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Bishop, Myron - Oral History Interview

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

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ORAL HISTORY

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Stanley B. Russell
Interviewer

Address: _____

SAGE

Date: 5/6/91

Myron Bishop
Interviewee

Address: _____

Date: May 6, 1991

Date of Accession: _____

PREFACE

When Dr. Stanley Kimball sent me the questionnaire regarding my early years at SIUE, I thought it would be a simple task to give him this information. In reviewing that period, we found ourselves gathering more and more data as we went along and have now spent almost four months in our research. Due to my health problems, Dr. Kimball kindly consented to written or printed data.

So that these events can be reviewed in their proper time-frame, we thoroughly researched the records of two newspapers - the Edwardsville Intelligencer and the Alton Evening Telegraph. Other newspaper articles were found in my own files which also included maps, reports and some of the pictures.

This has been interesting for me . . . I taught, and worked, and was a small part of all that transpired during those first years when the university was still but a dream, and putting this data together has made me realize what a tremendous, and arduous, task was accomplished through the efforts of dedicated leaders and the dollars and dimes of the area residents.

There were disappointments at times that made it seem as though we would never get the project going but, the next day, we were ready to go again. The difficult or bizarre events are always remembered through the years; nevertheless, there were many, many good people who

bowed to the inevitable and sold their homes and farmlands to the SIU Foundation with no rancor or criticism. These purchases formed the nucleus of the land on which the first buildings were constructed in 1963.

I have always been, and still am, grateful to the Board of Trustees for not involving me in any of the hearings or litigation that arose from time to time. I had been hired as the Land Acquisition Agent for SIU and they let me do my job. It was a good relationship and I still appreciate it to this day.

Myron Bishop
August 30, 1991

Documentation:

2 Plat Books of site
Master Planning Book
Memorandum dated April 24, 1961
on OPTIONS
Final Report on Parcels 2 thru 76
submitted in 1961
Farm Program Report 1959-1962

At this point, I want to mention the positive influence that Ernest Tosovsky, Sr. had with some of the property owners who were objecting to the purchase of their land by S.I.U.

He was supportive from the beginning; when he learned that I was having difficulty talking with some of the property owners, he would talk to them and then call me and tell me to go see them again saying "They will talk to you now".

His dedication to the concept of the university was so strong that he donated his home in July, 1961 to the SIU Foundation. A picture of that home at that time is shown below - the residence is now used by the SIU Foundation for ALUMNI SERVICES and ALUMNI ASSOCIATION.



eminent domain Law - the right of a government to take,
or to authorize the taking of, private
property for public use, just compensation
usually being given to the owner

WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY
Second College Edition

Throughout the years, when a government proposed to build a dam, a bridge, a highway, a university, or any public building, there have been people who have been unhappy at the realization that they must give up their home and land.

There were many in this area who were not familiar with the meaning of eminent domain. If they had known, the following stories might not have happened and their adjustment to this new state of affairs a little easier to accept.

When Dr. Harold See, who was a close friend, called and offered me the job of Land Acquisition Agent, I was living in Columbus, Ohio and we were having a party at our home when his call came through. I told Harold I would let him know; the next day I called and told him I would take the job. When I arrived in Edwardsville, I took an apartment on Commercial Street; my wife stayed in Columbus and put our house on the market to be sold. Later, in 1959, I bought the home where I now live on Thomas Terrace. During that period, I was deeply involved with the land negotiations. The property owners who were objecting to our efforts resisted by means of signs on their property and threatening telephone calls to my home at night.

I started working at SIU in July of 1958 and Stifel Realty Co. of St. Louis had been seeking options on the various parcels on the site. The Stifel agency had sent 5 or 6 new salesmen on this assignment for the purpose of giving them experience not knowing that this project required real estate agents with a broad experience and background. One of my first tasks was to pick up the files in the Stifel Realty office. They seemed very happy to turn them over to me and now, in retrospect, I think they had run into the opposition I experienced when I first called on some of the property owners.

During this period SIU classes were held in East St. Louis and Alton. I had a day class in Alton and a night

class in East St. Louis; I lived in Edwardsville and travelled back and forth and also made calls on property owners. Frequently, it was necessary that I attend meetings on the Carbondale campus. There was a rumor going around to the effect that the powers-that-be were trying to figure out how to keep me busy.

There were several instances which occurred during the land negotiations which I have not forgotten:

1) There were times when I was made to stand on the other side of a property line when I called on the owners to discuss the sale of their property. On one or more occasions, the owner had a shotgun to enforce his command.

2) Some property owners wept like little children when we discussed the sale of their property with them, but I understood their distress because some of the properties had been in one family for four generations.

3) One very small piece of property was claimed by three different owners. Since the sale involved such a small amount of money, the university paid each of the three claimants the agreed amount of money for the same piece of land to avoid litigation and title search.

4) During the negotiation period, and after the sale of the property, hundreds of pounds of fish were seined from the lake which is now in front of the Class Room buildings.

5) One story, which does not involve the university in any way, but was interesting to me, regarded an Assistant Professor who had contacted a lady in Colorado. She owned acreage in the ESIC area and letters were

exchanged back and forth trying to establish a selling price. The Professor wanted to purchase this land as a personal investment. Negotiations failed because the Professor would not pay the lady's asking price. The difference between their two figures amounted to 52¢ per acre.

6) There was a great deal of discussion in handling the farm program described in the Farm and Soil Erosion Program report. For low land, which was the best farmland, farmers were permitted to receive 2/3 of the profit from the acreage. Some farmers wanted to classify as bottomland ground that was rolling and 30 feet higher than bottomland so they could get the higher price. They wanted 2/3 of the crop from their land whether or not it qualified. Even though the soil on their upland acreage was red clay, they still maintained it was good farmland, which is not red clay but black soil.

As I have said before, with all that transpired in this period, there were those people who were most co-operative from the very beginning of this project. One was a farmer by the name of Leonard Meek who rented farmland from the university for several years. Our relationship with Mr. Meek had always been good but, sadly, one day while he was working the land near Bluff Road, his tractor overturned and he was killed.

At the very beginning of my work with the property owners, I hired 16 appraisers who were anxious to get the work. However, after finding themselves in the position of appraising

property that belonged to a friend or someone they knew, they decided they did not want the job any longer and I was left with 4 appraisers.

There were a few lawsuits filed in an effort to obtain the properties in question. I was in the Court House once or twice anticipating that a suit might be heard but almost all were settled prior to hearing.

The moments I treasure most are those when I meet a former objector on the street, or at the bank, or in a restaurant who approaches me and says "I just want you to know that my son is going to SIU" - another will say "We now have a grandchild who is going to SIU".

The message on the following page is a copy of one that was handed out to neighbors and friends during this period when opposition among the property owners was quite strong.

IMPORTANT

MESSAGE

Dear Friends and Fellow Taxpayers:

The issue concerning the location of Southern Illinois University and the 2600 acre tract of land Southwest of Edwardsville will, no doubt, require some serious thought on your part. About 70 o/o of the property owners will not release the land. Some important questions are:

1. Why did they require such secrecy to permit the wild rumors in the first place?
2. Why has our local newspaper refused to allow equal space and treatment on behalf of the landowners?
3. Why have landowners jobs been threatened by local employers?
4. Have you read of the plight in other countries when occupation by force is tolerated?
5. Did your son fight for a college or his home?
6. Did you read in the October 11, 1958 issue of the Champaign-Urbana Courier, the Commission's report against the establishment of new regional universities?
7. Did you hear the Governor's announcement, "This is purely speculation"?
8. Did you read the October 6th issue of "Life" and the October issue of the "Reader's Digest" concerning schools and colleges? The great University (Campus) of Illinois is situated on under 600 acres of land.
9. Would you be willing to donate now and pay for the next 20 years or so for part of the buildings plus the \$100,000,000, plus staffing and maintainance for unnumbered years? This in addition to our already heavy tax burden.
10. Would you approve of land grabbing in such a manner so as to enable a few greedy persons to present their ill-gotten gains to the state or its agency in order to obtain condemnation powers to acquire the remainder? This could happen to you.
11. Would you approve of any member of any local organization supporting this site making this statement to a landowner: "By any means necessary, legal or illegal we're taking that tract?"
12. Do we fight similar forces elsewhere in the world? Will this commuter school do you as much good as represented?
13. When you have answered these questions for yourself, perhaps you will agree as do hundreds of wonderful citizens of Edwardsville and other surrounding towns that it matters little to them whether a University is located on the East or West end of Edwardsville. A site east of Edwardsville is also under option and available at a substantial saving to you taxpayers!

PLEASE SHOW THIS TO YOUR NEIGHBOR

1. WHY DID YOU COME TO SIUE?

I was teaching in Evansville and was also a friend of Harold See. He was extension teacher from Indiana who came to Edwardsville and was instrumental in the establishment of the SIU campus in its early stages. Harold See asked me to come to Edwardsville as the Land Acquisition Agent for SIU because he knew of my teaching background and my experience as a Real Estate Broker, both in commercial and private properties.

2. DID YOU EVER TEACH AT SHURTLEFF COLLEGE?

Yes.

3. WHY HAVE YOU STAYED AT SIUE?

Because I believed in its potential and future growth.

4. WHERE DID YOU TEACH OR WORK BEFORE COMING HERE?

(See Copy A)

5. WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO SIUE?

Successfully negotiating the acquisition of 2600 acres of land for the SIUE Campus.

6. WHAT GAVE YOU YOUR GREATEST SATISFACTIONS AT SIUE?

Watching the growth of a great university rise from corn and wheat fields atop one of the largest bluffs along the Mississippi.

7. WHAT WERE YOUR GREATEST FRUSTRATIONS AT SIUE?

Trying to set up appointments with Delyte Morris with property owners; it was impossible to reach him either in person or by telephone.

8. WHAT ARE YOUR BEST MEMORIES?

(1) First SIU commencement which was held in a cornfield in June of 1960; I was appointed to direct traffic from Highway 157 to the parking area in that same cornfield. I remember people stopping on the highway and asking if that was a carnival; but I must have done a good job because one man gave me a silver dollar for my services.

(2) After the hostile attitudes I had experienced in the early stages because SIU was "taking our homes away from us", I was gratified to have parents and grandparents come to me and tell me that they had a child or grandchild now going to SIU.

(3) Walking into my new classroom in the Science Building.

9. WHAT ARE YOUR WORST MEMORIES?

Receiving threatening telephone calls at my home at night during the land acquisition negotiations.

10. WHAT ARE SOME HUMOROUS EXPERIENCES?

Without naming names, one story involves the farm couple who did not believe in doctors. The farm wife had a problem arise with her foot and it was necessary that she see a doctor. Her husband was so upset about the trip to the doctor's office that his wife had to sit on a box and ride to town in the back of his truck.

Another story was the one told me by a faculty member whose daughter was a student at the University of Illinois and, while there, wrote home asking for financial assistance because she did not know how to handle her checking account.

This story is humorous now; it wasn't at the time if occurred. I constantly ran into the attitude that because I came from Ohio, it was a backward state. I mentioned once that I started running in high school when I was driving the school bus. I ran 5 miles each morning to pick up the bus and then after returning it to the garage, ran 5 miles back home in the afternoon. When I said that the first year they didn't have a bus but it was a horse drawn wagon and the horses were kept and cared for by the school janitor. Upon hearing this, I was told that "My, I didn't know there was any place that backward." We are talking about the year 1923.

In the same concept, I mentioned once that there was a one room school on my Dad's farm. The response was the same "I didn't know there was anyplace that backward". At that very time, I was negotiating for properties on which there were one room schools right here in Edwardsville.

11. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECORD WHICH MIGHT NEVER APPEAR IN AN OFFICIAL HISTORY OF SIUE?

While I taught classes in East St. Louis, I had a class of students (10) - all of them white.

12. WERE YOU INVOLVED IN RELATING THE UNIVERSITY TO THE COMMUNITY?
IF SO, PLEASE COMMENT ON THIS ASPECT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S WORK

(See Copy B and C)

13. WERE YOU INVOLVED WITH ANY SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DIRECTED TO
THE EDUCATIONALLY DEPRIVED? IF SO, PLEASE DISCUSS.

No.

14. BASED UPON YOUR EXPERIENCE AT SIUE, WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS DO YOU
BELIEVE THE UNIVERSITY HAS MADE TO THE AREA?

- A. To an outstanding rapport with the community.
- B. To the demographic and economic growth of the City of Edwardsville and surrounding areas.
- C. To the cultural interests of the community by having professional speakers, musical events and theater brought to the area.
- D. To the economic future of the city with the most recent development of the Industrial Park.

15. IF YOU COULD INTERVIEW BUT ONE OR TWO OTHER PEOPLE WHO WOULD
YOU SUGGEST?

John H. Schnabel

Florence Kasiske