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Robert Bray

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Portrait of a Collector Interview with Robert Bray

Transcribed by Kate Browne

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Miner: Good morning. My name is Meg Miner and I'm the archivist at Illinois Wesleyan. And this is a sabbatical project on Minor Myers and his influences at Illinois Wesleyan. Um, and I am here today on February 4th with emeritus professor Bob Bray. Please, go ahead and introduce yourself—

Bray: Yes. Robert Bray. Almost always known as, as Bob. Been retired for a year and a half now, um, and was very, uh, active with Minor Myers during his presidency both in terms of committee service, advice, um, and, of course book collecting which is to the point here.

Miner: Right. Yeah. So tell us about that. When you say you were very active with him—what—how—what did that manifest itself?

Bray: Well, this included many, many conversations at both of our houses. Uh, at least two that I can remember sort of. Trips around McLean County and down into Dewitt County to look at used books in, in various place including—

Miner: Together? You would go together?

Bray: Oh yeah.

Miner: Oh, great.

Bray: Yeah, yeah. It generally happened on a Saturday or a Sunday when he could get away. I would have loved to have done it more often, but of course that really wasn't possible. We would go just about any place we thought there was a chance—for many years, south of here near a town called Forsyth there was a place called—I believe it was called The Book Barn. And actually, it was pretty much a barn and it was floor to ceiling, uh, old books—used books. In generally—in generally pretty rotten conditions. And I'll return to that subject when we return to Minor's proclivities. Book collecting proclivities. So yeah, he and I did have a relationship over books. One anecdote I have that tickles me every time I think about it. As you know, he's often thought to have been an 18th century person both in his character and in his, uh, in his predilections for books. And I'm sure that was true. However, there were certain aspects of book collecting that he never bothered to—you might call it the technical aspects. He never bothered to learn very much about how books are made. Which, of course, uh, is, is something that they teach—I went to Rare Book School, for example, twice, and learned about pre-industrial printing.

Miner: Mm hm.

Bray: Minor would ask me to show him how you can tell how many pages are in a signature.

Miner: Mmm.

Bray: And, and at least twice I went through this with him and he thought he got it, but when it got time for him to do it, somehow he was never able to tell the difference between octavo and duodecimal. He could do pretty well with folio and quarto.

Bray: Oh my gosh. That's so interesting. So, there wasn't a technical, um, interest on his part and you also alluded to condition—

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: —which is something that people often comment on. That he didn't really care about condition. So what was it?

Bray: A neurosis.

Miner: Okay.

Bray: And he even told me—Bob, this is a sickness.

Miner: Okay. How? How?

Bray: Well, he couldn't stop.

Miner: Okay.

Bray: And I think he meant not only that he couldn't stop, but that any old book would do.

Miner: Interesting.

Bray: Yeah, he did not like the idea of, of going looking and not coming back with things. And I never knew him to do so, but again, I only went with him a few times, so, on that. But if you, if you look at what he had on display at the President's house, for example, you could tell that what was important was that he found a title or something by an author that he thought important irrespective of the collector's first commandment that it be in fine condition. If not mint.

Miner: Hm.

Bray: So he would pull—he would be willing to buy a book that didn't have a cover or one that, uh, had come—the binding had come away at the spine. And was just sort of flopping there.

Miner: If he thought it was important—

Bray: If he thought it was important. But, of course, he didn't always know that when he bought it because he—although he was a polymath, as you know with music, and um, decorative arts. Furniture. Things like that. He—he—he bought books sort of with the idea in mind that while this will certainly be important and I'll check it out. He always bought a lot more than I did.

Miner: So when you used the word important, do you have a sense of what he would define that as?

Bray: Well, of course, he comes out of—he comes out of political science. But he's very—extremely literate guy. And he had learned over the years to recognize titles and authors.

Miner: Okay.

Bray: So that's—and that's mainly how he would go. He wouldn't say, oh, I've been looking for this particular book by this particular author for years.

Miner: By this edition or whatever.

Bray: Right.

Miner: Okay.

Bray: And then he would fold these into his collection. Maybe he would do research on them or maybe he never got around to it. I've never met a person with more energy than he displayed. Um, but when I would go to bed at night I suspect that he was just getting started. After a full day on campus being president.

Miner: Hm.

Bray: Yeah, but I think that neurotic energy that he showed in collecting was characteristic of many of the things that he did with his life as president here. Which meant that sometimes he would miss details that had to be brought to his attention.

Miner: Like what?

Bray: Well, when it came to things like, I don't know, the faculty constitution, perhaps. I know this from when I was CUPP representative on cabinet. And also, you know, I would say sometimes when we were looking for books, I said, Minor, there are much better editions of this when I happened to know that.

Miner: Mm hm.

Bray: He didn't know a lot about American literature which was where my main collecting was.

Miner: Right.

Bray: So I would try and slow him down a little. I think a lot of people tried to slow Minor down in some areas.

Miner: In all areas.

Bray: In all areas. The idea being that, uh, the payoff would be all the greater, but he was so impatient sometimes. Especially if an idea took hold of him. Yeah, it became an [ede fece] too

often I think in some ways. He, well, we're talking more about Minor the president here than perhaps Minor the book collector, so.

Miner: But the Tigger Factor with your—

Bray: Tigger. Yeah. And, you know, I still think about him a lot. And not only when I see this statue over here, although that will always—but I think that's such a fine representation of some of the very characteristics that we've been talking about. On his way somewhere with—in this case music and a violin. It could have been any book, really.

Miner: Right. Well, um, the kind of energy and the not detail kinds of things in his collecting. Could you speculate on how that sort of energy and, and, and, and...lack of detail manifested itself, then, in other ways in relationships with, you know, people on campus? You mentioned something about the faculty constitution.

Bray: Mm hm.

Miner: And, you know, it isn't narrowly about books, but I am curious about this if it's possible or if it's too much of a stretch to say that a person's nature in their personal interests and how that influences the daily, you know, life especially when it's a person with power.

Bray: Yeah. Yeah, I don't think there's any question about it, Meg. The book collecting mania was really a manifestation of a caricature. The caricature came first and the manifestation, of course, came afterwards. He, he was so enthusiastic about the liberal arts that he really did build a fire under the faculty. That fire, um, didn't burn after he died. I mean, it went out, I think. I think it's fair to say. But while he was here we thought better of ourselves than maybe we had any right to. But that boost in morale was lead by here's a PhD in, uh, social science that has a wonderful sense of the arts, of literature. Um, and he, he wants us to do our best.

Miner: Mm hm.

Bray: And not only that, he connects with us. He goes to things. It seems—he must have a 36-hour day. That's about it.

Miner: Oh, my goodness.

Bray: But by the same token, uh, the, uh, the, the impatience with people who say there were good reasons not to do something that he wanted to do, I think, may have resulted in some, some missteps. I think the, uh the hiring of Jerry Pope as director of—Dean of Admissions was perhaps his gravest error. And I never—I wrote him about that. And I—I've pulled no punches. I wasn't on—I wasn't on the cabinet at that point. And he wrote back saying no, no, Bob. You've got it wrong. And then he died. So we never worked that out. But he, he—I just, you know, we weren't—you can't be friends with the king. I know that. So I was just trying to be a counselor or maybe even an advocate for a different piece of the power pie even though the faculty slice is so small. And for that it probably wouldn't have prevailed, but if we came together over a drink I

would have been able to tell him what I knew about, about that decision. Which was pretty much forced, forced down the throats of the rest of the people at Holmes.

Miner: By Minor.

Bray: Not everybody but there were other possibilities that he wouldn't—yeah. So.

Miner: I mean, you know, sometimes it takes a friend and that's—the king or whoever can't always be surrounded by people who agree.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: So that was—do you think that was one incident obviously but emblematic of his management style?

Bray: Yeah. I think—I don't—I'm not a, uh, bookkeeper by any means let alone an accountant but I know that there were strong feelings in Shaw—in Holmes that the bonding of money, uh, well, for Ames, for example, without having the money come in yet was probably an overextension of, of sound fiscal policy. On the other hand, uh, who would want to come to this University without having something like Ames? I mean, if I were on a campus tour and I saw that and said, that's the library? I would be very inclined to do so. So I think it was a good thing, but did, did he succeeding president—did Wilson inherit an impossible situation? I don't know. I'm not—but I do know that, that, that Minor was in too much of a rush. Yeah.

Miner: Yeah.

Bray: And I think his relationship with Holmes was much worse than his relationship with the faculty.

Miner: So, you mean, long time staff members.

Bray: No, I mean people in policymaking positions over there as opposed to the general faculty. And another problem was that he was really too busy to think too hard about provosts. And I—well, that's, that's—I don't think that his provost represented him very well to the faculty or to any other cohort on campus. So...

Miner: Well, so...going along the lines of—and this is something that I've just been thinking about since I've been talking to people is my theory about him as a collector. He had a very expansive—it followed every interest that he had. Something would appeal to him and he would acquire it or begin acquiring in a certain area. And so I've been starting to think about what people have been saying about his actions on campus in the same light. So he had this idea that this particular program would be of benefit and so he acquired what he needed to to make that happen without regard to resources.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: So you mentioned he had books on this display that he thought was important at his home, but I also know there were a lot of books in this place, so when you say it was something was important and on display was on the main level at his house and other books maybe were less important were elsewhere.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: And so sort of thinking of how things get profiled in his personal life and I don't know. Maybe it's a flight of fancy.

Bray: Hard for me to judge on that. Whenever I was over there, um, sometimes with a group and sometimes just with one or two people for dinner or drinks. He would always pull something off the shelves either in the study or close by to show to me. Um. I never remember his going downstairs. And I was never downstairs so I didn't see the trains or any of that.

Miner: Oh really?

Bray: I wish I had.

Miner: The 3D shelves.

Bray: I wish I had, actually.

Miner: See, I'm asking everybody. Where is a picture of the basement? I would love to see a picture of the basement.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: And I haven't found it yet.

Bray: I assumed I guess that what he was displaying out there were either recent acquisitions that he thought were cool or just sort of standards that he kept out there because he liked them so much. But again, the, the difference between focus and, and wide angle with Minor. He was a wide-angle guy. And that meant that he would grab just about anything off of his bookshelf. It could be something as prosaic as, oh, a 19th century plumbing textbook.

Miner: Mm hm.

Bray: He loved textbooks for reasons that, of course, totally escape me. And I know that there were plenty of those kinds of things. But to his credit, he thought that a study of textbooks was a—was a perfectly good entry into the study of the world of the textbooks. And, and especially in education. And I think—although I didn't agree with him, I wouldn't have those things gather dust in my house, it could have been a great project. But, you see, he was never going to slow down enough to do such a project.

Miner: And that was—that's another thing I'm curious about. He had so many topics and he wrote on a lot of different topics, so how much did his collecting feed his research and writing? Um—

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: Or is it a chicken and the egg thing? I don't know.

Bray: Well, I, I, I looked at his books on furnishings. Can't remember the name of it. Brought it with him. He'd already published it before he got here. It was very interesting. And, you know, he was a decent prose stylist. Obviously had fine mind when he got focused, which he must have done for that particular book. But I never read much else by him. I did look at the coffee table book. Yeah.

Miner: Did he ever get rid of any of his books?

Bray: Not that I know of.

Miner: Grabbed one that he thought was important but turned out not to be.

Bray: I think he, but I don't know this for a fact—that he would have regarded getting rid of a book as some sort of sacrilege. Now, I think he would have traded one edition for another. But more likely—I wish I had the full bibliography at hand here. He'd get two editions of the work.

Miner: Hm. Hm. So, the full bibliography of—

Bray: Well, I wish I knew everything he had.

Miner: And that's one of the things I'm trying to do. So I have a list of books we had and in his records, I mean, he kept lists of books in different categories. I'm going to try and see if there's a matchup in there. He also had index cards. Not—it couldn't possibly be for everything he had, but he had index cards with research notes on them.

Bray: I see. I see. And these are all in his papers in the archives?

Miner: Yes.

Bray: That's great.

Miner: So, when you think of individual trips. Did he ever buy in auction lots?

Bray: One of the secrets that wasn't very well kept was that he had eBay on all the time in his office. And he was always buying and selling. Mostly buying. Books on eBay.

Miner: I've never heard anybody say selling. So always buying on eBay and always on in his office.

Bray: Yeah, he would—I remember having chats with him in there about policy and stuff. And you would hear a little prompt from the computer and he would almost always break off and go over and look.

Miner: My gosh. Is that when the conversation about it being a mania—?

Bray: No, he told me that on one of his trips.

Miner: Because I have seen, of course, the printouts on eBay in his collection. But what on earth did he do before then?

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: You know?

Bray: Spend a lot of time on the phone, I imagine, with dealers.

Miner: Yeah. So dings in meetings, huh?

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: That's great.

Bray: Yeah, I don't remember exactly what sound the prompt was, but I do remember there was a prompt.

Miner: Was he all disturbed about how powerful this was in his life or was he—?

Bray: He told me—

Miner: Was it sort of amusing to him?

Bray: When he told me it was a sickness, I got the sense he was bemused. He didn't take it too lightly, but he didn't take it as any deep problem either. Perplexed, maybe. Bemused. Yeah.

Miner: He had a couple—he had a small collection of books about books. Which is one of the things that we retained—his reference collection. And there are a couple in there about bibliomania. But none of them underlined. I was hoping to find some annotated parts.

Bray: Yeah. This is me!

Miner: Star. Arrow. Little pointy thing. Whatever. That's interesting. So you said you collect.

Bray: Actually, I've dispersed a lot—

Miner: Have you?

Bray: —of my collection but I had a lot—a main focus first in the literature and, and culture of Illinois. And the greater Midwest to an extent. Which grew out of my dissertation work in

Chicago. Back in the days when everybody who was pursuing an English PhD at least up there seemed to be book collectors. I mean, we would go—back then, you could go into, um, any, any charitable shop and there would be a pretty good collection of books. And you—amazing what you could find.

Miner: Good deals.

Bray: Salvation Army stores. Goodwill. Places like that. And we would come back with, you know, maybe a dozen or so titles and that would be our Saturday or Sunday fun.

Miner: Hm.

Bray: And I started that before I came here, but I got much more interested in it when I was working to make that dissertation into my first book. Um. I always—I—Minor didn't fetishize—fetishize—make a fetish of books. In other words, I don't think he felt magic when holding one in his hand, um, unless it was—

Miner: Interesting.

Bray: Well, I mean, when you got that many and you're buying that many, most of them are not for immediate reading in his case, but as over and against some plan in the dim future. With me, I tried only to buy the things I knew I would be writing about. And if it was a first edition in good condition so much the better. Because many of the things that I collected and wrote about were not in print and had not been in print in a long time. Yeah, so I still have that feeling. For example, when I come across a book in my collection or one in a bookstore that has any kind of memorabilia in it such as a press flower or a ribbon—something like that. I always feel tingly.

Miner: It's a connection with the material culture.

Bray: Well, yeah, and that readership is passed along.

Miner: You've got a kindred spirit in another—I totally get that. And it surprised me that you didn't detect that trait in Minor.

Bray: He's just in too much of a hurry. Now, I don't know what he did in the midnight oil time. He may have all but dropped on his knees to worship, but I feel that when he was around books with me, I felt more of this maniacal sense that I just gotta have more. Almost—he never—never full, never satisfied. Always wants more.

Miner: Did he ever buy books for you?

Bray: From me?

Miner: For you?

Bray: No, I know he had personal copies of—let's see—well, of my early work. I know he had *Rediscoveries* and a couple of other things, but I don't remember his ever getting me a book or presenting me a book.

Miner: Because if it's a true mania to spread to other people.

Bray: Well, he could see I was in bad enough shape as it was. I was sort of already in recovery and I didn't have the money either. He must have had a pretty good personal income in addition to his salary because he never stinted.

Miner: So the price of a book wouldn't necessarily stop him?

Bray: He would always choose a lesser price edition of the same title that was in poorer condition.

Miner: Okay.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: So he didn't sort in ABE books by most expensive?

Bray: No. That's very true. I was just working on some bibliographic problem yesterday for the—I know this is semi-relevant—

Miner: Please.

Bray: For the papers of Abraham Lincoln and we got a fascinating invoice from D. Appleton and Company in late 1861. Clearly Mary Lincoln had been on a shopping trip to New York.

Miner: Oh my.

Bray: And this invoice listed all the titles. 20-some. And some of those 20 were multiple volume sets of this or that. And there were a few of them that the people in Springfield just couldn't make sense of or identify. So I spent all day yesterday and a couple hours this morning. Got all of them but three.

Miner: That's fun.

Bray: You know, ABE books is perfect. Because if you got by most expensive, typically you'll find those very editions in the same frame of years, maybe. WorldCAT too, but it's a little less—wieldy. It's a little unwieldy. Anyway.

Miner: So the, um, the acquiring, then, I, um, having occasioned to work with other collectors over the years and some of them express such joy in the hunt. Right?

Bray: Mm hmm.

Miner: And finding that perfect thing that they've been looking for. Um, would you think this is a characteristic of Minor or was it, um—because you said he wouldn't necessarily be after a specific title. So I'm just trying to think about what his search parameters in eBay would be that he would be getting dings on.

Bray: That's a good question. That's a good question. I don't know what he was up to. It would have had to have been more focused than, say, when we went hunting.

Miner: Yeah, just pickin' through the bins.

Bray: But again, book collecting wasn't anywhere near what it was. Because the booksellers have all the books now.

Miner: Mm hmm.

Bray: Very rare that you'll find anything on your own.

Miner: Yeah.

Bray: And because they have that, they've become—for me, at least, bibliographical research tools rather than a place to buy books.

Miner: Interesting.

Bray: Yeah. For example, one of the things that Mary Lincoln bought from D. Appleton. I found on, on ABE books I think it was rather than Bibliofind. ABE Books \$355,000 dollars.

Miner: Oh, my gosh. Enjoy it. Hope that person enjoys it.

Bray: Well, it may still be there in the executive mansion library.

Miner: Oh.

Bray: Yeah, that's where those books went.

Miner: Yeah, it's a strange world when everybody can peak inside of everyone else's bookshelves.

Bray: Yeah, Yeah.

Miner: And, and compare. Keep up with the Joneses that way.

Miner: Met the guy downtown? Moved his shop from Chicago. No?

Miner: No. Who's this?

Bray: Gosh, what's his name? Rain Dog is the name of the bookstore.

Miner: Oh, I've heard his name come up. I've not—but that's new, right?

Bray: Last year. Honestly, I should be able to call his name. He's a great guy. And I think he just basically does most of his work online buying sales, so he came from Chicago to have a low-rent place to call a store.

Miner: Yeah.

Bray: And to store the books. So he's open now and again. Yeah.

Miner: So, um, do you think you don't know if Minor did auction lots or, you know, visited—

Bray: No, I don't know about that.

Miner: —those kinds of things?

Bray: I don't know about that. There's much about him that I don't know. Many of the things I thought I knew may not be the case. But he's a beloved memory to me. Um. Boy. He turned out to be true. Won't see his likes again.

Miner: Or those times again, probably, right?

Bray: That's probably true. It's a wonderful convergence of the right person at the right time.

Miner: Yeah. Do you think books were the central collecting interest of his life do you think? You mention furniture and fine art.

Bray: He was crazy about musical instruments.

Miner: Mm hmm.

Bray: Yeah. Which would indicate to me that the collecting impulse was rather deep seated. And he loved music and he thought he could play music. Some others disagree with that.

Miner: Disagree, yeah. But I've also been told he tried and he took lessons and tried to improve.

Bray: Yeah, the harpsichord in particular I think was something he treasured. And who wouldn't? And again, early 18th century before the pianoforte and the hammer-clavier came along. Yeah. You know, a lot of people do believe—and this was true in Chicago—that the 18th century was the greatest age. For—particularly for, for England.

Miner: Hm. And he was a real anglophile.

Bray: Yes, as we know from the banners and the windows.

Miner: Yeah. So maybe he had so many books because they were cheaper and easier to store.

Bray: Yeah, well, even then, even before he came here books are very expensive in England compared to new retail and older books. Still are. I contributed an essay on Lincoln as a letter-writer to—granted this will be a reference book when it comes out from Edinburgh University

Press—due out next month. \$255. Which means that only a few libraries will buy it. So I'm not sure—seems like a self-defeating enterprise to me. But, fortunately, I get a free copy so I'm going to donate it to the library. It's within your collection.

Miner: That's very generous of you.

Bray: Well, I'm glad to do it. You've really got me—you've really got the nostalgia tap flowing.

Miner: That's okay. That's why we're here. Do you have other thoughts of things we should think about in this?

Bray: Well, I wish that he could have stepped down before he got ill. Of course, he really didn't know. And I—boy, when cancer works that fast it's totally frightening, isn't it? I would have loved to have seen him on the faculty.

Miner: Oh, so staying on?

Bray: Oh yeah.

Miner: Do you think he wanted to teach?

Bray: Uh. I don't know. We didn't talk about that very much because he was always President. But he would have—he would have—I think he would have kept some of the flame alive that he himself ignited and might have been able to put fuel on it to keep the morale of the faculty up. Because then he would have been one of them. But, of course, that doesn't happen very often unless the President is a tenured member and fired and can't get another job. But I really think he would have been a very good as a colleague. Yeah. He would have dropped it—dropped some of that rush. Because he always—I guess he always had such an agenda as President that he had to hurry.

Miner: What do you think the agenda was?

Bray: Well, the agenda I think was to make this a top 25 national liberal arts university. And some of the things he did—and granted, Janet was a part of this was to finesse the Phi Beta Kappa business.

Miner: You don't think they would have come here without his finessing?

Bray: It's not supposed to, is it? I think one of the rules is no major in Business.

Miner: Oh, is it?

Bray: Yeah, I think so. So he and Janet sold him on this notion that, well, it was a liberal arts Business major. Yeah, I know I wouldn't either. He must have called in his chips on that. It meant a lot to him that we had Phi Beta Kappa. And the history of the university meant a lot to him. Not the Methodism though. He was a bit cranky about that. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I could never convince him to reacquire the archive from the Illinois conference. No, he

wanted to distance himself. He wanted to be more like Wesleyan of Connecticut. But I don't think he had any aspirations that we revive any graduate programs. I don't think that's true.

Miner: I hadn't heard that.

Bray: Well, he was very much invested in—emotionally invested in the music school despite rather weak leadership over there as unfortunately, in my opinion. And I think in his. But when I see now the sort of—what's a good metaphor for the typography of the campus now? In the spiritual sense? There's—you know, it's almost like it has in *Pilgrim's Progress*. We've got Vanity Fair in the business school. The Slew of the Despond for the humanities and so on. Morale is so low.

Miner: Yeah, it really is. You said he built a fire and it went out after he died.

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: What do you think—was it the perfect storm of world events or--?

Bray: Certainly, certainly, we didn't devolve—if that's not too strong a word—in the way we have without a national problem that's there. We're just on the—I think—the lower border between feasible and unfeasible financially. I have a good friend who—whose daughter has applied to St. Olaf in music. And she was accepted. And so I did a little comparative research. They're ranked about 17 places ahead of us in the *U.S. News and World Report*, but their endowment is twice ours. It's \$500 million dollars. And it's that margin—if we had another 100 million in the endowment, maybe of the worries would go away. But we don't.

Miner: Soften the blow.

Bray: But we don't. So I—what Minor was able to do—he knew every faculty member by name.

Miner: Really?

Bray: As far as I know. Yeah. And he could at least give them a cookie, you know? When he saw them. Because he would always—when I was with him—

Miner: Make a connection?

Bray: Yeah. He would always—he would always stop before walking on campus and it wouldn't just be hey, how ya doin'? It would be what's up with you? And there would be a little conversation there. Not only did, did Dick not do that, we rarely saw Dick. Of course, that's what Holmes complained about with Minor. He's on campus too much.

Miner: Oh, interesting. So what is the role of a president? That's the question, right?

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: What is he here to do? I'm not asking you to answer that.

Bray:

Miner: So do you thin Minor did that equally? You said he had an affinity for music and humanities? But did he share the love from your perspective?

Bray: You know, I think you'd have to ask—

Miner: See if they felt the love?

Bray: See what the Nursing school felt, for example.

Miner: Part of the challenge that I'm having is, um, you know, the self-selecting nature of the kind of work I'm doing, right? So I put out a call and I'm not entirely certain that I want to hear everybody's story and not just people who agreed with. 'cause I think history has to have available all sides of the story.

Bray: Right well I remember after he died and I sent *Tigger* around electronically. I—I wonder if I've still go this archived. I got a very warm response from a Nursing faculty—faculty member who was obviously almost in tears about minor. I think his appeal was not maybe universal. Um. Yeah.

Miner: When he got here, did you guys bond immediately?

Bray: Well—

Miner: How did you get to know him? Was it through CUPP or—?

Bray: No, he got to know me long before I was on the cabinet. I remember he would show up at English House now and then just doing the things that maybe a good provost would do at a liberal arts college, but we've never had a good provost. I think he knew that, but he wasn't about to—he knew it in the case of what's her name. The professor of Russian literature who was his first provost.

Miner: Ellen Hurwitz

Bray: Ellen Hurwitz. Sorry. Repression there. And he didn't have it in Janet. Um. For that matter, Dick never had a very good provost either. And that's where I think—since, since she wasn't proactive the with faculty—in fact, was almost sort of autistic about—well, anyway, the faculty—and we no longer had—because Janet had gotten rid of them, we no longer had division heads in the liberal arts. So what was it? Well, there were departments and that Slew of Despond was—you couldn't cross it to Holmes.

Miner: That created the silence.

Bray: Yeah. Yeah. And no really dynamic provost and Janet, Janet was the exact opposite of, uh, what's her name. Sorry.

Miner: Beth.

Bray: Beth, yeah. But Janet was driven by, uh, ill-concealed ambition. And that ambition, I think, led her to do some very bad things to people.

Miner: Ambition in what sense?

Bray: Uh, power.

Miner: Okay. Personal power? Not protecting certain parts of campus?

Bray: Well, and actually trying to get people to bend to her will. She—well, we’ve really gotten off on this ship.

Miner: No. It’s okay. I, I would say we can stop if you’d like to. Um.

Bray: Well, I’ll say this one thing about Janet. When she first got here, she went after Denny Bridges. And he beat her. He beat her completely. She wanted to, uh, uh completely reform Athletics away from professors and so on. And, um, thought that his little fiefdom ought to be, uh, brought in more over into the fold. Many things, many things good about that. For example, that they never come to faculty meetings even the ones who are tenured faculty. They act unilaterally. They, they end up—end up it seems to me—increasing the gulf between intellectual behavior and athletics. And, of course, now that we’re in a bread and circuses era the damage has long been done. And then she had other ideas that didn’t, uh, didn’t work out so well. The general education reform that she started—she did very early in her tenure did not result, I think, in a coherent liberal arts curriculum. And we still don’t have one.

Miner: Still struggle with that question today.

Bray: Yeah. I mean, it—and the faculty—especially when morale is low—thinks it doesn’t have time to think.

Miner: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you sharing your perspective on that.

Bray: It’s a, it’s a pleasure. And I think that serious work on the mind, character, and actions of Minor Myers, Jr. is a very worthy project for you, Meg. And I look forward to having a look at it when you feel like you’re there.

Miner: Thank you. I look forward—

Bray: You’re welcome.

Miner: —to seeing what it looks like when it’s there. So, we covered quite a lot of ground. And obviously you’ve touched on a little bit the, you know, the way we’ve stayed off the project but are there other things about Minor you think we should know to understand him?

Bray: I think I would reiterate one of the things I said before that the collecting is, is characteristic. In other words, it comes, it comes from a base that is, uh, um, can be seen operating in any number of ways.

Miner: In a number of ways. So it's not a stretch to say that? Good.

Bray: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. I think he was—well, I know nothing of, uh, his sex life, but it might have been that things like the book collecting and neurotic energy might have been a form of sublimation. I don't know.

Miner: Hm. Hm. Yeah, I don't know how much of the psychology I can get on this.

Bray: I understand that. But when you've been in the company of and now in the memory of a huge personality, you think about it. You make up stories. You try to account for things. And so on. And that's what I've done with Minor. And you'd be surprised the number of people who still want to talk about him.

Miner: Well, that leads me to my final question. But I will—before I get to that one, I will say what resonates with me about your comments is the cult of personality and the way that he could connect with people. And I thought it was very interesting your comment about some his behavior being more provostial than presidential. And I wonder how much of that came because he was a provost for a number of years before he got here. I haven't been able to make any inroads with anybody at Hobart William Smith but would be interesting to know. I've tried. I've got good feed back from folks there at Connecticut. From folks there. But, um—

Bray: How about trustees?

Miner: I'm workin'. I'm tryin'.

Bray: Do you think George would talk to you?

Miner: I've reached out to him and have not gotten a response.

Bray: He should.

Miner: If you know people and now that you know a little more about what's happening here. I am sensitive to people's—I understand there are legal reasons why people can't talk about some things but I also think it's possible to have frank conversations and leave them for the future and we if need to put an embargo on, you know, their availability for a certain amount of time, that's a possibility too. Um.

Bray: Yeah, yeah. Well, I wish Jerry Stone were still alive. He would have been wonderful. Bushnell?

Miner: He's hopefully coming next week.

Bray: Good. Good. That'll be good. And some people who were on the trustees—some of them were just bowled over by him. They were just—

Miner: In a good way?

Bray: Yeah, I'm thinking of. Craig Hart would—well, just so people who've got their names in Ames. Those who are still alive would be worth talking to. If any of them are. I don't know if Craig Hart died or not.

Miner: No. We've had one phone conversation to tell him about what's going on with this and he said he would consider it, so, yeah.

Bray: For a negative point of view, um, one of the Methodist minister trustees who, who Minor wanted to force off the board who was always carrying on about alcohol. An old—a real old school Methodist preacher. Now I'm not going to be able to remember his name. I think he's still alive, and if I think of it I'll email you. But he would give you a negative perspective on that.

Miner: Yeah, I'm not, you know, fishin'. I just don't want to—

Bray: No, I know that. Minor wouldn't give people like that the time of day. He was snob about things like that.

Miner: Oh really?

Bray: Yeah, yeah. If, if you were going to have a church connection with Illinois Wesleyan, it had to be things like I said, Festival of Lessons and Carols. High church Episcopalian over at the chapel.

Miner: Interesting. I've never heard, um, so far in these conversations I have not heard people say that he was—would slight people. So that's interesting.

Bray: Yeah, I don't know—

Miner: Everything had sort of been—as you said expansive rather than divergent.

Bray: The thing about this Methodist preacher again. He'd been on the board since the Eckley years. Of course, Eckley did the—led the first great purge of the ministers from the Board. Minor pretty much completed the job. But Minor would get, uh, would get very preoccupied with this guy when this guy would write a letter opposing—this was when—basically, when alcohol came to campus.

Miner: Sure.

Bray: And, and I remember cabinet meetings—at least one in particular that he wanted to start off with that at the top of the agenda. And how negative he was towards this trustee's point of view. And I finally said, Minor, look, that's not a serious matter anymore. I mean, you've got one trustee who's complaining. His name was Dees. That's right D—double E-S. Yes. So I got him off

of that and we got on to other matters. And after the meeting a couple members of cabinet came up and thanked me because none of them would tell Minor to shut up about anything.

Miner: Really?

Bray: Even in a nice way. Eventually, resentment abounded. As it's bound to.

Miner: Because?

Bray: Because they didn't feel that they could deflect him from his preoccupations which in some cases may have amounted to obsession. Again, that psychology.

Miner: One last thing. In *Tigger*, in one of your last lines you use the word sandcastles and this sounds like perhaps a connection with what you're just saying there.

Miner: Yeah. In the Bob Dylan song there's the line, "I've got a head full of ideas that's driving me insane" and he almost projected those ideas into a projection in some medium. For me, most of them were sandcastles.

Miner: Hm.

Bray: Um. The—although much needed, the fine arts performing center never got off the ground. Um. Well, any—and, you know, I didn't mean that in any hypercritical way it's just that I could see, I could see him on the beach—a beach building those things and they were all perfect. I mean, really well—well thought out and, uh—

Miner: Detailed.

Bray: Yeah, detailed. 'Cause he had the time to do it and, um, he wouldn't quite notice that the tide was coming in.

Miner: Interesting.

Bray: But I—that was said with love.

Miner: Yeah.

Bray: I haven't loved too many men, but. Yeah. Just a few. I think men are, for the most part, worthless. That's just me.

Miner: Sure. I won't say it. No, and I didn't meant to say it was a negative. It was just a word that struck me—

Bray: Yeah.

Miner: —as a little different—a little bit different from the rest of the poem.

Bray: I'm almost incapable of writing anything in a creative way. Maybe even drafting a memo without a little irony slipping in.

Miner: Thank you for saying that. Well, I really appreciate you talking with me and sharing your thoughts.

Bray: It's made me feel really good to think about Minor openly like this.

Miner: Good. I'm so glad. Thank you.

Bray: Keep in touch so I know how things are going.

Miner: I will.

Bray: Keep in touch so that I know how things are going.

Miner: You bet. Thanks so much, Bob.