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Branz, Nedra - Oral History Interview

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

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Interviewer

Interviewee
Q: Nedra Branz, Professor Branz, History Department thanks for being so kind to come to my office to record your reflections, your observations, the good, the bad, the humorous, all sorts of things about the many, many years you devoted to this campus as a pioneer. Now you came in 1958.


Q: From Carbondale.

A: I was on the campus. I was teaching at first. I was a graduate assistant there.

Q: At Carbondale?

A: At Carbondale and then I was hired to teach as an Assistant Instructor. I taught one term there and then they sent me up here to teach. I was on extension actually the first year.

Q: I see, and you taught at Alton.
A: I taught both places, but I guess I taught more at East St. Louis than I did in Alton.

Q: Why did you accept this transfer from Carbondale?

A: I doubt if I had a whole lot of choice to tell you the truth. It never occurred to me to say, no I'm not going to go because I think my employment there was pretty tentative that first year. It was supposed to be temporary and I was supposed to be an extension class and I was supposed to go back, but again I don't think I ever really had much of a chance to go back. It never crossed my mind that I would go back to Carbondale.

Q: Well then I gather that you didn't particularly want to go back to Carbondale or am I wrong?

A: No. I don't think so. I never thought much about it to tell you the truth. I just sort of drift like a leaf in the wind.

Q: Well the reason I asked that, the reason I'm probing a little bit is, as you well know, some animosity has built up between the two campuses...

A: Um-hmm.

Q: ...and I know some of the reasons. It had a lot to do with Harold See I think for example. It had a lot to do with the fact we felt like poor relations...
A: Um-hmm.

Q: ...some kind of second rate extension to use your word.

A: I think that was the feeling.

Q: And a lot of us didn't care much for that and so I'm trying to find out other dimensions if there are any of this animosity from folks that actually were on both campuses.

A: I never felt the animosity. I did my masters and undergraduate work at Carbondale. I always enjoyed Carbondale. I liked being there. I liked the town. I liked the campus, but it was small then and I never really felt any animosity towards the campus at all.

I was treated well there by the History Department. I moved up here. I guess in the long run it was probably just as well that I came up here rather than stay there. I probably would have been gradually squeezed out whereas up here I was more important because I was the only history professor for that first year. I was more valuable, I guess you would say, here than I was at Carbondale. I never really felt any animosity.

Q: I think that gives us some necessary dimension. Many people, such as myself, became what you would call Harold See men ...

A: Um-hmm.
Q: ...and we were going to create the Harvard on the Mississippi or who knows what. And then of course it did not happen and See was kicked upstairs and we became and remained for a long time a second campus definitely second class citizens. Your comments help of course put a little perspective on that.

A: Well I think we were all disappointed because we did, when we came here, it was the idea we were going to build Southwestern Illinois University. We really had a feeling that we were doing something much more than just an extension and I think we were all terribly disappointed that the campus did not develop that way at all.

Q: No.

A: Where you could lay the blame is hard to say. Certainly...

Q: Well...

A: ...it was not due to the professors.

Q: I think few people would disagree that Delyte Morris put the brakes on. Now of course we would not be here without him, but we could have been more I think if he'd have left us alone. Did you, I like to ask about Shurtleff. You never taught there, but you came so early. Do you remember the people that we, shall we say, inherited from Shurtleff?
A: I only remember the history - one woman...

Q: Claire Barard.

A: From the History Department.

Q: All right. I remember Claire.

A: She (mixed voices). Uh-huh.

Q: She was a carry over. I think there were quite a few. Eric Sturley I think.

A: Quite a few.

Q: Well...

A: There was someone else that I should remember but I don't.

Q: Well there were quite a few. In chit chat somebody was talking about some faculty members that lived at the Alton campus at times and your name came up. Did you ever for a while live in one of those little apartments?

A: I didn't live in the apartment. I lived in the old dorm.

Q: Well that's what I meant.
A:  Um-hmm.

Q:  The old dorm.

A:  Morris Carr and one young man from the Carbondale campus that was there just one term - we all three lived there. Morris Carr and I used to joke with each other you know our in jokes that we lived together on campus. We did, in the same building, different apartments of course.

Q:  How many did that dorm hold?

A:  I have no idea but it's certainly more than three.

Q:  And that was just temporary housing?

A:  It was just temporary housing. That was when I first came up here.

Q:  All right. Well not maybe terribly important but part of this walk down...

A:  There was no - there was no eating facilities - nothing like that. We just stayed there. It was just temporary.

Q:  Um-hmm.
A: I know Dr. Duncan lived next door in one of the old houses that belonged to the campus.

Q: When I came in August of ’59, I had three children and we lived for a week or two in that dorm and it was cozy. While we were trying to find a place and of course we did.

A: Um-hmm.

Q: Now you’ve already pretty much explained why you came to SIU, pretty much on assignment from Carbondale and a job of course. The companion question is, Nedra, you retired in ’84 so you were here 26 years? That’s a nice piece of your life. Why did you stay at SIUE so long?

A: Well I didn’t have a Ph.D. so it was not easy to move around of course and I just didn’t think about it. I liked being here. I liked Edwardsville. I liked the area. I got married not too long after I came up here and my husband worked in St. Louis so it was reasonable to stay here. Actually I don’t think I ever tried. I know I didn’t think about moving somewhere else. I never tried to anyway.

Q: All right. Fair enough. I stayed here. All of the people I’m so far interviewing of course are long termers and...
A: Of course there were an awful lot of people who did come up the first year or two that didn’t stay. I don’t even remember their names anymore. Babette Marks for instance in the women’s P.E.

Q: I remember Babette a little bit.

A: Someone in the Geography or in the Government Department, I can’t think of her name.

Q: Phil Vogel left in Geography. Noah Lukatz I think left in Poli. Sci. There was a German fellow that left, Guenter Remling.

A: Yeah. Remling. Um-hmm. I had forgotten about him. And of course George Mace later went down to SIUC in the Geography Department. He was still there the last time I heard.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the people who left here and went either back or just went to Carbondale and why you think they did.

A: Well I think it was promotion for them. They went directly to the campuses as someone in the administration and I think they thought of it as a promotion. Maybe they saw that this wasn’t going to go where it was supposed to go.

Q: Are you saying that in your opinion most of those that left here and went to Carbondale were in administration?

A: Um-hmm.
Q: Rather than teaching?

A: Well now George Mace went in administration. I also think Gene Peebles returned to SIUC. He taught and he was still teaching at the campus.

The other man, Gene Turner, who was the director for a while; he was about the third one I guess after See. He went to Carbondale as an administrator but I’m not sure of what.

Q: I have found it very easy to understand why people would come from there here. I’ve never found it easy to understand why they’d go from here there.

A: Well of course it was a bigger campus and you had maybe a little more prestige than you would if you were here because I think they felt this was just an adjunct to it. You may as well be on the main campus if your just going to be an adjunct.

Q: They certainly treated us...

A: Um-hmm and I think that’s the way these people felt about it.

Q: Their poor relatives.

A: Yes.

Q: What were some of your greatest satisfactions around here during those years?
A: Well I think in the early years when we first came up here it was just the feeling that we were doing something important. We were creating something you might say almost out of nothing.

And there was a great deal of friendliness you know. There were just a few of us especially we - who stayed on the East St. Louis campus most of the time. You know we were at Rock Junior High most of our classes and we ate together in the cafeteria and you know the old bridge club players - you know Florence Fanning and Jerry Runkle.

I shared an office for a term or two with our first Black professor who died very young, and with a 1956 Hungarian rebel, a very personable young man who went to St. Louis to teach.

And Dee Lovell and that group that always played bridge. The rest of us David Luan and some of us - we ate together all the time and it was a sort of a very friendly family affair you might say.

Once we came up here that - I missed that. I didn't see those people very much because they were all scattered all over the campus and being the only woman in the History Department left some socialization out.

The fellows never stopped by my office and said let's go over for a cup of coffee kind of thing. Except for the women in the English Department, there was no real camaraderie for me on the campus here. I didn't mind that because I'm not a very social person. I'm a loner but it was fun being on the campus down there. Even though it was terribly inconvenient.

We had no special offices. I know that first term I carried my books with me everywhere back and forth. I almost got scoliosis carrying textbooks because I didn't have a desk. I shared a
classroom desk with the school nurse for a long time out on 57th street when we still had our day classes out there because Rock was still not ready.

There was no place for the black students for instance East St. Louis was still terribly segregated and so they had their get togethers in half of the building. The offices were in the other half and their lounge was in another half of the building. It was crowded to say the least and even when we went totally to Rock and had our offices there we shared offices with two or three people. It was hard to lock them. I lost a lot of books while I was there. Just people taking them, forgetting to bring them back you might say.

Q: That's the most primitive story I've heard to date, Nedra, on those good 'ol days. Things were pretty primitive in Alton but not quite that bad. I never hauled my textbooks around.

A: You had a regular campus there.

Q: Any other things on your satisfactions of teaching and being a part of this pioneering experience?

A: Since this was new to most people in this area, we had a mixed bag of students, some who should not have been here at all, who could barely read and write, who had no understanding at all of what they were supposed to be learning and then we had really brilliant students who were just waiting for a campus that they could afford. I had one student who was so poor that she asked me what was important in my lectures so she could take a test. Another boy
could repeat everything you said on an exam. He was just phenomenal in his memory of history. Unfortunately he got married and didn't go on for his Ph.D. which upset many people.

You went from one to the other. I had some really fine students those first years particularly. You had some that were on the low end who really should not have been there, but their families thought they ought to go to college because it was local and there and you had the others who just - as I said just waiting for a chance to go. They really worked at it.

Q: What contributions do you feel you made to the area, to education, to this university?

A: I don't think I made many other than just taught an awful lot of students over those years. I taught some of them who later came to be teachers here too. Barbara Lawrence was one of my students for instance. I meet my students often. One year I was doing some research over at the East St. or the St. Louis Public Library and a fellow came up to me and he said didn't you use to teach in Alton at SIU and I said, yes. He said well you won't remember me, but I was one of your students in those large classes in the auditorium. Of course I didn't remember him at all because I had over 200 in that class in the auditorium. He said, I used to worry about you' because I always walked back and forth teaching. He said I was so afraid you were going to fall off the platform. We were up on the stage, the professors were.

Q: I remember. Was that Loomis Hall?
A: Yes.

Q: How about your greatest frustrations around here?

A: Well I think again being the only woman in the faculty, I was ignored somewhat. No one put me on committees for instance. Not having a Ph.D. was part of it. I had done about all of my Ph.D. work except for the dissertation, but that didn't cut any ice apparently. That wasn't terribly frustrating. Maybe it was just the macho image of a man that they thought women professors.

In fact, when I first got into history there weren't very many women historians. I remember the first history conference I went to. I had a feeling that I had gotten into the men's room by mistake. There were so many men and so few women. There were soon important women like Barbara Solomen and those, but there weren't just the day to day small school kind of professors - very few women. So that was a bit frustrating.

Q: You mentioned committee work.

A: Of course that was always a blessing, a blessing in disguise.

Q: I was just going to say that, but you could have certainly had all of my assignments.

A: I never said anything because I was afraid they would put me on something, but I do think it was partly discrimination.
And then of course there was always a frustration over students you couldn’t teach, they just weren’t going to learn or they didn’t have the capacity to learn. And then of course those students who especially during the Vietnam war, who came just to stay out of the war and almost dared you to teach them something. They didn’t want to be here and they were often, well I didn’t have too much trouble with rowdiness but I did have some impertinence and things of this kind. Okay I’m here now teach me something.

That was a frustration. That was really a frustrating period in more ways than one, emotionally. I was much against the war of course, but it was frustrating here to try to teach those kids that didn’t want to learn and those students who had done well in high school and were shocked when then didn’t do well in their classes. I’ve had them be really hostile about it, come and complain, I always made A’s in high school.

I remember one girl who complained about a C she got. She came in and fussed about it and I said well let’s see maybe your just not very good at writing tests. I asked her questions that were on the exam - I said what would you have said. She didn’t know. ‘What would you have said about that?’ ‘I don’t know.’ Of course before she got through I said well I think maybe you better leave and quit complaining because if I talk to you much longer I’ll probably give you a D. You don’t know anything about this particular course. So she didn’t complain anymore. She dropped out of the class.
Q: I had a student just last week, Nedra, who after the exam was over came to me and asked for extra time so I said okay. He wrote another 20-30 minutes. My teaching assistant computed that in with the old grade and it actually lowered it, it was so bad.

A: He would have been better off if he'd have shut up. I know they often want more time. I had one student one time who wanted more time. He wanted to take it home with him and do it. I said well I don't think we can do that.

Q: I had a student once who couldn't write English wanted to write it in Farsi or Persian and have her husband translate it.

A: Ahhh.

Q: Well...

A: I had a student who wanted to write his exams in Farsi, but he didn't want anybody translating them.

Q: Not even...

A: He couldn't understand why I didn't give him good grades because he couldn't read English very well. I said I'm sorry. I can't do that you know. You have to do it in English. If you come to an English speaking country and go to school you have to write in English.
Q: We have drifted here a little bit here and that's perfectly all right. I'm going to run with it because one of my questions is humorous events and we've just shared several. Share some more with us.

A: Now that you've asked me about them I can't think of any. Oh I remember one class I had, I had a fella that... He wasn't stupid, but he was a bit, not quite wacky, but close to it. He had a certain amount of brilliance but he was also very erratic and he used to ask questions that were strange to say the least. And I used to give him choices, two out of three or three out of four, that sort of thing. He just couldn't make up his mind about those questions so he said, why don't you just tell us how many you want us to write and don't give us choices.

I said you can write on all of them if you want to if that'll satisfy you. I don't care, write on all four. I won't grade all four but you can write on all four. But he was very perturbed that I didn't tell him exactly what I wanted him to know.

And I know the class that Barbara Lawrence was in I had fellas that kept trying to get off the subject and they'd ask questions which were valid enough. They seemed to be perfectly valid questions and I would answer them. Later she said to me, why do you do that. You know they're just trying to get you off the subject. I said well they don't though do they? I just answered the question and I would pull it back into whatever it was that we were talking about because if you don't answer the questions of the students who were just asking to be asking then the students who really need to know something will think you don't want to answer questions and they
won't ask questions. It's hard enough to get students to ask
questions anyway. But I always thought that was funny, Barbara
didn't put up with any nonsense in her classes.

Q: What are some of your worst memories?

A: Well having to move from office to office was one of the
frustrating things - never knowing quite sure where your office was
going to be you know. When we first came to Edwardsville, for
instance, I was on the third floor of the library in a little
cubicle. Another time I shared a room in one of the tract houses. I
guess it was with Beard had his office out there at one time and Joe
Beatty was out there I believe so...

It got to be a tiresome thing because you couldn't keep your
books there. You had to leave them all at home and if you wanted to
look up something there was never enough room in any of these places.
I had lost so many books moving from office to office so I didn't
take them with me. So that was frustrating and of course as I said
not being able to get across the kinds of things that you wanted to
get across and make students understand. That was the most
frustrating.

But I don't think I was particularly frustrated by the politics
of the campus because I just stayed out of it. I wasn't involved in
it.

Q: Now since you were a pioneer, of course you inaugurated some of
the American History courses on this campus. I presume one was
Illinois History.
A: Um-hmm.

Q: Would you care to comment on your experiences in being the first to teach that or any other course on this campus?

A: Well, Illinois History was something that I didn't know much about and Dr. Rosenthal asked me if I wanted to teach it and I said, yes I would teach it. I didn't know anything about it, but I would teach it. And finding a textbook for Illinois history was a problem. Robert Howard had written his book on Illinois; it's encyclopedic and not really a very good textbook, but it was the best there was. There are no good history texts in Illinois history and the students knew nothing about it. They know nothing about Illinois, even the students who lived in Illinois.

Q: They don't teach Illinois History in the high schools?

A: Apparently not. They simply didn't know Illinois geography or history at all. I never really particularly enjoyed teaching Illinois history. Partly I guess because I didn't feel very sure of myself and I had to study it as much as the students did.

Q: Anything you'd care to share with us about having been the first person to teach Western U.S. history on campus?

A: Well, I think there was a certain amount of resistance to us teaching it by some of the professors. They didn't think it was necessary. You know it was old hat and it was too well known. I
guess they were endowed by the same feeling about Frederick Jackson Turner that you had and they didn't feel that it really was very necessary, but okay go ahead and do it if you want to. The professor I used to have at Washington U. called it water hole to water hole history.

Q: Well being a westerner I take umbrage with whomever talked to you that way. Of course in those days I was teaching East Europe...

A: Um-hmm.

Q: ...and I didn't know or frankly care a whole lot what was going on in American history. Did you ever teach Woman's History? Were you involved in that?

A: Actually it wasn't women's history it was a women's suffrage movement because I didn't feel I knew enough about women's history to teach it. I did know quite a bit about the suffrage movement so it was basically the suffrage movement that I taught.

Q: Now would you consider that you were one of the first on this campus to get involved in any aspect of what we generally call Woman's Studies today.

A: No I wasn't the first. I was among the first but I certainly was not the first. I didn't institute it. I would give that credit to Sheila Ruth.
Q: You were certainly the first in the Department of History.

A: Oh, yes. Although John Taylor said he'd like to teach it. Sam didn't think that was very appropriate. I'm not sure but that John could teach it better than I did.

Q: I recently interviewed Patrick Riddleberger and discovered that he not only introduced Black History on this campus, but there is a great deal of evidence he pretty much pioneered the whole thing nation wide.

A: Is that right?

Q: Yes. Now that's why I'm boring in on this. I think we can establish very clearly that from the history point of view, from Woman's History as against Woman's Studies, very obviously you were a pioneer in that.

A: On this campus, yes. It was being taught at the various Seven Sisters colleges at that time as at Radcliffe, for example.

Q: A few comments please on Woman's History and or Woman's Studies, - the success of the programs, the validity of the programs, your reflections on them.

A: Well there's a certain amount of feeling that I had about it that women had been of course completely left out. Some of the short histories that you have, I can't think of just any of them now, but
several of them I had checked that were concise dictionary type, you know just little bits and pieces, smidgens of history in each of them and I found that there were only five women mentioned in that and of those five three were teachers and the other was Harriot Beecher Stowe. So I thought well that’s ridiculous there have been more important women than that and so I thought we needed to put them in their proper perspective.

I do think, however, they ought to be incorporated into the regular history classes and not separated out as Women’s History. I don’t think Women’s History is really very valid in that sense, because they are part of the overall history and until you can incorporate them properly into the general histories they are always going to feel somewhat discriminated against.

Q: There are those that say the same thing about Black Studies and Black History, that perhaps eventually it should just be ...

A: History.

Q: ...integrated. I presume the same thing could be said about Indian or Native American and perhaps Chicano and ...

A: But it’s difficult to do. I had a black student one time who asked me why I didn’t incorporate more blacks in my history and I said, well, this was the U.S. history I don’t teach it from that viewpoint. I teach political history and if you will notice I don’t talk about Irishmen or anyone else either.
I am talking about people who had political power. I said blacks didn't have political power in this early period. I said they were always there and they always had a political force themselves because you know the anti-slavery attitude or the pro-slavery attitude, but I said none of the blacks themselves had any power and they didn’t affect the political structure as individuals.

And I said you know I talk about that, but I don't talk about important black people anymore than I talk about important Indians or any others. It's just that I teach political history. She didn't agree. She still thought that I ought to include the black people.

Q: Any thing else along this line of your teaching, your inaugurating courses, the way courses developed, student reaction?

A: Well I always found that the students liked women’s history. They found it useful. I never had any complaints about that course at all. The women who took it and the men who took it - liked it. Now of course most of them were women who took it. It was a popular course generally speaking.

Q: Did I understand you to say you had a little trouble with texts initially?

A: There are no textbooks in that. I had a hard time finding a text.

Q: What did you use?
A: I used Flexner's, Eleanor I believe. I taught just the suffrage movement so her book was an excellent one for just that aspect of history. It only went up to, however, the early 20th century so they didn't cover women in the 20th century very well so I had to get something else. I finally wound up with a rather thick paperback by Abbromovich now I can't think of the other woman's name. There was two women.

Q: I know that book.

A: I thought it was much too thick for a good textbook, but there was a lot of information in it. But mostly I taught just, you know, use a selection and then add my own kind of thing.

Q: What do you think of Mary Beard's Woman and Force in History?

A: Well it wouldn't do as a textbook, but it would be okay as a supplement, something to read.

Q: If you were asked to come back today and teach a course on woman's history would you? Are there adequate texts and would you teach it any differently than you did many years ago?

A: Well I'd have to start with, are there any adequate texts and then go from there as to whether or not I would change the way I taught it. If there were adequate texts than I would probably teach it a little differently. I wouldn't rely so much on Flexner and the suffrage movement. But since most people think the women's movement
- at least in the 19th, early 20th century, was the drive to get the right to vote which isn't true, but that's what a great many people think.

When they say women's rights they think the right to vote and so it was suitable when I was teaching it to use that approach because I added other things. I didn't just leave it with suffrage, but I didn't go out very far into women in education except for the very early period when they tried to get schools for women.

I didn't do much with art and music, things of this kind where women have done well or not depending on your view. I didn't talk much about women artists, for instance at all. It was all the political moves to get the franchise or labor movement to get economic independence more than anything else. It wasn't really women's history except in that sense. I might do it differently now. I'm not sure. It just depends on the textbooks. A further reflection, I would not teach woman's history even with a good textbook.

Q: Do you think woman's history as a course is still viable or would you rather see it integrated?

A: Well if it could be integrated so that it wasn't just an after thought-- women did this or that. I think it should be integrated, but if it's not going to be integrated so that they take equal importance in wherever they are equally important than no, let's teach it separately. Just as I think that's true with blacks.
Q: I am now teaching basic American History courses and every year the textbooks get bigger and bigger because there's the old history then there's woman's history...

A: And black.

Q: ...black history.

A: And you had to teach a little bit about the Indians.

Q: And the Native American History and it is a real challenge....

A: To incorporate it...

Q: ...to synthesize.

A: Perhaps some of the "older" history could be left out. I never knew a student who enjoyed "Reconstruction" or the growth of industry.

A: And to some extent it's probably not truly valid because our experiences and men's experiences while they're side by side, they are different. The same way I think that black studies may be more valid than women's studies because their history is much more different from white history than a white woman's history is from a white man's history. And of course Native American history is same so different. Their experiences of being on the losing side or being
shunted around the way they were and ignored as they were is of course different too. I think women's history could be incorporated into the general history more readily than the other two can be.

Oh something else about curriculum that I am disappointed with, that the campus dropped the City in American History.

Q: The city?

A: Um-hmm. It was a course that I created and they do not teach it. No one wanted to teach it and I think a campus as close to an urban area as we are ought to have a course in the city in American history.

Q: Well one of the reasons is I suppose nobody could teach it and they didn't want to tool up.

A: Another frustration not connected with teaching is that the "administrators" of the early days, namely Dorris Wilton and Tom Evans never got their just due, especially Evans.

Q: Were you involved in relating the university to the community? If so, please comment on this aspect of the university's work.

A: No, no. No way.

Q: Were you involved with any special academic programs directed to the educationally deprived?
A: No.

Q: Well perhaps not specifically, but you probably had handicapped students...

A: Yes.

Q: ...and foreign students.

A: But I didn't teach them any differently than I did the others.

Q: Well okay but I can imagine you did a little more hand holding than you might have otherwise or more office hours...

A: Yes, more office hours.

Q: ...tutoring, the helping.

A: Yes, but I did that often times with some of our students too who have benefited greatly by just another explanation, closer attention. If they came to the office and asked for help, they always did better then in the next exam because often times it's a lack of understanding what the professor is wanting than it was lack of knowledge on their part.

So I found that any kind of help in the classroom, that's a problem, however, in the lower level courses is getting students to come and ask you questions, come and ask for help. They don't do it very much.
Q: You can hardly drag them in.

A: Hm-mmm. You almost have to make an appointment and say you be here at such and such a time before they'll come. They just don't, somehow they... They're not accustomed to it or they don't think it'd do them any good or they don't want to get that close to the professor or what. I don't know what it is, but it was difficult to get people in there. Foreign students are more inclined to do that, come in and ask, or they were for me anyway.

Q: Based on your experience at SIUE, what contributions do you believe the University has made to the area?

A: Well, it's hard to say. I know for some people it's of course another great economic move. You know it benefitted communities economically, the salaries that had come into the city of course. I have a feeling that it has less impact than it ought to have had. There are a lot of people who absolutely never come to the campus. There are people from Edwardsville, Collinsville, and Alton who have never stepped foot on the campus. They've never been out here and with all the programs, music and plays and things of this kind. My next door neighbor had never been out here until I brought her to a play one night. Her daughter is going out here now, but she had never been here. I think a lot of people in Edwardsville have no connection - no connection to the University at all.

In fact many still resent the university for forcing their families off their farms. I think they may resent it more now since land prices have gone up.
Q: After some of our graduates, history majors, got out in the area, particularly in the public schools, do you think we eventually got better freshman?

A: No I don't think so. I really don't. Well maybe better than the first one or two years that we had here. But that was such a mixed bag, you had the very excellent students and you had the very poor ones and of course to some extent you still have that. But I think you have less of the very poor ones than we once had, but we may not also be getting all those very excellent ones either because with various kinds of programs instituted, loans and things of this kind, they can go someplace else and they want to leave home, get away from home.

But still there's a lot of our students, local people, who still come here simply because it is still less expensive and you get a very good education here. They prefer being here to going away to school. But I'm not sure the teachers that we taught made that much difference. I hate to say that. I'm not sure it made that much difference.

Q: Are there any students you would care to comment on - something special or successful, something noteworthy that you might share with us?

A: No. Not right now. I can't think of any of them that have done anything very special. Many of them of course have gone on to teach. I know that, but I don't know any spectacular successes. Of course in my classes I taught the lower level so much. I didn't teach
graduate level classes so I sort of lost track of them. They went on. I think you - professors who teach the upper level courses were much more likely to remember their students in terms of their success later than I was. I know some of them did but I don't - I don't know anybody specifically right now.

I remember one student who is now County Attorney of Macoupin. I believe, his name is Richard Ringhausen. Is that success?

Q: What would you like to record on anything shall we say for posterity? What would you like to address and add to the record while you're here?

A: I don't know. One of the things that I noticed when we first came, that I think perhaps there is a little less emphasis on now than there used to be, was that every professor taught every student as though that student was going to go on and get a Ph.D. or that's the way they tried to teach. And I kept telling them these people are not going to be Ph.D.'s. They are going to be secondary school teachers. Teach them that way. They were not going to do that.

I think they've gotten away from that to some extent. They're teaching more on the level of what they would teach a student who could then in turn teach that in school and I think that basically that's what this school needs to do because most of our students do turn out to be or did then.

So the people who were taking history, who were majoring in history were going to teach it and so I thought that that was what they should have been doing was teaching them something the could teach.
The other thing that bothered me about the school was too many students; when I was supervising student teachers too many students got a minor in something they really weren't very good at, didn't do very well at and when they got to a school they were required to teach that. And they really weren't capable of doing a good job at it.

When they were teaching what they had majored in, they were pretty good. But when they were teaching what they minored in they weren't good. If fact they were just downright bad in many cases. So I don't think the University ought to recommend them to teach these classes and I don't think the schools ought to let them teach a class, a minor they made Cs in for instance, thinking that oh well people who make Cs can teach it on the level of C students. But that's not really true in English for instance. It's hardly true in history either.

Q: This would be back when we were discussing frustrations...

A: Um-hmm. That was one of the frustrations. This should be with the funky things. Once on one of the student evaluations one of my students wrote, Give her a raise. She is a nice old lady.

I think maybe now the University may have tightened that up a little better. The last time I supervised student teachers they were much better. They really were fine. They were good teachers and if they taught in the schools the way they were, practicing with their student teaching, they might very well make a difference in what kind
of students come to SIUE then. I don't know whether all their students go to SIU, but those that did would I think learn something because they were really quite good.

Q: Now of all of the things we have talked about would you care to add something or address some other point of the record, Nedra?

A: No. I don't have any famous last words. No, I don't think so. I enjoyed being here when I was here and I loved to teach. When I got to the classroom I was fine. I didn't mind teaching. It was just getting up and coming out here that got to be tiresome. Teaching itself was okay. It was the preparation for classes. It was the grading the papers. It was getting up and coming. Finally I decided it was just time for me to quit before I really got bad.

Q: Here's a kind of a tough question but I'm going to ask it anyway. Maybe a sensitive question but here goes. You came here very early - '58. There were very few women historians anywhere. There were very few women faculty members here at all and it stayed that way for a long time.

A: Um-hmm.

Q: And you mentioned perhaps an hour ago, anyway early on that some of your frustrations in that respect. The question I'm trying to frame is are things better now or when you retired, to be precise for women faculty and would you agree that the fact that you were here that you did stay all these years certainly must have made it a little easier for your shall we say sisters who came later?
A: It's easier for women on the campus I think than it was when I started. There are more women. They get promoted more regularly. They're more likely to be Ph.D.'s. Programs on the university campuses where they would do their masters and Ph.D. work are less likely to downgrade them. Now when I went to Washington U. the head of the department didn't like women in the Ph.D. program. He didn't, he wasn't impolite or anything, but he was well known to prefer women not to be in the program. He preferred men.

I never finished mine because they didn't like my dissertation topic and when he said they weren't going to continue my program. He said, well you just want to teach anyway. Which I felt most people did want to do who were doing the program.

I thought what a strange way to put it but I think that was an attitude that a lot of the professors then had towards women, oh well she's just going to teach. Let her teach the composition classes or let her teach the lower level history classes or whatever. As you notice I rarely got to teach an upper level course in spite of the fact that all I missed in my Ph.D. classes was the dissertation which didn't mean I didn't know the history but I very seldom taught an upper level class.

Now when they needed somebody to teach it they managed to get - an okay from the administration for me to teach a 400 level class, but of course after they got more professors they didn't need to do that for me so I never got to teach them. That was frustrating to me but I think generally women are a little more respected on the campus than they were when I started.
Q: Well I hope so and of course as soon as I say that that makes me realize that means that it was worse in those days.

A: Oh definitely. When everybody was suing everybody, I wanted to complain against the university for lack of salary raises and Dr. Pearson said well you’re making as much - I said these young men coming in without a Ph.D. and with no experience - they were working on the Ph.D. but didn't have their dissertation... Their position was the same as mine as far as that was concerned but I had years of experience. They came in at more money than I did - what I was making then and he didn’t believe it. I said you look it up and he did of course and found that that was actually true. Those young men coming in - they weren't - they aren't here now but there were several young men that came in - they didn't keep them when they came or they went on someplace else and so I lodged a complaint about it and of course got my salary raised. I didn’t like to do that.

I thought that I ought to have been appreciated all right for what I had done in terms of teaching because I have taught everything at some point or the other you know. I taught European history and I taught Tudor England, Western Civ, when we still had Ancient history in it.

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A: Of course the bulk of women on the campus faculty have their Ph.D.'s and they're brilliant teachers. They don't have that problem I think and they might have had if I hadn't kicked and screamed
about it. You know they might have given them less than the men just because they were women. I know they had some of those problems in some of the other departments.

Q: I think you're a little modest but I think I'm quite correct when I say that the fact that you spent 26 years here and did all kinds of things including fussing about it, if that is the word, undoubtedly contributed to the bettering of the situation for subsequent female faculty members that came on campus. Well anything else you would care to address, Nedra.

A: Well I think the other thing, I really enjoyed the history, of course I like history but I enjoyed the professors too. I think that the history department had less problems than some of the other departments. We were all being interviewed one time and questions of things that we liked and disliked about the university and one of the interviewers said I have noticed that the history department has a great deal of collegiality which I thought was probably true that we praised each other. We didn't downgrade each other. We, the history department is an excellent department and I enjoyed being with a department that I could be proud of.

Q: So thanks for coming by and sharing over an hour.
A: One of the nicer things I guess was being with it from the first, the good 'ol days sort of thing. They weren't as good as they sound to us now of course, but we took it with great aplomb. We enjoyed it and I think that's one of the good memories. I take great pride in my name on the plaque in the Rendleman Bldg.

Q: Well now that is a perfect end to this tape. Thanks.
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