

UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Calhoon

INTERVIEWER: William Link

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[Begin Side A]

WL: I'd like to begin today by asking you to remember the first time that you became acquainted with UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], your first impressions that you might have had as a new faculty member at UNCG, your first person—the first contacts you might have had with the institution?

RC: Well, the first contact I had were my two young colleagues, Jon[athan] Spurgeon and Converse Clowse [history professors], and thereby hangs a tale which is important to me personally, but probably illuminating about the experience of young faculty members at that time of the transition and also illuminating about the management style of department heads at UNCG at that time.

So Connie and Jon had been here two years when I arrived in the fall of '62. And when I was interviewed at the AHA [American Historical Association] by [Dr. Richard] Dick Bardolph [history department head], he said that they needed someone to teach survey courses in modern Europe and U.S. history, but that the early American historian was on his way out and would either be gone by next fall or be gone by the following fall, and I could expect to teach those courses. So that was an incentive to accept the position in addition to very positive kind of warm encouragement that Dick gave my career personally. It made me feel that this would be a very supportive place to be.

When I got here, one of the first—and met Connie Clowse and Jon Spurgeon. Jon was the English historian, a [University of] Wisconsin PhD, and Connie a Northwestern [University] PhD in colonial history. Connie said, "Were you told something—were you told that I was leaving here when you were interviewed?" And I said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I was." He said, "Well, at that time I was, but" he says, "now I'm not" And Connie very—then immediately generously offered to divide the early American field with me so I could teach an upper-level course in the Revolution, which I very, very much appreciated.

And out of that—out of conversations about that I discovered that there'd been an enormous blowup in the first year that Connie and John had been here. They had been anxious to decide whether to apply elsewhere for their second year or whether to stay here for a second year. And as months ticked by and they didn't get reappointment letters, they began more and more insistently asking when they would receive a reappointment letter. Dick Bardolph apparently regarded these reappointment letters as something that was merely routine and something they shouldn't bother him about. And

so finally in impatience when Dick was out of town one day, Jon Spurgeon went to see the chancellor, Otis Singletary, and Singletary said, "Oh, your reappointment letter is right here on my desk. If there's a problem, why didn't you ask weeks ago?"

Well, Jon had threatened earlier to go see the chancellor, and Dick Bardolph had written him a letter forbidding him to see the chancellor, pointing out there was a chain of command and it would be highly improper for him to go above the department head with a personnel matter request. Singletary apparently was very angry that a faculty member had been told not to come to the chancellor. And later Jon heard from another department head that there'd been an angry statement at a department head meeting that—by Singletary—that department heads were never to prohibit or to discourage faculty members from coming to see the chancellor.

So relations between Spurgeon and Clowse, who were both the—had this run in with Bardolph—and Bardolph were pretty tense, and when I got here—. And it was part of a larger—underlying that tension was the larger factor that Dick had come here from Illinois, University of Illinois, in 1944, and, since becoming department head in 1960, had really run the department the way I think departments were run in the Midwest in the 1940s—with a strong hand, with giving faculty a lot of autonomy—in fact, what must have been at that time a very courageous autonomy to teach exactly as they saw fit—but to leave administrative matters entirely in the hands of the strong, assertive, active department head. And the idea of having department meetings with votes or with any policy set by the faculty was just totally foreign to Dick's way of thinking. And to young faculty members coming in the mid-'60s, it seemed only sensible that things should be done in a democratic, open, cooperative way.

So that what I observed very early the next three or four years was slow and gradual and kind of a painful transition of the department from an old 1940s-style Midwestern department into the kinds of departments which evolved widely in the late '60s and early '70s with common interviewing of candidates and much clearer understandings about how decisions were made and how consultations was carried out, and so forth.

And I think—feeling the kinds of pressures of that transition, Dick Bardolph in early '68, I think it was—or early '69—then stepped down as head, and a search was begun for a new department head. The search committee operated quite secretly and, finally, after several months produced Professor Burlie Brown of Tulane [University] as a candidate for the headship.

WL: What year was that?

RC: This would've been in the spring of—this was April '69. And Burlie Brown's idea was that survey courses were—should pretty much be abandoned, and we should—simply used pieces of specialized courses—specialized topics is the way to teach history. This very—this worried—this offended very much a group of European historians who had just finished trying to develop a much more cohesive version of our required freshman survey of modern Europe course. And so their objections to his candidacy led to a kind of an abandonment of the search, and then a petition in the department to ask Dick Bardolph to reconsider and to stay on as head, which he did.

One of the—there were several dynamics at work here. One was that the department head received, back in '67, funds to bring an Excellence Professor [supported in part from proceeds from an endowment established by a contribution to the university] to campus. And so they used that to bring [Professor Richard N.] Dick Current back, who'd been department head in 1954 to 1960 and had been back once as a visiting professor.

And at Dick Current's recommendation—the department then had had the nerve to look for a senior level person—and Dick Current recommended a friend of his that he'd met in India named [Dr.] M.S. Venkataramani [visiting professor in department of history and political science], who was an Indian who'd gotten a PhD at [University of] Oregon in American history and was looking for work in this country to pay him to teach Civil War and a number of other 19th century areas. And it was Venkataramani and [Dr.] Roy Schantz [associate professor of history], who had recently come here while she was working on her dissertation at NYU [New York University] because her husband had moved to Greensboro and then had become very active in shaping the work on the reform of the modern Europe course—Venkataramani and Roy Schantz, who then organized the petition to ask Bardolph to stay on. And Roy saw a very important curricular interest at stake in that struggle, and I'm not sure just what drew Venkataramani into that fight.

But the three faculty members who'd had serious differences with Bardolph's management style were partly due to simply the fact that there was a press of time, and classes were out and some people were out of—not immediately available. But [Dr.] Ann Saab [professor of history, associate dean of the graduate school] and Connie Clowse and myself were not told about the petition, so our names didn't appear on it.

I sometimes wonder what Dick Bardolph must have thought of the petition, which not only had the names of a large number of people on it, but obviously had a number of key omissions. We would have rather had our names put off it—left off because we'd chosen not to sign it, rather than that we didn't know about the petition.

But all of those were symptoms then of the difficult transition from the older style department, which went back to Woman's College [of the University of North Carolina] days and went back to Dick Current's style of running the department and Dick Bardolph's style in the early years, toward a more conventional type of '60s, '70s department, which finally emerged in the 1970s.

And, again, Dick Bardolph recognized—I think he recognized that a new kind of department was coming. And he facilitated this change, in part, by appointing a committee to make structural recommendations about the department. That committee met in the—from the fall, I think, of '70, met in '70, '71—and out of that—it was chaired by [Dr.] Allen Trelease [history professor]—and out of that committee came the recommendation to create a department policies committee, which was, in the long run, sort of capped. By the time the department policies committee became a true institution five or six years later, the department had really completed this long transition. So there are a number of—those are pieces of memories of a larger political process.

WL: That was thorough. What you described—this transition from an older style of leadership and governance into a newer one which would be more familiar to people in the 1980s and '90s—were there specific people that were unhappy with Richard Bardolph's style? Or would you describe it as something that was a little bit generational, maybe?

RC: Yeah. Well, partly. Dick was operating from a very, very powerful institutional position, which had both pluses and minuses for people teaching in the department. We—the department had a freshman requirement which required that every single student at the Woman's College—and then UNCG—take modern European history, so that everyone in the department taught at least one section of modern Europe, and about 55 to, I guess, 60 percent of our classroom time was spent teaching that single course. And then the survey of American history was required of all elementary education certification students, who made up a large chunk of the student body, so that the survey course in American history accounted for another 30 percent, and there was maybe 20 percent of the courses in the department. That's a rough impression; I think it might be a little off. But it was an upper-level course—upper-level electives of all kinds that represented the remaining small slice of the pie.

And there was growing hostility in the university to the history department's apparent privileged position. We had twenty-one or twenty-two full-time members, and the department of sociology had three or four and so there were growing tensions. And at one faculty meeting where the history department was directly attacked in the mid-'60s. I think, let me see, it must have been the year before I came because I'd heard about it [unclear] directly—Dick Bardolph got up and gave—tried to deal spontaneously with this challenge to his department, as he should have done. And so he spoke at length and extemporaneously about the value of having a history requirement. And looking back on it, I think all of us would have agreed with what he said, but he said it in a manner which offended—hurt people outside the department and embarrassed the other members inside the department, in making what seemed to them gratuitous claims for the innate superiority of history as an intellectual discipline.

And so there was building in the late '60s this explosion, which finally came in the early '70s when we lost the history requirement and lost overnight half of our credit hours. And Dick tried to warn us that this was coming—that we needed to prepare as a department—we needed to adapt as a department to this threat—to this very serious threat to our departmental existence. And what he meant when he said that was we really have to stop—several of the members of the department who taught the modern Europe course kept—maintained very, very high academic standards, and so good students struggled to get Cs and adequate students struggled to pass. And so people who came out of those classes, you know, who saw their chances of a college degree going down the drain because they could not get—they could not pass modern European history—represented a severely aggrieved external constituency.

And Dick tried in his way to lecture us on how we had to soften up a little bit and give ground on—in the interest of maintaining the larger institutional strength of the department. And we ought to really question whether or not those grading standards were really appropriate for all freshmen.

That was a very delicate matter to raise and a very—a supremely important issue, but the kind of—well, what at the time I called byzantine mysteriousness, which seemed to characterize the running of the history department—somewhat created an atmosphere in which we really couldn't talk about those things. Dick would make his sermon in the department meeting, and there would be no discussion. And people who felt they were being—their right to teach their own courses and set their own standards were under

attack, would stalk out silently. It would be—was suddenly this sullen mood created by these sermons in department meetings. That probably happened two times, but the issues were clearly just underneath the surface all through the late '60s.

So Dick was struggling in a kind of solitary way to head off what he saw as a potential disaster and seeking our cooperation and not getting enough of it—not getting the cooperation from the three or four people—[Dr.] Walter Luczynski [assistant professor of history] and [Dr.] John Beeler [professor of history] particularly, and Jon Spurgeon, when he was here—in bringing the grading of that survey course more in line with the rest of the department. And, of course, they were—all three of them were outstanding historians who—and the students who had survived the 101 course often looked back on it as the best intellectual experience of their lives. There was—so it was a complicated issue. Dick was right in some ways; they both were right in their narrower sense, but the [pause]. Both Dick's style and perhaps the personalities that we were dealing with prevented the kind of coming together of diverse viewpoints that would have created a strong consensus in the department once that coming together had been completed.

So all of that created an atmosphere of both great intellectual excitement, but intellectual deadlock and tension in the department in the late '60s, and is the background—part of the background to the things I was talking about earlier.

WL: The department was generally united or divided? How would you characterize it [unclear]?

RC: Well, it was not united because each of us was encouraged—strongly encouraged to teach our courses as we saw fit. But there was—and that, of course, was a powerful stimulus to be responsible and to work hard and to do the reading and to teach the courses. But, at the same time, there was no tradition of—there wasn't much of a tradition of collegiality.

And I had come from a small graduate school—Case Western Reserve [University]—where the teachers, at least the younger faculty, prided themselves on collegiality. And so the first thing I did when I got here was to take a problem in teaching the Reformation, which was one of the first topics in this modern Europe course—it was a Palmer [?] course—take it to John Beeler, who was a medievalist that I thought probably knew more about the 16th century than I did. And he said, “That's outside of my period.” And that was the end of the conversation. He didn't seem to want to talk about historical subjects. And I sort of had the feeling he thought I was sort of putting him on, sort of testing him a little bit in an improper manner. So one had the—younger faculty members had the feeling that they really weren't to raise intellectual or historiographical issues with their older colleagues.

That wasn't true of [Dr.] Franklin Parker [history professor], who was in a—and it didn't need to be true of the other really powerful figure in the department—powerful personality in the department, [Dr.] Eugene Pfaff [history professor], who had been a Carl Becker [professor of history at Cornell University] student, who was a brilliant, spellbinding teacher of modern intellectual—European intellectual history, but who had been embittered when he was passed over for department head when Bardolph became department head. And so his—Gene Pfaff's strained relations with female members of the department, who had strongly, as a kind of a group, backed Bardolph and backed the

idea of Bardolph as department head, had sort of soured his relations with everyone, and it was—well, he was more willing to talk about ideas and teaching. He, too, was a little standoffish about it, so there were all—there were these personality—strong problems of personality and temperament, which also blocked the growth of collegiality and community in the department in the '60s.

WL: You suggested that Dick's—a lot of Dick's support was coming from the female members. Who else were—?

RC: Well, they would—those would be [Dr.] Betty Clutts [class of 1940, history professor] and [Dr. Elma] Josephine Hege [class of 1927, history professor] and then a really very fine historian who retired before I came, but I got—. She sought out younger faculty members and encouraged them—[Dr.] Vera Largent [history professor]. And then a couple of others, older women who retired in the early '60s whose—who I didn't know at all. So that was—and then [Dr.] Barbara Brandon [history professor], a relatively—who was a younger PhD who left—who married a [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill faculty member and left in the early '60s. So I guess it was Barbara Brandon, Jo Hege and Betty Clutts and Vera Largent—one older woman and maybe one other. So it was—in a department of twelve or thirteen, it was a substantial segment, and, you know, to a person they warmed to Dick's courtly manner and were put off by Gene's prickly personal way. And I think I was—you know I probably reacted to the two personalities in something of the same way myself initially, but that was another strong ingredient of the chemistry in the department.

WL: Dick was very much associated with the Woman's College [unclear].

RC: Yeah.

WL: I know he has very strong feelings because he came in 1944. What—how did this affect his style? You mentioned the influence of coming from the Midwest and the model of the way department heads were in Midwestern universities was—

RC: Well, there—his professional sort of imprimatur—his professional, visible image was a complicated one. And so just bits and pieces which don't form a neat package come to mind. One is that he commented once that he had been here several years, and he was on the—one of only five members of the whole Woman's College faculty that published a book. He published his dissertation on agricultural organizations in Illinois almost immediately after he finished it in this University of Illinois monograph series. He was—only five members of this faculty who had published a book, and he was still an assistant professor.

And, in fact, I noticed—once I found myself looking for a book on the history of education in the library and came upon all the Woman's College catalogs, the UNCG catalogs, and instead of looking for my book, I simply sat down and read through those catalogs, one after another, looking at the make-up of the history department year by year. And one thing I noticed was that Dick Bardolph, who came in here in 1944, did not become an associate professor until Dick Current's appointment as department head in

1954. So he languished for ten years as an assistant professor with a—what was a superb publication record, publishings, publication of a dissertation and then about—the early article in the *Journal of Negro History*, and I guess the article in the *AHR* [*American History Review*] came about just after his promotion. But clearly he had good reason to resent the slow rate of his own promotions. And I congratulated Dick Current once on having corrected that injustice, and he didn't remember it that way, so maybe the promotion came through before Dick was—Current was head.

But then, nonetheless, I can understand Dick Bardolph's initial feeling that he was badly treated here and that—and by comparison, all the people he dealt with were better treated. He really—a number of people, especially myself, received a lot of encouragement and even got the tracks sort of greased for us by very hard work on his part. But [phone rings] not everyone. [pause] There were qualities in his personality which prevented people from always perceiving or focusing on the generous, serving side of Dick's headship.

And these largely had to do with his running the department through memos. We never had—we very seldom—we had one meeting a year. And sometimes about complicated matters that we needed to talk about, we would get a very brisk memo telling us what the score was. There was one faculty member who was a Northwestern [University] ABD [all but dissertation] that Connie Clowse could have warned us not to hire. But he came here and had a nervous breakdown or a mental collapse during the year, and the symptom of the collapse was that he stopped meeting classes for—he began dismissing classes after ten minutes; he said he couldn't continue with the class. And people were pretty upset when Dick simply sent around a memo saying everyone was expected to meet their classes for the whole time, rather than dealing with this one case. Bardolph hated—I guess the heart of Bardolph's problems with people was that he absolutely hated face-to-face confrontations.

WL: Sure.

RC: When I once expressed to him—once to sort of let his hair down and let me know I could make some criticisms if it would make me feel better, and I said something [unclear]. He said, "Causing something, saying something which causes another person pain is like a physical wound to me." He said, "I would—" What I—what passed through my mind to say, but didn't say was, "Well, not saying—passing over situations in silence with people is painful too." So Bardolph's overwhelming dislike of personal confrontation and—with people—then led to this kind of aloof, memo-oriented, high-handed style of administration, which created these tensions in the department. And I think we parted out—well, I know it provoked us young faculty members to come together and form a kind of community in opposition to what we perceived as the maladministration of the department, which may have been a healthy step for us to take.

WL: The—my perception may be inaccurate, but the style seems to have considerably here.

RC: Yeah, yeah. And when Allen Trelease became acting head—. Let me think—in what year was that? There was a year Dick was on leave, and Allen was acting head and it was, I guess, in the late '60s. And when people would bring problems to Allen having to do

with due process and collegiality and open decision making, he had sort of a set answer. He said, "There are some things I'm free to change during a year as acting head. There are other things I'm really not free to change because I'm only in the job for a year." And so Allen was immediately made aware of these—this sense of grievance and—. And I think more than anyone else then, both Allen and Ann—creating a different kind of department was the agenda that both of them had as—in succession as they became head department heads in their own right.

WL: Did you find collegiality—in what sense did you find collegiality outside the department in your early days here? Did you find it a collegial place across departments, or—?

RC: Only in—only circumstantially. People were pretty much caught within their own departments. In a—when—in the—as late as the early '60s—I think it was as late as the early '60s, before I got here, they stopped having dinner—that dinner—faculty dinner at the beginning of school. The first faculty meeting—I guess it was for many, many decades—in the early '60s was a formal banquet, and—

WL: For the entire faculty?

RC: Yeah, and so—

WL: Where would it be held?

RC: I think they had it, probably had it in the Alumni House. I only heard about those. We were still, of course, having faculty meetings of the whole faculty until the restructuring of the 1970s turned professional departments into separate schools. But the only college-wide or institution-wide interaction I knew of was in the drama department. There weren't enough male students around to take the male parts in plays, so male faculty members were always invited to come over to try out. That was one place which—. And then the Faculty Center was probably more a place where young faculty members gathered to watch television and to talk, and that was an important outlet. But there wasn't a whole lot, a whole lot besides that.

WL: How would you characterize the composition of the faculty when you came in 1964? Say, university-wide, college-wide?

RC: Well, it was [pause]. It fell to several categories. Of course, the people I got to know first were young PhDs just out of—just starting out in their careers. And because the faculty was rapidly growing, there was just a large component of these people, largely either trained at Southern graduate schools, at Carolina or LSU [Louisiana State University] or—these two come to mind—or from Illinois. There were a lot of Midwesterners in the history department, and there was a—there were—seems like there was a Cornell/Illinois axis in the history department, but I can't think of any other Illinois—. Oh, yeah, yeah, Cornell. John Beeler and Gene Pfaff were both Cornell PhDs. So it was a—there weren't very many people from the West Coast. So it is a Midwest- and Southern-trained younger PhDs.

And then there—the second kind of obvious group were women who had come here because it was the only place they could get a job—largely in their twenties and thirties. And a number of these were very, very impressive intellects—women who hadn't tried to have a scholarly career, but were scholars in every sense of the word—people like Vera Largent, who studied under [Dr.] Louis Gottschalk [history professor] at the University of Chicago and was an absolute first-rate French Revolution teacher.

And then there were—and a group of strong male department heads at the—in the middle of their careers, who were the kind of people that Mereb Mossman [dean of instruction, dean of the College, dean of faculty and vice chancellor for academic affairs] liked—that is, males who were courtly and scholarly and in whose integrity she had absolute trust. And these were people like Bardolph and [Dr.] Kendon Smith [professor and head of psychology department]—those two come to mind—and Dick Current earlier. And so the leadership role of that group was another segment, impressive segment of the faculty.

Well, the other thing is—the other thing that sticks in my mind about Bardolph—I was once complaining to [Dr.] Jean Buchert [English professor] that I thought Bardolph had misjudged a female—the qualifications of a woman faculty member. And Jean told me very emphatically a story which I think is an important part of the historic records. She said not long after Otis Singletary came here as chancellor, he told the department heads—of course, this is an indirect quote, but I just have a kind of gut feeling that it's probably an accurate one. Singletary allegedly told the department heads, "We've got too many women around here. I want all of you to stop hiring women." And she said immediately Dick Bardolph rose and said, "Absolutely not. I'll hire the best-qualified person for any position, and if it's a woman, it'll be a woman." And Jean thought that showed considerable courage on Bardolph's part, and I think it did.

So that's another sort of vivid impression I have of Bardolph, which is indicative of a very important part of his style and role in those early days in that transition period.

WL: What about the administration here? When you came, Singletary was chancellor?

RC: Singletary was chancellor, and very—a very powerful personality and clearly very much respected throughout the state—a superb, apparently superb, witness before legislative committees with his strong, virile style. And then—his outgoing external leadership abilities were complemented just beautifully by Mereb Mossman, who ran the place—who literally ran the school from the inside with an eye to every detail. And so once when I took a chair out of one classroom and put it into another, the department secretary came and told me to be sure to put it back because Miss Mossman knew how many chairs there were in every classroom in McIver [Building] and expected the furniture to be left in its proper place. That was one of her rules.

But—so while she was authoritarian and high-handed, she spotted young faculty members who she thought were going to be—have promising scholarly careers, and she communicated to them that as far as she was concerned, it was important to teach well and it was also important to get on with their writing. And she wanted to support both, and she backed that up.

She was—the one way I know she backed it up because it benefitted me—was that she made sure that UNCG got its share of the Cooperative Program in Humanities

fellowships in Chapel Hill and Durham [Duke University]. And one year when UNCG didn't get one, she [unclear]. No—there were no screening committees. She simply decided which faculty members should be awarded these from UNCG. And one year when her recommendation was turned down by the committee over there, she apparently really went on the warpath.

And the next year, Dick Bardolph had told me he would recommend me to her for one of these. And it was a very strong reading for me not to accept an offer from another school. So I knew I had this full year coming up and, little did I know, that year Jim [unclear], a very distinguished Medievalist and probably the finest scholar at UNCG at that time, was also encouraged to apply. And, if only one person got it, it surely would have been Jim. And somehow Mereb Mossman managed to hold the club over the committee's head over there that they had let us down the year before, and this year they oughta [sic] give us two and pulled it off. It must have taken a tremendous power play on her part to get two Cooperative Program fellowships in the same year for UNCG. But because she did, both Jim [unclear] and I got those full year off in '69-'70, which were of incalculable value to both our careers. So she—and she also sent over some people over there who didn't like her and who disagreed with her, so she was even-handed in handing out those plums.

WL: Was the style—general style—what was the general style of the administration here? Was it hierarchical?

RC: Very hierarchical. There was a committee on—it wasn't called committee on promotions and tenure; it had a broader title than that. I forgot what the name is, but it was a committee which, among other things, handled promotion and tenure cases. It was a very small committee; it was elected. But apart from that, all these decisions were taken by, I think pretty much, by the dean and department heads. And it worked well because Singletary trusted, respected Mossman's judgment, and she was a strong, powerful figure who knew what she wanted and always—almost always—got it.

WL: What were the—what do you suppose the disadvantages were to Mossman's administrative style? There was some dissatisfaction with her—a few people at least—

RC: Well, I think there—yeah. There was very strong dissatisfaction with women who thought that she was antifeminist.

WL: Do you think that was legitimate criticism?

RC: It may have been. It may have been. It's worth noting that her foremost critic, Jean Buchert, got a Cooperative Program fellowship on Mossman's nomination. But Jean always referred to, scornfully, to faculty as Miss Mossman's pets and saw herself as not in with that group. I think I only saw one serious weakness in Mereb Mossman, and that came late in career when she was under tremendous pressure because she—. Enrollments were declining or at least enrollments were soft, and she saw UNCG as being priced out of the market by its high graduation requirements. And so she simply bludgeoned the departments into abandoning their old-fashioned curriculum and putting in its place a

typical early '70s cafeteria-counter elective system and—. But she made it clear that she was—she thought the survival of the institution was at stake. And in typical style then, she simply rammed through—she appointed a committee that she thought would be cooperative and would push this through.

Franklin Parker was on it. She thought that Franklin was such a sweet, gentle person that he wouldn't cause her any problems and when the—when she proposed dropping the language requirements, which was one of the hot issues, Franklin, as a strong advocate of trans-cultural understanding, vehemently objected, and she simply told Franklin that the survival of the institution was at stake and that she didn't care what he thought. And he was very hurt by that.

And so that was probably in many ways the—both the low point and the high point in different ways of her—and it came at the end of her career. Probably the other course, the other great high point, was one before I came here when she literally held the institution together at the end of the [Dr. Edward Kidder] Graham [Jr.] chancellorship. And when she, as I understand it, was reinstated after Graham fired her by the very, then, young President [of the University of North Carolina Consolidated System] William Friday.

WL: So she had—this is out of your province—but I guess you heard the lore associated with those years?

RC: Yeah, yeah.

WL: There was conflict between Mossman and Graham?

RC: Yeah. I don't know what it was. I think it was just part of a larger conflict between Graham and the whole faculty.

And then there was an episode I don't know very much about that also feeds into this. In '48, '49, I think it was, there was a major effort by a member of the English department, [Dr. William B.] Bill Mueller, led by him and supported by many others, to revamp the curriculum and to create something which would be much more interdisciplinary—what we now call interdisciplinary, but was—that's probably not quite the term for it, but a kind of a themes-oriented rather than a discipline-oriented curriculum. A number of schools adopted things like this in the late '40s.

And, after a long fight, Mueller lost and left, resigned as a result and went to teach in the Washington, DC, area. And Warren Ashby, who had just—who then was a young assistant professor of philosophy, was very much involved in that effort—close friend of Mueller's. [pause] And it sort of dropped out. People didn't talk about it except for Warren, who told me about it. But I had a feeling that the sort of aftershocks of that fight over the curriculum were [pause] part—I think there was a kind of shell shock for the institution. It—after having come through a very—not nasty—but very divisive fight, having one side having sort of won and having lost at least one good faculty member, maybe others, as a result—and then stopped talking about it. I don't know just how you gauge the damage as well as the benefits of that kind of a conflict, but it's something that probably needs to be investigated in understanding the institution in the late '40s, early '50s.

WL: Well, since the conflict over Graham was, in part, over curriculum as well—

[End Side A—Begin Side B]

RC: Yeah, well I just don't know enough about the Graham business to know just where or if he fit into that.

WL: Singletary was a sort of person on the move. He was a—and it's interesting that he provides every—

RC: [unclear] reached out to people, to faculty members. I think about my students and talk to them. He was a popular person because he was very human.

His daughter, as I recall, the story was she dropped out—was a student here and dropped out of school and married a kind of local drifter. And the morning after this happened, Singletary ran into someone on the campus and quite frankly expressed his—how upset he was of his daughter's behavior. And he said, "I'm so mad I'm going to go down and sell her MG [car]." And people sort of chuckled about this, but thinking back on it, he—that kind of ability to talk to others about his own personal distresses must have been a bond—must have formed bonds with other people, which a more closed personality in an administrator wouldn't have been revealed. So those impressions come to mind about—

And then—oh, there's something else that Singletary did, which I thought was very—potentially very interesting. He lured, after several years of effort, Edwin Yoder [editorial writer and columnist], who then—I forget which prize—he hadn't won any prizes yet, but he'd been a Rhodes Scholar [international postgraduate award for study at the University of Oxford, England]—Edwin Yoder, the [unclear] writer from the *Greensboro Daily News*, to come here to teach for a year. And Ed had a kind of an unusual arrangement. He had a master's degree from Oxford, so he did have a graduate degree. And he'd done a wide range of distinguished writing and book reviewing and serious historical writing for the newspaper, so he had really good qualifications. But Ed had a reduced load, which was just unheard of at that time, a nine-hour load. And the understanding was that the other three hours were sort of—well, it was never understood, but I just got the impression it was this sort of—the—an intellectual handyman for Singletary. Whenever Singletary was out of town, Ed would teach his courses. And I think Singletary envisioned using Ed as a kind of sophisticated PR [public relations] person for the university. And it didn't work out because, not long after during Ed's—the year when Ed finally started teaching, Singletary left, and so that eliminated that element of the role.

And then Ed was very disappointed in the UNCG students. They weren't at all like the Chapel Hill students that he had known as an undergraduate at Chapel Hill. They tended to be quiescent women instead of articulate men. And so his teaching style was—he was frustrated in trying to adapt his very laid back teaching style that had always—his most admired teachers at Chapel Hill had used to great success didn't work well here. So

that came to nothing, and Ed went back to the newspaper world and a distinguished career there. But it was an interesting idea and, had Singletary planned to stay here for another decade, clearly Ed Yoder probably would have stayed around and would have had a career in higher education—had a unique career as a writer, teacher, a roving representative of the university and sort of a troubleshooter.

WL: When Singletary leaves to—of course, he goes to Washington [DC]—he's succeeded in an acting capacity and then a permanent capacity by [Dr. James B.] Jim Ferguson. And you knew Jim quite well. How would you characterize Jim? Give me some—

RC: I remember my first—the first time I ever sort of really focused on Jim, a student—a very good student, the best student I had maybe, the very best I ever had—my first year here and she was asking me if she should take Dr. Ferguson's course in the Old South. She—I said, "Oh yes, that's a good course." She said, "Well," she said, "they say that all you have to do is listen to the lectures." And I suddenly remembered all the bits and fragments of Jim's Old South/New South lectures that I'd heard as I had walked down the hall when he was giving them and how almost every sort of—every time that happened, I would hear some marvelous characterization of something Southern and think, "That's very well said. That's nicely organized, gee." [laughter] You know that's obviously the distillation of a great deal of thought. What a wonderful think for students to be able to hear someone talking in this slow, casual, Southern, dignified way about things of great power and intensity, and somehow, you know, conveying the vitality of history without raising your voice or getting away from this typical Mississippi cadence.

All that flashed through my mind as this student asked me—when—and I thought how to advice to this—to take the course, and all I could think of to say to her was, "If you knew everything that was in his lectures, you would know a very great deal. Take the course." So that was my first impression.

The other early impression I got, I didn't—the other impression I got of Ferguson of those years, I got years later by someone who ought to be interviewed, if he hasn't been interviewed already, is [Dr.] Blackwell Robinson [associate professor of history and author]. And so then you might want to check this—my recollection of what Blackwell says and Blackwell's own recollection of it. But just let me put it on the record now because I think it's an important piece of evidence.

Blackwell was on the search committee for a new chancellor when Singletary—which brought Singletary here. And when Singletary's name came up and his Millsaps [College] came up—the fact that he was a Millsaps undergraduate was part of that record—Blackwell said, "Well, I'll call my friend, Jimmy [James Ferguson], at Millsaps and find out what he thinks of Singletary. And, according to Blackwell, Ferguson responded immediately to—. Ferguson, of course, and Blackwell knew each other because they'd been Chapel Hill—graduate students at Chapel Hill together. And according to Blackwell, Jimmy said, "Otis Singletary is a very ambitious man who's on his way up fast." That was the characterization—I often thought certain—Ferguson certainly wouldn't have spoken so candidly about his student if he'd known that he would later be associated [laughter] with a women's college at the institution in Greensboro..

And that was very much the—I met Bob Haynes [retired history professor from Western Kentucky University] initially in Houston, who grew up at Millsaps because his

father taught there, and he did his undergraduate work there. He said that was—I shared that anecdote with him. He said, “That’s exactly the impression we have of the contrast between Ferguson and Singletary.”

Singletary was ambitious and was going to make it big as a scholar, as a publisher, as an administrator. He was headed for the top and that’s where he had his eyes on. But Ferguson had all the same abilities, but he was going to focus on the—on what was—on the good of institutions and the well being of individuals and without this kind of obvious ambition and obvious focus on his own career—obvious attention to his own career that Singletary had. And so the—so that was a contrast, I think, which occurred to lots of people who admired both Ferguson and Singletary.

Singletary was—I mean here we had two American historians who had very similar kinds of historical ability—both superb teachers, both coming from a background in—having a contact with Millsaps College, and yet their personalities were so different that people decided by the time Ferguson had left—by the time Singletary had left—that they were really ready for someone who was—who had—whose strengths were those of dignity and modesty, which were hallmarks of Ferguson’s personality.

WL: Ferguson was very much the choice of the faculty?

RC: Yeah, yeah. During the—during his acting chancellorship, there was faculty petition—I was on leave; I was away that year on a one-year visiting position in Connecticut, but I heard that a large number of faculty members signed this petition that went to Friday. And that Friday later said publicly that that petition influenced him strongly to recommend that Ferguson be made chancellor in his own right.

WL: What was Ferguson’s administrative style? How did he, on a day-to-day basis or over the long term—?

RC: Well, it was the best of Mereb Mossman’s style without—with the addition of a kind of personal warmth. He worked through the same kind of network of dignified and highly scholarly male department heads that—who he had discovered just as there were four or five key department heads that Mossman favored and worked through. But Ferguson had probably a similar network—well, maybe a little wider. But Jim’s sort of sense of humor and his demeanor forged a much stronger emotional bond between himself and people that—most people he dealt with. So, lots of people—he didn’t have the kind of strong rapport with large numbers of people like Singletary, with his more ebullient personality could develop, but he had incredible strength and loyalty from the smaller number of people with whom he worked closely.

WL: I’ve heard that often when one called the chancellor’s office he would pick up the phone.

RC: Yeah.

WL: Is that—?

RC: Yeah.

WL: Seems to me sort of typical of his style.

RC: Yeah.

WL: Very open and accessible.

RC: I—at the end of my second year, I had to leave campus the day, the hour that my last final exam was given. And so I graded those exams in the car on this trip because I was going to be staying overnight with my future brother-in-law, who was coming back to get his master's degree here the next week. And so I gave him the exams, and I said, "Look, when you get back to campus, find a campus mailbox and there are several of them. There's one at the Administration Building. Just drop it in there, so that the grades will be turned in on time." So he got back to campus, and the Administration Building was locked and, instead of waiting 'til the next day to get in to turn in my grades surreptitiously, he noticed a light on at the top of one of the fire escapes. So he climbed the fire escape and knocked on the window, and it was the dean of—it was Acting Chancellor Ferguson, who was in the office working at night. [laughter] And who opened the window and said, "Yes, what can I do?" And my brother-in-law [unclear] to him and said, "I've been asked to turn these grades in." [laughter] And he took them and said, "Thank you. I'll see that they get to the registrar." [laughter] And years later, I was very embarrassed that that had happened, and Ferguson professed not to remember the episode at all. He probably had forgotten. Mereb Mossman would have remembered it, and I would have gotten a stern reprimand for leaving campus before those grades were in. [laughter]

WL: So it's fortunate that he ran into Ferguson rather than Mossman?

RC: Yeah.

WL: This is a very turbulent time in American higher education?

RC: Yup.

WL: Do you think it was fortunate that someone like Jim Ferguson was chancellor?

RC: Yeah, because Ferguson was just magnificent in the two racial crises on the campus which could have led to violence—or at least could have led to a massive police involvement, police intrusion, into the life of the campus. The cafeteria workers' strike in the—make sure I have my dates right—in the spring of '69 and then the Kent State-[University shooting of unarmed college students by the Ohio National Guard] inspired demonstration in the spring of '70. And then also the Neo-Black Society [NBS] confrontation versus the conservative students in the student government in '71, I think it was.

All three—in all three instances, Ferguson appointed a committee of people widely respected on the campus—got their advice and acted in a way which kept peace

on campus when things were very tense. And he was really a superb crisis manager in racial confrontation—racial—three different racial confrontations and learned in each one. Each one he would see things that he had learned in the earlier ones in retrospect, and he put to use.

WL: What was the nature of the—each of these crises?

RC: The first, ARA-Slater [food service company], was private contract—was and is a private contractor, and most of its employees were black and a lot of them were A&T [North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University] students and some of them were older black people. And it—I think mainly the—at the instigation of the A&T students, who had already—I think the chronology is correct here—had already had a strike on their campus against Slater. And there had been a very highly-publicized one even earlier than that at Chapel Hill over—by cafeteria workers—had quickly organized a union and called a strike for higher wages. And my impression is that the older black employees were entirely supportive of this though they weren't as willing to push to a confrontation.

So the—there were sort of active students at A&T who were—who came over and picketed and demonstrated in behalf of the ARA students, some of them A&T students of the area employee, some students on this campus. And then there was a segment of very strongly liberal white students at UNCG who saw this as a cause that—as this is the opportunity to participate in and root for racial justice in the late '60s. And so there was—there were a couple of hundred students and non-students on the campus constantly during the ten days or so of that strike.

And Ferguson's hands were tied because he couldn't do anything—he couldn't take any action which might be seen to be pressure on ARA to settle without then incurring obligations on the state to pay the cost of that settlement. So he had to—he felt he had to leave it as a labor-management dispute between Slater and these workers. And at the same time, he was trying to work behind the scenes to keep this body of student activists from precipitating violence. And it came very close to violence because there were—there was this mass meeting in Cone Ballroom [in Elliott Center] that started around nine o'clock one Thursday night, as I recall, and there were demands by people at the meeting, many of them non-students, for a march on the chancellor's house. There had been a march on the chancellor's house the preceding Saturday. And Ferguson had been very angered by that because here there were students standing out on his driveway shouting for him to come out, and he had—I don't think he went out. I had been in meetings all day between the students—between the cafeteria workers and the Slater representatives, and I was going to a family reunion in Roanoke [Virginia] for supper. So about 4:30 [pm] when the meeting ended, I left town immediately. So when I got to Roanoke, I called the chancellor's residence to see if any—to see if everything was quiet. And he said, "It's not quiet at all." He said, "One of the students got up on the table in the dining hall and said, 'Let's march on the chancellor's house.'" And they all marched over there, and he had either refused to talk to them or had found—had either personally or indirectly had told them that they'd have to make an appointment to see him in his office on Monday morning.

So the second march was—this proposed second march was, since it was a night, could involve a much larger number of students—a lot of people off the campus—and it

was fueled by several hour of angry debate, rather than just a few minutes of spontaneous advocacy in the incident in the dining hall on Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening. It was much more dangerous, and Chief Paul Calhoun had tear gas-equipped police all along Forest Avenue. And the students didn't know they were out there.

The president of the student body either knew they were out there or at least knew it'd be very unwise to march on the chancellor's house. And she got up and made an impassioned speech on how the chancellor was not gonna [sic] talk to a bunch of irresponsible, screaming radical students. And then a few minutes later she reappeared and said she'd just talked to the chancellor on the telephone and he would speak to—he would address the entire student body the next morning at ten o'clock. She hadn't spoken to him on the telephone because his lines were busy, and she had simply fabricated that on the spur of the moment. And—but she'd said it dramatically enough that tempers dissipated, and people drifted on home. And the next day the chancellor didn't have very much he could say, but he made the best speech he could, given the fact that things were still up in the air and there wasn't anything concrete he could say to any side—and the fact that he had obviously had been up all night and was really dog tired. But, under those circumstances, it was a good speech.

I was on leave in '69-'70, so I wasn't here for the Kent State, but like—as in other instances on the other campuses, the campus shut down early, and people simply went home without taking final exams—without having the last two weeks of their coursework. But there was a—by the time the chancellor, I think, saw that it was really important to—for there to be as much open oratory as possible and as wide a spectrum of people—. And John Beeler, with a long military career—the day after the Kent State shootings came to campus wearing a black arm band. And he and a—someone speaking in behalf of the Nixon administration's position on Cambodia then had a debate out in front of the McIver statue, I think, in front of what must have been a couple of thousand students. And so it was a—and, of course, giving way on the issue of final exams and closing the school, letting students go home, was a strategic retreat, but I think it showed that the Chancellor Ferguson knew how to close—and Mossman was very much involved with this too. They both realized how very close they had come to a disaster the previous spring, and they didn't want to run that risk again.

And then one of the key people behind the scenes in providing communication between all these groups was the Presbyterian campus minister, [James] Jim Allen. And by 1971, Jim Allen then was dean of students. And I think Ferguson saw the value of having someone with a campus ministry background in that position. And it was Allen, Jim Allen then, who, as I understand it, negotiated the agreement with the Neo-Black Society and their white supporters that the sit-in in Foust Building could continue and would not be deemed a violation of the law against blocking access to public offices if there was room for—if there was enough unoccupied floor space for a person to walk through that lobby. And so Allen managed to persuade the students sitting there to leave about eighteen square spaces unoccupied, so that, with great difficulty, someone could walk through that lobby. That was the most he could persuade the students to do. And Ferguson then was able to rule that the sit-in was a—was not in violation of the law and could continue.

Well, those negotiations were very, very tense, and it really showed how much Ferguson had learned from two previous confrontations. And he appointed a committee

with Frank[lin] Parker and Kendon Smith on it, and they heard the grievances of the Neo-Black Society and made recommendations which led to a restoration of NBS funding.

WL: They—the NBS had been—its funding had been cut off?

RC: Had been at a late-night meeting by a group of very sort of right-wing students who, on the pretext that the NBS wouldn't—pretext may be too literal a term—on the grounds that the NBS wouldn't admit whites. And which—there's a certain plausibility to saying, "Okay, this is a violation of the non-racial inclusion rules governing all student body organizations." But the student body—the student setup which carried out that cut did so, you know, by two [o'clock] or three [o'clock] in the morning after a long and angry debate.

There were parliamentary tactics used which were very dubious. So that, while there were probably wrongs on both sides—as Steve Underwood, who is now a doctoral candidate here and was a student body—was one of the student body, white student body leaders—told me last summer—he said there were things done which were disreputable by the Neo-Black Society people. The tactics of their enemies were just also cut throat and also unworthy of the university, and Ferguson was able to cut through those issues—again with the help of this hearing committee with Frank Parker, Kendon Smith and two or three other equally respected people on it—and make this ruling which satisfied the demonstrators and led to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

If the police had had to come in and clear out Foust [Building], as they well could have done; if—because their—if the students hadn't agreed to this compromise about leaving footsteps, foot places on the carpet there, then there would have been probably not a violent police arrest, but it'd certainly have been terribly damaging to the university. And so that was the third racial crises and the last that Ferguson was chancellor in.

WL: What was the condition of black students at UNCG in those days, in the late '60s, early '70s?

RC: It was one of very considerable isolation. He appointed—Ferguson appointed the ad hoc committee on university racial policies chaired by [Dr.] Elaine Burgess [sociology professor] and with a large number of students as well as faculty—was one of the faculty members on it. And the students, particularly, were able to put together data showing, and we had testimony—hearings and testimony from black students who were the first black students to go through various programs—that they found their dealings with many faculty extremely difficult—faculty who had never taught black students before who were totally uncomfortable doing so. So it probably wasn't the case of any overt racism or discrimination against students, but simply the fact that the institution didn't know how to make black students feel at home in the classroom and in organizations [and in] the life of the campus. The black students who came here, the first black students which came, first blacks which were admitted in the early '60s voluntarily—one thing to give Woman's College credit for being desegregated voluntarily, but the handful of students who were there until the early '70s were isolated and uncomfortable..

WL: You were involved in the early planning and creation of the Residential College [living-learning dormitory], weren't you? Tell me how that came about.

RC: That was very much [Dr. Robert] Bob Miller's [chemistry professor] initiative. When Bob Miller came to be interviewed for this newly-created position of dean of [College of] arts & sciences, the one thing he said he wanted to do if he came was to create living learning centers. And so when he got here, he put out feelers for the faculty who had ideas on the subject. [Dr.] Warren Ashby [head of philosophy department] had some strong—had some very clear-cut ideas. Warren was the chairman of the committee, and I think both [Dr.] Charles Tisdale [associate professor of English] and [Dr.] Murray Arndt [English professor] were on that committee. And that's—and again, that committee met the year I was in Chapel Hill on leave. So I wasn't in on that at all. But then I—Warren, who had been not on the racial policies committee but had worked closely with us just as an interested faculty member—called me up and said that I could teach in this new residential college. And I didn't teach the first year because I was still trying to finish my manuscript that I'd been working on. But I told him I'd be interested in it, and I'd want to be observer and come into the program just as soon as I could. So I was—I started teaching in the RC the second year, so I had [unclear], so that my perspective is as an initial outsider, then a close observer and then someone involved in the program.

And the Residential College reflected the fact that in the early '70s there was a lot of soft money in the university, and so Bob Miller was able to finance that reform, like other changes, with money to hire part-time people, and money to compensate departments send people down there. And so it was a—it—just the budget peculiarities of the institution made possible some—something like—made it easy to do something or feasible to do something like the RC in the early '70s. And then, as those funds dried up in the—by the last '70s, as you know, it was real touch and go—sort of the Residential College had become a strong enough institution to survive or, like so many of the experimental colleges from the late '60s, early '70s, to be shut down. And it narrowly survived.

But I guess the two foremost things that struck me about the Residential College—well, three things struck or strike—very significant about the Residential College institutionally. The first was Warren Ashby's strong insistence that it not be simply a miniature of the university—that is, not to have a hierarchical administration. So that, as director, Warren simply refused to make decisions. Decisions were definitely made by a kind of Quaker-style of consultation, which were both frustrating, but probably intrinsic to the nature of that kind of institution.

And then secondly, the college was created just before the curriculum upheaval of the early '70s, so that the core of the college's curriculum could be trad—a fairly traditional history-literature core, since those were both the existing requirement that the new college could meet in its own way. And that gave the college a kind of academic rigor, sort of accidental academic rigor. If it had been created two years later, it would've been very different because it would've not had any requirements that it had to uphold at all.

And then [pause] and then the final thing that's important about the early history of Residential College is just the accident of architecture. They picked a dorm to put 'em in—they picked Mary Foust. And it was—since the money for Mary Foust had been

given with the understanding that the building would always have that name, it was very important that it be called Mary Foust rather than Residential College. So Residential College was a paper title rather than a building title. But the fact that it was that building created a kind of an obvious logic to turning Guilford, the companion building—identical building across the street—into the Residential College as well. And since a hundred students—enough students to fill Mary Foust were represented the first year—it was simply the logic of the architecture which led to doubling the RC to two hundred the second year and having it—having the two dorms together be the RC. Well, by the third year or fourth year, the experience of trying to staff a program for two hundred students in two closely related but detached were vastly different from the tasks of simply creating a good program for a hundred students in one building. So the lesson that was learned the hard way over the first four years of the institution was that they should never have doubled the size—that two hundred was unmanageable, that one hundred was the right size and they should go back to Mary Foust and simply cut their entering classes in half. So that was the other salient feature of the oral history of the Residential College.

[End of Interview]

