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Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Project

Oral History

Dr. William Bost

March 20, 2012

Interviewer: Mattie Abraham

[Edited (By Dr. William Bost on 10/12/2012)]

(Tape Side One, 000)

Ms. Abraham: This is an interview with Dr. William Bost; and today is March the 20th, 2012. And today we're interviewing Dr. Bost about the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson building and his relationship with it. One of the first things I wanted to ask you Dr. Bost is was what was your relationship to the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson building?

Mr. Bost: Well I actually had two distinctly different relationships. I might mention one since this is a historical thought, my first relationship with the Lloyd-Ricks building was as a student in 1941. I came to the campus in '41 as a freshman in that fall and I got a job working in the Extension Service bulletin supply room which was on Extension Drive right by the Lloyd-Ricks building at that time. I think that street has been renamed since then.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm.

Mr. Bost: But we packed bulletins and office supplies and so forth and mailed them out, to the different counties, and for the first year, from '41 through the fall of '42, that period as a student I served as janitor; all of the student workers also packing bulletins worked as janitors in the buildings. And, of course, the newest freshman always got the director's office to work on, so I worked in Director L.I. Jones' office and he was very particular that it be no dust there or any other problems from a janitor's standpoint. I enjoyed that and made 20 cents an hour, but at that time

20 cents an hour I worked an average of 100 hours per month. That would buy two \$10 meal tickets in the cafeteria which was adequate to feed me for a month. So I thought that was an interesting occasion. Then I left to go into the service in World War II and returned in the fall of '47, and I got 30 cents an hour at that time and we didn't have to janitor. So that was one of my first experiences.

Ms. Abraham: What did you do for 30 cents an hour?

Mr. Bost: I did the bulletins, supplies, and packaging and delivering to the counties; mailing them out. So it was the same job actually, except we didn't have to janitor. We had to janitor after five, of course...

Ms. Abraham: I see.

Mr. Bost: ...Back in the first year.

Ms. Abraham: So that building when you were first a student was very new.

Mr. Bost: It was very new. It was a fine building I thought back then but, of course, it had some inherent problems in it as I discovered later. I came back to that building to work in 1959. I returned from Cornell University where I had gone on sabbatical to get a master's degree and returned to the Lloyd-Ricks building to work as a District Agent in Extension there. I returned there in June of '59, and the building was still in good shape then. The only thing was it was never quite adequate for the Extension Service's full complement of people.

Ms. Abraham: From the beginning it was inadequate...

Mr. Bost: It just didn't have enough room. From the beginning it was inadequate. The building was in good shape, except it had some difficulties such as flooding on the first floor; that occurred just anytime we got a big rain we'd get a flood on that first floor. And the old elevator in that building was very slow and almost broken down all the time. *Most* of us avoided that elevator; we would take the steps because we were afraid to get up and get caught between floors, in the old elevator.

Ms. Abraham: *(laughs)*

Mr. Bost: A good side note to that is that a young man who worked for Extension for many years and actually retired there as the mail man, he'd go to the post office and pick up the mail and take the packages and mail all them and bring the incoming mail to our building, was Wilbur Bell. And Wilbur was a very accomplished kind of a young man who, maybe he didn't have too much education, but he had a brilliant mind mechanically that he just picked up on his own. Wilbur was about the only one who could fix that old elevator once it got stopped between floors.
(laughs)

Ms. Abraham: *(laughs)*

Mr. Bost: We'd call Wilbur. But that's really about the basic knowledge I have of that building.

Ms. Abraham: So actually though, you... Am I correct that you probably have worked in every phase of the building? Because you worked in it when it was first just the Agricultural Extension Building, then when they added on to it, you actually worked in there for a long time; is that right? They added the new part?

Mr. Bost: Well, nothing had been added before I started back...

Ms. Abraham: Oh, okay.

Mr. Bost: ...Professionally.

Ms. Abraham: Okay.

Mr. Bost: It was still in the form of an 'H' and the Experiment Station was on the west side, and it was housed with all the Experiment Station people. There were researchers and teachers in agriculture. Then the connecting hallways, each row across, and then the extension building on the west side of the 'H'...

Ms. Abraham: Okay.

Mr. Bost: ...There were the Extension Specialists and all that. And the Home Economics Department had, I believe, four demonstration kitchens on the first floor down there in the part where it got flooded pretty regular.

Ms. Abraham: Okay.

Mr. Bost: And a meeting room. And then the other floors, were filled with Specialists like Agricultural Economists, and Home Economics people. And we, as I had indicated earlier, were very crowded on space. Money was pretty tight then, we did not get very many increases from the Mississippi legislature at that time in appropriations for buildings or anything else on the campus. In fact, it was quite rare to get that kind of appropriations then. So we developed a conservative plan to get some aid for more space and it was to expand the current building. But we abandoned that plan in about a year, but we never did go forth with it. Because we determined that it was going to be just as hard to get the expansion to that building, which was still inadequate, as it would be to get a new building. So we changed our approach and went after a new building. We took our request to the legislature for appropriations for a new building, and it took maybe two or three years to get that approved. Then we got the appropriations for the new building which is now named for me, on the campus... [Bost Extension Center]

Ms. Abraham: How about that.

Mr. Bost: I am so pleased to say.

Ms. Abraham: Quite an accomplishment.

Mr. Bost: I am quite honored to have it so named. Then we moved into that building. But there had been no expansion on the Lloyd-Ricks building during my tenure there...

Ms. Abraham: Okay.

Mr. Bost: ...Or my knowledge of the building until it was remodeled for the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson name.

Ms. Abraham: Okay. What are some interesting experiences that you had and some of the personalities that you met during your time there? You mentioned Wilbur Bell and his talent; maybe there are some other people that you might remember...

Mr. Bost: Well, one of the first things I learned when I came into Extension was (that) there were an awful lot of highly trained, highly motivated people to serve the people out over the State. And the Extension Specialists, their job was to take information, or research, from the researchers from the Experiment Station counterparts in the building and take it out over the State, send it out, by all means available; letters, phone calls, bulletins, and so forth, as well as travelling all over the State and giving speeches and lectures on new research information in the various fields in agriculture. So this was our major responsibility. And you run into a lot of problems. I don't mean necessarily problems, but interesting situations out in the country when you're dealing with people in the remote counties. The most interesting problems *were* out in the counties instead of in the office there. And I say this to again emphasize the fact that our work, the extension work, *was* off campus; it was not here in the building. We were housed in the building, and kept records in the building, and secured new information, and delivered new information; but most of the work was out in the counties. We had people employed generally by the University and by the counties and housed in the counties and we had to go to those, or did go. I say we had to go is the wrong way to put it; of course, *it was a pleasure to get to go*.

Ms. Abraham: That's a good clarification. Well, here's some specific personalities that we wanted to ask you about. Did you know Ms. Dorothea Dickens?

Mr. Bost: I knew Mrs. Dorothea Dickens very well. I didn't work close with her or anything.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm. Do you have any special memories about her?

Mr. Bost: Not really, I just was aware of the high respect that people held for Dorothea, and of her dedication to Mississippi State University and to her work here. She was a great person.

Ms. Abraham: So she was somewhat earlier than your main tenure...

Mr. Bost: She was really earlier than my tenure there.

Ms. Abraham: How about Dr. William Giles? Do you have any special memories of him as it relates to the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson or your work?

Mr. Bost: Well, of course I remember Dr. Giles very fondly. He was one of the nicest, best men, I ever had the privilege of working with. As you know, he served as Superintendent of the Delta Branch Experiment Station and then moved here and in that building. He moved into that building as Vice President for Agriculture and Forestry. So I worked closely with him in that position as Vice President. He emphasized strongly that we should employ good people and then give them the necessary tools to do their jobs and then let them do it and hold them responsible. He wasn't a man of much fooling around, he didn't have a lot of extra fun, but he was very much liked during his tenure as Superintendent of the Delta Branch Experiment Station and talked fondly about some of the opportunities, some of the things that happened along with the personnel over there as the chemical industry developed at that time; and I say that really to get around to this one story. People there, of course, or anywhere, we didn't know much about agricultural chemicals that are so customary and so available, and we depend on so much now. They were very few of them then. But when some of the highly poisonous materials became available to kill boll weevils, some material used which was not new but had been used, and I say that to emphasize the dangerous nature of those materials; arsenic was one that we used to sprayed cotton with; that Dr. Giles talked about one day he went out and a couple of the day hourly workers outside who drove tractors were mixing up some poison to go on cotton, and he noticed that they were getting their hands in it and you're not even supposed to touch that stuff because it's readily absorbed through the skin and is dangerous. So he said to them, 'Y'all be careful with that stuff, it's dangerous.' The man said, 'Aw, we're not smoking.' (*laughs*)

Ms. Abraham: *(laughs)*

Mr. Bost: The only way it could be dangerous to him was if he lit a match around it or a cigarette around the field it might blow up *(laughs)*. He didn't realize the other danger there. We had a bunch of things like that happen. You know, I don't really know any particular stories offhand to add to that.

Ms. Abraham: Well, that's good. How about Dr. Charles Lee? I imagine you worked with him a lot.

Mr. Bost: Dr. Charles Lee, I worked with him some, as I believe he was the Head of the Forestry Department at that time. And then when I worked with Dr. Lee, and this was the only time, so it was early in his tenure here.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm.

Mr. Bost: The fact is I did not work with him as President of the University. I think he may have left here for a short period of time and then come back and ended up as our President. But Dr. Lee was a fine man and it was a pleasure to get to work with him and get to know him.

Ms. Abraham: I imagine Dr. Keenum was not in school... during your time.

Mr. Bost: No, he was not.

Ms. Abraham: That's a little bit late for you.

Mr. Bost: Yeah.

Ms. Abraham: Dr. Louis Wise, though, you knew well.

Mr. Bost: I spent most of my time serving under Dr. Louis Wise. He was the Vice President for Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine. It was a pleasure to work with him; he was a very able fellow and a very, very outgoing, personable, good speaker type of a fellow. Louis was full of fun. But he had a good mind, and he could take care of business, and did. He was a pleasure to work with. He was

Dean of the College of Agriculture for a while; I worked with him in that capacity. And then when Dr. Giles became President of the University, Dr. Wise moved into Dr. Giles' place as Vice President for Agriculture and Forestry, and then I worked with Dr. Wise in addition to the regular work to achieve and secure and put in place the Veterinary School here which was quite a large undertaking. So he gave some good leadership for that and he represented us well in the academic halls of the University.

Ms. Abraham: That was another momentous thing that came out of that building...

Mr. Bost: It was, it was.

Ms. Abraham: Was the beginnings of the vet school; all the decision making and...

Mr. Bost: It was all made right there and moved out from that. I went with Dr. Wise. He carried me as Director of the Extension Service, and Dr. Jim Anderson as the Experiment Station Director, and Dr. Charles Lindley as Dean of the College of Agriculture; we went on a tour of several veterinary schools over the nation, some of the more prominent ones to learn what we might want to do as well as some things we might not want to do as we went about trying to secure funds and support in building the vet school. So we had a good bit of time involved in that.

Ms. Abraham: Well, there's quite a list on here... Dr. Rodney Foil?

Mr. Bost: Yes, I worked with Dr. Foil as Director of the Experiment Station. He, he was still... No, I was about to say he was still Experiment Station Director when I retired, but he was not. I'm a little bit confused on the time on that.

Ms. Abraham: That's Okay.

Mr. Bost: Dr. Jim Anderson served as Director of the Experiment Station, and he left the University before I retired, and I believe that's the point in time that Dr. Foil became Director of the Experiment Station. I know I worked with him for several years as Director of the Experiment Station, and that he was a very good Experiment Station Director and good to work with.

Ms. Abraham: How about Dr. Baker Andrews?

Mr. Bost: I knew Dr. Baker Andrews. I never did work with him any, but he was called the 'Father of anhydrous ammonia.' He just developed that here and he also had a pet project after he retired of doing away with the beavers in Mississippi. The beavers were a problem then, and they still are even more a problem now, and he had a good idea but he never could do away with the beavers. (*laughs*)

Ms. Abraham: (*laughs*)

Mr. Bost: But he spent a lot of time and a lot of hard work. He even had a little company go into business out in a building at Sturgis, I believe it was located at Sturgis, whose purpose and product was beaver skins, buying beaver skins, he thought, maybe you know, if he could make it profitable enough for people to collect beaver skins we could get rid of a lot of beavers that way. But that business went under, it didn't last very long. It was a good idea. But I do remember Dr. Baker.

Ms. Abraham: I had never heard that story. We had Dr. Bunch be interviewed yesterday, and I imagine he was here quite a few years; you overlapped quite a bit with him.

Mr. Bost: Yes I did. He was over the Seed Lab, and he, that may not be the complete technical name of it, but there was a Seed Lab and it had international arms; it reached all over the world. We had conferences on campus of people from quite a few countries at a time, and that was an international program and very well done. Dean Bunch led that. He was a good man.

Ms. Abraham: So MSU really shone in that area.

Mr. Bost: Yes, they did. They had an outstanding program in that area.

Ms. Abraham: I remember interviewing Dr. Verner Hurt. Do you have any special memories of him?

Mr. Bost: Not particularly. He was an Agricultural Economist when I was working here, and he was recognized as a good one, and very productive, and a very amiable, nice

person. I didn't have any close relationships with him. I admired his work and him.

Ms. Abraham: How about Dr. Clarence Dorman?

Mr. Bost: No, I was not privileged to work with Dr. Dorman. He was there before my tenure.

Ms. Abraham: Let's see... Dr. Dale Hoover?

Mr. Bost: Dale Hoover almost was before my tenure. We might have overlapped a year, but I knew and admired him a long time. He was a stern taskmaster in the teaching profession. He wanted to be sure that students who graduated under him and out of the College of Agriculture here were well-grounded in his field, which was Agronomy. And I do remember we had one person who had been offered a job, one of the county agents, as an Agronomist somewhere and he needed a Master's Degree in Agronomy, so he had a B.S. here under Dr. Andrews, and he talked to him about getting him a Master's Degree here and Dr. Andrews laid out a program for him that was as long as his first B.S. degree program. (*laughs*)

Ms. Abraham: That was a shock.

Mr. Bost: That was quite shocking to the county agent. In fact, he didn't go on through with it because of that. He would have been well-trained if he had, of course. But it just shows that Dr. Hoover was responsible...

Ms. Abraham: He didn't cut corners...

Mr. Bost: He didn't cut any corners.

Ms. Abraham: ...Interesting. Well that's the end of the official list. Are there any other personalities that you remember that I haven't asked you about? Or experiences?

Mr. Bost: No, I don't think I do. You know, that's been about 40 or 50 years ago and a lot of the goings-on are a little difficult to recall at this point.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm.

Mr. Bost: But it was... I recall it as a fine experience, and I enjoyed it tremendously. And there are a lot more people who went through that building in that period of time and later. But I don't think of any particular instance to add to it.

Ms. Abraham: Well I thank you very much. You gave some very good information for this project. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Bost: Well thank you very much. It's been a pleasure to participate.

Ms. Abraham: Thank you.

(Tape Side One Ends, 357)