

University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938
Oral History Project
Frank Kuntz – Class of 33
Monticello, Illinois
March 13, 2001

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is Frank Kuntz, an alumnus from the class of 1933. We are at Mr. Kuntz' home in Monticello, Illinois, and the date is March 13, 2001.

Okay, could I ask you first your full name and birth date?

Frank Kuntz: My name is Frank Bernard Kuntz, my birthday is December 14, 1909.

ES: And where did you grow up?

FK: I was born on a farm and stayed there until I was 8 years old and moved to a little town of Strawn, and grew up there.

ES: Did you have brothers and sister?

FK: I had 3 brothers and 2 sisters.

ES: Did they go to college?

FK: No they did not go beyond 8th grade, any of them. Well, one sister had 3 years of high school because we had a 3-year high school. The last one just went through 8th grade.

ES: Went through 8th grade. How did you become attracted to the University of Illinois, how did it come into being that you were able to go here?

FK: Well, probably because of Red Grange.

ES: Oh yeah?

FK: With football and Red Grange, I got interested in the University of Illinois, came down here, saw the place and said, "This is where I want to go to school." If I can, and when I graduate from high school.

ES: Did you have friends in your class who went to the U of I too?

FK: Yeah, but they were from another town.

ES: What year did you enroll?

FK: 1929.

ES: Do you remember your first day?

FK: First what?

ES: The first day you were there, arriving in town?

FK: I went out to a camp for a week, over by Decatur, called Camp Seymour, and it was put on by the YMCA, and the purpose of it was to get the new students aware of what to expect at the University. And so, I was out there a week before I really got onto campus to do much of anything.

ES: That was arranged for new students, kind of an orientation?

FK: Right. Right, there were a couple of different weeks, and so I have two pamphlets here.

ES: What kinds of things did you do?

FK: Well, we had orientation and we played volleyball and a few other sports, and got acquainted.

ES: Were there a lot of students? Was it required, were there a lot of students?

FK: No, I mean we applied through the YMCA, I don't remember if it cost anything or not. There's a picture of the new YMCA, that's there now. When I was in school, there was a frame building, like a house. [Photograph.]

ES: Were you involved with it when you were in school?

FK: The YMCA?

ES: With the Y.

FK: Somewhat. I attended their Sunday evening social gatherings, prayer meetings and whatever. And I got my job, my senior in school through the YMCA. They helped locate me in jobs so that I could stay in school.

ES: What was that job? What did you do?

FK: Well, my junior year I dried pots and pans and dishes at the Theta Nu Epsilon fraternity, across the street from my fraternity. And my senior year, I didn't stay in the

fraternity because I couldn't afford to pay the dues and the rent, and so I had a job at 103 E. Green St. being a janitor for my room and waited tables at the Pi Beta Phi sorority on south Wright Street.

ES: Where did you live your Senior year then?

FK: Pardon me?

ES: Where did you live your Senior year then?

FK: Oh I was living at 103 in exchange for being a janitor, but one Sunday night, I remember, they called me in and said that things were so tough they couldn't stay any longer and they were going to leave the house and go to St. Louis and live with the woman's sister. So I didn't know what in the world to do. There was an adult friend from Strawn who worked for Heffernan's Wholesale, distributing tobacco. And he'd go out every week, Friday, and deliver the orders that had been taken by the salesman. And he had a room on West Hill Street, up in Champaign, north of Robeson's, north a block, and west a block; so I had a long walk everyday, to and from the campus.

ES: Did your parents help you out financially?

FK: Yes, as much as they could.

ES: Did you get a sense that other students on campus were struggling to stay in school?

FK: Oh, I know they were. There were students my senior year who were eating jelly and crackers, that was all they could afford.

ES: Is that right?

FK: And the enrollment was under 10,000, it dropped, well it had been above 10,000, not a lot above, but it dropped down to 9,000 something.

ES: What did you major in when you were in school?

FK: I majored in Athletic Coaching.

ES: And how did you choose that? How did that interest come?

FK: Well, I had that interest in athletics.

ES: Were you involved in high school?

FK: When I was in high school, yes I played sports, and played ball and different things, when I had the opportunity.

ES: Did you have a favorite professor?

FK: I don't think so, I had too many different ones to get a favorite one.

ES: Was George Huff--

FK: He was the Athletic Director, he didn't teach anything. The courses were conducted mostly by, in some cases, Varsity coaches, in some cases by assistant coaches.

ES: Where were they held, your classes?

FK: In what is now Huff Gym, mostly, and also Kenney Gym, which in those days was called the old gym.

ES: Did you try out for the baseball team?

FK: Yes I did.

ES: What year was that? Your freshman year?

FK: Well yeah, my freshman and sophomore years, but I didn't make the squad, so I played intramural with my fraternity team.

ES: Did students on campus have a close relationship with faculty members, did you go over to their house?

FK: No.

ES: Not very often?

FK: No.

ES: I have a couple questions about rules on campus, what you were allowed to do.

FK: I thought you would ask me that. This little book was put out by the YMCA. And you ask, what can you do, what couldn't you do? The Christian Science Society of the University of Illinois, Illini Code of Sportsmanship. Of course, you did not boo the opponent and the rest of that good stuff. Conduct on the campus: one of the finest customs of Illinois, is that smoking is not indulged on the campus, if you are caught smoking you will be referred to the Dean on Monday, and the chances were good that you might be dismissed. It tells, defines where the campus is, that's quite large. Also, cutting corners, walking on the grass, plucking flowers, injuring shrubbery, and defacing any buildings or property is taboo, it is obvious that this tends to maul and detract the beauty of the campus. "On entering buildings on the campus students should remember to remove their hats." Now they're wearing them in class. Class memorials, each

graduating class left a memorial. “In the case of the Senior Bench, no one is allowed to sit on the Senior bench, but a Senior.” Whenever, Illini, Illinois loyalties Senior Play, Illini will rise and remember to remove their hats, and this is the only song that is customary to rise. Some special people rise not for their hail to the, “Hail for the Orange isn’t it”? Here’s one that you didn’t know about. At Lincoln Hall there is a Lincoln tablet on the south wall on the left-hand wall, as you come in the East entrance. Another custom which all students are expected to observe, is that a paying respect to the bronze tablet on the floor, on the floor of the library in the Lincoln Hall, which has inscribed on it, Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.” It is custom to avoid walking on the tablet. But the people got very careless, walked on it, so they picked it off the floor and put it on the wall; that’s the reason that it’s up on the wall. And then of course the new students were expected to wear a beanie.

ES: Was that all of the freshman?

FK: It reads like it, I thought it was just the fraternities.

ES: I don’t know.

FK: And then in the Spring of the year, they had the cap burning, and a bonfire out on the playground, North of the Stadium, where all that housing is now. And they have a large bonfire up in the air, and set it on fire, and got the hoses out and made a lot of mud, they had mud fights. The freshman threw their beanies into the fire, and () tore his clothes off, and left embarrassingly clad. Those were just some of the things that happened then, that don’t happen now.

ES: Did you participate in that?

FK: Yes.

ES: You attended a cap burning when you were a freshman?

FK: Yes. It got too rowdy here, oh probably 30 or 40 years ago, that they had to do away with it, because it got obscene and destructive.

ES: Did you wear your cap everywhere, did you wear it to class?

FK: Yes. But you took it off in the building.

ES: But when you were walking around campus, you had to wear it?

FK: Oh yeah, you had to wear your cap all the time.

ES: That meant you were—

FK: If you belonged to a fraternity, it meant some black marks and the paddle would come out on Friday night.

ES: Do you remember Thomas Arkle Clark?

FK: Sure do.

ES: Did you have any dealings with him when you were a student?

FK: Well he used to speak at our fraternity, we were one of his favorite fraternities, well that's what he told us. I suppose he told more than one that. I have a little story that he tells about, at our Founders' Banquet. He was telling about Tau Delta Tau, that was the letters of our fraternity, was his favorite fraternity. And he said that, of course you know there's a fraternity called Delta Tau Delta, and then there's a sorority the Tri-Delts. So he says, "There's the Tau Delts and Taus, and there's the Delta Tau Deltas," no he said that, "Tau Delta Tau meant Try damn it try, so there's Damn it try Damn it," And then he says, "There's the Tri-Delts." I guess you figured that out.

ES: So he would come over to your house and speak?

FK: Our fraternity. On invitation for a banquet, a Founders' Banquet.

ES: How did the students view him? How was he viewed on campus and by the students?

FK: Greet him?

ES: Viewed. Did they like him?

FK: I think most of them did; they respected him, because he had the power to put you out of school, just like that. And there were very strict rules, as you heard some of them read. Had a change in Presidents, Oliver Edward Chase came in and relieved, Professor, Doctor President Kinley, and he was somewhat more liberal. And that's when some of the changes began to occur.

ES: What kind of changes?

FK: Smoking on the campus side and smoking in a classroom. Just things got more relaxed.

ES: Did students have much contact with the President? Did they know

FK: No.

ES: Do you remember when Thomas Arkle Clark died?

FK: No.

ES: I believe that was in '32, that wasn't a big thing amongst the students.

FK: No, no I don't. He died when?

ES: 1932.

FK: That's when I was in school, no I don't think that he died that early.

ES: We talked about smoking, were you able to have cars on campus?

FK: Absolutely not.

ES: How did you get around? By foot?

FK: Feet.

ES: [Laughter]

FK: I didn't even use bicycles, I walked. There was some streetcars, there was a streetcar that went through the campus.

ES: Really?

FK: And, some people, rode them a bit but most people walked. The campus wasn't as big as it is now. There was no Gregory Hall or, a lot of other buildings. The Skating Rink was built when I was here. Freer Hall was the Girl's Gym, that was built when I was here. Those are the only two that I can think of off hand, but I'm sure that there were others.

ES: How would you characterize the moral code on campus?

FK: Very high.

ES: Were there rules about dating?

FK: No, no not about dating, but girls had to be in by midnight.

ES: Did the boys have similar rules?

FK: No.

ES: No. What about religion? Was involvement in the foundations on campus important, or were a lot of students involved?

FK: They were, I wouldn't say a lot, but they were kept busy. The YMCA, the YWCA, and some of the nearby churches. But, I went to church periodically, our house would get together and go to church, but religion wasn't a big deal I'll say.

ES: Where did you go?

FK: What do you mean?

ES: Where did you attend?

FK: What church?

ES: Uh-huh.

FK: Oh I'm a Methodist, but we went to different ones. Somebody in the fraternity was a Presbyterian, if he was going to church, maybe a group of us would go with him.

ES: Okay, what about social activities? You kind of talked about where you lived, but maybe if you could say where was the first place that you lived on campus? Your freshman year.

FK: The first place, the fraternity.

ES: It was the fraternity your freshman year?

FK: Yeah, most people did?

ES: What did that involve? Pledging? What did you have to do?

FK: Why they rushed you for, invited you over for meals, and get your cigarette for you, and held your chair out, until they got the pledge button on and then they started telling you, "Hey pick that up," or do this or that, you know.

ES: How long did that last?

FK: Pledging?

ES: Yeah.

FK: Three or four days, maybe a week. For activities, in those days, there were a lot of dances on the campus. There were three dance halls that I know of. There was one over on Bradley, on Wright Street. There was one over, Prehn's on Green and 6th, upstairs; that was the most popular, most expensive, had the best band. And then there was College Hall, down on 4th St. and Green. The building where they had the dance is still there. I don't know what there is there now. There was the Commercial College and different things there, but the dormitory College Hall, burnt down some years ago. And

then each fraternity or Greek house, fraternity or sorority had their own dances with an orchestra. A live orchestra. And then there were class dances, each, like there was the Freshman Frolic, the Sophomore Cotillion, Junior Prom and the Senior Ball. And then there was also, before the Senior Ball, the Senior Informal, which occurred during the school year and the Senior Ball was the last week of school. And then there was the Military Ball, and several other formal dances. Sady Hawkins Day Dance for the Ag boys, but there were a lot of dances in those days.

ES: Could students afford to go to the dances?

FK: Of course, they weren't expensive like they are now.

ES: Did you have to have fancy clothes or—

FK: No, well you had to dress up nicely, but people did in those days. I borrowed a tux to go to the Junior Prom. I wore my uniform, ROTC uniform, for the Military Ball. That was a formal dance; that was a big dance.

ES: And that was something the whole campus was involved in?

FK: No. Just those who were in advance military.

ES: Oh, well sure. But there were all-campus dances, like the Sophomore Cotillion?

FK: A lot of the dances that I mentioned.

ES: Was everyone invited?

FK: No, to attend the Sophomore Cotillion, sophomores. Freshman Frolic was freshman, Senior Ball was seniors, Junior Prom was juniors. You could have a date, but one of you had to be a junior for Junior Prom.

ES: I see. How did fraternities and independents students get along on campus? Was there a lot of mixing?

FK: No, there wasn't a problem.

ES: There was no problem. Did you have a higher status if you belonged to a fraternity of sorority?

FK: Oh I'm sure you did.

ES: You talked about the dances, what other activities were you involved in?

FK: Oh you mean, what to do on a date? Go to a movie, the boys used to go to what they called Coke and Smoke. Where you take your girlfriend between classes, you know

you had an hour between class, and you're going steady with some girl, or just asked a girl that you knew to go for a Coke, go to Prehn's or one of these places that I mentioned earlier. Prehn, Paul Prehn had three places on Green St., right underneath that dance hall. One on Daniel, where probably around where KAM's is now. And then one over on Oregon St., which is I don't know what it is. That hacienda looking building. And those were all owned by Paul Prehn, and for 20 cents, we could have a Coke and have a smoke, and sit in there smoke and coke for a while, until the next class.

ES: Were sports important? Did you go to sporting events?

FK: Yes, I went to most of them. I was in the Block-I and ().

ES: Were you?

FK: Went to the basketball games, baseball, track. I was interested in everything.

ES: And tell me again what your involvement with the baseball team was?

FK: I went out for the team. I tried to make the team, as a pitcher, but there were too many good pitchers there, and I didn't make it.

ES: What did you wear?

FK: What did I wear?

ES: What did students wear to class? How did they dress?

FK: Casually. But, most cases, neatly, cleanly, their shirt-tails weren't hanging out, most everybody had something on his head, a hat or a cap. Remember it said in the song, the men took off their hats and when they went into a building they took off their hats. And you wore jackets. The engineers wore corduroy trousers and corduroy jackets, and everybody, every engineer carried a slide-rule. You know what a slide-rule is?

ES: Uh-huh.

FK: That's how you could identify an engineer.

ES: How did the Depression affect student activities, how visible was the Depression, did you talk about—?

FK: Very visible, didn't have any money. Had to cut down, had to cut down on the social life, you had to cut down on everything, you had work, a lot of them had to work. I worked two jobs my senior year to get through school. I don't think I had a date on campus my senior year. When I'd go home, I'd probably date, some girl I'd gone to high school, if got home on a weekend, and that was rare because I had to stay on campus to wait those tables. One time I had a nickel for two weeks. Friday, Saturday night, I

bought an apple from one of these vendor wagons that used to prowl around the campus selling apples, and candy, and cigarettes, and stuff.

ES: What made you stick it out?

FK: Well to graduate.

ES: It was important to you and your family?

FK: Well, I had to have a job, that was my profession.

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

FK: My daughter and her husband, and Bridget there are Catholics. And so I've been going to mass at St. John's Chapel, attached to Newman Hall. A memory occurred one night when I was sitting there. When I graduated in 1933, I got my commission as a second Lieutenant in the Reserve, for the Army Reserve Corps, after being four years of ROTC, I was now in the Army Reserve. It was customary then as it is now, that the "to be" seniors go to summer training camp for about a month or six weeks. It was customary to go to some military instillation, some camp or fort. In 1933 the year I graduated, the money was so tight in the military that the people from the University of Illinois who were to go to camp, didn't go to camp, but they stayed on the campus and trained on the campus. And, they were billeted in Newman Hall, and when I was an officer of the day, I ran in there at 10 o'clock and put my flashlight on each bed, to see if the cadets were in their bunks. And they [Jim, Ted, and Bridget] didn't know, being Catholics, that that place had been used as a military place billeting area at one time.

ES: Sure.

FK: That would have never had happened, if it hadn't been for the scarcity of money, brought on by the Depression. The football team in '29 was very good. But they practically all graduated, so in 1930 and 31 and 32 the teams were very poor. As a result, because of their poor record and the scarcity of money, the crowds were extremely small, and I remember one game in 1932 when the University of Chicago, or maybe it was '31, the University of Chicago that was fading out athletics, came down and beat us, and there were about 15, 000 people at the game. I'll tell you one little political story, and then that's about all the stories I have, unless you want to ask me something. In 1932, in spite of the Depression, a friend and I, friend was from Chicago, I had met him growing up in Strawn. We were Republicans and we wouldn't change to be Democrats even though a Depression was on. So we went down to vote at the service station, down at the block. We walked in there and said we wanted to vote. Paul Prehn was the man on the campus and he was involved in politics, precinct committeeman or something. And he said, "Well are you registered?" And we said, "Well what's that?" Well, we were pretty naïve. And he said, "Well you have to be registered, before you can vote." So we started to turn and walk out and Paul came up behind us and said, "How you gonna vote?" And

we said, “Republican!” He said, “Come on.” And he took us in the back, we registered, and that was the first time that we had ever voted for President. But Roosevelt got in.

ES: Were students involved in politics?

FK: There was political, student politics yes. Probably bigger than it is now. Yes, you look in the yearbooks, you look in that yearbook of mine, where you got that picture of me, and previous ones, you’ll see the campus leaders, and you’ll see the people who ran for office. I can’t remember all the names, and they were, those pictures, they’ve got their coonskin coats on, some of them are still wearing coonskins coats. It’s interesting.

ES: But that had kind of gone out by the time you were in school, the raccoon coats?

FK: The raccoon coats had, yeah, but the politics were still there, yeah. In fact we were down, couple of my fraternity brothers I were down in KAM’s basement, one night, it was Prehn’s basement then I think, and this one kid down there was, he had some bootleg alcohol, and he was carrying on, (), messing around, and we got next to him. And he’d run for student office and got beat, and he was so upset that he was making a fool of himself down there.

ES: Was that a big activity for fraternity members - to run for student offices? Or was that something that independents did too?

FK: Independents, some independents, there was also, there was somebody who represented the fraternities, somebody represented the independents as well. Not everybody was in a fraternity. A lot of good people didn’t have the money to belong to the fraternity. They didn’t have the desire, or for whatever reason, I don’t know. I was in with a bunch of very good guys. I was reading an article in the paper about drinking, and the Greeks drinking now, that it seems to be the thing to do, or course we were in school during Prohibition, but the people our leaders, our president and our officers and the leaders in the house they wouldn’t tolerate drinking, you know, especially in the house. They frowned on it.

ES: What happened if someone were caught drinking?

FK: Well he’d be taken down and chewed out by him, or if it weren’t bad enough they would dismiss him from the fraternity, but that didn’t happen but more than once.

ES: Did other members of your fraternity drop out because of the financial—?

FK: Oh yes, our whole fraternity went broke, in November, and we were a local fraternity. You know what that is?

ES: Uh-huh.

FK: And, we went broke, as well as did practically all the locals. And, some of the nationals, and the members in our fraternity were kind of scattered. I was, like I said, I was living with this fellow from home, and some of the ones who were still in the fraternity, our membership was very low, that's the reason we went broke, they merged with Chi Phi's, and some of them went with the other fraternities. I think one went with Theta Chi, I can remember, but they merged with others, or they just went independent and forgot about it. But it was, it was rough.

ES: Where did you eat? You were talking about buying an apple, where did you have your meals during this time?

FK: Well, I was working in the sorority.

ES: In the sorority they would feed you?

FK: Oh, well that's what we got for working there. Two, three hours for one meal.

ES: And you waited tables?

FK: Yes.

ES: How aware were students of national events outside the campus? The Presidential elections or things that were—?

FK: Oh I think they were very aware of it.

ES: Do you remember the Stock Market Crash?

FK: Yes, in '29, that was the beginning of it. In fact, we almost had one yesterday, down over 400 and some points.

ES: Yeah. You said you did get your job your senior year, was that through the Student Employment Bureau?

FK: Well, I think, I don't remember how I got it. I could have gotten it through the YMCA, or I could have gotten by word of mouth, you know that's they way most of them were gotten. You listened around, or if you had a friend, or knew somebody, or—

ES: I've got a couple more questions, one of them is, were there many minority students on campus, when you were in school? Were there many blacks?

FK: No, very few.

ES: Do you remember black students being on campus?

FK: Oh yes, I remember Mr. Smith who came to one of our classes and then Coach

() would be dressed up, he was in a suit all the time, very handsome. He minded his own business, and everybody respected him. I presume, liked him, although he didn't have much to do with us. Then blacks had their own fraternity. And I don't think there was a sorority, because there weren't the many black girls here, but there could have been, I don't know for sure. And then there was a tennis player by the name of Turner, who lettered and was highly respected by his peers. And of course there were other blacks around, but they were not very many.

ES: Did they socialize with the white students?

FK: No.

ES: No.

FK: No in 1929 and 30s.

ES; What about the Jewish students on campus?

FK: They were a lot of Jewish, and they had their own houses, and they did their own socializing.

ES: They didn't socialize much with other students?

FK: We didn't inter-date, no.

ES: Were there radicals, probably by 1933, were there radical political groups?

FK: No.

ES: On campus?

FK: No.

ES: Did you attend Commencement ceremonies?

FK: I did.

ES: Your family came up for that?

FK: No because I only had a mother, and she just wasn't the type to come down to it. It was held in what is now Huff Gym and () back in those days.

ES: Do you remember who spoke?

FK: No. It's on my program, but I don't know where it is.

ES: What did you do after graduation?

FK: Tried to get a job.

ES: Were you trying to get a coaching job?

FK: Yes, coaching and teaching.

ES: And you had a hard time?

FK: Very hard.

ES: What did you, do?

FK: Kept trying.

ES: Did you move back to Strawn?

FK: Yeah. I worked whatever jobs that I could get, and they were hard to get. You couldn't even get a country school job then, because somebody with experience was even ahead of you even though I had a degree and they didn't have a degree, but they had some experience, I, you know would try to get a country school job just to get the experience. And it was, it was real tough.

ES: What was your first job?

FK: Being principal of an elementary school in Thawville, Illinois.

ES: Oh sure.

FK: For \$90 a month.

ES: And how long were you there?

FK: 5 years, until I was called back to military duty March the 10th, 1941, into the Army, and that's 60 years ago this weekend, past weekend. There's Sarah, who will be talking about her, haven't you Sarah? [Granddaughter in the room.]

ES: So then you came back from WWII?

FK: After 5 years.

ES: After 5 years.

FK: And then I got a job coaching and I started in the coaching field in high school.

ES: And where was that?

FK: Chatsworth, Illinois. I was there 8 years and then Morris for 19 years, then retired 29 years.

ES: Where did you meet your wife?

FK: Well that's got nothing to do with this. She's a farm girl.

ES: Not while you were a student?

FK: No.

ES: How has your education influenced your life? Or how has the University, or what role has it played in your life?

FK: Well, I got an education, it helped me get a job and hold a job in advance. That's a difficult question to answer, I think. That's the foundation for what you're going to do. It's like Sarah over there, who has started in to be a journalist.

ES: Well thank you.

FK: You're welcome!

END OF INTERVIEW