

Jack Thompson

November 16, 2001

Jeff Charnley,  
interviewer

Charnley: Today is November 16, the year 2001. We're in East Lansing, Michigan. I'm Jeff Charnley, interviewing Jack Thompson for the MSU Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution to be commemorated in the year 2005.

Mr. Thompson's given name is Walter John Thompson. As you can see, Mr. Thompson, we've got a tape recorder here for this oral history. Do you give us permission to tape this interview?

Thompson: Correct.

Charnley: Okay. I'd like to start with just some general questions about your personal background, your educational background. Where were you born and raised and where did you go to school prior to college?

Thompson: I was born in Lansing, Michigan, lived there until I was about seven. Lived a year in Williamston, about three years in south of Mason, moved to Trowbridge, which is now part of East Lansing, and then in 1948 moved to Oak Street in East Lansing. I've lived various places in East Lansing since.

I went to grade schools in Lansing, Williamston, south of Mason. Went to Champion School, which was also known as Harrison Road School, which was on the corner of Harrison

and Mount Hope, a one-room school. That went through the sixth grade. For the junior high and high school, we could go to either Okemos or to East Lansing. East Lansing was closer, but Okemos had a school bus that stopped right at the school, so most of us went to Okemos . So I went there to the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade.

Then when I was going into the eleventh grade, this Champion school district became part of the East Lansing school district, so I had to go to East Lansing for the eleventh and twelfth grade, graduated from East Lansing.

Charnley: What did your parents do?

Thompson: My father was basically a farmer for many years. He was a milkman before I was born. He had various jobs. He did construction work. And then the reason we moved to Trowbridge was because there was a farm there a woman owned, and he did the farming, the market gardening. We lived in what was the old Trowbridge Hotel. And then somewhere along there, during the winters he worked as a janitor for Michigan State University at Mason Abbot, and then when Quonset Village opened right after the war in 1945, he went there as supervisor for Quonset Village.

Then my mother was a schoolteacher for many years, but that was before I was born. Then after she started raising a family, she wasn't working. Then she worked for the English department at Michigan State University in what was the old woodworking building, which was about where the administration building is now. Then after that, she worked at Hunt Food Shop , which was in downtown East Lansing, and then when Snyder Phillips Hall was opened at

Michigan State University, she worked there in the food service, until she wasn't working anymore.

Charnley: Obviously that was in the later years of the depression.

Thompson: Later years of the depression.

Charnley: When you were growing up.

Thompson: Yes. Right. I was born kind of at the beginning of the depression and went through the depression and World War II. So those various things that my parents did were during the depression years and the World War II years and after.

Charnley: Where was the Quonset Village located?

Thompson: Quonset Village was at the corner, what it was was the old ROTC drill field where they put it, and Breslin Center is there now.

Charnley: So your father's work initially was part time and then it developed into full time for the university?

Thompson: It was full time during the winters. It wasn't part time. It was during the school year. Can I give you some story on that?

Charnley: Of course.

Thompson: Okay. Because he worked, he was the night man. What he did was clean the offices and the public areas at night when nobody was around. And on weekends sometimes, Friday or Saturday night, I used to go over there and help him. That was very, very interesting to me. It was, at that time, Mason Abbot, Mason was housing girls. Abbot was army people here to get an education. The army, or various military units, used the university during World War II for training.

Charnley: So you started at what age?

Thompson: I started working—you mean full time, meaning really working?

Charnley: Well, no. Even on this part time.

Thompson: I was probably fourteen years old. Maybe thirteen. Let's say thirteen, because when I was fourteen, during the summer I went over to Mason Abbot to see if I could get a job for the summer, and they said I was too young. Because I was familiar with Mason Abbot.

Charnley: After graduation from high school, at what point did you end up working for Michigan State.

Thompson: I started at Michigan State the next year, when I was fifteen, and my father was over working at Quonsets. And so I got a summer job there as a janitor, and then the next year. In '48, when Snyder Phillips was built, I got a job there in the food service, and I worked weekends and after school in the food service there. And on weekends, at night my job was mainly take the food out to the serving line. It was called a trucker. You had a truck, a little cart, and you pushed the food out. But on weekends I did whatever, and one of the things I used to do is work in the kitchen quite a bit. So one of the cooks, whose name was Nils Buie [phonetic], kind of took me under his wing and taught me to be a cook.

Charnley: Were you interested in that?

Thompson: Yes. Yes, I was very interested in being a cook. I enjoyed that. And so when I graduated from high school, I just continued full time as a cook.

Charnley: So your training as a cook was on the job rather—

Thompson: On the job, yes. Most cooks at Michigan State University are trained on the job. Some of them come in, you know, that's cooked somewhere else, but where they'd cooked somewhere else, they'd trained on the job, so it was really no difference.

Charnley: Did he pass on any words of wisdom about institutional cooking to you, that you remember?

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: What were some of those things?

Thompson: I really don't know. There would be no answer to that. Institutional quantity cooking is different than short-order cooking or restaurant cooking. You're cooking one thing, and a big batch of it, instead of little bits of lots of things.

One of the main things I learned in cooking was cleanliness. The cook's very concerned about cleanliness, about not doing something that's going to make somebody sick.

Charnley: So, food safety, as well as food preparation.

Thompson: Food safety, yes. This was emphasized very early.

Charnley: So this was in the years after the war.

Thompson: Right.

Charnley: How would you describe the campus at that time, the mood on the campus?

Thompson: What year?

Charnley: Let's talk about right after the war.

Thompson: Right after the war, the students that were coming in the G.I. Bill, they were older than students would be later. The students before the war, I didn't really know much about. For one, I wasn't that involved and I wasn't that old. But students then were very concerned about getting an education. They were older. You know, they'd saved the world. For one thing, they weren't about to let anybody tell them some silly thing to do, like wearing a freshman beanie. That was gone. A lot of them had families, too, and so they wanted to get their education and get out and raise their families and get a job. So it wasn't much fooling around.

Charnley: In the early 1950s, maybe right when you started, did you see any difference after that initial push of the veterans, World War II veterans, was gone?

Thompson: There was a little difference, but the people, they were the same generation, which is a word I don't like to use, but they talk about different generations. Generation, really, to me, should mean, my generation was my siblings, which two of them fought in World War II. My older sister worked in the defense plant, while my other sister, my younger brother, and I were kind of on the cusp of that generation. So we had some of the same values, but we didn't have the same experiences, the difference of being a kid during the war and being somebody out there fighting the war. But we had the same values.

So this was still, I think, we get into the fifties, the early fifties. There still is, people were concerned about getting an education. There wasn't much, as I said, fooling around. You know, there's always some, but not much.

Charnley: How did your job change over time, in the course of, let's say, the fifties to the sixties?

Thompson: My first job after I graduated high school as a cook, I went back to Quonset Village. It was still there. It was temporary housing of Quonset huts, and then a big Quonset hut where the cafeteria was. But they were in the process of building more dormitories, Snyder Phillips, three women's dorms, and then Shaw Hall was coming along. And at Quonset Village, it was kind of leftover equipment from army stuff. It was kind of like army cooking. But then this beautiful new Shaw Hall, just grand buildings, just being built, and so then when Quonset closed, I went over to Shaw Hall as a cook. That was new equipment and new building, just beautiful.

Charnley: Night-and-day difference?

Thompson: It was a night-and-day difference, absolutely.

Charnley: It's interesting, they're renovating Shaw right now.

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: At what point did you begin to take some courses at the university?

Thompson: This was 1952, and they just started night school, night classes. It was mostly just to take a class, and that's the reason I went there was just to learn something. I wasn't thinking



about getting a degree or anything. They had a course called Lit and Fine Arts, which you could take in place of humanities.

In basic college, you had to take so many credits in basic college to get your degree, and I had an interest in music, and so lit and fine arts was, there was three terms. The university was the term system then, three terms instead of the two semesters it is now. The three terms of lit and fine arts was music, literature, and art, so I really just took it just to learn something more about music. And so I took a night course in the music part of lit and fine arts, and I enjoyed that so much, the next time I took the second term of lit and fine arts, art. But I had an interest in art anyway. And then I took the third one in literature.

Then after that, I just kept on going, but instead of taking night courses, I would take eight o'clocks. I took probably more eight o'clocks than anybody in the world, because I went to work. I was on the afternoon shift at work, so I'd go at ten-thirty, take an eight o'clock class, go to work.

Charnley: Made for a long day.

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: That's interesting. Did the university support at that time education for staff or no?

Thompson: No. That was much, much later. In fact, it was after I had graduated before they did that.

Charnley: So that benefit came much later.

Thompson: Much, much later, yes. But it was very cheap, very cheap.

Charnley: Were you a musician? You just had an interest in music?

Thompson: Yes. I play the phonograph and the radio and the tape recorder very well. I don't read music. My wife is a musician, but I am not.

Charnley: So we're up to, let's see, the late 1950s. You're at Shaw Hall.

Thompson: Well, no. Let's take the middle 1950s.

Charnley: Okay. What do you remember about the fifties?

Thompson: 1955. Let's take that. I went into the army.

Charnley: You went in the army?

Thompson: I was in the army for two years as a radio teletype operator. I was a cook at Shaw Hall. When I went in the army in '55, got out in '56, and then that summer I went to Mason Abbot as a cook just for the summer. Brody food service was opening. The buildings had been open, and they were being fed in the old Quonset cafeteria. The three buildings, I think, three

buildings had been open, but they were being fed in the old Quonset cafeteria. But when I went over there was when the food service opened, and so I went there as a cook, and we were feeding up to 3,000 people.

Charnley: That must have been a pretty large operation.

Thompson: Oh, they say it was the largest in the world, I've heard. One of those "they say" things.

Charnley: Did you get drafted into the military?

Thompson: I got drafted. Totally got drafted.

Charnley: So you weren't going to make that a career?

Thompson: No.

Charnley: Where did you serve?

Thompson: Well, I was in the battle of Galveston, Texas. No. I was in Missouri. I was six months in Georgia in training, which was the longest training school they have. So one-fourth of my army career I was in training to be a radio teletype operator. Then I was in Texas, Fort Hood, Texas, for most of the rest of the time.

Charnley: Were you able to use any of those skills later on in life that you got from the military or no?

Thompson: I still do military lettering when I write. You learn military lettering to write very quickly and legibly. I still write quickly, but you can't read it.

Charnley: When you got back from the service, did you then have the G.I. Bill or was that not funded?

Thompson: We had the G.I. Bill when I got out, but I was still doing it part time, so I did get, for a long time I did get a little bit.

Charnley: But not full?

Thompson: But it still was very cheap, and so the little bit I was getting just added to it. But it wasn't that much.

Charnley: Obviously this is the time of the large building boom on campus, increasing the number of students. How would you describe the mood on campus in the fifties?

Thompson: It was different. There was a different generation, which is a word I don't—but it was different, the people older than me and my age, but the next ones coming along, and what I

noticed at first was that there was a lot of talk about teenager rights. When I was a teenager, I didn't have any rights, but this group coming up, they were kind of spoiled. They were very spoiled, you know, that came here in the late fifties and for a few more years, and there were a lot of them.

The university had been growing. Let's go back a few years back to 1943. Enrollment was 3,500, and in 1946 it was, just three years later, 14,000. That was the biggest change I had seen. There was four times as many people in three years. And so it still kept on growing from that. Buildings stepped up being built. There was a big building boom right after the war and another one in the sixties.

Okay, I got lost there.

Charnley: We're talking about the fifties and how the students were different, and you indicated that they came in with a different attitude.

Thompson: Yes. They came, and I noticed it. An incident was, then they used to have demonstrations. Okay, during finals week, you know, that's the only thing people were concentrating on, finals week. Nothing else was a concern of them. But there was demonstration, and that was during finals week. So these kids, instead of taking care of their finals, you know, were demonstrating. And these came along, these people came along happened to be—you know, times makes the person, or the person fits the times, but this kind of spoiled generation came along just at the same time as the Vietnam War, as concern about races. So they kind of fit into this. If nothing else was happening during this generation, you wonder

what they would have been like. So this was a time, very late fifties and sixties, of the demonstrations.

Charnley: So that began.

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: What were some of those that you remember? Did that affect you?

Thompson: Not much. They closed down East Lansing. The traffic couldn't get through. But I used to walk everywhere I went, so, you know. And some classes were stopped, but I never had one. Our classes were always held.

Charnley: There were some, was it the late sixties, when they took over one of the halls or one of the—

Thompson: Yes. I wasn't involved in that.

Charnley: I know that's later.

Thompson: Later, yes.

Charnley: But let's talk about that.

Thompson: I had a different job by then. I was an editor for the Division of Housing and Food Service, Division of Dormitories and Food Services then, but it changed later. Sometimes in the evening, I'd go to one of the halls to eat dinner, if my wife wasn't home or something. So one of the other guys and I went over to Wilson Hall, and it was closed down. The students had taken over the hall. So, you know, we went somewhere else to eat.

And then Emory Foster called me and wanted to know—I had been a food supervisor, food manager. I had been a food manager before being an editor. Not too long before that, I'd been a food manager, within the year. Emory Foster called me and wanted to know if I would go into Wilson Hall to be the food manager, because the problem was in the food service with the employees, supposedly. So I, sure, why not?

Charnley: So you went to Wilson after this?

Thompson: I went to Wilson and opened the food service back up. And you hear stories that after the students went in there they wrecked the whole place. I was the first in, opened the door, first one in. Everything was clean, nothing out of place, nothing broken. They had left it perfect.

Charnley: That's interesting.

Thompson: Yes, I thought that was interesting.

Charnley: So some of the accounts were a little exaggerated of their destruction or what they did?

Thompson: Right, yes. No destruction. They cleaned all the dishes, all the equipment, everything.

Charnley: That is a different story than what I've heard, or read or seen in some accounts.

Emory Foster was the overall supervisor?

**RB:** Emory Foster was manager of the Division of Housing and Food Services, and he took the title manager. He had been manager of the MSU union, the Union Building, and then in 1945, a number of the units were brought together as the Division of Housing and Food Services. It was the dormitories, the dormitories that had been the Union Building, the food stores, which had just been started, the laundry. These all became one division. The division and I started the same year.

Emory Foster was an amazing man. He claimed he could do any job. It was true. He could. People, managers, there are two types basically, ones that people do things for them because they want to, and the second type is one they will do something for them because the person is demanding, they're scared of them or something. Emory Foster was one, you know, was a leader, a real leader.

Charnley: So he was the first type?



Thompson: He was the first type, yes. Everybody liked him. Later on we had bowling, we got into bowling, the whole division bowling teams. They had a bunch of them. He bowled on one of them. He was just one of the guys. But he really knew how to organize. He's the one that put together the building of the dormitories. If it hadn't been for him, it wouldn't have been done as quickly as it was.

Charnley: Your own job, it changed then? Would you talk a little bit about that?

Thompson: Where are we now?

Charnley: We're up to the late sixties. How was it that you left the food service and went to—

Thompson: Okay.

Charnley: You were at Wilson Hall.

Thompson: I was at Wilson Hall just for—okay, let's go back. Let's go back to Brody.

Charnley: Okay.

Thompson: I was a cook at Brody, moved up to be the head chef at Brody. Then I was a food supervisor, and then I was a senior production food supervisor. And then they wanted to know if I wanted to be food manager of Akers Hall. I didn't have a degree then. I was still taking

classes. I was probably—it's kind of hard to say what class I was in, because I just took them three or four credits at a time. I was well in my senior year, probably. And so I went over to Akers as food manager, and then Mason Abbot, the food manager left, and so the manager there wanted to know if I would come over and be food manager at Mason Abbot. So I did.

Charnley: That was familiar territory to you.

Thompson: Yes. I'd been there. But it was a small one compared with where I'd been a couple years before at Brody. And they were good people, always good people, always good employees. The university has always had good employees. I can't say enough about how I liked working with them.

So I'm at Mason Abbot as food manager, and there was, probably three or four years before that, the Division of Housing and Food Services had started a house organ, an employees' publication called *Serving State*. My classes I was taking, my degree I was working towards finally was in advertising, which means there was a lot of journalism in that. So they wanted to know if I would be editor of it, of *Serving State*, and so part time I was working as the food manager at Mason Abbot and then working in Holmes Hall, where the Housing and Food Services offices were, editing *Serving State*. Then that kind of gradually worked to where I—

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two of the first tape, and when the last one ended, you were talking about food service manager and your becoming editor at *Serving State* was the newsletter.

Thompson: So I was working half of the time as food manager at Mason Abbot and half of the time doing editorial work for the division. It started out with doing *Serving State*, but I started doing advertising and writing speeches, and pretty soon I was doing that full time. And then we got our own small printing press, and I was kind of in charge of that, too. One of the secretaries was running the printing press. It was just kind of a one-man operation, with the secretary doing the printing.

Charnley: Was this a mimeograph-type production? Not mimeo, but a stencil machine or—the newsletter?

Thompson: Yes, that's what it started out to be. But then we actually got a small printing press, a small offset lithography press. That was mostly doing *Serving State*, but we also, then we started doing other graphic work and editorial work, writing things for the division, just gradually adding more and more stuff, writing out menus, you know. If somebody had some special something going on, we were doing stuff for that.

Charnley: So you printed that out?

Thompson: Printed that, yes. I kind of did the graphic works and the writing, whatever needed to be done. It was a good experience.

Charnley: At what point did you get your degree?

Thompson: Actually, I got my degree in '66, when I was manager, food manager at Akers. I got a B.A. in advertising. Then I continued taking classes towards a master's, still always part time, except two summers. Two summers I went full time. You could go the full summer or half summer. For my vacation time and whatever, I went to school that half term, the first half session, and I took eleven credits one half term and twelve the next. That's like taking twenty-two or twenty-four credits per term, and I didn't realize at the time, but that was a lot of credits.

[Laughter]

Charnley: Especially in the summertime.

Thompson: I enjoyed going to school all day long. I just really enjoyed it that way.

Charnley: It's quite a contrast from the one eight o'clock in your schedule.

Thompson: Sometimes I'd take two classes, so maybe I'd get seven credits in a term, but often just three.

Charnley: So from 1966. So how long was your degree period?

Thompson: I started in '52. I got my degree in '66. I got my master's in '73. I think I enrolled around fifty times, which is probably a record. I read in the *State News* somebody had thirty-five terms, and that was a big thing. Well, I'd done it fifty.

Charnley: Fifty different times. So not only were you working here, you were also studying all that time.

Thompson: Yes. And I got my bachelor's I got with highest honors.

Charnley: How did you get attracted to advertising?

Thompson: I really was interested in English, and so I started out in English. Advertising, to me, seemed a very good way of communications. I never thought of going into advertising; it was just I had to have something. So advertising seemed like a good way of communication. It got to the point you used a lot of graphics, which I was interested in. I'd taken an advertising class, and the guy that taught it, it was a big class, but he taught it like it was a small class. Very, very interesting. So that's how I got in advertising. Probably because of that class, I found I had an interest in it. And advertising was a very good field to take here, because you took some basic advertising classes, but then they wanted you to get a very well-rounded education, so you could take anything you wanted.

Charnley: A lot of cognates.

Thompson: Right, yes. So I took geology, geography, poetry, economics, whatever I was interested. German history and Michigan history. Taking classes here was fun for me.

Charnley: Did you take Madison Kuhns's course?

Thompson: Madison Kuhn, I took his class in Michigan history, and we had to do a term paper and I did one on an old abandoned railroad that I had interest in anyway and I had been taking pictures. And so I did a term paper, and he gave me an A-plus, the only A-plus he'd ever given in his life, he said.

Charnley: Is that right?

Thompson: And then Madison and I became friends after that.

Charnley: Where was the railroad?

Thompson: The railroad ran from Lansing down to Litchfield, through Albion, went down to Litchfield. It was a branch of the Michigan Southern Railroad. It was gone long before, before I—but, you know, you could still see where it went.

Charnley: By the roadbed?

Thompson: Yes, and I remember my father talking. It went through downtown Lansing, under Michigan Avenue. The tunnel is still under there, and it's used, it goes to the museum complex there. And my father would talk about the Michigan Southern Railroad, which I didn't know

what it was. It was actually the North Central Michigan Railroad—that was the name of it—but it was a branch of the Michigan Southern.

Charnley: Did it go straight south of Lansing, toward Mason?

Thompson: No. The other railroad went straight south. It went through Albion, went through Eaton Rapids, Charlesworth, Albion. It went as far as, let's see. It went to Litchfield. It didn't go as far as Hillsdale, but people thought it did, but that other, the main line of the railroad came from Hillsdale north, so it didn't really—it connected there. And then was taken—there was a Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad, and that was taken over by the New York Central. The New York Central took over the Michigan Central Railroad, which is the one that went from Lansing to Jackson. Well, the Michigan, the North Central had two railroads going pretty parallel, so it got rid of one of them.

Charnley: On line, yes. That's interesting. How did you first get involved in that research paper? Did you get involved in the railroad before the research paper or after?

Thompson: You're going to have to go back to Trowbridge, back when I was a kid.

Charnley: That's fine.

Thompson: Trowbridge was the railroad center. It was where the Grand Trunk Western Railroad and the Pere Marquette Railroads crossed. It was an interlocking station. There had

been a station there, but there was a teller there that controlled the signals. And my younger brother and I spent all our—we lived right across the street from the it, across the road in the old hotel, and so we used to be up in that tower all the time. The guy, his name was Mr. Shoal [phonetic], was glad to have us up there, because it's kind of a lonely job. And so we became interested in railroads, so all my life I've been interested in railroads. I found out about—actually, I was interested in the inner-city railroads.

Charnley: Interurban?

Thompson: Interurban, the late-night line. That was the one that came through East Lansing. But my interest in East Lansing history, I was interested in the interurban, and then there was talk about this other railroad that I thought at first was part of the interurban, but then when I found out it wasn't, then I got interested in that.

Charnley: It's interesting.

Thompson: Yes. Kind of one thing led to another.

Charnley: I live in Leslie, and this last summer they ripped up all the pavement and did one of these cityscapes, and the interurban tracks were right down Main Street. They didn't know that they were there.

Thompson: They found some?



Charnley: Yes, they found the tracks. Well, I have pictures, because I'd worked with the local historical society, and there were pictures of the interurban right on the main street and, you know, stopped and had pictures. And so it shouldn't have been a surprise, but the fact was that it slowed construction because they had to take all the rails, they had to take that.

Thompson: Yes, that's the one that I followed. It went down to Jackson.

Charnley: Yes, right through Mason.

Thompson: And Consumers Power took over much of that, much of that highway.

Charnley: The right-of-way.

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: But a lot of the right-of-way is still there. You can see the grading and you can see the power.

Thompson: I have pictures of that at different places, from Mason where it crosses Ralph Road.

Charnley: Kinneville Road, probably.

Thompson: Kinneville Road, yes. And then when it gets down to Jackson, it gets kind of lost in the Consumers Power stuff down there, all their complex.

Charnley: So you had a relationship with Madison Kuhn as a teacher?

Thompson: Yes, as a teacher and as a friend.

Charnley: In terms of local history.

Thompson: Right.

Charnley: Did he involve students at all in his research about the university?

Thompson: I don't think so. I think that was a one-person thing.

Charnley: How would you describe him as a teacher?

Thompson: Madison Kuhn's father was a preacher, and he talked like a preacher. I mean, he kept you interested in what he was talking about, you know. He was a very, very interesting teacher, probably one of my top five favorites, if not the number one. His knowledge of Michigan history and his debunking some of the things that I had read about, that these weren't correct. He even gave the reasons for them.

Charnley: So that stimulated your interest in local history, also?

Thompson: Yes. Actually, my interest in history was from high school. I had a high school teacher named Mel Buschman, who is still around, a very active person. But he made history so interesting, I became interested in it.

Charnley: Can we go back to your—we'll go back to your work now.

Thompson: Let's stop the tape. Stop the tape a minute.

Charnley: Okay.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Charnley: You were mentioning Madison Kuhn. What was his technique that you found most useful?

Thompson: What he discovered, or made me discover, was primary sources. Before if I'd write something, I'd go look it up in some book that somebody had written, in the encyclopedia. But he showed me where you look for the original, the primary sources, and to me, for ever since then, that has been very important to me.

Charnley: The importance of doing that original work yourself.

Thompson: Right, instead of to see what somebody else said about it.

Charnley: How was that paper to write?

Thompson: It was fun. Yeah, because I really had kind of started it before I even took, you know, because my brother and I had taken pictures. My brother was a photographer, and I kind of had got the information. So it was just a matter of putting it together in a form that was—and it was quite a long one, too. I had a picture taken south of Lansing of where it went through the woods, and he had written on there, “My wife and I went down and looked at this.” So he had followed it. That’s the type of person he was. His interest in history and my interest in history went together.

Charnley: That’s interesting, because obviously he was an important professor on the campus at that time.

Thompson: Oh, yes. Distinguished, one of the ones that I had that got the Distinguished Professor Award.

Charnley: Who were some of your other favorites that you had as faculty members? Any come to mind? You mentioned your advertising professor had an important influence.

Charnley: Kenward Atkin, who was in advertising, and then he became the chairman of it, and he was somebody that, you know—I was a part-time student, and in the departments, a part-time student isn't really there for any reason. But to him I was. They're concerned about the students that are taking the class, the courses going toward a degree. And so another one that kind of, he kind of took me under his wing. And I was an older student, too, and so once in a while he would come in. I remember something he would always ask us for some class. He would question, you had to answer, "My mother is okay, except—." [Laughter] These students, the younger ones had different things than I did. I forgot what I said. I think mine said, "Except she's too easy-going," or something like that, and he pointed out that I was older. I was much older than the rest of the students by then.

He was talking to me about teaching a class, you know, part time, but then he left before and it fell through. But he and Madison Kuhn were two grand.

Another one I had in journalism was Mary Smith. I had one course for her. But the teachers that aren't aloof. In those days, professors were kind of up above everybody. They aren't anymore. In those days they were. After our class at the end of the term, she'd invite us to her house for something.

Charnley: That made an impression.

Thompson: Made an impression, yes. One thing she taught me in journalism, one that I learned from her was quotations, direct quotes, indirect quotes. If you're using a direct quote, make sure it's a direct quote. Newspaper people don't do that. If somebody interviews me for something,

in indirect quotes it's something I didn't say. It's kind of the idea of what I said, but it's not what I said, not word for word.

Charnley: Not verbatim.

Thompson: So when I write something in direct quotes, that's what they said.

Charnley: You were able to use this advertising degree and the material that you were learning there just before that in your job as it changed.

Thompson: Right. As an editor, yes.

Charnley: Could you talk a little bit about that next phase of your work history?

Thompson: I was the only one in, I was the only one doing this, and people looked to me for doing things. So I just kind of went on my own, did what I wanted to do. I had to satisfy myself from what I was doing, and I'm hard to satisfy. And so they'd just give me something. You know, they'd want something, and I'd come up with something for them.

Charnley: Who's the "they" you're talking about? The administration or the—

Thompson: Anybody. The supervisor would have a special dinner. They wanted some menu or something made up, and then different halls would have anniversaries, and so what I would do

was do the history of that hall. Before they wouldn't do much about history, because we didn't know the history. Well, I'd do a booklet on the hall. So there probably are maybe a dozen of them that over the years I had done with old pictures. I'd look up old pictures and primary sources, going back to the records, going to the library, checking the old Board of Agriculture, which was the trustees then, looking through those and finding all kind of great things in there. I was interested in it, and so they were interesting booklets.

Charnley: What feedback did you get from your coworkers or students, any, in those early years?

Thompson: Okay, now where are we?

Charnley: We're talking about *Serving State* and your editing there. Was there any feedback?

Thompson: The feedback from *Serving State*, the employees liked it. It was a lot of stuff in there about other employees and about—but the way I knew that was if we were late in getting it out, they would wonder where it was. [Charnley laughs] And then we did a survey—this was many years later—on *Serving State*, and I thought there'd be a few people who'd send something in. I knew about doing surveys and I knew about what you would get, and I was amazed, just simply amazed at how much we got back and how much, and what it said mainly was, "Don't change it." You know, why change something?

The thing was that I grew up in the job. I had done these different jobs. I had been a janitor, I had been a cook, I'd done food service work, so I knew the people, and I grew up with

them. These people were my friends. I knew all about them. When I was a kid working here, the women they all mothered me. Well, they were still mothering me when I retired. [Charnley laughs] And working up through the job, when I became a supervisor, a manager, I knew what their problems were. Somebody that's gone to college, they graduate, they're in charge, they're a supervisor. What do they know? But I knew.

Charnley: You had the job experience.

Thompson: I had job—so if they told me they had a problem, I understood they had a problem, and we'd do something to correct it. If they told me something that wasn't right, which wasn't often, but I knew that, too. Central Bakery at Michigan State University, now the head of that is Gerry Stroecker. He had done what I had done. He had started out washing pots and pans, and then he became a baker, and now he's the manager. And his people just think the world of him. They'll do anything for him, he'll do anything for them, because he knows what it's all about.

Charnley: Did you work with him?

Thompson: Did I work with him?

Charnley: Yes, at any time.

Thompson: As my job with *Serving State*, quite often I would go to do a story on something, I'd spend the whole day there. I'd spend the day back in Shaw Hall where I'd cooked. I spent the



day cooking with them, you know, in uniform and everything and doing the story. I did this with the laundry. I spent time over there. And I'd done it over the bakery. That was one of my better experiences. So I'm an honorary baker. [Charnley laughs] I have a Central Bakery shirt.

They have a retail store there called Puffin's Pastry Shop. This was my baby, not the shop itself, but the name of it and the logo and everything. They wanted a name for it, so this came to me. It was before Gerry was the manager. I think Mike Rice, who is now the head of food services, was manager of the bakery then. They wanted to come up with a name. This was in my field of advertising, so I was figuring, okay. I'm looking for a soft sound, like a "uf" sound with a—you don't want sharp sounds. You don't want a "t" or something for a bakery. A bakery you're thinking about something soft, gooey. So I was thinking of like muffin and cream puff, so I came up with puffin, Puffin's Pastry Shop. And the puffin is a very colorful-looking bird, and it made a great figure for their symbol.

Charnley: That's interesting. How was the *Serving State*, how was that distributed?

Thompson: The upholstery shop. We had our own upholstery shop then, and they had a truck.

Charnley: But, I mean, who got it?

Thompson: We set it up with a different—everybody in the division, the different residence halls, the union, Kellogg, the food stores, laundry, we put so many, and then they, with their truck, would distribute it. And it came out not every month, but so it fell on an employee's payday. So with their paychecks, every employee got one. And then somewhere along the line,

I thought other people might be interested, so I went through the faculty directory and the heads of different departments and some other people I know, like Madison Kuhn, I put him on the mailing list. These are distributed by campus mail. And there was great interest in it. I'd hear from different people that I knew that they looked forward to getting it.

And then a problem in later years, the people in charge of the division were more interested in getting information to these people, the employees, so they were trying to make it a vehicle that would make it look better for those people than to give information to employees.

Charnley: So change the focus slightly?

Thompson: Yes. And it's something I always kind of fought against, but kind of ignored.

Charnley: How about student employees? Could you talk a little bit about them?

Thompson: Student employees? Yes. Back in, okay, in the beginning, there were a lot of student employees. A lot of students were working, because they were putting themselves through school. And they say that students that worked got better grades, and I've heard this a number of times, that it's been shown that they get better grades. To start with, when I was in high school, the student employees were older than I by a few years, but they were my friends. So after work, these were people I would hang out with, so I didn't do much with my high school. Then I was growing older, and so they were my age, so we did lots of things together. Then I grew older and they were younger. [Laughter] But still, it was good employees because they're smart.

The good thing about living in this area, these young people that are working, like Byers or any place, they're smart people, the college students. And the student employees, earlier ones, had worked before. They'd done some work, worked around the house, did something, so they knew how to work. I notice when I go over to Brody, there wasn't anything for kids to do anymore. I washed the dishes. Now you put them in a machine. Kids didn't know how to work. They didn't understand how to work. So you had to teach them how to work before you could teach them the job.

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two of the Jack Thompson interview. When the last tape ended, you were talking about student employees and having to teach them how to work.

Thompson: Okay. Very recently, it's hard to get student employees, because there is so much concern about the cost of education that they're putting so much money into education that the students are getting by without having to work, because they're getting scholarships and things like that. It's very hard to get students to work now. The residence halls in the last few years have had to hire part-time people to do the job that the students were being hired for. And you'll find this also in, like, say, McDonald's. They have a hard time getting people to work, because the students aren't working anymore.

Charnley: The union activities, were you involved or affected in that?

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: Let's talk a little bit about that.

Thompson: Okay. In 1960, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees came in to unionize the non-academic employees, and I got interested in it. I don't know why. Well, because I was interested in the employees. The people I worked with have always been very important to me. As far as I'm concerned, they're the salt of the earth, these people, the people that do the laundry or mop the floors or make the salads or whatever. These are very good people, for me. And so the union came in and were going to unionize these people, and I thought I better, I wanted to get involved with it, so I helped organize it.

And in the elections, I was elected vice president of the local American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. My name is on the charter hanging on their office yet. Every once in a while, I would go in there and check it. And then the man elected president left the university, and so as vice president, I became president, and I finished out the term as president. That was great fun.

Charnley: That is the early, in the early years?

Thompson: 1960.

Charnley: How did the administration—did they fight the union or did they not want the workers to be unionized, or what did you encounter?

Thompson: They didn't really know what to do, for the most part. Emory Foster was fine. You know, if that's what you want to do, that's what you're going to do. Emory Foster and I had a long talk about this, that he has to talk to me about it. And so we went to his office, and we had a long talk about it. He was not against it. He was, you know, that's fine. If the employees want to unionize, that's their business.

The university hadn't recognized it before I'd gotten out of it, and then the next year, I was promoted from head chef at Brody to a food supervisor, so I was no longer—

Charnley: You weren't in the union.

Thompson: In the union. But I did help organize the next one, the supervisors' union, later on.

Charnley: What were the issues in the 1960? Was it wages, benefits, work conditions or—

Thompson: No. I think wages, probably, if anything. The union has to find things, even if they're not there, to organize it. But I don't think there was much dissension among the employees, I really don't. I think they just thought, "Well, let's organize." And there was no bad feelings towards the university by the employees.

Charnley: You didn't feel any repercussions personally as a result of that?

Thompson: Oh, no. Oh, no. No. Then later on, a few years later, the union was recognized by the university. I think Bob Underwood probably talked to you about that.

Charnley: Yes. And I've been interested in this, because this, obviously, is a development of the last fifty years, since 1955 and the centennial of the university. It's a major portion in the attempts to organize the faculty, also, occurred during this time, even though not successfully.

Thompson: Right, and the students.

Charnley: And the students, right. That's ongoing or recent.

Thompson: That was ongoing. That was back in the sixties the student employees they were talking about organizing, but the students didn't want to bother.

Charnley: They weren't here long enough.

Thompson: They weren't here long enough, yes. They weren't on the job long enough. They couldn't get them organized.

Charnley: Did you have any direct contact with any of the presidents?

Thompson: All of them.

Charnley: All of them?

Thompson: All of them.

Charnley: Could you talk a little bit about your reflections?

Thompson: As my job with *Serving State*, I took on myself to interview each president. John [A.] Hannah, Clifton [R.] Wharton [Jr.], very interesting man to interview. Ed [Edgar L.] Harden was only here as interim president, but he was somebody I knew anyway, because Ed come out of Michigan State University and was president up north, and then he came down here and left. Yes, all of them. And as was Mrs. Mackey. I decided I was going to interview the president's wife, so I interviewed Mrs. Mackey, and that was great fun.

Charnley: What was the focus of that interview, if you remember?

Thompson: Just kind of where she was from, where she'd grown up, what she had done.

Charnley: This is Clare Mackey, right?

Thompson: Clare Mackey, yes.

Charnley: Was she from Michigan originally?

Thompson: I believe she was,, as I remember. Or was she? He wasn't, but she, yes. And she was a singer, which was interesting to me. Then she gave me a tour of her house, of Cowles House. Want to know something about Cowles House?

Charnley: Sure.

Thompson: Okay. [Laughter] There originally were, Faculty Row there different professors had houses, and what is now Cowles House was one of the houses. And then right after the war, when they were doing reconstruction, they put a big, tall fence all the way—you couldn't see through it—all around this one house, and when they took the fence down, there was Cowles House. Madison Kuhn told me that he went through that fence, and they had knocked everything down except maybe a couple of the walls. So what is there wasn't really part, very little of it was original. And the money, there were people in Lansing named Jenison that gave money to the university to build Jenison Field House, and money that was left over, the university built Cowles House from it. Cowles was Jenison's mother, her maiden name. It's pronounced "Coals," not "Cowles." My mother had always talked about the Cowles family, so—

Charnley: So you knew it from that.

Thompson: I knew that.

Charnley: From that angle.



Thompson: I learned that at my mother's knee. [Charnley laughs]

Charnley: Of your other colleagues, are there any that should be a part of the record? Who were some of those most memorable that you worked with closely?

Thompson: Want to talk about presidents? Do you want to go back to presidents?

Charnley: Sure, we can go back. Let's talk about President Hannah.

Thompson: John Hannah was John Hannah. I mean, he was beyond everybody else. He was the one that built the campus from a little thing up to a big thing. It might be because he happened to be the president here at the time, but if he had been president some other time and this opportunity, he might have been unheard. But, you know, he was a great man. There's no question about that. And the saying was that the concrete never sets on Uncle John's campus. They said he would get money from the legislature for a building, so he'd start three of them, and then have to go back to get money to finish them. I mean, that's what they said.

But to me, the greatest president was Clifton Wharton, Jr., because I think he had everything in balance. Uncle John left the university just when things were getting bad. Clifton Wharton came in, you know, during all the eruptions. But I think he had things in balance. He had sports where it belonged. Education was the main thing to him. He knew the politics of it. To me, he was the greatest president.

I think John [A.] DiBiaggio could have been as great, but the board of trustees tried to manage, micromanage the university. The sports, sports was too important to them, and to

DiBiaggio, I think, education was what this university was about. And so, you know, the provost thing, where he didn't want provost to be head of the sports director and the football coach, and he was overruled. And so instead of letting DiBiaggio be president, they wanted to be, and so I think maybe that's why he left.

Charnley: Can I go back to Wharton a little bit?

Thompson: Yes, sure.

Charnley: How did he treat the staff?

Thompson: Very well. John Hannah had a reputation for being—you know, also you would see him on campus. Well, I was always on campus, from a little kid up to, you know, all the time. I went to classes here, I worked here, I went to concerts here, I did things with my friends here. I never saw Uncle John on campus. Wharton, you'd see him.

Charnley: Oh, really?

Thompson: Yes. You'd see him around, down bowling, doing different things. And he was known for, he said something. I don't if it's the same, but that what's important, the people working on the serving lines of the cafeteria are important people, and he meant it. We remember this, because this made everybody feel good, and he meant it.

Charnley: Interesting. And you had dealings with almost all those presidents, then, or at least since Wharton, anyway?

Thompson: I interviewed all of them.

Charnley: Up through President [M. Peter] McPherson, including McPherson?

Thompson: Including President McPherson. I found President McPherson very businesslike.

I found Ed Harden very old-hat guy, old-shoe guy. Interesting that when I went to interview Ed Harden, he was behind his desk. He came out from behind his desk, and we sat at a table. And I noticed this because this is what I always like to do. I don't like to supervise behind a desk. If somebody came in for something, I didn't want to have that desk in between me and them. And it was very interesting when I went to Wilson, when I moved the desk so you couldn't get in, so when you came in you had to sit beside it. Boys would come in. They'd try to get in behind that desk.

Charnley: They wanted to be in front of it.

Thompson: They used to have that desk between them. But if you're doing it, you're kind of like a judge, I always felt.

Charnley: Oh, that's interesting.

Thompson: This is what I learned from probably the best manager that I worked for was Marian Emerson, who was food manager at Brody when I was a cook and a supervisor. Marian Emerson was one of those people that really the employees wanted to do for her because they wanted to do it for her, not because they had to. No employee in that place had anything against her. And you don't know why. It's just the personality. But any employee there would have done anything for her. She was kind of the last of that type.

As the younger ones came along, they were less interested in the employees. They were less interested, like she was, less interested in doing things for the university like Emory Foster was. His concern was not to make Emory Foster look good, but to do something for the university. As the later ones came along, their concern was, what are you going to do to make me look good?

Charnley: When you first came here, as even before an official employee, helping your father, did you anticipate that you'd have your whole career here at Michigan State?

Thompson: No. No way. Even when I started part time, I never thought I would be here for fifty-three years.

Charnley: So what year did you ultimately retire?

Thompson: '99. In September 1999.

Charnley: So, for fifty-three years. Was that a record?

Thompson: That's the record, yes.

Charnley: That is the record.

Thompson: That's the record. Tom Dutch is going to get fifty-two years.

Charnley: So what did you do to convince him so that you keep the record? [Laughter]

Thompson: Tom Dutch and I are old friends. He's another one, a very important person in this university. Probably over the years, the most well-known person in the university. I mean, the presidents come and go and you see pictures. Tom Dutch is somebody everybody knows. You mention Tom Dutch. Everybody knows him.

I first met him when he was a student working at Shaw. I was a cook, and he was a student working there. And I knew him over the years. He became a friend. He had a job after graduation, was the housing officer or something like that for the university, for the college then, mainly off campus, making sure that the houses were—

Charnley: Up to code.

Thompson: Right. Which I had mentioned, when I lived on Oak Street in East Lansing. After we moved from Trowbridge, I lived on Oak Street, right across from Mason Snyder's house. We had a big house there, and we had student roomers. As our family got smaller, people left, we

could get more students. And when I was working at Snyder Phillips, I'd roll out of bed and I'd be to work.

Charnley: You didn't have far to go?

Thompson: No. So I knew Tom Dutch over the years, and I'd see him once in a while. Then when that job, the job he had was eliminated for some reason, he came over to Brody as the manager, and I was working there as a cook. So I was working for him, and he was a grand person to work for. I wouldn't tell him then. [Laughter] Everybody that worked for Tom Dutch liked to work for Tom Dutch. And then I left there, and he sent somewhere else as manager. And then when I was over *Serving State*, working out of Holmes Hall as editor doing *Serving State*, that was under the personnel administrator. Well, in a couple years, he came over as personnel administrator, so I was working directly for him.

Charnley: So your careers intertwined quite a bit.

Thompson: Right. Some number of years, I was working directly for him, and he was just great to work for. Both of us always walked to work, so we'd often see each other. But then when he came over to Homes as personnel administrator, he lived just about six blocks from me, so his route then changed to walking to work by my house. So we walked to work together for twenty-five years.

Charnley: Is that right?

Thompson: Yes.

Charnley: So what was it, do you think, that kept you here all these years?

Thompson: It was just a good place to work. Lots of reasons. Good place to work, it was, especially the first many years. It gradually got not so good, but it was—and also it's a great place to be, a university, you know, the culture here. If I want to go to a concert. And another thing is, with the academic climate here, the professors, I did a story in *Serving State* about food waste. I narrowed it down to a cookie, somebody didn't eat their cookie. We counted how many cookies weren't eaten in one day in one hall, and we figured out how many weren't eaten in the whole university and how many were wasted, and did silly things. If you piled them up on top of each other, they would be almost as high as Beaumont Tower.

But then other things, I called Georg Bergstrom, I think it was, in food nutrition. He was a top, around the world well known in this. I asked him, "How many people could you feed with the energy from these cookies?" I mean, I could talk to this guy, a world-famous nutritionist. I called Malcolm Trout about, you know, how many cows did it take to get the milk to make this? Malcolm Trout was a well-known dairyist. Things like that. And then when I was over in Holmes Hall, Lyman Briggs School, College, then School, if I had a question about something, I'd go down there and I'd ask one of the professors, you know, about it, if I just was interested in it.

And we used to eat lunch together. The people that worked there and the professors, we'd always eat lunch together. Another incident, when you're with the printing press, you have

to be, with the real high-professional ones, you have to be concerned about the acidity of the water. It's something we weren't concerned about, but we got interested in it. So the chemistry professor, Steve Spies [phonetic], came down, checked how much, he checked the acidity of our water. If you wanted to know something with math, the math professor, I'd ask him. This was always, this is something people don't know about when you're working for a university, how much knowledge you can get from the people around you.

Charnley: The faculty resources.

Thompson: Faculty people, yes. And these are with everybody. The people doing the cleaning over at Lyman Briggs are great friends with the professors there. I mean, personal. And these people are picking up educations.

Charnley: So that concept of the living learning that developed here, you see as a real positive thing?

Thompson: Yes. Oh, yes. Probably, yes. They have classes in the room and where you live, because you're very close to the professors.

Charnley: In those particular colleges.

Thompson: Yes.



Charnley: What were some of the other community activities you got involved in? Obviously you were—

Thompson: You don't want to know. [Laughter] Where shall I start? The community?

Charnley: Just kind of preview some of the things. You've been active in the community, both before retirement and then obviously after, too. What would you list as some of those things that you spent your spare time?

Thompson: My interest for many, many years has been in local history, so I was with the Historical Society of Greater Lansing. I was in that. I held various offices in that.

I helped start the Friends of the Turner Dodge House. It's the house in Lansing that was an old large house that was owned by one of the big families here that the city now owns. It's under Parks and Recreation. I helped get that Friends started there when the city took it over, and I was the first president of that.

I was the Downtown Cultural Committee, which was under the Chamber of Commerce.

Charnley: In East Lansing?

Thompson: In Lansing, Lansing downtown. It's Greater Lansing. There's a woman named Paula Johnson [phonetic] was in charge of that, that was a staff person, and during the bicentennial, the U.S. bicentennial, there was a lot of interest of history and a lot of groups were formed. They really didn't have anything to do with the bicentennial, but local history groups,

and a lot of them were helped started by the Greater Lansing. The Historical Society of Greater Lansing helped, did the seating for a lot of them. So a lot of people knew each other in this area of local history, and then Paula Johnson was one of them. So when she was starting this, she brought a lot of people together—Geneva Wiskemann, myself.

Charnley: Was Justin Kestenbaum involved in that, too?

Thompson: Justin Kestenbaum, another old friend of mine. Justin was, yes. And it was a very high-powered committee, because a lot of high power. And it was a committee. It wasn't just people sitting around just to be there. They were very electric, a lot of ideas in the air. Bob Bouck was the chair, and he was with LCC, in advertising LCC, was the chair, first, I think came along. No. Anyway, the second year I was the chair of that, and both years we brought in Art Train. Art Train is owned by the state. It is a train that has a lot of art displays in the cars, and they take it to different cities.

Charnley: Traveling exhibit?

Thompson: Traveling, yes. Now they take it—we don't see it much here, but it's all over the country, and it's still going. So I was the chair of that for one year.

Charnley: Mrs. [Dolores] Wharton was involved in that, wasn't she?

Thompson: Yes, Dolores Wharton was involved in it. Yes, she was, come to think of it, yes. The bicentennial was also, as the bicentennial, a lot of involvement in that, and she was quite involved in the bicentennial. And then when the Kurt Dewhurst MSU Museum wanted to start a group for the museum, then I was the president for the first year of that to get that started. One of the things I would do is put together the newsletter. I'd put it together, and I'd even print it over in our printing press.

Charnley: That was *MSU Associates*, *Museum Associates*?

Thompson: *Museum Associates*, yes. *Museum Associates*. And there were different art things that we would do. There was the state journal, and the city of Lansing Parks and Recreation every year would have a youth talent exhibit. From all over the area, the kids would bring in things they had made, drawn, painted, graphics, and I was a graphics judge for that for many years. But then the state journal dropped it. But it was a lot of artwork from outlying areas. That seemed to be the most. The city of Lansing didn't seem to have it. But art teachers in outlying areas would get their kids to do things and bring them in. It was a big, big show they'd have.

Charnley: It sounds like your interest in music and art, which you expressed in your first course, it seems like that—

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two of tape two interview with Jack Thompson.

When the last side of the tape ended, you were talking about the art, your involvement in the arts. Let's talk about your community involvement since you retired in 1999.

Thompson: After I retired—actually before, six years ago, and I retired two years ago. Six years ago, I became interested in, East Lansing has a Historic District Commission that oversees the historic districts in the city, of what can and cannot be done with buildings in these districts, mostly houses. And so I thought, “Well, that would be interesting,” so I signed up for that, and I became a member, a commissioner of the Historic District Commission six years ago. In December this year, the next meeting, that will be my last one, and I probably will be going on the arts commission. I've applied for that.

But anyway, so I became interested in the Historic District Commission, and for, I think, the third year I was on it, the chairman can only be on for, be chair for only a couple years or something like that. So he couldn't be chair, so I took over as chair for one year, with the idea that after that year, I didn't really want to be chairman. I had chaired so many things over my lifetime that, you know, at my age. Anyway—

Charnley: The newness had worn off.

Thompson: With the idea that, after the year was up, he would come back, which he did. I really enjoyed being on this Historic District Commission. And then I became involved with the East Lansing Historical Society that had started a number of years before I got involved with it, and I have been vice president for the last four years, maybe. My wife is also involved in it. She

was in Old East Lansing. She grew up, born in East Lansing. A number of people on the Historic District Commission are also with the East Lansing Historical Society because of the same interest.

The staff person on the Historical District Commission that worked for the city is the president of the Historical Society. The city council person who has the Historic District Commission, an old friend of mine, Beverly Baten, is also on the Historical Society. And my wife, I'm leaving it, she's going on now on the Historic District Commission. She's been on the traffic commission. So there was a lot of interplay there.

Then I saw in the paper that East Lansing was going to start a citizens' police academy, and I thought, "Well, that would be interesting. I'm retired." So I signed up for it. And my wife was visiting her children in Oregon at the time. When she came back, she said she'd like to do it, too. So I called Sergeant Penny Novak, who is in charge of it, and also in charge of the jail, and asked if my wife. She said, "Oh, that'd be great." So she and I took the police academy, and it was just so interesting, just highly interesting. I didn't know much about the police.

And in the meantime, or about that time we started, my son, who was a cook for many years at Chi-Chi's, but was a part-time fireman with Meridian Township police for three terms there, became a dispatcher for East Lansing. His name's Chris. He dispatches for—well, they dispatch through MSU, East Lansing, and Meridian Township for fire and police. But anyway, then we got so interested in this police academy, when it was over I asked, told Penny Novak, the sergeant who was in charge of it, that I'd help with the next one. So what I do, and I've been going to all the classes again this time, and what I do is, I take pictures for them, take pictures for a record. I think there should be a record of what, you know, so that the people that are doing the speaking, and then of taking pictures what they're doing.

My wife and I graduated from East Lansing High School in 1949, which became Hannah Middle School in later years. And then when the school district didn't need it anymore, they didn't have enough students, the city bought it, and it became the East Lansing Community Center. They had what they call a chair rap at the beginning when they first took it over. Any citizen that's interested, you got there, everybody got together and you talked about what are you going to do, who's going to use it. For two Saturdays we did that. My wife and I both did that.

And then when they were setting up a committee for the community center, a committee of citizens, I was on the Historic District Commission, and I was the chair at that time, and they wanted two people from our commission to be on this committee. And so I appointed myself and Richard Wright, an architect, who was the other chairman that I was sitting in for. So he and I, and many other citizens, have been on that committee for, you know, since it started. We checked with different architects, who they gave a demonstration, and then we gave our recommendation to the city council, and they picked the one that we wanted. Then we worked with them on the plans for it, and the last thing we just finished was picking the furniture for it. It should be opening in January.

One of the things I've been doing with that is, I going in there every once in a while with my digital camera, taking pictures of the process of it. You know, what was old, and some of the stuff, as they were redoing it, they'd take off things, and there's showing the old things underneath it, which is always I enjoyed. So much of what I'm doing now is with the city of East Lansing.

Charnley: In looking back at your career and your time that you've lived in the area and worked for Michigan State, is there anything that you can see as a legacy or what's most important?

Thompson: Legacy of?

Charnley: Of your experience, your job.

Thompson: What I have left behind?

Charnley: Yes.

Thompson: I've left behind a record of housing and food services, because of my interest in history and my years with it, through *Serving State* and also just things I've written up about the division, those fifty year, twenty-five, thirty year, things about different halls. People in later years, why, this has a record.

I helped start the union that's the 1585. I also helped start the supervisors' and managers' union. Why don't you turn it off and let me collect my thought.

[Tape recorder turned off]

Charnley: Okay.

Thompson: Okay. We're talking about my legacy. The thing people don't realize is that when you do things, the reason you're doing them is because somebody before had done them, and

they think it's always been this way. They don't realize that somebody had thought about and made a change.

I'll go back to Brody. When Marian Emerson was food manager there, she, for some reason, the cooks became very creative about doing things, about methods of doing things, and she was just—and also, a man named Floyd Darling, who took care of the equipment, and he was very smart. He could make different things. And so we would come up with ideas of a piece of equipment or something, and he would make it, and some of that stuff is still being used.

A very simple thing. We had big pots, steam kettles that hold 100 gallons, and when you took stuff out of the pots, you would get a big saucepan, a saucepan, like a dipper, and you'd have a pan that you're dipping in, and you'd balance that on the lip of the pot and dip out there. Well, I thought we could have a shelf made, so he made a shelf out of a metal tray and a couple braces that you hook onto it, so you don't have to hang onto it with one hand. They're being manufactured now. That's what they use now.

And all the cooks had ideas that they would come up with. Another thing was what we became known as divider pans, that when you put food in a pan, like, say, sliced meat, you put one layer in. Well, I came up with the idea of putting, the same size as the pan, a sheet with holes cut in it, so then you put another layer on that, and those became known as divider pans. I don't know if they still use them or not.

And Saran Wrap, Saran Wrap just come out then, and I thought, you can find it in the grocery store, so why can't you use Saran Wrap to cover up things. So we bought Saran Wrap, and now you can buy commercial-size Saran Wrap, and we still use it.

The people today don't recognize that these old people that are still working there have done things for the university they don't know about. Now I'll go back to Wilson Hall, when I



went into Wilson Hall as food manager after it had been taken over by students. I had my choice of anybody I wanted to work with me, and I chose a number of people. One was Ron Rodriguez [phonetic], who was the store man at Mason Abbot. When the food would come in, the boxes and the stuff in the refrigerator, he would take care of it and when people needed him to bring it out. He was Mexican, or he is Mexican, a good friend of mine yet. It was interesting. I was taking a class on something at that time, and I was reading something about Mexicans in Lansing and how the leadership, they have leadership, but it's only within the Mexican community.

Well, Ron Rodriguez, and I got another guy named Joe Chavez worked at Mason Abbot. Joe was a cook. They were leaders of the whole—both of them were active in the union. They were leaders, natural-born leaders, both of them. So I asked Ron to come over there, and he was very helpful in calming things down. He was a steward over at Mason Abbot, but being at a level that we needed somebody to help is the employee level.

I also asked for a person that I'd known. Verna Bradley was her name. I was her first boss when she came over to Shaw Hall, and I always tell I remember when she was shy. She's no longer shy. But she came in as a supervisor, at that level. Very helpful. In later years, people didn't know about this. They didn't know about these people, what great things they'd done for the university, which is too bad. Verna especially. They didn't know her background, that she had helped save the university.

Charnley: Their stories are just now coming out, I think.

Thompson: Yes. Well, it's important that people know about Verna Bradley. Ron Rodriguez always, he went on. When Ron retired—this was very touching to me. When Ron retired, I

went to his party. He came over and he said, “You know everybody needs a hero, and you’re my hero.”

Charnley: That was nice of him.

Thompson: But he and I were great friends. What other legacies? I can’t think of anything, but I would notice over the years, you know, people doing things. I used to say, “I remember I started that. I started that. That’s how it got started.”

Just another simple example. At Shaw Hall, when the dormitories at that time and before, they kept food warm in the kitchen. It was a big trough thing full of hot water, with steam running through it, and you put the pans down there. It’s called a bain-marie. In Shaw Hall, in the serving lines they had little electric warmers. It’s very interesting, when they were building Brody, they came to ask us, “What would you do?” I found that very interesting that they would bother to ask us that, but that’s how they were in those days, because they figured the employees knew something. My suggestion was, get rid of these bain-maries full of hot water. They were dangerous, hard to clean. And put these food warmers in. When I went over to Brody, that’s what they had, and they still do.

It’s interesting that the management people in those days thought the employees had some knowledge, and I think that has gone away, too, somewhat. Gradually over the years, I’ve seen this. They don’t understand how important these employees are, what these employees, especially the ones that have been there forever, how much knowledge they have. So if somebody’s doing something, they could tell them, “That’s not going to work. I’ve tried that, and it’s not going to work. I know it doesn’t work.” So they’ve got to learn all over again.

I'm still thinking. Towards the end of my career, we were moving. What we had was a print room, print shop, and the room where—there were probably about three or four us by that time, and two printers or something. Or no, one printer and an artist. But the print room was different. We were all working together in one room, and it was very easy that, when you were doing something, and you thought, “Well, what can I do here?” and you could ask the guy sitting next to you. So there was a lot of interplay. And a very good artist, still there, named Alex Parsons, young. He's thirty-one, thirty-two years old, that I really respect. When I'd want something, wanted ideas, he was the one I would, and I still do respect him for his ideas.

But then we were being rearranged, and they put us in cubicles, like in that comic. What's that comic strip?

Charnley: I don't remember.

Thompson: You know, with the cubicles. They guy with the necktie. [Dilbert] You don't read the comic strips?

Charnley: No. Only occasionally. Not all of them.

Thompson: Anyway, sort of like cows in a stanchion. And also, if you want to talk to someone, you've got to go up and go around. And when the rest of the world is getting away from this for some reason, we were getting into it.

What else?

Charnley: I didn't have too many more questions. Was there anything else that you could think of?

Thompson: Okay, just some different things here. I'll go back to 1944, 1945. I took summer art classes in high school, seventh and eighth grade, with Alma Goetsch, who was a professor of art here, well-known professor of art here, and I really enjoyed that. The art department was then in the union building, on the north wing of the union building.

When I was at Snyder Phillips as a student, a high school student, this was really my third job, but there were some other high school students working there when I went there. And then the supervisor fired all of them except me.

Charnley: You were the only one that survived the ax.

Thompson: They didn't know that job was important. I had a couple years' experience with it. To me, doing a good job is important. To almost employees, something people don't know, the main thing about doing their job isn't the money, but it's doing something important. They want to do it right.

There was a case when I was at Brody, when I was a cook at Brody, the guy that cleaned the rest rooms came out and he said, "I want to show you something." I wasn't his supervisor. He wanted to show me how clean he had got that rest room, how important that was to him. But this is the attitude, and new supervisors coming in don't understand this, that these people are doing the job because they want to do it right, good workers.

Charnley: Pride of workmanship.

Thompson: Pride, yes. Okay, some other people. Probably the best person I worked with was a guy named Frank Jansen [phonetic], when we were the night cooks at Brody. He was kind of a funny little guy. He was from the West. He was kind of a cowboy. Everybody thought he was a funny little guy. But he knew how to work. I mean, he knew how to arrange things so the least amount—a time-study person should have studied him. There were times, you know, when the work was just overwhelming, and he and I were the only ones there. And I was a good, fast worker, and he was, also. And we always got along. Good person. Probably the best person I worked with.

Another thing is that in different halls, the residence halls, they have different philosophies of doing things, and they don't even know why they do that. Because that's how it's always been. Take Holmes Hall, where my office was, and the people there probably get along. The Holmes Hall people, the cooks, the custodians, those people, probably get along better than any people I've ever worked with. I didn't work with them, but they probably got along better, and I think it's because there was a custodian that became a supervisor. His name was Frank McLean. Now, he came from one of Lansing's top families. He was a Dodge. The Turner Dodge House, that's where he lived and that's where he grew up.

Charnley: Oh, really?

Thompson: Yes, really. And he handled the family property for years, and finally, I guess, it was all sold off. So he came out here and got a job as a janitor. But he was a class person. He

became the head, the supervisor of custodians at Holmes Hall, and his idea was, you do things right, you do things right and you get along. That philosophy's still there, and he's retired and been dead for a number of years. But I think, you know, it's his philosophy that's still there.

Another person, Jerry Puca. Jerry Puca came out of the computer business from when you used to use IBM cards, and he came over to the university, came over, excuse me, came over to the housing office, head of the housing office, and he and I worked together very well. Because I'd do the brochures, the information and all that, and it was his information. And he really understood the business of doing, of how things should be done in arranging things. He pretty much set up the way the housing office is, where you put people. When they come in, you put them in different halls and different rooms. He pretty well set that up. Very knowledgeable person, very good person to work with.

There's people that I worked with that, to me, are the epitome of what people should be like. Marian Emerson, Jerry Puca, Ron Rodriguez, Frank McLean, Frank Jansen, Henry Foster, people all kinds of levels. I look at these people and say that's how it should—and these are just the top ones. The ones below aren't that far below.

Charnley: Had the similar experience.

Thompson: Yes, they aren't far. The people that worked for, that do the work for Michigan State University are what's important, the president down to the—they're all important—to the person mopping the floors. They all do good jobs, for the most part. Once in a while you get a bad one, but not often. And they all take pride in their work.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project for the time we spent and also your insights.

Thompson: Okay.

Charnley: I appreciate very much. Thank you.

[End of interview]

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