Q. Good morning. It’s Wednesday, August 29, 2007. My name is Kevlin Haire, and I am here conducting an oral history interview with Dean Ramsey. This is side 1 of tape 1. Dean, thank you very much for being here. I appreciate you coming. I just want to start out on a general sense of your background to sort of lead up of how you got to Ohio State. You can tell me where and when you were born, a little bit about your family, and the path you took to get here.

A. Oh boy, that’s a long story.

Q. We have a couple of tapes.

A. I was born in 1930 on the west side of Columbus but only for a couple of months lived there. My dad was moved by the Kroger Company out to the little town of Pataskala, Ohio, which is where I stayed then all through my school days and so forth. And came back there and lived there, which is where I live now. So I have not migrated very far from the oak tree or whatever. I went through 12 years in Pataskala Schools, which it was called at that time, very small school with 200 people total. My class had 23 in it, which was enormous for the time, and I was expected to go to college. I didn’t have any idea where I would go. I had never heard of anything hardly except Denison and Ohio State University, because I lived between them, same distance one way or the other. My dad, even though he did not graduate from high school, expected me to go to college. There just was no question. So he was kind of an education freak. He was on boards of
education, and he was a very strong backer of young people in their education. So, that was part of the reason I came to Ohio State to start with. In 1948, right at the end of the Second World War, which [was when] a lot of GI’s were back. I was just a young kid off the farm, so to speak. Ohio State at that time was really concentrated with old temporary dormitories that were used during the Second World War for special education of people who were going to be officers in the military service. So the campus was an entirely different look than it is today because of those two-story dorms. They replaced barracks really. Part of my classes were in Quonset huts. My first class in architecture was on Neil Avenue where now the College of Engineering sits. And there were four big, two-story, like you see in all the Army movies, barracks. They were cleared out and drafting tables were put in. And that’s where I had my first architecture classes, in the two-story barracks at Neil and Woodruff. So, campus has changed a lot. I had English in a Quonset hut north of Derby Hall, in between Lord Hall. There’s a new building there now. But that was full of Quonset huts. So where the south dormitories are now on 11th Avenue, were all two-story barracks in that whole area down there, for the GI’s. Anyway, that was the atmosphere of 1948. The GI’s coming back had a lot of different kinds of education in the worldly travels that I hadn’t had. And it was difficult competing with those guys. They were on the GI Bill, and of course I was broke. And by the way, fees as I remember was $85 a quarter.

Q. $85 for all of your classes?
A. Yes. That’s just fees. And of course I had to live on top of that, which probably was another $200-$300. I think of that now, it’s just phenomenal. Of course, when I was working in my dad’s grocery store in Pataskala I was only making 35 cents an hour. It’s all relative. I think it’s gotten out of relativity here lately.

Q. For you, you didn’t have any kind of financial aid.

A. No, none at all, just what I had saved when I was in high school and working. Every weekend I’d go back home and work in the grocery store, which would provide me enough money to buy 35-cent meals at the basement of the Union, which was on 12th Avenue. The new one was not built. But I paid $5 a quarter to have that new Union built, which is the one they’re tearing down today on High Street. When I graduated in 1952, I got my commission in the Air Force in that building. And I think I was one of the first people to come through that, it was brand new.

Q. Oh my gosh, that must be so odd to see it torn down.

A. Yes, now it’s being torn down. Wendell Ellenwood, who was the Director of the Union for years and years, I think he just about cried when it went down, or was going down. The atmosphere on the campus is entirely different. In the 1950s, the campus really evolved. All those GI barracks were torn down. Buildings were air-conditioned which they had not been before. If you notice old buildings on campus basically are a hallway with rooms on both sides, so you can open the windows and let the air through. Today, on campus there are a high percentage of the rooms have no windows or are interior rooms, which means air conditioning came into being. And that was in the mid-’50s, when hundreds of buildings were
air-conditioned. And there were all kinds of problems that they ran into, of course, with big chillers and all the equipment that it took to air-condition old buildings. And that had an effect later when I became head of physical facilities. In the 1980s, those older buildings, with air conditioning, some were 30 years old, which meant that the maintenance headache was really developing. And there were hundreds of those. Anyway, I came to Ohio State, got a commission in the Air Force as I just said a little bit ago, served two years in the United States Air Force, one of which was in Morocco, North Africa. Lived out in the desert as a brand-new second lieutenant with three other officers and 75 enlisted men in tents, which was real fun and games. Then came back, spent the rest of my service time in eastern Pennsylvania at a radar site, then was recommended by a professor here on campus, for a job in Kansas City. So I went to the firm of Hare and Hare, which was a landscape architectural firm that did most of the regional and city planning for Kansas City and its surrounding areas. Did a lot of site planning. I did site work and design of the Harry Truman Library, those kinds of things. A lot of site work and planning for the Hallmark, Hall family, which was the Hallmark Cards people. And then got a call from Professor [Charles] Sutton again that they were looking for the first University landscape architect, which they had never had before on campus.

Q. Now let’s back up for a second. Was architecture then going to be your major when you came here?

A. At one time I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. So I found out in my freshman year math and chemistry didn’t match with me. So I was in Brown
Hall, wandering around in my spring quarter of my freshman year, almost at the point of being ready to quit school because I couldn’t find anything that I liked. But I was really good at drafting drawings, design work, that kind of thing. And I knew it but I didn’t really know what to do about it. And a professor by the name of Charles Sutton, who was the head of the Department of Landscape Architecture at that time, saw me in the hall and asked if he could help me. He was responsible then for me being able to continue school and graduate. He took me in his office and spent about three or four hours with me and set up a program for me to follow, which I never deviated from, from that day on. And graduated some three and a half years later. And basically then the jobs that I had were from him. Anyway, he called while I was in Kansas City, and he said, “You ought to interview for this.” So I came back to Columbus. I had been out there for three years and it was 1958. I interviewed with the University Architect’s Office where I would work. And was hired at $8,000 a year. I thought that was phenomenal because I was making $6,000 in Kansas City. That was a pretty good jump because I had two kids. So anyway, I came back to the University in 1958, November of 1958, became the first University Landscape Architect. I did a lot of site design, as I said a little bit ago, the 1950s were the beginning of enormous change on campus. Even today, there’s been a lot of change, but nothing like there was between the ’50s and ’60s because of enormous growth. I think we were at the point when I was in school, of roughly 20,000 students, in that neighborhood maybe. Which now it’s 50,000. I did the site planning and the planting plans for the new buildings being built. Of course, the old dorms were
there. Baker Hall had been there and the ones on Neil Avenue. But that whole area that contained GI barracks were removed and the Tower Dorms were built. The whole area from Woodruff up to Lane, was all houses on 35-foot lots. And it was jammed full of houses. And on High Street were businesses, which today are all gone. We were able to buy maybe eight or ten houses at a time and put in a dorm. And then buy eight or ten other houses and put in a dorm and so forth. But what I had done was to do a master plan so that we could buy that property in pieces, put it all together, and eventually it would all be one big site, with that loop road. The buildings on High Street, we got a federal grant to buy all those businesses, which were facing High Street. Like the ones on the other side of the street that are still there. That whole block from High Street to the ROTC building was nothing but housing and businesses. That was a lot of houses when you think about that, to buy out, but it slowly all came together. But that was a real chore at that time. Some of the other developments, obviously the Library changed to a high rise, the tower. Didn’t have the tower when I came to school. And basically there were some additions to Larkins Hall, little ones here and there. The area where St. John Arena now is, when I was in college, was a big cinder area that had been the old University dump. So they covered it with cinders from the Power Plant, and it was just a massive, big open space. There weren’t many people driving cars, so it really wasn’t needed for parking. But it was great for ROTC because they had cannons and they had tanks and all kinds of stuff running around out there. So when I left to go overseas in the military, they were just starting St. John Arena; when I came back, it was there. These kinds of
changes were just dramatic. Things that people today don’t recognize is that the railroad came across the bridge south of St. John Arena and north of the stadium. And people would come to football games from Cleveland or Chicago or whatever, on the train, and the train would pull in down behind the Power Plant and park. And people would go to the football game and get back on the train and they’d go back to Cleveland. So that railroad was there until mid-’60s, and every time you went across that narrow bridge it was a railroad bridge. Today it’s been all rebuilt for cars only, and it’s gorgeous. But the railroad stopped at the Power Plant, to haul coal in and out. Another big thing that happened in the ’60s also, was that we converted from coal to gas, which was a real change because you could walk around on campus east of the Power Plant and it was kind of grimy. One of the other things that dramatically changed is the area on the east side of the Power Plant, all the way from 17th [Avenue] clear up to Woodruff [Avenue], was the College of Veterinary Medicine and the College of Agriculture. Veterinary Medicine, when I came to Physical Plant in about 1960, was still doing surgery and had cows walking up and down that area, which is now in front of the bookstore. And the old cattle judging building and the rehearsal hall for the marching band, where the School of Architecture is today, where the parking ramp just south of that, was the judging building. It was called the rehearsal hall but it was an arena that judged sheep and hogs and so forth. That change has been so dramatic. It’s hard to visualize that. If I tell people this today, they wouldn’t believe it. That kind of change has been so dramatic. Anyway, the design work I did then with the University’s Architect’s Office was
that kind of thing. Did a lot of the site planning and then I did also the planting plans. Planting plans were an interesting thing. I was a landscape architect and very few landscape architects take much horticulture. They have about two or three quarters [of classes] and that’s it. Basically, landscape architects are planners and not horticulturists. So as a landscape architect, they expected me to do the planting plans for all these developing buildings that were coming on line. Even though I had had some experience and did some planting plans in Kansas City with the private firm, I was very rusty. When I started to do those planting plans, there was a committee made up of three people who were professors. One was Professor [Lewis C.] Chadwick, which the Chadwick Arboretum was named for, Professor Sutton who had been my professor in landscape architecture, and a professor from Botany. And those three professors monitored my planting plans, and I had to present them to them first before they would be installed or done. So that was a real learning process, because those men were tops in the field. Today, plants are named after Chadwick. So, I did a lot of that and really learned a lot about plant materials. And then along came Vice President [Carson]. Anyway, he decided that they needed a landscape architect in Physical Plant and made it a separate office, separate from the architect’s office. So I became my own entity and then had assistants, other landscape architects working for me. And the theory there was, if you design it, you’re going to have to live with it. So they made me in charge of all the maintenance operations of landscape, streets, roads, grounds, anything that had to do with site. I was responsible for maintenance as well as designing it.
Q. Okay, oh my gosh.

A. So I had to design it and live with it afterwards. And that changes your attitude when you have to live with things. And by the way, there’s the picture right there on the wall, of the railroad next to the physical plant.

Q. We have some great old photos. You were no longer in the University Architect’s office?

A. No, I was working actually for a man by the name of Paul Elleman, who was the second director of all Physical Plant operations for the campus.

Q. And the Vice President [Carson] who decided this, he was Vice President for what?

A. Business Administration.

Q. Okay. I know who you’re talking about.

A. But I was in that position then for some time. And then slowly they gave me another responsibility here or there, and soon wound up with a fair amount of employees, as well as the design responsibilities. A few years later, of course, I was involved with all of the structures being built, and it was really more structure-oriented than most landscape architects. I seemed to be gravitating towards the design of structures. So at one point they made me Director of Major Construction, which as a landscape architect was unheard of. Most are civil engineers or architects.

Q. What year was that, do you remember?

A. About 1980. It was rather interesting because at that time we built the veterinary hospital, the big one. Of course, we changed the administrative building for vet
We had built the outpatient clinic [for the College of Medicine]. We redid University Hall. And that’s a story in itself, which I’ll tell you right now. University Hall, of course, had a lot of romantic memories for a lot of people. Obviously, it was the oldest building on campus and it was something that people didn’t want to touch, but it was about ready to fall down. People were afraid going up and down the stairs. There were no elevators in it. It was totally an old building. So there was a professor in the School of Architecture who was doing photogrammetry of buildings. And he did photogrammetric drawings from photographs of all the facades of that building. And we had an architect reproduce those drawings into the final structural drawings for the new building. Which means that the new building was identical in every way to the old building, except the first floor was up out of the ground by probably six feet. So it was not handicapped-accessible. So when the new building was built, we sunk it down into the ground, so that today you only go up a couple of steps. It used to be big grand steps that went up in front of University Hall, if you look at the old pictures. Around that building, at the top, was a wrought iron fence, at the very top of the building where the flagpole was. We saved that. Took it off and saved it. The stone arch and the columns on the front of the building, and also the big cast-iron lamp fixtures, we saved all of those. We saved stone arches over some windows. When the building was built, they went back in place right where they had been. So when you look at the building today, and you can really tell it when you get up close, the stone is pretty well fitted and worn in a lot of occasions. Interestingly, the flag on top of University Hall is automatic, operated by light sensors. It goes
up when the sun goes up and goes down when the sun goes down. This is a new little quirk that came into being. The big problem with design was how to get that flag back down into some kind of container. And so it spirals as it comes down and goes into a tube.

Q. Wow.
A. Very strange thing.

Q. Now speaking of University Hall, why is it, when you look at the old pictures, it’s covered in ivy? You don’t see that now.
A. That’s a story I shouldn’t tell. I got my foot in my mouth after I retired about that. One of the things that we saved as well was the ivy that had been planted by some class back in the 1800’s, 1895 or whatever. And that ivy, Boston Ivy, is a deciduous ivy, not like an English ivy. Gorgeous in the fall because it gets crimson and orange colors and is just beautiful. After I retired, someone who will remain anonymous here I guess, decided that it was not good to have ivy on walls. And if they had done some research first, they would have found that it has nothing to do with the wall. There’s no damage to the wall. The only thing it can do, is it can get up behind wood pieces or eves and eventually push it out. It does not go into the mortar. It does help a lot with shading and making the building cooler. But they decided that it should come out. They didn’t talk to anybody first. They just went over and killed it all and pulled it out. I was walking across the campus after a football game the following year, and I saw this and I about had a heart attack, and wrote the alumni association. I heard back from the president and everybody else, about the ivy being gone. And it was gone from
every building on campus. But I was very unpopular for a long time because I complained. They did the same thing on the old Ohio Union on 12th Avenue. Anyway, on the south side of that building there’s even a stone in the wall which says, “Ivy planted by class such and such.” When that building was remodeled as it is today, and really nice building made out of old one, that ivy was also replanted. I don’t know, I haven’t looked lately, I’m a little scared, but I doubt it. Well anyway, after I was Director of Construction a few years later, I reverted back after that. I was made the Assistant Vice President for Physical Facilities after Tom Smith retired. There’s only been four Physical Plant directors since the beginning of the campus. [William C.] McCracken, who the old Power Plant was named after, Paul Elleman was second, and he was there for many, many years, 35 or 40 years. And then Walter Hartman, who really was my first boss. Then Tom Smith who I worked for, and then me. So I was the fifth of only five in all the years from the beginning of campus until the time when I retired. So now there’s been seven.

Q. You retired what year?

A. 1988. Next year will be my 20th year. I was here 30 years. During that time so many things have happened that we don’t see today. As an example, where the new alumni house is, was what they called an artillery barn, where they kept the horses for ROTC up until almost the Second World War when they still had cavalry. And the ROTC students would get their horses over there and bring them over on the fields where the stadium now is. And also they played polo. That’s why today they still call it the polo fields, and probably people all wonder
what’s the polo field? And all along that river bank is where the University Dump was. After they filled it on the east side of the river they started on the west side. At the point in time when I came, they had a lady who sat there in a little building every day and kept people from coming in and out, other than University trucks, because everybody in Arlington wanted to dump their trash there. So everything, the entire area west of the river from Lane Avenue to Chemical Abstracts was a dump. Today, Fawcett Center and the Alumni House are built partly over the dump. The east wing was built half over the dump, half over solid. Some years later, I would say about 1975 to 1980, Physical Plant got called and architects got called because that wing had settled right where the edge of the dump was. And apparently the structure under that part was not strong enough to hold that part of it. And it dropped about an inch. I don’t know if they jacked it back up again or not. It happened to go right through doorways. So they cut the doorways off temporarily so the doors would shut. Of course I was called back a few years ago to testify about what’s in that dump. And that’s a matter of record. Medical and chemical refuse dumping happened at that time. They didn’t incinerate; they dumped. And there was radioactive waste in there from iodines, radioactive iodines and so forth were used in systems, and they just dumped it. There was all kinds of things in that dump that people are aware of. After they finally decided to get into regular transfer and hauling of trash, then they assigned us to go over, which I did, hired bulldozers and pushed dirt up and around the refuse next to the river. That’s why you’ll find those hills, up over the old face of the dump.

Q. By how much?
A. Probably anyplace from 12 inches to 18 inches. It’s not a lot. Because for several years afterwards the soil would crack when it gets dry, and smoke would come up through because it would self-combust and we’d have fires underground. So that kept occurring for a long time. It may still happen. I don’t know. But those were some of the things that were in there. But we also had, and people know this, a radioactive waste over towards North Star [Avenue], just east of the College of Agriculture’s turf areas, that they do research on. There’s a place there that’s about 30 feet square where they buried waste. Unless someone has dug it up recently, which I don’t know about, it’s still there. And it stinks. But who knows. Some day somebody’s going to have to do some work there, who knows what. But that was our ignorance in those days of not knowing what radioactive material did, or some of the things that occur with waste and coal and all kinds of things.

Q. Well, like you said with the coal, was it because when they came from coal to gas, was it because it was cheaper to do gas, or just because it was cleaner? There was no sense of needing to be environmentally friendly?

A. There were the beginnings of that. There were environmental problems. Gas was a lot cleaner obviously, and our old equipment in there was wearing badly and had to be either rebuilt with coal or rebuilt with gas, so we put gas furnaces and turbines in, which was wise. Then they could get rid of the railroad. They could get rid of the cars, trucks coming into the center. A lot of repercussions of that, and the result of that was good. There were six gas-fired turbines in there, and then along came the Rhodes Administration. The big thing of the Rhodes
Administration was jobs for Ohioans. And southern Ohio obviously was the coal industry. The Rhodes Administration asked the University to take out one of those gas boilers and put in a coal-fired boiler. The EPA had a lot of the restrictions at that time, and this was in 1984, 1985. The EPA had restrictions on what was coming out of the chimney. And so we had to put in scrubbers. We had to put in filter systems, and to reduce the acid we had to put in lime slurry tanks to spray the emissions with lime to reduce the acidity. We had to build a big coal receiving building. We then had to buy coal and again, bring it back into central campus, which was done by enormous trucks, which then pounded our roads and did a few other things. But that whole decision, the coal-fired boilers, never totally functioned. It would run for a period of time, then it would go down and do strange things. We had an awful time with the reduction of the acidity and emissions. We had big bag filters in that building which were probably 40-feet-tall bags to filter solid particulates. Every so often you’d switch to another set and another set. And clean those back and haul away the ash. And then what do you do with the ashes? At that time, there was a minority enterprise situation going. One of the things that the purchasing department, or whoever made those decisions, said that we must buy coal from a minority contractor. And there were none. But we found one downtown who had an office, and that’s all he did. I think he had a secretary and that was it. We’d call down and say we want 300 tons of coal and we had been buying our coal during the beginnings of testing, direct from the mines. They sent it, and we had to pay a certain amount per ton. By buying it from the minority enterprise we had to add a dollar per ton. Then the
contractor would call the mines. So that was kind of a bad situation, which I
never quite understood. So those are some of the problems we had with the coal-
fired boiler. I don’t know what its status is today. I think it’s done. I think
they’re reconverting to gas if I heard right. They can take out all that stuff that
you see, those big tanks and scrubbers and all those things. And then that
building, which was the coal receiving building, could be used for other things,
and make a decent building out of it. That will happen. But those are the kinds of
things that we ran into. And that was politically oriented.

Q. I was going to say, you had to deal with a lot of different chiefs.

A. Yes, a lot of Vice Presidents. They sort of passed through and we kind of
absorbed every Vice President that came through who wanted to prove his metal.
So they reduced our budgets or didn’t increase them, so he could show how much
money he was saving. But we had some good ones. One of the best Vice
Presidents in Business Administration was Dick Jackson. Dick was an engineer
who had been with the city and he knew what engineering and what plant
maintenance were all about. He did a lot for our department during his time. He
retired about six months after I did and died within the year. Anyway, there’s
been a lot of changes. We fought for our budget. One of [the] things that I talked
about a little bit ago was those air conditioned buildings in the ’50s. And by the
’80s we had some 150 chillers in buildings throughout campus that would cost in
the neighborhood of $100,000 to change. And our budgets, if you take 150
buildings times $100,000, it doesn’t relate to very good budgets. So we had a list
of the worst to the best. And each year we would take out five or six chillers and
replace them, but the list kept getting bigger and we weren’t producing. After I retired, I really don’t know what they did about it. I really would be interested to hear. We spent a million dollars or better per year just replacing boilers. And some of them were down inside of buildings where you had to take out a wall, dig a hole next to the building, take out a wall and slide it out and get it back. So it was an expensive venture.

Q. How much of a priority was that for you?

A. It didn’t seem to be very much. Of course, they expected us to patch and continue. And some of those chillers had metal welded patches because the holes in them were big. And I suspect today there’s still some of those chillers that are still running. They are probably near their end. And they’re tough. They’re hard to get out. And today, a lot more attention is given to where those chillers are placed, so you can get to them. There’s a lot of those buildings where chillers were shoved back under the buildings and built a new wall, then added to the building, and it’s way back in the middle somewhere. I used to get some weird jobs too before I was Director of Construction. I told you once before about the tale of the bridge over the inlet at the Drake Union, just north of the Drake Union.

Q. Drake Union, right?

A. Yes, Drake Union. Just north of that there’s a little inlet where 24-inch water pipes took water up to the plant and the other from downstream, and to the Power Plant. And it was cooling water, and went back down the river and dumped into the river. That was another battle all the time because it raised the river temperature. And some of the people who were in those kinds of positions didn’t
like that. But in any case, that inlet was there. And as you know, there’s a dike all the way down through there. So to get, if you were walking along the river to get across that inlet, you had to go up on the dike and back down. So I got a call from the Vice President saying, “We’d like to build a bridge across that little inlet. Will you do it?” I said, “Yes.” He says, “There’s one catch. One of the board of trustees is on the board for C&O railroad, and we want to build it with a railroad car.”

Q. This is Kevlin Haire and I’m conducting an oral history interview with Dean Ramsey on August 29, 2007. This is side 2 of tape 1. Dean, you were just talking about having to build a bridge over the inlet near the Drake Union.

A. Yes. The Board of Trustees member was also on the Board of C&O Railroad. So he said, “Will you go down to the C&O yards and pick out a car?” And I thought I’d get a flat car because it would be easy and make it pretty simple. And he said, “No, you’ve got to get a box car. We’ve got a lot of extra box cars.” So I went down to C&O Railroad south of Columbus and picked one out. And at that time the railroad had ceased coming across the bridge over the Olentangy, but the railroad still came to where the College of Agriculture now is. There was no building there. And so the rail stopped there. They brought the railroad car up, picked it up and sat it down and took the wheels away. And there sat my boxcar and I was to make a bridge. So, I got the measurements off the boxcar and we drove sheet piling on both sides of the inlet. Then I hired somebody to knock the top off of it and haul it away, which left a really a nice bed, because railroad cars have two main beams, just as a bridge would. They are made in a shape that fits
well on bridge abutments. So I got that done, but I couldn’t figure out how to get it across the river. And there was a contractor friend of mine and I called him and I said, “You know, I need to get that thing over and on my bridge abutments. You got any ideas?” And he thought about it he said, “Yes, I’ve got a way.” And he had an old tractor, front of a truck tractor, not a farm tractor, but a truck tractor, that had this fifth wheel on it. He cut the cab off of it and made a trailer out of the bridge, and hooked it on his pickup truck and simply drove it over there, and drove it down the bank right next to the site. We picked it up with a crane and we set it on the abutments and built handrails on both sides. It’s still there today. Amazingly, because that’s been 35 years ago.

Q. Now was there any hoopla at the time about it?

A. No, we just did it. It was rather amazing. What truly amazed me is that it’s really been a good bridge and it’s still there. This is 2007. Speaking of that era, there was another little job that I was assigned. I got all kinds of weird jobs that people thought of, how to do things. The Navy had a submarine about 35 feet long that they used on parades out in Whitehall. The University had a little thing that all the students knew about, which was going to watch the submarine races. Well, they thought it would be a good idea if they had a submarine. And so we approached the Whitehall Naval Reserve and they said, “Yes, we can give you ours.” They were done with it. So I got the submarine on a trailer and brought it up here. Built two concrete piers and anchored it down because we knew it would be gone if we didn’t. So that submarine was there until I retired. That was some 10-15 years at least. It was painted multi colors. It was battered. It was beat up.
But everybody knew that they could go and watch the submarine races, which was kind of a fun thing. I guess it was just fun working here. And particularly my job because I got all kinds of strange things to do, which made it interesting.

Q. Did you have strange things happen when you were Director of Major Construction?

A. There were things happen all through. One of the things that happened when I was Director of Major Construction was serious but it’s still an interesting one. When we built the outpatient clinic, that’s a big square block building. Little-known point – and nobody wants to know – there’s 880 doors in that building. When we had the hole dug for that big building, which was about 25 feet deep, for the size of the building, there was a water line that came up through the side and had been propped up because it was ten feet above the bottom of the excavation. Until they could re-route the water line around it, the earth that they had taken away was dumped over near Canon Drive, next to the recreation fields over there. But anyway, I got a call real early in the morning that I had better get in in a hurry, which I did. It was one great big lake. I think there was an 18-inch waterline had broken during the night and nobody noticed it, and hundreds of thousands of gallons of water just pumped in until it was full. And the problem was that all that earth had moved was piled on the valves. We couldn’t find [the valves] because it was under all the excavated soil. So we were half a day getting to the valves to shut it off. And then when we shut it off, of course that shut off water to the hospital. So that was a major thing. It’s a wonder I didn’t get fired for that one. But in any case, that was a real bad problem. I don’t remember what
the water bill was to the city, but it was enormous. Another thing that happened during, thinking about strange things that happened, was down at Mirror Lake. We had gone through an evolution ever since I was here, even when I was a student, particularly when I was a student, if you get near Mirror Lake there was a horrible smell. And the springs that fed that lake at that time were high in sulfur, and the smell was terrible. So through the years the University has tried a series of many things to get that smell away. One of the things of course was to stop the spring, which goes down into the drain and goes to the river. But now they’re using city water. They didn’t want to go to the expense of using city water ’cause that lake holds a lot of water and evaporation runs away and all kinds of things. So one of the evolutionary things that happened is that somebody had the idea [that since] we have all these tunnels underground, why don’t we pipe some of that water that comes from the river from the Power Plant through the tunnel and dump it into the lake, which was a good idea, but nobody thought about the fact that first of all, it’s river water. And not necessarily real clean. And second of all, it raises the temperature some six or eight degrees from its normal temperature which makes algae grow and a lot of other things. So, that went on for a couple of years and we thought of different ways to try to make that work. One of the things that we did was to chlorinate the water. If you look down around the amphitheater there’s a little octagonal shaped stone building. And in that building had been housed for electrical systems or something which was not in use. We put a chlorinator and chlorine bottles that were over five feet tall in that little building, and chlorinated the water. And it was fairly successful to a degree.
However, again I got a call from one of the maintenance people that was out early in the morning who said, “You better come down and look at Mirror Lake.” When I got down there, one of the chlorine bottles had rusted through in that building and we had a chlorine leak of an entire bottle of chlorine. And chlorine is heavier than air, so it just lays there. It settles. If you were to draw a contour map of Mirror Lake up about two or three feet above water level, everything was dead from that point down to the lake. Every shrub, every bit of grass, everything was dead and brown when I got there. So it was a matter of absorbing all of the chlorine and eventually getting that back to normal. So there’s lots of problems. We installed a fountain in it, for aeration. That’s why the fountain was there to start with. And that was a big fight in itself because nobody wanted to disturb the stillness of this water. If you put in a fountain, it’s going to ruffle up the water. So until I came along, it never had a fountain in it, and I really caught it because we put a fountain in there. Because that was still a quiet place where you could go, that type of atmosphere. But we tried. The main reason we put a fountain in wasn’t for looks; it was to aerate the water, and the other things we were trying to do. So the fountain is still there.

Q. People like it.

A. Yes, people like it. It’s nice noise, water moving, most people like it. But it’s like the marching band; this is the way it’s going to be. You don’t change tradition.

Q. Did you end up dreading Football Saturdays when you were head of the Physical Plant?
A. Special events were difficult. One of the memories I have when I was in the position I was in was that Les Wexner was speaking for the spring graduation. The president at that time was Ed Jennings, I think.

Q. When was your last association?

A. About ’86 or so. The power for the stadium comes from McCracken Power Plant. And there’s a big cable that went all the way down to the stadium to switch gear and so forth. And the switch gear up in the Power Plant was old. Some of those switches had not been touched or changed for years and I inherited those. And I was in my office during the graduation, and I got this quick emergency call, “Come to the Power Plant. The power in the stadium went off during the president’s speech,” which was not good. But I went back there and the people who were responsible for that were already working on it and had it back to normal. Some of those switch gear are very sensitive to outside disturbance. There was a janitor standing there and he said something about that he had been sweeping in front of there and trying to figure out why it did it. He said, “You know, when that went off I had been sweeping near and I bumped that container,” what looked like a locker. And it went off. He showed us what he did and the power went off again. That was during Les Wexner’s speech. So we got it back on immediately because we knew what had happened. Of course, there was money appropriated right away for a new switch gear to replace the old switch gear. Another funny thing that happened. A couple of things. The North Tower dorms, if you look at the three towers up there, the faces of those face south, a big portion of them, the big flat side. And there was a group of students on about the
9th floor, the middle one I guess, the closest one to Woodruff Avenue. Anyway, they were going over to the dining hall, getting apples and grapefruits and oranges and so forth, and bringing them back to the rooms up there. At that time, all the windows in the dormitories opened, so that they could get air because some people liked it. But they had taken a tractor tire and cut it lengthwise, the inner tube, and had nailed it to both sides of the open window and made a big slingshot. And they were shooting apples and grapefruits and oranges and hitting people on Woodruff Avenue, which is a couple hundred feet. You can pull it clear out in the hall through the door and let it go. So the Physical Plant wound up, of course it was a student affairs problem, but physical plant wound up fixing all the windows so you couldn’t open them more than about four inches. So all those windows up there today don’t open. They used to.

Q. Did you have to react a lot with students who were doing pranks?

A. Oh yes, there were a lot of pranks. One of the things in that same dormitory, the old buttons on elevators were buttons that you pushed and indented when you pushed them. Today, you have heat sensitive ones. You just touch it and it changes. But in those days, those elevators had pressable buttons, and somebody found out that you could take Elmer's Glue and push the button and squeeze the bottle, and glue would run down through all the wiring and so forth on the back, and it just drove an elevator crazy. It would go up and down, up and down, didn’t know where to stop, and just keep going until you stopped it physically. Of course, you had to change all the controls.

Q. All of that destruction just for fun?
A. Just for fun. One of the things that happened in the south dorm, which cost us some money but not a lot. We had regraded around those towers. They had resodded one afternoon. And the next morning I got a call after I got in the office to come down to, I don’t remember which one of those tower it was, we went up to about seventh floor. They were 11-story dorms. And during the night, those students were men at that time in that dorm, had rolled up that loose sod that had been laid, took it up and totally sodded the shower. So you walk in there and it was steamy and wet, all mud. And they got it all green side up. Those kinds of prank were pretty constant.

Q. Were there ever students who you just wanted to kick them out?

A. Oh yes. We had tried that in the north dorms. There was time that something happened, I’m not even going to tell you what it was, but it was so bad that we had to totally take out all the carpets, sterilize all of the walls, and anything that was soft, totally steam clean that whole floor, and then repaint and recarpet that whole floor. We tried to get those students out of school. One of their fathers was an attorney and he handled the case for his son, and when we went to the student court he won. We never did get those kids out of school. But they were forewarned pretty well, and [the university] put them in different dorms in different places, because there were only about six or eight guys that were really giving us trouble. But that kind of thing was pretty malicious.

Q. And the students didn’t have to pay for whatever they did?

A. I don’t know how the results of that came out. I don’t know, they may have. Speaking of student damages and so forth, I was on campus, a couple of bad
things and one good thing. During the 1969-70 student uprisings about the Vietnam thing, it got pretty serious around here. The Oval was pock-marked [with tear gas burns]. You could walk across it a week later, [and] you could still smell tear gas where they had tried to break up crowds. The grass was burned and stained from that. I was going around the east end of the Oval in my own car to go [to the Faculty Club], and thousands of students were heading for 15th and High, and they went right around me. I was very fortunate ’cause a lot of damage was done. A lot of students were camping out, so to speak, on 15th and High. There were thousands of people who just stayed there 24 hours a day. I got a call from [Vice President Gordon] Gordon. We had installed an irrigation system at Mershon. He had the bright idea that we turn on the irrigation system at a certain point in time during the night. So we set it for about 4:00 in the morning and on came the irrigation and people all scattered everywhere. You know, in the administration building at that time, Physical Plant went over there and took all the glass out of that building and re-installed Lexane. Another result of that, we had brick walks everywhere. Across the Oval it was almost all brick. And we went back and paved over all those brick walks with asphalt.

Q. That’s why they’re paved now.

A. They were peeling up bricks and throwing them through the administration windows. So, you know, things that we had to do. We paved over all the beautiful brick. The atmosphere is different with brick walks as opposed to asphalt. That asphalt was the cheapest thing to do it with quick, or we probably would have done it with concrete. Some became concrete eventually. And the
expense of changing all the glass in the windows. They held President [Novice]
Fawcett, actually held him in the administration building. And we took him and a
couple of others down through the tunnels and brought them out into the Physical
Plant building and left that way.

Q. What do you mean they held them?
A. They totally surrounded [the building and] wouldn’t let anybody in our out for
days. They couldn’t get out to eat. They couldn’t do their normal things. And
they were actually held hostage, and we physically took them out down through
the tunnels, came all the way down to the physical plant power house, came out.
Of course, nobody knew they were gone.

Q. That must have been infuriating.
A. It was. It was a difficult time. You know where St. John’s Arena now is, that
whole grassy area, ROTC building, that whole grassy area was an army camp.
And we had tents and the National Guard camped there, several hundred people.

Q. Well for you it must have been hard to sympathize with anything the students
might have been arguing about, since they’re ruining your lawn.
A. I had a son who graduated in 1971 from Ohio University. And during that time
he was in high school. And he was seeing all this stuff. Later he became left of
center, and partly because I think of what he saw. I don’t know. I didn’t tell you,
also I had an order to design fencing to surround the entire east campus, main
campus.

Q. The whole campus?
A. The whole campus, with chain link fence, eight feet high with wire on the top. If you look, I don’t know whether it’s still there exactly, the entrance to Neil and Lane, there’s some concrete walls. Those walls were the first installation of what would have been the complete containment of the campus. Those were gates, big heavy iron gates were designed to go on those walls and swing open during the day, and have police check every person that came and went, through that gate. And that was going to happen at 15th and High, 12th and High, Neil and 11th [avenues]. That was going to happen and the rest of it would have been fenced in, with access only through those gates. And that came close to being. In fact, we had started.

Q. Would this have been a temporary thing?
A. No, it was going to be permanent. We had piers designed and wire in between them, chain link. It was a hefty wire fence. Finally, there was sense enough to decide, “Hey, this is just going to infuriate people.”

Q. Well, it would look more like a prison.
A. It would look like an institution of some sort.

Q. Somebody told me at some point that there’s a little [wall], it’s on Neil [Avenue] somewhere, near I want to say 12th [Avenue] or something, it has the gate that rises up and back, that somebody wanted that installed to slow down any kind of movement.
A. Well, basically there was, we worked quite a bit with campus planning, and one of the things that campus planning wanted to do was to make a pedestrian campus. So one of the designs I did was the closing of north and south Oval
drives. At one time there was a road all the way around the Oval. In fact, there were parades and all kinds of neat things went on on the north Oval. In the spring they would have a parade and people made floats. I participated in a parade with the College of Engineering, School of Architecture at one point when I was about a sophomore or junior. It was decided it would be good if they cut out all the vehicular traffic on the Oval. So we designed the closure and the pavements and so forth. In fact, if you look today, a lot of the pavement on the north Oval is the original material that we did way back then. So closing the campus. And behind the library was one of those. We tried to close it totally as we did north and south Oval, but because of the need of traffic then they put the control gate on it. And that was the only thing. Now, you had to have a gate pass to get through, like our trucks and our vehicles and emergency, that kind of thing. South Oval never did completely close because they needed parking for the library on the south side, from the Faculty Club westward there’s a strip of parking still there. In order block traffic between that parking [area] and the road that goes behind, knock-down posts were installed for emergency only.

Q. When you see something like Virginia Tech, the students, 1) are you glad you’re no longer plant director, and 2) had you ever faced any kind of security issue, other than the demonstration?

A. Well, the demonstration was probably bigger than Virginia Tech ever was, except nobody was killed. We were lucky. It came close to that, awful close. That’s probably the worst. There was always some security problems, theft, our own internal problems. Probably one of the other things that affected Physical Plant
operations was the change in the law that allowed strikes and unionization of public employees. Until that law came into place, you couldn’t organize on a state university or public grounds. And that really changed the whole picture of how things happened. We came close to having to close the campus a couple of times because of strikes. They even had to send students home at one point because we were very close to totally having to close down because of a union strike. In discussions of unionization, of course I’m obviously not anti-labor but I’m administration, so I have a different viewpoint than labor does. But we spent an awful lot of our budgets and energy in labor negotiations and when people had a complaint or a gripe, there was a system that we went through to hear all of those complaints. And how you promoted someone. Sometimes we’d have someone that we knew should be promoted but they didn’t have the kind of seniority that certain other ones did, so you couldn’t do it. That was disturbing, and partly why I retired. The other, it seemed like up until I became the Assistant Vice President it was fun. But when you get to that point where you are responsible for everything, it changes your attitude. And our budgets were really being tramped down. We weren’t able to do the things that we knew were right, that we needed to do to keep a clean campus and make it a beautiful place to come to. Budgets were horrible, and the other thing was, that labor was just driving us crazy. I spent a big portion of my time in labor and budgets. I couldn’t really administer to a lot of things that I thought … in fact, I shouldn’t put it on the record, but I was having arrhythmia problems, a heart condition, and I was in the hospital twice. When I retired, I haven’t had it since. It was just the pressures
of that type of situation. Schools that are smaller have a lot of major problems the same as we did. But I think that the size, you’re talking about administering a city, and you’re talking about putting them to bed at night and getting them up in the morning, and feeding them all, and making sure everything is working. You had to make sure they have a decent place to live and go to school. And that’s a little different than being the mayor of a city of 50,000.

Q. Right.

A. It’s a tremendous situation.

Q. How big was your staff when you retired?

A. I had about 800 people.

Q. A lot.

A. It really wasn’t, because we had had over 1,000 at one point. The thing that we had to do was to try to figure out how we could substitute contracts for people. And that was anti-labor because every time I would say, hey, we’ve got to save some money and get it done cheaper. I can take University Hall and have a contract company in here for custodian, I can do it for 20 percent less. And it’s costing me $100,000 a year, there’s $20,000. Hypothetically. But then you riled up the labor and they said, “You can’t do that because you have a certain labor agreement.” So labor caused a lot of problems. Our budget reductions, personnel problems, were all very difficult, and still are I suspect.

Q. I just happened to see, I had an inquiry that someone asked about Physical Plant. I saw two articles in there. One was your predecessor, Tom Smith, when he was
retiring, he said that one thing he wouldn’t miss or he knew wouldn’t happen was that the phone would be ringing by his bed in the middle of the night.

A. That happens.

Q. So did that happen a lot to you?

A. Not a lot but it happened. Some of the incidents that occurred were accidents or flooding. We had a tremendous flood under Pomerene Hall. There are tunnels that go down Neil Avenue and go through into Pomerene Hall as they do [to] every building. But there was a major water line break in one of those tunnels, and across the street from Pomerene. These are the kinds of calls you get at 2:00 in the morning. Someone discovered water coming into Pomerene and they wondered where it’s coming from. Well, it was coming up out of the tunnels. Across the street, a professor had a collection of historic women’s clothing in the basement. The rooms where his collection was stored were flooded. Of course, we were blamed. There was some loss, but most of the collection was saved. The collection of clothing [dated] as far back as the 1700’s and 1800’s, fancy ball dresses. I mean, literally millions of dollars worth, in that collection across the street. And the water was starting to come up in that building from that break in Pomerene Hall. That was a major issue, and he was on our case for weeks, because we had to help get all that stuff out of there. Then it all had to be dried and re-preserved because of the wet and horrible water that was coming up. That all ties together with the Mirror Lake overflow, the same area there. So that kind of problem is something that you just don’t want to go through. But the results
were terrible. They had to close down the food services in Pomerene. And it was a major dining room at that time. A lot of people ate there.

Q. Well, the blizzard must have been a nightmare.

A. That was fun.

Q. How did you all deal with that? Because it was the only time that it was shut down.

A. We had a good organization, I thought. In fact, I guess I shouldn’t say it this way, all the time I was on campus it was “my campus.” I felt so personally attached, that this campus was mine. You can’t do anything unless I know what you’re doing. I got that kind of an attitude, everybody knew this. We had an organization of supervisors that I thought were absolutely superb. The people working for us in supervisory capacities all the way down to shop foreman were absolutely top dog, in my book. We had shop supervisors that I could depend on. And snow removal was one of them. We had zones and each one of those supervisors knew their zone, and they knew the category of removal. For example, the hospital never closed. The emergency access to the emergency room and/or hospital is first priority, no matter what. And you keep that that way, and people knew that. The same way with dormitories where people live, had to get kids food, had to make sure they were [safe], that kind of thing. So that was second priority, where people were. The third priority was more minor kinds of roads, access over to the married student housing campus because they had kids in there and had to get them wherever, doctors and so forth. The priorities were that way and we came close a couple of times, to the point where we thought we had
had it. But it never really fully happened. We were delayed an hour or two, but there was no time that we closed.

Q. But the blizzard was in ’77.
A. We still had operations and we still had access to the hospital.

Q. But there were no classes.
A. They may have closed for the day but I don’t think it much of a major problem.

Q. But the basic services were still there.
A. The basic services were still there, all the employees, well there were a few obviously who couldn’t get in.

Q. Well, could you get in?
A. I did. I remember battling all the way in because I lived 25 miles away. But I got here. I was here for two days and didn’t go home.

Q. Where did you stay?
A. We had a cot brought over from dorms and I stayed in my office.

Q. How often did you have to do that?
A. I did it two or three times. One time during the strike situation. We stayed, all of us, and the upper administration stayed. In fact, we kept cots later, just for future emergencies. We just didn’t want to keep transporting them back and forth. I would say probably the biggest major change of our campus happened, I think, basically from 1950 to 1980. Those 30 years saw all the change, from a small campus. And then after the end of the second world war, education became different too, because all the GI's, most of which would never have gone to
college, were here, which increased the ranks and then education became important.

Q. Getting back to that a little bit, why do you think the east side of High Street, why didn’t the University start buying the east side of High Street? They’ve done that now with Gateway, but maybe that’s the beginning.

A. They don’t own Gateway. They’re participating in the Campus Partners thing. They don’t own the land. I suspect first of all expense. Developed land is the most expensive thing you can buy. Northwestern University found that out. I used to belong to Big Ten organizations and we’d go to various schools and see how they do things. And the acquisition of land, that tough difficult area where the north dorms are, the example of that was very expensive to buy all that and very piecemeal and hard to get. You can buy a little here and a little there and it took forever to get. Northwestern did a very brilliant thing. The land around Northwestern in Chicago is totally encompassed, more than we are, because we had open ground. They wanted about 25 acres to develop, and they went to Indiana and got an enormous barge full of huge limestone blocks from the quarries. Those stones were almost half as big as this room, limestone, and hauled them up and built a great big dam so to speak, out in Lake Michigan, to enclose an area. Then they went to Michigan with big barges and brought sand back and filled that entire area. So if you go to Northwestern and look around you’ll see this thing projecting out in Lake Michigan which is 20-25 acres. And it was cheaper than buying land, which is the answer really to what you’re asking. Why we don’t build east of High Street. I think today, as opposed to the way it was
then – I can remember when I came to school all of 15th Avenue, all of 15th, 17th, Chittenden, all that area, was really nice-looking area. And fraternities and sororities had their buildings all kept in first-class shape. But the attitude of private ownership became more of make money, get out of there type of thing. The change in attitude of Greek organizations allowed some of it to go. Or not be kept like they were. So that area has changed dramatically also since I was in school. I lived at 15th and High, right behind Long’s Bookstore, on the other side of the street. That was a neat place to be. It was just very clean. The streets weren’t littered like they are today. I go up and down the streets and, oh boy. Attitudes change and I don’t think there’s responsibility for a lot of people. At one point we had a landowner while I was here, who was acquiring lots of properties. He bought them and just had people living in them like rats. Didn’t do anything to keep them up. He finally wound up in jail eventually because of the problems. He made millions and people suffered. Today the results of that are still there. The alleys are dirty. I wish it could be more like the Campus Partners, I wish we could clean up that whole area.

Q. I think like when you were here it has to be one area at a time. That whole neighborhood isn’t going to change but as they do it, one area at a time.

A. Security during the time that I was here, the change in security from when I was in school to when I retired, which is 40 years or better, there was a whole difference in attitude. Girls could walk across campus at night and there wasn’t the slightest idea of any problem, or men for that matter. And today, when my daughter was in school during 1976 to 1980, I was scared to death for her, all the
time she was here. She lived on Lane Avenue and I kept thinking, “If she comes down through there for some reason …” I worried all the time, even though I was close. My wife was here. Not at that time my wife, but you could go out and there was no problem at all. I think it’s a lot worse. First of all, there was no drug problem, which, I don’t know how much effect that has, but there were no problems with that at all. It was just unheard of. When I was a student I had never even heard of these things.

Q. This is Kevlin Haire. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Dean Ramsey on August 29, 2007. This is side 1 of tape 2. Dean, why don’t you tell me a little bit about, you were talking about changes from when you were a student here until now, but I wanted to talk about people from when you were a student. What were the main ones?

A. Starting with President Fawcett. We were talking about the differences in the overall feeling of the campus and people’s safety and a lot of things. I would say that President Fawcett was the last President of what I would call the grand old era of Presidents, who I looked up to as almost a small god. Because their word was it. And how those people were respected. When I first came here of course, the President lived on 12th Avenue above Browning Amphitheater. And Mrs. Fawcett was a grand lady so to speak. She was just that way. One of the things that she was most proud of was the house that they lived in. And it was and still is there. It was maintained by us, the physical plant, and all the grounds around it. The old observatory was there, which is now gone, right west of the house. But one of the things that she was most proud of was the rose garden, almost like the
White House. And when Bob Hope came to visit, she wanted to show off her rose
garden. So we conveniently had our groundskeeper there who was a very hard-
working, quiet man, I made sure he was there. So this meant a lot to the Physical
Plant people, that she personally took Bob Hope to this guy and said, “Here’s the
guy that takes care of my rose garden.” Well, you think that sounds kind of funny
but in a way it’s not, because from a morale standpoint that went up about 90
points right away. The President’s wife felt strong enough about people. And
that was the attitude all over campus. And one of the things that you asked also on
your list here was the change in green materials, in growing plants. I came here in
the middle of the elm tree loss. And every elm tree on campus except for 50 or so
of them were dying from Dutch Elm disease. This was an elm campus at one
time. The major trees on campus were elm. And when they went, that left this
campus in really barren shape. There had never been any evergreens planted on
the Oval, ever. And so I introduced some of the evergreens that you see on
campus today. The pines and spruce and firs and so forth. The change of Mirror
Lake, which had been really just kind of a little puddle down there. We improved
the whole, what they call the south Oval. One of the best things I think that I was
able to do was to bring up the quality of the grounds maintenance operation and
the types of plant materials. And we started the Chadwick Arboretum because of
the variety of trees that we tried to introduce. I made it a point, even when I was
not doing the design that our landscape architects were calling for specific plants,
worked with the horticulture department and absolutely got the varieties of plants
that should be on a major campus. After I retired I came back to visit, and some
of the reaction was, “Oh boy, the campus doesn’t look like it did when you were here.” And I guess that was also partly due to the fact that I was personally felt it was mine. Another thing that kind of added to that too, Vice President Carson was very site-oriented. He wanted things maintained correctly – the walks, the trees trimmed, the grass mowed, he wanted things first class. And he had what he called “Gordon Carson’s Color Book.” And every so often I’d get a “Gordon Carson Color Book” – I was down a couple of ranks from him – I’d get this book in the mail, and what happened was that Polaroids had just come into being, and he’d walk around campus with his Polaroid camera, taking pictures of things that didn’t look so good. Where kids would walk and make paths and a tree that was half dead or something. So I’d get this color book and he would expect, within a week, for me to get that color book back with a reply for each photograph that was in it. And sometimes there would be 20-25 photographs in this book. And so he was responsible for a lot. He was looked at by a lot of people on campus as being a top administrator, but too demanding, maybe more so than he should have been. That’s the way a lot of people looked at him. But I respected that because I knew what he was doing. I could see that he was trying to improve the site, trying to make the campus look good. One of the first things that’s impressionable, when you bring a young person, mom and dad on campus, they don’t really see the professors teaching something right; the first thing they see is if the yard’s mowed. And that’s what he was aiming for. So he was probably responsible for a lot of the upgrades of the green space on campus. By force. But a very good
situation. And I see things today that, of course things are always better when
you were there.

Q. But I’ve had comments, not from colleagues, who have been here a long time,
who say that the upkeep of campus isn’t what it used to be. I’m sure a lot of that
is money.

A. I have to say this, when I drove in here today and parked, when you go out to
lunch or whatever, look at the lawn outdoors. It’s about six to eight inches high
and full of weeds. I thought, “Oh my gosh, the administrative office could at least
mow the yard.”

Q. Well, the flowers are checked up on by staff.

A. The flowers look great. By the people here, oh boy, okay. You have to resort to
that sometimes.

Q. Exactly. Two last questions. One is what do you think your great
accomplishment is overall, and two, you have to tell the elephant story that I’ve
heard about on several occasions.

A. Okay. Well, the elephant is probably just general. I think the fact that I was the
first landscape architect meant something. The fact that it grew from just me to
several. It has eroded some right now, because they have three or four on staff
but they are looked at as just part of the staff and not really a point where they
have the responsibility. They have the capability, not the responsibility. But the
overall level of buildings and grounds, I think during that 30 years, I think
improved drastically. Campus was at a low ebb, after all the elm trees had died
and post-war, when money was being spent to build barracks and a lot of other
things. I was fairly close to Bob Whiteus who was the associate dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine. And I had worked with him when we built the outpatient hospital for vet medicine. He called me one afternoon. He had an elephant that was going to die. And I’ll try to make it short. And he said, “Can you have some of your people come over and bury it?” And so what I did that afternoon was to arrange to have one of our shop superintendents to go over with his crew to west campus and dig a hole that was big enough for an elephant.

Q. And this is on west campus. You have to give the spot.

A. North of Lane Avenue and I’d say near where the turf test plots are off of North Star, east of that and kind of southeast of the big woods. There’s a little ravine there. Well anyway, I sent them over there, not thinking about talking to anybody. The next morning, the shop superintendent had the truck and the crane and some other things ready to go. They went over and of all things, the elephant was way back in the building. So they had to put a cable on the elephant and slide him all the way through the building to get him out. And they picked it up and lifted it into the dump truck. And I kept thinking, “I hope The Lantern doesn’t get here, because if The Lantern gets here, I can see pictures in tomorrow’s paper with this elephant with his trunk hanging over the side and all this stuff.” And so we proceeded. Bob Whiteus was there with us, the Dean. We went over to the hole and when we got there, Bob had brought along a chain saw. And he said, “We need to cut off about three feet of the front legs because these people at the zoo want it to do some research on feet and leg problems.” So they were going to dissect this leg. So we cut those off and laid them aside next to the hole. Dumped
the elephant in the hole and proceeded with the tractor to cover it all over. And
when we left, the elephant’s legs were still there and Bob said, “Well, they’re
going to be here pretty soon and they’ll get them.” Next morning, I got a call
from the Vice President of the College of Agriculture [Roy Kottman]. And he
said, “Do you know anything about what’s going on the land over there?”
Somehow he found out. But in any case, he said, “We found these strange-
looking things that had rolled down in the ravine into the creek bed. I had a
tractor with a front-end loader take them up and dump them in the woods, up to
the northwest. Can you tell me about this?” Of course, he was a little bit
disturbed that I hadn’t called him and told him what I wanted to do. So, we had
our discussion and I told him I was sorry and all that. So he said, “That’s all
right, I just wanted to know.” But I called Dean Whiteus and said, “Bob, (this is
by 4:00 in the afternoon and people were getting ready to leave), can you come
over?” I said, “We’ve got to go over and look because those legs were found
taken into the woods.” And he said, “Can you come over with a truck and we’ll
go get them, and I’ll bring them back to our incinerator and we’ll get rid of
them?” So by the time we got there, it was 4:30, quarter til five, and there were
about 25-30 people in the woods bird watching. And it was a little bit, kind of
interesting, that we had to go into the woods and find these things with these bird
watchers around, and we were afraid they were going to find the legs before we
found them. But we found them and he said, “You go talk to those people while I
take these things up and get them back in the truck.” As a distraction, I asked the
leader of the bird watchers, “Do you have proper authority to be in the woods?”
We didn’t want strangers walking through the woods. In the meantime, [Bob] got them and took them away. So I suspect that some day this campus will get big enough they’ll want to build a building there and they’re going to start digging and they’re going to find this massive something with two short legs. They’re going to wonder how it walked or what it was doing there. I can just see that 50 years from now. I won’t, but I’d love to hear the repercussions on this.

Q. They’ll think they’ve discovered a new species.
A. All kinds of strange things. Those are fun stories. At the time it was kind of tough. But my time at the University was absolutely fabulous. Couldn’t have had a better situation. I felt I was very fortunate, from a guy who was just about ready to quit at Ohio State to that point. I thought, “You know most landscape architects don’t have a horticulture background.” At that time I was very friendly with the horticulture people. I think my job, strangely, probably had more weird and strange things and fun things than most people who work for a school. And I did all kinds of things that were really different.

Q. You built buildings, buried elephants, all kinds of things.
A. You name it, we did it. We caught heck for not emptying the waste baskets.
Q. Well, thank you very much for coming. I appreciate it.
A. I hope I gave you the information you needed. I think there’s some future things that are going to happen, like I was called back two or three years ago, about the dump problem, those kinds of things. People don’t know until they run into it or discover it. People won’t understand why unless they have the story. I think the present person who is in my job, who’s now Associate Vice President, a young
lady [Melissa Bellini] who has only a business background, I think she is probably a better administrator than I was maybe, but she won’t understand why and wherefore of the engineering side of the physical facilities operation. I’ve thought of that several times and I guess it’s okay. But I’d like to have seen somebody with a background in architecture, engineering, something more oriented to that. Maybe some engineer with an MBA who has a business background. In fact, if I have time I think I’ll go over and see if she’s there. I’ve never met her.

Q. I just saw her picture somewhere.

A. Did you?

Q. Yes. Do you want to add anything?

A. No, except I thank you for the opportunity to put some of my little anecdotes in the history book.

Q. We thank you.

A. I guess I was very lucky when I was here, to have a job where every day was different. I never did the same thing twice. Sometimes it was good. Sometimes it was fun. Sometimes I was ready to quit. But it was a good 30 years.

Q. Well, thank you again.

A. You’re welcome.