

UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: George W. Hamer

INTERVIEWER: Linda Danford

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LD: Can you tell me when you came to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] and in what capacity?

GH: I came to the university in June of 1962, and I came as director of development for the university. And that assignment consisted of public relations work, fundraising, alumni work and the news bureau.

LD: And who hired you? What was the administration at that time?

GH: Chancellor Otis Singletary was there at the time. I was with—[clock chimes] Do you want to mark that out?

LD: We can just wait a second.

GH: At the time, I was working for Cone Mills Corporation [textile manufacturer based in Greensboro, North Carolina, known as world's largest producer of denim]. I was director of personnel for Cone Mills. And Chancellor Singletary called me and asked me if I wouldn't have lunch with him at the Rotary Club. And I, of course, told him I would be glad to go with him. So after the Rotary Club meeting, we went to his office and he asked me if I would be interested in coming out to UNCG to start a development program for the university. And I told him that I had a good job. I didn't know that I would be interested in it, but I'd be glad to hear more about it. So he told me briefly what the work would consist of. And after forty five minutes or an hour, we separated and I went back to my work, and I told him I would get in touch with him later. So in a day or two he called me and said that President [of the North Carolina University System William] Friday was going to be over here, and he wanted to know if I wouldn't come out and meet with the two of them about this development job. And I told him I would be glad to come out. So we had a meeting of about an hour, I guess it was. They offered me the job and told me again what the work would consist of.

And so after I left them, my wife and I talked about it, and I felt it would be a real challenge to start a new program. And on that basis and because I thought it would be interesting to work with the university and to be able to meet the people associated with the university and have some association with the students, my wife and I decided that I would take the job. So I went to work. It was about June 1st. It may have been the last few days of May, but it was around June 1st of '62 that I went out there and started work.

LD: So this was a position that was created for you? You were the first—?

GH: They never had had a director of development. That's correct. Mr. Charlie Phillips had been out there, and he had previously done public relations work, and he was closely connected with the radio station, and with Girls State [summer citizenship and leadership programs sponsored by the American Legion], and he traveled about over the state meeting with groups, talking to them about WC [Woman's College of the University of North Carolina] at that time. And that was the closest they had come to having a director of development. But when I went out there, it was as the first director of development, and my job was to get the department organized and going.

LD: And how long did you hold this position?

GH: I retired in '74—about twelve and a half years I was out there. During that first summer of 1962, I went to the University of Pittsburgh [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania] for a short course in development work. I had had experience in fields related to development work because I was a Boy Scout executive for—I think it was eleven to twelve years—and that job consisted of raising money. One of the jobs that was to raise money, so I had had that experience. And public relations, I expect, to the Boy Scout organization helped also. And then my work at Cone Mills was as personnel director, so working with people was closely associated with development work also. But the short course at the University of Pittsburgh helped considerably.

LD: Now were you expected to raise money primarily from the alumni or were there other areas?

GH: Other areas. All areas. All the money coming in that we could raise for the university. The alumni were a given. The Weatherspoon Gallery Association, the Friends of the Library, the Home Economics Foundation and the Friends of the Theater and Drama. And then while I was out there, we organized the Musical Arts Guild to raise money for the School of Music. So it was to raise money for all aspects of the university activity. But our goals to start with were related to the alumni. We felt that in order to have any support at all from people other than the alumni, we had to have the support of the alumni. So our first objective was to get acquainted with the alumni and get them interested in contributing to the university. We did not, however, want to use any high pressure methods. We went about it very low key and started off slowly. And before I went out there, the alumni had a membership drive. They tried to get alumni to contribute in order to receive the *Alumni Magazine*. The year before I went out there, I think that total amount raised in that way was about thirteen thousand dollars, in that neighborhood, a little less, a little more. I don't know exactly.

But we wanted to concentrate on the annual giving program, so we worked out an arrangement. Chancellor Singletary, with his help, got the alumni to agree to do away with their membership campaign and concentrate just on the annual giving. And in doing that, we agreed to contribute money to—out of the annual giving—to alumni scholarships. They had been out of this thirteen thousand dollars or more that they received, providing student scholarships. So we agreed to take those over. We also agreed to take over the publication of the *Alumni Magazine* out of annual giving funds. And supporting some of the positions in the alumni office; we agreed to that.

LD: Some of the clerical positions?

GH: Yes. And the first year on annual giving, we raised about thirty-five thousand dollars. And then it started growing from there. Each year it increased.

LD: Do you remember what it was when you left?

GH: When I left? Something over a hundred thousand a year. And that first year—I don't know if I can get all of this in sequence or not, but—

LD: That's all right.

GH: Let's talk about another objective other than getting the backing and support of the alumni, which we worked on very enthusiastically. We felt a great need for scholarships. There were very few scholarships. So we interested individuals in setting up scholarships, and companies like Jefferson [-Pilot Life Insurance Company, Greensboro, North Carolina] set up scholarships.

But one of the things that I'm most proud of, I guess, is the fact that we were able to get the Reynolds Scholarships. Just before I went out there, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation [Winston-Salem, North Carolina, formed by tobacco magnate R.J. Reynolds's children in honor of sibling, Zachary Smith Reynolds] had turned down a request from the university for assistance in building the what we at that time we called the arts center, the Taylor Theater and the radio station and the Music Building, that area in there. They had applied to the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for money to assist with building the Taylor Theatre and the radio station building. And they were turned down by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. So Chancellor Singletary and I talked at great length about what we could do in regard to the Reynolds Foundation request, and we both agreed that since scholarships was one of our major needs for the students to approach them on the basis of providing some scholarships. And Chancellor Singletary and I got together and worked up a letter that was sent to Dick Reynolds, who at that time was head of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, president of it. He was in Switzerland at the time, so we found out from the main office over in Winston, the R.J. Reynolds' office, his address, and we sent the letter to him requesting scholarships in his mother's name because she had been a student out there, UNCG, his mother. And it wasn't but a few days after that that we had a—Chancellor Singletary had a long-distance call from Dick Reynolds, and he said he was very much interested in the letter and thought it was a good idea, and that he would like for the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation to set up eleven scholarships, one for each of the congressional districts in the state and that he would provide the money for it out of the foundation. Well, those scholarships are not as extensive as the Morehead [awarded by John Motley Morehead Foundation (Chapel Hill, North Carolina) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill] ones, but they do provide a good basic fund for the students. And we went to work immediately with some of the folks over at Reynolds. For instance, one of Mr. Reynolds' nephews, Zach Smith, worked closely with us on the final details of the program. And we got it set up for students to come in the next year. And we set up a committee, statewide committee, to select these students, and it's been going ever since. I think they give around

seventy-five thousand a year, maybe a little bit more. I'm not sure. At least seventy-five thousand a year for scholarships. So we thought that was a good breakthrough for the scholarship program.

LD: And it's still eleven? Still eleven from the eleven congressional districts?

GH: As far as I know, it's still eleven—one from each congressional district.

LD: Did you do a lot of traveling to meet with alumni?

GH: Yes. You see, most of my work was off campus. I didn't have a lot of contact with students. My contacts were with businesses and with foundations and with the alumni. That first year in organizing annual giving I think it was about eight local areas that I visited and set up local organizations to do the soliciting, personal soliciting, in about eight areas. And then each year, we kept adding to that until we got some even out of state, like Atlanta, [Georgia] and Florida and New Orleans, [Louisiana] and New York and various places where we hadn't—. [clock chimes]

Yes, I traveled from one end of the state to the other meeting with alumni groups. I got to meet hundreds of them, and it was very interesting and inspirational to see their response. And my wife went with me most of the time because our two daughters, both of whom went to UNCG [Angela Hamer Dillard, Class of 1953, did not graduate. Janet Hamer, Class of 1964, MFA 1967]—the younger one has two degrees from out there. Well, the younger one was a junior when I went out, so we had no children at home, so Janet went with me just about everywhere I went traveling and meeting with the alumni. She got a lot of pleasure out of meeting the alumni also. It's very interesting. By 1969, we won the national award for—got first place among the colleges and universities in our group for our annual giving program. And we got two other awards. One was a second place and one was third place, but I think it was '69 that we got first place in the whole country on our giving program.

LD: Do you find the alumni of WC and UNCG very loyal?

GH: Yes. Yes, very much so. Of course, we went through that period, the changeover from a women's school to a coeducational school, and there was right much resistance to making the change. In '60, when was it—about '62 or '63, somewhere along there—that the change was made. I believe it was '64 that it was finally made The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, but it was coeducational back in '63 or somewhere along in there. I'm not sure about the years.

LD: Was that your first big public relations challenge?

GH: Yes. And then we had all the student unrest during the '60s, but I was not too involved in that because I was away from campus a lot. But Chancellor [James S.] Ferguson underwent a lot of trial and tribulation during that period. He handled it beautifully, I think.

LD: What were some of his more serious crises?

GH: Well, they had a strike at the mess hall, and it was a carryover from a strike at A&T [North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, Greensboro, North Carolina]. And they were striking and appeared at his house during the night and woke him up for one thing and caused a disturbance. I don't know the details to that. Maybe I better not try to enumerate them because I'm not familiar enough with them at this point. It's been fifteen—I've been retired now fifteen years, so things get a little cloudy.

LD: Did alumni ask you lots of questions about what was going on on campus when you—?

GH: Oh, yes. And I would usually carry some projector and some color slides to show them some of the buildings and changes that were taking place on campus. But they were all very much interested in what was going on on campus.

Then in '60, 1965, Mrs. [Thomas] Jefferson Penn [Margaret Beatrice Schoellkopf Penn, known as Betsy] died, and she had in her will provided that Chinqua-Penn Plantation [their English manor home near Reidsville, North Carolina] would go to the [North Carolina] Consolidated University [System] when she died. [Ed. note: Jefferson Penn was owner of Penn Tobacco Company.] She had previously made that provision that she would live there until she died, and then it would become the property of the university. So when she died in '65, President Friday assigned our campus the Chinqua-Penn house and the grounds immediately around the house, about thirty acres. And NC State [North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina] got the rest of the properties, seven or eight hundred acres of land. And when that was done, Chancellor Singletary said he wanted the development department to be responsible for the house and the grounds and so forth. So I took that on in addition to the development work that I had. And that took a lot of time and effort, but that was enjoyable also.

LD: So you were in charge of arranging personnel there and the conducting of tours?

GH: Well, I had overall supervision of the whole thing. During that first—in February, I believe Mrs. Penn died in February of '65. Shortly thereafter, we started looking for a director to move out there and take charge of it and operate it, and we interviewed several people, and finally got a director from the museum at Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut]. He was retiring—a Mr. Rogers, who said he would come down and take the job. So he and his wife came down at the appointed time and moved into the big house. Shortly thereafter he got sick and was in bed sick for about a week, and then at the end of that time I got a telephone call from her, from over at Chinqua-Penn, and they said that they decided they wouldn't take the job—that they figured it was going to be a little too much for them.

So they pulled out, and then Chancellor Singletary and Mr. Ferguson, Henry Ferguson [business manager], and I and Dean [Mereb] Mossman [sociology and anthropology faculty, dean of instruction, dean of the college, dean of faculty, vice chancellor for academic affairs] went over to President Friday's office to talk about it.

Cut it off now. I believe I'll get a drink of water.

[recording paused]

GH: We went to Friday's office and told him what had happened and what had gone on and what we tried to do—that we had interviewed several people and this one that took the job turned it down. And he said, "Well, George, I guess you're going to have to do it." And I said, "Oh, no. Not me." He said, "Yes. I think that would be the best plan." So we went about planning to set it up for tours, doing a lot of—making a lot of changes—had to put a fence around the property because people were coming in causing trouble. And that was days and nights and weekends of work to get it set up for tours. But we had—we got it ready; I think it was about April of '66 that we had it ready to open it for tours. And the governor came over and we had a dinner, a luncheon. The governor was there and a member of the Penn family and the chancellor, Miss Mossman, and that was the opening affair for the big house. And it opened two days later for tours and has been going ever since. Of course, it's been turned over to NC State now.

LD: The house has been?

GH: Yes.

LD: Oh, I didn't know that. I know several years ago there was discussion that they weren't going to be able to keep it going and they were going to sell it, and then I didn't hear anything more about it. I didn't know it had been transferred to NC State.

GH: Yes. NC State runs it now. They operated it—they've been operating it for I expect three years, something like that.

LD: Was it a revenue-producing operation ever?

GH: No. No. It brought in right much money, but never enough to keep it going on its own revenue.

LD: And she did not leave money for the operation?

GH: Yes. She left—I think it was in the neighborhood of seven hundred thousand dollars in trust. But a lot of that was used up by NC State. They had the rest of the place, you see. And a big herd of cattle—they used considerable amount of it, and we used some of it also. We had to put up a fence around the place; that was expensive. And that gave out after a few years.

LD: So it was something of a drain of the university?

GH: Yes. It had to come out of the university's budget, the remainder of it.

LD: That's unfortunate for such a lovely house to have been a liability.

GH: It is a beautiful place. There're some real nice pieces out there—Oriental pieces that are very valuable, very valuable.

LD: Did the university also insure it?

GH: Insure it? Yes, we had to insure the contents of the building. The state insures it—is self-insured on its buildings, but the contents we had insured.

LD: Which must have been expensive also?

GH: What?

LD: It must have been expensive also to insure the contents.

GH: Yes. The insurance premium was terrific each year.

LD: What was the effect of coeducation on annual giving to the college?

GH: The effect of what?

LD: Going coed. Becoming coeducational.

GH: Over the long course, I don't think it hurt. I think maybe it helped. The men, of course, while I was out there had not gotten to the place where they were big contributors as far as that goes. But I think over time that it will mean considerable to the university to have both men and women. It was—it's a little difficult to prevail upon a woman to give a big amount, unless she doesn't have any obligations at home or unless she has a lot backed up. I think it's—men have access to—have had access to more money and have been more willing to contribute big amounts like at Chapel Hill, for instance, where they've really raised a lot of money down there. But we weren't too far behind them back in '60, the early '60s. But they have—they got out of bounds as far as we were concerned pretty soon after that.

LD: What about athletics? Do you think that the current movement toward a more active athletic program is going to help the annual giving? Isn't that sort of what generates it in places like Chapel Hill?

GH: I think as long as they stay with an athletic program such as they have now and not try to get into football.

LD: I don't think there are any plans for football.

GH: What?

LD: I don't think there are any plans for football.

GH: No, I don't think so either. There's too much competition with Wake Forest [University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina] and Duke [University, Durham, North Carolina] and State and Carolina with big football teams; we don't have a chance, I don't think. But if we can

sort of stay in the minor sports area, I think there's a real opportunity there for UNCG.

LD: The university gets quite a bit of good publicity from the soccer team.

GH: Yes. Yes. I noticed in the morning paper that one of them made All-America again.

LD: Jason Hobbs. He was a fabulous player.

GH: This is the second year he's on it, I believe. Yes, that's a good program evidently. I'm glad to see that they're going to have a stadium for it also.

LD: Yes. The groundbreaking was about a week ago for the new stadium. What about the administrative transition from Singletary to Ferguson? How did that affect your office, and how do you see that?

GH: Well, it was very smooth, and it didn't cause any big change in our program at all. Both men were wonderful to work with, both Singletary and Ferguson. I enjoyed working with both of them. We had a fine relationship, and they were cooperative and anxious to see the development program move along. It wasn't until about— let's see, I guess it was 1971 or '72, something like that, that they made the development director the vice chancellor for development. They made the position a vice chancellorship. So that was a right good while coming, but—

LD: What was George Ferguson like? [Ed. note: Chancellor James Ferguson]

GH: Ferguson? Well, he was a very calm, easygoing person—very pleasant, affable and a real pleasure to work with. He was not loud and bombastic. He moved along very quietly, got his job done, got his points over. He knew what he wanted to do and went about it in a businesslike way. He and Chancellor Singletary were quite different, I think, in many respects, but, basically, they were both very sound operators.

LD: What about Mereb Mossman?

GH: Oh, she was a wonderful person to work with. She was very much interested in Chinqua-Penn. She and Mrs. Penn were good friends, and it may have been through Miss Mossman or because of Miss Mossman that Mrs. Penn left the place to the university. I don't know if that's a fact, but, anyway, she was out there right much; Miss Mossman was, before Mrs. Penn made the gift to the university. And she was always interested in what was going on out there and how we were progressing and what was being done. She was another person who was a wonderful person to work with. I hated to hear about her death recently.

LD: Just recently. You must have—she must have retired about the same time you did.

GH: No, she stayed on. She may have retired shortly after I did from her position as vice chancellor of academic affairs, but she stayed on and taught a few years after she retired. In fact, I stayed on from '74, 1974, when I retired as vice chancellor of development. I stayed

on as director of Chinqua-Penn until '81, until October of '81. So I had seven more years after I retired from my regular position.

LD: So Chinqua-Penn was a large part of your job and your career at UNCG?

GH: Before I retired? It was a part-time job after '74.

LD: But all things taken together?

GH: Well, no, it wasn't the major part. There was too much else going on. For instance, another thing that happened during my administration that I was proud of, and that was the Excellence Fund was started. And we raised the first million dollars before I retired. It was started about 1970, '71, somewhere along there. And the first million dollars was raised before I left in '74.

LD: Was that money raised from industry or from alumni?

GH: Foundations, industry, individuals, companies. Corporations gave a lot of the money. Jefferson, Burlington [Industries], NCNB [North Carolina National Bank] and various other corporations and foundations gave money to it.

LD: And it was for the purpose of faculty development? Is that correct?

GH: Well, it was used for several purposes. It set up Excellence Fund Professorships and had research scholarships for graduate students and had money for special programs that would enrich the university. But it has gotten much larger now, I understand, than what we started out with. And they have another name for it, I believe, now. We called it the Excellence Fund because we felt that the money we were raising would be used to enrich the total program of the university.

LD: What about the news bureau? What kind of things did the news bureau handle?

GH: Well, all of the formal releases from the university went from the news bureau. We had an active relationship with the local newspaper. And we cooperated with them on covering events out there. Sometimes they would send reporters, and sometimes we would use our own staff to cover the events. And we had our own photographer, and sometimes his photographs were used and sometimes theirs. And then we sent news releases to other papers throughout the state also. We have an extensive mailing list of newspapers—dailies, bi-weeklies, weeklies—that we sent releases to.

LD: Do you feel that the local newspapers gave UNCG adequate coverage?

GH: Well, I thought they were very cooperative. Of course, they have a—we realize that maybe we were going to ask more than we got, and that's to be expected because they've got GC [Greensboro College], Guilford College, A&T, Bennett [College], Elon [University], so many schools around that they have to give space to all of them. They can't just allocate

space to UNCG and overlook these other schools, so they have to spread it out, and we realize that. But they were, we thought, very cooperative, very helpful.

LD: Were there any scandals or times it strained your—?

GH: No, I don't think so, other than the student disturbances that we had during that period, but—

LD: They don't sound like they were terribly serious.

GH: Chancellor Ferguson seemed to handle them pretty well, I thought.

LD: Did you enjoy your time at UNCG?

GH: My retirement?

LD: Did you enjoy your time working there?

GH: Oh, yes, very much. Yes. I got to meet a lot of people out there that I never would have met otherwise and made a lot of friends, a lot of faculty people. Not too many students because I didn't have contact with them.

But one interesting event that took place while I was out there—at Commencement, Art Buchwald [American humorist, *Washington Post* columnist, won Pulitzer Prize for Outstanding Commentary] was scheduled to make the Commencement address, and he was coming in on Saturday, and Commencement, of course, is on Sunday. And Chancellor Ferguson and his wife—one of their daughters had a daughter that was graduating at Grimsley [High School, Greensboro, North Carolina] that Saturday night. So they asked the two of us, my wife and me, to entertain Art Buchwald that night. So we set up a dinner out at Chinqua-Penn for him. And we had about twelve or fourteen people at that big dinner table in the dining room. And we went in, had drinks beforehand, and then went in for the dinner and sat down. And as usual he had a cigar in his mouth or holding it, one or the other. He sat down in the dining room and looked around and said, "I wonder what the peons are doing tonight?" [laughs]

LD: Do you remember what year that was? [Ed. note: Buchwald's commencement address was in 1967.]

GH: Let me see. No, I don't know. I don't know what, which one it was. It was along the early '70s, I'd say, though.

LD: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record before I wrap this up? Anything you'd like to add?

GH: Well, it would be appropriate to say that I thoroughly enjoyed my work out there at the university—that I enjoyed the relationship with the faculty, the administrators and the students and the alumni. The alumni were very loyal and helpful. They scheduled meetings all around over the country for me and got the folks together for the meetings for me to talk

to and helped in raising the money, the annual giving money. I think three of the highlights would be that setting up the Reynolds Scholarships, bringing about a desired relationship with the alumni and setting up the Excellence Fund for the university were some of the highlights.

LD: Well, those are certainly things to be proud of.

GH: That I'm proud of and appreciate it.

LD: Well, thank you very much.

GH: You're welcome. I hope that will help some.

[End of Interview]