

DAVID ANDERSON

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Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is July 17th of the year 2000. I'm Jeff Charnley interviewing Dr. David Anderson for the Michigan State University Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial to be commemorated in the year 2005.

Dr. Anderson, you see, we're tape-recording this today. Do you give us permission to record this interview?

Anderson: Yes.

Charnley: Let's start first with your education and professional background. Where did you go to school?

Anderson: Well, that becomes a little complicated and embarrassing, because as an undergraduate I went to five different schools on the G.I. Bill. They revised that for the Korean War. You can only transfer once. But whenever I was bored someplace, I went someplace else, including going to Mexico for spring break for two weeks, and I stayed eight months. Rather interesting. But then I wound up at Bowling Green State in Ohio, and I found two things there that captured my interest. One was American literature, taught by Emerson Shuck [phonetic], and the one was the young woman who became my wife. So I finished at Bowling Green. I stayed there about a year and a half, I think, and stayed there for my M.A., was recalled back into the Army for the Korean War, got out in the fall of 1953.

I had originally intended when I got out, they promised me that I would be out by the first of September. I was not by the first of September, but I had had an assistantship lined up at Ohio State, was going to work on my Ph.D. I got out the second week in October instead, which was too late. So I began job hunting, and I had three job offers, one at Auburn, Alabama, for \$1,800 a year, one at the University of Maine for \$2,400 a

year, and one at General Motors Institute in Flint for \$4,800 a year, which was a lot of money then. In fact, when I took the job there, all my friends wanted jobs there, too, because it was more money than they were making.

But, anyway, took the job at Flint, and the following spring I began taking courses over here for my Ph.D., largely because I discovered that Russell Nye was a resident not only of the state of Michigan, but a faculty member of Michigan State University.

Charnley: And you were familiar with his work.

Anderson: Oh, yes. Emerson Shuck and Russ Nye were classmates at Wisconsin working for their Ph.D.s, working under Harry Hayden Clark. Shuck told me for years Russ Nye was the best American lit man in the country. Russ Nye began telling me that Emerson Shuck was the American lit man in the country. So I had the best of both possible worlds. Then Russ always referred to me as Harry Hayden Clark's grandson.

Charnley: An intellectual family tree.

Anderson: Anyway, I drove back and forth to Flint and took courses part-time here for about a year and a half, and then I came over full-time in the spring of 1956 on a leave of absence from General Motors Institute. Of course, I had never had any intention of going back.

I drove back and forth taking a full load, '56, '57, and then moved over here from Flint, quit my job in Flint, moved over here in the summer of '56, and took a job in what was then communication skills, which became later the Department of American Thought and Language. Again, I had no intention of staying. Here some forty-four or forty-three years later, I'm still here, for two reasons. One, of course, is that I've enjoyed myself tremendously here, and the other is that the place has always been pretty good to me. I enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, colleagueship with a number of very good people. During the years, every once in a while I get the bug to move on, mention it to Russ Nye and Russ would always say, "Remember, Dave, every place is bad." [Laughter] Of course, I'd say, "Well, what's the point?"

Charnley: That issue of loyalty or whatever you want to call it, it seems to be a paramount theme coming through a lot of these interviews, where people came to Michigan State with the idea of just staying a few years and ended up--

Anderson: Yes, right, I know lots of them. Of course, again, I enjoyed my Ph.D. program. It was A-1, first rate, better than you could get almost any place in the country. Russ was my chairman. There were some very, very good people in English at that time. Jim Rust, Harry R. Hoppe, a whole list. Name all the names. It was a first-rate department of first-rate people, and so I enjoyed myself. I always remember my final oral, defending my dissertation. Thirty-six members of the faculty came, and one of them even took pictures. Jim Rust took pictures.

Charnley: What was the subject of your dissertation?

Anderson: It was on Sherwood Anderson. It was a full critical study, full critical biographical study of Sherwood Anderson's work. It's since been published. Of course, I've maintained my interest in Sherwood Anderson from that day to this. In fact, I've done four more books on him. Of course, one of the key elements in founding the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature here in 1971 was, of course, my interest in Sherwood Anderson and in Midwestern writers generally. I've done books on Abraham Lincoln and Lewis Brownfield and Bran Whitlock and a number of others, all of them Midwestern. One book, incidentally, on Woodrow Wilson, who was almost a Midwesterner. Well, literally. His father and mother married in Pennsylvania, and he was a seminary graduate, and some of his relatives took jobs in the Columbus, Ohio area. His father, instead of taking a job in Ohio as he could have, took a job in Sutton, Virginia, and there, of course, is where Woodrow was born. Then, of course, his father moved to Augusta, Georgia, and he developed his Southern identity. But he's really a Midwesterner at heart. Both of his grandfathers lived in the Midwest.

Charnley: I had intended later to ask you about the SSML, but seeing as how you brought it up already, let's go ahead and talk a little bit about that. What motivated you to be the driving force behind the establishing of this new scholarly society?

Anderson: Well, I'd always been interested, as I said, in the whole range of Midwestern writers, Anderson, Dreiser, Lewis, many, many others. As I said, I did books on a number of them. But what struck me was that the Midwest MLA program at St. Louis in 1969, I was on the Modern American Literature Program, Alexander Kern [phonetic] from Iowa was on the program and Sanford Marovitz [phonetic] from Kent State was also on the program. Kern gave a paper on Dreiser. Marovitz gave a paper on F. Scott Fitzgerald, and I gave a paper on Sherwood Anderson.

For no reason except chance, I suppose, my paper was last. So I sat there listening to these papers and seeing how they were tying in with things that I was going to talk about in mine, so it struck me that there's something here that we should look at. I wanted to call it "Midwesternness" or something of the sort.

So I suggested to the executive secretary of Midwest MLA that we have a program that would explore this, see if there is anything to it, and he said, "Well, I don't think anybody would come." So I said, "Well, we'll see."

I wrote to a number of friends, all of whom had Midwestern backgrounds of one kind or another, including Russ Nye and Emerson Shuck and others, and suggested that we get together and talk about this. So the response was very enthusiastic, so we started calling ourselves the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

We had our first meeting in the fall of 1971. We've met every year since. That first meeting had a one-day program. We had about sixteen people here, I think. We had a lot of fun, enjoyed talking about we like to talk about, and decided to continue it. So thirty years later it's still active.

Charnley: How many members now?

Anderson: Well, it's somewhere between four and five hundred. I'm not sure exactly, but we always have a turnout of at least a hundred at the annual conference. We also sponsor programs at Modern Language Association, Midwest MLA, Pop Culture, and the American Literature Association. Of course, they're all well attended, contrary to that executive secretary, Sherman Paul, who said that nobody would come. I delighted in needling with him about that for years afterwards.

Charnley: When did you start the journal?

Anderson: The newsletter started in 1971. The *Midwestern Miscellany*, I think, started in '73, and *Mid-America* started in '74. They're still going strong.

Charnley: What motivated you to found the new journal? Was there an outlet or were you getting opposition from publishers?

Anderson: Well, there was a good deal of interest in it from almost everybody except librarians. I remember Jim West, who was then head of the Newberry [Library], I approached him about it to see what he thought, and he said, "Oh, not another journal. Too many journals now," which, of course, may or may not be true. But anyway, he was the only negative voice. Others warned me that academic journals are also very short-lived, and another one said, "Well, why not." So I thought, "Well, why not. Let's do it." We did it, and, of course, over twenty-five years later, it's still going strong.

Charnley: What were your roles in the organization? What jobs did you do?

Anderson: Well, for the first two years of the society, I was elected president. Then after that I became executive secretary, largely because it was too hard to handle records and financial records and checkbooks and things to new secretary-treasurers every year. So then I took on the role of executive director, and Roger

Resnahand [phonetic] took over the duties of secretary-treasurer. We've had remarkable membership loyalty. It's amazing how many people who've been in it at the beginning are still coming. Some are getting pretty old, including myself.

Charnley: There's obviously study of the literature of the Midwest, but is there any intellectual niche that you think that the group has certainly carved out for itself?

Anderson: Well, I think much of the interest is in fiction. There's some interest in poetry, but the majority of interest is in fiction. Then, of course, we have a lot of practicing poets who are members at the conference every year. It actually has two dimensions. One is exploring the cultural heritage of the Midwest, which largely focuses on literature and largely on fiction. Then we also have the concurrent Midwest Poetry Festival in which practicing poets and other writers read from their works.

We began to give two awards, first the Mid-America Award for somebody who's done very distinguished work in the study of Midwestern literature. That was in '78, we began that. Then in 1980 we began the Mark Twain Award, which is given to a distinguished Midwestern writer. In 1985 we gave the Mark Twain Award to Gwendolyn Brooks, who was so enthusiastic about the society and what we're doing, that she decided she would fund two prizes every year, \$500 prizes, one for the best poem read in the poetry festival, and the other for the best poet paper read in the Midwestern heritage dimension. We have continued those awards, added one other for the best piece of prose fiction read. So we have three annual awards given at the annual conference. We also continue to give the Mark Twain Award to a distinguished Midwestern writer and the Mid-American Award to a distinguished Midwestern scholar.

Charnley: Did the university support the group at all, either from the beginning or--

Anderson: Actually, I've had a theory from the very beginning. I've seen too many journals and some organizations killed because an institution has supported it in flush financial times and when things get a bit

tight, it's one of the first things they kill. Some very good journals have died that way. So I made up my mind from the very beginning that we would not only not give any institution any kind of control over the organization, but we would also not accept any money from them. So the Society has been self-funding from the very beginning and it still is. Then I get a wonderful letter today in which somebody says he's going to leave us \$25,000 in his will. It's always been self-funding, self-supporting.

The university has contributed space, and that obviously is an important contribution, but, on the other hand, it's not something that if we were deprived of would kill the organization. We'd have to work out of a vest pocket or something, but we would survive, whereas too often the institution funds the thing and then sees an opportunity to save a little money by cutting out the funding and the institution or the journal simply dies. A number of good Midwestern journals have died for that reason. [unclear] *Northwest*, that was published at Miami University, was killed about four years ago. The institution decided not to fund it anymore. *Great Lakes Review* was killed. It was at Central Michigan University on its last legs and then Central decided not to fund it anymore, killed that.

Charnley: So the pattern's there.

Anderson: They can't take our money away from us because they have no control over it. I think that's important.

Charnley: Sounds like a good strategy. Let's go back to when you first arrived on campus, or let's say after you got your degree, you started in communication. What was the name of the department at that time?

Anderson: It was Department of Communication Skills, and Paul Bagwell was the chairman. Well, the only person still around who came the same year I did is Bert [Bernard] Engel. Most of them are not only gone, but dead. Dreadful thought, isn't it?

Charnley: How was the campus different then in size?

Anderson: The size is certainly different. When I came, there were about 18,000 students. It was in the midst of very rapid expansion. Eighteen thousand students seemed like a lot of students, and it was, in terms of most other institutions, but, of course, it just grew and grew and grew. In fact, in the late sixties I heard President [John A.] Hannah remark that he was convinced that we would have 80,000 students by 1980. I suspect the projection was not all that inaccurate. What he didn't foresee was the tremendous growth of community colleges. There were only about two in the state then, and there was a tremendous growth in them in the late fifties and early sixties, and through the sixties. Then, too, the growth of other four-year institutions like Grand Valley and others, and then, too, of course, the growth of branch campuses, and the state colleges, Western, Central, Eastern, becoming universities and absorbing a lot more students. So those schools are now about where MSU was when I came. They all have about 18,000 students. Well, if all those kids had come here, we'd have had probably 100,000 students. Thank God. Traffic is bad enough as it is.

Charnley: When you first came, were jobs tough to get at that time or had the market tightened yet?

Anderson: The fifties were fairly tight period. Lots of hiring of temporary faculty for meeting the expansion. The sixties then were the boom years. Anybody who could virtually read and write could get a job teaching English someplace. Of course, faculties expanded considerably. I was on the interviewing team for what by then was American Thought and Language, and we would interview at MLA and elsewhere. We had interviewed two hundred applicants and hoped that we could hire six, and usually we could hire about six. But every place was hiring, and they were all tenure-stream jobs, so there was lots of competition, but some of the people whom we hired during those years are still here and some even still active. But the last good hiring year, I think, was 1969.

Then suddenly something happened in the seventies. I think part of it was the movement toward larger classes every place and the movement toward hiring temporaries. We began to hire temporaries in the seventies, and largely at first because we couldn't fill regular slots. But then the temporary slots became

permanent temporary slots, and temporaries were kept for, at one time they were kept for six years and then let go. That since, of course, has been reduced to about two years in most places.

But unfortunately, this has meant that a lot of young people have been forced almost literally to become permanent temporaries, jumping from one school to another. That annoys me no end. I think very sincerely and very strongly that no institution, especially an institution that produces Ph.D.s, has the right to refuse to hire Ph.D.s to fill their slots in tenure-stream positions. I suspect if all the temporary slots on this campus were filled by tenure-stream faculty, that we would see an entirely different faculty makeup. We'd see a much younger faculty with a strong voice in academic affairs, which would not be a bad thing.

Charnley: Were you involved in department administration in the ATL department?

Anderson: Well, yes. I served on every committee. I never had any interest in administration, but I did spend a five-year tour as assistant dean, which was an interesting experience. I was mostly interested in faculty development, so I worked in that area, developing conferences and courses and programs and whatnot.

Charnley: Who was dean at that time? College of Arts and Letters?

Anderson: This is University College, which is something we haven't talked about. But I had no interest whatsoever in becoming a career administrator.

Charnley: What were the courses that you taught? Was it primarily in the department here?

Anderson: Well, and college-wide. We had 300- and 400-level general education courses, which we devoted a great variety of subjects to, all of them interdisciplinary and, as far as possible, drawing on the talent from the four University College departments--natural science, social science, American thought and language, and humanities. We did some interesting things. In fact, we were moving very, very strongly in that direction.

In fact, had started a Humanities Coordinating Committee, which was a joint organization of the College of Arts and Letters and University College. I was chairman of it, and our function was to develop courses and programs that would focus on the non-Western world, the humanities of the non-Western world. We sponsored a number of seminars, brought in distinguished scholars from Africa and Asia, and sponsored seminars in the summer for Michigan State faculty so that they could become interested in, and perhaps develop programs in, non-Western humanities.

It was very successful until one thing happened, and that, of course, was when the powers-that-be, and I could tell you the man's name, who never had any use for University College, decided as his final gesture, final stroke of power, I suppose, as provost, to do away with University College. So he did, and undergraduate education and particularly interdisciplinary undergraduate education has not only never been the same since, but from what I hear from the students, it's never been very good since.

Charnley: That provost was Clarence Winder.

Anderson: Clarence Winder, yes.

Charnley: What do you think motivated the attack on University College?

Anderson: Well, it was always present. One thing that I think gave University College its original impetus was that a lot of senior faculty thought that they could shove all the lower-level courses in here, and then they wouldn't have to teach them. I know that was true in English. English saw this as a means of getting rid of freshman composition, which, of course, they did. Nobody had to grade freshman papers anymore. But at the same time, too, there were a lot of people who were hostile to the idea, hostile to the idea of general education, hostile to the idea of interdisciplinary education, and, I think, too, hostile to the idea that here were senior faculty teaching lower-level courses. They should properly, they thought, be taught by graduate students, a philosophy that I have never supported. I think undergraduates, lower-level undergraduates deserve the best

we've got, and that's what they were getting with the University College. Then suddenly--it was a shock.

Charnley: Was it tied in at all with the residential colleges?

Anderson: No. We worked together with the residential colleges. We staffed some of their courses and whatnot, and there were great plans for the future of the residential colleges. I was on the committee that was developing the program for the fourth residential college, which was to be based on the Great Books idea. Then suddenly the powers-that-be decided that there would be no more residential colleges.

Combined with the fact that Justin Morrill had lost its direction, let me put it that way. Justin Morrill was founded as an internationally oriented humanities college, and all the students were required to take four years of two foreign languages, for most of them French and Russian. Well, the students began to feel that that was an unwarranted burden and began to complain about the foreign language requirement. Somebody--I think I know who, but I wouldn't swear to it--decided that, "Well, they really shouldn't have to take two foreign languages. Let's make it optional." So we made it optional and nobody took foreign language. Well, of course, what happened was that it lost its orientation. It lost this international flavor that was at the heart of the college and it began to become a very, very experimental and--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about Justin Morrill College and how that had changed its focus after the language requirement was dropped.

Anderson: Before that, it became sort of a--I hate to use the word, but--a "hippie" orientation, kids who wanted to have fun, wanted to pretend that they were intellectual. I sent some kids over there. I said, "You should be in this course. Go over to Justin Morrill. They'll let you do what you want to do." But, anyway, then, of course, this was the handwriting on the wall, and it was done away with. But at the same time, too, the other two residential

colleges--can't think of their names now--

Charnley: James Madison?

Anderson: James Madison and--

Charnley: Lyman Briggs.

Anderson: Lyman Briggs. James Madison was supposed to have a social studies, social science emphasis, and Lyman Briggs was to have natural science emphasis. Well, Madison gradually evolved into a sort of a pre-law program, and Briggs--I don't know what happened to Briggs. But, anyway, Madison is gone. Briggs is still in existence in a somewhat different form.

But I think really what killed the residential college idea here was, in the first place, they're expensive to run, and there was a lot of second-thinking about expanding this at one time. We were talking about virtually every student being in a residential college, sort of the Oxford or Cambridge idea, but it just didn't work, and I think largely because initially because of the expense. I don't know. Then they began floundering, losing their identity, losing their purpose, and becoming something other than they were intended to. And, of course, again the powers-that-be decided to return them to their origins.

Well, there was a period in which there was a great deal of condensation and retrenching. For example, there was a very strong movement at the time, supported by a lot of people, to combine the College of Arts and Letters, College of Natural Science, College of Social Science, and University College into one college, which would be, I think--I forget what they called it, College of Arts and Sciences, something like that. It almost came about, except that when it came to a vote before one of the very rare meetings of the Faculty Council, it was overwhelmingly voted down. In other words, the faculty were pleased with the way things are. Well, then they went on to get rid of University College. I think that was probably a reflection of that. It was folded into the other three colleges, essentially. But the other three colleges, of course, have continued to exist in the form that

they existed in when they began in the early sixties, if I remember correctly.

Charnley: So President Hannah was supportive of them?

Anderson: President Hannah was very supportive of them, very supportive of University College. If Hannah were still President, I think University College would still exist. But for many people it was a strange idea, not a conventional idea, and they didn't know what to make of it, and I think that's still true.

Charnley: Let me talk a little bit about some of the other presidents. Did you have any personal contact with President Hannah?

Anderson: I had some, yes. In fact, I'd see him every once in a while. Hannah got around the campus quite a bit, and, of course, he was president when I got my degree. There were not many of us, and he always said he always was delighted to see new Ph.D.s. But I would see him all the time on campus. The last time I saw him, not long before he died, he was not in good shape, but his son had taken him out to the University Club for dinner, and it was really good to see him.

Charnley: How would you assess his presidency? Were you surprised when he left?

Anderson: Yes, I was, except that he was getting along in years, obviously. There was some feeling that Hannah was a builder. Well, they used to say that neither the sun nor the concrete ever sets on Hannah's empire. There was a good deal of truth to that, because he built a strong international dimension, and, of course, the physical plant that he built was magnificent. Anyway, there was some feeling that the university should kind of switch direction and emphasize not physical growth or numerical growth, but intellectual growth. Of course, Hannah had led it for, I forget, I think sixteen years and took it from college status to university status, literally made it an internationally respectable institution.

John Hannah built this university, no question about it, and anything and everything that has been done here for the better has been based on Hannah's original structure and original philosophy, because Hannah was a very strong believer in what was known as the land-grant college philosophy, that is, the university exists to do for the people in Michigan what they can't do for themselves, and, of course, provide substantial educations to people of Michigan who don't have the means to go elsewhere. Of course, it always maintained, continues to maintain, its strong agricultural foundation. The agricultural dimension has not suffered. The other dimensions have been added to the agricultural dimension and, to a great extent, in Hannah's time.

Charnley: The Midwest connection with this land-grant concept, was that any coincidence?

Anderson: I don't know. I suppose. I never really thought of it, but I suspect it's true. It's interesting that at times people talk at length about the land-grant philosophy, but I suspect it's more talked about than observed today. I have no evidence to support that, but I really have that feeling. Yes, I think there is a Midwestern relationship here, because, one thing that's been the case from the very beginning, as every president, beginning with John Hannah, was interested in the Society for the Study of Midwestern literature. It began under Cliff Wharton's presidency, I'm sorry, but Hannah, of course, was still around, still active. Hannah spoke at several of our conferences. In fact, we had a special program to observe the 125th anniversary of Michigan State. That was when?

Charnley: '77.

Anderson: '77, I guess it was. Hannah spoke at that and other presidents spoke, asked them to come, as a matter of fact. Walter Adams spoke.

Charnley: [Edgar L.] Harden would have been interim president at that time.

Anderson: Yes, Harden was there, as a matter of fact. They've always been interested in what we were doing. Wharton, I think, was the strongest support of the Society. He came on a number of occasions.

In fact, I'll tell you a funny Wharton story. I'm sure he remembers this. We had the Sherwood Anderson Centennial here in 1976 as the Society's conference for that year. We had a banquet in which awards were given and whatnot. At the head table I had seated President Wharton next to Sherwood Anderson's widow, Eleanor Anderson, a fine Southern lady. She was, I think, in her mid-eighties, sharp as a tack. But, anyway, she and Wharton were gabbing away all through the dinner, having a wonderful time. Then afterwards she said to me, "He certainly is a charmer. Is he any good?" [Laughter] And I told Wharton that. He said, "What did you tell her? What did you tell her?" I said, "I'm going to let you worry about that." [Laughter] Wharton was a very strong supporter, and a strong supporter of the Humanities Coordinating Committee that I talked about a bit earlier. We got grants from the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation for that.

Charnley: He had some connections there. The other presidents that you worked with, did you have much contact with them?

Anderson: Had a lot of contact with DiBiaggio. He was the only one I had nerve enough to call him by his first name. He, of course, was a native Michigander, and, in spite of his doctorate in dentistry, he had an undergraduate major in English, and so he was very interested, again, in the humanities and interested in what we were doing.

I think that may be one of the problems that both Wharton and DiBiaggio had during their presidency, was that they leaned heavily toward the humanities, and I think some people who had been accustomed to getting a great deal of attention were beginning to feel irked.

Charnley: In sciences and agriculture?

Anderson: Yes, right. Feeling left out. But they were both good presidents. I'm speaking from my biased point

of view. As I say, they were obviously different from Hannah in their orientation and different from Hannah ultimately, I think, in their vision of the university. I think Clifton Wharton and Mrs. [Dolores] Wharton, who was very active in the humanities, could not have been remembered in a more suitable way than in the Wharton Center [for Performing Arts].

I remember once, one of the things I was enjoying as assistant dean was trying to push publication and grants, and we put together a conference on grantsmanship and invited speakers on NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] and National Science Foundation and other granting organizations, and Mrs. Wharton gave a wonderful lunch for the visiting speakers. Of course, she was very active in various humanities boards anyway. She was quite interested in what we were doing.

Charnley: Supporter of the fine arts in particular.

Anderson: Yes, fine arts and humanities, in general.

Probably the president I've had the least contact with during those years was the acting president. Not Walter. Walter and I were very, very good friends. I haven't had much, of course, with [M. Peter] McPherson, but I've been technically retired most of those years, if not all of them, but he's very cordial when we meet. Of course, he gives his annual reception, I supposed you'd call it, for recipients of the Distinguished Faculty Award. I'm trying to remember who began that.

Charnley: Which president? Was that [M. Cecil] Mackey?

Anderson: Yes, Mackey began that.

Charnley: And you were an early recipient?

Anderson: Yes, I received the Distinguished Faculty Award in '74.

Charnley: So you get an annual lunch for that.

Anderson: You get an annual reception.

Charnley: And the title.

Anderson: Well, at the time you got a \$1,000 check, too. It's gone up considerably since then. I think it's around \$5,000 now.

Charnley: Let's talk about some of the students and maybe how the students have changed. Or have they changed in the course of your career?

Anderson: Well, they have changed in a lot of ways for better and worse. The increasing informality was beginning to irk me a bit, students wearing baseball caps to class. Some students deigning to call me by my first name annoys me no end. I kept hearing that students were supposed to be getting better and better and better. I never really noticed it. On one hand, I had some very good students over the years, some of whom who have-- well, I had an interesting experience just this spring. You know, the library now has a reception for faculty members who have published books during the past year, and I had two books come out. I was invited to the reception, and who else was there but one of my former students, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, who's in human ecology. He was my student about 1957 or 1958. Well, I had quickly pointed that out to the powers-that-be, including President McPherson, that I was the only there whose former student was also receiving the honor. It was a wonderful thing.

Of course, another one of my former students is Dan Gerber, and Dan Gerber has become a distinguished novelist and poet.

Charnley: And you've maintained contact with him?

Anderson: Oh, yes. I think we're going to give him the Mark Twain Award this year.

Charnley: How about the students' preparation intellectually? Did you see differences over time, they weren't as prepared in terms of the writing and speaking and general reading?

Anderson: I don't think there's a whole lot of difference over the years. Some are quite good, some are not so good. Some are completely incapable of dealing with abstractions, and others can handle abstraction. I think it's really a talent thing more than a preparation thing. The students who are gifted intellectually have always done well, and the students who aren't, well, most of them managed to struggle through.

Now, I do notice one thing over the years, and that is a tremendous amount of grade inflation. This began during the Vietnam War, when faculty didn't want to feel responsible for sending male students to the rice paddies. It didn't bother me; I didn't think it wouldn't hurt them any. It might kill them, but it wouldn't hurt them, might even be good for them.

Charnley: Your military experience.

Anderson: I had two wars under my belt.

Charnley: I won the draft lottery in '69.

Anderson: War might kill them, but it wouldn't hurt them.

Charnley: That protest, how did you look at it at the time?

Anderson: I ignored it.

Charnley: You ignored it?

Anderson: I ignored it, yes. I remember there would be marching through Bessey Hall, "On strike. Burn it down." I'm conducting my class in there, and everybody is there. I think they [unclear] students from the ones who were marching.

Charnley: Led by their faculty members.

Anderson: It was not that I was a supporter of the war. I thought it was a mistake from the very beginning and signed petitions against it, but once you commit troops, I think you have the responsibility to have troops, and I will always support the troops. I may disagree with the policy that sends them there, as I have in more recent years, too. I never thought we had any business in the Middle East, and I still don't.

Charnley: We've asked all the interviewees that we've had that have had World War II service, we've asked them, and I want to get you on the record, what units did you serve in during World War II?

Anderson: I was in the 15th Amphibious Engineers, participated in the campaigns in Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, and southern France.

Charnley: Operation Anvil, was it?

Anderson: Yes. I made seven amphibious landings, got hit twice, once not so bad and once pretty bad, still paying for the latter, and then took a reserve commission and was recalled for the Korean War, then 31st Infantry Division, Division Artillery, in the Korean War, fortunately came through it in one piece. Piece of cake,

actually, in comparison.

Charnley: You were an officer at that time?

Anderson: Yes. Came out as a first lieutenant. Spent my time on the Anzio beachhead. That's where I got hit bad.

Charnley: Then the G.I. Bill, you mentioned that before, and how you rotating colleges.

Anderson: Yes. The G.I. Bill, which is real something. The *Washington Post* had a feature on the fiftieth anniversary of the G.I. Bill, and I was cited as one of the successes of the G.I. Bill, of which I was very flattered.

Charnley: Interesting. Do you have a clipping of that?

Anderson: I have it someplace here.

Charnley: I'd be interested to see that. Do you think you would have gone to college had it not been for that?

Anderson: I don't know. I really don't know. Most of my generation, in fact, the kids older than me who graduated from high school, I'll say, '36, '37, or '38 or '39, '40, and '41, mostly did not. Very few of them did. If their parents had money, they went. In fact, I remember in the late thirties, the members of the last high school graduating class working on the sidewalks, on the NYA or WPA [Works Progress Administration], across the street from the high school. I think all of us anticipated that we would be going in the service well before the war, before American participation, because we fully expected it. I don't think many of us thought very much beyond that. I know I didn't.

When I got out, I didn't know what to do. They'd taken my war away from me, and I didn't know what

the hell to do with myself. Fortunately, I got some good advice and some good nudging, but I still thought I was killing time till the next war.

Charnley: You didn't continue with your reserve commission, or did you?

Anderson: I did up until about 1960, I think, and then I was falling behind in my reserve duties. Well, actually working on the Ph.D. I was passed over for promotion, so then I just dropped out.

Charnley: When you got on campus, there were obviously a lot of other G.I. Bill professors at that time. Did you have any contact directly or was there any camaraderie at the time?

Anderson: Yes, a great deal. We used to talk about the changing nature of faculty as a result of the G.I. Bill, because the faculty of the thirties and forties and fifties were largely traditional upper middle-class, many of them children of professional families. A lot of the parents were clergymen. They'd come out of an educated upper middle-class background, and they saw the academic profession, many of them, as a genteel profession somewhat like the church. Many of them were not serious scholars. Many of them were.

But the G.I. Bill in its aftermath introduced an entirely new kind of faculty member, largely coming out of the working class, many of them the first one in their family to go to college, and, I think, a new kind of seriousness toward the profession. The tendency in the first place toward a much more open group, and a tendency to a more serious attitude toward the profession still prevail because, of course, the G.I. Bill opened up higher education to generation after generation of kids who under the pre-war circumstances wouldn't have had a chance to go to college. Of course, the colleges and universities recognized this. That's why there is some much financial aid, scholarships, jobs, what have you, so that these kids can go, and, of course, they are.

We're still getting kids who are the first one in their family to go to college. Of course, this ties in very nicely here with the land-grant philosophy.

Charnley: The G.I. Bill certainly, Hannah used it to the benefit, in many respects, of the institution, don't you think?

Anderson: I think it benefitted virtually every institution because it had brought an entirely new kind of student. There were older students, many of them married with children, which gives the campus an entirely different flavor, when you see people changing their babies in front of the Administration Building, which you would see. An older group, I think a more serious group, and one that was from a lower economic class. I think it's all been for the better.

Charnley: Almost kind of a democratization to some degree.

Anderson: Yes, right.

Charnley: We talked a little bit about your own teaching. What interested you or attracted you to teaching at first?

Anderson: To teaching?

Charnley: Why did you like teaching? Teaching literature or teaching writing?

Anderson: Well, I've always been interested in ideas. I've always been interested in writing, and one thing I've liked about this course from the very beginning is that it combines my two favorite topics. I can talk about writing all day and I can talk about ideas all day, and particularly, of course, American ideas. I think some of the greatest ideas in the history of the world have come out of the central part of North America. They'd been adapted, of course, from other sources. One of the most eloquent documents that have ever been written is the Declaration of Independence. If you can talk about those ideas and talk about the attempt to make those ideas

reality, and talk, too, about interpreting those ideas, you've really got a fun course.

I think one thing that I noticed from the very beginning of the changing emphasis, communications skills was just that. It didn't emphasize subject matter, although there was subject matter, largely of your own choice, but it did emphasize skills--reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Well, it was often boring, because unless you talk about something or write about something or listen to something significant, it can get pretty boring.

Charnley: The twenty-seven uses of the semicolon.

Anderson: But with the introduction of the American subject matter, there was a tremendous change in the attitude of the students almost overnight. They respected the course, and I don't think they respected comm skills. Now, it's one thing to be said for comm skills that I've in recent years begun to appreciate, and that is that there was some emphasis on trying to accustom these kids to talking before an audience.

Charnley: Public speaking.

Anderson: And to speaking up. That, of course, is gone, not only from this department but from every department on campus, and I've noticed a deterioration in both the speaking skills of the students and the speaking skills of the faculty. I hear lots of scholarly papers over a year's time, and so many--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Charnley: This is tape two of the interview with Dr. David Anderson.

We're talking about the decline in speaking abilities of both students and faculty members. You think that decline has continued to the present?

Anderson: Yes, yes, I notice it in junior faculty. I notice it in some who are becoming senior faculty. In fact, sometimes I'll sit there listening to one and think, "God, I feel sorry for his students." Seriously.

Charnley: Going back to the Declaration of Independence, did you have any particular favorite technique that you used to get students to at least think about the concepts, the intellectual concepts that it raised?

Anderson: I focused on the revolutionary nature of these ideas. To suggest, for example, that all men are created equal. Think of that. Think of that. There may be physical differences, there may be biological differences, temperamental differences, talent differences, but all men are created equal, you and you and you and you and even me. And all the ideas of the Declaration. The idea that human beings have certain natural rights, and these are not rights that are given by government, they're not privileges, they are inherent rights-- life, liberty, and property, or the pursuit of happiness. But, either way, if property is your idea of pursuing happiness, by accumulating property, so be it. That's your privilege. You know, they're really tremendous ideas.

In the eighteenth century, they were revolutionary ideas, and they're still revolutionary ideas, because think of all the places in the world where natural rights may exist but they're not recognized. Human equality is not recognized. Well, you have to look at all these ethnic and tribal conflicts and religious conflicts all over the world.

Charnley: The whole concept of getting students to think about class as an issue, it seems like the Declaration's an ideal way to approach that. Again, going back to your teaching, did you prefer lecture?

Anderson: Primarily lecture. I am in the Emerson Shuck-Russell Nye tradition.

Charnley: And the attack on that method seems to be unfounded.

Anderson: Well, I have never had a student complain about it, and I think that's a test of something.

Charnley: In my own training, the only problem with the great lecturers that I had was you didn't want to take notes. You just want to sit and listen. They made it look so easy.

Anderson: My mentors, my models were both the kinds of lecturers that presided in such a clear, chronological, almost outline form, so that taking notes is really a natural part of the process, and that's what I've always attempted to do.

Charnley: So your relationship with Emerson Shuck and Russ Nye continue right through.

Anderson: Right to the end, to their deaths, to both of their deaths.

Charnley: And popular culture, how did that fit into your own scholarship? You tended to emphasize literature aspect?

Anderson: Well, what I'm interested in primarily is literature that may happen to be popular, and I use the term "popular" very loosely. I don't think a book has to be a bestseller to be considered a popular work. Certainly *Winesburg, Ohio* is popular. It has never been out of print since it was published in 1919, so that, in my book, is popular. Of course, many of the leading writers that I'm interested in have also had a number of bestsellers. Sinclair Lewis had many bestsellers. Dreiser had a number of best sellers. The contemporary I'm most interested in is Saul Bellow, and Bellow, of course, has had his share of bestsellers. *Ravelstein*, his new novel, was number eight on the *New York Times* list for one week, so that qualifies as a bestseller, certainly a popular work. I think "popular" is probably best defined, the way I use it, as "durable." If it lasts, if it speaks to more than one generation or more than one age or more than one class of people, then I think it's a popular work.

Charnley: What year did you retire officially from the university?

Anderson: I'm trying to think. I think January of '94.

Charnley: And your scholarship has continued, certainly. What's your recent project that you're working on?

Anderson: I am pulling together a book of essays, my own essays, on Sherwood Anderson, and they are reevaluations of Anderson. My first book on Anderson came out in '67. That's over thirty years, and I'm looking at them through different eyes, in many respects, and certainly different sensibilities, though it will cover essentially the same territory as my '67 book, but it will look at things in many respects in a different light.

Charnley: During your career, any activities that you had outside of academia in terms of within the community? Were there any link with your scholarship or political activity, clubs you're active with?

Anderson: Not a whole lot. For quite a while, what you were active in a club called the You and I Club [phonetic] [U&I?] which was a group of East Lansing residents. The club began, I think, in 1883. I was president for its centenary 1993. Met once a week during the winter, and one member of the club would present a paper on some topic of interest. Only two topics were verboten: politics and religion. Any other topic that the person wanted to present was acceptable. Of course, it was a very wide range of interests and some very interesting stuff. The group just kept getting older and older, and I'm told this happens to a lot of groups. So finally in the last year or so, it's been virtually inactive. Young people aren't joining them, and the old people are dying off.

I've been active in other things in the community from time to time, not a hell of a lot, because I've been keeping pretty with my [unclear].

Charnley: And you've still be pretty active in SSML activities.

Anderson: Yes.

Charnley: Were you ever a Fulbright scholar?

Anderson: Yes.

Charnley: Could you talk a little bit about that experience?

Anderson: Well, I was a Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Karachi in Pakistan, '63-'64. Was reappointed three times, and each time something came up that prevented me from accepting them, but it was a major experience, obviously, and I think I did some good in introducing American literature to some bright young Pakistanis, some of whom came to this country for further study. One of them even became a student of mine here. I directed his dissertation here. He's back in Pashaur, the University of Pashaur.

Charnley: In terms of your international travel, you've continued with scholarly papers around the world?

Anderson: Yes, I manage at least one international conference a year, I think. I don't have any plan for this year. I was supposed to go to Zimbabwe, and I decided not to, for, I think, obvious reasons. My health isn't that good. But I do plan to go to France this fall to set up a conference for probably 2002 in Paris on Midwestern writers and the City of Light, and Western writers who have spent time in Paris and whose work was influenced by France and the French and the international dimension, and there are a lot of them.

Charnley: Hemingway obviously, but who are some of the others besides Hemingway?

Anderson: Well, most recently, James Jones spent twenty years there. Bellows spent a couple of years there,

wrote most of [*The Adventures of*] *Augie March* in France. The list is almost--well, almost every writer has had some measure of experience there, but, of course, the writers of the twenties, I think they had their most profound experiences there because they could stay there longer. The dollar was much more valuable in terms of French francs. The franc was way down and the dollar was way up, so they could live on virtually nothing, which, of course, hasn't been the case for writers in more recent years, unless they make a lot of money writing. But I thought that would be an interesting focal point for a conference and an interesting place to have it. A number of people have said that they certainly will come and will participate, so I hope that that is indeed the case.

Charnley: Sounds like an interesting conference.

Anderson: I'm working on another conference which will be next year, 125th anniversary of Sherwood Anderson's birth, actually 125th anniversary of his birth, and it'll be the 60th anniversary of his death.

Charnley: So your scholarly work has keyed centrally on Anderson, right up to the present.

Anderson: Well, it keeps me busy. My life is really not that much different in retirement than it was before. The only difference is I don't go to class.

Charnley: Don't go to class, and don't have the papers to grade.

Anderson: Yes, that makes a lot of difference.

Charnley: Maybe just a final question. In looking back on your entire career at Michigan State, what would you say or how would you assess your experiences here at Michigan State University?

Anderson: Well, I'm still here, and I think that's probably the most profound comment I can make. I have enjoyed my life here. I've enjoyed the college. I've enjoyed the university. I've enjoyed the students. I've thought that I've had wonderful opportunities to do what I wanted to do in the scholarly dimension. I have thought about leaving in a number of occasions. I had an interesting experience last week, incidentally, when we went up to Mount Pleasant for a wedding. I've had three job offers over the years from Central Michigan--one as a professor, as a chairman, and as a dean, and I didn't take any of them obviously. But, anyway, on the way back my wife said, "I'm glad you didn't take any of those jobs."

I think it's been a wonderful experience, certainly one in which I made some contributions. I have a strong loyalty to both the university and the profession, and I think, to a great extent, both are the result of my experiences here. I certainly would recommend the place. I recommend it to parents all the time. I say, "You can get the best education in the world here, if you're careful. If you want to play and have an easy time, you can do that, too, but you're not going to get a good education. Pick your classes. Pick your instructors, and you will get a good education."

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project, for the time that you've spent, and your insights. Thank you again.

Anderson: Well, thank you. My pleasure.

[End of interview]

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