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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE 10/10/86

Robert L Britton
(Signature - Interviewee)

1727 Crestmont Dr.
(Address)

Huntington, WV 25701 525-2557

DATE 10/10/86

Robert Sawrey
(Signature - Witness)

Britton, Robert L.
10/10/86
MWH-32

RS: This is Robert Sawrey. Today I'm interviewing Robert L. Britton, B-r-i-t-t-o-n, 1711, excuse me, 1727 Crestmont Drive, Huntington, West Virginia. Mr. Britton was a professor at Marshall and a member of the original committee that started the Marshall Artist Series 50 years ago. Today's date is October 10, 1986.

Professor Britton, could you give me a little information about your background before you came to Marshall in terms of where you were born, and what school, and your parents' names and perhaps how you ended up at Marshall?

RB: Right. I was born in Oklahoma in 1907, a few months before it came a state. [someone talking in background]

RS: In 1907 you were born...what town in Oklahoma?

RB: Tipton. It was a small country town. I was born 3 1/2 miles from it on a farm. (so you were born at home?) Born at home. (okay)

RS: And then...how did your early childhood progress? Country schools?

RB: Country school.

RS: The one room country school?

RB: The one room country school. In district #65.

RS: You know, you just told me a couple of minutes ago you couldn't remember things. You've been telling me lies already! [laughter] You're remembering great. Okay. So, country schools for eight years?

RB: Yeah, for several years.

RS: Okay.

RB: And I went to high school at the high school at the little town of Tipton (in Tipton?), yeah (okay) and they bused us up there three and a half miles from where I lived to the school there at the edge of town.

RS: Okay. So now we're up to the early '20's, no, mid-'20's,

1920, something like that.

RB: 1925 was when I graduated from high school. (okay) Then I went to the University of Oklahoma and got, worked out a degree in three and a half years.

RS: How many students went to the University of Oklahoma then?

RB: About 5,000. We thought we was an enormous, big school. Which I guess it was (that's right).

RS: In those days that was a lot of people (yeah). And what was your degree in?

RB: Well, I finally stumbled into Geography as a major. And that's what my degree was in, I guess Social Studies.

RS: Why do you say stumbled? Did you major in something else earlier? And then change your mind to Geography?

RB: Yeah. I didn't have an idea in mind until I was...stumbled into Geography. I took, I happened to take a class in it, and it hit me right. So I stayed.

RS: And...what was your intention to do with your geography degree? (teach) Okay, and did you do that then?

RB: I went to the University of Chicago and did a master's degree in Geography. And then I started teaching right away. I taught about a half year in a school in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

RS: And what's that school called?

RB: Middle....

RS: Middle Tennessee today, right? (yeah) Okay, was that it's name back then, too?

RB: Yes.

RS: Okay. And where from there?

RB: That was a temporary job of course, from the beginning. But uh, they were looking for geographers. It was easy to get a job in the fall of the year. I had several offers from several places, but for some reason or other, I came here to Marshall University.

(and you can't remember the specific reason?) [pause] No, I....

Mrs. R.B.: You were registered with a teacher's uh....

RB: Yeah, with an agency that got jobs for people (and so Marshall...), was a Chicago....

RS: Oh, okay, I dealt with some of those folks myself.

RB: And there were several schools available and just how I came to choose Marshall I don't know. Maybe the Lord had me by the hand.

RS: Okay. And...let's go back just a little bit before we get you to Marshall. Were your parents Oklahomans, both of them? No?

RB: One of 'em one born in Arkansas, which was my mother.

RS: What was her name?

RB: Ida. Britton, I-D-A.

RS: Okay. What about maiden name?

RB: Whitt. W-H-I-T-T.

RS: Okay. And your father's name was certainly Britton? (yes) Where did he come from?

RB: From Texas.

RS: Ohhh...where did they meet, then?

RB: I think uh, actually...let me back up a minute here. He was actually born in Mississippi, and moved to Texas fairly early in his life, and considered himself a Texan mostly.

RS: Okay. And what was his first name?

RB: David.

RS: David Britton. And did ...his profession?

RB: Farmer.

RS: Oh, okay.

RB: We owned an 80 acre farm there in _____, Oklahoma.

RS: Okay. Did that farm stay in the family after you left?

RB: Yeah. It's not in it now, but it lingered on a few years.

RS: How did your parents do during the depression?

RB: Oh, they did the best they could. They moved into Tipton, a little old town and lived the rest of their days there in a three-room house, cottage.

RS: Were they driven from farming by the weather and stuff? Or did they quit because they just got old and didn't want to do it anymore? Couldn't do it anymore.

RB: That's the answer, mostly. They finally got old enough and of course, we children grew up and went off and did other things.

RS: Okay. Were there many brothers and sisters, your brother....?

RB: One brother and one sister.

RS: Okay. And what did they do with their lives?

RB: My brother Raymond, lives in Central Point, Oregon now. He's 80 some odd years old. And uh, he just worked at various jobs. He'd get a job with this company or that company and worked there until he retired. And just stayed there in Central Point, Oregon. (and then your sister?) My sister is [inaudible]....Travis Brown. She's living now in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. And she's 80 some years old, too.

RS: So you're the baby in the family?

RB: Yeah, I was the baby in the family.

RS: Okay, okay.

RB: My sister....she taught school. She was married to a couple of different people. She taught school for many years.

RS: Okay. Let's go back now and pick up the story with Marshall. You came here in September of '30?

RB: September the 8th, 1930. I drove all night to get here.

(1930?) 1930, September the 8th

RS: Okay. And you were in the Geography Department. (Geography Department) And if I remember correctly, the Geography Department has had like 3 or 4 chairmen in its history.

RB: That's right. Not many.

RS: And let's see, then, it was the 2nd one that was running the department when you got here, or the 1st one?

RB: The first one. Frances C. Burgess.

RS: Frances C. Burgess.

RB: Corrie Burgess. (pardon me?) Frances Cory, C-o-r-r-i-e Burgess.

RS: Oh, okay. And how many members were there in the department then?

RB: There were three. There was Frances Burgess, and who was the other at the time? (MRS: Uh, Brown, Earl Brown) Brown, and me.

RS: Okay, okay. How many courses did you teach? Can you remember that?

RB: I taught plenty. About 15 hours. (yeah, okay, uh...) It would have been five different, 3-hour courses.

RS: Did you have a specialty within geography that you did, and like she would teach other kinds of courses, or were you all teaching mostly the same types of things?

RB: Mostly the same type things. Most of it was teaching geography to teachers who would use it in the elementary and high schools.

RS: Right. And did you know the geography department moved from the College of Education to the College of Liberal Arts, just two years ago. Well, this is the 2nd year they've been moved. (yes) So all those years it was in the College of Education. (yeah) And at that time you're talking about, Marshall was, all of it was a teachers' college, basically.

RB: At that time, in the fall, the time I came here, Marshall had

about 1200 students. (1200 of them?) Yeah. (and....) And 64 faculty members. I don't know why I remember that, but I do.

RS: Sixty-four.

RB: Yes uh, let me think a minute. \$1800. (\$1800) For a nine-month contract. (okay)

RS: Was that...were you pretty satisfied with that?

RB: Well, that's what they were paying people that came there at that time to teach. And uh, it was two hundred a month, for the nine months. And I got to teach some summer terms for a little extra money, like maybe \$35 a week for five weeks summer term.

Mrs. RB:You gave courses off the campus.

RB: Well, I taught extension classes as she said. (did you get paid extra for that?) I got paid a little bit extra for that.

RS: Now, you got here just about the time when the country was really beginning to feel the Depression. (yeah) Did the number of students at Marshall go down over the next few years, because of that?

RB: I don't really think so. Marshall has had a tendency to grow.

RS: And what about things like pay cuts? Did you have to take any of those during the depression?

RB: No, not really. I don't remember taking a pay cut. (did you get....) (Mrs. RB: ...raises)

RS: Did you get...did you always get paid on time (yes) Like, I interviewed a school teacher from Wayne County, I think it was Wayne County, who said during the Great Depression, they sometimes wouldn't get paid say two or three weeks late. And sometimes they'd get paid in things like vouchers rather than real checks. And banks might discount them.

RB: I...I remember we got paid well, on time. (okay, good) I don't think otherwise. (okay)

RS: Where did you live in Huntington, at that time?

Mrs. RB: On 20th Street.

RB: First couple of years I lived at, in 1026 20th Street. (okay) And then we lived about a year at uh, what's that street over here we lived on for a year? (Mrs. RB and Mr. RB speaking at once) We rented houses for 3 or 4 years, but I had this house here built in 1938 over the winter, (oh), and moved here in March, 1939. And we've lived in this house ever since.

RS: Okay. And just in case I don't have it on the record, this house is 1727 Crestmont Drive (Crestmont Drive). And you were the original ...you had this house built. (had it built) Were there many vacant lots up here at that time? Or were you one of the last homes built?

RB: Oh, there were several...I think more built after then than before. (okay)

RS: Let's go back to the Geography Department a little bit here (alright). Uh...did you enjoy working under Professor Burgess?

RB: Crazy. Crazy. She had kind of a habit ofof uh, gettin' me to teach her classes so she could have some time off. Which was interesting in a way. But basically she was pretty great.

RS: Okay. Did you...have much contact with Marshall administration at that time, or did you basically deal with your chairman and go your own way? Did deans impose on your life?

RB: Not really, but...I guess Morris P. Shawkey was president [laughter by Mrs. Britton] ... for a couple of years or so. And there was....

RS: How would you describe that gentleman?

RB: Oh, I'm trying to think how to describe him. I don't think of how. (okay)

RS: Uh...

RB: He was uh...strong and ran things his way, so to speak.

RS: That wasn't a problem, though?

RB: No, it wasn't a problem.

RS: Okay. Wh....

Mrs. RB: ...Charleston, fight with the powers up there for

Marshall.

RS: How uh, how long did Professor Britton, excuse me, Professor Burgess remain the chairman of Geography?

RB: Oh, for several years.

RS: And then she retired?

RB: Yes. She stayed on 'til she was quite old. Age wise.

RS: Okay. And who followed her as chairperson?

RB: Lesley Davis.

RS: Lesley Davis is a man?

RB: Yeah. (okay) Dr. Lesley Davis. (okay)

RS: Now when did he join the department? After you?

RB: Oh, yes, quite some time...quite some years later. (okay)

RS: Uh...how did World War II affect you, the Geography Department?

RB: I was uh, they brought trainees in here from all over the country, young men, to get 'em a little bit of introductory training. And Marshall had a contract to do that, and I taught those young men some basic things, geographically, I guess, pretty much. So I spent a full year teaching trainees brought in here to be given a little introductory training before they went into the military service to go wherever to be involved in the war.

RS: So those were very busy years?

RB: Very busy. My goodness, that year was something. I taught six days a week, for instance. 'Cause they wanted to get the young men...they brought them in for 6 or 8 weeks or so.

RS: Now, was that when President Williams was here, did, was he the guy responsible for that program?

RB: Oh, I think probably.

RS: Yeah, 'cause seems to me he was here during the war. (yeah)

Okay.

RB: He was involved in it at length, at least.

RS: Okay. When did you uh, when did you have your first recollection of Sam Clagg? You must have had him as a student?

RB: Had him as a student, had him as a sophomore student.

RS: And I would assume he was a good student?

RB: Yes, he was excellent.

RS: And...and then he went off to war, right? (yeah) And then came back and joined the department?

RB: He came back and I think he took a job up at the uh, college up at Charleston there for a year or so. And then we moved him in to our department.

RS: Okay. Were you still a 3-person department?

RB: I believe so. Burgey was gone by that time and Lesley Davis and who, you remember, Mama?

Mrs. RB: Burgey, Brown and Britton.

RB: Well, that was the first three.

RS: So it was probably Davis, Clagg, and Britton, now, in the late '40's.

RB: Well, we didn't get Clagg into Geography for a while. But as soon as we needed or could get one, we brought him into it. In the meantime, he done a doctor's degree down in Kentucky. And uh, that would have been about, I'm trying to think of the years, and I can't....

RS: It seems like when he retired this past spring, that he had been teaching for close to 40 years at Marshall, so late '40's maybe. I...we can check it.

RB: It is 39 years.

RS: Was that what it was? So '47 maybe he came something like that. Did you get your doctor's degree?

RB: No. I never have.

RS: Did you ever consider that a problem for you professionally or academically?

RB: Some, some a little bit.

RS: In what ways?

RB: Salary wise for one thing.

RS: Uh, prestige on campus?

RB: No, I never had the prestige problem I don't think.

RS: O.K. Uh, do you think it's probably held you back in terms of maybe promotion or salary a bit.

RB: Yes. I took some courses and went to Chicago a summer or two took additional work and uh _____ Kentucky a time or two for _____ hours of work. I got about half way past my master's to a doctorate, but I never did get a doctorate.

RS: O.K. During the years that you taught at Marshall. The school must have grown considerably.

RB: Yes. Yes. It got up to eleven or twelve thousand.

RS: Were those changes of that nature good for the school, do you think?

RB: Great. I think it was great.

RS: Did you think that Marshall was a better institution by the time you left than when you arrived?

RB: Yes, it was. It grew and developed and improved right along, I think.

RS: O.K. And did you tell me you retired in '72?

RB: Yes.

RS: O.K. So that meant you were teaching here for forty-two years.

RB: For forty-two years.

RS: And during that time you served under three chairman, Burgess, Davis, and Clagg?

RB: Yes. Yes.

RS: Is there any way that you could compare those three folks as colleagues or bosses?

RB: Well, _____ Burgess was a royalty woman from out of the historical past. She was a great person. Great teacher and a great person. And she got paid although she was from a wealthy family, had plenty of money. She got paid pretty well anyhow, even so and enjoyed that I think, a good bit.

Mrs. RB: Well, she was...[inaudible]

RB: She was important to the administration, the president and the deans. (She was a powerful faculty member) Yes. A powerful faculty member.

RS: Sounds like the Geography Department has a history of finding powerful faculty members to lead it. (yeah) When you look at Dr. Clagg (yeah), uh, what about Professor Davis? How does he fit in to that uh, did he...?

RB: Well, he came from the University of Chicago and I had known him up there. [clears throat] And when we needed another faculty member, when Burgey I guess, retired, he took the job here and uh, taught here.

RS: Okay. And how about Dr. Clagg...as a boss?

RB: Clagg's a great person. (in what specific ways?) Well, he's a strong person.

RS: Any problems that ever arose between the two of you, or between the Geography Department and any other group?

RB: I felt I should have been the chairman of the department when Davis...Davis dropped dead, I guess. And uh, they made Clagg the department chairman.

RS: And they would have been the dean of the college?

RB: Yeah. Dean Wilburn.

RS: Did that make you bitter?

RB: Not really. I figured I earned it and should have had it, but I didn't get it. So I, but I loved teaching Marshall students. [inaudible]...really, anyhow, all the years I was there. And I worked, worked, worked hard because of liking what I was doing. And uh, for whom I was doing it...teachers. For quite a long time there, early on, the students came to Marshall and went two years and got a two-year teacher's certificate. And then went to teaching. And most of the students I've taught were, became teachers or were teachers. And for a two-year degree thing, which was adequate and important at the time.

RS: Did the students change? Over the years, in terms of what they came to college to get? Uh...what they wanted from you in the classroom?

RB: Oh, about 85% of the students were West Virginia people. And the other 15 came across the boundary from Ohio and Kentucky. Once in a while we'd get somebody from New Jersey or someplace, and they were right famous for being [laughs], from someplace like New Jersey or such.... But I loved the Marshall students. They were great people.

RS: And so what I think I heard you say was that basically the students didn't really change much over those years.

RB: They stayed the same. They haven't changed yet, much as I can see.

RS: Uh...how did ...Marshall respond to the upheaval in the Vietnam era, conflict era? Did the students then seem more interested in causes or commotion rather than classes? Or didn't....

RB: No, no, not really I think. I have to say no to that question. (okay)

RS: What were the facilities like for you? Did Marshall have the necessary classroom space and equipment you needed in the classroom? Or...was that a problem at times?

RB: It was a problem at that time. Sometimes we had to have big, big classes 'cause we didn't have enough faculty and so on, so

forth. I had classes [inaudible]....over a hundred students. We didn't have rooms big enough for that many. We had to bring in chairs and folding chairs and things. And uh, see, what am I talking about? (facilities, problems like that) Oh, yeah. We were always crowded.

RS: Always too many students. That's not a problem for us any more. We...we work pretty hard to attract as many students as we can.

RB: Oh, yeah, we had too many. And we didn't have enough classrooms. Or big enough ones.

RS: Now were you housed in Jenkins all those years? Jenkins Hall, where your office was and your classrooms?

RB: Oh, we weren't in Jenkins, we were in that other building there beside ...no, not Old Main either. What was the building there on the corner? Can't think of the name of it.

RS: Let's see...(the Model school)...I don't know. I'd have to look at a map. (yeah) That's what we're supposed to do when we want to know that kind of stuff, isn't it?

RB: I reckon so.

RS: Okay. Uh...anything you can think of that you would like to say about your years at Marshall? We haven't talked about any of the presidents or...much. Anything else?

RB: [pause] Oh, only that Marshall students were my favorite people.

RS: Easier to deal with them than the administrators, unh? (yeah) That hasn't changed.

RB: Some of the administrators were ...I never thought any of them were, was outstanding. Stewart H. Smith was there for 25 years, and he catered to the downtown people, more than he did to the faculty or Marshall. In a lot of ways. (and that bothered you a little bit?) Yeah. He was mediocre. Most of the presidents were mediocre.

RS: Do you suppose that was because of like the size of Marshall that we really couldn't....

END OF SIDE 1

RB: ...I thought that most of the presidents, the picking of them was what wrong in there. And they tried to get outstanding people when they hired a new president, but they didn't manage to do it, in my opinion, very well.

RS: What was that process? Were faculty involved in the selection process?

RB: Some politics was involved in it usually.

RS: Always is. (yeah) But were faculty involved in the committee or whatever who selected the candidates?

RB: Not really. Not as much as they should have been.

RS: Okay. Let's switch gears here a little bit and ...and focus for a while on the Marshall Artist Series. (okay) I just saw a deal the other day that John Miller, who's taught in Modern Spanish (yes), in Modern Languages, called the very first show I guess we could say that the Marshall Artist Series put on. He was not on the faculty then, he was a student. I guess he was even junior high age or something, living in the Huntington area (yeah), uh, but you were here (yes). And had some connection with the starting of the artist series?

RB: Yeah, I was chairman of the committee for some years.

RS: Okay. Did that committee have a specific name?

RB: Not that I think of, but I'm sure it did have.

RS: There must have been a reason why you were on that committee. I mean, why you instead of anyone else, and why you were the chairman.

RB: I was very active at the time. I worked extra time all the time. I was so devoted to Marshall and what it was and what it meant. (Mrs. RB: he means students)

RS: Okay. And the director of the series was Mr. Baxter?

RB: Yeah, Curtis Baxter.

RS: How did you get to know him or where did this idea come from

that we needed cultural kinds of things like the artist series that was brought to town.

RB: I don't know. It just started and grew. I guess Curtis Baxter was important in the thinking of it, trying to get it started. We felt that Huntington needed some cultural items of importance. That committee was formed and then made up programs to occur to the uh, devotion of Marshall to Huntington in a large measure (okay). We felt that was good relationship between Marshall and Huntington, the city, the people.

RS: Can you remember anyone who served on that early committee with you? Or in the first years with you?

RB: I think Miller eventually got on it. You know, you mentioned him several times.

RS: Uh...how did the committee function? Did it have a budget, and did it get advertisements from various kinds of performers or programs, and sit down and say, well, we can afford this one, and we can't afford that....?

RB: I think we had a budget of sorts. It wasn't very big. To get some people in for...for performances, speakers and musical performers and such.

RS: And your committee made the selections, at least, picked the ones you wanted to see if they were available? (yeah)

RB: I'm trying to think of some other people on that committee, and I can't do it at the moment. Maybe I won't be able to.

RS: Okay, well, if they come to you, just yell 'em out. (okay) Now uh, you called yourself the chairman of that committee.

RB: I...chairman was nominated from time to time and I wasn't chairman all the time.

RS: Okay. But you were on this committee for about how long, do you think?

RB: Oh, several years, ten. (past World War II?) Yeah.

RS: Okay. Did you report directly to Mr. Baxter, or was he part of the committee?

RB: He was part of the committee.

RS: He didn't chair it, though.

RB: Not all the time.

RS: Okay. Do you have any idea where the money came from to pay for these programs?

RB: From the Marshall budget. I think the president of Marshall or committees....I think that's where the money came from. (and...) As part of the Marshall budget.

RS: Okay. Were there student fees involved? There are now.

RB: I'm not sure. I don't really remember for sure. (okay) If it had...if it was student fees, it was very low fee, maybe a couple of dollars.

RS: Right. It's probably somewhere in that range even now. Did students get to attend for no charge?

RB: I don't know. I can't think for sure. (how about the community?) Well, they were charged. (okay, from the very beginning?) Yeah.

RS: Was the idea to bring something for Marshall students or for the community or for both? (both) Both, from the very beginning? (yeah) Okay.

RB: Community was very important part of it. And students, of course, too.

RS: Okay. Were there community people on your committee?

RB: Yeah. Yeah, there were. (and some students?) I think Bill Campbell, a big businessman here in town was on the committee back then, for years. (okay) He's an older big shot now, but he was a young big shot then. Quite wealthy.

RS: His name was Campbell? (Campbell, yeah) You say he's still in town? (yeah, he's still in town) Okay.

RB: Saw his picture in the paper the other day with a group of people doing something.

RS: Okay. Were you...successful in attracting the kinds of programs that you thought were quality, to Huntington? (yes)

RB: Basically, they were quite adequate.

RS: Okay. Can you remember any that were especially fun or exciting or memorable?

RB: [pause] No, not really.

Mrs. RB: You're referring to the Artist Series? (RS: yes, yes) Well, they always had good ones.

RS: Yeah, I've been here now for 7 years and I'm amazed at what comes through town. (RB: it's good)

Mrs. RB: They...they were diversified. They had some through the music....

RB: We had some famous people to speak. (yes) For some musical performance. It was a fairly good variety of things.

RS: Did uh, did you ever have disappointments related to the Artist Series? Were there ever times when it might have collapsed? Or did it always seem like well, it's gonna be with us?

RB: I think it seemed to be with us (okay), for sure. I don't think it was any [inaudible].... (okay) Not that I remember.

RS: Did you attend most or all of the sessions, programs?

RB: I attended a lot of 'em.

RS: Did they go on right through World War II?

RB: I believe so.

RS: When you were trying to bring in various performers, were there problems related to let's say, geography? If somebody lived on the west coast and it would just have been prohibitively expensive to bring them here, or did you ever run into something where someone just said, "I just won't go there because of well, that's West Virginia", or didn't issues like that ever come up?

RB: Not much.

RS: Okay. That's good.

RB: That I remember.

RS: Okay. Could you tell me just a little bit about Mr. Baxter, why he would have been so energetic in this area, what he may have contributed?

Mrs. RB: Wasn't he a native son?

RB: Yeah, I think he was a native son. I think he was a bachelor, not married. And uh, what am I trying to think of?

RS: Just a little bit about Mr. Baxter. Why he adopted this concept.

RB: Well, he thought it was needed in the beginning, and was involved in the start of it and stayed with it all along, and was active in getting the programs thought up and lined up and performing. It was an interest of his that he was especially devoted to.

RS: Did uh, you or any of the committee or anyone else ever travel to arrange programs, like go watch some kind of a program somewhere else, to see if it was what you might want to bring here? Or was it more general idea what the people were already; they were famous enough.

RB: Famous enough. Yeah, we didn't go any place to see, to try 'em out, that I ever remember.

RS: Okay. About how many performances or programs were there per year?

RB: A dozen or so.

RS: As many as a dozen?

RB: Yeah, I think so.

RS: Okay. Today, they have I think, three different series of programs, all under the Artist Series (yeah). Were you in those various categories back then, too? Not you, but were the programs divided into categories back then?

RB: I think so.

RS: And the same one is sort of like travel uh...speakers on various places of the world?

RB: Yeah, speakers, and musical.

RS: Musicals and then maybe some in between kind of stuff. How would you characterize the Artist Series, in terms of its contribution to Marshall and the community, over the last 50 years?

RB: Great.

RS: In what ways?

RB: In doing what it does. Contributing some things to Huntington that it needs and profits to have, and appreciates.

RS: Do you think the community really does appreciate what they have then?

RB: Well, not as much now as they did back in those days. But they...they still have some support here.

RS: Okay.

RB: They had more of it back then than they do now, I think.

RS: Because we didn't have television?

RB: I think that's a big factor in it.

RS: Yeah, it's hard to impress people now.

RB: Yeah.

RS: But still, this series is very, very nice. (yeah) Have you been able to attend many of the performances in the last few years?

RB: Not in the last few years. We spent the last several months of each winter, the last several years in Florida. And of course, obviously being there weren't available.

RS: Do you leave your house empty?

RB: Yeah.

Mrs. RB: We have good neighbors.

RS: That's the nice thing about living up here in the hill. When people stick their nose around that don't belong, you recognize it. Where do you go in Florida?

RB: Ormond Beach.

RS: Where is that?

RB: That's a part of Daytona. (oh)

Mrs. RB: Upper part of Daytona. Daytona has more gamblers and more night life. Ormond is very quiet.

RS: I was wondering if that's why you went there. The night life and the gambling. [laughter] No, you go to the quiet part, unh?

Mrs. RB: We don't even go down to keep in touch with what's going on. In Daytona.

RB: We threatening to go in a few days now.

RS: Do you uh, at this stage of your life, have any regrets about what you did with your life?

RB: Uh, I think the Lord has us by the hand when we came here to Marshall. We stayed...I had job offers over the years. I had well, World War II ended, I was offered a job at the Geography Department at the University of Cincinnati. But I...it would have paid me [inaudible]...increase, but I was devoted to Marshall. I liked what it had, did. So, I stayed. If that tells you anything. [laughs]

RS: It could tell me several different things. What about just the general idea of having devoted your entire life to the education of young people. Have you ever questioned yourself on that?

RB: I thought it was wonderful. And West Virginia people were mostly [inaudible]....

RS: Do you think the West Virginia people are any different people than Oklahomans?

RB: Oh....not that much.

Mrs. RB: Where were we traveling one time, were we in Washington and somebody started yelling, "Mr. Britton, Mr. Britton, Mr. Britton, wait up a minute." A couple of students he had taught.

RS: So you got along very well with students.

RB: I hope so. I think so. I was very devoted to teaching. And I did extra work, extra hours of study, because I was so interested in Geography, and in teaching it to students.

RS: How have uh...let me start that over again. I'll say it this way...how have you adjusted to retirement, if much of your life was related to teaching?

RB: I worried about retiring back when it came up as a possibility and a probability. And since I've been so devoted to teaching, I was afraid that maybe I'd climb the wall when I retired. Oddly enough, I've enjoyed it. It's not been a problem. I'm not too sure why not, but ... it has not been a problem. (good) Partly of course, like going to Florida in the winter would help some, I'm sure. But otherwise, the rest of the year we're here and we know so many people here in Huntington over the years. Although that's fading, being retired 15 or more years.

RS: Mmm-hmm. Uh...I don't want to pry into your personal finances and if you think I am, just tell me to shut up and leave you alone. But, obviously part of your income's related to the state teachers retirement system or something like that (yes, yes). Do you think that your contribution to that or Marshall's contribution to that was adequate for a person to retire on? Has that system done well by you, as far as your concerns?

Mrs. RB: He's a good businessman. He did other things.

RB: Marshall didn't do enough, but I did some like she says, on my own. I tinkered with real estate on the side some. And made some money and INCO and such. But Marshall hasn't quite done as much as they should have, in my opinion.

RS: So, if you were trying to live on your teachers retirement, you would be in a painful situation.

RB: Yeah, I'd be in a bad situation. They're gettin' money and raising the faculty salaries out there at Marshall and such, but the retirement thing stays the same as it was when you took it. And that ought to be improved, but it's not likely to be, I guess.

RS: No, unfortunately, I think you're right about that one. Let's see, anything thatI think we're about out of tape and I'm about out of questions. Anything I should know that you'd like to remind the world about concerning your life at Marshall?

Mrs. RB: May I say something?

RS: Okay.

Mrs. RB: St. John's church out here, he was in on the beginning of that. And....

RB: Yes, that's been an important factor in my life. (yes) St. John's Episcopal Church, out at 3000 Washington Boulevard, at the hill (right, I know where that is). Yeah. I was...Rector Tyler, who wasfrom uh, what's this church down there? (Mrs. RB: Trinity), Trinity. And he wanted me to come out and get a church started out there. And I worked with him on that, so.... One of my interests has been St. John's Episcopal Church. It's been quite a great thing in my life. And still is, and will be.

RS: Okay. Were you involved in any other kinds of stuff within the community? Not that you should have been. Don't get me wrong. I mean, that's busy enough.

RB: I taught classes down at Ohio University, down at Portsmouth for twenty-odd years. And they paid me seven or eight hundred dollars a class. And I taught about 3 classes a year. That was an important source of income to add to the Marshall salary, which never was too big. (they still aren't) They still aren't.

RS: I mean, they might look big, compared to what you made, but so are the costs. (yeah) I mean, I don't need to tell you that; you know what it costs to live.

RB: The biggest salary I ever got was \$15,000. (after 42 years on the job) Yeah. And that was only a year or two. So....

RS: Yeah. Okay. I think I'm done. (well, it's been interesting) Well, I appreciate your time very much. And we'll get you a copy of the interview as quickly as we can, we're glad to have you. Thank you very much.

[Mrs. Britton starts talking]

RS: Okay, I'm back here for a second. Uh...Professor Britton

suggested he'd like to talk a little bit about Marshall athletics. And Cam Henderson.

RB: Athletics have been important to Marshall from the day I got here until later on. But the most important athletic thing, of course, was Cam Henderson, and his football coaching and so on and so forth. And uh, athletics has played an important part in Marshall ever since I've been here. Sometimes more and sometimes less. But the Cam Henderson era was the most famous one.

RS: Do you have any comments about Mr. Henderson as a person? Uh, I noticed that, please understand that I'm an outsider (right), and I knew nothing of Cam Henderson until I arrived here. There are people in our community who treat him like a god (yes), and there are people in the community who would have us believe that he was a hard driving, hard drinking autocrat, and I don't have any idea.

Mrs. RB: [inaudible]

RS: And I don't have any idea who Mr. Henderson was.

RB: He was sort of as my wife says...[Mr. and Mrs. speaking at once-inaudible] He was a great, great man. He was a fantastic person.

RS: And you would then conclude that he had a very positive impact on Marshall University and the students.

RB: Yeah, very much so.

RS: And you mentioned just briefly that you were on the athletic committee for a while. (yeah)

Mrs. RB: Well, you were on it for years.

RS: Did that committee work with Mr. Henderson and other coaches or with athletic directors, or how did it work? What did it do?

RB: We worked with 'em most of the time peacefully, adequately. I guess there were times when we set up rules or regulations of some sort or the other, and we thought it was needed. But I don't remember exactly what.

RS: Okay. Did the role of athletics in your mind ever get out of hand? That is, too powerful, to over emphasize.

RB: Yeah. It may have been during the Cam era somewhat over done.

RS: We hear a lot in my lifetime about athletics to campus students who have no business, people who have no business trying to be students, that really they're professional performers, rather than serious students. Was that a problem, ever?

RB: I don't buy that. (okay) It was never a problem, as far as I could see.

RS: So, Coach Henderson never brought to campus a sizeable number of people who were really not equipped to be in college. He always brought athletes who also could succeed as students.

Mrs. RB: No, if he did, he would have them tutored. And brought...and helped. (Mr RB:yeah)

RS: So that wasn't a factor, as far as you can recall.

RB: Not that I can recall.

RS: Okay.

Mrs. RB: I'm butting in too much.

RS: Were there other coaches who contributed in a greater or lesser degree than Coach Henderson?

RB: Well, the first coach we had, I can't think...or very soon after, at least, was Dan Dandeleit (could you spell his name?) d-a-n-d-e-l-e-i-t. (okay) And he had coached a high school down in the west end or something. And he got hired on then as a Marshall coach for a year or two. (in football?) In football, and whatever.

RS: And basketball too? (yeah) Okay. (A lot of 'em coached both) Okay. Henderson did, right?

RB: Of course he insisted on that. (okay)

Mrs. RB: Cam Henderson got the most out of the athletes and....

RB: I don't think of...athletic director by name, on the spur of the moment. (okay)

RS: But your basic point was that athletics have always been, or has always been an important part of the university, and a legitimately important part?

RB: Yeah, I guess. I don't know about the word legitimate for sure, all the way.

RS: [laughing] What kind of qualms are you having here about that word? [more laughter]

RB: It's sometimes maybe overdone. Maybe during the Cam Henderson era. (okay)

[Mr. and Mrs. speaking at once - inaudible]

RS: Okay. Well, one last question then I guess, that's related to athletics. A couple of years before you retired was the airplane crash. (yes) What can you recall about the events of that? That week, and how it affected you and your relationship with Marshall or anything of that nature.

RB: Well, I was very close to a bunch of the people that was killed in that wreck. And my grief was great, of course. I went to many of the funerals that were held at this church, that church, the other. They had several at St. John's church. Had funerals for people... [Mrs. RB speaking]

RS: Did the plane crash in any way increase your devotion to the school or in the sense, do you think the community reacted in that fashion?

RB: Oh, I'm sure it did. I had for instance, Charlie Couch was a personal friend of mine. And he was interested in _____ church, too, but that was beside the point, somewhat. And he was one of the ones killed, several other people killed were close friends of mine. And it was a sad, sad thing to have to adjust to.

RS: Okay. Any other comments?

RB: No, I don't think of any.

RS: Okay. We'll sign off again. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW