

University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938
Oral History Project
William O'Dell – Class of 31
Ft. Myers, Florida
March 18, 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 William O'Dell an alumnus from the class of 1931. We are at Mr. O'Dell's home in Ft. Myers, Florida and the date is March 18, 2001.

I wondered if you could begin by stating your full name and birth date?

William O'Dell: My name is William Francis O'Dell. I was born in 1909, January 24. Easy to remember because if you reverse those two numbers, 24, you get my age, (but don't forget to add 50) [*laughter*].

ES: [*Laughter*.] Could you talk a little bit about where you grew up, your hometown, and about your family?

WO: Well I went to Illinois from LaGrange, Illinois, Lyons Township High School. We had lived there since 1923, and I had moved around 4 or 5 different cities before I even got to high school, but that's where we landed and I went to Illinois in the fall of 1926. And the reason that I went to Illinois was that there was a football player, number 77, who was to have graduated Illinois in 1926, but Red Grange did not graduate because it went into Pro-football. But he had such an impact on high school students that I would estimate that half of our class at LaGrange High School went to Illinois simply because of Red Grange, just Red Grange. He was the hero. He was the image of all that we wanted to be.

My father was with the Mueller company of Decatur, Illinois, and they made, and still do I presume, make brass goods for municipalities. He traveled quite bit, but he was well known in Decatur, because he was with that company, although we lived in a suburb of Chicago.

ES: Did you have brothers and sisters?

WO: I had two older sisters. One went to Rockford College, and she graduated in the class of '28, at Rockford. My older sister did not go to college. She went a secretarial school, but she did not go to college. I suspect in those days my father couldn't afford the expense of sending her to college.

ES: Was education important in your family? Higher education?

WO: Well I think it was, because neither of my parents got beyond high school. And, as I can talk about later, it was very important, very important. Very important because my father did not have a college education and he realized the value of it.

ES: You mentioned a lot of people in your class went to school. Was that true in the 20s, did most students go onto college?

WO: I don't know what the percentage would be. Of course it varies greatly from one school to another, and this being a suburb of Chicago, I would say that half of our class went away to college.

ES: You said that you started school in 1929?

WO: I entered Illinois in the fall of 1926.

ES: Do you remember your first day? What were your impressions of the school when you came into town?

WO: Well of course I'd been down there several times, prior to that, so I was not completely unaware of what was there. The first time that I visited Champaign was as a guest of my sister's boyfriend, who was a member of Alpha Delta Phi, and I stayed at that house in the 1924. My first game as a spectator was 1924 when Red Grange ran wild over Michigan. That was that famous game where he scored two touchdowns in the first 4 minutes, or something. Two touchdown in two minutes or what have you. I went away saying that this is a great place to go to school if every game is like this. So that was the impact of Red Grange. Not too strategic a reason [*laughter*] but it was a reason. In fact when we were rushing, being rushed by fraternities down at Champaign, Red Grange was a member of the Zeta Psi fraternity. I was invited to go over to the Zeta Psi house, and when we got upstairs, they said, "Would you like to see Red Grange's bedroom?" So we walked over and here was a room that was roped off with Red Grange's bed over there. It was like George Washington slept here. That's Red Grange, and you cannot overstate the impact of Red Grange on future alumni, future Illini.

ES: How did you find housing when you first came down here?

WO: Well the first year that I was at Illinois I did not pledge a fraternity. I had 3 offers, but none of those 3 was a house that I had my mind set on. So I did not pledge the first year. But the second year I got an invitation from Delta Upsilon, and I pledged that fraternity.

ES: So the first year you lived in a boarding house?

WO: No. I lived in a private home. I was disappointed in not being a fraternity man because the fraternities were important. We can talk about that later if you wish. I was set on being a fraternity man and I did not make it the first year.

ES: I wondered if I could ask you about your major; what was your interest academically?

WO: Well my father thought I should be a lawyer. Keep in mind my father did not have a college education, but he thought lawyers were great people. When I was being rushed by the Theta Chi house, one of the members at Theta Chi asked me, “What are you planning, what school are you planning to go in to?” And I said, “I’ll probably end up in the Law school.” He said, “Why do you want to go into the law school.” I said, “Well, I wanted to be a lawyer.” “Oh,” he says, “You don’t want to be a lawyer. Go to the commerce school and you can take some business law, but you don’t have to be a lawyer. Then you can combine your business and law in one school.” So without my father knowing it, I forgot the idea of being a lawyer and I ended up in the commerce school. Now these are not very sophisticated reasons [*laughter*] for making a decision, but that’s the way it was.

ES: What did you hope to do with that degree then? Did you—

WO: Graduate [*laughter*].

ES: [*Laughter.*] Just graduate?

WO: No, in those days it was really interesting in retrospect. The people did not, in my class, the class of 1930, plan on what job they were going to get because you had no choice. You had to go in and find a job that you didn’t want to take, but if you wanted to make a living you had to take that job. You took any job that you could get. A very good friend of mine Joe Sheehan, class of 1933, had a degree in accounting. He was an outstanding student and outstanding in every way. He was a janitor for Bethlehem Steel because that was the only job that he could get in 1933. And I ended up trying to sell direct mail for a fraternity brother, Fred Ebersold, the class of ’24, selling direct mail to gasoline stations (which was short-lived).

ES: So you didn’t go to college thinking that you were into a certain field?

WO: That’s right, I was going to go into business, period. That’s what I wanted to do.

ES: And then get whatever job you could get into?

WO: That’s right.

ES: Did you have any favorite professors in the commerce—

WO: That’s a very good question. I wish I could come up with some. A fellow by the name of Green, I think he was in accounting. But, I never was close to any of my professors. I think I was more fearful than anything else, and I don’t remember them well.

ES: Was there any kind of relationship between students and faculty outside of the classroom? Did they have students over to their homes?

WO: We at the DU house had professors over for dinner. That was rather common. When I was a pledge at the house they had a reception for David Kinley, the President of the University at the time, and two friends, two other professors. They were talking together as a group and an upper classman told me, "Bill, go over and enter that group because they're all by themselves." Hank Roberts told me that. And I thought he was kidding. I walk over and introduce myself to the President of the University and these two strangers. Why I said, "You must be kidding!" And he said, "Bill get over there and meet those people or I will beat your ass." And he meant it, and I mean I would have taken it on the rear-end if I had not gone over there. So I went over and apparently survived the approach, but in any event I went over. I was a pledge at the time and obviously very insecure.

ES: So there was, kind of a—

WO: Oh, I had tremendous respect for professors, tremendous. In fact we all had. We all respected the educators, high school, college...never challenge them.

ES: What kinds of classes do you remember? Or, what kind of classes did you take when you were there?

WO: Well, the classes I enjoyed most were those in salesmanship and advertising. I was not an accountant. I didn't enjoy accounting.

ES: How big were your classes? How many students were in a class, section typically?

WO: I don't remember them being very large or very small, I would say 25.

ES: Can you identify strengths or weaknesses in your academic education there? Does anything come to mind being particularly great or—?

WO: No, I never, never really thought of education from that point of view. I just accepted what was being offered. I was never one to rouse people and be confrontational. I didn't sign any petitions or any of that. I do remember, this is a little bit of a digression here, but I was active in leading a movement that resulted in getting permission from the University to open the tennis courts on Sunday. That was one of my major contributions [*laughter*] of my education.

ES: They had a rule that you couldn't play tennis on Sunday?

WO: On Sunday, that's right. At least until after church. I think the rules would bear me out on that.

ES: So how did you do that? You circulated a petition among students?

WO: And talking to the authorities. I don't remember just how it came about. That's a very good question on your part. I don't remember the catalyst that caused it but it did take place.

ES: Well, I wondered if I could ask you about some of the rules and restrictions. Do you remember any in particular, besides the tennis rule [laughter]?

WO: [Laughter.] Oh I remember the one that made me a 1931 graduate instead of a 1930 graduate. When I got kicked out of school. There was a University no car rule at the University at that time and undergraduates could not drive cars unless they were employed. I got my parents permission to take the family car from LaGrange down to Champaign for a big Spring weekend, dance weekend. So I had this car in violation of their no car rule. And this made travel with my girlfriend from one fraternity to another easier, and go to many different fraternity parties during on weekend.

I was driving down Green Street with 3 or 4 people, en route to Chicago, or LaGrange, to return my car and then took the train back to Champaign on Monday. There was a note in my mailbox from Dean Thomas Arkle Clark asking me to come into his office at 11:30 the next morning. This would strike terror into anyone's heart. And so I showed up and my interview with him was probably 40 seconds long, and the message was that I was being expelled from the University for the balance of the semester for violating the no car rule. He named the people in the car, what direction I was going down Green Street. The rumor, of course, around the campus was that Thomas Arkle Clark had a spy ring, and that had never been documented, but I don't know that it had ever been completely denied either.

In any event, Thomas Arkle Clark was a feared dean. I had tremendous respect for him, but that was the rule and regulation that I do remember.

And my father, I will give him credit when I told him what had happened. I had lied to my parents really. I told them that there would be no problem, that this was just for a weekend. He never berated me in anyway, but he did say, "Despite your actions, I will give you a graduation present, and that will be another semester in school so you can get your degree, because it is essential if you want to be a success that you get that degree." I remember clearly, he said, "Bill, you go back to school." No I didn't want to go back. I said, "Dad I don't need a degree. I am a college man now. I don't need anything more." And he said to me, "You go back and get that degree or you will regret it the rest of your life because you will always have to explain why you didn't complete your schooling!" So I did go back for the following semester. Of course, in retrospect it was great advice, but he never turned me over his knee and thrashed me or anything [laughter].

ES: He didn't question Thomas Arkle Clark doing this?

WO: Well he did. He talked to Adolph Mueller, then Chairman of the Board of Mueller Company in Decatur. And I believe he was a member of the Board of Trustees at the University at that time. In any event it was Adolph Mueller who went back and talked to

Thomas Arkle Clark. The response that Thomas Arkle Clark gave Adolph was, “he was lucky it wasn’t more severe.” So that was the end of that [*laughter*].

ES: So this was your last semester in school?

WO: And this was in May, two weeks, three weeks away from my degree. It cost my father another semester’s education. Very unfair, in retrospect, a horrible penalty for such a relatively minor infraction. [In my opinion!!]

ES: And that was a big financial strain in 1930, ’31?

WO: Yes it was. On the other hand my father was employed by the Mueller Company and my family was not really hurt by the Depression in anyway, except for my inability to get a job. But as a family, we maintained our living standards, pretty much as we had always done.

ES: Do you have a sense of what other students thought about Clark? How he was looked at, did other student fear him as well?

WO: Well I assume that would be true. His role was enough to scare anybody. He was very stern individual. He must have been 120 years old.

ES: Was he pretty invisible? Did you see him around campus a lot of have much contact with him?

WO: Oh, I had no contact with him. He was one of these people you steered clear of. You’ve never had a pleasant relationship.

ES: Were rules for men and women students different? For example, did women have curfews? Did men have anything like that?

WO: To my knowledge they did not. Sororities of course had a, I think it was one o’clock on weekends and ten thirty or something on the weekdays. They were quite strict on that. But I can remember violating that when my future wife, at her sorority actually climbed down a ladder to have a date with me, after she had checked in at her sorority [*laughter*].

ES: [Laughter.] She get caught?

WO: [Laughter.] No, no.

ES: What was her sorority?

WO: Alpha Chi Omega.

ES: Let's see. I wanted to ask you too about drinking. Was drinking a problem or a big activity?

WO: Not really, because Prohibition started in 1918 and went for 15 years, fraternity drinking, at least in our house, was not a problem at all. There may have been some people who tried to make so called bathtub gin, but it never became problem. Now, to show the difference from when I joined Delta Upsilon in the fall of 1927, the year before the DU's had had their social privileges revoked for one full year, because at a dance a chaperone recognized that there were two women on the second floor of the fraternity which was against the rule. Not only that, the chaperones were standing at the foot of the stairs and a bottle of liquor slid down the stairs inadvertently and ended up at the feet of these two chaperones standing there. So they turned the house in and the regulation called for the house to lose its social privileges for one full year. So what little drinking there was, was taken very seriously.

ES: What was the moral code on campus?

WO: The moral code, you mean what?

ES: How regulated were people in regard to morality and what was right?

WO: Well, number one we didn't have automobiles. And in my opinion the automobile was a great contributor in the decline of morals. The sororities had strict control over their membership and they had to be in at a given time. And I won't say that there wasn't something going on, but then on the other hand in contrast today it was quite tame.

ES: Was prostitution a problem in town, were you aware of that?

WO: I never heard of the subject.

ES: What about religious life, did religion figure into a lot of student activities who were—?

WO: Well, as far as religion was concerned there were very few members of our house who went to church on Sunday. We had two Catholics in our house and whenever we had discussions on religion sitting around the fireplace at night, if these questions got too tough, we would walys say, "Talk to Bill Budinger, or talk to Francis O'Keefe." They can answer your questions. Religion did not play an important role.

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ES: Okay you mentioned this a little bit, but I was wondering if you'd talk about fraternity life and how important that was to students, during the 1920s?

WO: Well, the role of the fraternity at Illinois at that time was very important. And I think most people that entered the University wanted to be a member of a sorority or a

fraternity. That's my judgement. My desire was extremely strong to become a member of a fraternity as I mentioned earlier. It played a very important role in my life because when I went to Illinois, I was withdrawn, somewhat insecure. There was an organization on campus called Tumas, an obvious Indian name. This was a so-called Junior honorary, among fraternities, and the two members per fraternity, the senior member, picked the junior member. And this was considered quite an honor to be a member of Tumas.

As it turns out, the organization Tumas, over the next several years turned out to be nothing more than a social gathering, and their parties were "extremely wild." The University finally cracked down on them and forced the group to disband some time in the 30s. It was very important to me because when my friend, the president of the house, George Whyte, who was captain of the Golf Team, designated me as the member for Tumas, I took a new look at myself. I thought, "My gosh, he's picked me out of all these other guys and maybe I could amount to something." So that little relationship was somewhat of a turning point in my life. I learned a lot from a fraternity. I learned how to get along with people. I learned organization. I learned Robert's Rules of Order. The fraternity was a great help to me. I have talked to my two grandsons and tried to talk them into the fraternity life, neither one of them wanted any part of it [*laughter*].

ES: Is that something, your interest in fraternities, is that something you came to school with, or once you got to Illinois you saw—?

WO: No, I got that before I came here. I never considered any other school. My father wanted to send me to Dartmouth but I would have no part of it.

ES: How did the fraternity students and the independents get along on campus? Was there much intermingling or—?

WO: Oh well in general, I would say that there was not much. Although you get outside of the fraternity and get in classes and so forth that line disappears. The fraternities were very powerful in determining would be editor of the *Illio* and who would be editor of the *Daily Illini* and manager of the baseball team and so forth. The fraternities pretty much dominated that.

ES: So being in a fraternity sort of elevated your status on campus?

WO: At least in the eyes of people who were members of fraternities anyway [*laughter*].

ES: [Laughter.] You don't have a sense of how the independents looked upon the Greek System?

WO: No, not really because we didn't have much interaction with them. Not that we were rejecting them. Our lifestyles were different and we just didn't have the contact. We were not looking down on them in anyway. We just didn't associate with them because we were not brought into contact.

ES: What kind of activities did you do at Delta Upsilon?

WO: Well as I would say, I was not a big man on the campus. I was a member of the Intrafraternity Council but that was automatic because I was president of my chapter and you're automatically a member of the Intrafraternity Council. I was quite active in that.

ES: What kinds of things was it involved in, did it regulate—?

WO: Well I think they were the sounding board between the administration and the fraternities themselves. There were no major problems at that time as I remember. But, the Intrafraternity Council was very active. I was a member of Scabbard and Blade, the military society. I guess everybody who took advanced military was a member of Scabbard and Blade, maybe not. I was a student captain.

ES: What did that involve?

WO: I don't remember just what it involved really. I enjoyed military work. I was in the Army Reserves for 10 years after I got out of school, as a second lieutenant. The Armory was kiddy-corner from our fraternity house and I got to know some of the military officers rather well. I enjoyed them more than I did Dean Thomas Arkle Clark [*laughter*].

ES: [Laughter.] Unless you were—

WO: Continually run down. I hope he doesn't have any descendants that read this kind of stuff.

ES: Were you in any other organizations? Student groups?

WO: I don't remember any other. I might have been on a dance committee or something.

ES: Do you remember cap burnings, did you participate in that or—?

WO: It was what they called the Spring Rush? Where the students would form a gang and go downtown and smash windows and things of that nature. And take the little streetcars and rock them back and forth. Dean Thomas Arkle Clark sent his photographers out and got pictures of students that did that. And they ended up out of school. But, that was a rather childish group that got together to do that type of thing.

ES: What kinds of things do you do in the fraternity? Like did you have a lot of dances, a lot of social events?

WO: Yes, we would have several dances a year. I was president of the house my last year, which was a good experience for me. I had maintained a relationship with fraternity brothers, for many, many, many years. And I look upon my fraternity

experience in a very favorable light. It was good for me. It wasn't always good for everybody but it was good for me.

ES: You mentioned your cook's name was Opal?

WO: And I think her last name was Hunt, but I'm not sure. Her first name was Opal. Very popular, very good cook. The waiters in our house were largely from Sigma Pi, a fraternity right across the street from our house. In our chapter house, the seniors sat at the heads of tables. It was up to the seniors, or the head of the table, to maintain order and to maintain table manners. If you didn't put your knife on your plate, you were corrected. If you had your elbows on the table, you were corrected. Now this wasn't when we had guests, but when we were by ourselves, usually Monday nights, when we had chapter meetings, you had to behave at dinner and learn how to handle yourself. [We wore jackets for all evening meals except for Mondays and Saturdays.]

ES: So you had a meeting weekly?

WO: That's right.

ES: Group meeting weekly?

WO: And we had a hell week, that was really hell. That was a horrible experience. I can't begin to detail the activities that we were forced into. That was prevalent, not just the Delta Upsilon house but every house had severe hell weeks where they put the pledges through an unbelievable assignments. When I became chapter president, it never dawned me that if I were a strong president of the chapter I would have outlawed the thing. In retrospect, I can't believe that I tolerated what went on during hell week. But that was what had been going on for so long, and I went through it, and a lot of people I'm sure subconsciously said, "I went through it and these guys are going to go through it too." But in retrospect it was childish. Today in at least the DU's there is no hell week. They take on some social project, local aid as to having hell week per se. Opal was a very good cook and we had a good relationship with the waiters. There was a degree of dignity at dinner time. There was no food throwing, nothing like that. You behaved. It was good for us.

ES: Were you expected to keep up the house?

WO: No, we had our own hired maintenance man. He was the guy that rang the bell in the morning to wake us up in our dormitory. We all slept in the dormitory and sometimes the snow would blow in on you. We had a lot of respect for him. He outlived a lot of the fraternity members. We were just there three or four years, but I can't even recall his name now. But he was a great man.

ES: Did you have an adult living in the house with you?

WO: No.

ES: No?

WO: No, sororities did have housemothers, but the fraternities did not.

ES: What kinds of things did you do for fun? You said you met your wife at Illinois, how did you meet her?

WO: I met her in a chemistry class during my sophomore year.

ES: And what was her name?

WO: Bess Baer. We were both standing along side the wall that contained all of the chemicals, and this little thing standing next to me said, to anyone who wanted to hear her, "I can't find this damn stuff." And I was so intrigued by a young lady that would use damn, I looked at her, and the next thing I knew I was dating her [*laughter*]. And we got married, married for 53 years.

ES: Where did you go, what kinds of things did you do when you had free time?

WO: Well, free time on weekends, we would usually go to dances, University events, of which of course there were plenty. During the week we would try to arrange to meet after a class and go down to Prehn's, everyone knows of Prehn's. And that was a great meeting place. Go to College Hall for a dance. Go downtown to the Orpheum Theatre. And the Virginia Theatre which had movies. We would go down there quite often.

ES: Did you go to a lot of the sporting events?

WO: Oh yes. We were not too far away from the stadium, our fraternity house. We had one member, who was a member of the 1928 national football champions, Lou Muegge. He ended up as a coach down in Missouri. A lot of the men that came to Illinois in the 20s came to the athletic coaching school, which was maybe, one of the first to offer coaching as a subject for credit. I believe I'm right on that. In any event we had 3 or 4 or 5 members of our fraternity that came from out of state to go to Illinois, simply because of the coaching school.

ES: Were you aware of the Depression when you were in school, in the late, late 20s?

WO: Oh very much aware because when the September Crash came in 1929, I was taking a course in money markets. You can imagine, we talked about we were studying: the role of the Federal Reserve Bank and what would preclude any crash of any kind. And all of the standards that had been held up for so long just came crashing down with the stock market. It was a very, very exciting time. And 1929, did not affect the chapter much, but by 1930, I would say that maybe a third of our chapter members did not return to school because of the Depression. In fact our membership at the DU house was so thin

that we were unable to make both ends meet. We had considered, somewhat seriously, joining with a fraternity next to us, Sigma Phi Sigma. We did not do that, and I don't know that we actually talked to them, but within our house, we seriously considered them asking them to join, so we could merge into one house, and make both ends meet. However, fortunately that turned out not to be necessary and we had a strong alumni board and we came through. But, I can remember that many of those in school didn't have enough money to pay their bills, just didn't have enough money. It was a period that is hard to envision today.

ES: Did you have a mortgage on your house that you had to pay?

WO: Oh yes, uh-huh.

ES: But the alumni were able to cover?

WO: I forget how we resolved the non-payment. Non-payment was a pretty common thing, but we did. I don't know the details of how we mastered the thing.

ES: How did students stay in school? Did a lot of students have jobs, or—?

WO: Well, you got along with what you had, that was just about it. The house bills during the Depression ran \$40-45 a month. That included food, housing, and dues, \$45 a month and that was a lot of money for a father back home who was having trouble making his own ends meet. They were demanding times but as so many say it was good for all of us [*laughter*].

ES: I wanted to ask you too, what did students wear to class? Did you dress up to go to class?

WO: Well not, down at the University of Virginia where you had to wear a jacket at all times when you lived at your housing, but you did dress up. Today's casual dressing, I think, would not hold at all. It was several cusps above today's standards.

ES: Did you have a raccoon coat?

WO: [*Laughter.*] No, I didn't. But my sister did. My mother had a full length mink coat. Father did very well during the 20s. Everybody was doing well in the 20s. We lived very well. No one buys mink at all now, am I right [*laughter*]?

ES: [*Laughter.*] But your father didn't have stocks in the market so he wasn't much ()?

WO: He was but it was not a major thing because he always had a nice income in addition.

ES: Did you say you didn't have a job while you were in school?

WO: I didn't.

ES: Any outside job?

WO: I did not, right.

ES: Okay. Were you aware of other groups on campus when you were a student? Do you remember blacks in school?

WO: The blacks were, I don't remember them at all, simply because, well number one, we were completely geographically separated. It was a "historical" process. I don't think by design. They just lived where they wanted to live, or they lived together. I don't remember, my own attitude, I never looked, or really looked down upon a black person. I don't quite know how to describe my feelings towards them. We would never consider a black person for membership, because the rules and regulations of the national Delta Upsilon organization at that time stated that the fraternity was restricted to, "men of caucasian background." That was stated very clearly.

ES: In the 1930s?

WO: Yes, and prior years.

ES: So you didn't have contact, much at all, in classes, or—?

WO: Well, we might sit next to somebody in class, but it was not by design, it was just a chance basis.

ES: Do you remember discrimination? Do you remember any incidents?

WO: No, we didn't view it as discrimination in those days. It was just a way of life. We never recognized it as discrimination.

ES: What about Jewish students. Did they intermingle among other students on campus or were they separated at all?

WO: I don't remember any separation. I don't remember that ever becoming an issue. Being an all-caucasian fraternity, Jews were not solicited for membership. Although I had several very good Jewish friends, I never thought anything about it.

ES: You mentioned you had two Catholic members in your group. Were there any problems between Catholics and Protestants?

WO: No, I don't think so.

ES: No. How aware of national events were you when you were a student? Did you know what was going on? Of course, you knew the Depression was going on, but did you know about other events, presidential elections, or—?

WO: Oh, I think so. I can't believe that we didn't. I think it depended a lot on your family, more than the University, but I think I was reasonably well versed.

ES: Did you read the newspaper or have a radio or—?

WO: I certainly read the *Daily Illini*, that may be all I read for most of the time.

ES: Were student politics a big activity on campus?

WO: I think the answer would be yes, very much so—determining who got the top jobs and things of that nature.

ES: Was it pretty prestigious to be a campus person, elected to a political position?

WO: Oh, I think so. Yes, I can remember names like, Timothy Swain and Rick Meers.

ES: Do you think they had much power in forming policy?

WO: For policy for whom?

ES: For students, or you know, you were talking about getting the tennis rules change, did students have much say in how they were regulated?

WO: Well, now I don't know how you define much. It's hard to say really. I don't remember students thinking that they were being trampled on or anything like that. The thing is, in those days, you had so much respect for your superiors that you didn't really challenge a lot. Confronting a teacher or a professor would scare the life out of me [laughter].

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ES: Did you have a sense of whether the campus was Republican or Democrat? Or what the political tone among students was?

WO: That's pretty hard to generalize because I would think mostly in the terms of the membership of my fraternity rather than the campus at large. I don't remember whether it would be classified more Republican or more Democratic. I really don't know.

ES: I was going to ask you about commencement, but I guess you didn't go through commencement.

WO: You're so right [*laughter*]. My father tried to get me back in that far, or could I take exams even though I wasn't in school, but nobody would yield.

ES: Did you have final exams that you took at the end of the year?

WO: Oh yeah, did we have final exams? Oh yes.

ES: Okay.

WO: I remember an exciting event related to final exams. I was sitting in what's the main hall there at the end of the Broadwalk, what do you call that building?

ES: Smith Music Hall?

WO: Music Hall. In any event, it would hold two or 300 people.

ES: Oh, Follinger Auditorium?

WO: Yeah, I don't remember for sure, but in any event there must have been 250 or 300 of us taking final exams. You would of course sit next to somebody was not taking the same course as you were taking. We hadn't been 10 minutes into the the final exam period. This professor in the psychology department who was standing in the front of the room screamed in the middle of this quiet atmosphere, "stop that man, stop that man!" And a student sitting the on aisle half way down the auditorium, got up and ran to the exit. Apparently someone thought they caught him cheating or something and he was trying to run away. And this psychology professor yelled, "stop that man!" I don't know if they stopped him or not but in any event he discouraged anybody who had any notion of cheating. It was such a scary, scary situation. I forget the name of that professor. But yes, we took finals very seriously, as anybody would.

Incidentally, speaking of the hall there. We did not refer to anything like, "the Quad." The Quad as such, per se, did not exist during the 1920s or 30s. There was the Broadwalk, we referred to, "I'll meet you on the Broadwalk," or so forth. But the Quad we did not. The Broadwalk was the center of activity with these large trees, rows of trees. And I presume they're still there, I don't know.

ES: Well, the Dutch Elm disease took out many of them in the 60s--

WO: Oh that's right, that's right, that's exactly right, forgot that.

ES: So you didn't go out and study on the Quad?

WO: As an excuse to be with your date, yes. But that would be about it.

ES: Do you remember the campus authorities? I've heard of Pete the police officer. Does that ring a bell?

WO: Just, no, just Thomas Arkle Clark [*laughter*].

ES: [Laughter.] He made a big impression on you?

WO: Yeah, I'll say he did [*laughter*]*—*my father too.

ES: What did you do right after you received your degree?

WO: Well, remember, the Depression was in full force. I worked the only place that I could get a job: through a fraternity brother of mine, Fred Ebersold, class of '22 or '24, who was an account executive for a direct mail house. I got a job selling direct mail campaigns to oil dealers to pay for half of it, and the oil companies would pay the other half. And that was my first job. I don't know how long I lasted, maybe 6 or 7 months and that was the end of that.

And then, about that time, Stewart Howe came along, and he must have known my condition, and he asked me if I would like to join his organization, which was a growing organization, by 1931. I know he had started an office at the University of Michigan, and he asked me if I wanted to join and go to Purdue and open up an office there, which I did. And I don't know how much money I made, but I got enough to get married on. And the real reason we were able to get married was because my wife taught school at a high school in Streator, Illinois, which is where Stewart Howe came from. So Stewart Howe and my wife knew each other. Because of the Depression, they did not pay her on time and she had three months income coming beginning in June of 1933. So on the basis on the what little money I was making from Stewart Howe, plus her three month income that we knew was coming, we were able to get married. And that was all we needed [*laughter*].

Then I went to Columbus, Ohio and opened up the Ohio State office. It was relatively easy to sell this service because fraternities were destitute for pledges. Fathers didn't have enough money to finance them so that any promise that this service Stewart Howe offered, if it brought in just one new member, that would pay for the service, of course that was true. And it was a good thing. That was very rare, very easy to sell. And I enjoyed working for Stewart. He was a very nice guy, very nice guy, very pleasant, very fair, very helpful. He helped me a lot in writing. He was a good man to work for.

ES: Did you remember him in college? Were you friends or—?

WO: Yes, because when he was in school, he started the alumni chapter bulletin, chapter publication for his fraternity, Kappa Sigma. Then he sold his services to fraternities at Illinois, as soon as he got out of school, or maybe before then. I know he lined up, 15 or 25 or 30 fraternities as his clients while he was in school. And I was one of them at the DU house. So I edited our chapter bulletin, the *DU Line*. I knew Stewart for maybe two years before I graduated, then a half a year elapsed, and then I joined his organization, sometime about 1932.

ES: What kinds of things did the organization do for fraternities, what did you provide?

WO: Basically it was the publishing the chapter publication for alumni. They maintained the chapter's alumni mailing list which was very important. Most fraternities did not keep records, good records, reliable records of their chapter's alumni. And he took over the mailing lists. At Purdue I sold a little additional service. I carried out rushing campaigns for fraternities. I would carry on the correspondence over the letterhead of the fraternity. If you're going to do fundraising at the fraternity level, at the chapter level, you've got to sell the alumni, and this, the chapter publications, was the vehicle for causing alumni to be enthusiastic about the chapter per se. And it worked. You could see it that it really worked.

ES: And how long did you work for Stewart Howe?

WO: Until 1934. Then I went with the Penton, the Penton Publishing Company in Cleveland.

ES: So you had career in publishing?

WO: I started out with Steel Magazine. Penton Publishing was a publisher of business papers or trade magazines. And I worked on Steel as a salesman of advertising.

ES: I see.

WO: Then I stopped at a given point in time. I started a market research company called Market Fax Incorporated in Chicago, and that grew out of my dissatisfaction with my ability to prove some of the things we were claiming about Steel Magazine. I wanted readership studies. Readership studies were considered very pioneering in those days, to use the so called scientific sample—scientific survey.

ES: I see. And when was that, when did you develop that?

WO: That would have been, well I, getting into the details, 1938, '35, '37.

ES: How do you think your education has influenced your later life? Positively or negatively, your experience at U of I?

WO: Well I would say that the whole experience was positive except for a few set backs here and there. Overall, I thought that I benefited greatly. I had a journalism instructor that I enjoyed very, very much. I don't consider myself a great writer but I learned a lot of what writing skills I have, from him. And I remember the salesmanship courses at the commerce school. Accounting, I could not get interested in accounting. I should have because that is the big thing today [*laughter*].

ES: [*Laughter.*] Well thank you, is there anything else you would like to say?

WO: Well, I think you've exhausted far more than I thought I could talk about but you're a very good interviewer.

END OF INTERVIEW