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Fred Hoyt

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Oral History Interview with Fred Hoyt

in the Hansen Student Center, January 22nd, 2016

Conducted by Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan Archivist

Meg Miner: This is Meg Miner. I am here in Hansen Student Center on January 20...3rd now I think, 20-23rd, no 22nd. Sorry. One twenty-two with Fred Hoyt, and Dr. Hoyt if you could start by introducing yourself and telling us how you're associated with Minor and we'll be off and running.

Fred Hoyt: I'm Fred.

Miner: Thank you.

Hoyt: I teach business at Illinois Wesleyan, and I had an interesting relationship with Minor because like Minor I'm kind of a packrat too. I have a three room library, but it wasn't the books that drew us together, it was stamps.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Hoyt: And I am a philatelist which is okay between consenting adults. [Miner laughs] Sometimes my wife is a consenting adult and my stamp collection- but I have a very exotic collection, I collect stamps used in China by foreigners. There were foreign post offices in China, and depending on who you were, if you were one of the great powers that were defeated in World War I like Germany or Austria. It ended in March 1917 when Germany and Austria- when China declared war on those two countries. If you were Russia, the Russian post offices in essentially the big cities in China came to an end in 1921, '22 depending on when the revolutionaries took over. If you were the United States, France, Ger-Japan, and Great Britain, formally the post offices closed at the end of 1922. And Hong Kong being...a British post office-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Hoyt: -'99 was really the last one. So that's-that's kind of my collecting interest and Minor was very excited about other people's collecting interests. And- and this is a typical Minor story for me but one that taught me something. I had gotten something that was really pretty exotic. It was a passport issued to a British soldier- British officer who traveled from Chi- it was issued to him in China-

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: -and it was stamped with the passport stamps and the consular stamps as he traveled overland back to Great Britain. And it was just wonderful and I had never seen anything like this before. And I had to share it with somebody and I took it into Minor and I said, "Minor! Look at this!" and he put his glasses up on his head like Minor was wanting to...[Miner laughs]...and he was reading it and he's going, "Fred, this is- oh this is wonderful!" and he thought about it and he said "I think I have three just like it."

Miner: Oh no! [laughs]

Hoyt: That's when I learned not to try and trump Donald Trump...[laughs]...or Minor Myers.

Miner: That's funny. Do you know how he got interested in that kind of thing?

Hoyt: Well, I don't know-

Miner: In stamps or-

Hoyt: I...I said you- I think he was a packrat. He collected almost everything, and I remember there were a couple of stamp shows in- at the time in Bloomington-Normal that he and I would go to and it was "You'd better not have gotten the kind of stuff I'm looking for, Minor." [Miner laughs] And-and a correlation between books and- and stamps at one point in time. He went to a- oh God, I- I think it was something in Europe he went to, and there was an exhibit of stamps from Tsingtao, which is a German colony, and in fact Tsingtao beer is because it was a German colony and as the guy told me when I went there the Germans wouldn't fight without their beer...[Miner laughs]...so they started a brewery that was initially with the British that was taken over by the Japanese in 1914, then taken over by the Chinese in 1945. And it's China's best known brand. But he said "Fred," he said, "there's this wonderful book on it of the exhibit you've got to have," and I'm thinking "Why don't you buy it for me Minor..."[Miner laughs]...and bring it back?" Instead I had to look for it and-and...get it.

Miner: So he never gave you anything, huh?

Hoyt: He gave me encouragement to spend money foolishly.

Miner: [laughs] There you go.

Hoyt: And he did that too, and the anecdote I wanted to relay- we went to the IES/IAS program in Beijing, and- with Mrs. Minor, and the contrast between those two- Minor was always gone somewhere, and there's an area, Liulichang, and Liulichang is the old antique district.

Miner: So he would get to a city and go adventuring?

Hoyt: Oh god yes-

Miner: Ok, go ahead.

Hoyt: And Mrs. Minor was just appalled at the stuff- and he came back, arms full of old scrolls and- and stuff like that. He was just like a little kid.

Miner: Huh.

Hoyt: And it was, "Fred, let me show you all the neat stuff I bought!" And Mrs. Minor had a hard time. She- she thought Japan was dirty.

Miner: Huh.

Hoyt: You can only imagine how appalled she was in China which was dirty. And I remember one- one of the dinners they served...scorpions.

Miner: Oh dear.

Hoyt: And she was just appalled and I'm going "Give me more."

Miner: [laughs] Like hold the scorpions and you just-

Hoyt: Yeah.

Miner: -and pick 'em up by the tail.

Hoyt: Well they were- no, they were...they were kind of roasted and-

Miner: Well sure, but they were-

Hoyt:-and like some of my humor tasteless.

Miner: I didn't say that, for the record.

Hoyt: So- so it was kind of fun comparing notes with him. He kind of got in in a little bit of a way into...American Revenue stamps.

Miner: Hmm, okay.

Hoyt: It was one of the kind of things he kind of play with and we compared notes 'cause there was one dealer, his name was Revenue Roads (6:11??), and- and it was kind of a race when the show opened here between me and him to get to the guy because I'd have killed him if he had got to some of the stuff I really wanted. [Miner laughs]

Miner: Did you ever trade back and forth with him or was it just-

Hoyt: No.

Miner: You get it you keep it?

Hoyt: Yeah.

Miner: Do you know if he ever like sold off parts of his collection or-

Hoyt: I have no idea. I- I- I- I don't think he was a collector, I think he was just a packrat. And it- it was kind of the way he approached a lot of things. I always compared Minor to a lighthouse.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And whenever the- whenever the lighthouse- wherever the light showed got intense focus and then it moved on.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: 'Cause I remember I was sitting in my office one day and I get a phone call from Minor and he says "What are you doing for lunch?" and I say, "I don't know, what am I doing for lunch now sir?" [Miner laughs] And- and he had this wonderful idea and it was he wanted to attract a violinist who- world class violinist who was probably also a po-potential Nobel prize winner-

Miner: -in literature-

Hoyt: - in liter- you know, the typical Minor person. And he wanted to create an arts management major- or minor or whatever. And he had these wonderful ideas and we were in a room like this and it might have even have been this room, I think it was one upstairs that might have been next to the president's office, the boardroom.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Hoyt: And he brought in Vadim and- and he had all these thirty-five people and he had this wonderful idea, we were going to do something with the University of Illinois, we were going to do a- a facilities management dimension to it-

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: -and for two weeks he was absolutely focused on it, absolutely excited, and I knew if I shut up and- and took it easy for a while it would go away and eventually it did.

Miner: Isn't that something.

Hoyt: And the- and the spotlight went onto something else.

Miner: What do you think the effect of that kind of person is on- I don't know, a place like Illinois Wesleyan or people such as yourself or-

Hoyt: Well, it had a good effect on me 'cause I'm kind of a ditz too...[Miner laughs]...and- and...I had a chair who shall be nameless since the computer is on, but she said "Fred," she said, "You're unfocused."

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And I said, "No I'm not. I'm eclectic." [Miner laughs] And I think Minor was definitely eclectic. I thought in lots of ways he was the kind of disheveled in terms of his...his....I wanted to take him to a barber on occasion...[Miner laughs]...he looked and acted the part of college president. Slightly ditzy, incredibly funny, incredibly quick mind, I mean he would sit there during a presentation and scribble a couple of notes and his presentation indicated that he had not only grasped what the other person was talking about but he had built on it and moved it in a new direction.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: He was when he came an incredible breath of fresh air here.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: When he left, as I said, I think in some ways it was unfortunate the way he left, but it was also unfortunate- you go through the rogue's bgallery of presidents and eight to ten years is probably max.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And- and then the cycle starts repeating itself. I think the issues became very different at the end of his career than the beginning.

Miner: What cycle? The cycle of personalities?

Hoyt: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Hoyt: Th-this I told you when this was off, I've been a Scoutmaster for thirty-three years and my mistakes are gone.

Miner: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Hoyt: Hopefully soon...[Miner laughs]...and in fact if I play my recruiting right they never even join...[Miner laughs]...but in academe people remember. A quick anecdote, we had an incredibly wonderful candidate here from- for a marketing- senior marketing position and...he didn't get the job. Well, he didn't take the job, and I met him a couple of years later in In-India. And I said, "Well, what was it that did it?" This was during the...when Wendell was president.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: The-the interim when Wendell was president. And...he said, "Well," he said, "I didn't come to Wesleyan because I wanted to come with tenure." And Wendell said they couldn't do it because they'd done it once and it didn't work out.

Miner: Oh dear.

Hoyt: And...man said "Well, I asked Wendell when it had happened and he said fifteen years ago." And I said, "Well, let me finish the story for you." I said Wendell isn't president because someone remembered fifteen years ago something he'd done I said the long memories in academe.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: And I think that's-that's part of it, I think the- the...Minor's title should have been cheerleader rather than president.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: He had a hard time I thought with confrontation. I think he had a hard time with finances too. And the game was in the midst of changing to the point where one of my nightmares sometimes was that Minor was still president of Illinois Wesleyan. And we're facing the financial challenges we were facing with a cheerleader instead of somebody who was more like banker.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: Dare I say so.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: Yeah.

Miner: Well somebody who, who if I understand what you're saying, is able to express the cold hard truth-

Hoyt: Oh Minor escaped- Minor tried to avoid reality as much as possible.

Miner: Is that right? Okay.

Hoyt: Well, he lived in his own world. It was a fun world populated with playfulness. Minor was a...oh I'm trying to think of the word I used to contrast him with his provost...Minor was whimsical.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And she was capricious. He-he like I said was fun to be around in his- he was enthusiastic. And it was always kind of fun- first time he came here, the inauguration. Were you here for the inauguration?

Miner: I- No. I only met him once actually.

Hoyt: Okay. Coach at four-

Miner: Oh, I've seen the pictures, yes.

Hoyt: -and Minor talked around- Minor talked about all of his wonderful children and he didn't mention business. And he had never been at a school that had a business department. And when we went through the greeting line I said "Are all your children beautiful?" and he said yes. And I said "You didn't mention business." I get back to my office and Mona had just hung up the phone and she's laughing. We got an apology...[Miner laughs]...I said what happened and he said he didn't mention business...[Miner laughs]...well he didn't always recognize business and then there was-

Miner: But he'd recognized that he made an error in judgment.

Hoyt: Well yeah, but he- he forgot it quickly.

Miner: Okay. Well alright go ahead. Sorry.

Hoyt: Well, my other funny Minor story I thought...when we went from seven to six.

Miner: Yes.

Hoyt: Minor talked about it. Initially it was this is going to help us be better teachers because we'll have more time to work with students. And it had evolved into think of all of the writing you could do with all of that time, and research.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And I remember seeing Minor one Sunday at Kroger and I said "Minor," I said, "When you started this discussion, it was all about teaching."

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And I said now it's become all about research and writing.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And he said "Well, what's wrong with that?" and I said this is a teaching institution. The next day we have a faculty meeting. And Minor starts by saying "I want to thank my good friend Fred Hoyt...[Miner laughs]...who's sliding under the seat embarrassed as hell by this discussion...for reminding me that this is a teaching institution."

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: Well, we're leaving the building and it's snowing out. And I pick up a snowball, I make a snowball and throw it at him. And like the good poli-sci person he is, he says "Fred, that's lese-majesty." I said

“Number one I missed you.” [Miner laughs] And I said number two if someone needs to have snowballs thrown at it, somebody’s going to do it and it’ll likely be me. [Miner laughs] Those are my Minor stories.

Miner: They’re great. So it sounds like...you’re maybe of two minds [overlapping] on a personality like Minor.

Hoyt: [overlapping] At least two.

Miner: Ok, in a position like he had here. And one of the things I am interested in is this idea of influence on the institution and in my particular case its influence on the library to which I believe existed and was present. And I’m thinking of other places on campus so where he had a particular vision for something and influenced a direction of a department or did you see that in other places?

Hoyt: It- it definitely wasn’t business.

Miner: Okay.

Hoyt: I’ll just say that.

Miner: Okay. [overlapping] And why would you say that?

Hoyt: [overlapping] Minor rode in on- Minor rode in on some really good times. I think I have the timing right. He came in with the US News and World Report number one. And that was a wonderful wind in our sails.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: And we rode it quite a bit and the faculty were quite unhappy about it because they didn’t want to be number one in this diversified category-

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: -which basically said we’re a great school ‘cause we do more than liberal arts.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And we got into the category that we’re in and we’re number fifty-three or sixty or whatever the heck it is. We were so much better off being a diversified organization. Minor was very proud of those kinds of things. In fact, I’m trying to remember...we had an awards banquet breakfast every year and he went on and on about one of our double majors and I can’t remember what it was that he didn’t emphasize or didn’t know about this person but it was really an incredible thing this kid had done. I mean, Minor was just so excited and had, you know, the football player that plays piano and does ballet and that kind of stuff. And sometimes he missed what we more saw in these kids.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: I- I said he was a great cheerleader. And at a time when morale was quite low at this institution, and I think faculty today would identify within those days.

Miner: So when he got here you’re talking about.

Hoyt: When he got here-

Miner: Mm-hmm. Ok.

Hoyt: -he was exactly what the university needed. And I remember George (18:16??) talking about President Eckley the prince of darkness...[Miner laughs]...I don't think anyone would accuse Minor of being prince of darkness-

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: -because he was, I said, playful. And sometimes a little fanciful. And I think I said as things got tough, it got harder and harder to believe he had the kind of tools we needed to move from point A to point B anymore.

Miner: And you saw that then early 2000s or- I mean I'm just trying to place it in his time on campus.

Hoyt: Well, toward- toward the end.

Miner: Okay.

Hoyt: And it- it was pretty obvious when Wilson came in and there was a- a major financial mess-

Miner: Right.

Hoyt: -that he had to clean up 'cause Minor's tendency was to sweep stuff under the rug-

Miner: Gotcha.

Hoyt: -and by the time...Wilson came in the rug was on the second floor that's how much was swept underneath it.

Miner: Sure.

Hoyt: And it- I think- I think it's a real tragedy and I think about it in terms of- well it's a lesson in leadership. One of the hard things- and I face this as a Scout leader, how and when to get out.

Miner: Hmm. To know when you're in over your head or- or for the good of the organization

Hoyt: Yeah, yeah.

Miner: Or just for you personally.

Hoyt: Yeah. Yeah, and for the organizational sense too, when is a...you know, a basketball example, Mr. (19:51??), you know I feel really bad for Mike because his knees are older than mine and he's a senior. And it's be really neat to go out on his own terms.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: Especially with a national championship.

Miner: Yeah. Well...one of the reasons that I'm doing this project- I mean, obviously these conversations have a lot more application to, you know, the university history as a whole, but the reason I got involved

in this was because of the auction- the organization and auction of his personal book collection after the university purchased it from the family when Minor died-

Hoyt: Okay.

Miner: -and I don't know if you have any memories of that particular event on campus, it was-

Hoyt: None.

Miner: Would you as a collector care to state a...a theory about how Minor would have felt about his collection being auctioned? It's one of the things I'm curious about.

Hoyt: I can't- I can't remember, I brought some stuff into the library and I said "You might not be interested in this," and they said "Why not?" and I said "Cause it's not 1795 and bound and lettered."

Miner: [laughs] And you brought that into his library or our library?

Hoyt: No, into our library and I was kind of poking fun at the kind of things Minor was into.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: And I kind of understand it 'cause my fraternity house...we stocked our library in the fraternity with- there was a bookstore near the University of Chicago that sold books by the pound.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And we would go in there every year and buy the best looking books...[Miner laughs]...'cause that's what really counted. We had a lot of nice-looking, meaningless leather bound books.

Miner: Sure. Okay.

Hoyt: No idea about Minor's...what he had- I suspect he had...he was a collector but he was also a packrat.

Miner: Yeah.

Hoyt: And- and packrats accumulate lots of stuff.

Miner: Sure.

Hoyt: I know, I'm one.

Miner: [laughs] Well is there anyone else you think I should be talking to in this project or-

Hoyt: Well turn the- turn the thing off and I'll tell you some people.

Miner: Well, I'll do that. If you think of anyone later, you can tell me too. Is there anything else I should know about Minor before I turn the thing off?

Hoyt: Well, I'm- I'm curious what other people's memories of Minor are.

Miner: Yeah, well I'm hoping to curate this in some way so that- so that we can make that public and make it possible for people to explore those- those kinds of things, but [overlapping] I really appreciate-

Hoyt: [overlapping] He was president twelve, thirteen years?

Miner: Fourteen.

Hoyt: Fourteen.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Hoyt: Okay.

Miner: But he wasn't the longest. There was- there were several others who were longer, so...yeah.

Hoyt: Yeah, but time- time is getting shorter these days.

Miner: Well that's so true.

Hoyt: You can live fifteen years, and fourteen years now.

Miner: Yeah. Well thanks so much for sharing your memories, we'll go ahead and turn the thing off-

[2nd recording]

Hoyt: Just cause it's really funny.

Miner: Ok, we're back with Fred who's going to tell us other Minor stories he just thought of.

Hoyt: I just of a major Minor story...[Miner laughs]...for me anyway. When Minor came here, he invited the faculty to his house for dinner.

Miner: Everybody?

Hoyt: Well, in- in various stages.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Hoyt: And- and...we went to a play. I...I have to admit it's the only play I've ever been to at Illinois Wesleyan. But the play was *Radio Days*, and he called me- he said at the end of it he said, "What do you think of it Fred?" I said "I've got to have that sign." He said, "What sign?" I said "They had an applause sign!" [Miner laughs] He says "Why do you need an applause sign?" I said "Cause every time they flashed it, people applauded!" [Miner laughs] And I said if I had that in class, students would know it's ok to applaud, so I need it. But ten minutes later he calls me back, he says "It's yours." So it's sitting in my office and I bring it into class periodically so that kids know it's ok to applaud. The other thing- and I had mentioned it to you, was- off-record that occurred to me, but it's worth mentioning on record too, Minor was such an incredible fan of good music. Classical music, but I say good music 'cause people might not understand that that's classical music. And if I'm in town, we will go to the- the big concerts Wesleyan has.

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: And I remember talking to Minor at one of them about how wondrous it would be- to be a music major and he said "Why would anyone not want to?" And I look at him and said "Probably 'cause they want to eat."

Miner: [laughs] And his response?

Hoyt: He laughed. And- and that- that was Minor too. I said he was in a lot of ways he embodied what people outside the university think a university president ought to be like.

Miner: Sure.

Hoyt: He was playful, he was witty...and I said he looked like he didn't always look in the mirror before he went outside.

Miner: [laughs] Probably that got him points with the students.

Hoyt: Yeah. And- and with some of the faculty too. I said he was- he was a...in lots of ways the kind of person that universities say they like to turn out but have a hard time dealing with 'cause they're not eclectic or unfocused...[Miner laughs]...I know-I have no idea what his professional credentials were like other than Princeton, and there were times that Carleton got in the way-

Miner: Hmm.

Hoyt: -'cause he was always- for- for- for a while it took us a long time it took to train him when he said "we" it was mean Wesleyan and [overlapping] not Carleton.

Miner: [overlapping] And not Carleton. Oh, that's interesting.

Hoyt: 'Cause he was very fond of- of his undergraduate. In fact, it was hard to realize that he was really a Midwestern kid. 'Cause he picked up a lot of east coast. [laughs]

Miner: [laughs] Thanks Fred.