

UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: May Lattimore Adams

INTERVIEWER: William A. Link

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[Begin Side A]

WL: Why don't we just start where we finished before I turned the machine on. And that is, you were telling me about Dr. [Harriet Wiseman] Elliott [professor of history and political science, dean of women].

MA: Yes. Well, she, of course, was an unusual person, and as I said, during World War II, she took such an active part all over the United States. She was appointed by President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt to the Consumer Defense Council as the consumer representative and the only woman member. And when she finished that work, she then went with the Treasury Department as—and went all over the United States selling war bonds. She was the best woman speaker I ever heard. She was excellent. And she was on the committee that organized the WAVES [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service]. She also attended the first meeting of UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] in London. And she was always active in politics. When I came here as a student, she was on leave campaigning for President Roosevelt. She was a political science teacher at that time, and she was on a semester's leave campaigning for Roosevelt when I was a student.

WL: And that was 1935.

MA: '34-'35.

WL: '34-'35. Anticipating the campaign of 1936, I guess.

MA: Yeah, uh, huh. And then when she came back was when she became dean of women.

WL: I see.

MA: When I was a student, there was a woman named Geneva Drinkwater who was the dean of women, and she was here only one year. She and this institution were not very compatible. So she went back to where she had been as a teacher. But that was interesting times and exciting times, of course.

WL: Was she—with all these obligations, she must have been off campus quite a bit.

MA: She was. And we had an acting dean of women; one of the counselors in the residence halls was appointed as an acting dean, but she was here to touch base—school opening, in critical times and all that. She was not away all the time. But there was an acting dean on the campus because she was away so much. Then she then came back and was full time dean of women again. And as I said, in that day, there were only two type administrators; the chancellor, and I believe at that time he was probably called dean of administration.

WL: Yeah. That's right.

MA: And the dean of women. I actually worked under seven chancellors, and I knew Dr. [Julius] Foust, although I never worked here. He had retired the year I came, but I knew him after that. And as I said, having worked in Miss Laura Coit's office, I knew a lot of the very early faculty members who had been here since the early days and were still here. Wonderful people, most all of them. And some of them were close friends with Miss Elliott, too. So, you know, I had a lot of experiences I cherish. And then

WL: So—excuse me—this first generation of faculty members that were around when you first came: people like Laura Coit [college secretary, general assistant to the president] and—

MA: Well, Laura Coit, Mary Petty [science faculty], Miss Strong who taught math—Cora was her name. I was trying to think. Cora Strong. Many people that had been here maybe since the first, or certainly since the very early, days were still here. And as a result, I did personally know a lot of them. And then after Miss Elliott became ill and died, I was still in that office for several years, and then I went to Physical Plant and was the administrative assistant in Physical Plant for the last twenty—maybe a few more than that—years. Something like twenty years.

WL: Where was Physical Plant located? Has it always been in the Administration Building?

MA: Well, when I first started in Physical Plant, it was the only thing in the old McIver [Memorial] Building. They were getting ready to tear it down. And we were in basement offices way down at the other end, but they were renovating the Foust Building. And as soon as that renovation was completed, we moved to Foust Building. So actually, I worked for Miss Coit, Miss Elliott, and Physical Plant all in that building. The only time I did not—was not in that building—was when it was temporarily in old McIver Building.

WL: I see.

MA: And I don't mind telling you. Katherine Taylor was made dean of women after Miss Elliott. She and I differed in our feelings about Dr. [Edward Kidder] Graham [Jr., chancellor], so she fired me. And—but, I just ended up taking a short leave and came back.

WL: And that's when you made the change to Physical Plant?

MA: That's when I went to Physical Plant.

WL: Katherine Taylor was a person that had been around the campus—or was around a long time after that, I guess, [inaudible] presence on the campus?

MA: Yeah, well see—

WL: Strong personality.

MA: Yeah. In a lot of ways. She graduated here in 1928. She had a Weil Fellowship [for graduate study, honors Henry Weil, Goldsboro, NC, philanthropist and businessman]. She was a brilliant person. And then she taught French, and she was a counselor in the dormitory and then she was made dean of women. And when Otis Singletary came, he made her dean of students and moved her to Elliott Hall.

WL: Was that a less powerful position?

MA: [No response]

WL: Some kind of a demotion?

MA: If we weren't on tape, I'd say it was—well, she herself said it. It was like being in the Navy and being kicked upstairs for a reason. She was in charge of Elliott Hall and, you know, was moved over there. And it kept them from working so closely together is what happened there. But—

WL: She used to be right in the middle of the administration, right? That position did—

MA: And she was one of his few people who was a strong advocate for him. And she tried to really mend fences and run interference for him with faculty, with Dr. Graham.

WL: Dr. Graham. Oh, yes.

MA: And so then when Dr. [Otis] Singletary succeeded him, why that, you know, it was just better for it not to be that way.

WL: I see.

MA: And see, Dr. [William] Whatley Pierson was here twice as acting chancellor. And he was really instrumental in my staying.

WL: I see.

MA: Which I did, and it was a drastic change, but I thoroughly enjoyed everywhere I worked.

WL: Well, tell me about Graham. Edward Graham. His chancellorship. I've heard a lot about it already.

MA: Yeah. I'm sure you have.

WL: Seems to have been, on the one hand, a very—well, some people describe him as brilliant or a person who had a lot of ideas.

MA: He was brilliant. There's no doubt about being brilliant. He was a man very small in stature who was—followed a very well-loved and wonderful administrator, his father, who had been at [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill. And a cousin of Frank [Porter] Graham [president of the University of North Carolina]. And he lived in their shadow. He had a lot of the arrogant ways of people small in stature—men, in particular, who seem to try to make up for it.

WL: You mean. became aggressive, aggressiveness?

MA: Yeah. And going to have their way. And so the faculty was really divided. I mean, when he started off, let me say, for a year or maybe more, he treaded a good course, he watched what he did, he got along with people and then, gradually, things began to deteriorate. I remember distinctly what happened when he came. He had been at Cornell [University] as a dean, and they told the truth about him. He was somewhere else out in the middle west, and they wanted to get rid of him and they praised him to the sky. So the people who were doing the selecting decided he had matured and improved and went on and—see, his basic character, I guess, came to the front.

WL: I see. And who was doing the selecting? Did that come from Chapel Hill or was it—

MA: Yeah. That came through Chapel Hill.

WL: I see. Of course, he—

MA: There may have been some people here on the committee. I'm sure there were. I don't remember who. But I'm sure there were some from here who were. Do you remember who [William D.] “Billy” Carmichael was?

WL: Yes.

MA: Alright. Billy Carmichael was provost at Chapel Hill. His remark was that he had been Ed Graham's counselor in camp when he was a little boy. That he was a brat then, and he was still a brat. And that was generally—and see, his personal, his family life deteriorated and as it did, he did too. By the time he left, he was drinking a great deal, you know.

WL: Yeah. But for a year, there was peace, and then after the year—after about a year—

MA: Yeah. I would say about a year. Things went what I thought were quite well. And see, our

office always worked closely with the chancellor, even as they gradually added some more administrators. It still was an office that works very closely with the chancellor. So that actually—I not only worked under him, I knew all of them well but Dr. William] Moran. He came not long before I retired.

WL: What were the conflicts over? Do you think it was mainly a matter of personality, or why did he alienate the faculty? Was it a matter of what he wanted to do or was it more a matter of his—

MA: I really think it was more a matter of personality and the way he went about it. It could have been, you know, some basic changes he made and things he did, but I think it was mainly personality.

WL: How did the—how was his resignation handled? What you know about it.

MA: He was asked to resign, and he stayed on here in the chancellor's residence and even after he was no longer in the office, he was allowed to stay on for a little while. And, well, he stayed drunk most of the time. Then, you see, when he left—I don't remember how long it was after he left, but he—the place he went to—I'm trying to remember—

WL: Boston University, I think.

MA: Where?

WL: Boston University.

MA: I was thinking he went somewhere before that, but maybe not. Anyway, he left home one morning and sent the sheriff to tell his wife he wasn't coming back. He was leaving. He didn't face up to it himself. That tells you—I mean, you know, can you imagine being married to somebody twenty years about and walking out and not telling them you're leaving? And that's what happened. And then he later married Elvira Prondecki [director of Elliott Hall], who had been here. And this had started while he was here. And see, the thing about Katherine Taylor is that she and Katherine Taylor were very close friends. And people really thought it was Katherine he was interested in because they would meet at her house.

WL: I see. So he would be seen going to her house?

MA: Yeah. And she lived in the dean's house right down here on McIver Street. And it was next door to what was then the Home Economics Practice House, they called it. And the tales those students told were something.

WL: Out in public view, in a way.

MA: Yeah, it was. And their youngest child, their only son, same age as my son who was in kindergarten and grade school at Curry [School, laboratory school located on campus]

with him. And they were good friends and so, you know, they would be back and forth at each other's houses and that kind of thing. And I was quite fond of his wife. She was a real nice person. But—and of course, he has since died in recent years. But um—

WL: She's still living, is that right?

MA: Yeah. She worked at Duke [University] for a long—she had a doctorate. She's smart herself. And she worked at Duke after that, and I'm sure she's retired by now.

WL: What was the faculty alignment? He must have—I've heard that Dr. Graham had supporters in the faculty. Some of the faculty people that were drawn in and people like [Gregory] Ivy [art professor], [Dr. Marc] Friedlaender [English professor].

MA: Yeah. That's right. He had some. I would say it was a minority, I think. I don't know that I really know the alignment. Among other prominent people who had been on the board of trustees and things like that, there was also a division. Katherine Taylor was close to Mrs. Julius Cone [family founded Cone Mills, Greensboro], and she has Mrs. Julius Cone solidly behind her. On the other hand, Emily Preyer [class of 1939, honorary degree 1977] was just as much on the other side. And Emily said to Mrs. Cone one day, "You just must talk to different people than I do." And I had been real close to Mrs. Cone because she was very close to Miss Elliott. And when Miss Elliott became ill, and they brought her back here to the hospital and it was obvious that she wasn't going to get better, Mrs. Cone would call me and say, "Meet me at the hospital and let's talk about what can be done." And you know, I would go on out to her house, and we'd discuss it. And also, Mrs. Cone's granddaughter was my son's age and in kindergarten or nursery school with him. And so I felt that, you know—but you could tell a difference as this went along. Mrs. Cone was always very cordial and very nice, but you could tell [inaudible] And I don't really—I can't tell you, but you're right about Ivy and Friedlaender and some, but I can't tell you a full alignment because I really didn't know. There are some things that sometimes people didn't discuss, you know, when you have a division like that. A split like that.

WL: And of course, you might see it from a different perspective, as well.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. That is true.

WL: But he did have supporters on the board of trustees or at least the local people that were on board, such as—

MA: Or had coming in if they weren't right then. He had a few.

WL: Yeah. How about somebody like—let's see, was Virginia Lathrop [class of 1923, honorary degree 1966]—was she active at that time? She was on the board of trustees, wasn't she?

MA: Yeah. And see, she had been on the faculty—on the staff—here. I'm not sure about Virginia.

WL: But lived in Asheville, I guess, at that point.

MA: Yeah, she did. And I'm not sure about her—but even among students, there was division. The student government president might come in and talk with me and say, "You know, I just can't believe some of these things."

WL: It was all going around among the students?

MA: Yeah. And at alumnae meetings. An alumna from Georgia whom I had known very well as a student said, "You know, one person comes and tells us one thing, and somebody else comes and tells us another thing and we don't really know what to believe." It caused division all the way around. In fact, it took a long time to heal. Did a lot of damage.

WL: Yeah. That's what other people have told me. A long time for divisions to—

MA: Yeah. A very great deal.

WL: There's a big conflict, I gather, over the Alumnae Association, wasn't there? In the Office of Alumnae Affairs that involved Graham? Was that—

MA: Yeah. Has anybody talked to Betty [Brown] Jester [class of 1931, alumnae secretary]? Have you had anybody talk to her?

WL: Yes. Missy [Foy] talked to her and needs to talk to her again. I don't know how much she was willing to—you know, how much she told her about this.

MA: Well, I think Betty would be—Betty's health is not too good, but there's nothing wrong with her mind. I haven't seen her in a few months. I see her occasionally. And one day she said to me—. After all this happened, as far as Katherine Taylor and I were concerned, you know, I dismissed it. She never drove. She'd call and ask me to take her somewhere, and I would. And on a Sunday afternoon, when her illness had been getting worse, Eldercare came in, and I had on my answering machine an Eldercare message saying, "Please, please, please call immediately. We understand you know Katherine Taylor." And so when I got over there, Betty Jester and her husband drove up about then. He's died since. And she had just gotten violent with an eldercare attendant who was there. When I walked in, she seemed to know me. She sat down and talked and I said, "You know, everybody doesn't do to please us. And there are some things we just have to do." And she said, "Yeah, but it's hard." She just would get, you know, vicious. And I said, "In a little while, somebody else would come on duty." This was not a new person. She had been working six months for them. It was just something that hit her. And so Betty called me later and said, "Isn't it funny that they called the two people to come over there that she'd treated dirtiest?" Because she did. She went over and told Betty Jester that Dr. Graham wanted her out of that office.

WL: She was the one who delivered the news?

MA: Uh, huh. And so she, you know, got out. And—

WL: But those are names that still come back to her? I mean, you two still—

MA: Yeah. I see her. Our children were also friends. Her son and my son. They've all grown now and don't see each other anymore, but we were good friends. But Betty has been very, very kind to Katherine. She went by to see her as long as she could and that kind of thing. We all just dismissed it as a—now what do you call it—she really had a sort of a maternal attitude toward Ed Graham, like she was protecting him. And you know, "You poor little boy." That was—

WL: Sounds as if she went to extraordinary lengths to protect him.

MA: Yeah. She did. Well, in fact, when she let me go, her complaint was that I had said to somebody that she was more Graham than Graham. And they repeated it. And that was her only complaint. And in fact, she asked me to leave in July and then asked me to stay through college opened—through school opening that fall. [laughs]

WL: Well, I gather, by the time he resigned, I guess that things had gotten really very unpleasant.

MA: Oh, they had really gotten bad, bad.

WL: And tell me if I'm putting this together correctly. But this is what I've surmised. There was a basic conflict of personality and style that was at root the issue here. But the opponents of Dr. Graham were able to use other things as ammunition to force his resignation. Is that accurate?

MA: Yes. That's right. And of course, they had really deteriorated to where the situation was that bad, you know. It really was just bad.

WL: And that, in itself, is a reason to—What about the role of Chapel Hill and the Chapel Hill people you mentioned. Billy Carmichael. I guess at this point, President Gordon Gray has left, at least in the later stages, [William] "Bill" Friday—One of the first things Bill Friday does as president is to handle this situation here.

MA: That's right. That's right. And yeah, Bill Friday was there. Because what I did, myself, when this happened, the man who was superintendent of schools here in Greensboro was superintendent of the schools in Shelby where I grew up when I graduated from high school. The minute he found out this had happened he said, "Now you may have a job with the Greensboro City Schools and continue your retirement." And I said, "I appreciate it and I may need it, but it's a matter of principle. I think I'm going back to UNCG."

WL: That's when—you mean, when you left Katherine Taylor?

MA: Katherine Taylor's office, yeah. Mr. Ben Smith found out about it, and as I said, I had

known him when I was in high school. So I went over and talked with Dr. Pierson. He was the acting chancellor, and he had been dean of the graduate school at Chapel Hill was what his position had been. And everybody told me that Dr. Pierson was a person who would talk to you and give you no answer until later and not to expect anything. So, when I went to see him that afternoon, I told him that all I wanted was to tell him my side of the story to be sure he had the facts. When I left, he said, "I have talked with President Friday, and we have already agreed that for a person with your record of service, there's a place. It's a matter of deciding where." And so I felt like I had really scored one in that case. And I remember that it was President Friday because, you know, he used those words. But you're right that that's one of the first things Bill Friday had to handle, and, as far as I know, he handled it well. It was a ticklish situation.

WL: Yeah, and essentially, he had to, I suppose, go to Graham and give him the bad news and get him to resign gracefully.

MA: I assume so.

WL: Yeah. Whatley Pierson came in as a kind of a caretaker administration.

MA: Uh, huh. Interim chancellor. And he did it again, I guess, when Dr. Singletary left.

WL: Well, no. Blackwell. Gordon Blackwell.

MA: Blackwell, I guess. Blackwell, yeah. It was before Dr. [James] Ferguson. Yeah. He was an interim chancellor second time.

WL: How would you describe Whatley Pierson?

MA: Very, very, good administrator, a good person for that time—excellent for that time. He calmed things; he took things very calmly and handled them very calmly, and everybody respected him.

WL: What did he try to do in order to—how did he try to heal the—this open breach that occurred in the university and all the way along the line? What kinds of things did he try to do?

MA: He probably listened to everybody. I don't know that for a fact. But I would say he probably did, and his wife was a marvelous, marvelous help. The minute they moved into the chancellor's house, by that time I was in Physical Plant, and I went down there—I was sent down there to help her with something. I don't remember what, and she started immediately having these small groups of people over for coffee in the morning. It would be some faculty members, some staff members, you know, a mixture, and it would be a small group. And she did a great deal of that. And she was a wonderful diplomat. She had been—his wife had been ill for years, and he had been almost a recluse except for going to his classes. And this wife was a graduate student under him. And she was really very diplomatic and did a lot of that outside the faculty meetings and—what was the governing board back then?

WL: Board of Trustees?

MA: No. I'm talking about of the faculty. Advisory committee, I think it was called, to the chancellor. I remember Dr. [Walter Clinton] Jackson saying one time his biggest trouble with the advisory committee was making people understand they were elected to represent the whole place and not just their department. So—

WL: Tell me, since you've raised that question about the faculty, it's something I wanted to ask you earlier. Faculty, I gather, here had a kind of a tradition of strength and especially some of the women faculty.

MA: Oh, yeah. Very definitely. They were outstanding.

WL: And were used to participating in the administration. Since you had kind of a small administration, is that accurate to say? That they were used to—

MA: Yeah. Yeah. As I said, being just the two top officials, the advisory committee was a very strong group and different people were elected to it and that kind of thing. I think—see, Dr. [Julius] Foust, in the latter days of his administration, was not real well. He did not want to retire when he was forced to. I think he was seventy or more. But he did not really want to retire, and he had, for instance, things that should have been done in the chancellor's office were being done in our registrar's office or Miss Coit's office or—and one of the first things that Dr. Jackson had to do was gather back what really belonged there. It wasn't a bad, bad situation, but it was just that he—and his wife was his secretary, so this was also his second wife, and she had been his secretary for years. So that if he was out of the office, she was out of the office, and they would just close it is what I'm told. I was a student during Dr. Jackson's first year. Then as I said, I started working in June.

WL: Was Dr. Jackson a good chancellor? Was he an effective chancellor, do you think?

MA: Yes.

WL: No problems with the faculty?

MA: I don't think so. As far as I know. Of course, back then, I didn't know as much about it. [laughs] But I would say not. And he and Miss Elliott worked together beautifully. And he very much—they were a marvelous team. They balanced each other. She would sometimes jump, and he would say, "Let's go a little slowly. Think this over." And they were a marvelous team.

WL: So he got effective advice from her? Miss Elliott?

MA: Oh, yeah. Very definitely. She was much more than dean of women. And this was true until the administration grew.

WL: How would you describe Dr. Jackson? I mean, his personality, his—

MA: Very kind, very concerned, very judicious. Always open to students and faculty. I remember his—I did one step on the side of being a counselor in a dormitory. I was an assistant counselor in a dormitory. I wasn't the counselor.

WL: When was that?

MA: That's when I was still in Miss Coit's office. When I went in Miss Elliott's office and was going to work that closely with the counselors, we decided I shouldn't live on campus. See, I lived on campus before. And she and I, between us, decided I shouldn't do that anymore. So—but during the time that I lived on campus and was an assistant counselor, and it was a freshman hall—I was in Spencer before it was renovated. Because of the fire laws, we could not lock the doors. And so the counselor over the whole building lived in this end, and I lived mid-way down in the other part, and I was really, mainly, to be there at night. But we did a lot of dealing then with homesickness. And I remember his saying, "If anybody's homesick, I'd like to talk with them. There's never been anybody as homesick as I was when I left home. And I understand and I can sympathize." And I mean, he was that way about lots of things.

WL: And he took that kind of interest in students?

MA: Yeah. They stopped and chatted on campus and—I have the yearbooks from about '38 'til I retired, I guess. And a lot of the candid pictures in those would be Dr. Jackson stopped on campus talking to a whole group and that kind of thing.

WL: Let's go ahead to the chancellor. Since you had a lot of associations with chancellors, I'm kind of interested in going farther with this. The chancellor that followed Pierson would have been Gordon Blackwell. Didn't stay very long. Was here only four years, five years?

MA: He was, I would say, not as strong as some of the others, but no great big faults. And he went back to Furman where he had been before. And see, he stayed until he retired. And I don't know that he had a lot of faults. I don't think he was one of the strongest ones, but—

WL: I guess wasn't around long enough to have made a—

MA: No. Not to make a big—

WL: But his personality is—

MA: Was good. He had a good personality.

WL: Very pleasant person?

MA: Yeah.

WL: He's followed by Otis Singletary after another stint by—well—

MA: Yeah. Pierson was there. I think that was when he was—or was Pierson here at the end of Singletary's, before Dr. [James] Ferguson. I'm not real sure.

WL: No. He came after Blackwell, and, of course, Ferguson was brought in by Singletary so he served as acting chancellor and then became the regular—

MA: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. And people were very happy over there when that happened.

WL: Did Pierson's second stint—how did that go?

MA: It didn't last as long. I don't know that it made a big difference. He was, as I said, interim. Certainly he didn't do anything that damaged anything. And he was a good person for holding things together and keeping things going. He was a really fine person.

WL: How would you describe Otis Singletary?

MA: Gung-ho. [they laugh]

WL: I've met him. In fact, I've interviewed him so I can appreciate—

MA: Have you? Is that what you would say?

WL: Yeah. I'd agree with that.

MA: I don't know that, that I know that he made a great—I mean, I don't think he made any great big changes and I think he was effective, you know. You see, he wasn't here long. How long was he here? Not all that long, was he?

WL: No. He was not here that long. '62 to—only two or three years because of course, he was on leave, and then he really essentially left for Washington.

MA: So he wasn't here that long, but he was attractive and got along.

WL: Faculty like him? Everybody like him, you think?

MA: Seemed to. I don't know that he had any particular—anybody who did not. He was fine.

WL: Tell me about coeducation which comes in 1963 during Singletary's administration. This, from what I can gather about coeducation, it came—well, the college was presented with it, essentially. It wasn't something that involved a lot of discussion. It was something that you were told.

MA: That's right. And that a lot of people didn't like. And of course, you know, we'd had one year of coeducation in the Depression. Did you know that?

WL: Is that right?

MA: In '32, I think. Before I came here. They had allowed men to come as day students because of the Depression. It was not an outstanding group of people who came.

WL: Just one year, though?

MA: Uh, huh. Just one year. And they really were not outstanding students or outstanding people, and it was kind of a dismal year is what I gather. Now, I know a number of those people who attended then, since I've lived in Greensboro this long. And I do know that one man who has been an outstanding lawyer in Greensboro was in Miss Elliott's political science class. And this tells you a lot about her. She called him in one day, and she said, "Can you not afford to go anywhere else to school?" And he said, "Well, he had an uncle who would help him go to the University of Virginia." She said, "Do it. You don't want to be a lawyer educated at a women's college." And he was an outstanding student, and he has been an outstanding person.

WL: Who was that?

MA: [Charles] "Charlie" Hagan [Jr.]. And she—I've heard her tell that story, and I've heard him tell that story. And as I say, that tells you something about her. But it was not an outstanding group by any means, and so there are people—and of course, there are faculty members—who say that the level of teaching deteriorated because women are, as a whole, better students. Also, the appearance of students—that may be the times. It may not be because of the men students.

WL: Are you talking about the period in the '30s, or are you talking about after?

MA: I'm talking about after. The appearance of, the way they dress, the way they look, the way they do definitely is down and whether it—I don't know that it's caused by men students or just the times, but it all happened at the same time. So there are people who—and, of course, what Miss Elliott's thesis was, that because it was a woman's college, women took all the important roles as students, which was so much better training for them. And I will say that all over North Carolina and really all over the United States, we have very outstanding alumnae who have done very important things who were students then. We may have it now. I may just know about those. But that was definitely true during that time.

WL: It being a Physical Plant, did you have much to do—I mean, it must have a problem in terms of—

MA: I didn't deal with students as much. But that was the '60s and maybe that was what was good for me because I had worked so closely with students, and I had enjoyed it so thoroughly that along there where they started saying they would help with curriculum, they would do this, it would have been hard for me to take.

WL: To make that adjustment?

MA: And I didn't have any trouble with working in Physical Plant. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I am a little bit more mechanically minded than a lot of women and understood the workings of Physical Plant. I had one young man ask me one time, "What does a woman do as administrative assistant in Physical Plant?" And I said, "I don't nail and hammer or paint, but I know when it's done right." And I said, "After all, I'm the administrative assistant to the director," and, you know, I don't have to—but I really enjoyed it. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was not a difficult transition.

WL: Who were the directors of Physical Plant while you were there?

MA: I worked under only two. Mr. Gurley, N.H. Gurley, was until his retirement and then Hank Odom came after that, and he did not last long. He never learned his job. He was—in fact, he was dismissed about—I retired in July, and he was dismissed in October. He was here two or three years, but—and really, everybody, all the superintendents under him and everybody tried to help him, and he was just not a person who could be helped. Really never learned to do the job.

WL: Was Physical Plant, in terms of its administration, to whom was the Department of Physical Plant responsible?

MA: Business Affairs.

WL: That was always the case?

MA: Uh, huh. And see, Henry Ferguson retired as vice chancellor for Business Affairs the same day that I did. And he was—I guess Mr. Claude Teague was that person when I was here, and I worked for a number of years after I started working he was, and Mr. Ferguson succeeded him. So those are the only two people in that position while I was here.

WL: And Mr. Ferguson stayed on for twenty years or so, thereabouts, a little bit less maybe as I recall?

MA: Yeah, I think so. He had been in, I think, Chapel Hill. I believe he'd been in the administration in some capacity in Chapel Hill.

WL: Going back to the 1950s, one of the changes that came to this campus in 1956 was the admission of the first black student to campus. Do you have any specific recollection of how that occurred and what, if any, ramifications there were?

MA: I don't think we had problems.

WL: No problems?

MA: No. I think it went smoothly. Of course, we didn't have many, but—and I don't—now, see, for years I had charge of room assignments. People chose their room assignments in the

buildings, but anything—I assigned all the freshmen, and I did all the changes in the summer. And I don't remember big problems. There are certain students who preferred to room with—for instance, Jewish students preferred rooming with Jewish students. They were on the court. They did the same kind of things. I didn't necessarily assign them that way, but when they chose, they would choose that way. And the first black students did that, too. And I don't remember that we had any big problems.

WL: Didn't the first—as I understand it, the first couple of black students were actually put in separate wings of dormitories. Is that correct?

MA: They could have been. Yeah.

WL: As a way of—

MA: Yeah.

WL: Well, of course, there was great concern about the fallout that might come from this and the fear that, you know, all kinds of possibilities and—quite understandable, I think. They wanted—the administrators, as I understand it, were concerned that there not be a big incident so that the thing could work smoothly. Is that accurate?

MA: Yeah. See, my son was, I guess, student government president at Curry when the first black student was admitted. And they had just one.

WL: What year was that?

MA: He graduated—well, he may have come before that year. My son graduated there in '64. And see, Curry was very small. And I guess, it was Bill's senior year, the Greensboro Council of Christians and Jews used to give an award to one high school student. They now give it in every high school, but at that time they just gave one, and Bill got that award. And one of the things that Herbert Long, who was the principal, put in his letter of recommendation was that they felt that Curry had handled, you know, the acceptance of black students smoothly and that it had caused no problems in that high school. And I don't remember—I'm sure we were cautious. I'm sure we did things to try to prevent anything happening. But see, and then it was '59 that I left the dean's office. So—

WL: But you have no specific recollection of any big effort—

MA: Any big problems. See, we dealt with so many things like handicapped students. We'd have to do certain things for them and that kind of thing that anything that came along like that, I just used to thinking it was [inaudible]

WL: Yeah. And it was, I gather. You know, I think that probably—it struck me that one of the big traditions of this institution has always been civility and courtesy. And so in a situation like that, that diverts you if that kind of tradition comes out.

MA: Just like when I said the handicapped students. you'll find parents who are overly anxious about handicapped students . And I know this was one of the times, I guess, when Miss Elliott was away, and it was school opening and these parents brought a student, and they were just asking for all kinds of concessions that didn't seem important. I mean, I felt the student could handle it. And I went across the hall and asked Miss [Mereb] Mossman [sociology and anthropology faculty, dean of instruction, dean of the college, dean of faculty, vice chancellor for academic affairs]. I said, "Would you come over and talk with them?" And you know, she was a polio victim, walked with a cane. And I remember distinctly that she walked to the door with that gold headed cane, you know, standing just as erect, came in and talked with them. And she said, "Now your daughter and I understand that we must do the things we can ourselves." And she finally got those parents to go home. I thought they weren't going home. But as I said, whatever came up we seemed to handle it. And that's the way I remember about the black students.

WL: Since you mentioned Mereb Mossman, I'd like to ask you about her. She, of course, got her start in the administration under Graham.

MA: I know it. I know it. But she was one of his opponents.

WL: Oh, she was?

MA: Yeah.

WL: I've had some trouble getting a reading on where she stood on that.

MA: Well, she would never say so. You know, because she did. She was put into that position by him, and that's true. But she also was, you know, one that knew that something had to be done. And I'm sure that she maybe had a party. But she was just not—that was a real—you know, she was a very quiet kind of person. And being a sociologist, you know—and, for instance, she was one of the people extremely concerned when I left Katherine Taylor's office and let me know that in no uncertain terms. And said that whatever she could do, she would like to do, you know, if anything. But she—yes—she was one—and she was a big help then to the Piersons, you know people who came in after that

WL: Now you made the move from Katherine Taylor's office in 1950—

MA: I left her office in '59, I think.

WL: '59. Okay. I just wanted to make sure I had the date right.

MA: Yeah. I think it's '59. Mereb Mossman was an effective administrator, do you think? Was she—how would you evaluate her as an administrator?

MA: Good. Not really outstanding. Good, though. I think most people she handled quite well. Because of her sort of calm way, there were people who accused her of fence riding. Of not taking a stand sometimes, but I think mainly I would say yes.

WL: I've heard from several people that women faculty felt that she favored men faculty and disadvantaged women faculty.

MA: Oh, really?

WL: Yeah.

MA: Well, I don't—I hadn't—

WL: Not something you'd run into, I guess.

MA: I really was not aware of that. I know that we had one or two—well, the dean of the School of Home Economics was a fiery little person, and she just got furious and stamped her foot. And, you know, that kind of thing and I'm sure she probably felt that way that she favored men. I'm not sure, though, whether that was justified or not.

WL: The other thing I heard about her is that she was a—what today you might be called a "micromanager." She liked to have her hand on everything, including the number of chairs that are around each classroom.

MA: Yeah, she probably did. She probably did.

WL: Including controlling the motor pool and that kind of thing?

MA: Yeah, because see we handled the motor pool but under her direction.

WL: Back to the chancellors. Jim Ferguson you've mentioned a little bit. Say something more about Jim Ferguson, someone that you were associated with over the years.

MA: Well, he was an extremely nice person. I would say he was a good administrator. He didn't cause problems and I assume he must have handled them all right. You know, there are always problems.

WL: Yeah.

MA: Is that the reaction you've gotten?

WL: Yeah. Yeah. Well, of course, I knew—

[Begin Side B]

WL: She's volunteering over there also. How would you—following coeducation, it's my impression that the new University of North Carolina at Greensboro, this new title that comes in 1963 and coeducation brought on a kind of period in which the—what was

Woman's College lost its bearings a bit, maybe. Drifted a little bit. Is that true?

MA: Yeah. It lost its prestige as an outstanding woman's college.

WL: It no longer had a monopoly over the brightest young women in the state.

MA: Yeah. The brightest and the best and, you know, the best educated and outstanding faculty and all of that which they'd always enjoyed, I assume.

WL: Yeah.

MA: And I think that that waned a little bit there. I really do.

WL: And you witnessed that, do you think, while you were at the university, say in the '60s and '70s?

MA: Yeah. Of course, I wasn't as closely tied to that, you see, after I went to Physical Plant.

WL: Right. Yeah.

MA: So I cannot say that I was as aware. But that would be the feeling I had.

WL: What about the Physical Plant of the University? How did it do? Did it decline, do you think, or did it improve?

MA: I don't think it declined. It probably improved and the thing, while I was there, that I regretted most was that every time you get budget cuts, Physical Plant caught them first.

WL: Is that right?

MA: Really. Supplies, jobs and everything. And see, you can't—you've got to keep the plant going. But that did not ever seem to be first, you know. It was first for cuts, but it was not first to be maintained. We really struggled over a—probably struggling now.

WL: Yeah. Well, in that particular area. Well, one person told me that his theory, his reading of these years while Jim Ferguson was chancellor, was that for a variety of reasons, Jim Ferguson was a faculty person and had faced a period of limited resources, placed his priority in faculty and allowed, essentially, was faced with an unpleasant choice that allowed support and resources for facilities to decline.

MA: Yeah, that's true. I didn't know whether it was all his fault.

WL: No.

MA: Whether it was just what happened, but that's definitely true. That's what I'm saying that you know, you suffered. I mean, the facilities suffered. And you let things deteriorate, and

then it's so much harder to bring them back than to keep them all the time. And Mr. Gurley was a good Physical Plant director. He was knowledgeable, and he was good to work with. But when you cut funds, you know, you just—you don't have what it takes.

WL: Yeah. Did the look of the campus change, do you think, radically over the last twenty years that you were here? Say from 1960 to 1980? Did the campus undergo a major change physically?

MA: I don't think so. You know, we got [Charles] "Charlie" Bell as the landscape person in there, and he was talented and knowledgeable and interesting. And, in as far as he could with the money available, I think he did a good job. And some things, yeah, needed upkeep, but it just wasn't available. But not badly, I don't think.

WL: Yeah. Well, how was Physical Plant organized? Did you—in terms of the people that you hire? Do you have regular staff and then if you needed more people to work, you would hire them? Is that right?

MA: In the summer, we had painters and yard people that were temporary. In the winter months, we had mainly a permanent staff. And see, that's so diversified with the steam plants under it. The police department was then. It's not now, but it was then. And the painters and the carpenters and the housekeeping staff. See, that's a lot of people. And just like I said about owning the garage. Back then we had a lot of vehicles, and we were responsible for the upkeep of them. So it was a large—and still is—a large department. And then we had a lot of temporary painters in the summer. We tried to paint the dorms that needed it in the summertime. And then we had extra yard people, the grounds people, too.

WL: Yeah. And if there were cuts, these were the people that would be affected?

MA: Yes.

WL: That's usually the case. Temporary people—

MA: Yeah. Yeah. And then—well, they were. And then, see though, as they cut budget, a lot of jobs were just frozen. Unless you could prove that you absolutely couldn't do without them, you just lost the position for a while.

WL: I see. Yeah. You mentioned the police department. Twenty-five years ago there must not have been a very big police department here, was there? What was it comprised of? One or two people?

MA: No. A few more than that. Four or five. Actually, like when I was in school, I think there was one—two, maybe. No more than that. I can remember a long time ago when, if a girl got sick in the residence halls, the police chief was a great, big, strong man—and he went up there and just carried her on his shoulder to the infirmary. You know, they did all that was done—whatever was needed. And that—I doubt if—I guess there were two or three people then. But it gradually grew to, I guess, six or eight.

WL: I see. Well, that about covers it. Is there anything else we need to talk about, do you think?

MA: Well, I don't think of anything else.

WL: Well, I appreciate you having done it.

MA: Well, I've enjoyed it. Glad to do it.

[End of Interview]