohen
Martin Knott
Bobby Garrett
Herbert Camp
C. E. Lowery
John Simpson
John Sklepovitch

Ray Mills
William Myles
Charles Welborn
James T. O'Connor
C. R. Smith
Edwin E. Rodgers
Bill Hawkins
C. A. Loudermilk
J. T. Nation
T. B. Hagerman

Jack Baskett
G. D. Sledge
Jimmie Stewart
Earl Le Doyen
Quentin Billingsley
Charles Hayes
David Bryant
Glover Cary
Charles Reynolds
Bob Simmons

Eric Tipton
Tom Ward
Bob Milliken
Bob Curry
James Drake
Douglas Perkins
Thomas Moseley
Morris Hardwick
David Ransom
Vick Roerk
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:28:22 | PT: So you did have a Baptist Student Union here?  
OL: Well that’s our Baptist Student Union.  
PT: All the way back then. |
BAPTIST STUDENT UNION

HAROLD LEE President
LENWOOD SHIRRELL, JAMES WHITMER Membership Vice-President
ANNE PORTER, RUTH WILSON Social Vice-President
JUNE BAXTER, HAROLD ALLEN Devotional Vice-President
JENNIE FOSTER Extension Chairman
MARGIE LAFFERTY Secretary
CHARLES LIVELY Music Chairman
HAROLD MATTHEWS Training Union Representative
NANCY ANN GOOD Sunday School Representative
BETTY TOPMILLER Town Representative
BETTY CAMPBELL Y. W. A. Representative
VIRGINIA HUNLEY Reporter
BILLY McCLELLAN Publicity Director
MARTHA CRADY Magazine Representative
MRS. H. B. ALLEN Student Secretary
MSS MAE WILSON Faculty Advisor
OL: That was a those folks I knew a lot of them. That’s a [Betty] Topmiller girl her dad was mayor. There’s a guy who taught at Western the longest I think he died at about 100. Let’s see that’s the religious group. Who’s in there that I know. He’s a preacher. I knew him personally. I think he’s dead also. Most of these guys are minister students. Well let’s see Billy McClellan, Harold Moore’s dead, Harold Allen’s dead. Harold Lee I don’t know. Doug Moseley’s still living, wrote a book about Western. Doug Moseley do you know the Moseleys? Okay. He’s the writer of the book. Okay Earl Moore’s a teacher. [H.F.] McChesney’s the guy right there who lived so long.
WESTERN RELIGIOUS

OFFICERS

HAROLD ALLEN .................................................. President
DOUGLAS MOSELEY .............................................. Vice-President
MARTHA ANNE FRITZ ............................................. Secretary-Treasurer
EARL A. MOORE, H. F. McCHESNEY ......................... Sponsors

ROLL

Billie McClellan  Harold Matthews  Norman Antle
Mary Phil Egerton  Harold Lee  Hoyt C. Parsley
Martha Anne Fritz  Douglas Moseley  Robert Oldham
Margie Lafferty  David Feild  Michael A. Fancher
Harold Moore  Earl A. Moore  La Verne VanCleave
Harold Allen  H. F. McChesney
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:29:24 | **PT:** McChesney was the one who was here who was the oldest?

**OL:** Yes, Chesney, McChesney, right. Let’s see. You may not be interested in this. That’s my wife right there. She was in library science. I just brought this. That’s Vet Village. That’s the barn I torn down.

**PT:** Okay. So we can find these photographs in the 1948 yearbook.

**OL:** Right. Yes, this is in the ‘48 yearbook annual. Let’s see let me look up here. There are the Quonset huts.

**PT:** Okay.
VETERANS VILLAGE

An outstanding feature of the college life is Veterans Village, a housing project maintained by the college and the Federal Government for veterans and their families attending Western. The present population is approximately 275. The village is organized as an urban area with its own market, maintenance office, and organized delivery of utilities, under the general management of Mr. Sterrett Cuthbertson.
| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:30:02 | **OL**: That’s where North and East Hall is. That is the Rural School. I tore that down. That’s where North Hall is. That’s the old Home Ec building was right there. We’re digging a big hole there today. This is the Western Area Vocational School which I tore down. That was a World War II buildings that were built there for vocational training and I tore all these buildings down and built the Downing Center right there. Let’s see, that’s where Central Hall [Minton Hall] is now and all of the buildings that you see over here. I lived in this building. That’s Normal Drive. I lived in a building just like this right over here. These were metal barracks. These were what we call they were built out of 3/4 inch plywood. Charlie Keown lived in one of these as students and John Oldham and all of those. These were called prefabs back in those days.

**PT**: And they were right here on campus?

**OL**: Yes. Oh, yes. This building right here students stayed in this back part who operated the building. Now you probably heard of Clifford Todd a great big donator. I spent the night with him right there. He lives in Bagdad now, Bagdad, Kentucky where my daughter-in-law’s from. She’s from Bagdad. But he, we spent the night . . .

**PT**: I did not know there was a Bagdad, Kentucky.

**OL**: Oh yes. There’s a Bagdad, Kentucky. It’s up near Shelbyville.

**PT**: Shelbyville.

**OL**: And Clifford Todd lives in Bagdad.

| Tape 1 | 1 | 00:31:48 | **PT**: Okay, did a lot of the faculty and staff at Western just live really close by Western?

**OL**: Well yes. Charlie, after the veterans moved out we had right over here . . .

[end of side 1]

| Tape 1 | 2 | 00:32:11 | **PT**: We’re talking with Owen Lawson and he’s showing us pictures in the 1948 catalog, not catalog, yearbook talking about some of the buildings on campus.

**OL**: Okay. There was a series of small bungalow type homes here where McLean Hall is and Regents Hall [Bates-Runner Hall] on the corner. I believe that’s Regents Hall. Yes. Across from the Physical Plant Parking Structure okay, that’s the first building I really built, helped build. I mean from start. Dr. Thompson lived in that house right there, a little white house. I moved all these houses down here where Poland Hall is now. And they stayed there until I moved them away and I moved them to the University Farm. That’s where they are today. Three of them are out at the University Farm. I moved them out to University Farm. Charlie Keown lived in one, the dean of students. Manuel Wilkerson lived in one. Kelly Thompson lived in one and I believe Millard Gibson lived in one, ag teacher. And anyhow those were teachers lived in those in 1946-7-8-9. I went back to the Korean War in ’50 so ’50 and ’51, yes. But my Physical Plant building was right here in the Parking Structure is here. I pulled down all these where the [Diddle] arena is and all that I pulled Jonesville down.
PT: Jonesville.

OL: I did all that. The arena, I managed the arena building. I managed all the buildings built between 1958 to 1988, ’86. Every one of them.

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<th>Tape 1</th>
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<th>00:32:21</th>
<th>PT: How does it feel to be back in these buildings that you helped build.</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>OL: Well it’s good and bad. The, I did that one. I didn’t build it, but that was built in ’27 the year I was born. My wife worked over there for fifteen cents an hour as a in the library a library helper and I was making I was working for the university. In fact I met her right down the hall.</td>
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<th>Tape 1</th>
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<th>00:34:56</th>
<th>PT: So were you in charge of building Cravens and moving everything . . .</th>
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<td>OL: Yes.</td>
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<th>Tape 1</th>
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<th>00:36:33</th>
<th>PT: How about the ghost of Wilson Hall or some . . . ?</th>
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<td>OL: The what?</td>
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|        |   |         | PT: Ghosts, ghost story? |
|        |   |         | OL: Oh the ghost story from Van Meter? Well that’s been around for a long time even when we were students but I never saw him. But a lot of people as a matter of fact a lot of people we’ve had one or two people who didn’t like to be in the building at night. They’re still living or I’d tell you who they are. |

|        |   |         | PT: That’s okay. |
|        |   |         | OL: Because they have a little bit of superstition about it. Yes that’s interesting too. I met my wife of course in Cherry Hall just by coincidence we were she was a student and I was a student also back between my World War II and Korean |
War thing.

But anyhow back on the pictures a minute. Just to show you. That’s my wife [Mary Helen Moss], where is she, oh there’s my wife right there. She was military queen attendant. I thought you’d be interested in seeing some of those. And I’m always interested in showing them.

PT: Yes I’m sure you are. I’m sure you are.

OL: And she was a librarian at Western later.

PT: For how long?

OL: Oh Mary worked there eight or ten years in Helm and in this one.

PT: Okay. So in both buildings she worked.

OL: Yes, in both of them. Okay back to where we were. Where were we?
PT: Well I was going to ask a question about Helm Library. Whose idea was it to keep that?

OL: Convert that? Well I’ll tell you an interesting story about it because I know all about it. Margie Helm our librarian was my wife’s boss and a very fine lady and who lived to be nearly a hundred. She they got ready to build a new library and Dr. Thompson and we were anticipating moving back in those days when we were building buildings I mean we’d have six or eight under construction at all times you know during that period of time. And I was doing all of that and managing
trying to keep up. And anyhow Dr. Thompson suggested to Margie Helm who had been here since 1920 one of the old ladies and she was, she was a fine lady and she was a disciplinarian as far as libraries were concerned they were just one way and that's the way it was going to be. And so Margie Helm had some questions to Dr. Thompson about converting it to a library. And so Dr. Thompson said, “Well, you pick a consultant and we’ll have him come in and we’ll talk about that.” So Margie Helm picked a consultant of her vintage. I don’t think Dr. Thompson really intended for this to happen. But, because I was there you know but at the time I thought it was a good idea as but as I had to meet this fellow and do the leg work I got to thinking Miss Helm’s already talked to this guy you know. And he came in and he was violently opposed to converting that building to a library. But if you knew Dr. Thompson and you would know that he was going to do it. And it’s beautiful. It’s fantastic. We took the athletic around the frieze you know there’s a frieze up there? Okay. You know what it was there originally? Athletes, Roman athletes were in that frieze. We took all those out. See you probably don’t want to know that. And me, maybe Dero may remember, Dero Downing I don’t know but I doubt it. He was still teaching at the time. Anyhow, but we took that out. Miss Helm was really, because my wife worked for Miss Helm and Miss Helm was really apprehensive about it. But Dr. Thompson it was a wide open building and the building was built in 1937. Structurally it’s in fantastic shape. It’s wide open we could do anything with it. We had a balcony in there. I did the P.A. system I told you a minute ago. I did the P.A. system over there for that building until we got the arena. It had great acoustics, seat about 4500 people, great basketball arena for its time. But anyhow, it was wide open and it could be easily converted and spacious, plenty of space. So Dr. Thompson finally just made the decision we were going to do it that way. And we’re going to do everything we can to take the athletic atmosphere out of it and I think they did a good job.

PT: How about the smell? Some people say that they worried about the smell from the locker room permeating the library.

OL: Do they think they still smell it?

PT: No.

OL: We ripped them all out.

PT: Someone claimed that that was a worry.

OL: Oh yes they did. We had that, we had that, we did. I’d forgotten that. We did have some people who were concerned about the mold and all those things, but it turned out to be a great building. And my wife worked there for ten years. And I liked it. And then when we built the addition we connected it with the bridge. By the way the air conditioner’s out over there and they’re going to put a temporary in. When I was here it went out and I put a temporary in the next day. They’ve waited three months. I don’t know what’s the matter with them. I ordered a standalone chiller and had it up in three days back fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago. Cause that chiller that’s not the first time it went out. That may be the third time but the first time it went out I did that because it’s a building you can’t stand to be in if it’s not air conditioned. This building here was not built for air conditioning so if the air conditioning is off in this building you open the windows and you’ve got a pretty good ventilation because this was built by the WPA in ’37. WPA built this
PT: And you renovated this building [Cherry Hall] . . .

OL: I renovated this building.

PT: Why was that necessary?

OL: Well, we put air conditioning in it. We air conditioned it. We put all many of the new floors in. We left some of the terrazzo, the old terrazzo. We made some changes in the basement area where Physics moved out and Chemistry moved out. Chemistry was in the basement and when we built the north wing we moved Chemistry over there. And I built finished the basement for Journalism other classes that we had. And it was too good a building to destroy. This building was built with Indiana limestone. That’s Indiana limestone on this building. That’s copper on the cupola. By the way, I just walked by the statue out here and Ransdell needs to know that if he doesn’t seal that terrazzo it’s going to ruin. It needs to be sealed. It has not been sealed it looks like to me for years. I hadn’t been by here. I usually kept it sealed. I put the Pylon out front when it was a college and then if you look at it you’ll see that I sawed, had sawed two cuts and I inserted university when we were made a university. So I cheated on that. No one knows that very much. But Dr. Thompson asked me what I was going to do and I said, “I can fix it.” And so I had a rock mason come up and saw out college and had an Indiana limestone, university put in there.

PT: Put it in there. Some people say this Cherry Hall is the safest place on campus today.

OL: Wouldn’t doubt it. Very, very well constructed, pan construction what we call pan construction. It was a construction technique that was developed in the ‘30’s but not used any more. But nowadays they use the steel or concrete beams. They put up the beams and then they put like wood beams you would do wood beams. This is pan construction. They came in and they built a pan with things like your slab is like that then it goes down and comes up and comes back up. These are built in see that’s your floor above. These are built in and poured simultaneously and they are full of steel, steel rods that go like that. That’s called pan construction. And it’s so work and labor intensive that they don’t do it anymore. So if you looked up there you’re going to find these beams exposed under there under the ceiling. And that’s the way it was built. This is one of the best built buildings. And I built fifty, forty, forty or fifty, forty of them I guess. I don’t count them much anymore. There were only eleven when I got here and this was one of them. This was built in ’37. My wife was at the dedication. This one cost $400 and some $450 let’s see, 497, something like that, $197, 400 and some thousand dollars. And we remodeled it and I’ve forgotten how much I spent on it but a pile of money.

That building [Gordon Wilson Hall] was built in ’27. The man who designed that building was Brinton B. Davis. You’ve heard of that name. Brinton Davis was the architect who did this building, that building as a matter of fact he did I think he did Van Meter, Potter Hall, the Industrial Arts Building, the library. He did all those back in the teens. And in 1927 when this building was designed, ’25, ’26 or ’27, ’25 I guess they finished it in ’27 there was a man working for him in the office a young draftsman named W.S. Arrasmith. And W.S. Arrasmith became an architect. He was already an architect in the ’20s and he designed for us several buildings on the campus, the dormitories. And he did the Fine Arts Building I believe. Anyhow, he was here one day and meeting with Dr. Thompson who was the president and I was in the meeting
and he said, he was old then he was probably I thought he was old about my age 75 or so, but anyhow, Mr. Arrasmith was a great historian and he said, “Dr. Thompson have you ever looked at the frieze on that building? Have you ever looked at the frieze?” He said, “Had you ever wondered how those names got up there?” Chaucer, Keats, Shelley, Goethe so on, you know them all probably. But he said, “Did you ever wonder how they got up there?” He said, “I was a student draftsman back in the furthest corner of our drafting office doing the exterior skin to that building. And I had just returned from World War I” being in it he said “I put all those up there and I put Goethe up there because he was a German.” And he said, “Nobody has ever questioned it.” And Dr. Thompson almost died laughing. He said, “I can’t believe you would do that.” He said, “No one has ever questioned it before.” Because the German sentiment you know in the ‘20s was bad. And even when I was growing up in the ‘30s it was bad you know. Germans can’t do anything a bunch of heathens. But anyhow he put that in there. And that’s how it got there. Now Ransdell doesn’t know that. And I don’t think Downing knows it either. I never did tell Downing, but Arrasmith interesting character. But he said, “That’s one of my proudest moments when I . . .” He came back and did, he did Bemis Lawrence and Barnes-Campbell Hall those two buildings for us and some other buildings. And he told me that story because and he told Dr. Thompson that story.

OL: Yes, but Dr. Thompson won’t ever tell.

PT: And Dr. Thompson knows all these things.

OL: The library right here. That was our original library. That’s as I told you a while ago the rock out of Cabell Hall went into some other buildings on campus. Since they have been torn down.

I’ve been here so around so long and when we I mean some of the things that are interesting about our tenure was that we put all of the infrastructure in here that’s here during my, I didn’t do it, but I was there when it happened and helped do it. We put the Master Plan into effect which has not been really updated by a pro even though Gary indicates that and Gary used to rent pliers from me down at the Physical Plant so I know him pretty well. But Gary, Gary has not had that professional person to come in who’s a man from out of town with a briefcase and do your master planning. You can’t do it in-house. It just can’t be done. You can use the resources from in-house but you can’t do it, but that’s not their philosophy today and I shouldn’t be critical. That’s not what I’m doing. I’ve got as much invested in this university as anybody on it because I had forty-some years here and I built more buildings than has ever been built on it you know but so be it. I’m over the hill.
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<th>Tape 1</th>
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<th>PT: How about Pearce Ford Tower?</th>
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<td><strong>OL:</strong> Pearce Ford Tower is 254 feet and 11 inches tall. And it would have been an inch taller. The restrictions on the takeoff lanes out of the Bowling Green airport FAA forbade building buildings beyond a certain height so far from the end of the runway. And the first that’s why it only has twenty, doesn’t it have twenty-seven?</td>
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<td><strong>PT:</strong> That sounds right.</td>
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<td><strong>OL:</strong> It only has twenty-six. There’s no thirteen. It only has twenty-six. It’s 200 it lacks about 2 or 3 inches, it would have been taller. When we were designing it Dr. Thompson wanted it to be taller. And it would have been taller had that regulation come into play because when we started designing it we discovered that there was a limitation on height restriction on a takeoff. So we had to reduce it to about two or three inches. I’ve forgotten how much, but nobody knows. You’re the first person I’ve ever told.</td>
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<td><strong>Tape 1</strong></td>
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<td>00:54:09</td>
<td>PT: Now whose idea was it to build such a tall building on this campus?</td>
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<td><strong>OL:</strong> Well I’ll tell you I’ll have to tell you a little history. At the time . . .</td>
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<td><strong>PT:</strong> Okay.</td>
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|        |   |          | **OL:** Well the building. Thompson, the presidents were having a little argument, a little competition about who could build the tallest building. That’s what we think and what popular you know the general consensus was. I don’t really think that happened. Because we were beginning to get in to at that time I recall Dr. Thompson asked me to do a ground study on available land that we had because you know land was becoming. Well when we came here we had everything built fourteen buildings, ten or twelve buildings built right around this hill. Then we started going that way and we started going that way and this way and beginning to think our two and three story buildings are starting to take too much ground space. So we, so we got into elevators on Minton Hall which was not Minton Hall originally but after John Minton retired well they named the hall after him. We began to think more about high-rise building because of well first we had elevators that were competent, reliable, safe and we had fire treating fire resistant materials that would meet fire code so we began to build higher buildings. So that’s the reason we built the building. It was to save ground space. As I look back on that because I had a lot to do with it because I managed all these committees. I was chairman of all those committees. It was probably a good, good thinking because now we’re going to be cramped for space. Ransdell’s trying to buy this space and buy that space and acquire this because it’s happening on all universities. It’s not confined to Western. They’re being strapped for expansion space and you know if we when we got the thousand acres out at the farm the extra acreage was made a thousand acres by the interstate that’s another story, but how that happened, but that’s given us some more land to develop but it’s out there you know. And then here we are now when I left Western I think we had probably one bus now we got ten busses and no place to park them. When I left Western probably 9,000 students in ’84 when I came here there were less than 1,500 students on this campus. Less than 1500 when I graduated there were only probably 2,500. So I started to work here when we had 1500 students and ten buildings, eleven buildings, no air conditioning. I put the first air conditioner in the building on this campus.
<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>OL Response</th>
<th>PT Question</th>
<th>OL Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>00:57:19</td>
<td>Van Meter Auditorium in President Thompson’s office which is the first office on the left as you go in the building. I put the first window unit in there in his office. That would have been 1957 or 8 somewhere along in there. Now you have to understand that I worked as a student from the ‘50s early ‘50s on through ’86 because I was a student manager when I went back to the Korean War and came back then I was in charge of all the buildings, maintenance, everything for twelve to thirteen buildings had all the keys. I had all the keys to every room on this campus as a student. But that was a common thing back in those days that the students ran all of the services on campus. We had only one electrician at that time. We had some heating plant guys that fired our heating plant but that’s it.</td>
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<td>00:58:25</td>
<td>The Ag Center. We built a small ag center out there back oh back in the ‘60s. That’s the small building that’s there now. And then the big building was the last building we built and it was what two or three million dollars, three million, something like that. It’s more of an arena is what it is. It’s a horse show arena. It’s not as big as we started out to be. I chaired that committee. We wanted it bigger but it’s nice. It’s nice. And then we put living quarters in it for students because the students operated the farm at that time totally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>00:59:19</td>
<td>Oh yes it was in Snell Hall.</td>
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**Tape 1**

**2**

**00:57:19**

**OL:** Van Meter Auditorium in President Thompson’s office which is the first office on the left as you go in the building. I put the first window unit in there in his office. That would have been 1957 or 8 somewhere along in there. Now you have to understand that I worked as a student from the ‘50s early ‘50s on through ’86 because I was a student manager when I went back to the Korean War and came back then I was in charge of all the buildings, maintenance, everything for twelve to thirteen buildings had all the keys. I had all the keys to every room on this campus as a student. But that was a common thing back in those days that the students ran all of the services on campus. We had only one electrician at that time. We had some heating plant guys that fired our heating plant but that’s it.

**00:58:25**

**PT:** How about the Ag Center? Whose idea was it to do that?

**OL:** The what?

**PT:** The Ag Center.

**OL:** Oh the Ag Center. We built a small ag center out there back oh back in the ‘60s. That’s the small building that’s there now. And then the big building was the last building we built and it was what two or three million dollars, three million, something like that. It’s more of an arena is what it is. It’s a horse show arena. It’s not as big as we started out to be. I chaired that committee. We wanted it bigger but it’s nice. It’s nice. And then we put living quarters in it for students because the students operated the farm at that time totally.

**00:59:19**

**PT:** Once upon so an Ag department was here on campus . . . ?

**OL:** Oh yes it was in Snell Hall.

**PT:** In Snell Hall?

**OL:** Yes.
PT: Were there any animals or anything in there at the time?

OL: No. No. No.

PT: So that’s why then you moved out of Snell Hall.

OL: Well Snell Hall we moved out of Snell Hall when we built the building I don’t know what he’s named it now but the building on Ogden Campus, the newest building which is the one across the road across the street. The north wing of the science building was the first building one of the first buildings that we built under our big building program, the north wing. Then we built the Thompson wing. Then we built the what do they call that building now?

PT: The Planetarium?

OL: Hmmm?

PT: The Planetarium?

OL: No, I built the Planetarium with the original Thompson Hall. The building next to it, the big building, that’s one of the last buildings we built. I can’t remember the date on that one. I should. One of the last buildings we built. The Ag building the Ag Center we built, that’s the last building we built before I left. And I left in ’85-’86. And we ran out of money. We just didn’t have any money, and other things. The Parking Structure, the new Parking Structure that’s built they built lately this year, my original planning I did the planning for a lot of the buildings that are here helped do a lot of the planning. I was in charge of it but sometimes I did it and sometimes I had help. But when we built the Parking Structure we had already built the Physical Facilities Building and my office was in that building. And we built that 1000 I was chairman of that committee and then I wanted to build it between the stadium and the arena where the new one now is being built. That’s where I wanted to build it, but I was overruled by Dr. Thompson. That’s alright he’s the boss. But I wanted to build it where that one was built now because I had helped design the arena and the stadium. And I had made sure that the architects put the elevations on the stadium and on the arena that would fit the levels on the Parking Structure so you could walk into the Parking Structure or the Physical Facilities Building into the arena cross the Parking Structure into the stadium without getting outside but that hasn’t nobody has done it yet, but that’s what I did it for. So nobody’s asked me. They don’t ask you anymore but I know more. I know a little bit about the history of this campus probably enough to make me dangerous.
OL: Snell Hall, no. Snell Hall the old building?

PT: Yes.

OL: Snell Hall was built in 1927 and there was a building in front of it named Ogden Hall. Ogden Hall was built in 1850s or ‘60s. We did not own that campus. We still don’t own that campus. We have a 99 year lease on that campus. We do not own that campus. The Ogden Foundation owns that campus. When we got ready to build the north wing of the Science Building which is Thompson Hall the north wing it’s on the oldest building which they are talking about remodeling. When we got ready to build that building I chaired all these committees we learned that we couldn’t finance it on property we didn’t own. So the Board minutes will show this, the Board of Regents minutes but because I was there when they made them but the Board of Regents . . .