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## **Carol Lohman Memoir**

### **Lohman, Carol**

Interview and memoir

Digital Audio File, 35 min., 9 pp.

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Lohman was a member of the Springfield Committee for Higher Education that started meeting in 1966 to start the new university in the capitol city. The name – Sangamon State University – was selected from nominations by the public and was so named after the Sangamon River that flows through the area. She discusses the uniqueness of SSU because it was a junior/senior level university, unlike any other higher education institution in the State of Illinois.

Interview by Karen Hasara, 2008

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Narrator: Carol Lohman  
Interviewer: Karen Hasara  
Date: October 28, 2008

Q. This is Karen Hasara on October 28, 2008 interviewing Carol Lohman. Carol, what are your first recollections of attempts to locate a university in Springfield?

A. Well it goes back a long way. And it was forty-two years ago when this Springfield Committee for Higher Education held its first meeting and that was on September 23, 1966. And would you be interested in knowing a few of the people who were there?

Q. Certainly.

A. The Henry Barber, an attorney was there and then C. "Tiny" Groeteke and Lou Herndon, Dr. Richard Herndon, and then Dr. Lee, and myself. And then two or three others were there like Dr. Price who was head of the Lutheran group of people here in town. And the first item of business discussed was whether or not we wanted to endorse the three year senior college plan as proposed by the executive director of the Board of Higher Education, Dr. Glenn.

And that we ended up endorsing the plan and it was passed unanimously. Well, that was the beginning and so then we had to, to decide what it was that we wanted to ask the Board of Higher Education for, and we knew it would take a lot of meetings, a lot of connections.

Judge Bill Chamberlain came along and was on our committee, very soon and he was an outstanding addition to the group because he had the political connections and the friends in the legislature and he was wonderful to work with and just did a fine job of knowing all the background that was going on politically.

And then we talked about whether or not to have a consulting group to be hired to update the Crane Report which was made several years ago. And so we decided to table that decision for that day but our committee that day, though, was enlarged and we added Bob Saner, a banker, Jim Armstrong, a newspaper publisher, Hugh Graham, an attorney, Tut Greening, an attorney, and John Kirby who had a business that I don't recall, Bill Chamberlain, Ken Cole, and Jim Dare and Maude Myers and they all were in very prominent positions within the community and within the state. And Bill Chamberlain was asked to serve as co-chairman of the committee with...George Hoffmann, yes.

So that was the beginning and in the Archives I think that you would find a lot of minutes of regular meetings that we held beginning in 1966. And I was the secretary of the committee and tried to keep as accurate minutes as I could. Things just moved along rather fast and sometimes we were going one direction and sometimes another as to what we really wanted in Springfield and also what the Board of Higher Education might give us.

So that was just the beginning and, and then, it just... Well, of course by then, Lincoln Land was coming into the picture and we didn't know how that would affect the plan that we had for higher education. At least we'd hoped we'd get all four years which we didn't. And we ended up with a junior-senior and a first year of master's programs and – which was one of the few in the state.

I remember one other that was up near Chicago and then that was what we ended up with. But we were very supportive of Lincoln Land and did all we could to help assure them that they'd be able to fill their commitment to the community. So I can stop with that for a little bit.

Q. Well if – tell me even before this first meeting, I mean, what brought the meeting about?

A. Well I think it was George Hoffmann. And he just thought the one institution we had – Springfield College in Illinois – just wasn't sufficient for the capital city. And he got some ideas and he got a good committee put together. It ended up being a very strong committee because along the way others were added and then we also formed some sub-committees and made assignments to them. But George Hoffmann was the motivator, the one who got us all going.

Q. And you mention Lincoln Land. By this first meeting, did you know that Lincoln Land was in the works or did that all come about a little later?

A. Well, I think by 1967 that we knew about it. And I'm sure we did because Lincoln Land opened in 1968.

Q. But you didn't know at the time of this original meeting?

A. Well, there were rumors.

Q. Right.

A. There were rumors. Nothing set for sure but people in the nearby counties were counting on trying to get some higher education so they backed Lincoln Land very strongly. But at first it was just mainly rumor about them. But we were very supportive of them, yes we were. But we still wanted the upper grades and that's why we pushed forward.

Q. Can you go in a little more then about how things progressed from these first meetings into the actual decision that there would be a university and to the opening?

A. Well, I haven't underlined the highlights or anything but I could quickly look at these minutes and see what information that I could come up with. We thought that we needed a survey to show the need for an institution of higher learning. And that it should relate – it could be used to be service to the state and have all different types of courses.

And we of course were going, we were expecting to get some funding from the state. We had no idea how much or what that would be and with the community college coming along we weren't sure that we'd get anything.

But as I said, as we went along, that certain members were added and we had a very strong committee and some subcommittees. In October of 1966 Bill Chamberlain was very active and he gave a report in selecting, talking about selecting someone to conduct a survey of the Springfield area and a recommendation as to the size of the Springfield Committee for Higher Education which was this committee.

Those things changed as we went along but we did invite the local news media to cover the committee meetings. And that was very, very good planning to get some of the information out and let people know what we were thinking of and hoping to get. We weren't sure ourselves yet what we would get but we were just going... Governor Kerner was very cooperative and Bill Chamberlain, of course, we knew him well. And that didn't hurt any [laughter], helped a lot.

Q. So, I'd see you'd already talked to the Board of Higher Ed at the point of this first meeting.

A. Yes.

Q. And then was that relationship positive and were they helpful?

A. They were helpful. They didn't indicate in any way what we would – what they would approve at the end. But, so we just kept working and kept talking to different people and then in the mean time, Lincoln Land was coming along and being formed and as I said, that opened in 1968... no, no, no – yes, 1968 is when Lincoln Land opened. And the Board of Higher Education was very interested in case we did get some higher education that they wanted it right there next to Lincoln Land.

And, of course no one had really thought about where we would locate, whatever we got but that made such good sense to do that. And of course there was no land that was available or had been – we didn't have the money to buy the land right next to Lincoln Land, but my husband was the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in 1968 and we had more things going on in the community.

We were one of the finalists for All-American City and he went along with three others from Springfield to Washington and presented our case because we – there were also rumors that there might be a medical school in the works somewhere. And we just – Springfield was disappointed that we didn't win that award but it still gave us a lot of good publicity.

But here we had Lincoln Land being built with the – they called it "Plywood U" – very temporary buildings. But they wanted to get it open and get it going. So in the meantime we were having

a survey taken and trying to just figure out what it was that we wanted ourselves. Of course, we were just going for everything that we could get.

And it was Dr. Homer Kimmich who was really working hard to get a medical school here at the same time. So it really in one way made it more difficult for us because we already had gotten state support for Lincoln Land and now SIU Medical School a possibility was coming along and so we just plodded right on ahead and just worked as hard as we could with our connections to come up with something very worthwhile.

Q. Do you think that the fact that Lincoln Land came along about the same time was the reason that the board approved the upper level institution?

A. I've always had that feeling that they probably didn't feel that it was necessary to repeat the first two years of college. And it also, this upper university kind of thing, was a new concept and I think was being used out in California. And Dr. Glenn, the executive director of the Board of Higher Education, came from California and so, yes I think so.

And then we just moved along and then they were – Tut Greening was talking about trying to get two-thirds of the voters to approve the annexation of Springfield to the Lincoln Land junior college district at an election to be held on April 4, 1967 probably. And Tut wanted us to be surrounded by Lincoln Land districts and then we wouldn't have to have a vote in Springfield, we could just annex to the district. And that was called the "doughnut hole" and that, in one way, I was against that.

In fact, not long ago – I hadn't seen Tut for years – but he said, "Carol you were about the only one against that." And I said, "Well, it just didn't seem right to me – that our people would be taxed and they wouldn't have had a chance to vote." Well, it went through and, Tut got it done and of course then we had no vote or anything, we were just annexed. So – and that was, this was 1967 now, that that kind of thing was going on.

Q: But the Board didn't ever say to you that because of Lincoln Land we want this University to be an upper level university – they didn't ever specifically say it or did they?

A: Well, no, I don't remember that they did. And we, of course, were also talking to the presidents of the U of I and SIU. And both of those presidents, one was Delyte Morris, down in Carbondale and then Dr. Henry was the president of the University of Illinois. And each one came individually in their chauffeur-driven limousines and we were very impressed with that [laughter]. Of course today, they don't have that service, I don't think, but that was very impressive to us, certainly. Do you have something else that you wanted to ask about?

Q: Oh yes. So, when did you find out or did the legislature then vote on this or was this a decision of the Board of Higher Ed?

A: Well, it's what – as I remember – it's what the Board of Higher Education recommended to the legislature and I feel sure that that it was passed. And so then the BHE just went on ahead and set this procedure up and none of us were familiar with such a set up because there weren't any, in our state anywhere. So we got Maurice Scott of the Taxpayer's Federation of Illinois to say publically that he would support the senior college proposal that had been made by them – by the Board of Higher Education. And so, that was just coming along and...I'm just trying to see the highlights of these minutes.

Q: What was the community's attitude? I mean, was there good reception from the community, was there opposition?

A: I don't remember any opposition at all, and I think that the community was coming right along with us and that they would be thrilled to have more higher education in town.

Q: Then how did the property, how did the land get purchased then?

A: Well, that's another interesting story. As I mentioned my husband, Bud Lohman, was in 1968 the president of the chamber of commerce. And there was a meeting that was held in Springfield and I think by then that the board of regents was in the process of being formed, and that board would overlook any higher education we had in Springfield and also for other universities and that comprised the board of regents. Now we don't have the same – we don't have the set up of the board of governors and the board of regents. That has all been taken away.

But as I said Bud was president of the chamber and we were having a meeting in the Leland Hotel and Dr. Glenn was there and some important people in town and Ray Page was the secretary of education or whatever it would have been at that time and he said that he was very interested in Springfield getting higher education but he told us that we shouldn't expect the state to pick up the total bill. He said, "Springfield needs to do something."

And so Bud stood up then and just announced to everyone that he would recommend that the community raise one million dollars to buy enough land, enough acres, for both Lincoln Land and for whatever schooling that we got. And then he [laughter] he did that on his own and then he had to go back and report it to the chamber board saying, "This is what we're going to do because we need to."

And he appointed George Hatmaker who was chairman and president of Franklin Life Insurance Company – who was also very interested in this program – Bud appointed him the head of the committee to raise the million dollars. And George he was, called on George in his office in the insurance company and George said, "Well, I'll do it if you'll be my vice chairman," and Bud said yes, that he would.

So then they set up another, different committee from ours, and because we'd had nothing to do with – except donating and also talking to people but it was all over Springfield by then and

people were getting excited about it, even though we didn't know quite yet what we were going to get.

Q: So, were you able to raise the money?

A: Yes, the money just came in and was raised in a shorter time than my husband thought it would be. It just – it came in and it was wonderful. So Springfield was doing its part. We weren't just there with our hand out saying, "Well, the state can pay for all this." But as I said earlier, they had wonderful support from the governor; he wanted this – to get it too.

But he, I'm sure, was very happy to hear that we were going to raise a million dollars here. I don't remember the exact number of acres but as you go out to UIS now you see some open ground. So not every acre has been used yet and there's still some room for who knows – maybe other buildings or whatever.

Q: Which came first, the state saying yes, you will have a university or the money raised for the land? Do you remember?

A: I don't remember definitely for sure but – I just don't. If I had time to read all these minutes I could find out but...I just don't remember and I don't want to give a wrong answer.

Q: That's fine, right. How did the name come about? Do you remember that?

A: Yes, I certainly do.

Q: How we became Sangamon State.

A: Actually, there was an article in the newspaper and the community was asked to give a name to this – by then the University had been approved by the legislature and the BHE – and that we should move on along with it and I mean, what was your question?

Q: The name. How did the name come about?

A: Oh, yes. The local news paper had said anyone interested in proposing a name for our new University could send the recommendations to the paper. And in about three days – well, in several days – then the paper printed the suggested names. Like "Central Illinois University," just different ones and there were about twelve names proposed and I'd turned in six of them myself! [Laughter] And so the Board of Regents had a meeting again at the Leland Hotel and said that – well I seem to digress here – but...

Q: That's fine.

A: What was the question?

Q: About the name, the name.

A: The name. We, well first, the executive secretary of the Board of Regents was Franklin Matsler and he had a dinner one evening. Mary Jane Masters was there, my husband and I, and the Matsler's were there. And we talked most of the dinner about what name should it be.

And among other names and all I said, "Well I think the University of the Sangamon would be a good name," because the Sangamon River circles all around through all of central Illinois. It goes clear over to Urbana and Champaign and beyond and that I thought the University of the Sangamon would be very appropriate.

Well Ray Page, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, said well, he said, "If it's going to be mainly backed by the state financially then I think you need to put 'State' in it." And so that's how it became Sangamon State University.

And it was actually, Mary Jane Masters had been at the dinner at the Matsler's house and she spoke up at this public meeting we were having in the Leland and said that she recommended the University of the Sangamon. And that's when Ray Page said, "Well, I think we better add 'State' to that," and it became Sangamon State University.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful. How do you feel about the Sangamon State now being part of the University of Illinois? Was that acceptable to you or do you think it was a plus?

A: Well, personally I think Naomi Lynn, who's a good friend of mine, did a great job of getting us hooked up with the University of Illinois. It's always been a fine University and certainly in our state it just was the leading University at that time and that I just thought it was a wonderful idea and that's what was done and I think all of our committee probably was very happy about that. She did a great job; it took her awhile to get it done but she hung in there and did it.

Q: And are you still involved at the University? Do you still go out there and participate in things out there?

A: I'll be out there this evening as it happens, but it's not really – I'm going to UIS but it is not a University function. It's, at first when Sangamon State opened I was just out there all the time and I was the citizens' representative. And so I could go and attend the faculty sessions and Dr. Robert Spencer was president then.

And I just, I think maybe he had hired maybe fifteen professors by then and he had many more to hire. Some lasted longer than others, some – Cullom Davis came in early and he's certainly been a marvelous addition to their faculty and he is, now I think, retired from that.

But we just had a citizens group who took around potential faculty members around town. When we were told that they were coming in, there were just a few of us who drove them around and I was fortunate to draw Cullom's name and I didn't know him ahead of time. But

since then he's mentioned a hundred times to everybody, "Well Carol is the one who took me around Springfield." And he came on very early.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about this community committee – seems interesting that you would be allowed to sit in on a lot of the university meetings. How many of you were there?

A: Well...

Q: And were you well accepted by the..?

A: Very much so. Bob Spencer wanted everybody to enter in to running the college; he wanted the professors to be in on it, he wanted some of the city people to be in on it, he wanted the janitors in on it, and he just wanted everybody to have a feel for running the University.

Well I think most of us know that kind of supervision and leadership just doesn't work real well and it took them a long time to get reorganized and go on their own way. But that was Bob's way of working to begin with and then he just had to make adjustments, that kind of thing. There were just a very few people like me who really wanted to know what was going on, as it started and everything they asked me to do I did.

Now during the years – and I've known all the presidents that we've had, and some have been more successful than others, I just have always enjoyed my friendships with them, Dr. Durward Long and especially Naomi Lynn. Naomi was by far the best leadership and strongest leadership that they have had out there.

Q: Uh-huh. Going back a little bit, before the University, you know, was named and opened, were the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois interested in being in Springfield? Was their discussion about Sangamon State – before it was named of course – being a branch, so to speak, of the University of Illinois or Southern or was that not ever part of the discussion at all.

A: Well, it was mentioned and I think many of the committee members would have been thrilled to have been lined up with the University of Illinois. And early on when this meeting was formed we said, you know, we should contact both of those Universities and just see if we couldn't get one of them, we would take either one, to come and start a branch of a university here in town.

At that time neither one of them was interested which seemed odd to me because then as they watched and heard of what was going on in Springfield and all the enthusiasm for higher education then each of them let us know, "Yes, we're interested." And that's when they came up in their chauffeur-driven limousines and they were really working hard to get us.

Well at that time we just – I mean they'd turned us down early and the BHE of course was making its decisions along at the same time and it just could never work out that we could be attached to either one of them at that time.

Q: That's interesting.

34 minutes 28 seconds

End of Interview