



Voices of Lycoming Oral Histories

Lycoming College Archives - Snowden Library

Oral History of
Dr. Carl B. Taylor
Alumnus, Class of 1930

Date: December 6, 2006

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Transcribed by: Julie Dougherty

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Interview with Carl Taylor

Good Morning, the date is Wednesday December 6th, 2006. I am speaking with Carl Taylor, a graduate of the Williamsport Dickinson Seminary in 1930. I am Julia Dougherty of Lycoming College Archives.

JD: Okay, can you tell me when you first came here as a student?

CT: Well that would have been in the fall of 1926.

JD: What grade were you in at that point?

CT: I was a freshman.

JD: You came here through high school?

CT: That's right. See I lived in the northern part of the county, and so I had to go into the city to go to high school.

JD: Where did you live in the northern part?

CT: It's called Cogan House Township.

JD: Oh yes, I have a daughter who lives in Cogan Station.

CT: Well, we were ten miles farther north.

JD: How did you get back and forth?

CT: Well, I lived with my aunt and grandparents on High Street.

JD: Were you a day student?

CT: Yes, for three years I was a day student and then I lived in the dormitory.

JD: Can you relate some experiences of things that happened while you were here?
[Pause] Who were your best friends?

CT: I suppose my two best friends were Larue Shempp from Williamsport, and Bob Kilgus. We were three freshman and all day students.

JD: Did they have freshman orientation then when you had to do crazy things?

CT: No, none of that.

JD: Well that's good.

CT: At least if they did I wasn't aware of it.

JD: And what was your major while you were here?

CT: I don't think we had majors then. I was part of what they called a college prep student. I don't think we used the term major in high school.

JD: Who were your favorite teachers and what were your favorite courses?

CT: Well, I guess Professor Sterling in English would have been certainly one of my favorite ones, one of the best ones. There was a Ms. Cab who taught ancient history, Medieval & Modern, and Freshman English— three courses she taught.

JD: Were there a lot of students here at that point, were the classes large?

CT: The classes as I recall were anywhere from fifteen to thirty or thirty five.

JD: Oh that's not a large number, that's pretty nice. You must have gotten a lot of attention.

CT: Oh yes, we had what would certainly be called small classes.

JD: You were here when Dr. Long was the president.

CT: Oh yes.

JD: What was your opinion of him?

CT: [chuckles] I suppose it varied at different times. I respected Dr. Long. I thought he sometimes tried to be a little too formal about things. But I got along very well insofar as that went. I think he ran as they say, "quite a tight ship."

JD: I heard he was very strict.

CT: He was that certainly. But he could become a little informal too. I remember once, I was a little surprised, I was out at the old athletic field watching the baseball team and he came out there and borrowed a catcher's glove and warmed up our pitchers. Apparently he had been a catcher in his younger days. And I remember the one pitcher Wayne Stoke, who was a very good friend of mine; used to tell how once in a while Dr. Long would come out and warm up the pitchers before a game. That's just about the only informal behavior I saw of him. He was really quite formal about his behavior.

JD: How old do you think he was at that point?

CT: Well I didn't think too much about that. Lets' see, his oldest daughter Gladys was about twenty one or twenty two.

JD: He must have been in his forties.

CT: Yeah, his late to mid forties. I would guess between forty five and fifty.

JD: That's a fascinating fact. That's the first time I heard that. That's great, that's worth this conversation alone.

CT: And when I was back, I was talking to two or three of the alumni who had come back, and this girl said she and her boyfriend were in the hall when Dr. Long came through and I can't quite get his exact words but something like, "You two have to stand so close to each other when you talk?"

JD: Oh my. Who were some of your classmates that graduated with you other than your two good friends, can you remember?

CT: Well, Dorothy Long was one of my classmates—Dr. Long's daughter. There was a Roberta White; her mother was Dr. Long's secretary. And Roberta White, she was a top student.

JD: Her mother's name was Betty, I think.

CT: I kind of have forgotten what the mother's name was. She had two daughters; she was a widow, and two daughters she put through. And Roberta, the youngest one, was in one of my classes. And then the person who was in practically all my classes was Virginia Bryan. Apparently we ended up for four years, one two three, within one percentage point of each other I think. I remember them saying we three were somewhere between 94.0 and 95.0.

JD: That's amazing.

CT: As it turned out, I happened to be on top, Roberta second, and Virginia third. We were within less than one percentage point from each other.

JD: And where did you go after you graduated?

CT: My folks had moved up to Canandaigua, New York and I took a post-graduate year in the Canandaigua Academy they called it, high school. And since my older brother was in what they called Dickinson Junior College, did you know they had a junior college?

JD: Yes sure.

CT: Well, my brother had gone one year while I was a senior. And we had moved up to New York state, my folks had, and we were within sixteen miles of the college. And my father thought, well we could commute to college and if I spent one more year as post-graduate the two of us could drive together. And two could ride as cheaply as one, these were depression years. So I took a post-graduate of commercial subjects up at that Canandaigua Academy as they called it, high school, while my brother Bruce finished the junior college. And then we both commuted to Hobart College together. He finished his two years there—he had two at the Dickinson Junior College, so he finished up there. I took a total of four years and graduated from Hobart College.

JD: Did you feel that your education here prepared you for college?

CT: Oh my yes.

JD: Good, that's great to know.

CT: Well enough for me to finish at Hobart a junior Phi Beta Kappa.

JD: Wow.

CT: And then finish at the top of my class as a senior.

JD: You were motivated.

CT: Yeah, very much so. Have you ever heard of Minnie B. Taylor?

JD: No.

CT: She was my aunt and she was a social worker in Williamsport, and early been a Methodist Minister in South America and she knew about the academic world and so she was my father's advisor. But you see I lived with her and my grandparents for three years there, my first three at Dickinson. And my aunt, she had come out of the country and gotten her bachelor's degree at Dickinson in 1894 I think it was. And she'd gone on to do various things. And she ended up the Dean of Women at the Junior College and Seminary for two years I believe, in 1931-1932.

JD: So she got her bachelor degree at our seminary, the Dickinson?

CT: She did.

JD: I didn't know they did that.

CT: No, I'm sorry, she got her diploma there. She got had gone to Muncy Normal to become a teacher, and then she went to Seminary in three years and got her diploma then. And then she had gone on after a few years to Syracuse University and got her bachelor's degree then became a missionary in South America and then back to Williamsport in 1920 as a social worker. So she had a house where my older sister and my older brother and I all lived when we were freshmen at Dickinson.

JD: She sounds like quite a lady.

CT: Oh she sure was, I wrote up an article about her. It's in the Lycoming County Historical Society, bulletins and...

JD: When was that, when did you write that?

CT: Let's see, it was in the 1980's. I called it, I think: *Minnie B. Taylor: Pioneer Educator*, I guess I called it.

JD: I'll have to check it out.

CT: They should have a copy there at the Historical Society.

JD: Oh, I think I have it here. You didn't do to the junior college here, you went up there to Canandaigua and then Hobart, and then what did you do? Once you got out of school.

CT: Well I had a scholarship to go to Kalamazoo College in Michigan to get my master's in sociology. And I did that in one year. Believe it or not on an eight hundred dollar scholarship and that covered all my expenses during the depression. Course I didn't spend any money foolishly. But then I had a fellowship at Columbia University for a year in sociology, worked towards my PH.D. But at the end of one year there at Columbia, I was hired as an instructor at Hobart and William-Smith College—with the great salary of one thousand five hundred dollars a year with a promise of a raise of one hundred dollars a year, for each of the next five years. But then the war came along.

JD: And I bet you thought you were rich at that point.

CT: Well, I was darn fortunate to have a job. Those were depression years, so I was teaching there as a sociologist when the war started. It so happened that one morning when I arrived on campus the dean said Hobart wouldn't have to close because of all the men who were being drafted. Because he said we were getting a Navy D-12 and D-5 program there in which college level guys who had been in the Navy would be sent here for twenty week programs. 'We have to teach certain courses, and two of the courses will be mathematics courses which you took under me,' he said. 'And I want you to be one of my instructors'. And he says, 'I will take care of your military occupational

deferment throughout the war,' which he did throughout the war. So during the war then I taught trigonometry, analytical geometry, once in a while a couple of courses in American History and a course on sociology.

JD: Wow, you had a wonderful career.

CT: And then after the war I was ready for something else. We moved back into our homeland up in northern Lycoming County; Cogan House, White Pine. And we were what we called ourselves, "Back to the Land Homesteaders." And so I worked in the township; they were putting the schools together up there and for two years they needed a teacher for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and I taught those kids. That was between 1930-1935, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in a one room school.

JD: Wow that must have been different after teaching in college.

CT: That was quite an experience. I thought afterwards I was the first teacher those kids had who had ever gone even to high school. As soon as they finished in the old days, they immediately went to Muncy Normal, got certified—none of my teachers in grade school ever went to high school—they went directly to Muncy Normal to get certified and then taught.

JD: That's amazing.

CT: That is an amazing historical thing.

JD: How long did they have to go to Muncy?

CT: They could get temporary certification in one summer.

JD: Out of eighth grade? And what year was it, how old were they at this point?

CT: Well most of them were between eighteen and twenty. My aunt, and this is really amazing, my aunt went there the first time summer after she finished the eighth grade—Aunt Minnie Taylor—finished the eighth grade, came back and was assigned to teach at a school up on Buck Horn Mountain, a long school, and she taught that two months before she was seventeen years old. Can you imagine that?

JD: No, that's hard to imagine. It really is.

CT: Those were the old days.

JD: And the kids learned too I bet. The motivation was different at that point.

CT: Right. I was very much involved in the township organizations, the churches and so on during those years, but I had a serious farm tractor accident in 1955. I had abdominal

internal injuries and what they call a crushed pelvis. So I decided to become a white collar worker again, so in 1957 I began over at Penn State and I worked as a graduate assistant helping in the departments and rural sociology. I did that during the winter sessions and finally in 1961 I completed all my requirements for the Ph.D. and I came down here to West Virginia to teach at the university.

JD: Oh that's how you ended up in West Virginia. That was going to be my next question.

CT: One of the members of the rural sociology department was taking a job down here as a director of a department and she hired me in 1961. I taught here and by 1978, West Virginia State still had a law which said all employees had to retire at age sixty-five, mandatory sixty five. So I went out on old age in 1978.

JD: And you're still here and you're not old yet.

CT: I'm only ninety-three.

JD: Are you healthy?

CT: Oh yeah, I teach classes.

JD: Really, where?

CT: Well, in the aging program here. And I learned how to do chair caning, seat weaving, and I teach classes at the night school here on seat weaving.

JD: Wow, you're remarkable.

CT: So, I still keep endowed then.

JD: Is there anything that you haven't told us at the school that happened while you were here? Or any experience, or anything?

CT: Well, back in the 1970's Lycoming awarded me the annual...

JD: Outstanding Alumni. Yes, I have that.

CT: Do you have the president's statement? He covered a lot of things.

JD: Yes, I do see the list.

CT: He did a good summary. I'm not quite sure where he got all his information. I thought of that the other day when I put together a little booklet for my descendants on

our family history and I saw that. He covered a pretty good survey of the things I've done.

JD: Dr. Bloomer is quite a guy.

CT: Yeah, Dr. Bloomer did it.

JD: Our present president is a nice man too.

CT: I don't know him.

JD: President Douthat is a nice man. Well is there is anything else you would really like to say, like us to know?

CT: Well, there's one thing—when I get a call from the alumni office in regard to contributions I find the students who call never heard of Dickinson Seminary. Of course I say I'm not really an alumnus of Lycoming College.

JD: Well, yes you are an alumnus of our predecessor schools, you definitely are. And especially being the valedictorian you are very important.

CT: Technically in a way I am, and in a way I'm not. I did mention once to one of them, the school upon the hill—have you ever heard of that.

JD: It was up on the hill.

CT: Yes, but they leveled the hill off I guess, pretty much. So they wondered where was the hill? Well I said if you came out on Academy Street and keep going you had to go up a little hill to get to Old Main.

JD: That's right. And I think they should have preserved that building.

CT: It had a lot of history. And I guess the only building left that I would know is what our new gymnasium was.

JD: It's now the fine arts building.

CT: Is Bradley Hall gone?

JD: Oh yes, they took that down too. And that was a beautiful building. They keep the frescos from that building and installed them on another building which they call Honors Hall, which is down on Basin Street. So that part of it is preserved, but it's changing, the campus is changing all the time.

CT: I haven't been there for about three years I guess.

JD: Well that's not too long ago. You must be active then as an alumnus.

CT: Until last year I drove up the two hundred fifty miles myself, drove up and attending the Cogan House Township fair. There is another bulletin in the Lycoming County Historical Society on Distilling Birch Oil in Cogan House Township, I did that one. They boil birch wood and got birch oil or wintergreen oil, and so I wrote up an article for that in the 1980's—that's in the bulletin there. And out of that they got the Cogan House Township Fair.

JD: I've never been to that.

CT: They have that every fall around Labor Day, but I guess they're considering not having it ever again since it takes too much work.

JD: Do you still have family in the area, Carl?

CT: I don't have family in that area anymore.

JD: Do you have family where you are now?

CT: My younger son lives in Morgantown, and the older one is over in Alexandria, Virginia.

JD: Well I really appreciate you speaking with me.

CT: Well, it's good to talk to you.

JD: And if there is anything else you remember...

CT: Well the only person left from my era that I have any contact with is Helen Ranger.

JD: Yes, I spoke with her about a month ago.

CT: She was a day student too, a year behind me, but we correspond. The next to last one was Virginia Bryan who was in my class but she died about a year ago from Alzheimer's. So Helen Ranger, I can't think of her last name now.

JD: Pederson.

CT: She and I are the only ones I remember from the 1930-1931 era.

JD: Carl, do you live in your own home?

CT: Oh yeah, I live here independently. Every Friday for about three hours I spend at a big retirement home here. I go over there and sit and put seats in chairs for those people. Many of them have brought chairs from home that they didn't want to leave and they needed seats. Any kind of chair, hand craft type of seats, we call it Russian Splints and caning. I go over there and work on seats and chairs and I talk to the old people, many of whom were acquaintances of mine. And I said one day I'm going to get old and I want to know how it is so I spend time around these old people in the retirement homes. But my health is very good, I've had two hip replacements but they were successful. I can drive wherever I want to.

JD: You are something else.

CT: Well, I've just had good health so I've been able to keep going.

JD: Well thank you very much for speaking with me.

CT: Nice to talk to someone who knows there was a Dickinson Seminary.

JD: Well thank you very much, and have a nice holiday.

CT: Thanks, same to you.