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Thomas Griffiths

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Oral History Interview with Thomas Griffiths,
in Hansen Student Center, February 23, 2016

Conducted by Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan Archivist

Meg Miner: Good afternoon! This is Meg Miner. I'm the Archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University and I'm working on a sabbatical project on Minor Myers and his – the effect of his influences on campus. Today is February 23rd, 2016. I'm in the Hansen Student Center with a former faculty member, member of the administration, Tom Griffiths. If you could introduce yourself and list all the many ways that you're affiliated with Wesleyan and Minor would be great.

Thomas Griffiths: Okay. Well, my name is Thomas Griffiths. I came to Illinois Wesleyan in 1981 as an Assistant Professor. This was my first post-doctoral position in the Biology department. Bruce Criley was my boss. He hired me and he was my chairman for 20 – almost... 30 – I guess it was 30 years. He was the only chair I had here but I worked my way up from assistant to associate professor with tenure, to full professor in record time, it turns out. And then I became, when Minor Myers came here, actually one of the endowed chairs. It was actually a chair created, I found out later, by Minor. He reallocated funds that a family had given for student aid fund... Actually made me the very first Beling professor, B-E-L-I-N-G, of Natural Sciences. Subsequent to that, I understand that Ram Mohan has it, and I think one of the mathematicians has it now, but it's one of the endowed chairs. And in 2007, I left Illinois Wesleyan. I had been an associate Dean since 2001, was there for 5 years for what was supposed to be a three-year term... [both giggle] ... We were in bit of a quandary at that point because Minor died during that time and so towards the end of my supposed 3-year term, I got kicked upstairs as acting Dean of the Faculty for a year, then went back down to Associate Dean when we brought in Dick Wilson and then Dick Wilson and Janet McNew parted ways. Janet went to – off to Florida, or to... Florida and Dick asked if Roger and I would take one more year at being – he was the Acting Provost and then I was again the acting Dean of Faculty. At the end of that time, I contemplated becoming the Provost here. A lot of people were trying to suggest that I do that... felt wrong to me in that I had been here as Professor and had a lot of friends and I didn't know if I could be objective. So I, instead of doing that I took the position as Provost at Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA, and was there for four years. And then got heavily sick of being an administrator after 10 full years of doing it and decided to come back to teaching, and at that time, Wesleyan had no opportunities for me so I took a job at Illinois Central College, a two-year school, junior college over in East Peoria and came back to the home that we still owned, south of town in Bloomington township and I had been at ICC now, this is my 5th year. I tenured a second time. I'm now, for the second time, an Associate Professor. The community college system does not recognize anything that anyone does at a liberal arts

Miner: -oh, man...

Griffiths: college level so I had to start over, and so I am now almost a full professor for the second time in my life. I don't know whether they're gonna make me an endowed chair. I don't know if they have those there, but it's been interesting.

Miner: Oh, my Lord!

Griffiths: And I'm enjoying it. It's been kind of fun. So... but I knew Minor in a variety of ways. I was not a member of the committee that actually was responsible for hiring him but when he was on campus for his initial set of interviews, I was on 6 or 7 of the committees at that time that actually met with him and had a lot to do with providing input to the hiring committee about him. I liked him very much and gave a positive review in all my capacities. Minor came in and he proved to be pretty much what I thought he would be. We were dealing with a very short-term president who was here just a couple years. I can't think of his name right now.

Miner: Anderson.

Griffiths: Anderson! Will Anderson, and the place needed a little bit of morale boosting and Minor was that cheerleader, definitely, made people feel pretty good about being here, about themselves, and I was here during his entire administration. Toward the end of that time, I became Associate Dean, working for Janet McNew under Minor, and then again up and down, Acting Dean, Associate Dean, Acting Dean until Minor's death and actually saw his entire career here, went to his memorial services, spoke briefly at them and ... so I was here for the whole thing, pretty much.

Miner: When you say he was what you thought he would be for Illinois Wesleyan, can you expand on that a little bit?

Griffiths: mm-hmm ... He came from Hobart and William Smith College in mid-New York State region and when he was announced as a candidate, I actually had a very good friend who was in the Biology faculty at Hobart William Smith and his name was Jim Ryan. And Jim and I talked and Jim told me that Minor was a Provost at Hobart and William Smith that was a very supportive, a very much a cheerleader for faculty ... did a lot for morale. Some faculty liked him very much, some faculty didn't care so much but Jim told me pretty much what Minor was going to be like as President and that was accurate. Minor was... very interested in what I guess I would regard as the – kind of the old school model of a professor – someone who taught, who also was involved in scholarship and was an active member of a close-knit tight community; that was Minor's idea of being a professor. And that fit in very nicely with what I thought a professor ought to be, too. I came here and tried to keep my research going, even though that was something quite difficult to do with the teaching loads that we had at Illinois Wesleyan. And Minor was very supportive. He was always willing to lend a verbal cheer to what you were doing. He was very impressed with people who were doing scholarship that he pushed them very hard. He showcased people. He asked them to talk at alumni associations and he invited me actually to go to a bunch of different places during his time. I went to Washington D.C. with him to talk about what was going on - my research and other people's here on campus. I went to Arizona with him a couple of times. I went to California with him to talk about research at Illinois Wesleyan – it was, you know, something he supported. And he was... as I said, I guess, he was very grateful. He showed his gratitude by surprising the heck out of me at one of the convocations by announcing from the podium that I was the new Beling Professor of Natural Sciences, something I had absolutely no clue what's going to happen. So, as I say, we fit in pretty well. He appreciated what I was doing for the place and I appreciated him as president. I thought he was pretty good president.

Miner: When was that – the named chair, was it 2000?

Griffiths: I became a full professor in 1991. I think it was 96 or 97. It would be in the record somewhere but it was just – just a few years after I became a full professor.

Miner: Okay, so about midterm for him... mid 10 years.

Griffiths: Something like that... I'm – I'm ...(overlapping)...

Miner: So we're placing it on his timeline and...

Griffiths: Yup... Yeah...

Miner: Okay... Why do you think ... so you said that he repurposed some money to do that. Why do you think that was important to do?

Griffiths: Because of his philosophy -

Miner: Okay...

Griffiths: - his – his – he wanted to support anyone who was exemplifying his idea of what a professor should be-

Miner: Oh, okay.

Griffiths: -someone who was not just a teacher but a scholar ...(overlapping)...

Miner: And that was different – that hadn't been a Wesleyan tradition during ...?

Griffiths: not – not for most people – no!

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: No, really had not.

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: Place changed a lot under him, I think, and some people had problems with that. The people that my friend at Hobart William Smith said who wouldn't like him didn't usually like him very much.

Miner: So people who were ... who were teaching-

Griffiths: - less fitting of his model -

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: And I think a lot of people felt that the game had changed a little bit and unfairly. They were unhappy with him coming in and setting a new set of standards that they just didn't feel like they wanted to meet or could meet at that point in their career.

Miner: So you have the unique perspective of becoming, you know, going into different administrative capacities. Do you think that's a fair judgement or those kinds of seat changes for people? Is there – are

there ways that – I don't know – is there a groundwork that can be laid to prepare people for that kind of change or is it always just sort of ... (overlapping)...

Griffiths: I think it's always going to be that expected, kind of shock. I don't know how you – how you do that. I think a new person comes in and there are seat changes and major – major changes and, you know, how you are evaluated, how you – you know, what's important, what – how you're rewarded actually, you know, where you – what your raises are based on. And certainly, that's always gonna be the function of a Provost more than a President but a dynamic president can make I think a big difference in how the Provost decides to – to do things.

Miner: Oh, that's so true. Was he – so for the people who were resistant to change, I mean, if you were supported and lauded, was there a sort of a counter acting with people who were resistant?

Griffiths: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: Yeah. Yup.

Miner: Can you speak a little bit about that – how that would look?

Griffiths: I – I think it's difficult for me to do that because actually in some ways that's one of the reasons why ultimately seeing opportunity to move into administration, I actually went that way. I actually felt that some of my colleagues, and I'm not just speaking about immediate colleagues in the biology department – I don't necessarily mean those people but there were people on the campus who ... I think, maybe felt I went a little too far too fast, maybe I, you know, became not only a full professor very early on but a named professor...

Miner: Right.

Griffiths: endowed chair professor very early on... and that's something I feel was ...(overlapping)...

Miner: It's 15 years after you're here. Is that a relief...

Griffiths: Well...

Miner: ...for some people I guess?

Griffiths: I was an Associate Professor for two years and there were people who were Associate Professors for ten or fifteen years, so I was promoted fairly quickly ... fairly quickly...

Miner: I see. I see.

Griffiths: So... I'd prefer not to get into that too much so...

Miner: Okay! Sure. Well, so here's why maybe I have some relevance in pressing this. One of the issues that I am interested in is, of course, the library, and Minor's influence in the library. And I understand that there was an individual named Clayton Highum who was here ... who ... I don't know if you care to

characterize your memory of him or how he ran the library and how that might have changed after Minor's death. Would that be a comfortable place to go?

Griffiths: Well, as much as I know about it -

Miner: - Sure! -

Griffiths: - I don't know whether I have any kind of special knowledge. When – when I came here, he was the Head Librarian-

Miner: Right!

Griffiths: - and they were in the old...(laughs)...

Miner: Shein

Griffith: Shein Library, thank you. Yup. Few words still escape me 'cause I've been gone too long.

Miner: Yeah.

Griffiths: And ... I got along very well with him. I – you know, I was especially close actually to Bob Mowery in the library. Bob and I shared a lot of interests so Bob and I became fast friends and I believe Clayton was kind of, in many cases, regarded a good librarian and other people didn't think like so, good. And it was a very different kind of library than the one that we have now. Minor is, of course, in large part responsible for what we have now.

Miner: Of course.

Griffiths: And, and I think almost unanimously, I would say that when it happened, the faculty were ecstatically happy that that was one of Minor's priorities and that he made it happen. I know, in administration later on I found out, the way he made it happen left the college in something of a financial problem.

Miner: Right.

Griffiths: There were – we didn't know about any of that as faculty. We weren't sure how would he finance that but I know that there were some problems with that. and again, I don't know how far I can go into that because what I was told at the time was confidential about the finances of the place but in a nutshell, we had some short term interest – short term loans that started out at low interest and I guess, started skyrocketing and the trustees were not happy about that and that caused some of the problems that – that we saw. But again, as far as the original library goes, what we have now is... [giggles]... totally different and wonderful in terms of the space we have, and the facilities we have and the resources we have. I know that sometimes Minor's view on things was not the same as Sue. Sue ...

Miner: It was Stren. It's now Anderson.

Griffiths: Stren... Okay. Sue Stren. Gosh, I'm so sorry.

Miner: That's okay.

Griffiths: It's been years.

Miner: Yeah, you're doing great.

Griffiths: And I – and I had my own set of librarians to deal with in Lycoming, so I can tell you what their names are but – the – Minor, for example, was very interested in having a complete set of, what was it called, not books and print but serials – the whole serials collections – what was it called? Serial ... the old journals What the ... what the series was at libraries around the world. It was a multi-volume, big, huge, flat -

Miner: So an index of-

Griffiths: -like – index of serials

Miner: -of serials

Griffiths: Yeah. Yeah. And I'll think of the name in a minute, but I know Sue did not really think that was important. Minor insisted that we have it on our library.

Miner: And did we have it?

Griffiths: And I don't know whether we still have it or not. I sure liked it. It was wonderful for me. I got to look up a bunch of 1800s, and 1700s, and 1600s stuff that I otherwise wouldn't be able to get accurate reference on so... I ... I agreed with Minor and not with Sue, about the importance of that.

Miner: So, umm... so ... Clayton Highum, the librarian, wasn't from what I understand, an innovator?

Griffiths: I don't – I wouldn't characterize him as an innovator. He ran a very traditional, small college library with a small, fairly small budget and fairly limited resources. There wasn't a lot of space like we have today for doing the kinds of things that we do – study space and was kind of an aquarium.

Miner: Yeah. Right. Yeah. And the reputation of the library on campus, I - suffered from what I understand. The way that the library changed under Minor's leadership – I don't know if you can characterize any of that. So Clayton was either left, or removed or something happened to him.

Griffiths: I believe so. I don't know for sure.

Miner: Sure. And Sue came in and ... do you have a sense that the changes started happening, you know, fairly quickly or was it, I mean, how was – would the campus have been involved in making those changes or was it something that was strictly left to the library?

Griffiths: Well, no, there were advisory – faculty advisory committees – I can't tell you what their exact titles were

Miner: Sure.

Griffiths: but yes, they had a lot to do with it, too. And Sue did. I give credit to Sue. She – I think – I think it's fair to say she was in the middle of it as I think I said, I don't know if she always agreed with the direction Minor was trying to push. I got the distinct impression that she didn't always

Miner: Sure.

Griffiths: - but by at large, I think the faculty were very much on board from the beginning and then when the first gifts were announced, and the plans were drawn out and saw what might appear on this campus. At that point, I would say that was probably the height of Minor's support and popularity on this campus among with faculty.

Miner: Really? Oh wow he had done CNS

Griffiths: (overlapping) I – I think so.

Miner: ... by then, right?

Griffiths: Yeah... let's see.

Miner: That was in the 90s.

Griffiths: We did – I – you know, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to think about this -

Miner: That's okay!

Griffiths: the first thing we did was the natatorium.

Miner: Yup

Griffiths: and we had little trouble with River City Construction. They built it - the pool wrong – and it had to be ripped up and redone and We were still in shirf ... what did they – CNS was '95

Miner: Yeah... all that stuff was early 90s till mid-90s.

Griffiths: Yeah, and what year was the – what was the Ames?

Miner: 2002.

Griffiths: So it was – it was after CNS.

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Griffiths: I still stand by that statement

Miner: Okay

Griffiths: and I'll tell why. The natural science faculty was very pleased, obviously, with the facilities we had. But I'm not sure other people on this campus were quite as happy – I mean, they were happy we had it but I don't know if they were happy to be in the old buildings that they were in, and I think the library was a campus-wide joyous event. I mean, everybody from the English department to the Sociology people to the Biology people and so on, I think, saw that as kind of a – a great need that we had had for years, and I – I guess I'm thinking that they – it kind of I think brought people more in line with 'this is becoming a really great place to be' than it had been before – that's just my opinion-

Miner: Yeah.

Griffiths: -and I don't really – couldn't even tell exactly what I based that on but I just remember that as being a real – a really unifying kind of thing.

Miner: I have been told – I haven't verified this in the documents yet but that the theatre building was scheduled to be before the library so I'd imagine -

Griffiths: That's right! That's right.

Miner: - there might have been a segment of community that was not entirely enthused or – yeah ...

Griffiths: Well, yeah ... I mean, I – I think there's ... yep, there was a lot of frustration in the Eckley years that we were a very parsimonious place. Salaries were not seen as being competitive in many cases, facilities were not considered to be top-notch in many cases, to have someone in here who, you know, was promoting good raises for people who deserved them and building buildings and things like that – even though we didn't know at the time that he was kind of putting the place in a precarious financial situation which we're still awa – which – I should say we - you are still suffering from. It was – it was very energizing for faculty who cared about the place, people who wanted to do great things here.

Miner: And they, the ones who were inclined to respond did so then – to energized – to the energized

Griffiths: I think that's accurate. Yeah.

Miner: Okay. That's great. Something else I was thinking about related to the library... it'll come back to me.

Griffiths: Okay.

Miner: So tell me a little bit about you as a collector. You mentioned that you have a collecting interest of your own.

Griffiths: I did my Master's degree with Charles Woods at Vermont and Charles was David Clingnor's first Ph.D. at UMass Amherst. I know that's – hang on because I'm gonna explain this a little bit more.

Miner: Okay. Okay.

Griffiths: I thought when I got out of Bates college, that I really wanted to work on the anatomy of mammals and I stumbled upon Charles Woods at Vermont's. He was working on rodents, I wanted to work on bats but do similar kinds of things. So I applied and was very pleased when I got in The University of Vermont in Burlington. I was there for four years; started there as a Ph.D. candidate and then said "No, I'm gonna go see - going to the source..." So I'm going to his first major professor at the University of Massachusetts who is more suited to what I wanna do. So I finished the research Master's and then went to Massachusetts and got my Ph.D. But, here's the reason why I'm saying this. Woodie and Dave Clingner were both avid collectors of old books. First time in my life I had ever been in an office that was floored to ceiling, outer office, inner office completely jammed with classical books and Woods inspired my interest in a lot of them. He taught his classes around his books and -

Miner: Really?

Griffiths: - and he gave his graduate students complete access so we would go in and would sit in a corner of his office and read these 1800s, 1700s, classic things. And then in Massachusetts, I found out where Woodie had learned to do this. It was from his first Ph.D. advisor. Charles Woods was his first Ph.D. I was Dave's 7th Ph.D. student and Jim Ryan, who was at Hobard William Smith was also my academic colleague. We all have a love of books. Every one of us has been inspired by Dave and by Charles Woods and so I started collecting them too. And I have managed through the years. I've got – I think like Dave or Charles – Woodie had – gosh, I don't know – probably several old books, different ages – some of them very rare, some of them extremely difficult to find these days, almost ... completely out of print. I don't know whether you remember this or not but I think you helped me -

Miner: I do remember vividly.

Griffiths: - I was on sabbatical leave and I moved them down to my research lab in the CNS and found one weekend that one of the pipes had burst in the ceiling.

Miner: I was a little afraid to ask how are they doing.

Griffiths: Oh, they break my heart – to look at them. Some of them were untouched. Some of them were barely touched and they're okay. Some of them are unrecoverable. They're brown, and they're, you know ... pages are stuck together.

Miner: Yeah...

Griffiths: I couldn't believe it. It was one of the things that broke my heart and made me even more eager to leave at that time.

Miner: Oh, dear!

Griffiths: You know, it was just not even the value of them but the fact that they were things that I prized and really loved. And so, anyway, I have this collection of books, and Minor was interested in – was it 18th century – I thought that was right. I wasn't sure about that... just about everything, I mean, everything from the 18th century. He collected just about everything. He was a huge fan of eBay. He would buy things on eBay and he would buy lots of books put up by people...

Miner: through eBay?

Griffiths: I... don't know but I know he used to get lots of books, maybe they were privately advertised – I don't know they were through eBay. He bought a lot of things on eBay. But... he would sometimes discard books that he bought in lots that he didn't really want and I have a couple of those from him. I have this ridiculous, old, early I think, early 90s, maybe – maybe it was – maybe it was late-nineteenth century book called *The Bat*. It was a novel and it was, you know, I actually never read it carefully but – but Minor handed it to me apparently one day. It was a part of a lot of books that he bought and he saw no interest and thought I'd like it so he gave it to me as kind of a gag gift. He gave me a couple of other things that Marvin and I were trying to remember exactly what they were – nothing, nothing in any way special, nothing that was actually the thing I really wanted but – but I was touched that he would do that.

Miner: Was there something you would have wanted of his [laughs]

Griffiths: I'm pretty sure probably did. yeah, he, he really, he had some incredible stuff. I got to browse his library a little bit too, occasionally to see what he had, and used to show me things occasionally that he had just gotten very proud of them, so... but we shared that interest and we... I don't think I was anything like he was. My interest was pretty much professional and natural history, which is my – sort of my area of specialty

Miner: Your focus?

Griffiths: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: Yeah, exactly.

Miner: From what I can see, regardless of what Minor said, he had no discernable focus that many collectors would define. Do you think that's an accurate assessment (overlapping)?

Griffiths: I think that's quite accurate. Yeah, he was eclectic. He was – I mean, other than I guess 18th century, he was very non-discriminating in what he collected. He collected pretty much everything, I think. I think that's - cook books, you know, about that probably. I mean, cook books. Old, cook books. A lot of people when they heard that, even people who are professional collectors scratched their heads – why would you do that? but that was one of his areas. I'm trying to – he was interested in – I think he had an interest in coins, he had an interest in stamps maybe, he had an interest in, I mean I guess I'm, I guess I'm scrambling a little bit here cause I – I actually I guess I don't know that for absolutely certain but he seemed to have an interest in just about everything.

Miner: You're the first person who told me he got rid of anything.

Griffiths: He never gave away anything that was important to him...[laughs]... He did it as a – I think, as kind of a joke. He – he did something similar one time, which he laughed when I told him about this. This may not be anything that you can use but I'll just tell you any way...[giggles]... There was a book and a movie called, The Relic, I think it was. It was a horror movie and a horror book. It was about a monster that had been brought back to a museum and originally it was till the American Museum of Natural History in New York city. When the movie was shot, they used the field museum in Chicago.

Miner: Oh, great.

Griffiths: So, they used that museum. But basically, it was a monster that ate brains- I mean, it was really pretty gross. And here's the thing – the author of the book said it in the American Museum where I was going regularly as a research associate. I was a – I still am a Research Associate at the American Museum, which means I can go there and use their collections without supervision. They – they trust me and I can look at that so do what I want to do. But at the time when I was going there when he was president – when Minor was president here, he gave me the movie I think, or maybe it was the video of the movie and he encouraged me to watch it. And I did, stupidly. And it turns out that the monster attacked all of its victims on the ground floor where I would go down to work in the fluid collection. So the next time I was at the museum, of course, I work at night and I would go downstairs, take the elevator down 5 floors to the basement where the monster attacked everybody and you know, all the pipes are

groaning and steam pipes are whistling in the background and I'm down there all by myself – there's people around but no one near me and it's where the monster ate your dated victims. And when I came back and told Miner about that, he laughed... [Miner laughs] ... He thought that was so funny. Anyway, as I say, that's probably not anything of interest to you but it's just – it was just-

Miner: - I think that is fascinating, but he's the one who told you about this story?

Griffiths: He did. I...

Miner: So he must have made the connection with your research area.

Griffiths: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. He knew I was at the museum and he knew about this but I think he gave me... I don't know, I can't remember now. He gave me the book, I think, or the – or the video. He gave me another video one time on bats, which I still have at home but I'm – I can't exactly remember but we had this conversation which he enjoyed very much ...

Miner: What other conversations did you have with him about collecting? Did he ever share with you about... what these things meant to him or...?

Griffiths: ...Not hugely and, Meg, this is where I was wondering how much you'd cite me, too.

Miner: Sure.

Griffiths: We – he was the president for much of the time I was here and I was in Biology doing my job. And we, until I moved into administration, we did not have a lot of interaction. He noticed what I was doing and it ultimately resulted in the named professorship but we were not back and forth very regularly.

Miner: Sure...

Griffiths: He would stop and he would ask about what was going on and be encouraging but he did not share a lot of what he was doing. Much of what I knew he was doing playing with his trains in the basement – things like that I heard second-hand from everyone.

Miner: Oh, so you never went to the basement?

Griffiths: I actually did not go to the basement while he was alive. I did, after he died. There was a question about radon and whether or not there was radon in his basement and as an administrator I did get to go down in there at one point. And then I went back after-

Miner: -But you wouldn't have done like the testing or anything?

Griffiths: Oh, no, no, no – we just – we just were hearing about it. There was an issue. Do you know about that?

Miner: I've heard about it but nobody really told me how it was resolved, or if it was ever verified.

Griffiths: I'm not trying to know that either as well as I should but when it came up, it was in administration and so I was privy to some conversations about it. Most of the conversations were in the Board of Trustees I think and I was not privy to a lot of those but I heard about the, sort of second hand

kind of thing. And I think there was a question, at least in Minor's wife's mind, Ellen, Ellen's mind, whether or not going down to the basement might have been a bad thing that contributed to his cancer.

Miner: Yeah. And I did hear that. But why were you sent to the basement? I mean it seemed a curious way for you to phrase that.

Griffiths: Well, after Minor passed away and the house vacant, we had an occasion to go over there on one occasion and we went down to see what the basement was like, basically, and no special reason. We were not testing or, you know, trying to find out anything. We were not investigating or anything like that. we just went down. And then, as I say, when Dick Wilson came, we had occasion once again to go down. Margaret and I went on occasion and it changed completely – the whole place was, you know, renovated and made much nicer, I think, than it was when I saw it the first time.

Miner: So you saw it with his collection still in it or was it after they were moved out?

Griffiths: No, they were actually being – I think Sue actually, am I right about that, had a lot to do with packing them up.

Miner: Oh Anka, I believed it.

Griffiths: Or Anka?

Miner: Yeah, I was told that Anka and Mona packed it up.

Griffiths: Gosh, I thought it was Sue but maybe it was Anka. Anyway, Sue certainly would be supervising as the – I think she was – is she still the Librarian Head at that time? Yeah, she would have been. Maybe – maybe she was supervising. Maybe that's what I was thinking right now.

Miner: You didn't happen to take any pictures down there, did you? I'm desperate to find a picture of his basement. I've heard so many things about it and I ... yeah, so I'm asking everybody.

Griffiths: Had cell phones been as prevalent, someone probably would have done it but that was pre-cellphone days, but – pre smartphones.

Miner: Indeed.

Griffiths: Now, I wonder if – I wonder if there are pictures. There might be.

Miner: I gotta get a hold of Mark. He's here, there and everywhere.

Griffiths: Yeah.

Miner: Mark Featherly.

Griffiths: Featherly... yeah.

Miner: What does collecting mean to you?

Griffiths: I primarily – I don't collect for collecting's sake. I think Minor, in many ways, collected just to be a – he was a collector – a person who just loved collecting things.

Miner: What would that mean? What would that-

Griffiths: -There is some visceral joy at simply assembling things that are tied to one another. My – my collecting was done entirely so that I could have access to otherwise really difficult to find, early publications in my area and really I did not wanna branch out beyond that. I had no interest in really much beyond what it was that I was doing. My own stuff...

Miner: Did you get a sense that Minor's collecting was something that he would do regardless of the price or was he pretty selective in how he – you mentioned eBay, right? And so bidding is a huge thing on eBay.

Griffiths: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He – I got the strong impression and I have no figures to all those values but I got the strong impression that it was vital to him. He was willing to pay quite a bit. Oh, he just – some of the things he gave me, he gave me because he had two, he wants to put two of them.

Miner: Oh, interesting!

Griffiths: So sometimes he'd bid on things he didn't even realize what he was getting. I forgot that until just now but that's actually one of the characteristics of what – when he did part with something, it was usually because he had a duplicate, and actually I think that may have been many of the things, or most of the things I got from him ... were duplicates from lots that he bought.

Miner: That's great.

Griffiths: Well, I had completely forgotten that, until just now. That was – that's – that's a good question.

Miner: It's amazing what clicks through, right?

Griffiths: Yeah.

Miner: So... but otherwise if he wanted something then he wasn't really going to be stopped by-

Griffiths: Pretty sure he was – yeah... I'm pretty sure he just went after anything he was really ...[laughs]... and...

Miner: How does that work out for you?

Griffiths: Well, he had a president's salary, he had a house, he had, you know, free transportation - I think he had a lot of money he could do to it. For those of us who are professors, as you – as you I'm sure you well know, it's a little more difficult.

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Griffiths: When my advisor died, Dave Klingner died, he had set up a provision in his state that all of his former Ph. D. students were supposed to be contacted and we were supposed to be able to go in then and pick through his collection, take what we wanted. Dave's first and second wife decided that was not an option and they decided to sell Dave's collection through a New York agency, but the funniest thing was, the book that I wanted the most found me.

Miner: Oh, how?

Griffiths: It – it was on a table in Vermont. I went to a meeting there, walked in to the vendor's area, walked over to a book collection, looked down and saw this book on self-American bats that I had wanted ever since I had known at Dave's. I picked it up and I thought '*God! This is going to be expensive. I can't afford this;*' opened it up, David Klingner.

Miner: Oh, my word!

Griffiths: The book went to New York, and I don't know where it went in between but it wound up in this non-New York bookseller's collection, and it was 5 bucks. It would – the real value of it was far far greater. It was so rare. And the guy at the book shop had no idea. So... I got my book. My one book that I really wanted (overlapping).

Miner: Oh, gosh! What a wonderful feeling.

Griffiths: Tangential, I know to what we're talking about here but I had to tell you 'cause it was really – it was really wonderful to – to find that book. The book found me, actually!

Miner: Yeah...

Griffiths: It found me after all those years and what are the chances that I would walk in at a meeting that I wasn't even, you know, trying to find books. I was just there. I was giving a paper at the conference, and I just happened to be free at that time, and walked to the table where the book was waiting. It's really kind of eerie a little bit.

Miner: That's fascinating. Yeah. My goodness! What a find!

Griffiths: What a find! Yeah.

Miner: And those kinds of stories, I mean, just add so much to what we collect, right? I mean, the sense of discovery within! Did Miner ever share any of those kinds of discovery moments.

Griffiths: I saw him excited that he had just found – he would always bring whatever he was the most obsessed with at ... [both laugh] ... that point to the office

Miner: Oh, he would?

Griffiths: and I'd suspect that between meetings he would probably be looking at these things, and when I would come in for the many meetings I had with him, more often than not, he would be looking through something and he would show it to me. And I would get the, "well this book is of this providence" and you know, that "I got it through this" and our first 10 minutes of the conversation would be what it was that he had just bought.

Miner: That happened more than once.

Griffiths: It happened almost every time.

Miner: Oh my gosh!

Griffiths: And then, we would go to whatever the business of the meeting was at that point but there was always a tangential sort of discourse off to the side and then we'd get back to the main subject. He was very, very proud of his acquisitions.

Miner: That's great. Did you get to do that with him too?

Griffiths: Oh, share my stuff? (overlapping)

Miner: Yeah. Yea, never guess what I found.

Griffiths: Yes. Actually, once or twice although I didn't have the money that he did so it didn't happen as often but yeah once in a while, and he always was excited. I think in one case envious ... [both laugh] ... cause it was an 18th century manuscript, but

Miner: Oh, manuscript...

Griffiths: Yup... oh I'm sorry... 18th century publication. It was a museum publication paperbound-

Miner: Sure. Sure.

Griffiths: but yeah he was-

Miner: -catalog for museum-

Griffiths: _yeah, yeah exactly.

Miner: Oh, fantastic. That's great... what else about collecting in Minor do you think we should know about?

Griffiths: Well, I'm pretty close to the limits of what I know about it.

Miner: It's okay. Do you know anything about how the – I mean, I know you said you weren't involved in like the pack out or anything but do you know about how the collection was acquired and how the decision was made to auction it?

Griffiths: The one that we have in the Ames Library right now, you mean?

Miner: The Minor's Collection...

Griffiths: The Minor's Collection of stuff...

Miner: not – yeah – not the – right...

Griffiths: what we have then in the rotunda.

Miner: What we have in the rotunda is the honors collection. That's not anything he personally owned.

Griffiths: Where did his – remind me, where is his collection now?

Miner: So, the university purchased it.

Griffiths: Yes, I remember that.

Miner: You remember that? Okay, and then I was put in charge of auctioning it, which is why I am organizing it for assessment essentially. And I never went into the house. It was packed out and brought into sheen. And I worked on it part-time for a year and a half.

Griffiths: That's right... that's right.

Miner: and then somewhere in the middle of it, a decision was made to auction.

Griffiths: Yeah... yep...

Miner: Yeah. We ended up keeping about 10% of it and I was going to mention it to you we have some natural history things that you might be interested in.

Griffiths: Oh, probably I have seen them.

Miner: Probably you have.

Griffiths: Briefly.

Miner: It's a wonderful foldout of creatures of the earth and ...

Griffiths: He showed me many things.

Miner: ... a conchologist book by Edgar Allan Poe which I find so curious, yeah... so the decision to auction it as a collector or maybe based on what you know of Minor, what do you think you would have thought of that.

Griffiths: He would not have wanted to do that.

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: He believed very strongly that acquiring them was really important, essential and he did not approve of I don't think he approved actually of librarians reading collections...[giggles]... I don't think he really liked that. I think he – once a book was in your possession, you make room for it. And cataloged it - took care of it and made it available, to the extent it could be made available. I'm pretty sure he would not have approved but that's just my opinion. I don't know for sure.

Miner: Sure. When the collection was purchased by the university, my understanding is that the family withheld some items.

Griffiths: -I believe that's correct.

Miner: And I don't know where in the decision-making process that kind of a thing happened but... I mean, some collectors collect for the monetary value and to leave a legacy and some people just collect for the sheer joy and love of a subject or the act of collecting. I don't know where you could put Minor on a spectrum like that. Do you think you would have any input on that?

Griffiths: Well, I can tell you I don't think he did it in any sense of the word for the monetary value of it. He collected what he thought what he wanted to collect, and he collected inexpensive things and he collected expensive things and he collected what really interested him. I think he was a collector first and then everything else second to that. He had the urge to assemble collections and he built them. He built them, you know, he saw this hole and he would assiduously pursue that item that belonged in that hole. And sometimes he would find it and sometimes he would not. If he found it, I don't know this for sure, but I think he bought it ...[laughs]... whatever the cost was-

Miner: Sure.

Griffiths: -because I know once in a while I got the very strong impression when he showed me something that this was not an inexpensive item. This was something that was taxed even to him

Miner: he didn't brag about it or -

Griffiths: Yeah, he never – never made a big deal about the cost. He just wanted to get things. He wanted to build a collection. I think he was a collector.

Miner: You're the first person who indicated to me that he might have had a strategy in his collecting. So, not just that he had, you know like, queries out in some of these databases and things and just popped up – so that's interesting to me too.

Griffiths: I stand by that, I think. I hadn't really questioned that before but I think he had things he wanted to fill in gaps in his collection. I believe that that's accurate. I think that's correct. And it was not just, well here's something - I mean, there may have been some of that in his collecting, I'm sure that at least initially when he was beginning to build collection, that's probably how it worked. He saw something that looked interesting and bought it and then he realized while there is this other thing over here that, you know, that maybe I could get some day. I don't know how purposeful it was at the beginning, but when I knew him, I think he was building... I think he was building collections. Ellen probably could tell you more accurately than I could about that.

Miner: I'm hopeful.

Griffiths: Yeah, I think whatever she says is probably the final word on that, so...

Miner: That's great... gosh, back a little bit to the comment about the library and the fact that we did auction it, and I will – I mean, the claim you know 'I'll stake my flag' right? I mean, I wasn't involved in the decision and I have an idea of how the decision of what to auction came about, and why. And I, as a librarian, I do understand the pressure of an academic library on a small campus, having a focus but it's a struggle, right? It's a struggle for the memory of the individual and the appropriate place to put things.

Griffiths: Have you talked to Roger Schnaitter?

Miner: He has not responded to my request for an interview.

Griffiths: Okay. Well, here's something that I will tell you. Roger and I worked together. He was the acting Provost and I was the acting Dean of Faculty. We did this for two years, non-consecutive years. One was Minor's last year when he was pretty sick and when Janet moved up to acting President, or

wasn't after - maybe even after he died. And then the second one was when Janet left, we were asked by Dick Wilson to come back up, so we had a year in between when we went to our regular positions. But I do remember Roger and I meeting with Sue and I do remember discussions of the auctions – how it was gonna be the done, what the process was gonna be. Now, Sue did not report to me. She reported to Roger. I was there and I remember the discussions about how we were gonna do this and your name came up a hundred times but I can't for sure tell you. My memory isn't good enough to remember exactly how those decisions were made but Roger would know... 'cause he was very central

Miner: Yeah

Griffiths: to that part.

Miner: I surely do hope to talk to him.

Griffiths: Is he still in town?

Miner: As far as I know, yeah! Well, that's great. Yeah, and it's – and it's certainly something that I have a personal vested interest in conveying to certainly the Wesleyan community and the people who care I think are probably dwindling but there is perception that those books were gifted to the university and that the library sold them and so there is – over the years I have had perhaps a little thinner skin than I should have in hearing some of those stories and trying to correct the misconception that, you know, they were purchased at the university's request and essentially thrust them all on the library to deal with ...[chuckles]... and the library did what was appropriate by library standard.

Griffiths: So your recollection of that time is that the university purchased his collection after he died?

Miner: Yes.

Griffiths: Okay, that is correct. I'm pretty sure. There was at least some hint that that was money that was going to Ellen... I think as a kind of settlement to help her ... to help her.

Miner: Yes. Yes.

Griffiths: And I know that Roger and Sue would meet regularly and Roger, I believe, was acting at the direction, I guess, ultimately at the Board of Trustees, I think, in whatever it was he was doing. I remember several discussions between Sue and Roger. I was peripheral. I was working on something else at the time, so I can't tell you for sure what exactly happened. Maybe I could if I thought about it a little bit more but I'm pretty sure Roger would, if he's willing to talk about it.

Miner: Right.

Griffiths: would be the person to ask about it, because he was very much central to that whole decision-making and how we divided the books up and what the directions were to you, I think, in terms of how you were to proceed. I'm – I'm sure of that that Roger could tell you. I don't know whether he'd be willing to do that but (overlapping)... 'cause it might be a little touchy.

Miner: Yeah, and I – and I'm sensitive to that but I'm also - I mean I think you know, the future deserves to understand events and I do have an opinion. I do feel that the library was consulted and I mean, I think

– I think that – I don't know who gave the ultimate blessing but the – but I think it was one of the few instances actually in Minor's tenure when I think the library was listened to and heard, and followed through on a recommendation, so you know... I mean I don't have a – I guess I don't have a bad feeling about the way it ended up but I definitely have a desire for the community to understand that there was nothing unethical that happened because the – in the donor world, in the library donor world not the monetary donor world, it is very important for a library to have a reputation of caring for its collections within its capacity. And so if something was gifted to us, something of that magnitude and we were perceived as making money off of it, that would be a very bad thing

Griffiths: Sure.

Miner: so I just want to set the record straight on that.

Griffiths: Sure. Sure. I have to tell you, I believe that all direction came ultimately from the board.

Miner: Yeah.

Griffiths: The board -if anybody is going to take any kind of blame for what happened to that collection, I believe it's accurate to say the board of trustees made the – at least the uber decision, the overall decision about what was gonna happen..

Miner: Sure... to purchase it

Griffiths: yeah, and maybe also to auction some of it off

Miner: and then to auction it as well

Griffiths: And Roger, I'm pretty sure, was the principle root that the instructions came through. I don't think he decided any of that on his own, but I actually have to tell you that I was never present if he was told anything, they never – they never told me, or I was not part of it in the meeting where they told that, so... but I know that Roger was, and Sue had conversations about that whole process... several of them.

Miner: Yeah.. and I absolutely don't wanna leave you thinking that I'm thinking placing blame. I mean, that's not really the way that I'm thinking about it. It's just sort of trying to lay out how these things ...[overlapping]...

Griffiths: No, well, I – well, I have to – actually have to tell you it's a little bit of a surprise to me when you say there perhaps are people who do see the library as – see, that's not – I can tell you that's not true at all.

Miner: Okay.

Griffiths: I mean I can certainly tell you with a great deal of assurance that that's – the library was not in any way involved in anything like that. I can tell you that from sitting there listening. I know that's true from Sue and Roger's conversation, so if anybody says that, please refer them my way.

Miner: I will...[laughing]

Griffiths: [chuckles]... I was there. I know that's not true.

Miner: Thank you... Yeah. I think probably there was so much emotion at the time, right? And so much information was kept from faculty...

Griffiths: ...[overlapping]...oh, huge emotion... and much secret

Miner: Yeah...

Griffith: and a lot of the secretiveness was Minor's. Minor was very unwilling to talk about his worsening condition. He was ... I will tell you... last time I saw Minor Myers alive was in his office. And two days later, he left his office and as far as I know, never came back, at least when I was there in the administration building. But the last conversation we had with him, something really good had just happened to me. Something – external award or something – I can't remember what it was now. I'll think of it. And I – and he – we were right after cabinet meeting. He asked me to come in and - to show me a book ... [Miner laughs] ... and I told him about this and he was so ecstatically happy for me. I walked out. I said something when I walked out – I don't remember what it was now but some kind of toss off remark that made him laugh, and I never saw the man again. I – he got - announced – they announced his sickness, that he was being treated, he was going to the male clinic to be treated. Things took a huge turn to the ... sad side of things and I kept expecting we'd see him. I kept expecting he'd come even in his weakened condition but we never saw him again. A few colleagues saw him in the passenger side of their car with Ellen driving around town. I didn't. I wasn't one of those. I did get a note from him a long time later with the bat book that he sent me. He sent me and said," I think you don't have this."

Miner: Oh, he sent it while he was ill? Oh, my...

Griffiths: I'm pretty sure he sent it while he was ill. It was either the bat – he sent me something. I think it was the bat book – pretty sure it was. And ... and then he died. And we did a very moving service for him and a lot of people very, very gloomy and sad and we felt that an era had passed, and we all wore chrysanthemums at his service, do you remember that?

Miner: I did, too. I wore one at commencement that year.

Griffiths: Yes. His son wrote – it was my idea – chrysanthemums were a flower that isn't remembered so somebody who is no longer with you was a language of flowers and at one of the cabinet meetings I suggested that and his son wrote me a nice little note thanking me for that. He said that's - he couldn't imagine a better...

Miner: ...Minor?

Griffiths: ...for Minor. Minor III, I believe.

Miner: okay.

Griffiths: I think it was – oh, gosh, I'm so sorry. My mind is – it has been so many years I can't really recall now but it was one of them did and – thank me for that. But to walk out of his office, he seems okay and never see him again, never hear his voice again, never see him again – it was quite a shock at that time. So...

Miner: I still have my flower...

Griffiths: You still...?

Miner: ...at my office...

Griffiths: I have mine too. It's in my upper dresser drawer at home. I still have it.

Miner: Yeah. I only met him once, so...

Griffiths: You only met Minor one time?

Miner: Yeah. Yeah. So these conversations have, you know, obviously given me context but like I said, over the years so many people have shared little bits and pieces and some of them have been, you know, highly praiseworthy and some of them rather critical. So the conversations that we're having with people have helped, I think, fill out a little bit of our history that nobody really has recorded yet.

Griffiths: He was a human being. He had attractors. He had people that loved him, people that supported him, people that were not so fond of him, you know.

Miner: Sure. One of the things I am curious about is this idea of the influence where it developed, right? He was a Provost at Hobart. Did he do these kinds of things there. Did he, you know, talk to the librarians there? And at Connecticut, I got some wonderful pictures. He was the friend of a librarian in Connecticut and a couple of people there are gonna talk to me too.

Griffiths: When he was announced as a candidate here, I was on the search committee pro – pro say – but I was a member of committees that were scheduled to meet with him. But when he was announced as a candidate and coming from Hobart William Smith, I contacted Jim and asked him what kind of person he was. And Jim was quite forthcoming. Very complementary.

Miner: Yeah.

Griffiths: ...[giggles]...When Minor came here, he was meeting with the faculty development committee, whatever we were called in those days, and I was sitting in the – on the table and someone asked him about how do you support young faculty. And he started telling a story about a faculty member at Hobart William Smith that he had helped to get grants, you know, he said – I shocked him, “That would be Jim Ryan, wouldn't it?” and he just ... [Miner laughs] ... he said, “Wow! You really do your homework,” to the committee but Jim was my friend and Jim happened to be there. It was serendipitous but it was really pretty funny that – I've never seen Minor quite so shocked as when I brought Jim Ryans 'cause Jim Ryan was the guy who he helped. So... that may have made him a little more interested in us – any place that was interested enough to really look into it that deeply his background – maybe made Illinois Wesleyan more interesting for him perhaps, I've always wondered.

Miner: That's fun.

Griffiths: So...

Miner: Well, maybe we can close with just a couple of follow up comments and ... When – I remembered what I was gonna ask you about the library and you said that Sue didn't always agree with Minor's request. Do you know if there was a kind of ...[overlapping]... on that or...?

Griffiths: The ... the union list of serials – is that what the – is that -

Miner: -that could be.

Griffiths: Okay. I know from her – pretty sure, from her comments at the time that she did not consider them as important as Minor did. I believe Minor got them, obtained them from some place and pushed them in the library and my strong reaction was that she was not as thrilled as he was. I kinda got the idea that he had kind of pushed them a little bit. Now, if Sue says differently, I certainly would yield to Sue, but -

Miner: -oh, I have asked her about that but -

Griffiths: - but – but I'm pretty sure that that one and a few other things were not – she did not see eye to eye with Minor.

Miner: But they happened!

Griffiths: But they happened...

Miner: And they were gifted to the library

Griffiths: exactly

Miner: and then we dealt with that

Griffiths: exactly. yeah.

Miner: So the kind of person you know that he was, and with your wonderful range of experiences both here and afterwards, what kind of influence do you think he had on campus, or what kind of impact? Is there a way we can say that that personality did x or y or contributed to x or y?

Griffiths: I have a colleague at ICC, Masters prepared. Her name when she was a student here in Biology, my student part of the time was Elizabeth Elsacer.

Miner: Yes!

Griffiths: She got married and she is now Elizabeth Maze. And every time that we talk about Minor, her life was changed by Minor, by his enthusiasm, by his interest in students, by his “passion” as she calls it and many other students felt the same way. They really truly loved him and were inspired by him, side that they saw. I think in many cases the faculty that wanted to see this place become a better institution, more nationally known, more of a scholarship type of place – myself I'd include in that group – we're delighted that he was here. He set the tone that favorite people like us and made it possible for us to do the things we needed to do, and rewarded us in my case by making me the first Beling professor. I think the people that generally did not like him were the people who got stuck ...[laughs]... cleaning up his messes and sometimes people who were not in a position in a discipline where they could do scholarships, like for example. It just wasn't possible on a campus like this and I think was some resentment there that he was the kind of president who lauded people who could do this and the feeling was – some of my colleagues in Biology didn't feel it their disciplines allow them to do this 'cause they needed multi-thousand dollar grants and difficult to get and that kind of thing. They were less enthusiastic

about it. But I think he changed the tone of this place. He changed the campus in terms of its facilities. Everything from, you know, the new science building, the new library, the new CLA – all that stuff either started under him or was finished under him. Well, the natatorium was really the previous president. I think even this building was at least started by Minor. I don't know whether it was finished when he was still ... well, I think it was, wasn't it?

Miner: Yeah. It opens – the renovation on Hansen is the same as the library. They were...

Griffiths: That's right. That is correct. That's correct. Yup. And then Dick Wilson built the new admissions center and the new State Farm building, although we were talking about those things under Minor. We were discussing, we didn't call it the State Farm center but we were talking about getting rid of the – sorry –

Miner: Shaw...

Griffiths: what is it – Shaw and replacing it with something. And that discussion continues when Janet was acting president and then got handed to Dick and I think Dick took it all and rambled it and got it built. So...

Miner: That's great. Are there other things you can think of?

Griffiths: No, you've astounded me with what you've brought out here. I have to tell you so much of that was deeply buried. I hope everything I said was accurate, some of it is deep recollection and I'm sure I'm right about it. I'm not absolutely certain. I kind of wanna - I'd like to double check some of this stuff 'cause I'm not absolutely positive but I'm pretty sure everything I've told you is 100% accurate.

Miner: Well, you know the joy of doing an Oral History is we could go and verify the facts but I can never forget the emotions and the effects of things and you know, honestly when people come and ask questions about Illinois Wesleyan's history, that's what's the fascinating and fun and exciting part about it is how it affected people. Not that you know we've got everything down to the end's degrees. What were the you know the impulses that drove the institution in certain direction and I really appreciate your time in doing it.

Griffiths: Sure.

Miner: and the difficulty that it, you know, sometimes raises for people. Thank you so much.

Griffiths: You're welcome. My pleasure, honestly.