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Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Project

Oral History

Dr. Tom Loftin

April 9, 2012

Interviewer: Mr. Ryan Semmes

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(Tape Side One, 000)

Mr. Semmes: Echoes of Lloyd-Ricks-Watson. Monday; April 9th, 2012. Interview with Dr. Tom Loftin; interviewed by Ryan Semmes.

Dr. Loftin: Now you're going to be asking questions?

Mr. Semmes: Yes sir.

Dr. Loftin: Alright.

Mr. Semmes: I'll ask the questions to you and you just look right at the camera.

Dr. Loftin: Alrighty.

Mr. Semmes: Or you can look at me or Jim. Well first we want to say thank you for coming in and helping us out with the project, Dr. Loftin.

Dr. Loftin: Well, thank you.

Mr. Semmes: If you could really quickly just tell us your name and when you got here to Mississippi State.

Dr. Loftin: My name is Thomas Loftin. I first came to Mississippi State as a student in 1952, graduated in '53, and served off campus for approximately ten years. I then

came back to the university in the Ag Extension Service and stayed with the Ag Extension Service until my retirement in 1986.

Mr. Semmes: So what is your relationship to the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Building?

Dr. Loftin: Well, when I moved into the building in January of 1965, I was employed as a Community Development Specialist while Dr. Bill Bost was Director of Extension.

Mr. Semmes: Alright. And how long were you in the building?

Dr. Loftin: I was in the Lloyd-Ricks Building for two or three, maybe four years, and the staff increased in size and our Community Development Department moved over to Memorial Hall until the Bost Building was completed, and then we moved into the Bost Building.

Mr. Semmes: What year did you move over to Memorial?

Dr. Loftin: I do not recall.

Mr. Semmes: Can you tell us some interesting experiences that you had, or about some of the personalities you interacted with while you were in the Lloyd-Ricks Building?

Dr. Loftin: Well yes, we had a very close working relationship with the other departments within the Extension Service. In 1965 under court order the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service was ordered to integrate, and at that time the black Extension personnel were housed mostly in Jackson, and under this court order it became necessary that we come together. And at that time four of the individuals that were in Jackson moved into the Lloyd-Ricks Building and were assigned to the Community Development Department. They were Mr. Thomas Moman, Miss Alberta Dishmon, Esther Reed, and Lillian Palmer. They all came in and were fairly well accepted, and they served in the department and with the Extension Service until they retired.

Mr. Semmes: Who are some of the other colleagues you recall working with there in the building?

Dr. Loftin: After I came to Mississippi State as a professional, I enrolled in Graduate School and was in the Department of Ag Economics. At that time one of my colleagues was Dr. Verner Hurt who was a staff member and later became Head of the Department, and was very instrumental in helping me get a PhD. I still maintain a working relationship; we are retired, we hunt and fish together, and are very close friends.

Mr. Semmes: Could you tell us a few things about Dorothea Dickens?

Dr. Loftin: No, I do not recall Dorothea Dickens.

Mr. Semmes: How about Dr. Giles?

Dr. Loftin: Dr. Giles, I knew Dr. Giles. He was Vice President for Agriculture, Forestry, and etc. He was a very gentle man, but he could be tough if necessary.

Mr. Semmes: In what way, can you recall a way?

Dr. Loftin: Not right off; I don't recall.

Mr. Semmes: Did you have any interactions with Dr. Charles Lee?

Dr. Loftin: No, I did not. He came in after I retired.

Mr. Semmes: But you did tell me earlier that you were a classmate with Dr. Mark Keenum.

Dr. Loftin: I was; he was in Ag Economics, and I was too. I was also working with Extension and he came to Extension after getting a degree, and we were close friends and still are. He, in my opinion, has done an outstanding job at Mississippi State on recruiting students, getting funding for various activities, and keeping the university on an even keel.

Mr. Semmes: Can you talk about any projects that you and Dr. Keenum worked on?

Dr. Loftin: Not exactly because he was coming in just before I got out, and he was in the Department of Extension Marketing, and then in 1986 there was a cutback in state funds and about 20 or 30 of us older people that had time in to retire were

requested to retire. Mark left the Marketing Department and went back to Ag Economics to finish his degree.

Mr. Semmes: What could you tell us about Dr. Wise?

Dr. Loftin: Dr. Louis Wise was a true gentleman. His long shot was meet and greet people. He did an excellent job, and he is the father of the Vet School. He went to Jackson, worked with the legislature, and they funded it.

Mr. Semmes: Now you did mention that you had some experiences with Dr. Rodney Foil. Could you tell us about those?

Dr. Loftin: Dr. Foil was Vice President for Agriculture. He was instrumental in getting more room and facilities for the Ag Division.

Mr. Semmes: How long did y'all work together?

Dr. Loftin: I don't recall.

Mr. Semmes: Now did you say... did you know Baker Andrews?

Dr. Loftin: I knew Baker Andrews. He was said to be the father of anhydrous ammonia for the production of agricultural crops. He developed the tools and the wherewithal for the anhydrous ammonia to be used on crops.

Mr. Semmes: Now you did... I can't recall if you said if you knew Dean Bunch or ...

Dr. Loftin: I knew Dean Bunch but I had no working relationships with him much.

Mr. Semmes: You mentioned Dr. Bost a little bit. Could you tell us a little more about him?

Dr. Loftin: Dr. Bost was a great administrator in Extension. He went through some hard times during the court-ordered integration of Extension. He came through it and was able to maintain the organization, and it kept growing as it is today. He and I are still personal friends.

Mr. Semmes: Are there any memories that you have of working closely with Dr. Bost; any experiences or projects that y'all worked on together?

Dr. Loftin: Well he was administration, and he gave us orders more or less, or, 'Don't you think this is what we need to get going?' and he was a smooth operator.
(*chuckles*)

Mr. Semmes: (*chuckles*) Do you recall Dr. Dorman?

Dr. Loftin: No, he was gone years before I got here.

Mr. Semmes: And Dr. Hoover?

Dr. Loftin: Dale Hoover. I knew Dr. Hoover, and he was in Agronomy, but no working relationships.

Mr. Semmes: Let me ask you a little bit more about the building itself. Where were your offices?

Dr. Loftin: My offices were on the third floor on the east end of the building. There was one flight of stairs going up and we had an antiquated elevator at the time, and sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. But the building was functional except during flooding rains it would flood. This is one of the reasons that it was refurbished.

Mr. Semmes: Did you ever get stuck in the elevator?

Dr. Loftin: No, but I knew some people that did. (*laughs*)

Mr. Semmes: (*laughs*) So you were up on the third floor; who else was in the office space with you on the third floor?

Dr. Loftin: The part of the staff that was brought in from Jackson and myself; we were occupying an old area that was once a kitchen, and they put these cubicles in for each individual to have privacy.

Mr. Semmes: What was the cubicle like, what was the office space like; did you have good equipment?

Dr. Loftin: It was about the size of the Stennis Room here, and the... they were metal cubicles here they make offices with even today, and they were fastened to the floor and stood up about head high.

Mr. Semmes: Did you always have good equipment in there?

Dr. Loftin: We had good equipment. It was... everybody had their own phone, and this was before the days of the computer, and the offices were comfortable, a good desk, and a good chair.

Mr. Semmes: Other than the flooding were there any other little issues with the building?

Dr. Loftin: Not that I recall. The way the building was set up originally there was no access from the second and third floor to go across into the west end of the building, and when the building was refurbished they built hallways through.

Mr. Semmes: This was after you retired.

Dr. Loftin: Oh yes. *(laughs)*

Mr. Semmes: *(laughs)*

Dr. Loftin: I've been retired like 26 years this year.

Mr. Semmes: How often since your retirement have you interacted with folks in the Extension on campus?

Dr. Loftin: Well, a good bit, but more everyday activities. The people that have been retired will meet and greet, and then also in organizations that we are members of.

Mr. Semmes: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your time in the Extension Service here on campus?

Dr. Loftin: The original building was satisfactory when it was built, but it was outgrown in 1965 when I came here. But otherwise it's what we had and what we had to do with, and that's about it.

Mr. Semmes: I'm just trying to think if there's anything else you might want to bring up or say.

Dr. Loftin: Not that I can recall. (*laughs*)

Mr. Semmes: (*laughs*) Well, let me ask you; what were some of the experiences for the African-American Extension Agents that came in?

Dr. Loftin: It was very difficult for them to adjust in moving from their domicile in Jackson and offices into a strange situation where they were unsure whether they would be accepted or not. By the way, these four individuals were the first black professionals to be housed on campus.

Mr. Semmes: And you said there were two men and two women?

Dr. Loftin: There was one man and three women. One of the ladies, Ms. Esther Reed, resigned some time after '65 and took a job with... at Rutgers University.

Mr. Semmes: What was some of the outreach work that y'all would do together?

Dr. Loftin: Well, in the counties the County Extension Personnel had organized community clubs. They were... at that time they were still segregated and we worked with both black and white clubs, and the staff that had come in from Jackson was real instrumental in helping us work with those clubs.

Mr. Semmes: And were y'all responsible for all the counties?

Dr. Loftin: We were responsible for all the counties; only a few of the counties had these community clubs, but the County Extension Personnel; the County Agent, the Home Agent in those counties were in charge of those clubs. We were brought in as resource people.

Mr. Semmes: What were some of the projects that you would work with these clubs?

Dr. Loftin: Some of them was every year most of the counties had a county fair and they would put on and construct and do educational booths for... based on what that community club had done during the year, and they were judged on originality and how they looked and so forth; and it was a very enjoyable experience.

Mr. Semmes: What were some of the activities that the clubs would be involved in? Was it home demonstration type work, or...

Dr. Loftin: Mostly organizational work. What do we want to do? Have a better community. Some of the clubs had their own community center and would operate out of and through that community center.

Mr. Semmes: Who were the groups that these clubs were usually working with? Were they younger people or were they farmers or...

Dr. Loftin: Rural people; farmers, factory workers. But it was more of a community-type organization; a geographic area.

Mr. Semmes: Anything else you'd like to bring up about the building?

Dr. Loftin: I think that the renovation and cleanup and all that was done on the renovation is exceptionally well planned and a great job was done on this.

Mr. Semmes: Well, Dr. Loftin, I do appreciate you coming in. I hope you enjoyed yourself, reminiscing.

Dr. Loftin: Oh yeah; yeah. I enjoyed it.

Mr. Semmes: Well very good. Thank you so much for coming in.

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