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Cullom Davis Memoir

Davis, Cullom

Interview and memoir

9 CDs, 360 min., 95 pp., Table of Contents

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Davis, Emeritus Professor of History at SSU/UIS and retired after 39 years of teaching and participation in the experiment that was Sangamon State University. He started at SSU when the university first began by hiring the faculty, some of whom he described as "de-frocked priests" and "refugees from the campus battles of the 1960s." Davis started the Oral History Office at SSU as a means to preserve less prominent historical interests such as women, minorities, and the poor. Those oral histories remain as part of the Special Collections at the UIS Archives in Brookens Library.

Interview by Justin Law, 2009

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PREFACE

This oral history of the life and work of Cullom Davis is the product of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Justin Law during late 2008 and early 2009. Justin Law transcribed the recordings, and Cullom Davis edited the transcripts. The UIS Alumni SAGE Society conceived and planned this and other interviews in order to produce personal memoirs by former students, faculty, supporters and employees of the university. The entire collection is on deposit in the UIS Archives and Special Collection, and is available for reading and research.

G. Cullom Davis, Jr. was born on May 2, 1935 in Aurora, Illinois. His parents, George C. and Betty Scripps Davis, moved the family back to their previous home in Peoria when their son was two. After public schooling in Peoria, Cullom attended Lawrenceville School and then Princeton University, both in New Jersey. After graduation in 1957, Cullom married Marilyn Whittaker, and they moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, where he taught history for two years at Punahou Academy. From 1959 to 1964 he was a graduate student in History at the University of Illinois (Urbana), and he then joined the History Department at Indiana University, where taught for five years. By then the family included three children: Cathy, Lesa, and Cully. Several years later the marriage ended, and in 1976 Cullom married Ann Chapman Giordano.

In late 1969 Cullom accepted a job offer from Robert Spencer, newly appointed president of Sangamon State University. With the nebulous title of Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and diverse urgent duties, he began work on February 1, 1970. Over the next 30 years he held successive faculty appointments and a variety of administrative positions. He retired from teaching in 1995, and from his assignment as Director of the Lincoln Legal Papers in 2000.

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word. Both the transcriber and the editor have preserved the informal conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. UIS is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Cullom Davis Memoir
Interview 1: February 8, 2009
Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois
Interviewer: Justin Law

Begin tape 1, side 1

Q: This is an oral history interview with Cullom Davis, the interviewer is Justin Law. Ok Cullom, why don't we start with where were you born?

A: All right, that's, that's a straight up question. I was born in Aurora, Illinois, up near Chicago, but I really am a native of Peoria because my parents came from Peoria. And they lived there almost all of their lives except during the Great Depression when my father lost his banking job in Peoria and the family moved up to Aurora in the hopes of finding something. And I was born in the hospital in Aurora on May 2, 1935.

Q: What are your earliest memories of Aurora?

A: I have none. Because my parents then moved back when I was about three, I guess, in 1938 because my dad got a job in a department store back in Peoria, which is where his parents had lived and my mother's parents had lived. I might add a little bit, just for context, my parents had both grown up in Peoria though my mother was born further west in Schuyler County, Illinois. But they had both grown up in what I think I would describe as...middle-class comfort. Her parents were successful, and both of my parents went to good colleges actually.

So they were college educated, but as I look back on it as an historian, they were very profoundly influenced by the Great Depression because my dad lost several jobs. And I think, I think, they got by only by help from his father, my grandfather, who was not real wealthy but wealthy enough to be able to send a check every month for about a hundred bucks which was rent, and food. So they lived an uncertain life in those years, and they had a daughter already, who'd been born in 1930, my older sister, whose name is Mary.

And by the way, I'm a junior. I'm George Cullom Davis Jr. And to save confusion in the household because my father was known as George, from the beginning they called me Cullom, which I kind of appreciated because I don't particularly like the name George, and ...so this was a little more distinctive, so I always have to spell it for people (laughter) because it's an unusual family name.

Q: What do you remember of life in the forties?

A: Ok. Well, and I do remember from about just age four, I remember a couple little things but nothing about the period. No, it's just that as you develop consciousness, you know. I faintly remember my other grandfather, my grandfather Scripps, my mother's maiden name was Scripps, and I, I remember him once building me a little toy boat which was, you know, is what a kid would remember. But he then died very soon before I

turned five years old and both of my grandmothers had died earlier. They both had some sort of heart condition, they both died in their early forties, so I ended up really only knowing one of my grandparents.

But a...I remember a...probably the most vivid series of experiences pertaining to WWII. I was in school; I was a six-year-old when Pearl Harbor was attacked. And being a boy, I was caught up in the patriotic excitement of the war. Now we were encouraged in school and at home to save metal, particularly tin cans and a lot of our food came in tin cans. We didn't have frozen food, particularly available to general consumers. And I would ...I remember in my mother's kitchen, I would remove with these old fashion can-openers, the bottom of the can after we had used it and then flatten the can and put both the lids in it and save them in a sack and then carry them on my wagon to a collection point about four blocks away. And supposedly this was helping the war effort. A lot of historians later believed that it was just a way of making people feel they were doing their share.

But we also had a Victory garden, we had a back yard, not huge, but big enough to plant vegetables. And I remember my parents also said that also was part of the war effort. My father tried to enlist in the Navy, but couldn't, he had poor teeth. But I had an uncle who served in the Army Engineers during the war, and I followed his, I had a little map, you know, and I would follow that sort of thing. So I was a, you know, a six, seven, nine-year-old boy, really interested in tanks, and airplanes, and the war stories and all, that's probably my most vivid over all impression of the forties.

I had friends in my neighborhood, I would walk to school, it was just four blocks away in Peoria, and it was called Washington School, and I had good friends in the neighborhood. One of my good friends, as I look back on it, was an African-American. And we lived on kind of the bluff of one of the hills of the Illinois River Valley, in Peoria, not in a fancy home, but a comfortable home...and he lived below the bluff. But he, his name was Junior Tracy, and he often came over to play. A and I remember sadly that at a certain age, my mother said, "Well, it's been nice that you've been a friend to Junior Tracy, but we're going to have you playing with your own more immediate neighborhood friends."

And at the time, I just kinda, didn't understand that, and I don't say that to criticize my parents. They were part of an earlier generation, but I think that happened to many families, that after a certain age you were to stick with your own. And I had some other friends. But I always liked Junior, and I often thought, what happened to Junior Tracy? And I've had regrets that I wasn't a little more, stubborn, in wanting to keep a friendship. This was definitely a mixed school; it was right on the borderline between the black, community in the flats, and the, the, the bluff. So there were plenty of black children in the school. And you know there's a certain age when you don't know prejudice, you don't even feel it, you don't know, you don't make those distinctions... That's kind of a sad memory of my life.

Clearly my parents still weren't all that wealthy because, not my grandfather Davis, but my grandfather Scripps, was living in our house with us, and that was more common in those days, it would be a multi-generation family. And then my uncle also, before he

went to the war, was living there. And I think it was probably, what was it, a three-bedroom, maybe a four-bedroom house, old place, but you know, we people lived together, and part of that was to save money.

Q: So what were your early interests in history?

A: Oh gosh...

Q: Where do you think your interest in history came from?

A: Well, I don't know that I, personally, was interested. I mean I was interested in war. But my father, who spent his whole career in department store sales work and never as a real executive, kind of what used to be called a floor walker. He would kind of be in charge of walking around on the...and he was a wonderful man, gentle and loving. And he loved to read, just was a, consummate reader, and among his favorite writings were histories. He kind of liked western history; he loved to read about Custer and his last stand. He loved British history, of the early American West, and so I'm sure, in some subtle way because of the way he talked about the heroes in his life, I picked up an appreciation for history.

And the first real history book I remember was one he gave me, which was compiled by Life Magazine after the end of World War II. It was a photographic history of the war, a great big thick thing...(cough)...excuse me, and I would pore over that a lot. It wasn't really a history, it was, well as Life Magazine was, it was really a picture book, with captions, and a little bit of text. But for a young kid, it was fascinating to see the various bombers and fighter planes, tanks, and some of the generals, and so forth. So I don't recall a particular interest in history through grade school.

My parents moved to a suburb of Peoria when I was twelve in 1947 because they had built a house out in Peoria Heights. And so my last three years of grade school, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, were in a smaller grade school in Peoria Heights Grade School. But even there, oh I know we had to study social studies in, I think, eighth grade, we, you should learn some American history. But it wasn't, I didn't especially, actually I loved what they called mechanical drawing, they had a short course in that, and another short course, what a funny old word in orthography. Do you know what orthography is?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Well it is words, the study of root words, and prefixes, and suffixes, and I, I was pretty good in vocabulary and spelling, I was a very good arithmetic student, just had a natural head for counting, numbers. So, as far as grade school was concerned, I read history as part of the curriculum, but you know, I maybe, you know I may well have, kind of, glanced thru a few of my fathers books, but I don't remember kind of sitting down and reading them.

Q: So, when did that, when did that culminate then, I guess?

A: I don't, well I'm trying to think, well, I went to one year of high school in Peoria, it's called Peoria Central, it's still there, and there I was a whiz in French, and Latin. My parents felt strongly about my studying Latin, and Algebra, which was what they taught then to freshmen, now I think they teach that in grade school (laughs) but in those days it was. And I was excellent in those things, and I don't, I don't remember a freshmen social studies course, less I may have had one, but then I went away to school in New Jersey, a school called Lawrenceville, which was an all boys school and which was fairly well known, particularly it was known, as what they called a feeder school, if you wanted to get into Princeton University.

And I have to tell you, that both my grandfather, and my father, and also my uncle, Davis, had all gone to Princeton. So, there was a family tradition there, which was engrained in me, a lot, in fact, even at age eleven. In 1946, I rode with my father in an airplane to a reunion at Princeton. It was his twentieth reunion, and my grandfather was there, and my uncle. But there was a family picture of three generations, me, this little eleven year old, at Princeton. Lawrenceville School was just five miles down the road from Princeton, so, it was something of a feeder school.

And I went there suffering from a fairly serious disease, I had developed... am I speaking too rapidly here... I developed hepatitis, from, apparently contaminated food, or unsanitary behavior on my own part, I don't know what, it wasn't the fatal, it was type A, which, I simply couldn't eat any fatty foods for the year, and I didn't exercise the whole summer before going away to school. I had to lie down because in those days you had to be very inactive, and I learned then that I could only drink skim milk. Now days I wouldn't drink anything else; I couldn't eat butter, no greasy foods because it was kind of a strict diet, and bed rest all that summer, which for a fifteen year old, and fourteen year old, is no fun.

And I was well enough though to go away to school. I took the train alone. But I couldn't exercise, which made me the butt of a lot of adolescent teasing. You're teased anyway for being a newcomer. But I couldn't get, I couldn't participate, I'd been a very good swimmer, not great, but a very good competitive swimmer as a kid, couldn't do that, so I'm pretty sure that I was perceived by my classmates as pretty much a nerd. (laughs) But I, I buckled down, I was homesick. I worked hard, and it was a great experience just because the teachers were really excellent. The classes were very small, maybe nine students per class, it's a beautiful school with its own campus, and a beautiful athletic facility, and you know, just everything, really plush.

And I began to shine as a student. And got very good grades in geometry, and solid geometry, which I don't think they even teach in school now, (laughs) not calculus; that was still ahead. But I took some history classes, and my history teacher used, my American history teacher, used one of the classic, big, textbook of the time by two distinguished historians, Samuel Elliot Morrison, and Henry Steele Commager. And it was an immense, nine hundred page text, no pictures to speak of, no graphs; it was a classic, hard-headed, history book.

And so that was our text, and I did well in that class, but I don't remember deciding at that time that I want to be a historian. But I did well, and I know I got a very good grounding at the secondary school that I think, you know in American history. Now let me pause there; I've kind of monopolized. So, if you want to take a moment to catch up, or have a question about that, you're welcome to.

Q: How long did you attend Lawrenceville?

A: I attended three years. My sophomore, junior, and senior years, and air travel was possible then, but it was more expensive, and so by and large, I only came home for Christmas. And I stayed with my aunt and uncle in their home in New York for Thanksgiving. I don't remember Easter; I may have come home for spring. But it was a train ride, a day and half train ride, from Philadelphia to Chicago and then down to Peoria. So I developed an ability to travel on my own.

I spent three years there, and I did very well academically, I was an honor student, won some awards, got a Latin prize, got a French prize, got an Algebra prize or a Geometry Prize, and had excellent grades, but I never did get involved in athletics again. I don't know why, but I got very active in, what do you call it, extracurricular things. And I was a student council member, and I was, became President of the theatre club, and the Chapel Ushers, and a bunch of things that. So I was kind of an all around good student, polite, nerd (laughter) I guess.

Though the irony, and I have to tell you quickly, the irony was that, when I went home, when I went home I dated a lot, I dated a girl steady, from eighth grade on, took up drinking, illegally, you know, pretty early, as a sixteen year old, didn't engage in real vandalism or anything, but at home, I was a good guy, popular, teenager. At Lawrenceville I was probably thought of as a pretty straight arrow person because there were no girls on campus. You couldn't date, it was hard even to get off campus; you were kind of a prisoner. So, as I look back on it, I was kind of... I wasn't leading two lives, but because of the circumstances, I was a real straight arrow at prep school (laughter).

Somewhere, excuse me, one example of the effect of the Depression on my parents was, it was drilled into me, that, you weren't guaranteed anything in life, so you had to make it for yourself. And I think that my parents felt that my father had led too, too privileged a childhood. He hadn't worked in summers, he had fun, he was given everything he needed. And so my parents had me working from age thirteen on, in the summers. I worked in a day camp where I was sort of a junior counselor, five days a week. Then I got a job on a small railroad that was headquartered in Peoria, and I worked on the section gang. Now that's hard work, swinging a mallet to pound the spikes into a wood tie in the hot weather. I mean that's hard work, and I worked hard at it. But I was so bad at it I think that the foreman got tired of me and I got transferred to the engineering crew. And they were nicer guys, and it was still hard work. We pounded wooden stakes, we were leveling the track, you know, or doing the, what do you call it, transit work to even

out the track. We didn't do the evening out but provided the numbers that then the equipment did it.

But I did that for two summers. It was hard work, and I made good money, for a kid. I was able to buy a car. But my point is I worked. And then I worked a summer at a brewery, in Peoria, the Pabst Brewery. It was also hard work, moving beer, cans, cases of beer cans, and into railroad cars. You can imagine how hot they get. And then for two summers, with a friend, we formed a partnership that did landscape work. Mostly spraying pesticides and insecticides, and so I became accustomed to working. And in all likelihood, most people who look back on those experiences feel they learned something from it, they learned to get along...doing all right on time?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So, got a little distracted there, but I wanted to fill in, some of my, the rest of my life, at home in the summers, and at school, where I was very busy as an honor student and so forth. So my Lawrenceville years were very successful, and it meant that I, I guess had no problem with being admitted to Princeton, which today is an extraordinarily selective school. It wasn't that bad then, but it was selective. But I had all kinds of advantages. Good grades, Lawrenceville, and a family tradition. Though I did apply to other schools, but you know, the decision had been made for me in effect by my parents.

I was a fairly obedient kid, rebellious, once or twice, but they had me slotted for Princeton, and so I thought, Ok. That's how it ended up. Meanwhile, I was dating my steady girlfriend, named Marilyn, M-A-R-I-L-Y-N, and my parents liked her a lot. But they worried that we were not dating other people. We were just kind of seeing each other exclusively. She visited me once, they had a prom at Lawrenceville, the one time girls were allowed on campus, strictly chaperoned, of course. She actually took the train out, visited for prom there. And I was invited to other girls' schools, fifty miles away in Philadelphia or two hundred miles away in Boston where I went for a tea dance (laughter) or whatever it was but that was social life. Social life at Lawrenceville was, you'd have, not pizza but hoagies. You know what a hoagie is?

Q: Uh-huh

A: Submarine sandwich. We'd get hoagies and watch corny television, every Saturday night. Or there'd be a movie in school, in the gymnasium; they would set up folding chairs and we'd watch a movie. That was our social life (laughter).

Q: Do you recall any of the movies that you saw?

A: You know I don't, that's a great question, and I'm giving you a terrible answer, I really don't. They weren't first run movies, but they were, I think, fairly recent vintage, we didn't see King Kong, I mean that had been out for ten years, so I don't know, but of course, at home too, I use to love to go to the movies, they were westerns, and or Walt Disney movies, I remember some of the really early Disney movies, Dumbo, for

example, it was at an early birthday party that my mother gave for me. We all went to see *Dumbo* (laughter). But although I'm an enormous film fan now, and a self-proclaimed expert, movies weren't you know, what they were for Martin Scorsese or other directors, they weren't the meaning of my existence as a teenager.

Q: Well, what was then, the meaning of your existence as a teenager?

A: Well, thank you, boy, that's a great question. My girlfriend, my family, I obviously loved learning, athletics had been, and I played golf at home, but I wasn't that great. And I, I didn't take up really serious swimming again until I went to college, and even then I wasn't fantastic. I was on the team, but I didn't compete in any races, so (coughs), so, spectator sports I enjoyed. Peoria had one of those famous girl's baseball teams, what's the movie, *A League of Their Own*, I don't know if you ever even saw it?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But you know, during the war, men, major league ball players, most of them, the good ones, were serving. So they formed the league, particularly in Illinois, of girl's softball. And I remember my parents and I would go, this was in the forties, to the Peoria Redwings games, and also Bradley University basketball games. Bradley was a power house then, nationally. It turned out, to my, to their, to my tragic reaction, also a crooked sport. Some of the players had been taking money to shave points, you know what that, I mean, to win, but to win by less than the odds makers had predicted, and they went to prison. And this was a shattering experience for me as a teenager. I knew these guys, and I had their signatures. And I knew these guys, and yet, they were criminals.

So it was, it was probably my first encounter with the, failings of human nature. It was a big time...so I enjoyed spectator sports. And I read, did I read history? Yes, under my dad's influence as much as, I guess, my history teachers influence. I read some biographies, of Theodore Roosevelt, and Lincoln, and I became tremendously fascinated by Winston Churchill. And I remember as a teenager reading his six volume history of World War II, which was a very personal history. And he was a very beautiful writer, and I just consumed that, and I loved it. And that's an example of some of my reading from those days.

Q: So you begin Princeton, in the fall of 1953?

A: Yes, exactly. And fortunately, but in fact, ultimately, unfortunately, two of my closest friends from Peoria also were admitted to Princeton. So we roomed together, which was great fun. But as a result, we didn't meet as many new friends as we might have, just the three of us rooming together, just that first year, but we met others. But I always thought in retrospect, although I may have been less lonely, like I had been when I'd went to Lawrenceville, it's a form of limiting yourself, to me, because you've got your friends, they're built in, because you've known them for twenty years. But they were nice guys, it's just that, I didn't do all that well at Princeton; I drank a lot, partied a lot. I got respectable grades, but C's.

Q: Now were these friends that you would spend the summers with...

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: When you were home from Lawrenceville?

A: One friend was Neal, N-E-A-L, who've I've kind of lost, though I know him, but I haven't seen in years. The other one is still a good friend even though we're separated by two thousand miles. His name is, his nickname is, Twig Branch. That's not his real name, it's his nick name. But I'm probably the only person that calls him Twig now because he's an adult, and been a college teacher, a lawyer. And if there's a phone call for Twig, he knows it's from me (laughter) probably, and he may not even like the nickname, it's a habit. Yeah, they were good friends. And Twig remains a good friend.

Q: So what were your extracurricular activities?

A: Well I...

Q: At Princeton?

A: Got involved because of my participation at Lawrenceville with the theatre, with a famous theatre group at Princeton called the Triangle Club. And they were famous because their whole existence, focused on, the, the writing, scripting, staging, of an original musical every year. And that's pretty hard. But you know, Princeton was a men's school, so, if you had a chorus line, this would be five guys in a chorus line, but they did it. And it was kind of a satirical thing, and I worked hard, but I, you know, I wasn't an actor. I worked back stage. Are we getting close to where we have to?

A: We're fine.

Q: Ok. I was an electrician. And I designed flats, flats are the scenery, and I was pretty good at it. And it was a great big theatre, so I learned a fair amount about backstage work. Why wasn't I an actor? Well, I never got the bug, or maybe I was little bit self-conscious. But and so I worked on it, but I didn't get to make the trip because they, they made a tour every Christmas vacation for two weeks of major cities around the country putting on the musical every night and going to debutante parties after the show.

And so it was a great thing, and I didn't get to. I didn't qualify to go my freshman year, I did my sophomore year, and it almost killed me because I was trying to study hard. Examinations at Princeton were always after Christmas break, which is, not good. And I got really sick on the Triangle Club tour and was behind. I spent a week in the infirmary, so and I missed classes. I would cut classes because of Triangle work, which I shouldn't have done, but I did, so I got in a little bit of trouble.

At Princeton, I remember a Dean called me up because I had more class cuts than were permitted and so my grades suffered a little bit. I was sick that winter, so I was a terrible sophomore I guess is the best way to put it (coughs). And they didn't have fraternities, but they have clubs, I guess. And what you would call rush, was called, for some reason, bicker, at Princeton. Bickering was the process of being looked over by clubs and then being selected of course, and they were selective clubs. And it was very selective.

And as I look back on it, it was very biased, prejudiced, not against me, but we had Jewish students at Princeton, not many. The rumor was there was always a quota for Jewish students, and they invariably wouldn't get one of the prestigious club bickers. And I, that made me uncomfortable, but I can't ever claim I led a protest against it, and even I went through agonies over bickering because I didn't get into the club I wanted, that my best friends had, but got into another one, a good club, but not the same one.

And I, you know, it all kind of culminated, in the middle of my sophomore year, as sort of a general depression, I suppose, in retrospect, I didn't know what that was then, and I had to struggle through that. I wasn't medicated for that, I didn't get counseling, I worked my way through it. But it was kind of a low point of my college career. I was getting C's, one D, but I, but by that time I did like history. I took several history courses my freshman year, in European Civilization, it was called, and one in American History. And I really loved history, and they had a superb history department at Princeton, distinguished scholars who were also, also taught your classes.

So you'd listen to a lecture in a big room, 250, and then you'd meet with your professor, not a graduate student, but with a professor, for a discussion once a week. And you had to be prepared. And the assignments were really heavy. Heavy, heavy reading, a lot of writing, but it was a discipline I liked. And I was never an outstanding history student, but I was good, and I liked it, the point is I really liked it. And so I got B's. Maybe one A or two, couple C's. So I was kind of an Ok student. But I had found what I wanted to major in. And that's what you do your sophomore year. And I'll pause there, in case you need to pause.

Q: No, we're fine.

A: Ok.

Q: We talked a little bit earlier about your summer work...

A: Uh-huh.

Q: What was, what did your work entail at Princeton?

A: Well I got some student help jobs, oh you know, I sold some catalogues, I'd go room to room selling Christmas gifts out of the catalogues and making a little bit of money. These were all, and I did, sometimes I'd rake leaves, you know, standard stuff. Then I found a great job, after school, in the afternoons, after classes and everything, supervising

kids at a day school, in their athletic stuff, outdoors, kind of easy. But I coached, you know, I coached softball, baseball, and basketball. I didn't coach soccer because I didn't know anything about it.

And so for four hours, usually in the afternoon, I could ride a bike because cars weren't allowed at Princeton to this day school and make probably, you know, a buck and a quarter an hour or I don't know, whatever it was, so that helped. But most of the money I made was in the summer time and what I made I contributed towards my college, my parents obviously sacrificed to help me go. In those days, you know, total tuition at Princeton was probably like fifteen hundred dollars or so every year. And so I contributed, to my costs, and my parents obviously sacrificed to help too.

Q: Any other memories you'd like to discuss of Princeton?

A: Well, the... the one distinction at Princeton was that, you had general exams, like they do in the British universities, even though they required you to go to classes. Well, you didn't have to go to lectures, you know, if you missed too many classes the Dean would call you in. And at Oxford they don't care whether you attend lectures or not, but they give you an examination after four years and you better know your stuff. Well they had general exams also, but they called them comprehensive exams, and they lasted for three days. And they were the same for all history students, and they were long, long essays, not true false or anything else, these were all essay questions.

But there was also an honor code at Princeton, which I took very seriously. Now you sign and every time you took an exam, or handed in a paper, you had to sign that you had neither given nor received help on what you were handing in. And it developed in me, and I don't want to claim I'm some angel, but it developed in me a pretty definite, absolute, code of ethics about intellectual honesty.

And so I developed at one point, I liked to type on an electric, portable typewriter, so I got permission to take my comprehensive exams back in my dorm room using my typewriter because I couldn't bring the typewriter with me into the lecture hall. And I was so proud because there were books around me that I could have used, you know, to cheat, and I didn't. It's funny, I guess I'm a little smug about it now, but you know, it, it felt good, it felt good to me that I was trusted to have a typewriter. That was one thing.

The other big requirement at Princeton was to write a thesis. That was a big deal, and I started working on that my junior year. And the two week vacation I had from my summer job I spent in Springfield, Illinois doing research at the State Historical Library on my thesis topic, which was a political biography of my ancestor Shelby Cullom, who, had been a protégé, I guess that's a little overstating it, of Abraham Lincoln. He lived in Springfield, he was a lawyer and argued cases with Lincoln, joined the Republican Party as Lincoln had, but he was twenty years younger so he wasn't the same generation. But he then became governor of Illinois for two terms, and U.S. Senator from Illinois for five terms, and I thought, well what a great subject for a biography.

So I spent two weeks, my summer vacation weeks, from my summer job, in Springfield, and bless his heart, my father came with me. And we stayed in an old rat infested motel in Springfield. He took time out from his work, and we worked together. I think he was wanting hard to help me, and help ensure that I finished my thesis because he hadn't finished his thesis, and he had never graduated. He had attended for four years, been a good student, but he just hadn't finished. So I think psychologically he probably saw, that here was his chance to...

Q: Finish his thesis...

A: Yeah, yeah, that's silly, but I mean, you know, I know he felt strongly, both my parents felt very strongly. So I worked hard on that thesis all my senior year, and I wrote a much longer thesis than I had to; it's probably two hundred and eighty pages, and it's pretty good. It's not definitive, but I had to go through the Congressional record, session by session, which was an enormous amount of reading. I had to go through newspapers, from microfilm, several manuscript collections. So this was a, this was a serious effort for a twenty-one-year-old, and I got a good grade on it. It wasn't an A+, and I thought I deserved that, but I got, I think an A-. So and I didn't graduate with honors, but I graduated comfortably. And so I look back on my Princeton experience favorably, though there were some bumps in the road, some crises for me, socially, I guess psychologically, I had good friends, I still was in love with my eighth grade girlfriend. She was at an eastern college, so we saw a lot of each other, and I had numerous jobs, and life was good.

Q: Why don't we break there?

A: Yeah. Ok. And that's fine, we can call it a day if you'd like. I could add that if there's another tape we need, one other thing about summer jobs, but I don't know how much time you've got there. If it's now, listen, tape is cheap, do you have time? Perhaps another twenty minutes?

Q: I have, yes...

A: You sure?

Q: Yes, definitely, I definitely have time, we're just getting started.

A: Well, just stop that, and we probably...

End tape 1, side 1

Running Time: 44 minutes, and 45 seconds

Interview 1: February 8, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 1, side 2

Q: This is Side B; it's a continuation of an oral history interview with Cullom Davis. The interviewer is Justin Law. Cullom, let's discuss a little bit your early interpretive model as an historian. How did you conceptualize history?

A: Yeah, this has to be in retrospect because at the time if I had been asked that question, I would have...my jaw would have dropped...an interpretive model? But I think it's a great question, and...and I can answer it a little more seriously when I talk about my graduate education. But I would say that clearly what I liked most about history was the lives of people. So you might call it a biographical, of the great man approach to history, I guess that's really what I was reflecting in my reading tastes; certainly they had been my father's reading tastes.

And so it was narrative history, of course there wasn't such a thing as quantitative history in my profession in those days. But it really was the grand old narrative biographical history tradition, which was the kind of history that people like Morrison and Commager, and the other giants in the profession were into. Now there were some other interpretive, within that there were some more politically oriented themes, but again I think those might surface when I talk about my graduate education.

Q: What was your conception of your generation? How did you define your generation?

A: Well, you know, there was a lot of popular literature in the fifties about how dull and drab and uninvolved we were in the social issues, and it's true, I think. I was clueless of the...Brown v. Topeka Board of Education decision was issued in 1957, the month I graduated. I was clueless about things like that, I mean, I read the newspapers, but I wasn't engaged in issues like that. They didn't come up in history classes, except one professor I had, at Princeton, named Eric Goldman, was a real liberal Democrat, and he kind of wrote the way he voted, and he, he was a marvelous lecturer and writer.

And he wrote several books that I read, and I took one of his classes, that basically talked about the great progressive tradition in American politics, from Teddy Roosevelt and the progressives on up thru Franklin Roosevelt. And so I, that rubbed off on me, and it, it also, there were many critics then of our generation for being unengaged, and there was one famous book called the grey flannel...

Q: *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*...

A: The man in the, thank you, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, you know, about some advertising worker, and advertising was one of the professions a lot of my friends were entering, I thought about getting into it. The ultimate job was to go with, darn it, that company in Cincinnati [Procter & Gamble]; that was what you did, you become a brand

manager, you know, visiting supermarkets, fighting for shelf space, but you'd work your way up and you'd become a hot shot ad writer.

And so I was attracted to that, but I was certainly a part of the Silent Generation. And the phrase silent generation may not be as well known, but in fact, it was a book that was written by a sociology professor at Princeton, I can't think of his name, and he wrote the book based on interviews he conducted with my classmates. They were anonymous at the time, but in the last fifty years their names have been revealed, and I knew a few of them, we were friendly. But I certainly felt in sync with the sort of expressions they had, they talked about marrying, getting a job, maybe on Madison Avenue, maybe in banking, and had very moderate political instincts, very moderate, and certainly didn't think of themselves as activists or protesters, what's to protest? Everything seemed so bland, but it wasn't bland, but I was part of that post-war generation that accepted life as it was, by and large, I confess.

And in fact, this gets me nicely into talking about a summer job I had, my junior year, even though I took two weeks off to do research on my thesis, I was hired as a trainee, a liberal arts trainee, if you can believe it, at Caterpillar. The world headquarters of Caterpillar is in Peoria, and they had a program, they were always hiring accounting students and engineers for summer jobs hoping that they then would join Caterpillar. But they had a small number of slots open to jerks like me who were history majors, and the money was good, and a lot of it was spent, a lot of my time was spent in classes where you'd learn about Caterpillar and learn about heat treating metals, stuff like that (laughter), and you'd go to the proving grounds and see them operating these big tractors, it was kind of a nice deal.

But my assignment was, presto, in the advertising department at Caterpillar. And there, I got to write, not ad copy, but I got, you know, they had a magazine, a monthly magazine for the dealers, and I got to write articles for the dealer magazine. I got to write some press releases. And I was allowed to study the expensive advertising that Caterpillar conducted thru an advertising agency because this was national advertising in magazines like The Saturday Evening Post, which was the most popular magazine of my era. And Caterpillar was doing a lot of soft, we'd call it soft focus advertising, about the Great America that lay ahead once we had better highways. Guess who, guess what, how we're gonna build those highways, tractors, and graters, you know, but they were advertising for the interstate highway system.

And for, for bridge building, and pipe laying, but it was soft advertising, it was very... it was what they called then institutional advertising. They weren't urging, well they were urging dealers to sell tractors, but they were urging readers of the Saturday Evening Post to, understand the needs of our country as it faces the future, and so that really, you know, that excited me, so I thought, well you know, advertising because I had a certain gift for writing. And they told me I did, and in fact they invited me to come back the summer after I graduated, which would have led (coughs) possibly to a full time job right in my home town. And so I took it.

I got married in June of 1957 to my long time sweet heart Marilyn. And I had my job at Caterpillar, though it was only for three months because there was something else in my head that I was... Now I'm gonna have to back up here a little bit. Because I had enjoyed running the athletic programs at this day school, I thought maybe, and I had gone to a nice prep school, and I thought maybe I could be a private school teacher. I couldn't be a public school teacher because I hadn't taken any education, they didn't have education courses at Princeton, but I might be able, I might be allowed to teach history at a private school. So I interviewed, at a couple of them, one a pretty well known one, it was called Choate, C-H-O-A-T-E, up in Connecticut.

And I went up there for an interview, and I think I may have done all right, but it scared me away because I'd be a housemaster, and responsible for these kids twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, and I thought, you know, I'm getting married, and I know what I was like when I was driving a housemaster crazy, I didn't think that would be the ideal life for a newly married couple. So, I didn't want that. But then, the president of a school in Honolulu, Hawaii visited as he did every year, the Ivy League schools. He had a thing about recruiting Ivy League graduates, I think he thought it gave a certain tone to his school. This school is called Punahou, P-U-N-A-H-O-U.

And he was a character, not very intelligent, but he knew how to raise money. And he had this thing, as I say, about bringing Yale, Princeton, and Dartmouth graduates to teach at his school. I think he figured, well they'll stay for two years so I won't have to give them raises, you know, they won't stick around, but they'll enrich the prestige of this school. It's a terrible thing to say, but I think it was his motive. And it was not a bad deal.

He offered me, and my wife, free, one way, transportation, to Honolulu, and a magnificent salary of 420 dollars a month and living on campus. They had houses, we had to pay rent, but it was nominal. So that's what I was toying with, the summer I was at Caterpillar. I also had this job offer to teach in high school at home, social studies.

But I was classified 1-A by my selective service agency, so I could be drafted, at any time. So that was my quandary. Because if I were drafted it would be from Peoria, and if I were, if I had shifted to Honolulu I could be in trouble. So, it really was a dilemma for me. And I applied for a...deferment, but they weren't giving that, but also they weren't drafting anybody. This was between wars, you know, there was nothing going on, so I finally notified my draft board I was teaching, I was taking a teaching job. And once I had the teaching job they did have something called a teaching deferment, and I might get deferment. So I took the chance, and I went to Honolulu.

And so that was a cross roads in my life, between a career at Caterpillar, and it probably would have been in advertising, I might then have jumped, I might have jumped to an advertising agency in Philadelphia or New York. And you know, it's a life that I might have done well in. But I wanted to teach, and I tried teaching, so this was what Punahou offered. It was a fateful decision because I liked it, I found that I liked it. I don't think I was a very good teacher, but I'd never had to deal with sixteen-year-olds, and tried to motivate their interest in history. I know I was probably bad as a teacher, but I enjoyed it

and I must confess, we had a great time there because four of my classmates at Princeton were there too. And we raised hell on the weekends we just had a great time.

We were all young newlyweds (sighs). God, I bought a used MG convertible, it is a classic, was, a classic, well now we would call it a classic, it didn't run very well, in fact it was always hard to start, I had to park it on a hill. But it was a great life, for two years I didn't save a nickel, but I did get a, an exposure to teaching, which I liked. Now, you may have a question about all that, but I, so I'll pause for a moment, but this was important.

Q: Well it seems it was a big decision to go to Hawaii; it sort of affected the trajectory of your life, in many respects.

A: Yes.

Q: And there's just one question I had, and it's not necessarily relevant, I guess, to this area...

A: It's Ok.

Q: I was just wondering what kind of music you were listening to during this time period?

A: Ok, great question. Rock and roll was coming, you know, early rock and roll. Elvis Presley was one of the premiere, I forget, but it was in the fifties, and I liked it. But I had grown up, and this I owed to my parents. I had grown up listening to LP records, long playing records, of two genres of music, Broadway musicals from the thirties, and forties, and fifties, like Oklahoma, and South Pacific, and Pal Joey – these great musicals of great songs, and the other was jazz. Apparently at home, I remember, one of the warm memories of my childhood was our listening to records. And we would dance, you know, on the living room carpet, cause I loved to dance, it was mostly jitterbug, do you know what jitterbug is?

Q: Yeah, I think so. I think so.

A: Ok. And I'd dance with my steady girlfriend a lot at dances, we went to dances. And my parents played that kind of music, I memorized, not by wanting to, but just by hearing some of it, songs from the musicals of the forties and fifties. And so that was my taste, it wasn't as much rock and roll. I do remember we went crazy over Bill Haley and the Comets, which probably is an unfamiliar group to you. They, one of their hits was *Rock Around the Clock*, and I won't, but I could still, off tune, recite the lyrics to *Rock Around the Clock*.

Q: Do you remember a film called *Blackboard Jungle*?

A: Sure. Sure. Wait a minute I don't want to confuse it, was that not, that wasn't Sidney Poitier?

Q: It was Bill Haley and the Comets...

A: Oh, Ok...

Q: With their music in it...

A: Ok. Well I'm sorry, it wasn't, it was about a teacher, in the city wasn't it?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Now I forget who the teacher was...

Q: I think it was a known actor at the time.

A: Ok. anyway...

Q: I'm not quite sure.

A: But now Haley's soundtrack is on that, now see you know more about him than I. I don't remember that and maybe *Rock Around the Clock* was one of the numbers in that, but it's one of the legends of early rock.

Q: What do you remember of the music of Hawaii?

A: Oh. I loved it, the traditional music I kind of liked. I even learned how to play a pretty poor ukulele. So I learned some of the traditional Hawaiian songs, the romantic syrupy things that Don Ho later made famous. He was a legendary performer of Hawaiian music. But there also were some innovators, maybe they weren't Hawaiian music players, in fact, in Honolulu and what was the guy, it was called a sort of jungle music, Martin, Martin Denny. And they had LPs of his music, which was unusual, unusual compositions, and it wasn't lyrics it was just instrumental music, but that was popular with our group, and... (coughs)... excuse me.

Q: What was your, looking back, what do think your purpose in life was at that time?

A: You know, it was a two year honeymoon, but I was doing something I liked. But I remember after the first year thinking, well Cullom are you going to make a career out of this here, are you going to stay here? And that had its complications, and I loved Hawaii. I never felt hemmed in even though you could circle the whole island of Oahu in a day or two days. I never was homesick, my wife's parents visited, my parents were able to visit us.

For two years we didn't go back, I was asked to be in a couple of weddings and couldn't afford it because it was too much of an effort, so I loved Hawaii. But the one thing that scared me was there were a couple of older teachers, in the social studies department, nice guys, one was a retired rear admiral; they were both alcoholics. And I, you know it's silly, but I thought is that a projection of me, if I stay teaching prep school to snotty nosed eleventh graders for forty five years, am I going to become a dissolute person?

And I also signed up voluntarily for a graduate class in American history at the University of Hawaii. It wasn't a terribly good class, but I worked hard in it because I was doing that to test well whether I wanted to advance my education a little bit. And I enjoyed the experience. I wrote a paper which was pretty good, and I conferred with him, I consulted him, and I knew the University of Hawaii was not a prestige graduate destination. So I had no particular intention of, I could of chipped away on a master's degree and still taught full time. But I really decided my second year there that I needed to get back to the mainland and make a career decision.

But I still hadn't decided on teaching. I remember writing to some of my parent's friends in Peoria, who were bankers, to see whether there might be an opportunity for me, and they didn't say no because I came from a good family and had a good education. I didn't contact Caterpillar, and I don't know why, I didn't. So those were all on the line, but at the same time I applied to graduate schools, Stanford, the University of Michigan, and Illinois. And by that time my wife and I had a baby. I didn't have any capital, my parents, certainly couldn't finance my graduate education, so I had to look for money.

And Stanford offered me an assistantship, but the tuition was high, and I would have loved to have gone there because it's a great school. Michigan wasn't sure. Illinois offered me a full tuition fellowship, which meant also a small stipend for living expenses, so that was my decision. Illinois was not a distinguished history department, but they were certainly respectable. And so we decided that we could live cheaply in Champaign Urbana and that I could get part-time jobs that would supplement my fellowship, and that my wife could, if not work, could at least take care of our daughter.

And we could make it by, though her parents also helped us. It was a difficult request, but they were very supportive, and they were very wealthy, and so we got a hundred bucks or so a month to help. So I then made a decision to go on for a master's degree in history at Illinois. I hadn't even contemplated, you know, beyond that, but I thought with a master's degree I might be able to get a teaching job some where. If you want we can stop there now, or if you want me to go thru graduate school I will.

Q: Well...

A: Are you running a little short on time, have you gotta...

Q: How about we do a couple of more questions?

A: Ok, fine.

Q: What would you say your political and social outlook was at this time?

A: Ok, very good. My parents had been, well my parents had voted, well my father had voted for F.D.R. in the thirties. But they, they were born Republicans, and they became Republicans, ended up despising “that man in the white house”. I don’t know why, they just, they were part of a tradition that just didn’t like Roosevelt and disapproved even of his wife, who of course is one of the saints of all time.

But my parents were kind of prejudiced. It wasn’t racial in that case, but they had their strong views. And I, think in 1956, and they were also very critical of Adlai Stevenson, in 1956 running against, or in 1952 against Eisenhower, and Dad idolized Eisenhower because he was the commander in chief in the European theatre in the war, and I admired him too, and I think I voted for let’s see, in 1952 I wasn’t able to vote, I was 17, I wasn’t able to vote, but I probably would have voted for Eisenhower, and in 1956 I don’t think I voted. I was away in college, and I don’t think I voted, and I don’t know what I, I don’t remember my politics, though I’m not, I know, and I know by then I had been influenced by Eric Goldman and others at Princeton, and I was leaning Democratic.

So by the time I graduated from college, my parents and I would have arguments. And you know, polite arguments, but arguments, and I was breaking out of a kind of Republican tradition. And we laughed about that to some extent because there was no presidential election until 1960. And socially, I was sensitive to the protest movements surrounding me. I really was. And I’m pretty confident when I say that I was emotionally supportive of the civil rights movement.

But I can’t say I was ever an activist, and there were opportunities in the late fifties and early sixties to march, and I didn’t, so I was still part I guess of the Silent Generation. I clearly had civil rights sympathies, sympathies for the poor, and democratic tendencies, but I wasn’t active in politics. And so I guess that’s the extent of it. We weren’t allowed to vote in Hawaii because it wasn’t even a state, but it became a state when we left, so I wasn’t a particularly active citizen.

Q: Cullom, why don’t we end our discussion with a comparison?

A: Ok.

Q: How did your U of I experience relate to your Princeton experience?

A: Ok. Now it’s getting into graduate school, which is a whole other, whole other stage. But that’s all right, that’s fine. Well I’ll admit that from the beginning I was viewed as kind of a superstar. And that’s the curse of a Princeton degree because I don’t think I deserved it, and I never have felt like that. I mean you only deserve what you’ve personally accomplished, and it, it was a veneer of a Princeton degree, it, it impressed my professors. Now I worked hard, and I think I eventually earned their respect on my own terms, but it was you know that kind of education, it’s a door opener, it creates the

impression of superiority, which troubles me frankly, but I'm a beneficiary of it so I shouldn't really mind. As to the quality of the education, [at UI] it won't hurt if I talk about that before we go into more of it, it was inferior. It really was, in numerous ways.

There were one or two professors I really admired, there was some other, total stuffed shirts, just total stuffed shirts, and the brightest of them, in my opinion, was a brilliant German historian, but he left, and I later found that kind of the best young historians didn't stay at Illinois, which is, not healthy, but the old windbags did.

Now, I allied myself with one professor who was a very decent guy, he was in southern history, or progressive history, a specialist, named Bates, B-A-T-E-S. He wasn't one of the stars of the department because he had struggled to publish his first book, but he was a gentleman, and I worked hard in several courses for him, and I did very well. I published an article, a paper was published in a journal, so, he became my advisor, and a nice guy, and there were a few other professors along the way, like, but these were not the intellects whom I had admired at Princeton, I don't mean to speak disrespectfully, but it was, it was kind of easy, probably too easy, and when it wasn't easy I felt it was kind of senseless hoop-jumping.

Q: What do you mean exactly?

A: Well, they had, and most universities did, a program requirement for two foreign languages to meet your PhD and I by that time. I did really well as a Masters Degree candidate, didn't have my masters degree yet; it took about a year. I was on track, having written a prize winning paper, having been accepted for publication in the Journal of American History, so I was hot stuff.

So I'd, I'd pretty well said, well I'm in this for the degree, PhD, but that meant two foreign languages. And I had been a whiz in foreign language in college and in secondary schools. And I took the French exam without even studying for it and did fine because you weren't supposed to speak the language, you were just supposed to be able to translate the language and roughly. You had to be able to read an article in a foreign language journal even if you were an American historian, which is a little quaint and they don't even require it anymore. But I chose as my second language, not an easy one, I chose German, which for me wasn't easy.

And I got caught up in an inter-departmental conflict kind of, a rivalry between the German department and the History department. And the German department taught the classes and administered the exams, and the History department looked at the results, and I had trouble with German. It was my first real intellectual, I don't know, barrier. I took a course, I studied hard, took the exam, and failed it; took it again, failed it, and now this began to affect me emotionally, you know. I began to think that maybe I'd made a mistake. Eventually I passed it but had wasted almost a full year of my graduate study.

So it was my first comeuppance after being this superstar. I was kind of behind the eight ball, and it had, I think it had various other psychological ramifications, which we'll

maybe get into later. The point is, I ran into a brick wall with that and only overcame it, and I tried to convince the department that the German instruction wasn't very good, and the German marking of the papers wasn't good either, just technical issues that you wouldn't expect a history PhD to have to worry about, so, I thought I was being, forgive me, screwed, but the department wasn't about to go to war, you know, on my account. So I just had to just tough it out, get tutoring, and find my path.

Q: Well Cullom, I think that is...

A: Yes.

Q: Good for today.

A: Yes, I agree.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you, Justin.

Q: And we'll continue soon...

A: Ok.

End of side 2 of tape 1

Running Time: 34 minutes, and 45 seconds

Interview 2: February 15, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 2, side 1

Q: This is an oral history interview with Cullom Davis; the interviewer is Justin Law. This is interview number two. Cullom...

A: I think, excuse me, are you getting a signal there? On the needle? Just want to make sure we're...

Q: Yeah.

A: Testing...

Q: We're good.

A: Ok, fine. Sorry, good.

Q: Ok. Cullom, it's 1960.

A: Ok.

Q: What do you remember about that year?

A: Ok. Well I was living in Champaign-Urbana then, I think told you that I had grown up in a Republican family.

Q: Uh-huh...

A: I got caught up in the emotional support for John Kennedy. And another graduate student and I particularly followed it, and he was actually a political scientist, one of these real by-the-numbers sort of political scientists; everything was quantitative to him. And I'll never forget Kennedy came to Champaign-Urbana and rode in a motorcade down whatever that is, Green Street, I think, I can't remember the major artery there. And my friend came rushing back to me and said, "I touched his hand! I touched his hand!" (laughter), and I was excited. But I thought here's this guy who really believes that politics is a science, and has nothing to do with human emotions, you know, and yet he was going berserk because he'd touched Kennedy's hand.

But it did lead to some family arguments, nothing serious; but my parents and my then in-laws were Republican, and so we had some arguments. But then, and I remember my parents saying, "I can't understand how you've become a Democrat." And I said, "Well, you sacrificed for me to get a good education so this is the product," which they didn't agree with but anyway, that's all. It was a high-water mark in my political, early political life because I was, I was twenty-five years old then, and it was really my first (clears throat) voting election.

Q: Was it something about the candidate himself, or the time period?

A: I think it was his youth and his ideas, (clears throat) excuse me, his ability to reach an audience, with great speech-making and with a great sense of humor. All of those things affected me and a lot of my friends. This was (clears throat) much like with a lot of young people this year, took to Obama, I did too. Let me pause just minute there just to pause. Sorry for the interruption.

Q: And we're back.

A: Ok.

Q: So it was your first voting experience...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: And there was something about youthfulness and his ideas...

A: His ideas, his rhetorical skills, his sense of humor, I mean in the debates he made a very favorable impression on me. And I probably had been influenced in college by some of my, I suppose most of my professors were Democrats, they didn't say vote democratic, but their view of American history was kind of from that progressive perspective. Now I was, I'm sure I was influenced by that.

Q: So as his administration took shape and began...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: What were your impressions of the administration? Did you stay connected with politics?

A: I stayed interested. I followed it very closely. I remember being really excited by the notion of the Peace Corps. I thought that was a brilliant idea. I can't say that I was tempted to ditch my career and enlist, but I thought that's the kind of public service that appealed to me. And he slowly began taking up the civil rights cause not all that eagerly, I should add, but he did.

And then he excited a lot of people when he called for space efforts to reach the moon by the end of the decade. He set this time table, and this is something we can do and should do. Obviously it had a lot to do also with our test of wills with the Soviet Union, but it was also one of those wonderful ideas that had great support. And I liked it, so I followed that with interest.

And I followed the civil rights struggle with interest; I was appalled by some of the killings, in the early sixties, of civil rights volunteers. I read about the "Freedom Riders" in the south, some of my friends actually became activists. And I remember one very close friend actually, after the Alabama troops under Governor Wallace had beaten up protesters, he went down and participated in the march to Selma. I didn't, and so I never really was an activist, but I remember out of my meager university salary contributing to the NAACP, so that was the extent of my political involvement.

Q: Did you feel that, the, I think the term we used was the Silent Generation...

A: Yes.

Q: Did you feel like that the Silent Generation was changing...

A: Yes.

Q: Or there was a new generation taking form?

A: Well...

Q: Or both?

A: You know it's hard to measure, as a historian it's hard to talk about the end of one generation and the beginning of another very specifically. But there's no doubt there was a new mood of activism and engagement on college campuses; I could see that at the university where I first taught, at Indiana University, there were protest marches on campus, I supported them. There was a student strike there, I think it was 1967, and it put me in a dilemma.

I was a conscientious teacher, I taught this really large lecture class, of nearly five hundred students. And I thought it was important for me to fulfill my responsibilities to educate them, but I also felt that I didn't want to cross a picket line. It wasn't strictly speaking a union picket line, but it was a picket line. So I went to the effort of writing out all of my lectures for two weeks and mimeographing them and announcing that they were available to pick up. I don't know how many of the students picked them up, but it was my way, maybe it was kind of being devious, it was my way of fulfilling a teaching obligation without actually crossing a picket line.

Q: I watched a film recently about the student strike at Columbia...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: It would be about a year later...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: And they were talking about the relationships with the students and the faculty, the university government. Did you feel that you were playing the role of mediator? What did you feel your role was in connection with the students and the administration?

A: Well, as I say, I didn't play an active role in the kind of the diplomacy or negotiations between the students and the administration. By that time, I also at Indiana University was an administrator; I was an associate dean, fairly minor one, but I was an associate dean. And not that that bound my hands I thought but didn't put me in a position where I was mediating disputes. But I do remember in my lectures urging students to get involved.

I remember that it used to be one of the messages in my lectures, American history does matter and each generation, one way or the other, is creating history and therefore they should get engaged. I didn't say vote this or that, I thought that was beyond the pale, but I did urge them to be active and I probably at the time reflected on the fact that I was part of a generation that hadn't been very active, and I thought because of a new president and new issues that was important to do.

Q: What did you feel the role of the university was in society at that time?

A: Well, that's a good question. I thought it was, obviously its fundamental role was to educate post-high school students. But I always felt that its chief importance was of a liberal arts education rather than a technical education and that it should consist not only of providing answers but of proposing questions and making questioners of our students. So I always felt that there was a dialogue there that was fundamental to a good college education. I wasn't seeing a lot of that at my university with some thirty-five thousand students, and although I taught these freshman introductory courses, dialogue was pretty difficult.

I didn't teach discussion sections, my graduate assistants did that. I met with them [the ga's] every week and I would suggest things for them to discuss and I would occasionally sit in on one of those. But I wasn't meeting that much with students except that I did have one upper division course, more specialized course, where I'd meet with about thirty students twice a week. But I did feel the university and most universities were not fulfilling their responsibilities to engage undergraduate students, that there was, that there had developed in American higher education a preference for publication over teaching.

And I understood that publication was important but I felt that there would be, that there was a distortion there, and I wasn't a victim of that distortion. I did fine at Indiana, but I felt strongly that they were not devoting attention to undergraduate education, which made me a little restless, though I loved the university and I really liked my colleagues at Indiana.

By the way, I spent six years there, but I was restless because I didn't think that the administration, the top administration was particularly concerned about the quality of undergraduate education, it was a low priority and that was true at Berkley where there were protests, I mean it was all over the country, Columbia, so Indiana wasn't particularly bad. It's just it was part of a general problem.

Q: Ok. Now let's back up a little bit.

A: Yeah, Ok.

Q: When did you first come to Indiana University?

A: Ok. I was on the job market in 1963-64. And that included going to meetings of the Organization of American Historians, and the American Historical Association where I was able to line up some interviews with prospective employers. One of them was at the University of Maryland, which was a pretty good school. But then one of them was at Indiana University and there were special reasons for that, I had published an article in the leading journal in American history, which was, which began as a seminar paper. It was an article on the history of the Federal Trade Commission, and that made me kind of stand out, to at that age, at that time, to already have an article in a major journal before you got your first job put me above many rivals.

And so I was invited to interview at the convention, and then I was invited to interview at Bloomington, Indiana and to meet the faculty, and by that time I had developed a pretty good ability to explain myself on my feet, and so I was offered the job. It was a new position, and they were trying to beef up their emphasis on modern American history. And one of the problems was that I hadn't finished my dissertation yet, and there's a complicated story behind that, let me just say that I had stalled, whether you call it thesis syndrome or whatever, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I had finished all my preliminary research. I had been in Washington for a whole summer, or a whole winter, and done other research, but I simply wasn't writing the dissertation. Even though I had very good skills at writing and had used them and part of that I think, in retrospect, was psychological.

I'd gone through some marriage problems that weighed heavily on me, and I think in retrospect in some way that I don't understand, I had a barrier here. So, it was clear, when Indiana hired me that they expected me to finish my dissertation. So I took the job, and worked very hard on to develop some new courses there, loved the teaching. A lot of the students were grateful I was there because they hadn't had any specialists in twentieth-century American history before, so I was kind of a breath of fresh air. And my colleagues liked me, I think, and I was a junior member, but I think they liked me.

That sword was hanging over my head of no dissertation and I didn't really make any progress that first year, none. I can't remember writing a word. My excuse was I was so busy developing courses, that was an excuse, and so well my chairman, you know, spoke to me at the end of the year, and said, well, you did well and we're to giving you a minimal raise, I was making seven thousand eight hundred dollars, ah but you know the dissertation has to be finished. And it was clear that within three years, if I hadn't finished it I'd be let go. They didn't say it quite as threateningly, but there was no mystery there.

Q: Why do you think there was such a demand for you to finish the dissertation?

A: Well, because this was such a prestigious department of history, it was very large, some sixty members, they were part of a system that was always competing to be the best department in the Big Ten, the best department here, there. And so my colleagues on the faculty were publishing books and articles, and here I was without even a dissertation. This was unfinished business on my part. It was a requirement of my job, it was unfulfilled.

Q: Did you, did you feel like in spite of not having completed the dissertation you were still an effective teacher?

A: Oh, I thought I was a great teacher. And I think I was, I mean, the feedback for me was excellent. But that didn't really matter as far as the university was concerned, and yes, I was a very popular teacher with some of the most advanced students, the juniors, seniors, and even some graduate students who took my courses on the progressive, the progressive period, which was my specialty.

Q: What do you remember about the students of that time period?

A: They were hard working, conscientious. The department had pretty high admission standards for graduate study, and I got to know many of them because they were teaching assistants under my supervision so I got to know them a lot in that capacity as well as teaching them. And I thought they were bright and they reflected well on the university and the department, and I know they liked and maybe even admired me. But also I'm sure in their gossip they knew that there was a cloud hanging over me. I guess I have to talk a little bit about finally finishing my dissertation because it's kind of an interesting story.

Q: Ok.

A: Fortunately my chairman my second and third year was a really nice guy who liked me, but he did have to counsel me every few months, you know, how's it going? And I finally had to admit that...

Q: So your second and third year chairman?

A: Yes, was a nice guy and sympathetic. I finally told him I had developed hives, which I assumed was somehow related to nerves. And he said, you know, maybe you should talk to someone, one of the psychiatrists at the university here. And I said sure, I've never done that before. I was a little self-conscious about that, but I did talk to this guy and he gave me what do you call that, Rorschach test and all, and he got nowhere.

So by that time I was in pretty close touch with the chairman, and he said, well maybe you really need to see a not a psychologist, but I do happen to know someone up at the medical school who is a psychiatrist. Maybe he'd be willing to talk with you for no fee because I didn't have the kind of money to purchase a shrink. So once a week for two months I drove up to Indianapolis to meet this guy and he was a wonderful man. I met with him in his office which had curtains and draperies, a nice desk, and table lamps and a couch, you know, the classic psychiatrist's couch.

And I talked about myself, you know, my childhood, my mother, my father, my wife, my marriage, my children, I talked about everything. And it was, for me a remarkable experience of self discovery because I could talk candidly with this man about some marriage problems and other issues, but I still wasn't writing my dissertation. By the way, I know it was a maturing experience for me to have a professional explore my life with me.

So he then, the psychiatrist, you know, kept seeing me. I think this is productive but maybe you ought to talk to a behavioral psychologist. I stress the word behavioral because, I don't know how much you know about the field of psychology, but a behavioral psychologist is one who feels that you can do things to more or less pressure someone to stop doing a bad thing or start doing a good thing. So I made an appointment

with this guy, and when I got on the phone with him he was very impatient and he was working in his lab, he specialized in running rats through mazes, not people, rats, Ok?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So I met him in his lab and he had on a white lab coat, there was no sofa to sit on or even an easy chair, I had to sit on a lab, sit on a lab stool, and he said, "So you have to finish your dissertation?" And I said, "Yes sir." And he said "Well, you're not doing it now?" "No." And he said, "Well, I'm here to help force you to write that dissertation." He said, "I want you to, the next meeting, bring your checkbook, and I'm going to have you write a series of checks, dated week by week for the next three months. And we're going to figure out a schedule whereby you have to finish each Sunday evening so many pages of typescript. And we'll make it very easy, the first week, the first Sunday, it'll be maybe three pages, but then it'll grow, you know, four the following, six the following, and you'll know that if I don't get copies of those pages mailed to me postmarked before midnight on Sunday, I'm going to send those checks in."

He said, "Now I want you to make out those checks to charities, and I want them to be enough that you won't go broke that you won't have a bad check, but it's gotta hurt if the check is cashed." So I did. I wrote out twelve checks, and I made them out to the NAACP, and the American Civil Liberties Union, and another one of my favorite charities. I wouldn't go into this too much except it's a great story. So I finally that first Sunday sweated it out, but finally I did in fact write three pages. And he, by the way, the guy didn't care about footnotes, he didn't care about grammar, he just wanted pages.

He just said, "I could care less what you write, I just want you to write." And the next week I almost didn't make it, so I made an emergency visit to him and I said, "There's something wrong here because these are charities that if I could afford to support I would, so I feel a little bit conflicted here because if I succeed in writing I won't be giving to charities that I like." So he said, "You're right. Tear up those checks and make out a new series of checks to charities in which you despise." About that time there was an organization called the American Nazi Party and there was another one called the Christian Crusade, it wasn't just that it was Christian, it was really, really anti-black, anti-Jewish; I mean it was really pretty bigoted.

Q: Right.

A: And so I wrote these checks out, and I never had any more problems. Every week I got those pages in. And after three months I had the first draft of a dissertation about three hundred pages, and so it was a miracle. I hated the guy, I mean, you know, he was really neurotic, as far as I could tell no feedback, no "nice job", anything like that, he said, and he said, "I also won't take excuses. I don't care if your family's in a car crash, I've gotta have those pages postmarked before Sunday night, midnight." So, I just knew he wasn't the kind of guy that I could convince, you know, my dog ate the homework, all right.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was an absolute deal. I despised him, but it worked. And so I managed in four months, to write the first draft of my dissertation, I still then had to footnote it and it still took me a year to get it all done. But it was an immense psychological relief to me that I got this monkey off my back.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And so, and these two professionals, the psychiatrist and the behavioral psychologist profoundly disagreed on everything in life professionally. But they found me an interesting character because I had benefited from the psychiatrist's advice, but I had really prospered from the behavioral psychologist. So they wrote an article, I'm written up in the literature. I'm not going to tell you where it is because I'm concealed in their essay, but I am part of the professional literature on what's called the thesis writing block. And so believe it or not that worked.

And my department was pleased, I didn't get published but at least I finished my requirement for the university. And by that time I was working almost fulltime as an administrator. But I still was teaching, and so that was a great plus. I finished it in 1968. I mean I got the degree in 1968; I finished it in late 1967, so that closed one chapter for me. It didn't end the problems in my marriage nor did it deal with my restlessness at the university over its lack of attention to undergraduate education, but I continued to have very good friends in the department, and I really loved that university.

And it is and was a really great university. I'm not sure if I was right for it because at that stage in my life. I was more interested in really, really good teaching than I was in really, really good publication, and it's just a different kind of place. Later on I did a fair amount of publication not because I had to but because I wanted to, and that's a big difference there.

So I'll just wrap up this, I taught courses, I was a dean, a pretty successful dean, thought I probably had a career at Indiana except for the restlessness. And in the fall of 1969, having been there five years I got a phone call... no, a colleague in the department said, "You know, I've got a friend who has been the dean at a graduate school in Rhode Island, he's a political scientist, and he's gonna start a new university in Springfield, Illinois. And he's looking for bright young people who might be interested." And he said, "May I invite him to call you?" And I said, "Sure."

So I got a long distance call in like October or November of 1969 from Robert Spencer, calling from Springfield. He was putting together a team of people to work with him to get the university open in less than a year. And we talked at length on the phone, I sent him my résumé. But within a few weeks he said, "I'd like you to come over." And so early in December I did, I drove over from Bloomington, Indiana, and I spent two days here meeting with him and some of the other original employees. There were, I think, about four or five employees of the university at the time. We were down in the Myers

office building downtown, and I met some townspeople because President Spencer, one of his unique ideas was that this university ought to be engaged in the community and the community ought to be engaged in the university.

Q: What were your first impressions of Robert Spencer?

A: I thought he was brilliant.

Q: Why?

A: Because he was in my judgment, he was witty; he had a PhD in political science from the University of Chicago. He had been a student of the legendary president there, Robert Hutchins. And he also wove for me a story of the kind of university he wanted to plant down in Springfield and it bowled me over. His ideas, I thought, were exactly the right prescription for everything that was wrong with higher education.

Q: What was everything that was wrong with higher education?

A: What was wrong was that, higher education was becoming more technical and less liberal arts. It was unengaged in the wider public world with public affairs; it was over-specialized in narrow, narrow fields where a professor would only care about his particular piece of the action. It was indifferent toward teaching and its students weren't in any way oriented to the demands of the workplace that they would eventually try to reach. And finally it was a star system, that is to say, the heroes at the big universities were the big time scholars who published books and the great teachers were ignored if not let go.

Q: So there was something about Spencer himself and his ideas?

A: Yes, yes. Only excuse me, he had one other idea, that there was a town and gown war in most university cities where the university was insular and arrogant, and the townspeople didn't trust the university. He said, "That's all so sick." So he was determined to create out of clay, a university that would represent the antidote to all of those ills. And I was smitten, absolutely smitten.

He later on wrote down these ideas in about a two-page essay, which we among the early recruits called the "blue memo" because it was printed on blue paper. And it was, we thought, a beautiful summary of what a university in the 1970s should try to do. He wasn't even sure that there should be tenure for the faculty at this university because tenure had its own short-comings, but he was open on that because it's a tough system to avoid.

Anyway, so I was taken and went home to talk to my wife and children, I was uneasy about returning to the state of Illinois not because I hated the state of Illinois. I had grown up in Peoria and long since had felt that I had parted company with my old hometown friends because they were in business or banking and I was an under-paid professor and I

didn't have their interest. I mean my interests were in teaching and the world of ideas. So I was uneasy about returning to a city that close to Peoria, which was kind of silly but I was. And I loved Indiana, it's a beautiful part of the state, and I had a lovely home there. But after my wife and I talked about it, I think even she agreed, though, it was tough for her to leave friends, but this was an irresistible opportunity with risks but nevertheless irresistible.

I was, in 1969, thirty-four years old, and if I was going to make a break, this was the time to do it. But I had a secure job, and I wasn't just fresh out of graduate school, so I think Robert Spencer thought, this guy Davis has some experience and so I was named for want of a better title, assistant vice-president. We didn't have a vice-president at that time, but I was assistant vice-president because he didn't think I was seasoned enough to be something like vice-president for academic affairs. I was assistant vice-president, which was fine, I didn't care. I about doubled my salary that, I mean I was then making around fourteen thousand, which would have been nice increases, but this was more like eighteen to twenty, so it wasn't double at the time. That wasn't a major factor, but it was, it was nice.

Q: When you spoke earlier about when you first came to Springfield, in December...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: ...and you met some of the early employees, do you remember who these early employees were?

A: Yes.

Q: Who were they then?

A: Sure, sure Robert Batson (B-A-T-S-O-N). He and I were both Princeton alumni but very different in our temperaments. He was a great big, overweight and forward faced guy. He was a specialist in public administration, the field of public administration. He had a pretty healthy appetite for alcohol, but he was funny and loud, and a lot of fun up to a point. So, we got along, we were cronies basically. He and I were charged with overseeing the hiring of new faculty, Recruitment, interviewing, and hiring of new faculty, and then of course Bob Spencer.

A local woman had been hired to be kind of the social secretary; her name was Anna Belle Patton. A-N-N-A- B-E-L-L-E Patton. So she came from a prominent social background, and so she was hired. Another woman, unmarried, was Sally... I know her name... Sally Robinson. Sally Robinson. She actually had a PhD in social anthropology, and so Spencer had hired her to kind of take a look at what the governance system of the university should be because he wanted the community to be involved in helping to govern. Not that, I mean, there was a board of trustees for the university because we were part of, I should back up, we were part of a regent system...

Q: Uh-huh...

A: Which included Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, and then the new pipsqueak university in Springfield, so they were the real governing body but there are always... the university has its own internal governing body, you know, like a faculty senate, or he didn't want a faculty senate, he wanted a university-wide governing body that included faculty, and civil service workers, and students, and interested community members. And he asked Sally Robinson to kind of from a sort of social anthropology standpoint to figure out a good plan for doing that. Who else? There were a couple of people on the business side of things, M.J. Bucklin, B-U-C-K-L-I-N, was the one, and some others whom I've forgotten about.

But there was also a remarkable person, who was our first librarian, Mary Jane MacDonald, M-A-C-D-O-N-A-L-D. And she had been a librarian at the University of Illinois in Urbana many years earlier, and then she had been the government documents librarian for the state library here. And she was one of these non-stop workers. She applied for and had gotten a job as a librarian until they had hired the head of the library, and she was already creating archives before we existed as a university. She was that kind of person, I mean she is a wonderful, wonderful person, and we didn't even have a physical library yet, but she took up the job of ordering stuff, so that when the temporary campus opened we'd be able to...

Q: What about Bob Marsh?

A: Bob Marsh, I'm not sure he was that early, he was like the director of records and admissions, nice guy, a little bit. I'm gonna be blunt here, he was a little rigid, but then you need, you know, you need because most academics or faculty members were kind of, we were all kind of flakes or at least idealists. There were people who came from conventional backgrounds, and Bob was that, he was really kind of by the book. Maybe you need that, in a director, registrar, director of admissions, but he was that way. Then there was a guy by the name of Asa...

Q: Ruyle?

A: Yeah, Ruyle, thank you. R-U-Y-L-E. He also had experience in higher education and he was kind of a business affairs sort of guy. And I, he was fine, I think he didn't have a lot of patience with faculty members, particularly the kind of people we recruited. He was almost openly doubtful about a lot of the faculty, maybe even me. I remember this is just a story. I got in the habit of writing memoranda on important issues and one of them was my belief that while we were a university and all of us in leadership positions had doctoral degrees, we shouldn't go around calling each other doctor because it created an invidious line within a community of scholars, that we're just by first name, or Mr. or Professor, but doctor tends to do that.

And yet everyone in town wanted to call us doctors because they didn't have academic doctors here, they had medical doctors. And I wrote this memo to that effect and Asa had

a doctorate and he was very proud of it, and I was proud of mine. I just didn't really feel it was necessary for us to separate from others. So his secretary later told me that Asa got his memo from me and he reached into his desk drawer and got a rubber stamp out, BAM, it said "bullshit" (laughter). That's, it's alright so we got along but he just had a different approach to this. Also there was, a dean of students, a dean of students who was Bob...he only lasted about a year or so. Nice guy though, had been in the Peace Corps, War on Poverty or something...

Q: Macalister?

A: Thank you, gosh, it's good that you've done your homework. Bob Macalister, very nice guy, but I think, as pressure built it was tough on him because it got to be very tense on campus with everything we had to do, so he left after a year or two. But he did hire an associate, Homer Butler who became instantly popular. He'd been in the Peace Corps, he'd met his wife in the Peace Corps in Africa and he was a fun loving guy and everyone's favorite. And he was part of an effort that the president had to integrate the university. Springfield was not familiar with racial integration and so Homer Butler was the first challenge as were some of the early faculty.

Bob Spencer personally talked to realtors in town, to say we're bringing in a professional here at a good salary, he has great credentials and you've got to refrain from just showing him places to live on the east side. And that, and realtors weren't accustomed to that, a lot of the university, they knew there'd be a lot of hiring, and so they wanted to be on the right side of the university and so the Butlers' were able to find a home over on the nearer west side, a nice home and so Spencer took that interest personally. He felt very strongly about it to his credit, in my opinion, as he did, with other early African-Americans and Asian-American faculty.

Now I have to tell you, there was a lot of chaos in all this. We were hiring people without really checking references very well. We didn't insist that they produce a copy of their PhD, for example. We just took them at their word, and there were a lot of candidates, a disproportionately large number of candidates who were de-frocked priests and also I would also say refugees from the campus battles of the 60s. And maybe I was, for that matter and in a way, I was a refugee. Some people who had been denied tenure at their universities and so they saw this as a second chance. That doesn't make them unqualified. Are we still running?

Q: Cullom, let's pause so I can flip the tape.

A: Sure. Is it running still though?

Q: Yeah...

A: But it's almost over. Ok, stop it then but run forward on cue.

End tape 2, side 1

Running Time: 45 minutes, and 4 seconds

Interview 2: February 15, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 2, side 2

Q: This is a continuation of an oral history interview with Cullom Davis; the interviewer is Justin Law. This is interview number two.

A: Now what's the date, just for fun, 15th of February right?

Q: 15th of February, right. Cullom we were, we were discussing, I guess beginning to discuss, the hiring process.

A: Yes. We were in a run; we had to hire forty faculty in the space of about three months. I joined the payroll on January 30th of 1970. We were supposed to open the next August. There were no buildings planned, nothing. Although the faculty recruitment and hiring was a major responsibility, I was also involved in visiting architects, talking about curriculum, talking about admissions procedures, and standards, the gamut.

It was like creating as if, as if there had never had been something called a university that you, that you could use as a model because we thought you had to do everything from the start, you see. I and others felt strongly that in order to avoid all the mistakes of higher education elsewhere, we couldn't sink into the rut of existing practices. Now that's kind of absurd but, you know, we thought even an admissions application form, we had to carefully create one. And we didn't dare borrow one as a model so you can imagine the time we spent in kind of endless talk. But it was that feeling that we had to start as they say de novo, from the start, d-e-n-o-v-o.

When it came to faculty then we had kind of an open budget, I'm embarrassed to admit this but I think the university had been appropriated something like a million bucks that year to get started, so money was no consideration. We had no problem making offers to someone to be a candidate, stay three nights at a motel, pay his air fare, and meals, take them out to meals. Almost every night between February and July, almost every night except weekend nights, I was out entertaining faculty candidates with Bob Batson. So I gained weight and had a lot of fun but, you know, it was hectic. And there'd be three or four candidates in town on any given day, so you'd get confused on who was who. And

we made some serious mistakes in some hiring but by and large it was a pretty remarkable group, you know.

But all of us had high expectations and that we would be able to create this Eden on the Prairie (chuckles) and again, Bob Spencer was the source of this. Later on when Bob became controversial, people were giving credit to others, but I am firm in my belief that he was the key to whatever good ideas there were. Now what happened was, he began to discover in his monthly board meetings that the board had no interest in innovation. That was the key word we had, innovation. They were businessmen, lawyers, and on the staff they were educational bureaucrats, in my opinion, and they simply didn't see any reason to do things differently, there, here than elsewhere.

Q: Now then, who was responsible then for hiring Spencer? Was it the Board?

A: The Board. Its staff had written, had done the recruitment job but Bob Spencer came in like, I think like August of 1969 to be interviewed with the Board. And he at that time was the Dean of the College of the Graduate School at the University of Rhode Island. He had taught political science in Vermont, he'd written one book, and he was a great conversationalist, very serious Catholic. So I think they liked him, but they were wary about innovation, very wary, and probably the most wary were the staff members of the Board of Regents, from top to bottom with I can't think of any exceptions, they were, I'll use the phrase again, educational bureaucrats, which meant that they didn't want new ideas, and they therefore, they had the ability, the power, to force Spencer and people like me to do things conventionally rather than unconventionally, so there was a friction there.

Q: What do you think they wanted? What kind of university did they want?

A: They wanted to open a campus that didn't make waves, that didn't cause controversies because here we were the state capital city, you know, it could be troublesome. We'd be in the minds of legislators living up in Chicago if this university did crazy things. There were all kinds of examples on other campuses around the country of violence and protests on the campus, Kent State among others, and they didn't want that. It occurred in Illinois too, at U of I and Carbondale, at the University of Chicago and Northwestern. They wanted a safe, conventional, by the book university. And by and large the trustees were the same way.

There was an executive with the John Deere Company in the Quad Cities. There were one or two exceptions, and there was a former director, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, pretty strict, pretty conservative and conventional. There were a few exceptions, there was an eminent African-American chemist [Percy Julian] from Chicago who seemed to have some sympathy for these ideas, though he wasn't as active in the board meetings because he couldn't get here for all of them because he wasn't in very good health, but he was an impressive man, self-made successful chemist, and a few others, who seemed to understand that there was some virtue in what we were trying to do. But these other people hadn't read the critical literature about higher education, in

their minds what was wrong with higher education on these other campuses wasn't poor education but it was unruly students and and permissive deans.

Q: So their understanding of the function of the university in society was more defined by the newspapers and television, rather than by critical literature?

A: Yes. Yes, and it was a corporate model, that a university is like a corporation, and it's got a CEO, which is the university president, and he's accountable to the board, and he's not accountable to his employees like faculty and others, he's accountable just to the board. And so I know it put Bob Spencer in an increasingly difficult position because his ideas were so brilliant and his intentions were so admirable, but he had to face that kind of stress right away.

And we were to some extent insulated from that directly, though we would go to board meetings occasionally, but it was Spencer who bore the brunt of it in my opinion. And all we knew was that Spencer would come back and he would be getting a little testy and he would say you can't do things crazy, we've got to, you know, we've got to make our peace with the way things are, and that set many of us including this unruly faculty that we'd just hired, really set them on edge and they began to view Spencer as the enemy rather than the ideal.

Q: Do you think he made a mistake by not including other members of the administration and the faculty, in the relationship with the board? Do you feel like if Spencer would have turned more to his colleagues...?

A: It's hard to say. It's a good question. We were involved, I mean I got to know board members and I went to some board meetings but I don't remember giving reports. They (that board) wanted only one person to deal with, they didn't mind meeting me and we'd visit over a meal prior to the board meeting, but they wanted one guy and they told him what they wanted to happen and he had to make it happen. So I don't think he had a lot of choice.

He might have been a little bit more political, more astute in handling that, I really can't say, but I do know the pressures on him were severe. And so I'm sympathetic to him and still admire him, although I grew very critical of him and his regime because he had kind of run out of the good will of the people on the faculty and a good many administrators as well. One of them said, you know, the first president of something brand new is going to be a sacrificial lamb at some point, and he was within what, five or six years.

Q: Do you feel like the Board was micromanaging the university?

A: Yeah. But and particularly, not so much the board, well maybe the board, but particularly the board staff, I fault them. These people really had no imagination, no patience with Spencer. They didn't... in my opinion it was just as much their job to support the campus president as it was to tell him what to do. He was the educator, and they weren't, but they tended to let him hang out on the limb, and they would set... I

remember, I can remember going to board meetings and the Executive Director, who made big money, would sit there and let them roast Robert Spencer and never once said, "You know I think we ought to, we ought to cut some slack here and realize the hard job that the president had." He was protecting himself, which is what bureaucrats do. And so I developed a very severe distrust and distaste for the staff of the Board of Regents. Board members, you know, some of them were good and some of them were not, but Spencer was on the grill, you know.

Q: Well let's talk a little bit about your first duties I guess.

A: Uh-huh. Ok.

Q: As being part of the university. So you come in January of 1970?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: What are you responsible for?

A: Principally to work with Bob Batson on getting the word out, we took out ads in educational magazines, reprinting the so called famous blue memo, initialing a call for positions in almost all fields, you know, couple of historians, couple of English professors, mathematicians, physicists, chemists. And it, and there was, there were a couple of articles in the Journal of Higher Education, no, the Chronicle of Higher Education, which is a major weekly. They wrote a couple of articles about us because we were among a handful of kind of exploratory or innovative university campuses opening at that time, one of them was also Hampshire College in New England, another one was Evergreen State College in the State of Washington.

Q: I've been there, it's an interesting place.

A: Have you been there? Yeah it is. It is. And so is Hampshire. And then of course our sister, we of course were an upper division university, you know, which in itself was a novel idea, which was supposedly was done actually I think for economical reasons. See the state had created and now supported a whole system of junior colleges throughout the state, or community colleges, and so they didn't want to rebuild a lot more four year campuses. They thought they could build what they called capstone universities, one in the north and one in the central part of the state: Governors State University south of Chicago and us so that was another complication. We were competing for students, it was easy to recruit faculty but later on we couldn't get enough students, who were, who already had two years of college education but...

Q: What were your criteria for faculty?

A: Ok. Well, we didn't insist but we looked for what's called a terminal degree, which in most fields other than to say Studio Art, would be a PhD. So we looked for that, and if there wasn't that we looked for something really special about the person that they had a

lot of publications, that sort of thing. And then we also wanted evidence that they were really good at teaching and devoted to it.

Q: How would you go about determining that?

A: Well, basically the interviews and I think we probably asked them in their letter of application to talk about that a little bit, maybe an educational philosophy, and some of them had a very definite educational philosophy drawn on some of the literature. There was a lot of literature then about what was wrong in education generally, as well as in higher education.

Q: I must ask.

A: Yes.

Q: In your interviewing with the faculty, did you take into consideration (cough) your own interviews with Indiana University?

A: Probably, I think so. I think probably I developed some experience having been a candidate myself both at Indiana and then at Sangamon State, probably did that, but it doesn't mean I had a trick question. I never had any kind of trick questions to catch them off guard. I'm told by people, colleagues so I have to be a little careful here, that I was one of the real wonderful early colleagues because I was a good conversationalist and some of them insisted to me that they came in no small measure because I was very bright and I was overseeing the hiring. And if that was the kind of people they were going to be here, they wanted to come.

Some of them later (laughter) said, "Cullom, you sold me a bill of goods." But some people I respect said that, and they may have just been flattering me, but I think I did a good job. Now was I as good at selecting people as I was at recruiting them? I think I made a few mistakes, we all did. There were a few people we hired who just didn't work out and within a few years they had left, one of them as I recall was actually was a felon (laughter).

Q: No kidding.

A: I think so, now I'm a little fuzzy here, and I'm not sure, did we ever actually hire him? Maybe what we learned early enough to scotch that one, but there were, as I said, there were a lot of defrocked priests, and that didn't bother us. They were idealists, most of them. Some of them, I think, probably had some psychological baggage, but several of them were really good teachers and devoted, and we just naturally attracted idealists. And so there were probably out of the original, out of the original forty, several of them decided that this wasn't the place for them. They left because they didn't like it.

And then after three years maybe another three or four just didn't work out. And then at some point we instituted tenure decision making, which came really around the fifth or

sixth year. And that became contentious because a lot of the faculty didn't want any tenure. I mean they wanted tenure, they wanted protection. Spencer wasn't sure but it was a difficult issue to resolve and then the actual process was extremely controversial. Some of the dead wood, and there was some dead wood, through due process were denied tenure. But they were popular people, nice people, and so it was a wrenching experience for this campus, and once again, although the decisions were made by their peers, essentially, the blame tended to go on Spencer.

Q: Backing up, I guess, just a little bit.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you feel like Bob Batson had similar criteria, or were you approaching the recruiting from different points of view?

A: I don't know. I'm not sure, I'm trying to remember, this was thirty-five years ago or more; I'm trying to remember. I'm sure there were subtle differences, but we both believed in a liberal education, we both believed in public affairs, which Spencer had stressed. This ought to be the Public Affairs University of the State, and actually there was some sanction for that in the original papers. But he jumped at it, he thought that we ought to be educating citizens, and we ought to be educating future leaders, and in the state capital, that was the natural place to do it.

And so both Bob Batson and I jumped at that, we thought that was a great idea, and we stressed that in our curricular decisions. We envisioned a required course called the Public Affairs Colloquium, or PAC, that in its original manifestation I continue to think was a really good idea. I think it probably got twisted and turned, and made less valuable, but the original idea I think was a valid one. And it was to be one expression, not the only one, one expression of the university's public affairs mandate that all of our students would get a grounding in public policy issues whether it's AIDS or water pollution or building airports or whatever, that would happen.

And you know we also envisioned an entire week every year devoted to what we called University Week, another I thought pretty good idea, and you know other universities later went on to develop that in the winter, you know between fall and spring semesters. This was to be a single course, which students could get credit for because they'd go to daily lectures and evening programs, and University Week I think was also a way of kind of uniting the campus.

We embraced the idea and asked candidates to talk about it, of internships, what we called Applied Study, that every student – every student – would as a capstone to their education would spend several months in some sort of unpaid position in a setting that he or she may soon want to enter. And it took a lot of work to find those opportunities, but we did and there was a special office that oversaw that. I had a lot of students; I would visit them in their Applied Study work assignments. I thought that was a pretty good idea.

Now some of these are so straight and conventional that some students just didn't feel it made sense for them, that they already had a job maybe, and they didn't need an internship to know what the work life, what the world of work was all about, but I thought in general those were worthy ideas. And again there's a lot of credit due to Bob Spencer for those ideas. The university governance thing became very contested. We all participated but pretty soon there were community members coming to these who took offense at the raucous behavior of faculty and students in it, and said to hell with you people. So it turned out to be probably more divisive than useful to have citizens as well as members of the academic community in a governing situation.

Q: Take me through one of those raucous...

A: Right.

Q: Meetings, what would make them so divisive?

A: I can remember a few when our temporary campus, one of the big, one of the biggest rooms there could probably seat a hundred people. What would the issue be? It might be... I'm trying to think, it should be, I should have a good example, I, there was one issue over borrowing books from the library. The original library directors felt there shouldn't be a due date, to return books, that's just, that that's the old way of running a library, and we all agreed. We thought that was a wonderful thing.

Well of course you know human nature being human nature if you don't have a deadline of returning a book you don't ever get around to reading it. And in the first year of the library, which was richly supported by the university thanks to Bob Spencer, I think one fifth of the entire university budget went to the library to buy books etcetera, but it lost a huge amount of its original collection. People just never returned the books and that became an issue in some of the governance meetings. Do we, do we begin having a due date for books, or not? And you know, outside citizens would be amazed that we would really think that students would somehow return books, or faculty would return books if there was no deadline to do so.

So they thought probably that there was some unrealism and there was a bit of unreality in what we did. I know one outside member thought that we should do credit checks on all the faculty searches, and he said so publicly. And he was from a big insurance company, he was an executive with Franklin Life Insurance Company, and we were shocked, that was unheard of in academia, maybe that's the way you do it in a business setting...

Q: I think I know who you're talking about...

A: Yeah, Francis Budinger, B-U-D-I-N-G-E-R, nice man, he was a student of mine at age sixty-eight; he hadn't ever gotten his college degree. Nice guy but he just brought a totally different institutional perspective to something we thought would be an intrusion into someone's privacy that's irrelevant to their qualifications to be a professor.

Q: It raises a question for me. What was the nature of the student body? Was it mostly a mixture of young and old backgrounds.

A: Well I remember the statistics, which were I think that the median age of our first year's cadre of students was between twenty-nine and thirty. An awful lot of people attended who were middle-aged, even in advanced age. Milton Freidman the head of the Channel 20 television station became a student. I talked about Bud Budinger, Francis Budinger being a BA student.

There were several characters who took up courses as a way to enlarge their lives. So a lot of pent up demand particularly from a good many women here in Springfield, married women who had put off college and never finished for one reason or another, who now went back to college and that produced some stresses in some marriages around town. I don't mean to say because of some hanky panky, but these were women who learned that they were smarter than they ever thought they were. And they began doing well in courses and that made them probably a little more argumentative and less interested in keeping the house neat and clean and all.

I know from people who told me that there were some liberated middle-aged housewives who were affected profoundly by that. So there were a lot of adult students, some people fresh out of community college, but my recollection is, in my classes, that one of the virtues of a historian was, if I wanted to talk about the experience of war in history I had one woman, who, who remembered World War One, and a good many who remembered World War Two, and others who were involved right then with Vietnam. And so it was a great mixture of ages to look at things historically, that's my recollection.

I think the other thing about most of the students is the ones who were really looking for a job because it meant degree... I meant looking for a degree because it meant a job, they didn't care about being liberated or they didn't care about having their world enlarged. They wanted a union card and I don't blame them; that's what they waited for all these years. They'd worked in some low-level state job and here was their chance to get a better job and they didn't want to be intellectually liberated, they just wanted to be told the information in lectures, and then take a test, pass it, and graduate, and get a better job.

So there was some tension between all of us who were teaching and didn't want to lecture. We wanted to pose questions. We wanted students to speak up and to show their ability to learn by that participation. A lot of students really didn't care for that. Some did but others didn't, and they wanted a degree from a respectable institution. And if we were going to become a flaky place, it would degrade their chances of a better job. And so what they wanted was an instant U of I. Well that couldn't happen anyway, and we weren't U of I but... So and they wanted orderly things, they wanted degrees, they wanted the professor to come in and say I'll lecture about this and I'll give you a test next week. They didn't want them to say, "Now what do you want to talk about?" (chuckles).

Q: So the non-traditional students came in varieties?

A: Yes. Uh-huh. Sorry, I got a little windier there, but I'm trying to paint a picture of the students. There were some real entrepreneurs among the students. One legendary guy, I forget his name, we had so few rules that there was no limit on how many course credits you could sign up for, maybe you've heard this story. And so you could sign up for as much as you want, and there was no particular penalty for taking an incomplete. So being a pretty bright guy his very first quarter because we were on the quarter system initially, his very first quarter he signed up for god knows, forty hours. You only could finish fifteen or so hours each quarter, and he took incompletes. And then didn't have to enroll the next quarter or the next quarter. He would just finish the work, and he would get a quarter, he would get three quarters worth of education for one quarter's worth of tuition, pretty clever (smiles). We finally had to put a stop to that.

But I always felt, well that guy was working the system pretty well (laughter), and I had to admire that. So we had some clever students, a lot of whom thought that much of the idealism that we were displaying was really beside the point, that they didn't feel was important. Many of them are sentimental about it now but at the time they thought now why don't you get your act together, and we worried about the, not certification, what's it called, what universities... accreditation. It was tricky the first few times we were accredited because everything was so crazy. That's what they cared about, they didn't want to graduate from an unaccredited university obviously.

Q: Now as I understand it, in the beginning there were not traditional academic departments?

A: Right.

Q: The grading system was not traditional; there was kind of an evaluation system.

A: Yes. Right....

Q: Let's, can we talk a little bit about those.

A: Ok, two of those. Those are good questions. Yes. We felt and President Spencer agreed that one of the problems in higher education was over-specialization, so "departmentitis" was a problem. And so we insisted, we instead called our clusters or programs, which have a less of an institutional hint to them. And so we would kind of convene and there was no chairman. The person who would call the meeting was a convener, so it was all kind of softening the hard edges of university life elsewhere, and they were very democratic.

I mean if the history teachers got together for a program meeting, the convener was just one among equals. He would just schedule the meeting, or she, and if ten students showed up their vote was every bit as valid, their votes were just as valid as the faculty. We could be outvoted, and sometimes were, but they took it seriously if they cared, and I don't think we were ever hurt by that. But it was an interesting system, gradually... and

also as a result we didn't have departments with assigned offices in the very same places, were kind of scattered people the first few years. That changed but the idea was we wanted people to interact with others; we were big on interdisciplinary study. And if you, if you don't have a history department of offices next to each other that will encourage interdisciplinarity, so, we did that, and all those had a good effect. I think there's more interdisciplinary study now at most universities, but it isn't as absolute as when we started.

As far as evaluations are concerned, we refused to call it a grading system because grades were inimical. We called it an evaluation system. First of all, anyone could take any course, pass/fail any course, there was no limit to that. They didn't have to be other than your major, you could take any course pass/fail. And then we had to write evaluations of the students, each student a paragraph. And we did it, but I have to admit it got to be kind of a real pain. And I'll have to admit also that I devised, and many of my colleagues I'm sure did as well, the same opening paragraph for each evaluation describing the course, and then I would, you know, I'd have maybe a sentence or two about the student, so it was a little contrived to say the least.

Q: Where did these ideas spring from?

A: The literature of criticism in higher education, which Spencer had read, and we'd all read, all of these things were targets of the educational reformers; grades created unpleasant competitiveness, departments created stars, and so these are part of what's wrong with higher education. And to some extent I think that was a valid diagnosis but certain things in life are, you know, you're going to be evaluated seriously.

And if you were a principal in a school district and you were looking at the resume or the transcript of a graduate of Sangamon State University and all of the courses can't be given a number like History 361, instead it has to be called Radicalism in American Poetry, and that the grade is pass rather than B, they're gonna say, "You know, I don't know if your really any good or not."

And so we were getting feedback that students were being hurt by the pass/fail grading option. It was tempting for them, but it put at risk their chances of a job, if they wanted a job. Now some of the middle-aged women who took classes, that was probably great because they worked hard anyway. They were being liberated intellectually, but for a lot of students who really wanted that union card, pass/fail and written evaluations weren't because the written evaluations... you couldn't condense them in a transcript so they were at risk.

The one nice thing about listening to students at this campus was they as much as anyone, as much as the Board, the Board of Regents, were saying, "Wait a minute here. You're not thinking of me. You seem to be, you say you care about students, but you're putting our careers at risk with some of your idealistic notions." And so I've always felt in part that our backing away from some of the more extreme ideas we had occurred just as much from student pressure as Board of Regents pressure. And we were hoisted on our

own petards, if you know what that phrase means. We talked about students and so we had to listen to them (laughter), and so I think it worked out all right, but I'm not going to blame Spencer. I do blame the educational bureaucrats. But if the students wanted things a little more conventionally, I think that was bound to occur to some extent.

Q: I think also too, there were some changes going on in society...

A: Yes.

Q: A turn towards not really traditionalism but almost vocationalism.

A: Vocationalism, competitiveness, all of those things, sure, sure. And so here we were a university that wanted to change, but then some of my friends who regret what's happened since then resent the change. Well, if you're an institution believing in change you're going to keep changing, and we changed a little bit more into the conservative direction, philosophically, and so how can I quarrel, that's part of change.

Q: I believe the clusters were Justice and the Social Order...

A: Yes.... Environments and People...

Q: People, Work, Culture, and Society...

A: Society, yes....

Q: And the fourth one was....

A: Something in education....

Q: It was something, but what I wanted to ask was....

A: And they were clusters unlike a program, which would be say history. The clusters were deliberately interdisciplinary groupings of programs. Now go ahead, excuse me...

Q: Where did history fit into this?

A: Well it didn't necessarily all together fit into any one of them, but any historian could teach classes that he or she chose in any of those clusters and would probably meet with one of those cluster groups to hammer out something that would be useful to them. I taught a couple of classes in Justice and the Social Order.

Q: What were those classes? Do you remember?

A: I taught one on, well, The History of American Law, which was also a course in History but also in Legal Studies and also in Justice and the Social Order. I taught a course on Vietnam, co-taught it, lots co-teaching there. What was that in... I'm not sure,

maybe Justice, no it wasn't Justice and the Social Order, I don't recall. But you didn't, in other words you could have a course either in or not in one of the Clusters. But if you wanted it in the Cluster, you'd go to their meetings, and talk, and help shape the class that way, but you weren't required to have courses in those. They were just groupings for intellectual sake. You could teach just in your quote program, which a lot, which some people did.

Some were more experimental and we also of course had an Individual Option program, which was a non-focused degree except it was self-imposed focus. A student could decide that they wanted to study...criminal justice in China, and sometimes unfortunately we didn't have the faculty who could adequately teach that, and so it became problematic sometimes. But it was an idea and a way of responding to student interests. Some of the universities have tried that, but we certainly did from the beginning. I'm not sure if it's as active today as it was.

Q: Well it's interesting, there are definitely some legacies with the PAC courses...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: Still exist, I've taken, well I guess I've taken two or three...

A: Uh-huh, yeah, Ok...

Q: And Applied Studies still there...

A: Right...

Q: Individual Option's still there...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: But the grading system has changed...

A: It has changed...

Q: Pass fail's still available...

A: Still, yeah, but probably not in your major, I don't know, what are your...

Q: I think it's still an option...

A: Ok, Ok...

Q: So it, so there are...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: There are legacies...

A: Uh-huh...

Q: Certainly some of the original faculty are still there.

A: Yeah, not many, but some...

Q: But some...

A: Some are still teaching part-time but most of them have retired. But sure and they're good people, friends of mine and they worked hard here, and they feel they were part of a unique experiment. And some of them regret that it changed, but as I say, I argue that we were change and so we had to change ourselves, but that's all right.

Q: Cullom, we maybe have time for one more question.

A: All right.

Q: So I guess I better make it a good one.

A: (laughter)

Q: Well, we'll end it, how about we end it like this, you, you referred to the Blue Memo...

A: Yes.

Q: Couple of times and the Blue Memo has come up for me in different contexts.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: In oral histories, it is often something that is referred to as being the definition of what we wanted SSU to be.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: How do, what are your thoughts on the Blue Memo now, thirty-nine years later?

A: Well, I haven't thought systematically about how apt it is today compared to how apt it was in 1970. I suspect that a few of those ideas have either been fulfilled institutionally or are not quite as urgent as they seemed to us at the time. But by and large I think it is a reasonable prescription for a good college education. I can't think of any of those ideas that is bogus. I think the emphasis on teaching is still valid, not to the exclusion of publication or research, but it's a valid emphasis. I think all those are valid, but like

everything in life you've got to balance things. And it represented a diagnosis of what was really wrong at that time. Some of those ills have moderated somewhat I suppose elsewhere, but that Blue Memo still remains a reasonable working plan for a university, maybe not a top grade research university but for a good university nevertheless.

You know, we've used up our time today and this may be it. But I know if I thought about it there'd be a lot of other experiences that might be worth recounting, but we'll wait and see, how time goes, and how your time goes. But I, if I tried year by year to go through my jobs, you know I had a lot of different jobs at the university, I probably could think of a fair amount more, but I think it's your call.

Q: Thank you. I think we've sketched out the background...

A: Yeah.

Q: And there's definitely room for the foreground...

A: Yes.

Q: We'll stop here and begin again later.

A: Ok, thank you.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

End tape 2, side 2

Running Time: 45 minutes, and 14 seconds

Interview 3: February 22, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 3, side 1

Q: This is an oral history interview with Cullom Davis; the interviewer is Justin Law. This is our third interview, and today is February 22. Cullom, let's talk a little bit about your experience prior to coming to SSU. What college had you attended and what degrees had you received?

A: Oh, I don't know whether we covered it, Ok, well I went to Princeton University in New Jersey, and I don't know if we covered that or not.

Q: We have.

A: Ok and I graduated in 1957. Taught prep school for two years, and then went to graduate school at Illinois, where I got my masters in 1961 and my PhD after much sweat and strain in 1968.

Q: Where were you working when you first learned about SSU?

A: Well I was teaching and serving as an administrator at Indiana University in Bloomington, a place that I really liked a lot. It was kind of like a plum job for me coming out of Illinois, and I was the envy of my friends coming out of graduate school. And it was a very pleasant place to work but as I may have said, I got a little restless in the mid-sixties because of the student unrest, and it hit the Indiana campus. There was a fire at the library, which strikes me as a sacred institution on any campus, I don't remember the upshot. But it was a measure of troubles there, and there were some student strikes, and I think I told you about the way that I dealt with the student strike.

So I was, I guess you'd say, happy with the institution in some respects but impatient with its lack of response to the needs of undergraduate education, not that other big universities weren't just as bad or worse. So that was when a colleague told me that a friend of his, Bob Spencer, was recruiting for the university and I got the phone call, and I guess I've told that story.

Q: What did you know, or infer about the university before visiting it?

A: (laughs) Well, of course I'd never heard of it because it only existed in a statute that had been enacted by the General Assembly and signed by then Governor Shapiro in, was it Shapiro? By then it might have already been Ogilvie in the summer of 1969. So I knew nothing about it. And my colleague at Indiana, I don't remember him telling me much about it except that it was new. And then I, I'm pretty sure Bob Spencer called me and we chatted over the phone. And he talked about some of his views and that really did strike me. And I told you I was a little uncomfortable about the prospect of returning to Illinois, central Illinois, but given my frustration and his vision, I thought it was worthy vision to have, so I sent my resume but already he was interested and we hit it off very well.

Q: Was your original impression one of enthusiasm or suspicion?

A: You know to be honest all I can remember is the enthusiasm. To me and it increased during the spring of that first year, I started at the end of January. The excitement of creating a new university that would be so responsive to all of the problems in American higher education, it was a tremendous rush for me and for the people I was laboring with.

And Bob Spencer really appealed to me. This was, this man was a real educator, and his values were values that I admired. I hadn't thought about them in many cases, but I found them extremely exciting and appropriate so I mean it was a little worrisome. I was

leaving a comfortable job at an established university, but I don't remember that preying on me particularly, I was just excited.

Q: How did the university in the spring of 1970 compare with the colleges you had known up until that point?

A: Ok. A different universe, I mean as we envisioned it. It was still just on the drawing board, but it couldn't have been more different. I mean there was talk of avoiding departmentalization, of avoiding a star system. At Indiana and of course Princeton, the faculty were superstars, and they had special parking permits and they had their own dining room, elegant sort of dining room, facilities. And in both institutions the traditions were powerful, and there was a pretty rigid attitude towards classes, and designing classes, introducing new classes, all that sort of thing.

So this was entirely different, this we envisioned as a place that would adapt and be quote innovative. And that meant always looking at everything with fresh eyes. It couldn't have been less like anything I had ever known in my life.

Q: At that time, what was your understanding of the university's approach to learning and teaching? How did you react to that approach?

A: Well, we of course hadn't done it here yet, but what Bob Spencer said and what Bob Batson and I discussed, and then others as they joined us, was an open teaching environment. We wouldn't have bells that began and ended classes, we would just begin when it seemed appropriate even though there was a schedule, we envisioned a class schedule, but no kind of regimentation you know. And that the emphasis would be on learning rather than teaching so the students would be much more critical to this environment rather than faculty would except that the faculty would be instigators of learning, and it would take skill over lecturing.

At Indiana I had lectured and at Princeton I had thrilled at the great lectures I had had; here we weren't going to stress lecturing, we were going to stress the producing of ideas by students and having them carry the ball. And we talked about it all, but everything we discussed, from getting rid of the grading system, to getting rid of the perks that faculty at other places have, to being able to introduce new courses basically on impulse, and naming them according to our values, which was different than the standing sort of thing, History 301, 1929 to the present or something, our courses were going to be interdisciplinary and kind of "dial your own class."

So as one who helped shape the curriculum and recruit the faculty and even write the original catalogue, which was almost a joke as I look at it now, it was so sparse in its writing. At one meeting, I remember, when we were pulling out our hair trying to put together a catalogue that would actually be available before classes began, I suggested, amusingly that we should have a catalogue with blank pages that that would appropriately reflect the kind of openness. Well it was amusingly an off hand remark, as

I told you Spencer was under great pressure and it easy for me to smart off on things like that, it seemed to be in the spirit of the place.

Q: What characteristics and practices most and least appealed to you at that time?

A: Well, the ones that most did I think we've covered, but all of them were part of Bob Spencer's ideals, a focus on liberal arts education, experiential learning, a focus on public affairs, addressing public issues, teachers as instigators of learning rather than vessels of information, small classes, the library as the very center intellectually and physically of the campus, these all appealed to me.

I began to get a little frustrated because I began to see that necessarily there were people who joined the payroll in administrative positions like personnel, purchasing, things like that, they were nice enough people, but they were recruited from the state bureaucracy, and they didn't have a clue about this vision or particularly care about it because it didn't directly touch them. And that process continued and in retrospect, it can't be surprising that you've got to do certain things; you've got to order things and avoid getting in trouble with the state or the law. But these were not people who shared our vision, and they were nice enough people so that didn't trouble me. But it was part of my realizing that this could not be some Eden on Earth, that there would be conventional people working here.

Q: What were your initial impressions of the campus?

A: Well it was muddy. There was a one-story ranch house owned by a former Congressman, I forget his name, right in the middle of the property. And there was a road, I guess it's West Lake Drive, going straight through, I guess, what was envisioned, and a lot of corn and soybeans and some barns and silos. But I was involved because there were so few people besides the President who could be in meeting with, first of all, the master planning architects, a firm in St. Louis. Joe Murphy was the principal of that firm, an older guy who was associated with Washington University, and he and his architectural office conceived of a plan for a commuter campus.

And to some extent he was invited to conceive of the buildings of the master plan as being angular to the extent that the center of the campus would resemble Piazza San Marco, or St. Mark's Plaza in Venice, Italy, where if you're there you can turn in any direction and see corners of buildings, angles of buildings, it's kind of a never ending thing. And Bob Batson, bless his heart, thought that ought to be the model for our campus, and that fit very conveniently within a circular design.

The notion that you would have the core of classroom buildings at the center surrounded by parking lots because we knew we had to have parking lots though they were considered part of the problem of a commuter campus. Students would drive as close as they could to their classes, eat their dinner in their car, take a class, and then leave, so we worried about a campus life and what parking, big parking lots would do to any sense of community.

But the master plan was circular in design... you can still see remnants of that. It's a little bit funny now because superimposed on what is a classic middle-western grid of ninety degree angle streets and I've always laughed, that's because we became a part of the U of I. But you know we never quite completed the circle; it was, if you look at a bird's eye view of the campus, it's about three quarters of a full circle. But that was the idea and it appealed to us, and I sat in on meetings in both Springfield and in St. Louis before that.

We visited a few places because the first building Bob Spencer felt should be the university library, and his reasoning was this, that the authorities are going to have to give you your first building, actually buildings, so he didn't want that to be a permanent classroom because that you'll get when you have students. He felt that the one building that could be put off forever if we didn't make it our first priority was the library. And he wanted it in the very center of campus, so we visited the University of Illinois-Chicago campus library, which had been finished about five years earlier, a pretty ugly place actually.

And we talked to an architect at the Murphy firm, I think his name was Wofford, Ted Wofford, I think that's correct, he was designated as the principal architect for the library. He had been an enthusiast of Frank Lloyd Wright, was an enthusiast not that you'll see Wright's influence in that building, but he did have unusual ideas because of the circular campus. And the emphasis on angles he designed a library as a hexagon, which is a little odd because ordinarily you'd design a building as a projection of the items in it.

And books are, if you project books and book stacks, you'd assume that the most ideal, the most efficient building would be rectangular. He thought otherwise and it's controversial, but there was a certain attractiveness to it I think. And besides it is energy inefficient, which is being corrected upon now thirty years later. I've always thought it was kind of intriguing, and the idea was to build a really big library because it was, it would be our only "gimme" library, only "gimme" building. So it was to be big but the idea was that it would be much bigger than the library needed so there would be classrooms temporary classrooms there.

And as the library grew and the university grew and classroom buildings were built, gradually the classes, the classroom spaces would be evacuated to expand the library. I think that was a really good idea. Now it still hasn't come to fruition, there's still classrooms in Brookens but over the years portions of the building have been shifted from classrooms to library space, so it will be big enough for the library indefinitely. And I think that was a brilliant stroke, a good example of Bob Spencer's thinking. And the architects I thought were good and so I was involved in that.

And we also met with a furniture consultant, who was a high design, a New York City furniture consultant; she was a nice woman but because we were stressing the importance of having clusters of conversations to induce students into getting out of their cars and

actually sitting down and meeting people, we had little spaces all over the temporary campus, those metal buildings where people could gather.

And she came up with some really offbeat, kind of swing chairs, maybe even some bean bag chairs, I can't remember, very sixtyish furniture, which turned out to be inefficient and not very durable. So within five years we were replacing a lot of that furniture, but she at least understood that we wanted to encourage conversation. I'm not sure how well we did, but at least that was an aim of the furniture design.

And then the classrooms, we talked about how the classrooms should be initially just the temporary buildings and I can't think who but one of us came up with the idea of a kind of tiered classroom, which came to be known as "The Pit." And it was a sort of experimental classroom with no lecture space, a square room with about three tiers of seats, benches really and flooring, carpeted flooring around it. And you'd just sit down and gather that way, but it was very popular with many teachers. They would beg to have their classes meet there, a lot of students thought it was uncomfortable, but that was one building, one room in particular that we designed. So all of those things were reflections of an educational philosophy, I guess we should say that I was involved in most of all that.

Q: What were your initial impressions of the community?

A: Well when I visited in December of 1969 in addition to meeting Bob Spencer, and Mary Jane McDonald, Bob Batson, a few others, I was given about a three hour drive around town, that probably included lunch, by Carol Lohmann, L-O-H-M-A-N-N. She was the wife of a well-known downtown banker, herself interested in education, and she had volunteered as many citizens did to help in any way she could. And so she was a designated escort for visiting faculty candidates, who began to number in the dozens a week. I was on the early verge of that but she drove me around Lake Springfield. I think she was trying to impress me that this was a nice lake in central Illinois and it was, and I ended up living on a couple of those properties, and we talked about the city, and I already knew Bob Spencer's views about the city.

I've told you them, he didn't think there should be a wall between the campus and the community. He wanted citizens in the community to partake in the governing of the university in an advisory capacity just as any governing body does, and he hoped that the university would be a respected institution. For example, he also pushed very hard and it was hard to push this through our board of regents because it looked like a distraction. Within a few years he pushed and lobbied hard to get a public radio station on campus, and it's thanks to him and his lobbying, his model was, oh what is it, WGBH in Boston, which he grew to love. And he thought that a public affairs university should have a public affairs radio station and it operated on a shoe string and in many respects it still does. And you know that was a luxury for a tiny campus like ours, the board of regents was not at all enthusiastic about that. But he thought that that was part of our being a good community neighbor and I think he's right, was right.

And so the community was important and I shared those views. I thought that there shouldn't be a separate town and gown, a town hostile towards snotty nosed students. And I didn't, we didn't think there would be because we knew we were recruiting local people, these would be citizens of Springfield. Some would come here but not many and they would be older, so we didn't really worry about campus demonstrations.

But jokingly at one meeting with the master plan architects I remember that there was a plaza in the middle of the original temporary campus, a sunken plaza and some steps leading up in all directions, he said to be sure to put electrical outlets in the lamp posts so that the TV crews covering our demonstrations could easily plug in to the electricity. Now he was being whimsical but that's the kind, that's the environment in which we were opening, that spring of 1969. I think that was the Kent State killing, which you may not have heard about, pretty grim anti-war protests that led to national guardsman killing students. And also the college in Mississippi, I can't remember, I can't think of the name of it, so there was a little bit of the morbid feeling on our part thinking of stuff like that.

Bob Spencer used to talk about his dose of reality was when he loved to go to the main post office, which had just been built out on East Cook Street I guess it was, and he'd go there early in the morning to drop off some stuff, it was just a habit of his from years past. He'd always talk to the same mail clerk, and this guy was not a college educated person himself and very suspicious of college types, and he would give Bob Spencer a real dose of reality from a community, probably a blue collar community perspective, "what are those crazy people doing now Dr. Spencer." And he used to laugh a lot about how he used to like to go get the mail and his infusion of reality.

There were people here in town, once the faculty arrived, namely us, who seemed terribly "hippieish" and radical to citizens, including citizens who were taking classes and that led to some friction. And the trouble is of course, being in the city of the state's capitol that meant that state senators and reps, whether they were in this district or elsewhere, would read about crazy things as they happened here, not many crazy things happened on campus. But there were faculty members who all year long wore sandals and never wore a tie and I didn't wear a tie either after a year down here and who had beards and who were to some extent, angry about... if not life then society and education.

So that began to give us a reputation of being different, particularly because we were being compared automatically to our sister institution Lincoln Land, which was, we thought, snobbily just a glorified high school. But they had an adequate president, who had experience as a principal of high schools and then a college professor, actually a nice guy, I got to know Bob Poorman, but he was extremely conventional, and he and Bob Spencer just could not get along. I mean they were personalities just diametrically opposed, and they talked about coordinating things but never really did. Bob said, "You know we're building a great library and would you like to participate?" And he said, "No we're building our own." But it was a puny library, which one would expect I think of a community college.

Then without really consulting with Bob Poorman we switched after a couple of years from the quarter to the semester system. And even though Lincoln Land was larger in enrollment than we were, they had to, largely because of family vacation schedules, they had to switch themselves without any sort of advance notice from us.

So there were some hard feelings between the top leaders of the two institutions. And a lot of the faculty though I was very friendly with the history faculty there and some others, they all had a kind of skepticism towards this crazy place, a little envy as well, I think. But they were on much more secure ground than we were; I mean they had a tax base serving the needs of various students that wasn't as secure for us. We were depending on state appropriation. If we screwed up we could be closed down even though we thought we were so small, but nevertheless that sense of adventure and excitement was present on our campus. It wasn't particularly present there, but there were some very good teachers there, very good. And you may know some of them, and I liked them, still like them, and they had to move from what I like to call "plywood u," over there on South Sixth Street, near where the, what was that restaurant? [Heritage House]

Q: Near the St. Nicholas Hotel?

A: No, way down south, what was it? You know you could go in and pay five dollars and eat all you want, I blanking on the name, it was torn down about five years ago.

Q: Gallaghers?

A: No, it's even further south, near the interstate, the junction of I-72 and I-55, it was a... it doesn't matter, but that's the area where the campus was, right across sixth street from the new Wal-Mart, on sixth and I-72, on the west side of sixth street. Anyway they had been through that conversion and they were building permanent buildings and we were building these metal temporary buildings.

We later thought that they were smarter; they had built out of plywood, which they knew would get destroyed very quickly. We had built pretty good temporary buildings, and we're still using some of them (laughter) because the state looks at them and says, well these aren't bad. But on the other hand the campus has grown a great deal, particularly under the leadership of Naomi Lynn, that's lead to a building boom out there. I wandered there, sorry.

Q: Well, my next question, what was your initial impression of your faculty colleagues. We sort of touched on it a little bit, but what were your impressions?

A: Well, I thought we were recruiting some exceptionally good people. I had a very good, much admired friend, who had been a year or two ahead of me at Illinois named Ralph Stone, and he was a great scholar. He had published works on American foreign policy during the nineteen teens and early twenties. He was teaching and had tenure at Miami University in Ohio, which is a very, very respectable institution, but he, quiet as he was,

if you never knew him, he was very quiet and kind of withdrawn, but he was politically really engaged and he just couldn't stand Miami, it was too conventional.

So he applied to come to Sangamon State, and I was thrilled. And there were others who were really outstanding people, but who were either refugees from other institutions that hadn't given tenure or didn't appreciate them, and I was to some extent that. I hadn't been denied tenure, but I was, you know, escaping something. And certainly Ralph and others, you know, had been denied tenure, or were just fresh out of graduate school, people like Larry Golden or Judy Everson and others, and I think they also caught, to varying extents, the idealism of the place. Some more than others, but as I looked at them, they were... looked to me potentially, a pretty impressive forty charter faculty members.

We rushed hard to get a few in the last minute, and some of them didn't work out very well. And a number were denied tenure some five years later when we had our first tenure review. And I think by and large those people who were denied tenure probably shouldn't have stayed. I think there was, more or less, a fairly fair sorting out procedure, but it was a wrenching institutional process because we were so small. We knew each other so well. There were some other faculty who I thought maybe were a little over the edge, I didn't, I got along with them, but I thought I didn't know what they'd be up to. Most of them left voluntarily or by necessity within a few years. So in general I thought it was pretty good. And most of them were I thought here for the right reasons.

Q: We sort of discussed this, but we might as well ask the question, what were your initial impressions of the students, and the administrators?

A: Well I told you a little bit that some of the administrators in the non-academic areas were conventional, nice enough people, and I got along because I had to as an administrator. I had to interact with them, and I did... those in the academic world. There was Bob Batson, who, I told you, was larger than life, in so many ways, drank too much, but he was a great conversationalist and had interesting ideas. He was very creative, and so he was probably my closest colleague for three or four months until others began joining the faculty and the staff, as early faculty appointees.

I remember among the early ones were a couple, Bob and Jackie Jackson. He was a former Episcopal Priest, and she had never got an academic appointment, but had written, she was a writer, and they both taught English. Bob didn't last long nor did that marriage last long. But they came on fairly early and then someone in education because we know, we knew we needed someone who knew about how you jump through hoops to be certified to offer educational degrees. I'm trying to think of who that was, I think his name was Jerry Storm, and he was a nice enough guy, didn't stay more than three or four years.

But we had to have certain specialists like that, and we felt strongly with an early faculty of forty we had to represent as many disciplines as possible. We had two mathematicians, a Chinese-American guy, I'm blanking on his name, and then Mary Kate

Yentema, Y-E-N-T-E-M-A, who was very nice and was certainly not a radical, a good teacher and devoted, and then we got a geographer, who turned out to be a disaster, kind of a conventional guy, but we thought that we ought to have someone teaching geography classes.

We had a biologist, John Walsh, a former priest, very nice guy, and as I've told you before there were a lot of former priests, probably five or six in the first faculty. I'm assuming that idealism drew them... was secular, they may have felt that this is kind of a secular body of people, just like a priesthood. I don't know, I don't want to try and psychologize them, but John Walsh was a nice guy.

Then there was another fellow, I'm forgetting his name, who taught counseling and was a former priest. Then a woman... we recruited an academic vice president, nominally my boss, and his name was George Cohen. He was charismatic, a wonderful conversationalist, he came from the state of New York, had a great New York accent, was a character really. He could weave all sorts of lovely ideas just as Bob Spencer could, and he needed an associate, so he brought as his associate a woman who was a former nun. And it pretty soon became obvious that they had a relationship, which thirty five years ago was kind of, you know, a risky sort of thing on campus. And she left and then he was fired, within in what, four months or so because he just couldn't produce for Bob Spencer.

That's when I felt he was under pressure from the board and the bureaucrats, and George just wasn't delivering on stuff, so that was a trauma in the summer of 1970 because we were getting ready to offer classes. To lose our academic vice president after just a matter on months was tough, and he was replaced necessarily by a very conventional person whom Spencer had recruited because he had experience and all, and his name was Ernst Giesecke.

And so I then interacted with Ernst Giesecke, G-I-E-S-E-C-K-E, but he bored me to death to be honest. He was a nice guy, but he also kind of I thought talked more than he did. A lot of these people told great stories and spun out their visions but meanwhile, I thought I was kind of in the trenches dealing with forty faculty and trying to start a university and dealing with student complaints and all. So Giesecke was, and he stayed on for about five or six years but wasn't highly regarded among his peers. Now you did ask me about the students, didn't you?

Q: Well, may I ask one question before the other question?

A: Yeah, of course.

Q: Was there any divisions amongst the faculty over the firing of the first academic vice-president?

A: Sure, sure. There were. People, I would say the more activist faculty were outraged because they adored George. He was a messiah almost, they adored him and so this was

an act of treason you know. They thought it was the president; others were just appalled by the instability on campus.

I remember, two of my dear friends, husband and wife team, David and Judy Everson, he was a political scientist of some stature, he had taught at SIU, and she was finishing an American Studies PhD and hadn't had a teaching job because she was married to a faculty member at Southern. So she just was a housewife and she was desperate to have an academic job, and I think just as much as anything that they came here because they could both have jobs. But they didn't share in a lot of the radical talk, they did share Spencer's ideals, I'm sure, in fact I know they did, but they didn't share in a lot of the politics of their colleagues. And I don't think they were so outraged by George's firing as they were appalled by the instability on campus because "is this place going to survive or what", and yet they remained reliable, good citizens. Both of them were critically important to the survival and growth of the university.

So I can't think of all of them, I can't divide the list but there was a lot of unrest that summer, angry meetings. Some faculty who were only in the process of planning the move, rushed out here for the weekend or so to meet in a sort of non-stop protest meeting, saying what are we going to do. It passed over, but it was, it was kind of the first great trauma of Bob Spencer's presidency.

Q: I guess we can now ask about your initial impressions of the students?

A: Yeah, yeah, even though I was very busy right in the middle of campus not in the administration building. And I said, "Look, if I'm going to be just dealing with students and faculty I don't want to be in the administration building, I'm just going to have an office and a secretary and a grad assistant in the middle of one of the temporary classroom buildings." To me stylistically that's what made sense, and I could roam the halls, talk to people and so forth, and I think I did a decent job. Basically, it was holding things together.

My title was amorphous; I was still recruiting for the next year's faculty. We were supposed to double from forty to eighty and so I had to work with Bob Batson, and others on the original faculty to recruit people. But I also had to deal with everyday, routine problems about rescheduling a class or this or that for whatever reason, and so I saw a lot of the students.

What I learned early was that a lot of them really didn't care about innovation. They wanted a degree because they wanted a better job, or a job. And so some of them went along but were indifferent toward taking a class in the pit or participating in group discussion rather than taking notes from a lecture. They were decidedly indifferent toward that if not hostile. And some people of a rather brittle frame of mind, middle-aged, had jobs, were actually hostile; they thought this was crazy. It was the crazies running the insane asylum, they thought.

But I liked them; I got to know a lot of students, hired one as my graduate assistant, he was a hippie, nice guy but he was unusual. Most of the students, there were some radicals, but most weren't, they struck me by and large as they were just grateful finally having a place that they could go to because a lot of the talk then was about "place-bound students," students who had families here or jobs or circumstances that made it unrealistic to go to a campus for a degree. They could go to Lincoln Land, but we represented the only hope for place-bound students to finish a degree, so they were nice and I think they went along by and large.

Q: So you would say that the student body was a reflection of the community?

A: I think by and large. Very few students came here from out of town or another university. I know some did, not that many. We weren't as famous as some of the other experimental colleges that were opening about that time: Hampshire College was a private school that drew people from all over the country; Evergreen State, I think probably did, but we didn't, we never were that big of a radar blip I think. And so these were largely local people and some responded wonderfully to this atmosphere. Some accepted it but didn't particularly like it. And there were some people who took courses here and even got the degree but felt that the degree was a debased degree, that they weren't forced to work hard enough by taking final exams or submitting papers on written assignments, so it was an easy degree.

And one guy who later became prominent politically here in town, once pointed to a university official in this politician's office, and he said, and there's my degree and it isn't worth shit. He was, he was very critical, I'm not sure that was all that common. Nowadays you hear nothing but a kind of reverence and respect, particularly as I've told you, mature women for whom this represented their only real opportunity and then a liberating opportunity to really grow and discover that they had brains that could really do things. And that sounds like a putdown but it's not, it's just that they'd never been in a situation culturally or domestically where their own ideas were that important and here those ideas were important, they were valued.

Q: In one sentence, describe the SSU approach to educating students?

A: I got to think here because you're forcing me, I'm forcing me to come up with one sentence

Q: You can say two, it's Ok.

A: No, no, I think it's a useful exercise. An SSU education was intended to expose students to ideas, encourage their active participation, stimulate their interest in the wider world, invite them to learn the value of a good research library, and help them test their career interests with off campus job experiences.

End tape 3, side 1

Running Time: 47 minutes, and 40 seconds

Interview 3: February 22, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 3, side 2

Q: This is a continuation of an oral history interview with Cullom Davis; the interviewer is Justin Law. Regarding what and how you taught in the first few years, what courses did you teach? Were the subjects conventional, or not?

A: Well, as I think I said, that first quarter in September, I guess, I don't know when we began, I know we couldn't began classes on campus. We hadn't finished yet so we met in churches, downtown church basements for a couple of weeks. But essentially the quarter was out on campus and duckboards, I mean it was muddy, much of it unfinished. But I did teach a course, I co-taught a course with this mathematician, nice guy, and we taught a course on Vietnam, which seemed timely. It may have been a PAC, I can't recall, but I needed someone to co-teach it because sometimes my administrative responsibilities forced me to be out of town, recruiting or something.

So this worked out pretty well and so I did that. I'm not sure if it was a very successful course. I never taught it again, it was a little beyond my scope of knowledge, so I was faking it, not faking it but I was having to cope and he had read things that I hadn't read so we worked reasonably well as a team.

The next spring I really can't remember, I probably taught one course every semester, but I was a fulltime administrator, as I said Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. And what did I teach, I got interested in the subject of Futurism because around that time a famous book by Alvin Tofler called *Future Shock*, and it really caught my interest. And there were courses on the future springing up on campuses, kind of progressive campuses, and I thought, well you know, in a way the future is the flipside of history so, although that's kind of stupid analogy.

But at any rate, I did... now it may have been that first spring; I taught a course called Futurism. I know it was that spring and read Tofler's book and I had students work on separate projects because each one of them was going to have to write a very long, predictive essay on some topic.

And about that time in my administrative capacity, we were trying to think about what we wanted to do in the form of a week devoted to the whole campus. And we decided it would be at the end of the spring quarter, and it would be called University Week. And we agreed that it ought to be on the future because 1971 was thirty years before the 2001, that was of course the subject of that great motion picture. And so we and Judy Everson helped plan this cause she was a great admirer of the film, she was a real authority on the film.

We arranged to be able to book that film in the local movie theatre, the one over on Macarthur. And we arranged to have Arthur Clarke, the author of the short story in

which it's based, available. And a colleague of mine in History named Ed Ezel was able to get someone who had worked on the special effects for that motion picture, a famous Hollywood special effects designer. Then we talked Illinois Bell into having a demonstration of what they then called the speaker... video phone or something like that; it was an early version of YouTube or whatever.

And gosh, what else? Students decided that they would build a geodesic dome. And so we really did, we really put a lot of effort into University Week that year, and it was a great success. The public, we made a point of advertising in the newspaper to encourage the public to attend. And it seemed as if a lot was going on, all sorts of gimmicky things and some were serious ones, evening lectures or films or programs, daytime panels and presentations. It was a great success and the people on the planning committee really worked hard on it. And I was an active participant in that, one of the leaders of it, but by no means the only leader.

And that was a nice out growth of my class because we arranged to create a time capsule, which would actually be in a trust department vault in a downtown bank with the essays that my students had written all microfilmed and placed in this time capsule, and we had a ceremony. It was a little corny, but the notion was we were looking ahead. And we said, "Gee, whenever, if we're all still alive, we'll have to take a look at this." So it was a thirty year time span, time capsule, so I do remember teaching that class in the spring of 1971 and also helping to lead and design, arrange for University Week.

Based on that experience, well we spent a lot of money, money that wasn't as available in future years, but we had plenty of money that first year. Based on that experience I was convinced that PACs worked and that University Week worked, and that they were distinctive parts of our curriculum. After that I began teaching History courses, but I also would often teach that course on Futurism. By the second year I started teaching once a year the Oral History course.

And what else did I teach? Gosh, I taught a few other History classes. In the History curriculum we developed a special curriculum that focused on world history, and it was fun to participate in that because we, there was a wonderful book on the twentieth century world, and then other specialized books, and I enjoyed teaching that course once a year. It was called the Roots of Contemporary History. So I would teach Futurism, the Roots of Contemporary History, Oral History, and the others are not as memorable to me until later when I was teaching Legal History, but I taught all over the place.

I remember one year I helped teach a management class just because it kind of stretched my brain a little bit. I co-taught courses, which was part of the fashion. But I have to tell you that because I almost always had administrative assignments throughout my whole career at Sangamon State (UIS), I rarely had a full teaching load. I taught a course on Clayville a couple times. You know Clayville? Rural life center that the university acquired and we were trying to teach rural life there, there were people more professionally interested in that than I was, but I did, I did offer some classes for high school teachers out at Clayville.

Q: So was Clayville then, like a separate campus or like an extension office?

A: Yes, it became close to an extension campus but a really small one. It was a lovingly restored stage coach stop, brick building, beautifully done by a well known local physician and his wife who had money. And there were outbuildings and barns that were brought on to this site so that it became kind of like a small village: barns, cabins, and this beautiful brick stage coach stop. And every fall there would be a festival, a fall festival at Clayville, which was very popular, hundreds or thousands of people would come.

Well the owners of this property decided that as they got older they really wanted to turn it over to a place like this university. So they did and the university agreed to maintain it and continued to maintain it and to offer credit courses because one of my colleagues in history Ed Hawes taught rural life studies. So the program grew for a while and there were credit generating courses out there which helped justify the expense of maintaining the property.

But when Hawes left and all that credit generating ended, Clayville became a problem for the university because to maintain it, you had to spend a lot of money on upgrades, and electricity, really expensive stuff. And we were no longer generating academic credit out there, and it didn't (without the fall festival) generate that much visitor attention. And we weren't a big enough campus to operate it like an outdoor museum around the calendar, so eventually we had to sell it for a dollar to someone. It has fallen into disrepair but there was a time when it was a lively, growing enterprise.

Q: Interesting.

A: But I rarely had a full load of courses whether we were on the quarter or the semester system, usually three classes. I rarely had because as Assistant Vice President I had a full time administrative job, and I only taught because I really loved it.

But I resigned as Assistant Vice President in, I guess it was in the summer of 1972 after a year, after two years. I was exhausted by the pressures, and I could have stayed on, but by that time we were beginning to develop a kind of administrative system where my role was, I guess I would have been a Dean. But I really wanted to return to teaching and though I didn't have tenure yet.

President Spencer liked me and wanted me to stay, so he found a place on the faculty for me. I just had had enough. But then within a few years I was back doing administrative things, it's been kind of an on and off characteristic of my career.

Building the Oral History Office was itself, became an occasion for administrative reduction for teaching because it grew very rapidly and gained a lot of favorable attention. And we were pretty new at that game, and so... and my classes were large, and I was able to get some grant money to support it, so that became a big thing. And so for a

while, I had one course reduced every semester because I was running the Oral History Office.

And I want to tell you one quick story about the Oral History Office because it was the sort of thing that grew from the seed, that developed... a secretary, and a grad assistant, grants, and so it deserved some sort of official sanction. And yet I knew having gone to Board of Regents meetings that the board and the bureaucrats at the Board of Regents looked down their noses at any new enterprise like that, even though mine was already underway and going.

I knew that they had a rule that you couldn't establish a center without approval, and you couldn't establish a department without approval. You couldn't establish a program without approval, but they never said anything about an "office." So that's why I called it the Oral History Office (letterhead and everything) and I, in effect after a few years, I was the only one really running it. I had named myself as Director of the Oral History Office. That's being flip I guess, but I kind of enjoyed pulling things off like that because I thought it made sense. And I wasn't going to jump through silly hoops created by people who had no imagination or really progressive ideas. So the place grew and became one of the best known in the country.

I stayed with it as long as I could until other jobs impeded, and now it's not as active because they're not creating as much stuff. There are no grants, but it's still a respectable collection. As you know, a lot of it was used for the race riot exhibits, documentary and everything. So I've always quietly chuckled that I was pretty ingenious in calling this the Oral History Office, and it never got any review by the Board of Regents, anything like that at all. And I'm glad it didn't because they probably would have said, well it's not creating credit except your classes... the rest of it isn't creating credit, so why would a small university do that. I just did it.

Q: Where did this come from, this interest in oral history, this idea?

A: You know I don't, on my part you mean?

Q: On your part.

A: Because it began, no it had started at Columbia University.

Q: Right, right, right...

A: During World War II, there had been some wire recording work. But I read about it somewhere that an organization had been formed in 1965 or 1966, something like that, a nascent organization, and I got intrigued. A colleague and I, Ed Ezel, (money was freely available) got approval to go to an Oral History Association meeting in Carmel, California one fall. And we had a great time, I met some fascinating people, and this must have been in 1971, the fall of 1971, and so I was convinced then that we would start some sort of thing with the university.

I got a grad assistant to help me with that, a guy named Jim Krohe, and taught courses. And I insisted that the students, as their assignment, would produce legitimate oral histories so they had to learn everything. And so it steadily grew out of student effort.

We had an office, we had a secretary, and then I got a grad assistant, you know it just grew because I was kind of a hustler actually. I had gotten to know about oral history when I had taught at Indiana because I was asked as a Modern American historian once, to meet with someone who had known Jane Adams, the famous social activist in Chicago. And he was visiting Indiana University because he was giving some papers to the Lilly Library, which is a famous manuscripts library on the campus in Bloomington. And they wanted an historian to meet with this person, and so it wasn't to interview him, maybe, I don't remember, but I know I met with him. I guess I did. They set up a tape recorder and I just talked to him about his collection, not so much about Jane Addams but how he had collected these things and some recollections of her. It's probably a dreadful interview because I had never thought about doing this sort of thing.

Research to me had always meant doing work alone in a library, but that was my first exposure to the notion of oral history. Excuse me, I must back up again. I did some interviews on my dissertation, four or five people in Washington who had been members, who had been directors of the Federal Trade Commission. I had just handwritten the notes, they were short interviews of forty minutes, and I just, I didn't have a tape recorder or a wire recorder. So I just hand wrote notes, quotes, but I that was a primitive form of oral history. I didn't have any transcript, but I cited those interviews in my dissertation. So that had been my first informal exposure, so I was ripe, let's put it that way, I was ripe here to start something. I became very active in that association, as an officer and eventually as president.

In 1984, wrote a textbook with some friends that was the standard textbook for about seven or eight years. So it was a very important step in my professional career, a whole new world, and I've always been that way. I've kind of always been alert to something fresh or new to do and that turned out to be a very fruitful one.

Q: Should we discuss oral history a little bit more?

A: We can, if you have any questions.

Q: Well I do, but I almost want a whole session for oral history, there are a lot of different projects.

A: Well it's a good time to do it. We could, I mean if you want. A lot of projects just developed naturally. I had a grad assistant, a very gifted interviewer, named Bobbe Herndon, who subsequently died. She was a well known local woman of some wealth, and she had a natural skill at interviewing. And she got interested in of all things, not high society, but coal mining.

And so she interviewed some people from Benld and Girard about coal mining and the coal mining wars of the 1930s between the United Mineworkers and the Progressive Mineworkers of America. And they were sensationally good interviews. I've used them as examples in all kinds of talks I've given, and so we got involved in coal mining.

That's the way these things develop. Somebody had an interest and I encouraged them to pursue it and then that happened. Then some other of my students were interested in ethnic groups, maybe they had grandparents who were Polish-American, so we began interviewing that. I never had an early African-American student, but I became interested in Springfield's African-American history.

And I got a grant in 1975 to hire a black preacher, Nigel McPherson, to interview African-Americans and he did. He wasn't the world's best interviewer I thought, and I was afraid he was kind of an authority figure to the people he was interviewing because he interviewed a lot of his parishioners. So I thought, well, it may be fine, but they're probably going to try to be accommodating to him because he's kind of an authority figure. But they're still worth having, and he was a wonderful guy. And so that's how these groups grew; they kind of grew out of a natural topic or the interest of a particular person like Bobby Herndon in Labor History and Nigel McPherson in African-American History.

Then I had a retired Air Force Colonel, Horace Waggoner, who was a grad assistant, and he was also good, as you'd expect for a career military person. He did everything by the book, didn't have a lot of historical imagination, but he worked really hard and I was able to have him. When we got the opportunity to do an oral history of the old Shawneetown Bank, though there were no living people who knew the bank as such but they knew Shawneetown and its move from the Wabash river valley. So we were able, Horace was able to do the very literal thing of looking at the old bank. He went down there and interviewed people there, and kind of like an architectural, detailed architectural history of everything he learned from people who lived in Shawneetown, which resulted in a big four volume compilation of data that the then Department of Natural Resources. They wanted this for a restoration of the old Shawneetown bank, so they paid me to pay Horace Waggoner to do that.

And then I used Horace when I was able to lobby someone for money through the Illinois Legislature for a General Assembly Oral History Program, and that was a continuing thing. It was a pittance, I think we got 30,000 dollars a year but that was enough to hire him and pay for some travel. And I did a lot of the interviews and he did even more; we ended interviewing maybe forty former members of the state legislature, Republicans, Democrats, Chicagoans, Downstaters, women, blacks, whites.

It had always been an idea of mine for that period in time to have a respectable body of data you'd need thirty or forty, randomly selected, and that was a great success. It got a lot of national attention, and it was hard to lobby for the money because they would make fun of the phrase oral history, I remember these clowns in the legislature. But eventually

they began to see it was valuable, and it's too bad it didn't continue but I was exhausted from it and had other duties, and so I never tried to keep it going after six or seven years.

Q: You look at the records and the volume, just the amount of oral histories collected, it's just really impressive.

A: Yeah, it is good.

Q: It's just really suggestive of the amount of work involved.

A: Now that's Horace, bless his heart, he, we had a transcriptionist, we paid for a transcriptionist, and he was getting paid, what, 12,000 dollars a year or something. But he just worked really, really hard on that stuff. I've always known that if you're gonna hire people, hire people who are workaholics who make you look good, and Horace did. He was a little rigid and I tend to be a little more of a spontaneous interviewer, but he certainly worked hard. He also unfortunately died at too young an age. The project didn't grow by leaps, but it grew by opportunities that manifested themselves either through grants or personal interests of graduate students.

Q: How do you feel you've changed as an oral historian?

A: Well I became more disciplined in the interviewing, that is to say that I read the literature and then created some literature on good interviewing techniques. And I think that made me a little more sensitive to not introducing myself too much into the dialogue, and using the journalist's questions, "who, what, where, when, and how." So I think just reading the literature, writing the textbook, and just the practice all those helped. And I began to do a little bit of private work on the side when companies or individuals wanted some oral history work done I did it. When I was still heading the Oral History Program I thought that was unethical, that if they were worth interviewing I should just do it on my own time, and so I did it on my own time. But later on when I was no longer in charge of oral history, I would charge for my services, I did that for some others and still do.

Q: How does that experience compare to working in the Oral History Office?

A: Well I'm picky, I'm picky about it because I warn potential clients that if they want simply a sweetheart oral history I'm not their customer because I'm a professional historian, and I don't say that snobbishly. It's just that I'm not interested in writing and leaving out all the warts. So I say that I have to warn you, you don't have to answer questions that are awkward, but I have to ask them. So I've always made that clear to people in the contract that I will write what I see and if they don't like it, they do own the work I've done but if they change it, I have the right to refuse to let them use my name.

Well that's the only leverage I have in my stature as an historian. They have to pay me and I will write what I want and if they don't like it they can change it. But I have the right to say you can, you can publish it, you own it, it's your property, but you can't

necessarily use my name, but I've never had to do that. So I've had some scruples about that sort of thing, but the money has been good, it really has.

I've conducted countless oral history training workshops around the country for a hundred bucks here or there, you know there wasn't a lot of money but it was fun. And actually that textbook I wrote stemmed from a state library workshop for Illinois librarians who wanted to learn about oral history. We met for a whole week in I guess Bloomington, Normal, and I wrote up stuff for that and then turned that, with my colleagues, into a textbook. So a lot of that speechmaking and workshop offering became part of my life as an oral historian.

Q: This is a little bit of a technical question, but in reading some of the literature on oral history, I found that oral historians sort of divided up into three waves. First wave of oral history kind of ends in the seventies, the second wave begins late seventies through the eighties, and then like a third wave sort of, has developed in the nineties. And I guess the differences between the waves are kind of how accepted oral history was amongst the historical community, number one, but intellectual changes I guess, a development of the theoretical basis behind oral history is, what does this bring to mind to you because you were kind of there through those changes?

A: Right. Well my understanding, I think there have been phases in oral history development. I would prefer to characterize the first phase as one dominated by Columbia University where the emphasis really was on interviewing elites, former presidents, generals, mayors, governors, for good reason. But the point was that these were people who also left voluminous papers, but the interviews would add a little bit interesting human element to an immense amount of data that already existed.

Beginning in the sixties and seventies because of an interest in "the others" in American and rural life the emphasis shifted towards interviewing those people who haven't left copious records. African-Americans, working people, women, not the unknowns, but the ones who hadn't been in a position to see to it that their letters were kept, or their papers were kept. In that case they may not be individually of enormous consequence, but as groups they're important. And the interviews are very important because it is in many cases the only real source for them.

And I would agree that there is a kind of third phase, which to me is more of the theoretical phase that much and more literature has been written about the nature of an interview from an intellectual standpoint and from the standpoint of an anthropologist or a psychologist and so forth. So by and large those changes I think are valid, for the time it's kind of the maturing of it and not that interviewing elites has ended. Heck we, of a sort our legislative series were elites, they weren't very high elites but you know... so it's not that one ended and the other began but the emphasis certainly up until the seventies was on elites, especially at Berkeley and Columbia and at UCLA were the three leading institutions, famous artists, famous politicians, famous generals, and so forth.

Q: Do you, do you feel like you were part of that change?

A: Yes.

Q: Or, is that something that has been defined by hindsight? At the time it's sort of difficult question.

Q: No, I understand. No, I think we were conscious of that. I'm part of a generation that went to graduate school when elites, dead white men, were the focus of attention. But as a professor and as a citizen, I became very sensitive to the changing historical interests in my profession, women, minorities, the poor. And so oral history just reflected those trends in the historical profession. And so it's just something that I breathed in and expressed myself, so it's been very comfortable for me.

Q: Maybe we should move to another question.

A: Ok.

Q: Back to our syllabus, I guess. Was your teaching approach similar to that of your colleagues? Or was it different?

A: I think it was similar, yes, I remember pushing hard to engage my students, I may not have been quite as heavy handed about that. There were some professors, some of my colleagues, and I respect them and they may have been better, who would walk in the room and literally say, "Now what are we going to talk about today?" If there was nothing but silence, he would say, or she, would just remain silent until someone said something. And so it was a way of really forcing people to speak up.

I tended to be a little more kid-gloved when it came to that sort of thing. I produced a syllabus, and I would tell them preceding class, well I want to focus our discussion on such and such. And I occasionally, I wouldn't give an hour lecture, but I would give maybe a twenty minute mini-lecture on something and then discussion and then other things. But I think in general I was very much in agreement with my colleagues about the need for being sensitive to students in the classroom.

Q: Do you think it's accurate to say that when you are a teacher you are somewhat an actor? Are they similar?

A: Sure, sure, I'm as bad as any of them, sure, I love to get a laugh, I love to... is it acting? Well it's, well I'm not an actor but I'm sure that through expressions and pauses I work at wringing out a response of my students. I mean some teachers literally act, I mean literally, play a Nazi officer. I've never done that, I'm too cowardly of an actor. But I think yes I've learned some techniques, which I would shamelessly use to get a rise out of an audience or a class.

Q: Did you think of yourself as a teacher or do you think of yourself still as a student or how did you define your role?

A: I really thought of myself as a teacher although I didn't want them to show undue respect. I didn't want to be called doctor and I told them so. I prefer to be called Cullom, but I knew there was a difference between why I was in that classroom and why they were in that classroom. And it was my job to lead the class and to plan it and to stimulate discussion and to prepare them for tests and to give them assignments that would enable me to evaluate their ability.

So I never shied away from the teacher's role, which I thought was valuable, some of my colleagues did. And they may have had great success; I didn't visit classrooms of my colleagues so I don't know. They may have had great success being a little more passive. I'm just, I guess, a little old-fashioned enough to see myself as a teacher.

Q: How did you approach co-teaching?

A: Well I enjoyed it, but it can be a little bit frustrating. One thing you learn (and Deans never understood this) is, it's not as if each of you only has half as much work because you're co-teaching, it's not that at all. Sometimes it's even more work because you've got to work out your respective roles and responsibilities. But there were times when I found it to be very intellectually stimulating. I taught a course, a PAC with a close friend, Chuck Strozier, on nuclear weapons. He's a psychiatrist, a psycho-historian, and he knew of a good many people in his field who were experts on atomic warfare, nuclear warfare.

And that was really exciting because Chuck could refer to sources in our class that I was unfamiliar with. And so sometimes it's really sparked the intellect in me to have a co-teacher who does that, and at times it was just working out our respective responsibilities, but I almost always enjoyed it. I'm a fairly social animal, and I think if someone had an absolutely contrary teaching style, totally contrary, I probably wouldn't enjoy it. If they insisted that we shouldn't, in any way, guide the students towards, say next week's focus, I wouldn't be comfortable with that. So there are probably some people who haven't asked me and whom I wouldn't ask to co-teach, not out of disrespect but for, just for, we're just two different birds.

Q: What was the nature of camaraderie amongst the faculty? Was there camaraderie?

A: Yes, I think so. This is before departments loomed larger, but even as they did, yes. But in the first few years we would generally meet as a body, forty or eighty people and get angry as hell over things the administration was doing to us. Even though I was part of the administration, I tended to be sympathetic to their feelings. And there was a lot of camaraderie. I'll never forget the opening meeting, the opening faculty meeting, one fall about three or four years after we opened when the administration... and I was no longer Assistant Vice President, handed out a faculty guide. And it was really nice because it had pictures as well as blurbs about us. So it was designed so that students could see who the faculty were and identify a face with a name.

But I was in a kind of snot-nosed mood, so I thought that this was just like having, getting your high school yearbook. So I began circulating my copy and asking people to write a poem or something like a yearbook entry, “roses are red, violets are” that sort of thing, by their picture, and it became a treasure. I got about thirty signatures and funny little comments like, “hope you have fun next year.” You know, all that nonsense stuff that appears in a senior yearbook, and I gave it to Tom Wood a few years ago. I said this really belongs in the Archives.

So there was camaraderie, but we also formed, if not cliques, at least different points of view on issues. And it was sometimes politically, not politically in the partisanship way but over the depths of our anger towards President Spencer or Vice President Giesecke or the board.

Q: Was it the personal was becoming political or the political was becoming personal?

A: That’s a good question. I’m not sure if I can make that distinction. I think if it’s at all possible kind of simultaneous, but maybe the political was becoming personal. Some people with whom I’d been pretty good friends parted company; well after four or five years the faculty formed a union and most of the faculty members joined. I didn’t, I just always felt that I could bargain, you know, bargain on my behalf adequately. I didn’t feel that I’d been screwed by the authorities. I got mad at them often, but always preferred dealing with them independently.

I didn’t really want to have a union to represent my interests. It was just philosophical, but it did put me on the outs with some of my colleagues. I think that there no longer is a union. It ended about eight or ten years ago, but there were some people who looked upon me with some hostility because I didn’t join the union because the membership was probably about eighty percent, something like that.

Q: Was that union a response to, what was that union a response to?

A: Grievances.

Q: What were the natures of the grievances?

A: Well I can’t remember all of them, I really can’t. I know under one vice-president, John Kaiser, an old friend and historian, but a pretty heavy handed guy, they tried to increase the teaching loads. When we went from the quarterly to the semester system, the idea was that, well, you had to teach sixteen hours of credit, or something. People were furious, I was furious about that and things like that.

Bob Spencer and his budgetary issues because pretty soon the university was struggling with its money, and they wouldn’t replace somebody. If somebody left a department they would just shift that position to some other member of the department, and that happens all the time. And there were some other issues; sometimes a tenure decision or a promotion decision would become controversial among some sectors of the faculty. So,

yes, it ended up that I had closer friends in some quarters than elsewhere. But even though I wasn't that close to them, I worked hard at friendship.

Q: We're about done, it's about to stop.

A: Ok, well we can wrap it up there today then.

Q: Ok.

A: And if you, I mean we could do more, but I'm not sure. Let's wait and see, this will do it for this month.

Q: I think we're good for today. Thank you, Cullom.

A: Ok, thank you.

End tape 3, side 2

Running Time: 46 minutes

Interview 4: May 31, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis' home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 4, side 1

Q: This is a continuation of an oral history with Cullom Davis; the interviewer is Justin Law. This is interview number four; the date is May 31, 2009.

Cullom, today I thought the first question I might ask you is, I'd like to talk a little bit about the process of realizing Bob Spencer's ideas. Would you describe it as an organic process? We talked a little bit about what was wrong in higher education and Spencer's prescriptions for it, his ideas really, ideas that I guess you share. What I'm interested in is how did these ideas become a reality and how did they take shape?

A: Sure, sure, well I think I've already told you that with his "Blue Memo" we had a bible for attracting, and appraising faculty candidates, so we were looking for people who would be drawn to those ideas. And I would say that most of the first faculty and subsequent ones were, not all of them (we sometimes filled a position just because we needed a geographer, and so forth) but by and large a lot of people did, so one key move was going to be an eager faculty and we had that. Another was going to be a supportive administration, and we had that in the president's office. Another was going to be in the development of our curriculum and of our requirements.

And I've talked about this piecemeal, but we did incorporate in our curriculum planning that spring and summer and for the next several years, a requirement that students have so many credits in a public affairs colloquium, that students unless they were able to petition

out of it would have an applied studies requirement, that students would have to devote a fair amount of time to library research, and that no matter what degree there would be a liberal arts component of their higher education, so that we did write into our requirements, our degree requirements and curriculum planning.

Q: Now when the curriculum was being developed in the spring of 1970, I know there were some fiery meetings amongst the faculty and the administrators, how did these meetings shape the curriculum?

A: It's hard for me to precisely pinpoint that. Most of our fiery meetings were over personal actions that occurred or failed to occur, but let me think, the university hosted, maybe it was in June [1970] a community meeting at one of local motels including community members, in which we kind of unveiled our plans. And there were a lot of arguments, but I don't remember curriculum being a particularly contentious part of that.

There were other issues and one that may have occurred a little later that summer, but one of the early victims of the university's momentum was Bob Spencer's firing of our academic vice-president, the man to whom I was nominally responsible. Remember I was appointed assistant vice president before there was vice-president. And I was assistant vice-president for Academic Affairs, and this is why George...

Q: This was George Cohen?

A: Thank you. George Cohen had been hired as vice-president. He was an engaging guy, shared much of the interest in the values that Bob Spencer had, was a charming conversationalist, but very quickly he failed to deliver on things that Bob Spencer said he had to produce, namely the written curriculum and requirements and the other matters that defined a university.

Now I'll say in George Cohen's defense, it was not easy to do. And I was part of having to do that, and probably I failed in certain ways, but that and a few other kind of personal matters produced a real gap between Cohen and Spencer. Cohen also brought a former nun, Sister something, to live here and there were allegations that they were carrying on an affair... now in this day and age that probably would be a ho-hum thing, but in 1970 that was serious, and so in, whether it was in June or July, I can't remember, but Bob Spencer fired him.

Cohen had ingratiated himself with many of us on the early staff, as well as the new faculty hires, so the word got out instantly to all the new faculty hires scattered still around the country. And that did lead to a kind of series of ad hoc meetings, emergency faculty meetings in the mid-summer of 1970 trying to reverse what Spencer had done, which legally couldn't be done and what would happen in the vacuum. And it was Bob Spencer's first crisis and that I do remember as being stormy.

And there were, on the other hand, some... a lot more mild mannered faculty who only attended these emergency meetings who were appalled by the rancor of their about to be

colleagues, some people who were just moderates didn't, hadn't anticipated joining a rocky enterprise like this, so that I remember.

On curricular matters, I'm sure as we began to caucus into groups, there were some for example I remember we decided we would play down the existence of departments. We wouldn't even have departments, but we would have programs representing traditional disciplines like History and English, but to mix things up we would also have some interdisciplinary programs. We designed four of them, it took forever for everybody to agree on them. One of them for example was called Justice and the Social Order, largely philosophy, political science, a little bit of sociology; another one was Environments and People, which was anthropology and environmentalism; and then there was one called Work and Society I think, economics, labor studies, sociology; and I'm managing to blank on the fourth.

But these were creations on our part to try and deliberately cross disciplines with courses and even majors, so a person could major in Justice and the Social Order or rather than majoring in political science, and I think we could have done better, but we invested enormous amounts of energy and there were fights among us over exactly how to title and to describe these various programs.

Q: Would you say these conflicts were part of the process of realizing Spencer's ideas?

A: Sure, sure. He didn't like stars, he didn't like conventionality. I'm sure he got impatient with how we tortured our way through these because as I've pointed out in the sections I've just edited, he was under pressure from board staff and board members to get this thing going and let's have a typical university. So he was already under pressure, but yes, this was consistent with what he had envisioned.

Q: Would you say that some of the disagreements came from a different idea of what kind of university people wanted to create?

A: Yes, indeed. Many of us on the faculty and I was also in the administration, but many of us on the faculty really had this vision of an egalitarian community. We were all equals and Bob Spencer was just another faculty member. Well of course by any reasonable description that was naïve, but we had that notion. And we thought it was consistent with his arguments against a star system with the faculty and an open stacks library.

And we were going to be open and egalitarian and why not have the whole government, not just governance, but government of the university be that way. So sure, we argued over that, and I remember Bob engaging in some sharp arguments about how he was responsible. And he had to make decisions, but it cropped up often. We invited a wonderful guy who had been mayor of Springfield, Nelson Howarth, a brilliant sort of civil rights enthusiast before his time. And he was a little long in the tooth by the time he spoke, but he had the faculty all excited. But that had its own repercussions because we

were dealing with the reality that, in a university people had different role that everyone couldn't be in charge.

Q: We talked about earlier how the university had a public mandate to be a public affairs university. How did you conceptualize public affairs, how did you define it?

A: Now it wasn't easy, but we had a few models. Bob Batson and I had both attended Princeton University, and he knew more about its Woodrow Wilson School than I did. But we both knew that it specialized in offering ad hoc courses on some issue, some public policy issue, like the building of a second airport in Chicago and all the different forces at work, political, economic, geographic, agricultural, transportation, involved in making that decision. And so I played a role in that because I had played around with those ideas myself.

We envisioned, I'll give him chief credit, a public affairs colloquium, which would be thematic, topic-oriented, interdisciplinary by their inherent character and maybe only offered once and then something else, though some of them became popular and became a frequent topic. But the idea was to have students do original research, make arguments in class, and produce a research paper or product on this public policy issue. They would also have to learn how to interact together because in some they would act in small groups. That was a new sort of thing in universities, then you worked alone.

But this was the notion of working cooperatively so those... the public affairs colloquium is probably the most obvious manifestation of public affairs. University Week, which I've also mentioned, was another; there was hope that at some time we might have a graduate degree in public affairs. That wasn't clear but it was deeply involved in the public administration masters degree. Internships, not all of them but a good many of them, would be involved with the state or community agencies that would be public affairs, we would have speakers come to campus on the issues, all those things happened.

Q: Would you say that your conception of public affairs was influenced by your undergraduate education at Princeton?

A: I can't say it was in my case. I knew about the Wilson School, I didn't take courses like that; they didn't have them for history majors. But I had some friends who had been in the Woodrow Wilson School; mostly that was done at the graduate level but not exclusively. But I knew about it enough to think wow this works, and not just at Princeton but at others, like Syracuse, and George Washington University, the Kennedy Institute at Harvard, so this was not unique at Princeton, but it was practiced. And I was aware of it, but I can't say it was on my own part.

Q: Did you ever conceive of public affairs as being social change?

A: Sure. (laughter) I, maybe not, well some of us, speaking collectively of the faculty, thought of that as the most important thing that we're talking here if not revolutionary change but action. So we would take up issues like poverty and sexism, so there was

clearly, if not above the surface, then below the surface, the notion that this commitment would be a commitment to change, social change. And some of the courses did as indeed some of our faculty were real change agents. I was probably on the fence on that. I certainly had beliefs that were strong on social change, and I probably talked a little bit, that way, but I wouldn't have consciously, or deliberately done that because I always had this notion that it wasn't fair to push my political views onto students, but I probably unconsciously reflected that.

Q: So perhaps maybe your conception of public affairs was really one of civic engagement?

A: Yes, though civic engagement is a little different from social change. I mean civic engagement means voting and being involved as a good, informed citizen. Social change is an agenda, and so there's at least to me there's a somewhat different, but sure, I think civic engagement is right what we were talking about.

Q: Do you think one's conception of public affairs influenced what they thought the university should be?

A: Yes, I do. But this would be a home that would be comfortable, I mean welcoming to social critics whether it's against the war in Vietnam or against racism or poverty. And that sense seeped out into the community, all over particularly after classes began, and it became something of an issue. It looked like we were all a bunch of radicals running this place, and we were trying to radicalize innocent students.

Bob Spencer (maybe I told you this one) but he used to talk about how he liked to... when he wrote letters at home over the weekend, he liked to drop by the post office, the main post office and had a favorite postal worker who always greeted him by saying, "What's your campus gonna blow up tomorrow?" This person was pretty conservative in his politics, and he just, what he read about in the paper, about the university, convinced him that this would become a radical Mecca.

And so Bob was getting a little dose of local reality when he was mailing the mail on Sunday evening. He was hearing that too from the board, I don't remember him telling us that, but I know that what he was hearing was uneasiness from what we would describe as largely conservative businessmen, and a board staff that were fairly conventional.

Q: Would you say that the board conceptualized public affairs as training for future bureaucrats for state government?

A: Yeah, I think to the extent that they even thought about it, that was what they had in mind, a knowledgeable, useful, well-behaved, bureaucrat, sure.

Q: Now in the spring of 1970 there was a so called "Rent-A-Student Conference." Do you remember this event?

A: Wow. This may have been written up in the Chronicle of Higher Education, we did have a meeting and again at a local motel, and I think a number of the early applicants were invited to join us for a daylong session. For some reason my memory of that is a little faint, but I remember the article about it.

We had a lot of attention from the Chronicle of Higher Education, which is something that a lot of people around the country read. We wanted publicity, and this gave us some. And basically it gave us the opportunity to talk about the curriculum that included faculty. I don't remember any of that taking any strange twists, I think it was just an interesting idea; we didn't have students so we rented some.

Q: Do you recall if the students were receptive to the ideas that the founding members of the university were putting forth for what they wanted out of the university?

A: I don't remember at that meeting hearing either acclaim or dissonance. I did discover, as many other new faculty did that a lot of the students couldn't care at all about being intellectually liberated or engaged in public affairs. They simply wanted a degree, and they hadn't had an easy chance, it was called place bound. There was no real baccalaureate institution close at hand so if they had family or a local job, however bad a job it was, they couldn't continue with their education and that's what they wanted. And if we said you've got to take a public affairs colloquium they'd take it, but that didn't mean that they were going to be liberated by it.

So while we discovered as a faculty that no matter how innovative and even radical, as many of us were, we had really by and large a very conventional student body. They simply wanted a degree, and they didn't want any discussions or classes in which they'd have to think of questions to ask. They wanted to be lectured to, so they knew what would be required on the test they would take, and so there was a tug of war. It wasn't critical, though some students voted by not coming back, I'm sure, I don't know the numbers.

Others loved it and just thrived in this atmosphere, but others just put up with it. And some of them later complained that the strange titles of courses that were showing on their transcripts made it hard for them, particularly if they were trying to be a student teacher, some Principal out in Loami would look at a student and the transcript that said Justice and the Social Order and say, "What the hell is that? Didn't you take civics?" So some did complain, and I think by and large most of the faculty agreed to at least respect that point of view and give it some space. Some didn't, some basically said, "That kind of student is not welcome in my classroom." But most said sure, since we were student oriented I felt we had no choice but to be responsive to what career goals students had.

Q: Do you think the creation of the Oral History Office was an experimental endeavor or an innovative endeavor?

A: That (laughter) is kind of slicing things pretty thin. It wasn't really experimental, other places did it by the way; we were not the first. We were certainly the first major effort in the state of Illinois and very quickly we became a fairly prominent one nationally. But I can't claim that we were particularly experimental, except that we were among the first to teach a course for college or graduate credit in which the students had to not only do interviews but actually even process them.

Partly that was because I didn't have university labor to help transcribe tapes, in those days you transcribed them. We had to transcribe them, so I told students (and it is true) that you can't really understand oral history really unless you've transcribed. We were among the first I think to do that. I didn't regard it as a breakthrough idea. It was just a practical solution to a challenge. We didn't have our own hired typists like they did at places like Columbia. So I'm not sure we were either experimental or innovative, but we caught a wave, we caught a wave and rode with it to some prominence.

Q: Was your engaging with oral history a way of fulfilling the public affairs mandate?

A: Well, yes, yes, because you know it applied to faculty as well as students, not as rigorously, but we all were expected to be good citizens whether we were on campus or in some other way. And I enjoyed, I loved that idea. I got involved in politics but also the oral history projects because it had students but it also reached out to the community to interview people, got a lot of attention in the press. I did a lot of talks about it, conducted workshops, so yes it was a very easy way for me to reach a larger public.

Q: Ok, we talked earlier about some of the changes in terms of tenure and lack of departments and the grading system, just for clarification, do you remember when these early systems changed into a more traditional system? What changed first? Was it the structure of the university in terms of departments, was it the grading structure, tenure, do you remember how that change came about?

A: Well we instituted tenure, I've forgotten exactly when, but it seems to me it was in the fourth or fifth year because faculty who had been hired ordinarily would have to go through a review a year prior to the end of their tenure. And we were all hired with no notion of tenure, but you couldn't keep a faculty under broad rules that apply at universities around the country. You had to be assured a job if you were tenured and a tenure decision had to be made in the sixth year of their employment.

So Spencer initiated the process, the process itself was controversial though tenure by then came to be valued by faculty, a form of possible protection against the board or the president who might take objection to their behavior. Spencer probably wasn't all that in favor of tenure but I think he felt there would be a civil war if it didn't happen so we took the initiative, so that was around the fourth or fifth year as I recall. Grading, the non-grading system or the written evaluations because there could be grades, but basically the written evaluations ended pretty quickly. I think probably by the third year, I think it was a dead letter.

The departmental changes those were much slower to occur, and they still haven't totally... well they have. But we still had very flexible programs and we didn't allow the elected chair of a department to be called a chairman, he or she was called a convener. And those continued because we were soft pedaling the administrative, the rule making side of departmentalization, so that took... there was still vestiges of the anti-department form twenty years later. I'm sure I can't pinpoint it, but our first, we reorganized the university a number of times. And one of those times we had one dean of university programs and then a dean of public affairs, which wasn't programming, kind of an odd thing.

Then we turned to the kind of more conventional sort of thing, dean of education, school, programs, public affairs programs, dean of arts and sciences. But it took probably ten years before we really had that kind of conventional structure to do programs. And the interdisciplinary programs continued for a long time, and some of them eventually died. But then other interdisciplinary programs rose, Women's Studies for example, African-American studies, things that were more topical in nature. So you still see a good deal of interdisciplinary activity today when we had the Capitol Scholars program started, what, about six, seven, or more years ago. They had some courses that were consciously interdisciplinary and even co-taught with two teachers.

Q: Ok, we talked a little bit about Spencer's exit and his just becoming a teacher, who was his replacement?

A: Ok. There was a period of an acting presidency held by vice-president John Kaiser, a fellow historian, who had become vice-president in about the second year. Let's see Cohen left, an elderly man named Giesake was vice-president, not a very capable person, not much energy, kind of held things together. And then he left and that's when John Kaiser was named from within the faculty, and John was really pretty effective. He was a no nonsense sort of guy, sense of humor, very capable, hard working, but he had a hard edge. And he just stood up to faculty and they laughed together, but he also made it clear that he was in charge. And so I think Spencer liked him, they got along fine. Kaiser helped Spencer avoid some of the problems he had, and then after Spencer announced his resignation Kaiser was acting president for about six months. I can't remember the timing, but he then took a presidency out in Idaho and in his place was Alex Lacy.

Q: What do you recall about Alex?

A: Well, I was on the search committee that picked him, headed by the board, board members, but I was one of the faculty on the search committee and I was co-chair actually. And we picked a guy who was very articulate, was a Dean at Georgia State in Atlanta, and had a pretty good record. We visited his campus, talked to people candidly, we thought, and didn't find any problems. And so he came and it was a rocky three or four years, maybe five. There was a change in academic vice presidency because Kaiser had left, and then there was an acting person, and then a woman from Southern named Sue Dezonolet, D-E-Z-O-N-D-O-L-E-T, I think that's right. She could take about two years or so because Lacy was a difficult person to work with. And the university was

going through all kinds of budget crises because our enrollment wasn't growing, and the state was putting the squeeze on us. And he had some big ideas but none of them ever really developed, it was just a distraction from other things. So she left but I liked her, she was a good vice-president.

Then there was another acting vice-president, and I was urged by colleagues to run for vice-president as an insider because no one had any idea of what would happen if we got an outsider. And I wasn't particularly keen for the job, by then I didn't particularly respect President Lacy. And I'm not by nature a consistent administrator, but I did throw my hat into the race. And the search committee came down after interviewing everyone and decided that I was their first choice. And then Lacy sat on that recommendation for about four months, which is really unusual, usually they act quickly. I should have taken that as a hint, and I probably should have said I'm out of here, I'm not going to run, I'm not going... should withdraw. I really should have but I didn't.

And he eventually named me, and I lasted for about a year. And I found him to be a chillingly difficult person to work with. He was, I thought, devious, that he lied and that he deliberately put me in difficult positions because he wanted me to fail, I was convinced. That sounds paranoid but I was convinced of it. And indeed I did, I worked very hard but not always that effectively. And finally right after graduation, I'd been provost, chancellor, provost and vice-president for about a year, he fired me, he offered to let me resign. I said no you're going to have to fire me. In a way I was relieved to be fired because this was no job for me.

It was overwhelmingly these constant pressures. I had to lay off, not faculty, but a lot of staff because we were going through a budget crisis. He had his favorites in the administration and I was not one of them. So a lot of money that I thought should go to academic affairs went to business affairs and other areas. And there were some people working for him that I thought were plotting against me. Though in a way it was a relief, but it was a dreadful year for me even when I'd take a week's vacation I'd get urgent phone calls from him saying I had to come back. And sometimes I waited a few days; he was just playing me like a drum.

So it was pretty miserable, and so I was fired. It created quite an uproar on campus and there was a faculty senate decision to inquire into the reasons for this. Three outstanding faculty members worked on a team to investigate this. They interviewed me, they interviewed him, they interviewed others and six months later came out with a report that was heavily condemning what Lacy said that I was in some ways inept. They just felt that Lacy had indeed tried to put me in impossible situations. Now that wasn't controlling, it was like a vote of no confidence. The faculty senate approved that report, so it was tantamount to being a vote of no confidence, which a board cannot really ignore; they can decide to ignore it. But if you ignore that, the president is walking the plank in effect.

And so within three months he was nudged out, as president. I took that as something of a vindication, but it still remains a really, really nasty experience in my life. I was

humiliated, I thought, mistreated, and my only memories are of having to lay off good people because we had no money and put in unfair positions and making tough decisions on some faculty tenure matters that he overruled for political reasons. And so in a way I was glad to wash my hands of that particular administrative role.

And I look back on my career, a lot of my administrative positions, usually they've been acting, like the Deanship and a few others, and one year is probably about right for me. And this one was also about one year, but I would have stayed on if I hadn't been fired unless my health had failed or something. It's not that I'm reluctant to answer questions; it's just that it was a real bad year for the university and for me.

Q: Ok, let's change directions a little bit.

A: Ok. Sure.

Q: I listened to an oral history that you collected in the mid-seventies of somebody that worked in the library. Her name was Katherine Armitage...

A: Armitage, right...

Q: I just wanted to ask if you had any recollections of her.

A: Oh I do, dear recollections. The charter library faculty and the first Dean, Howard Dillon, were a remarkable bunch. And I have to credit Howard Dillon with recruiting such good people. I mean we all knew and it was really important to me that the library was the most important entity within the university in those early years. And a lot of money went to it, a lot of thought went into it, we had an incumbent, Mary Jane McDonald, who was a superb worker, but she had no aspirations to be the director of the library.

Howard Dillon had impeccable credentials as a library administrator, and he was a very gifted administrator. And he played a key role in the final design work on Brookens Library with the architect, though I'd been involved in the early planning for it just as a charter administrator. And then he recruited this great group of people and maybe the best of them all was Katherine Armitage, who was a soft-spoken, diminutive woman, very bright, with a sense of humor. She knew library science wonderfully and everyone liked her. She just had a quality of interacting with faculty and students that made her beloved. She didn't stay as long as I hoped she would, and I can't remember, she may have gotten a little tired of the pressure, there may have been romantic pressures, I'm a little fuzzy, or also maybe also, she just wanted to go to North Carolina. I mean who wouldn't? That's a great state.

But she did leave after maybe, I guess, five or six years, and I had a chance to interview her for a little bit. It wasn't a detailed interview, and I can't remember exactly what the occasion was, maybe she was about to leave, I just don't remember. But we've stayed in touch and I've seen her within the last three or four years because she comes back once in

awhile, and she was only one of several really good people. John Tonegate was another superb librarian. Katherine Harris, who now is the chief librarian at the presidential library, is another. And there were three or four others, all of whom were wonderful colleagues. They really were colleagues. This is what made the library different from most university libraries. These were faculty members by name and title, which is itself a little unusual.

But they were also de facto faculty members, that is to say, they could head up a faculty committee. They would be called upon to visit classes and talk about research opportunities. They would help us chart the book acquisition work in our fields, it's called collection development. And so they were true colleagues and I think still are. I don't know if that quality still is as strong as it was, but it was one of the real virtues of the campus, and again, substantial credit belongs to Bob Spencer. That was his vision of a library, and he hired Howard Dillon. And he set aside an enormous amount of the university's budget in the early years to the library for book acquisitions, and library staff. Bless his memory because that was terrific.

Q: Now you served in an administrative position in the library?

A: I did. When Howard Dillon retired, are we running out of time or we doing all right on time? Ok, when Howard Dillon retired in nineteen, I think it had to be seventy-five, we wanted a national search. And we wanted it done carefully, but in the meantime, John Kaiser, the vice-president, felt strongly... and Bob Spencer... that we needed to have an acting dean and because I'd been very interested in library affairs and a supporter, I was offered the position, acting dean. It meant I dropped one class, no change in pay, but I was acting dean.

And the irony is, I took that position just weeks before the official move of the library from its temporary quarters on campus into Brookens. Brookens had been finished; it took five years to build that building but it was finished. And I get no credit for the smooth way in which the movers moved the books; that had all been planned a year earlier. But it happens, it happened I was there, so naturally I took credit among my colleagues at least for having brought them a new library, teasingly.

And I think that was a very happy year. I think I earned the respect of the library faculty and the library staff; that is the professionals who were not teaching librarians. I got to know other librarians around the state at meetings, and I think I earned their respect. I learned a lot about libraries, fought for our budget with some success. And I didn't really have any great crisis, so I think the year that I served, almost a whole year, was a successful year. I was happy to return to the faculty, but that job I feel I handled well.

Q: Now that was your second administrative position?

A: Yeah, I'd been assistant vice-president of academic affairs. I did that for just a couple of years and then retired because I was strung out, used my faculty title to teach, started the Oral History Office. And I got a little release time, but that was an administrative job

and I may have told you that I covertly named the project the Oral History Office. I've told you that story? And after awhile I began signing my name as Director. No one appointed me that, no one created the office except me, but it was a way of avoiding bureaucracy, which must approve those things.

So I had been Director of the Oral History Office, but it was a self-appointment, not really administrative though I did get a little time off from teaching to do that. My second official administrative job was as acting dean of the library. Then my third was as Academic Vice-President and Provost of the university under President Lacy.

Q: Ok, let's break there.

A: Ok, good.

End tape 4, side 1

Running Time: 46 minutes, and 30 seconds

Interview 4: May 31, 2009

Location: Cullom Davis home, Springfield, Illinois

Begin tape 4, side 2

Q: This is a continuation of Interview 3 [Interview 4]. So Cullom, how did the university change in the 1980s?

A: Wow. Ok. Well we went, I think I mentioned, we went through a long, slow, shrinking of enrollment and faculty and budget, and those are connected, and that is demoralizing and at times frightening, and that also included the, in my opinion, disastrous presidency of Alex Lacy. And he oversaw two or three different total rearrangements of administrative structures; that's when we went through some of these different efforts at deanships, structures. So he tinkered with that sort of thing, and I think some of the early excitement waned as the number of the faculty who were part of the original enthusiasm were outweighed by the newcomers, though we weren't hiring a lot in the eighties. Some people left for one reason or another, but of the original forty faculty members maybe there were still by the end of the 1980s, there maybe were still twenty to twenty five tenured, charter faculty.

But a lot of others because by then the faculty, maybe a hundred and twenty or so, we were outnumbered, not outnumbered, we were a minority. And some of the new faculty kind of scratched their heads at some of these ideas I'm sure, you know, who are these people who that think we have to have public affairs colloquiums and applied study. But by and large a lot of them bought into those ideas, though maybe without quite the clarity that some of the charter people had for them.

So in my opinion, the public affairs colloquium began to soften a little bit, almost anything could be such a course. And it could be someone's own hobby horse, for example, and applied study also. I think the number of waivers began to increase because I think some students just didn't want to have to go through that. Interdisciplinary activity was still strong, classroom teaching style still tended to be informal though with the growth, the only growth programs were in business, legal studies, and I think education. And particularly business grew so most of the new faculty were either management or business administration.

And there were some faculty morale problems because a lot of them drew really good salaries, higher in their first year than someone who had been working here fifteen years were making now. That's the market, but it still hurts if you're not one of the privileged. So there were some morale problems within the faculty.

But departments like mine were shrinking in size, and there were questions raised by our governing board about whether you really deserved to have a master's degree program. If you only had twenty eight graduate students, did that really justify us? So you had to bite down, you had to justify, or think of ways in which you could make your masters degree more popular and therefore longer lasting. So a lot of programs lost that, in fact a lot of programs even disappeared, as we had to tighten things down, so it was not a very exciting period.

As I look back on the eighties as a ten year period, it was downsizing and demoralizing by and large. When Lacy left, under pressure, his successor was a man named Durward Long. I can't remember the years here, but I can put some thought to it, but he served during the eighties, I guess, maybe early nineties. Durward Long was another historian, a labor historian. I wasn't on that search committee, but clearly he had been fired from his previous job at the University of Hawaii. But his explanation was that he was brought in to change everything. And when you do that, you make enemies, and that's true.

If you bring in someone to change everything he or she will make enemies and therefore they're not going to last long, even if they succeed at their job. Whether he succeeded or not I don't know. But he had been fired, and he explained that. So he was hired, and he did some good things. He worked hard to add another building or two to the campus, nothing really special because we were still under the Board of Regents and had no money to speak of. But they added on a small gymnasium to the student affairs area, you've probably never seen it, but it's a small gym over there in the temporary campus.

He added a new entry way to the library on what would be the east side. There hadn't been one, there'd only been the one entrance, and at the time it seemed like a silly thing to do. But you know, that other entrance is very convenient. And what other good did he do? I don't know, but he got in trouble very quickly. He had a drinking problem, and he was accused by some woman of sexual... not discrimination and not abuse, sexual harassment. And he was a pretty difficult person administratively, a really tough guy. He said I'm an expert in labor relations, and that's the way we'll leave it. And we had a

union; we had a faculty union, so things had become somewhat rigid with collective bargaining on union matters. And that was contentious within the faculty and between the faculty and the administration, and between the faculty and the Board of Regents. So that was another kind of problematic aspect of the eighties.

Long, as I say, was successful in some things but he wore out his welcome fairly quickly and was not a respected figure on campus. And he finally quit under pressure. He was smart enough to arrange to get a faculty appointment in history. I forgot how that happened, but he persuaded the then dean of arts and sciences to give him a faculty appointment in history. And that dean probably felt he had no choice. But also what it did was, it tied down a history position, a very expensive history position. He was making a lot more money than anyone else in the history department, not as much as he made as president but still a lot of money. And that was another morale buster in our department because he was gone a lot. He didn't teach much, but he had a tenured teaching job in history. We didn't think he deserved it.

On the other hand I think I've already told you that Bob Spencer, we believed, deserved his faculty appointment and held it honorably. That's the difference because Spencer thought like a faculty member and Durward Long didn't. Long just died in the last three or four months I think. He had a home here but was separated I think from his wife and traveled a lot, kind of a con man I think in some ways just like his predecessor. Lacy was a con man, both of them went on to failures in their subsequent careers, so that was an unhappy situation too.

On the other hand, I had a nice Fulbright professorship at the University of the West Indies then to do oral history. I was, coupled with a sabbatical, and late in the eighteen eighties I was offered the directorship of the Lincoln Legal Papers Project, which I took in 1988. And that for me was great although it meant that I could teach less. I was only teaching one course a semester, but I had to give up the Oral History Office. I couldn't possibly run that and it had been doing beautifully. I had gotten some grants for state and other oral history projects, so it was booming. And it wasn't easy to give that up because when I did within a few years, it had no real direction under a faculty member and so it lost its secretary and grant money and so forth.

But I found that I really loved doing the Lincoln Legal Papers. That had me working downtown, and I would teach one course at night on campus both semesters. So I began to become separated from ordinary campus affairs, not by choice but it was Ok. I enjoyed working downtown; there were benefits to that and it was really fun, not always easy. but it was really fun building a successful documentary research project, lobbying for the money to get it, and then hiring very, very promising young MAs to do it. All of them I hired from SSU and not that I ruled out other possibilities, but they had great skills, and they were here, and they were interested.

And I was able to... in taking the job with the Historic Preservation Agency, I was able to persuade the then Director that the staff, my staff would be employed by the university, and then the agency would reimburse the university for those salaries. So the university

had control over the employees at the Lincoln Legal Papers. The then Director's successors hated that, the trustees of the agency hated it because despite rulings to the contrary, patronage still was rampant in state agencies. And there would have been patronage hires, and I'm not philosophically speaking against patronage. I knew my employees cared about history and would do it and would do well and would regard themselves as professionals and wouldn't look at a clock to see when they were entitled to a break. I don't think I overworked them, but they just loved their work. And they worked so much more effectively than the people around them at the state historical library, which was then underneath the old state capitol. I'm just saying that that was a new opportunity in my life, a whole new field, documentary editing, which got me involved in a brand new professional society and association of documentary editing.

And got me doing some writing about Lincoln, which I had never bothered to do, and got me to hire and groom people who turned out to be really talented historians. And we began finding things, so there was a lot of publicity, attention nationally for this sort of thing. That was heady stuff, and so it was an altogether satisfying professional change for me. I was careful to hold on to my tenured position at the university because I never knew when I might get fired because I tangled sometimes with the successive directors of the agency and certainly one of the trustees (who is a very well known, very political woman, here in town). And I just knew I wanted to be able to fall back on my tenure at the university, which I held on to till I retired from teaching.

Q: What courses were you teaching at this time?

A: I taught a course on public policy analysis in the public history program, which was using some wonderful books out of Harvard in which you use history to guide public policy making, great book and great series of case studies. I didn't offer it very often, but I thought it was a terrific...because a lot of thinking goes into it, how use or misuse of history in public decision-making. For example there was a famous civil war case, of presidential decision making, another one is when Gerald Ford faced the issue of a swine flu epidemic and whether there should be mass vaccinations and some of them are modern. These are kind of like public affairs colloquia, what I'm talking about, where you bring to bear history and a lot of other subjects, to make an intelligent decision about a public policy issue. So that was fun to teach. I only taught it once or twice in those twelve years.

I taught oral history at least once a year and that was half my teaching load. I felt that I had to do that at least once a year to keep that going. And I taught a legal history course, American Legal History. I really enjoyed teaching that; it was not an easy course to teach. But (and it was offered jointly to legal studies graduate students and history students) it was the kind of cerebral course I really enjoyed teaching. So those were good years. I had a couple of crises as Director of the Legal Papers, but in general they were very professionally rewarding years.

Q: It seems that during this time period you really started to publish a lot of writing?

A: I felt that I had to establish at least minimally, my credentials as a “Lincoln Scholar.” I never had posed as one, but people began of thinking of me as a Lincoln Scholar because I was directing this project. Except I felt I really had to do that and I had some ideas. Fortunately when doing some of the early legal studies work, I had four or five ideas that I could turn into papers that were delivered at conferences and then published in book form. None of them was a book length manuscript, but I did do that. And that I thought was simply my marker as a Lincoln Scholar. It was limited to his law practice, but I thought that had been overlooked anyway so it was Ok. None of these papers was really a breakthrough. In many ways they were a new way of saying familiar things. A few of them were new.

I did demonstrate because we were discovering that Lincoln was a much busier lawyer than we or any biographer had appreciated and that his legal work was very important to his developing political consciousness. But I tried not to exaggerate the importance of the legal practice, I mean his great love was politics but his bread and butter was law. And so I tried to put them in balance, but I think I did contribute through my papers a better understanding of Lincoln. And I know through the documentary edition, the complete edition that I saw through to completion in 2000, is a contribution, a major contribution to Lincoln scholars, not to the general public (they’re not going to go through a hundred thousand records) but anyone who wants to seriously write about Lincoln the lawyer or really a Lincoln biography has to deal with that stuff. And they couldn’t beforehand because it was scattered and hidden all over the place.

Q: Where did this interest in Lincoln come from?

A: You know that’s a great question. I remember when I first arrived in Springfield; I didn’t particularly care about Lincoln as a subject. In fact I remember being active in a series of pamphlet histories by the local historical society which did everything but Lincoln. In fact I wrote a piece describing this series of ten pamphlet that there’s something more important to Springfield than Lincoln; there’s coal mining, there’s African-American history, there’s this and that industry.

So I was the anti-Lincoln in many ways, but gradually I got involved. I was part of a major grant funded project called the Lincoln Project here. I was not the director, I was offered the directorship but I didn’t want it. The grant helped refashion interpretive material for all the Lincoln sites, films and booklets and so forth. It was a pretty good project, and I was key in that and I did edit a book on Lincoln that stemmed from that. It’s called *The Public and the Private Lincoln*. I didn’t contribute an article to it, but I did edit it. That was, that got me into Lincoln a little bit.

But it was really through the law practice, my study of American legal history that I began looking at what we had in our own archives, the Sangamon county court records, of his practice. And so it was really through legal history that I... that was what got me appointed Director of the Lincoln Legal Papers and that I had done some administrative talent and some fund raising talent.

The Lincoln part I had to work on, and that's why I say I quickly became active in giving papers and publishing. It was kind of like a third career for me I guess you'd say, in a way. I stayed as Director of the Lincoln Legal Papers for twelve years, 1988 to 2000. I stayed on as a consultant for another year or two year as a consultant and finally retired completely in 2000. I retired from teaching in 1995, so that was a long time ago, fourteen years ago because I needed to devote full time to Lincoln at that point, that was 1995. I had been Director for seven years but juggling teaching and that and after 1995, I could concentrate full time on the documentary project until 2000.

Q: What was that like for you, for the first time not being a teacher?

A: Well, I still was giving a lot of talks and that's not teaching, but I was still giving a lot of talks, you know three or four a month all over the city, state, and country. I wasn't teaching and you know people would ask if I wanted to teach a course. And I really didn't then because it would distract me from what was really a consuming responsibility, and I found that I could get by without it.

In fact my students were my young assistant editors, five of them, it's not fair to them... some of them had been my students, but I thought, selfishly, I was grooming them to view themselves as professionals. They never would have dreamed they would be professional historians, giving papers, publishing papers, and earning stature. So I think I was a good senior colleague, grooming, and encouraging, and giving them credit for things; I deliberately gave them credit for things.

When we had advisory board meetings I would have one or two of them each give a portion of my report, so they could give the report and get some experience with reporting to a board, so little things like that, I think I was good at that. We tended to govern by consensus, that is, our meetings deciding every kind of issue by and large were consensus. If we were in a stalemate, I would finally say well I have got to break the stalemate. But by and large we worked these things through, so I think it was a very constructive work environment. And they stayed; no one quit when I was running it, which is good because they were good, too.

I'll just make one other comment, and I became active in this association for documentary editing, which is the professional body for documentary editors. And I felt I had to do that too; it was one way of giving visibility to our Lincoln work because we were one of the new kids on the block. All the big papers projects were like Founding Fathers – the Washington papers, the Jefferson papers, the Adams papers, et cetera, or the Jane Addams papers. And we were a rookie in that world, and I had to work hard to see to it that we got some attention.

So one thing I did that they hadn't bothered doing was to start a quarterly newsletter. It was simple, but it also enabled us to set up a mailing list that we then could use to try to raise money. So I became very good at raising \$20,000 a year just from supportive people who got our newsletter free of charge. And I then became active in the association and was shocked when they within four years asked me to be president. I

turned them down, and they said no, you've gotta do it this year, you're the right person, and I finally did. I didn't want to be president of that association, I didn't feel I had any of the deep background that most of the members had but fortunately it turned out to be a pretty unchallenging year. So I did it, again largely because it gave more exposure to the Lincoln Legal Papers. So that was an important phase of my professional life, no doubt about it.

Q: Now as the 1990s progressed, what were your impressions of the changes of the university?

A: Well, when did Naomi Lynn come? Mid-nineties I think...

Q: 1994, 1995, somewhere in there...

A: Well, she was our best president ever in my opinion. She did allow decisions to go unmade for awhile, but on the other hand she is a superb leader, a superb fundraiser. She makes friends easily, she works a crowd comfortably, she is a professor's president. That is to say she understands the academic world and respects it, and she has great political instincts I think that's crucial. She had the brains and also the political instincts, and I think I've probably already told you this story, that demonstrated my sense of her political sophistication.

When we became part of the U of I, she wanted that to happen, but she couldn't pretend she did because there were strong feelings on our campus that we were going to be devoured by the big U of I. She felt it was necessary because the board we operated under was pathetically weak and had no money and we were starving. So she did that very quietly and effectively, building bridges, and then it occurred. And it was relatively a non event. There was some long standing faculty that said this would be the end of whatever good is here. They were wrong, and everything's been fine, and we've gotten buildings and support and stature that we never would have had otherwise, but there were some problems. One of them had to do with a seemingly unimportant matter of school colors.

At one point then President Stukel of the whole system convened his three chancellors, including Naomi Lynn here in Springfield, to say that we agree to standardize school colors. In Urbana they're blue and orange, in Chicago they were blue and red, and here they were blue and white. Well the other chancellors said you can't do that. It's just an invitation to demonstrations and protest. So he thought about it, and said Ok, we will have one standard color, dark blue, and the others will reflect the individuality of each campus, which is a nice compromise.

But still, it left Naomi Lynn with a problem because our uniforms and flags were a kind of very light blue and white. And she knew that if she went to the director of athletics and said, order dark blue uniforms, someone would have heard that and said here we go it's the Urbana dictating everything. What she did instead, she got the university president Stukel to give them three years to adjust to this change. Every year she told the

director of athletics to slightly change to a darker blue each time. No one ever noticed or cared. Now it's the sort of issue that someone who is looking for a fight, if they'd known about it, would have raised this as a crucial issue and it wasn't crucial. But it could have been if she hadn't handled it adroitly. I don't mean to say it was, maybe it was deceptive, Ok, but the last thing she and we needed was an issue with the mother campus, at that point.

She got her way by insisting that we retain one of our own colors, the white and the blue, it looks better as a contrast to the white to have a darker shade of blue. But it would have been an issue if it had surfaced that way. Urbana dictates dark blue, so she just got three years and did it quietly. No one ever said a thing. Now that to me is an example of very adroit administration. Maybe she was being a little devious, but I think the mischief that she avoided, or that we avoided, made it well worth it.

She was a very, very successful president, then chancellor, and she still is revered. She raised a lot of money for us and raised the visibility of the campus and brought us some buildings. Really it was she who brought us the new university classroom building. It was built on her successor's watch, but she got the commitment to it. And I forget whether it was her predecessor or her who got the science building, probably her predecessor. She did a lot and didn't make many enemies. I can't think of any people who ended up really disliking Naomi Lynn.

Q: I know the transition kind of came about right as you were ending your teaching career. Would you say you were generally supportive of the transition?

A: You know, yes, I was sentimental. But I felt by now we've really matured somewhat and our best qualities are pretty well ingrained, interdisciplinary work, fairly egalitarian faculty structure. I wasn't really too worried about that, and I thought there might be some benefits. Others were worried, deeply worried, but I think the ones I know who were worried, no longer have those worries.

There are very few ways in which the mother campus has imposed its will. I mean it's a different accounting system, but that's for the accounting office to worry about. So the school colors have changed, but no one noticed. We don't have to ring bells at the end or beginning of classes like they do in Urbana. We have interdisciplinary courses, not much really has changed except we've gotten a pile of buildings and support for new programs. We can't complain about that, and our endowment has grown a lot because we are part of the U of I endowment, which is a monster. It's been easier to raise money for our campus as a result, so now even in Springfield I think people have a lot more respect now that we're part of the University of Illinois.

Q: I'm not sure really how to word this, but I'll do my best. What would be your suggestions, what would you like people in the administration to keep in mind as we move forward. I don't know if that makes sense, what should we remember about SSU that's important?

A: Our incumbent chancellor spent several years saying he didn't want to hear the words Sangamon State because as far as he was concerned this was a new university, and he kind of made a point of that. It was a mistake. He didn't gain anything by it, but it was a reflection of his own whether you want to call it insecurities or vanity, I don't know. He softened on that because some people, who worked with him particularly in the alumni office, have finessed some of those issues so that now there are alumni gatherings that talk about Sangamon State with respect. It's not a UIS and I'm proud of that. I don't call myself Professor of History Emeritus of SSU because I retired from UIS. I could I suppose do that, but I don't.

The University of Illinois has a stature that I don't mind exploiting. But I think it's not necessary to debase or pretend there was never such a thing as Sangamon State University because it's from that beginning that a lot of really, really good ideas are still in place here that we can take for granted. I would remind administrators that that whole package that Spencer developed is worth respecting because I don't think there has been the attention in recent years towards public affairs. It's been starved in my opinion. And I've been critical of our current chancellor for that, not to his face, I have been critical. So I would remind someone, if anyone asked me, that there are components of that original vision which deserve nurturing and which in fact can become seeds of greatness for this campus in the twentieth first century as well as the things that we have and don't seem to be going away.

We have the interdisciplinary studies, we don't have that star system, but we have the beginnings of a star system. We do have some endowed professorships, not so many that I think it's a problem. I think the campus has adapted well to some people who are above the others because I think we've been careful in choosing people who are not going to be arrogant about their exalted position. And I would remind, and I have already reminded both of the people who have held, or who are about to hold the exalted position of Lynn chair in history that they need to be sensitive to the fact that this is a campus that has not been used to the fact of having elites among its own ranks.

I suggested that to Phil Paludan, who was very amenable to being sensitive and suggested it already to Michael Burlingame, who is going to be holding the Lynn chair. So that would be my advice to them, but as I say there are some things that need some re-nourishing, that would be my chief advice.

Q: What are your thoughts on retirement?

A: It was a great idea. I haven't had any regrets at all. I worry a little bit now with the recession, I mean we're comfortable, we're very comfortable. We don't have the kind of discretionary income that we had until last year, but you know, I wouldn't mind some consulting or maybe even a teaching job. I would hate to take a teaching job because I think I'm a little rusty, and it does, forgive me, tie you down from taking any extended travel in the winter. I could teach maybe a fall course, but you know the money isn't that great as a part time teacher. I'm not sure it would be worth what I would have to give up.

But I do do gigs; I was in Chicago last week to give a talk, which I got paid a nice fee for. I've done some writing that I was paid for and that's been lucrative, a little consulting, not much but some, some oral histories I've done, and I wouldn't mind doing more of that. But I'm not desperate for that, and I only do things that I know are really going to interest me personally rather than just for the money. So I've been very happy in retirement. I haven't missed teaching, which surprises me because I started my career devoting myself exclusively to teaching. And I loved it as long as I taught, but I haven't missed it. I don't know what it is, certainly I interact with students, very, very, comfortably. But the structure of classroom teaching is something I don't really miss.

But I'm very grateful that I had the opportunity to be here for the last thirty-nine years. I don't just mean Springfield, which I like, but Sangamon State and then UIS, which were a wonderful fulfillment of my potential. I had the flexibility to pursue interests from one to the other, I had a forgiving environment which allowed me to make mistakes, and I was in an environment where I was rewarded, not always financially, but in other ways, for what I did accomplish. So that was a good ride, and I look back on it with great affection.

Q: The only other thing that I have really is if you'd like to say anything about your family. We really didn't talk about your family up until this point?

A: Sure, sure. I guess I talked about my divorce?

Q: No, not really.

A: Well I did talk about some marriage problems.

Q: Right.

A: That had lead to the psychiatrist and all that sort of thing. My wife Marilyn and our three children, including a toddler, moved to Springfield of course in 1970. We quickly had to buy a house and did on the west side of town. But we really wanted to be closer to the university, and we were able to find a home on Lake Springfield within six months. So in the summer of 1970, among all the other things that were keeping me going crazy at the university, we bought this home right near the university on Lake Springfield. That was great, but the problems in our marriage continued. And we even participated in a couples counseling program about two years later in 1972 or 1973.

All that did was to bring, conspicuously to my attention, that our marriage really was kind of a hollow shell, and so when my wife suggested that we separate, I was ready to though I was kind of scared. I was insecure about whether I would be attractive romantically to anyone ever. I had dated this woman when I started in seventh grade; we had gone steady for five years and then had married, had three children, had been married for eighteen years. So I was very insecure frankly, but we did, we separated in the summer of 1974. I lived in a motel for a couple of weeks, what is that awful place on South Sixth Street, can't remember the name. It's really a dump now, and then that

summer I borrowed a couple of faculty members homes who were gone for parts of the summer.

And then because I was going to have custody of my youngest child, my son, and probably one of my daughters, I bought a tiny little house near the university, but in the Laketown area. I don't know if you know that, but Laketown is off of Stevenson Drive, very small little matchbox homes. And that would enable my son to go to Hazel Dell School, which is where he would have gone if we still had lived on the lake.

So I took up being a single father, and he entered kindergarten there, and there were some real problems negotiating whether we were going to reunite or divorce. I finally became convinced that divorce was the only realistic option. Once I tasted being away from the shelter of a marriage, I realized that it was not a good marriage and that whatever... I had to move on. And one of my daughters wanted to live with me too, the one who was a senior in high school, so I had a kindergartner and a high school senior in this tiny little house.

And I began dating Ann Chapman, who was recently divorced, with two young sons. She had had a devastating divorce, and so she was emotionally fragile but very pretty and she loved her children, came from a very nice family here in town. Although she was incredibly shy and quiet, I began dating her, but I dated others too. And we dated for almost a year and a half because I was wary about jumping, but at one point finally after a year of dating her we decided to date exclusively. We didn't ever live together, but we spent a lot of time together. And I liked her sons, and she was wonderful to my daughter, both my daughters and to my son, so we got married in May of 1976.

We've been married exactly thirty three years last Wednesday, and it's been a very happy marriage, not without its challenges but very happy. At one point we had all three of my children living with us plus her two children, and it was a little crowded. And then my oldest daughter got her own apartment because she was finished with high school and working and going to college. And then it was down to my daughter, my younger daughter and son, and then my younger daughter went off to college. And then Ann raised my son along with her two sons until they left home. So she was a surrogate mother because my children's own mother loved them a lot, but she, she had some other problems, probably wasn't the ideal mother. I know I wasn't the ideal father, I know I wasn't, we limped along. All three of my children are very successful and have done very well, and I'm proud of them. And two of them are married and have children, and one of Ann's sons is married and has two children.

We see as much of our children and grandchildren as we can. Ann and I are still in love; we travel a lot. She has blossomed as a personality with some self-esteem that she didn't have. I don't take credit for that, but it's happened. She used to be very self-conscious among other academics, who were my friends because she never finished college. She went to college but never finished. She's gradually gotten comfortable with that, and I think it was partially because I pushed her, but also just after awhile you realize that these academics are human beings too. And if I like them, she's going to like them because

they're nice people. Some people, in any field, can be a little nasty, but she's made a lot of friends among my friends. And I've made friends among her friends, so it's a happy life. And she fully participates in things I do at the university; she's traveled with me to professional meetings, all that sort of stuff.

Q: Well very quickly Cullom, I like to end my interviews with this one question, what does the future hold for you?

A: Well I can't give a history of the future, but I'm seventy four and in pretty good health. I've got a gimpy right knee, I've had kidney stones, I had several other exotic problems, but I, I'm pretty healthy. I love certain kinds of exercises, I can't run anymore, but I do bicycle. It's a good life.

End tape 4, side 2

Running Time: 48 minutes

6 Hours of Interview

End of Interview