

**University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938**  
**Oral History Project**  
**Merle Boren – Class of '34**  
**Cincinnati, Ohio**  
**May 21, 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 Merle H. Boren, and alumnus from the class of 1934. We are at Mr. Boren's home in Cincinnati, Ohio and the date is May 21, 2001.**

**Okay can I ask you your full name and birth date?**

MB: Yes, Merle Harvey Boren, birth date, December 15, 1912.

**ES: Okay, tell me about your childhood, growing up, where you grew up and who your parents were, and that kind of information.**

MB: I grew up on a farm, a mile out of Plainville, Illinois. My mother had a been a school teacher, my father a farmer and rural mail carrier. One of 4 boys. We went to school through the first three quarters of my freshman year in high school, and moved to Champaign-Urbana in March of 1927.

**ES: Now tell me why your parents decided to do that?**

MB: They couldn't conceive of sending four boys away to college. In the first place it was 200 miles from Plainville to Champaign-Urbana, and to them that was a long, long way. And, as it turned out it was a great decision, but a big sacrifice of course on their part. It meant not only pulling up roots before the school term was over, but then getting four boys in school, two in high school and two in grade school.

**ES: Now in the late 20s, was your family experiencing some parts of the Depression that early on?**

MB: Well the Depression, actually, from the standpoint of farming, and in many aspects of business had started already, though it was 1929 before the big market crash. So, that made it ever so difficult for the family. My father having had no training whatever for the type of work, real estate, he got into when we made the move. But, everybody else had it pretty hard too those days.

**ES: Where did your family move in Champaign-Urbana?**

MB: They moved to a house very near the campus; today that area is part of the campus. To be exact, they moved to the intersection of Springfield Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. That would be the northwest corner. Someplace half way, lets say, between the old Burnham Hospital and Uni

High in the other direction. We had about . . . a mile walk to Champaign High and less distance to the grade school, where my two younger brothers attended.

**ES: I see. Was education important to your parents then?**

MB: I would say, just eminently important. My mother having been a school teacher, I suppose, was partly responsible for that. And, no one of the four of us had the least doubt he would someday get the opportunity to go to college, that was just accepted, and never a question whatever. And as it turned out 3 of the 4 did go to college.

**ES: Was that something you wanted to do?**

MB: Actually, I never thought of it in those terms. It was more of something that we knew, was expected of us, by our parents. And, I suppose we had all been imbued with a knowledge that you certainly could live a better life with an education.

**ES: After you got to Champaign, when did your family start to feel the Depression?**

MB: I would say, probably in 1928, probably a year after we had been there, because as I said before, many aspects of business had been affected already, even though it was another year before the Market broke. Another thing that made it a little bit hard on us, of course, was the fact that the farms from which we moved were sold to people who couldn't afford to own them. And, couldn't afford to make payments on them. Ultimately the folks lost the farms, which was their principle asset, that plus the home in which we lived in Champaign.

**ES: You said your father was in real estate?**

MB: Yes, he was in real estate, for probably a year or two before the real estate business disappeared from the face of the earth. There just is no more property there to sell, and I would say that Champaign-Urbana was probably a place where the Depression was felt less than in other places in the country, but it still was felt severely there. He had a job, a minor job or two, after real estate, before he got finally into work with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which company he stayed with until he retired.

**ES: I see, I see. You said you went to Champaign High School.**

MB: Yes.

**ES: Were there many other students who went to college, or was going to college fairly rare?**

MB: I would say probably, I'm going to estimate 10 to 15%, maybe a few more. To start to the University didn't mean one would last beyond the first semester. The fall-out rate in those days was pretty severe, and it hit the student body heavily at the end of the first semester.

**ES: And that was because of the grading?**

MB: Oh absolutely.

**ES: I wanted to ask you too about the house you lived in, now you said it was a rooming house?**

MB: It was a large home, and a nice home, but large. We had 7 students, there were 4 large bedrooms on the second floor, and in one, 3 students, in a second and third there were 2 each. And 4 of us slept, the 4 brothers slept in the 4<sup>th</sup> bedroom, if you can imagine that. Then, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> level was a beautiful dormitory—hard wood floor, wall, ceiling, beautiful, and that was strictly for the students.

**ES: Did your parents make a lot of money from the roomers, do you remember how much?**

MB: I have a pretty good idea. I was thinking about that the other day. I would say, the average student paid some place between 15 and 20 dollars a month for a room. The average student worked for his meals, for one hour period, their noon hour was more typical, but three times a day, breakfast, lunch, dinner they worked and ate themselves, in an hours time. That's a typical student living in a rooming house and working for meals at a fraternity or sorority house.

**ES: To live where, with your family?**

MB: To live there, uh-huh. And, I don't believe any paid over \$20.

**ES: So they received their meals there at the home too?**

MB: No, they would go to various fraternities or sororities where they waited on tables and got their meals.

**ES: Waited on tables and in return got their meals.**

MB: Got their meals.

**ES: I see what you mean. What was it like to live in a house full of students?**

MB: You actually didn't see them as much as you might think. Some studied at the library, all of them would study some at the home. Each one had a student desk, a little place for his books. My mother made the beds everyday at a certain time. In some of the rooming houses, the beds were never made.

**ES: Did she have rules for the students who lived in the house?**

MB: Yes. We had one interesting student, an Italian boy. And we got a telephone call one night, telling us to advise him that his father had just been murdered. The next morning the Illini

News, I believe they called it, headlines read: “Mafia Chief Killed.” That was the father of this student living at our house.

**ES: Had you any idea?**

MB: Yeah.

**ES: Prior to that?**

MB: Yeah, in retrospect maybe, not otherwise, he was an only child. His mother and father would come to Champaign at the end of the semester or at a holiday to take him home in their car, back to Chicago, whereas most of the students got out on the highway and hitchhiked, or found \$4 for a roundtrip on the Illinois Central to Chicago and back. On one occasion, the mother and father came, I guess it was Christmas vacation, and took 2 or 3 of the other students back with them, in their car. And mention was made by one of them, in my presence, “I swear there’s something wrong.” I said, “Why, what do you mean?” “Well, when we were going back to Chicago in the car, I have a kicking around that lightbulb, and I noticed a couple of guns there!” Now, at the time I probably I said, “Well maybe the guy likes to go hunting on the spur of the moment,” but they, when they made the call, whoever, I guess, Chicago Police Department, asked my mother to write down how they wanted him to return to Chicago. You know, go from here, to let’s say, ( ) Field or whatever, on the way up and make several stops and communicate with them to let them know that he was okay on his way back. We never saw him again. The family did tell us, the mother, that they were changing their name and moving to New Jersey, gave us their name and address, which was a confidential number of course.

**ES: I see, wow.**

MB: Isn’t that something?

**ES: Wow.**

MB: Some of the boys were from the rural part of Southern Illinois. We had two Engineering students, both from the east St. Louis area, and both of whom joined the U of I Engineering faculty. Several were active in gymnastics. For the most part, [they] were all well behaved boys from nice families.

**ES: Did your family get close to them or—?**

MB: Pretty, reasonably so, yes. I would say so, more so maybe than you should because you were with them constantly. I never knew of any one that ever failed to graduate. They all graduated. Some excellent students. One engineering student again from the Chicago area, was very active in gymnastics, and very good, as several of the others were too, for that matter. This particular one went on to become a professor of Engineering at VPI, we used to call it, I think they now call it Virginia Tech.

**ES: Could I ask you about your major-what you majored in, why, how did you choose your study?**

MB: I suppose math was always very, very easy for me. So, I was either going to take Engineering or Business, one or the other. If it was Business then I would get into accountancy, and that's what I did.

**ES: Did you have a career goal in mind when you started as a freshman?**

MB: That question reminds me of the time when there were three of us, all married, decided one day to pinpoint a salary at which we would be willing to sell out for the rest of our life. We agreed that if we were offered an opportunity to become a mail carrier at, it was either 200 or 250 dollars a month, we would sell for that right now, for the rest of our life. And this was serious, but that'd give you some idea of where this country was and what the prospects were in the minds of young people. That was not an unpleasant thought at all 200 to 250 dollars a month. That was just about as far as anyone could go; big money. But, I would say, my long range hope was to find a work that I would enjoy and I felt that I could probably manage money once I had the opportunity to get some, probably better than some others. All I needed was to make some sacrifices and save a little and put it to work, which is what I tried to do.

**ES: Why do you think students went to college during the Depression?**

MB: I think largely because of their parental training at home. I think anyone I knew who was in college, pretty much felt, as I did, as well as my siblings, that this is expected of me and this is something I have to do. It's the right thing, but that can only come from training in a home. And there again, the mother having been a schoolteacher certainly had a big bearing upon her philosophy, and there was just no ifs ands or buts, you're going to school one way or another, if we're going to give you an opportunity to go to school. When I started the school, I would doubt if I ever got any monetary help from them, a home, a place to live, and good food, that was it. We had jobs between school terms, and the tuition was certainly nothing like it is now. I'm not real clear, but as I recall, there was a time when the semester tuition was like \$10.

**ES: Was that something you were responsible for then?**

MB: Was responsible, yes. You had an opportunity to work in the summertime, and you did work, and if you saved your money, you had enough to buy your books and get in school.

**ES: Did you have any favorite professors when you were in college?**

MB: Well, yes; I never had any I didn't like, I will say that. I never ever had one that I didn't like; that's a little unusual I realize. I would say my favorite would have been the young ones teaching accountancy. They were very, very bright. Now this was in the first year and second, as you got further along in your schoolwork, you were exposed to the professors. Whereas, in your early years, your freshman, sophomore years, you saw the professors, in what we call the lecture periods, where they would lecture all the quiz sections as a group. And then in your junior, senior year, you would have them for your regular class work. At that point in time, most everyone was teaching out of his own textbook, each professor. I remember that very clearly. The one in income tax, I remember, had written the book, the one in the CPA Review course was

taught by the professor who authored the book and who at that time headed up the department that included accountancy. It was called the department of Business Organization and Operation. Professor Scovill made it his business to help accounting graduates find employment after graduation.

**ES: How did he do that, did he have connections with businesses?**

MB: Yes. As a matter of fact, the first job I had, as I told you, was with the Department of Agriculture. He did some consulting work for the Department of Agriculture, setting the Accounting system up for the Resettlement Administration.

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

**ES: Did students and faculty socialize outside the classroom at all? Did you feel close to any of the members?**

MB: It's interesting you would ask that. In those days we specialized at what we called "smokers," who often had members and prospective members of professional fraternities. Professors, often attended these "smokers."

**ES: I see.**

MB: Maybe in, usually in his home, and food would be served, not a meal, but tid-bits. And always, cigarettes, that's how they became known as smokers.

**ES: I see.**

MB: There were many, many professional fraternities, like, oh most any curriculum you could think of would have several professional fraternities involved in it, which were semi-social. It would again involve, what we then called the smokers, and just a social get together. I would say that was pretty much the extent of the socializing. Now, I knew one professor probably a little better than most of them because in one summer I mowed his lawn.

**ES: Oh yeah?**

MB: So that was one of my jobs. Then I'm thinking of another. When I was taking graduate work, I did work in the home, or cleaning, or semi-skilled work lets say, maybe repainting floors or something like that, in the home of the then acting Dean of Women, who was Leah Fullenwaller Trelease, who was acting Dean of Women following the retirement of the previous Dean of Women pending a time of replacement for her. Leah Trelease was the wife of Sidney Trelease who was a business partner of my wife's grandfather. There was Burton and Trelease Real Estate and Building and Loan Business.

**ES: I see.**

MB: And that's how I happened to get the job of working in their home. Beside this, they lived on the lately redone second floor of an apartment building. Beside that apartment building was the home of Sid Trelease's mother and father. The father was the professor at the University when I did some work in their house too.

**ES: Do you think a lot of students did that, work for faculty?**

MB: No, probably not.

**ES: Did you have a sense of how the faculty was getting along?**

MB: Yes! They didn't get paid anything like they get paid now, I'll tell you that. They worked harder, and I think there was probably less pressure on them to publish or perish than is the case today. Although that of course was done. But I would say, from my knowledge personally, and then seeing my son and his school, and my granddaughter, her schooling, I would have to say, that the faculty in those days certainly were giving the public more for their money than they are today.

**ES: And of course they were hit by the Depression too, the faculty members.**

MB: And they suffered salary cuts, they definitely had to, and they didn't live as well as they live today. I don't know of any member of the faculty, and I'm sure there were some, but I didn't know any who belonged to a Country Club. They didn't live in the larger homes such as they do now, but you can say that for people in most any profession.

**ES: You may have told me this, but why did your parents choose Illinois as the school—?**

MB: In Illinois, why did they choose the University of Illinois?

**ES: The University of Illinois as opposed to one of the other state colleges?**

MB: That I simply could not answer, except that to them, there was just one University, the others at that time, weren't even universities. I'm not speaking now of course the University of Chicago or Northwestern, but I'm thinking now of what we then called Teacher's Colleges. There was Southern Illinois Teacher College, it's now Southern Illinois University. There was a Western Illinois State Teacher's College, it's now named something else, and Eastern, I think is now called Eastern Illinois University. And there was in the city of DeKalb, Northern Illinois State Teachers College, now Northern Illinois University, etc.

**ES: Right.**

MB: To most, *the* university was the University of Illinois. And if anybody in Plainville, Illinois even talked about a university, [they were] talking only about the University of Illinois where Red Grange played. And I can remember a couple of years before we moved from Plainville to Champaign-Urbana, there were several people in Plainville who made the 200 mile trip to the opening game at the new stadium when it rained from morning until night. A piece of plastic

that you hold over head cost a fortune. It was really an all day rain storm. And that was the year that Red Grange ran so well against the University of Michigan the opening of the stadium. And as you know the stadium was there as a memorial to the people from Illinois who fought in World War I.

**ES: But you never saw him play? Did you make to one of the Grange games?**

MB: When we moved, I think he had been out of school a year which would have meant that '26 would have been his last year. His brother, Garland Grange, was still playing, and I saw him play.

**ES: But you didn't come over from Plainville to the game?**

MB: Oh, no, no, my dad wasn't that interested in football either, nor was his brother. But several of the business people in Plainville, I would say four or five of the men, made a trip.

**ES: Could I ask you about rules on campus?**

MB: Sure.

**ES: What rules were there for students?**

MB: Rules that it would be nice to have today, unfortunately they don't have. You could not smoke on the campus. They of course would have no jurisdiction over that.

**ES: Jurisdiction, yeah.**

MB: Shortly after I started to school at Illinois, fall of 1930, a new President was hired. President Chase was hired from, I believe, the University of North Carolina. He was what we would today call "liberal." To him, if students wanted to smoke, that's fine, that's their own business let them smoke and if they want to smoke on the campus, fine, let them smoke on the campus, which they did. And it wasn't at all unusual to go into a professor's little office and see him smoking a pipe. I don't recall whether students were permitted, lets say to smoke with a professor in his office. But I remember many times seeing them smoking in their office.

**ES: Was Chase popular with the students because he allowed them to do more, because he was more liberal; was President Chase popular with the students?**

MB: I would say vastly more so than with the parents of the students. I would have to say that he probably went a little bit fast with his changes, probably too fast, certainly no question about it, as with certain parents, because some just were very unhappy with, as they termed it, permitting students to do just what they wanted to do. Prior to his regime as President, students could not drive an automobile at school unless Champaign-Urbana was their home, and they were on an errand involving home life, such as, driving to a grocery store, or taking their mother or father to the grocery store. They were fairly liberal with that although you certainly wouldn't



drive a date to a school dance, even though you lived there. And I guarantee you wouldn't if you lived away from the campus.

**ES: Do you know what the rationale for that was, why students couldn't have cars?**

MB: I don't know really how they justified it, except as a safety measure. To me, that would be pretty important, and I can't see that students were any happier once that ban was lifted, and it was a ban that was watched very carefully at the UI school. You were expelled from school if you violated the automobile regulations. Now if you were a physically impaired person and had to drive a car to go to school. That was different. There were very, very few exceptions. And in those days there really weren't that many students belonging to fraternities and sororities. They were definitely in the minority even during the better of the four years that I was in school. I'm talking about the economy of the area. As I mentioned before, many of the fraternity and sorority houses were taken over by the mortgagee organization that had lent money for their building or improvement there to. I would say that substantially less than 10% of the students, in the 4 years that I was an undergraduate, were in fraternities or sororities.

**ES: Why do you think that was, just for financial reasons, or—?**

MB: Financial reasons, it would cost more to belong, I would say, particularly if your home was Champaign-Urbana. If you lived out of the community and came to Champaign-Urbana then you got your board and room you see. But there again, there were some fraternities where even the students at the fraternity rather than eating there, would work for their meal. Most of them, I would say—

**ES: Did you have interest in that at all?**

MB: Did I? Well you see I was married when I was a freshman and as such I could not afford it. We did try and succeeded in going to some of the nicer affairs, such as the big dances.

**ES: Do you remember Thomas Arkle Clark, the Dean of Men?**

MB: Yes.

**ES: What were your impressions of him?**

MB: That he was very, very fair, and certainly a necessity. Perhaps, even more popular with the student body than the President of the school, because it was his business to act as a link between the schools management and the student. He made it his business to speak the language of the student.

**ES: In what way? How did he do that?**

MB: In conversing with him and making the student feel at ease when they had a problem, and came to him with their problem, and that's the way Clark taught his successor to operate, as well as some of the assistants who were later hired. I think at one time, in addition to Dean Clark,

there were probably 3 or 4 other assistant deans. And as an entering freshman, you were assigned to a dean. I don't know whether you were re-assigned one each year, I don't remember that. At least, you at all times, all 4 years, had a dean whom, you were welcome to go see. Many, many students utilized that benefit. Now living in the community such as I did, that was a little different. You had your parents there. But many of the young students became homesick. Many of the problems were personal.

**ES: Is that right?**

MB: Oh yes.

**ES: Not just disciplinary?**

MB: No, no, no, I would say some would be grade problems, but disciplinary, that wasn't a major problem at that time. We had one policeman on the entire campus. The famous Pete the Cop. Pete Adams.

**ES: What do you remember about him?**

MB: The campus cop, Pete Adams? He was there probably for 40 years. We had a fire department, and that's where I worked for a while. The fire chief was Shorty Fay. Shorty was about 5 feet tall and weighed about 250 pounds. He was also, when needed, the chauffeur for the President. The President was furnished a large automobile, a Cadillac, and when he needed someone to chauffeur for him, then Shorty Fay was the man. He would have one of the regulars at the fire department take over for him for the day while he chauffeur the President.

**ES: Chauffeured the President, huh.**

MB: Later on when Chase became President, he brought with him a chauffeur.

**ES: Did you have any contact with the President at all?**

MB: Well, very little. I had an occasion when they moved him from his Carolina home into the President's home, the new home that had just been built. There was a period of let's say 2 or 3 weeks when he wasn't able to move into the new home, and we had him in temporary quarters, the family: mother and father, and two children. I had occasion to run an errand or two over [there], at the time I was working at the fire department. And, that's as close as I ever came to the President. Now [*laughter*] during graduate work, I was grading papers for the a professor of Governmental Accounting. His name was Lloyd Morey and he played the organ and his wife sang at the church where my wife belonged, and where I would attend with her. Lloyd Morey later became interim President, I believe, while they were searching for a successor.

**ES: Students then really didn't have much contact with the President at all?**

MB: Never, I don't know of any student who ever had contact with the President.

**ES: Dean Clark or Dean Turner were mainly the best names, those names were known?**

MB: Oh yes, exactly.

**ES: Was there a moral code on campus? Was morality regulated very strictly?**

MB: I would say no, it was no problem. I'm sure there was immorality going on, no doubt about that, but it probably wasn't as open as it is today.

**ES: Was that something that Dean Clark would get involved in?**

MB: Oh yes, yeah, yeah, that's right.

**ES: If there was a problem?**

MB: Yeah, if, yeah. The only major problem that I can think of, in my 4 years, was the cap burning event at the end of that period when the freshman who pledged fraternities were able to throw their caps away, burn them on a trash pile, which the University provided for them. And I mean that made a pretty big size fire. The various fire departments of Champaign-Urbana stood by, in case it spread, prevent spread of the fire, which made for mud, which made for kids wallowing in the mud, which would call for them, if not half naked, totally naked. This happened just this one year. It got out of control, and this would have been in early fall of 1930. Then they got whatever you call it, a line up and started down the streets of the campus, into Champaign business district, from the first floor to the second floor of every sorority house they could break in to. And I'm talking about hundreds and hundreds, just got totally out of control, totally.

**ES: And they had one campus police officer [laughter].**

MB: Oh yes, I mean Champaign and Urbana had police all over the area. Yeah, they tried to, and there was nothing poor old Pete could do, he couldn't do anything anyway. But there was certainly nothing he could do there. It was a disaster and it was pretty costly to the businesses. They couldn't have been any more naked then they were from the time they marched from the campus, to downtown Champaign and back to the campus. I don't know how many of them, probably a small minority, were the freshman who had entered the cap burning, or just anyone who wanted to get in trouble. The class was penalized, I believe it was the class that graduated in 1934, my class, was denied certain social privileges such as some of the usual class dances.

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

MB: But they are not as serious as you read in the papers today.

**ES: You're talking about the hazing?**

MB: The hazing, yeah. That was a disciplinary problem, but minor, obviously minor. But this event in the fall of 1930—

**ES: So the class--**

INTERRUPTION.

**ES: With the cap burning even, was there alcohol involved in that? I know it was Prohibition time but—?**

MB: Well, if it was Prohibition time, then there was definitely alcohol [*laughter*]. Because I saw, in high school and college, more alcohol in Prohibition time than I saw afterward.

**ES: Is that right?**

MB: Oh yeah, yeah.

**ES: How did people get it? Did they make their own?**

MB: From the far north end of Champaign-Urbana, various bootleggers, and, but I can't think of any high school or college even when there wasn't some alcohol and it wasn't good alcohol either. I mean it may have been made in a bathtub. It may have been made by a bootlegger who didn't know how to make whiskey.

**ES: Wasn't as good huh?**

MB: No, no I should say not, but that was one of faults, I guess, of Prohibition. The law was passed, but it didn't stop the drinking. Now in larger cities, in Chicago or any city near the Canadian or Mexican borders, of course you could get, good liquor. In fact, to answer your question with reference to the cap burning, I would say there probably there was some, but I don't think to any great extent, I really don't I think it was just that kids in large groups found it to misbehave and they did. There was damage done in theatres, damage wherever they went. How it was paid for, I don't know. The repair, I have no idea, but it covered all of the campus area, and Champaign. I don't think Urbana, downtown area, was involved at all.

**ES: And the penalty was that your class couldn't have—**

MB: The penalty was that the class was denied certain usual dance events.

**ES: But the people involved were mainly freshman fraternity people?**

MB: I don't think there was ever nailed down who the leaders were, or what percent of them were people for who this whole even was planned because the University had always cooperated with the students in having a fun evening, but it was limited to geographically to the immediate area of the bonfire.

**ES: I see.**

MB: But this one really got out of control.

**ES: I see [laughter].**

MB: To me at the time it was funny. It's still funny, but, it could have had much more serious consequences than it did. It could have very well have had.

**ES: I have a question about religion too. Were students involved in the foundations on campus?**

MB: Very much so, yes indeed. I think the Wesley Foundation wasn't very old, the new pretty building they had there with which you're familiar.

**ES: Did students go to church or—?**

MB: Let's see, I'll tell you one thing you would be interested in. The Jewish group had a, I think they called their foundation the Hillel Foundation, if my memory serves me correctly. I think that was the first Jewish foundation on American campuses. Now I suppose all big schools have a Hillel foundation, but I think the one at Illinois may have been the first. I do not remember the name of the Jewish leader who headed it up. A matter of fact, he was the speaker at the Commencement exercise for Uni High the year my wife graduated.

**ES: Were there many Jewish students on campus?**

MB: No. There was a Jewish fraternity on the campus. I'd say maybe one half of one per cent of the students were Jewish.

**ES: Do you remember black students?**

MB: Yes. I would say that they were treated just exactly like they should have been. Really, not problems, whatsoever. I saw no problems. Now occasionally there would be something between the black and white, at a ball game maybe at a high school, but I can't think of anything of any segregation or attempted segregation whatsoever. Now this was in the 30s, and here I went to work in the state of West Virginia. I think in the year '47, and there was still segregation there. But in my swimming class, we had a black student and I thought nothing of it. Very few however, there weren't many, very few. We had an awful lot of Chinese students. Later on when students were permitted to have automobiles, during holidays up five or six of these Chinese would go together and pool their money, rent a car, and you wanted to get out of their way. I would say every one I ever knew, both in undergraduate and graduate work, was subsidized by the Chinese National Railway. And I don't think the average American realizes how important, particularly in those days, the railway was to the China. It's very mountainous country, and they found the easier to transport people by rail than to build expensive highways, which they couldn't afford. And the Chinese National Railway subsidized college costs for most of them. Most were graduate students.

**ES: I see, and you didn't feel like they had any problems on campus?**

MB: No, no not between their various ethnic groups, no. I was never made aware of it, if there was any problem, no.

**ES: Now you said you got married while you were a student, where did you meet your wife, or how did you meet your wife?**

MB: I met her when I was working at an oil station which my Dad owned. And she would stop there to buy gasoline for her car, or her parents' car. And those days, there was one car per, or per family, that was the maximum. We chummed around with three other couples, and during my graduate work we lived on Green Street, you're familiar with that. I think it was 307 Green Street, as I recall, and the minister and his wife, he was doing graduate work, lived on the first floor, and another couple, I'm trying to think what school he was in with he and his wife, they lived on the second floor. My wife and I lived on the third floor. I fired the furnace, kept the halls clean, to pay for our room. The second floor was occupied by a girl who was a best friend of my wife. The first floor was this gentlemen doing graduate work and preaching at two different rural churches, to make a little money. But he was much older than the rest of us in the house. I would say he and his wife would have been in their 30s. He had very close family ties in Germany. His mother was a widow, and lived in Chicago, and he had had an excellent education, but was furthering his studies at the University. [He] got his doctor's degree when we lived there. Then he started teaching at the University, and was dismissed at the beginning of the War because of his close connections back in Germany. I mean very, very close with the highest ranking people in Germany.

**ES: You said it was fashionable for people to get married at a young age?**

MB: Yes. It was not unusual at early ages such as 17 to 21. I would say there were an awful lot of married students in those days, of course after the War, an even higher percentage.

**ES: Did being married make any difference financially?**

MB: Made it easier.

**ES: Made it easier, how so?**

MB: Well, you could get free food both at her place and your own [*laughter*].

**ES: Where did you live after you got married?**

MB: Well, we lived separate for a while. Then, we lived at her home for a while. Later we moved to an apartment where I worked to maintain the apartment. And finally to a house on Green Street. It was not rented as the apartment we had half of the whole building. But it was cut up so there were two small apartments. Then I did work for the my wife's grandfather who owned the building, and paid for it, through rental. I loved to be able to remember what the rent was, and I just can't think to save my life, but it was a nice. Now that was my senior year, and then we did graduate work, that's when we were at the house on Green Street.

**ES: Did your wife work while you were in school?**

MB: No, except for baby sitting. Matter of fact, she baby sat for a boy and a girl, children of the one who became the first Dean of Veterinarian science at Illinois. Years later our nephew married the girl.

**ES: I see.**

MB: Then we had another connection at the University. Dean Mumford was the great dean of Agriculture, my wife's uncle by marriage was the brother to Mrs. Mumford.

**ES: Oh sure, and the building.**

MB: Yes, uh-huh, yeah.

**ES: What kinds of things did you do for fun when you were a student?**

MB: I played an awful lot of handball at what we call the "new gym," because that would be something else now, I think it later became the Huff Gym.

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MB: But it's not the Sugar Bowl, which came much later.

**ES: Right.**

MB: And I'd played a lot of that during my graduate work. But as a married couple, I would say, bridge and other card games. Your entertainment was very simple, but of course I've always hunted and fished a lot, but that didn't involve my wife.

**ES: You said roller skating was a—?**

MB: That was a fad, that was a fad, when we moved in to Champaign-Urbana. From the day we got there, that fad, probably died out in about a years time. But it was unbelievable.

**ES: So that was more in the 20s?**

MB: No this would have been in 1927.

**ES: Okay, okay.**

MB: Every weekend there were various places on the campus area, various places on the public street, that would be lined off for races or exhibitions, always involving the students on their roller skates, hard to imagine.

**ES: But when you were a student, it had kind of died out?**

MB: Yeah, oh yeah. I think it probably died out, I don't even remember whether it was continued into the spring of '28 or not. But, it certainly was something in the spring of 1927; we moved in. It had been going on sometime then of course.

**ES: Were you in any organizations, student organizations?**

MB: Very few, again because I had to work constantly. I worked for the Building and Loan. I worked at the properties they owned, cleaning floors.

**ES: This is while you were a student?**

MB: Yes. I worked at the Fire Department.

**ES: What did they have you doing?**

MB: In the Fire Department?

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MB: Very little, cleaning up, polishing, sweeping, menial work, anything you did, didn't require any brains [*laughter*]. And keeping your area where you slept clean. And—

**ES: Were there many fires?**

MB: Seldom, very few. I would say the fires I went to. . . I don't believe I went to a single fire, except at the Chemistry Building where some one had left a formula cooking overnight, that they shouldn't have left, or didn't react like it was supposed to react and a fire got started. But for any fire, any place on the campus, or in Champaign-Urbana near the campus, we would act as a back up, to the city fire departments. I met a couple of years ago, a gentlemen who just retired from the Fire Department. It became a pretty good sized operation later on, but it wasn't much of an operation when I was there. There was Shorty Fay the Fire Chief, and two full time firemen. Then we had one graduate student and then two or three undergraduate students. The biggest non-academic employer at the University, I suppose, was the Department responsible for the heating of the buildings. We always referred to it as the Power Plant. It was headed up by a neighbor of ours, it was a very responsible job, and through that connection, both my brother and I had stints as firemen at the University Fire Department.

**ES: You actually rode the truck and—?**

MB: Oh yeah, you bet your life we rode it, we came down the pole, rode the truck. But, we had various duties outside the premises of the fire department. One was, of course, we were in charge of the alcohol. I don't know whether you've ever heard that story or not.



**START OF TAPE 2 SIDE B**

MB: A barrel of 200 proof alcohol (this is during Prohibition days now) was kept at the Natural History Building, an old vine covered building. Whenever that alcohol was needed by authorized people on the campus, which would be Chemistry Departments as an example, they had to get it through the fire department. We had to take the key and open the barrel and see that they measured out a certain amount of alcohol, and we had to do the book work involved. It was a pretty eventful thing when you went out there. Boy, they watched that like watched nothing else. We had a lot of laughs over that.

**ES: Do you think most students had jobs, had outside work, or how prevalent was that?**

MB: I would say so many of them came from the Chicago area, but I would say, in those days, most of them had summer jobs, yes. Those who had the summer jobs saved their money. They had to.

**ES: Did you have jobs during the school year?**

MB: Nothing of any great importance. I remember I did some work on the streets, and at night, during storm areas, and I'm trying to think, how I got that job. I don't know, but there were several times I had work. It may have been through the fire department after I had left them. I got jobs when they needed emergency work or say cleaning up a street, or there had been a storm, something such as that. I did some of that, but I also worked under the FERA, which was the Federal Aid to students. They assigned you work, as best they could, that would relate in some fashion to what your were studying.

**ES: I see.**

MB: Now mine actually involved a library at the time, my work. Why that wasn't related to Commerce, but at least maybe that's all they had available. So I did relating to record keeping at the library. That paid, seems to me like some place between 10 and 20 dollars a month.

**ES: Did you sign up for that or have to apply?**

MB: Oh yes you had to apply, and all did not get it, yeah that's right. During graduate work, then of course, I graded papers, and was on the staff half the time, for which I got paid that, for whatever faculty assistants got, \$60 a month, for half time work. I also graded papers, and worked for our 3<sup>rd</sup> floor apartment on Green Street.

**ES: When you were in school did you feel like you were having a tough time?**

MB: No, no, not at all, not at all.

**ES: Were you aware of other students who weren't affected by the Depression at all?**

MB: Yes, that didn't help things, but you didn't see too much of that, within Champaign-Urbana itself. Of course there were the children of professional people. They too worked but had it much easier than most of us.

**ES: Were the fraternities and sororities [made up of] more of the wealthier students?**

MB: I would say possibly, yeah, perhaps. The ones that we had at our house were not members of fraternities but had no financial problems whatever. However, a lot of the students did have it pretty tough.

**ES: Did you talk about that, did students talk about their problems?**

MB: Not at all, not at all. The things that you measured by were so different than they are today, you see. The people today, in this country have it pretty soft. I would say that the people today don't have the luxury of going through a Depression, for those of us who went through, we look at it as a luxury, as something that we were better off to have had and experienced.

**ES: How did it change you?**

MB: Didn't. I would say just gave you, generally speaking, a desire to become self-reliant and a desire to improve yourself.

**ES: Did you have friends, or know of people who were, hungry, or just really—?**

MB: Not really, no. No, not really. I never, I'm sure you've read of people standing in line for food, no I never experienced it.

**ES: You didn't see that in Champaign?**

MB: I didn't see that, and I don't know, I'm sure there had to be help given to the poor people in Champaign-Urbana, but that probably involved, for the most part, the ethnic black. And they were certainly no problem, not like we have right here today in Cincinnati. No problem whatsoever. But to answer your question, no I didn't. I never saw a hungry person in my life. When I was doing graduate work, I think we budgeted \$4 a week for groceries. I saved money when I was doing graduate work. By the time I finished graduate work, I had paid back anything I owed my wife's parents, for the time we lived, at their house. The only debt I had, at the time I started work for Kroger was when I first bought an automobile. Now you see this day and age, kids from the time they reach 16 they have an automobile; I had graduated from college in '34, in the fall of '37, 3 years later when I took a job with Kroger, which required travel, only then did I buy an automobile, and then I went in debt some six hundred odd dollars less whatever I paid down, but I got rid of that debt in a couple of months. Now I would say, that average student today particularly those with debt go ahead with some graduate work, it would take them instead of a couple of months to pay off any school debts, I would say five years, at least.

**ES: Much different.**

MB: Yeah, they never going to pay them off.

**ES: Let me ask you about one more subject. When you were in college, how aware of national events that were going on outside of Champaign-Urbana were you? Did you know about what was going on in regard to the Depression, or political elections? Were you involved?**

MB: Uh-huh. Well, yeah I think in those days people were very much aware, more, the man on the street was very much aware, not only the students, but the man on the street. Yeah, I think students were tremendously impressed with Roosevelt administration. Roosevelt immediately sought out educated people, college professors to join the administration. During his entire administration, he was going to the colleges to get his people for leaders. I think that very much impressed students.

**ES: Do you think the campus was primarily Democrat or Republican?**

MB: I would say probably 90%, Roosevelt whether Democrat or not, yes I think it was probably, although Champaign-Urbana was probably a Republican area, I'm guessing, I don't know. But, among students, I'm positive it would not only be Democratic, I'd say probably 65, 70% Democrat, and probably 99% Roosevelt.

**ES: Was politics an activity with students on campus, student government? Were students interested in that kind of thing?**

MB: Was I?

**ES: You or other students, was it big—?**

MB: Not really, not really, there was always those who aspired, I guess, they wanted to be something they weren't, I suppose. But, that wasn't a big thing at all. I remember the one who with his mother lived in one of my wife's grandfather's apartments. He was a college politician. He never joined a fraternity, but he was always very much involved in politics. At my 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, I sat at a table, my wife and I, with his wife and him, and the other party was a good friend of mine during school, and his wife. He was one of the married people, we knew and ran around with some. And he was the student military commander.

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MB: He had married the daughter of a well known person on the campus, known as Tommy the Towel Man. Tommy worked in the old gym handing out towels.

**ES: Oh okay.**

MB: Whenever you took a shower, or whatever, you would always stop by and got a towel from Tommy. And a good friend of mine, he married the daughter. He was an older person; I think

when he graduated he was probably 25 years of age. He worked for the Green Giant Pea Company and a few years later brought my youngest brother into the company.

**ES: Do you remember in the mid-30s any radical—?**

MB: No.

**ES: Political movements on campus at all?**

MB: No, no. I wasn't aware of it then, and I haven't been since, no. There probably was some of that, but it wasn't all that of a, important or—

**ES: Did you go through Commencement exercise?**

MB: Yes.

**ES: Did your parents attend that?**

MB: Oh yes, indeed. And then Honor's Day I was in that. I think in between my junior and senior and they came to that event, that and the graduation exercises.

**ES: And then tell me what you did. You went to grad school right after—**

MB: Yeah.

**ES: Did you look for a job first at all—?**

MB: Yes I did. If I had gotten a job anything like what I wanted, I would have taken it in lieu of doing graduate work, because graduate work was secondary to me. I would say that the average salary offered, to the very few who got jobs, varied from 17.50 a week to 27.50 a week. General Electric paid 27.50 a week, but one of the public accounting firms paid 17.50, so you weren't looking at too much. That's all, and there were so few hired. Now, a few came to the campus to interview people. But, few were taken, those that were, were paid practically nothing. I interviewed for General Electric... I did not get a job offer. That was a disappointment. I would have liked to have gone with them. They required not only good grades, but they wanted people very active in campus affairs, very, that's what they were primarily looking for, and you can't be real poor, you can't work your way through school and be active in campus activities.

**ES: I see.**

MB: I would say, my only disappointment for looking for a job prior to deciding to go to do graduate work. I went out on one or two interviews. I voluntarily went to Chicago area and visited the office of Jewel T, I don't know whether you've heard of Jewel T. or not? That was a very prominent, well horse and buggy delivery plan, they went throughout the country, horses, buggies, and selling, many of your food stores started like that, but they were running at that time a chain of very fine food stores. I went there for an interview on my own, though it was. . .I had

written to them and they asked me to come and see them. Oh yes, on a second trip, I visited Montgomery Ward, began on my own writing letters and so forth, sending them whatever information I felt they might be interested in, and they, those two sent back forms to fill out, which I did; visited both of them. And neither materialized there, and those two companies are gone now anyway. [In addition to interviewing on campus, I traveled to Chicago on two occasions, once to interview for Jewel Tea Company and Montgomery Ward, but I got no offer.]

**ES: Yeah.**

MB: But I would love to have had the job at General Electric. Five of us were selected and from the five they picked two, in accounting, I don't know whether they hired in any of the other professions or not, but in accountancy they hired just two, both of who were not only almost straight A students, but were very active in campus affairs and that's what, where the GE people put their emphasis.

**ES: I see. And you weren't as involved in student activities because you worked.**

MB: Oh yes. I would love to have been involved, it would have been fun. I would have enjoyed a fraternity. Our son just loved the fraternity life when he went to school at Ohio Wesleyan. But yes, that's one thing and if you get married young you're going to miss out on that, or, and if you're poor and have to work you're going to miss out on it. And if you're both, married and have to work, then you must necessarily miss out on school activities.

**ES: And then you did get a job?**

MB: In 1937. [After three semesters doing graduate work and a half time assistant on the staff at U of I. I worked full time one and a half years for the US Department of Agriculture.] I took a job with the Kroger company. My initial pay was \$40 a week. That was a good job in those days. We traveled, we had no base, we'd come back to Cincinnati twice a year, but in the meanwhile, we'd be out, we'd leave Cincinnati and be on a month at each of three different divisions doing the audits. We did that for four and a half years. I took the job as comptroller down at the Terre Haute, Indiana division. [I was in that capacity only six of seven months when I was commissioned as a naval air gunnery officer in the US Navy where I served three years in World War II.]

**ES: And then you said you came back and went back to Kroger?**

MB: Came back and went back with Kroger.

**ES: And returned—**

MB: And of course they offered me the same job back at Terre Haute if I wanted it, if I didn't they had another offer or two. It was a nice program they had set up for returning service personnel.

START OF TAPE 3 SIDE A

**ES: So you're saying your work with the fire department got you into some of the football games? Did students attend the athletic events in the 30s?**

MB: Yes they did, but it was under different conditions than now. In those days, for \$10 regardless, we got an athletic book. And with that, you got, I think, maybe every football game, not every basketball game though.

**ES: When you were a grad student?**

MB: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. But I believe that we got some sort of a concession. Oh I know one concession we got, when you were on the staff half time doing half-time graduate work, you paid no tuition fees.

**ES: Uh-huh.**

MB: Such a nominal nothing you see. You had very few student fees in those days, maybe a locker in the gym, or maybe a key deposit, or something like that.

**ES: What were the requirements coming in to school? I know someone has told me that you had to learn how to swim.**

MB: How to—?

**ES: How to swim. Or you had to take swimming in high school.**

MB: Oh, I don't recall that. I don't recall that. Now I did take it. I think I had to take it one semester, and the course I took was called Lifesaving and Diving. But, when they started actually teaching the course the man who headed it up or happened be the swimming coach at the school, decided that he could do a better job with us if we decided, if you want to dive, we'll make you strictly diving, if you want lifesaving, we'll make it strictly lifesaving, so I chose the life saving. At the end of the course, if you passed it, and we all did, you got your Red Cross life saving certificate.

**ES: I interrupted you when I turned the tape over, you were saying that you got back from World War II and then you took a job in Cincinnati, is that right?**

MB: Yeah, when I first came back, I had took a job in Cincinnati, in the Merchandising Research Department just as a, just as a refresher course, so to speak. During that time we, gave thought to how we wanted to finally wind up our career in the Kroger Company. And, I was with that a matter of just months, during which time I was interviewing the head of our Branch Accounting, for the same type of job I had when the war started, I was interviewing the head of the auditing Department with reference to taking over the federal tax office; and I was interviewing the head of the real estate department for possible career in real estate. Now I was doing all that, during this waiting period when I was with the Merchandizing Research

Department. Then when I took the job in real estate, I was assigned to head up the real estate department in Charleston, West Virginia. I had that job until I came back to our Cincinnati home office in 1959 where I had various real estate assignments, lastly as the Director of Property.

**ES: How would you say the U of I has influenced your life?**

MB: My life? Well I would say, greatly. Any college would have done something in that direction, but I preferred a state university with research facilities such as the University of Illinois over let us say an Ivy League school.

**ES: Well, thank you.**

MB: You're entirely welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW.