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Pamela Buchanan Muirhead

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Oral History Interview with Pamela Buchanan Muirhead

On February 25, 2016 in the Hansen Student Center

Conducted by Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan Archivist

00:00:28 - Pamela Buchanan Muirhead introducing herself and her affiliation with Wesleyan

00:03:19 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing the search committee process

00:08:39 - Buchanan Muirhead telling a story about her students admiring Minor

00:14:17 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing Minor's collections of sheet music

00:17:53 - Buchanan Muirhead explaining the images herself and Minor enjoyed collecting and how others perceived them

00:19:58 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing her time as acting dean of the faculty

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00:32:05 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing Minor's memory

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01:02:57 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing the spirit of Wesleyan when Minor came

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01:17:19 - Buchanan Muirhead discussing the donation of books to the library

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01:34:06 - Buchanan Muirhead giving a story about Minor and Ellen

Meg Miner: Good morning. This is Meg Miner. I am the archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University and today is the 25th of February. I'm in the Hansen Student Center, and I am speaking today with an Emeritus and distinguished faculty member, Pam Muirhead. Pam if you could introduce yourself and tell us how you're affiliated with Wesleyan and Minor and we'll see where our conversation takes us on this investigation of influences of Minor Meyers.

Pamela Buchanan Muirhead: [laughs] Minor Meyers. Well, I'm Pamela Buchanan Muirhead, and I toss in the Buchanan, because I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan in 1968. So, I did my undergraduate here. I came back to teach in the English Department in 1972, and I retired in, I think, officially 2014. I believe that was it....is that right?

Miner: Yeah. Time flies.

Muirhead: Lovely retirement it is. And, I-I was on the search committee. I was a faculty member of the search committee that hired Minor. And, for one wonderful and intriguing year I was acting dean of the faculty while Minor was the president and got to know another side of him...um...in that way. My husband and I...lived...owned a house that was under what is now..on the land that is now the Ames Library. So we lived sort of a half a block from the President's house and so we got to see Minor and Ellen in casual ways and, um, we had a son who was about the age of our..their younger-younger son.

Miner: Jeff

Muirhead: Jeff, yeah. So just the few...you know...those few connections over-over the years.

Miner: I didn't know about the house connections. That's fascinating. Thank you for giving up your house for the [laughs] library.

Muirhead: It-it was, Minor actually...it was a typical Minor thing. My husband was quite the grump, because we lived...I walked across the street to-to campus—

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —for twenty years. And he was not happy about..leaving, you know. It-it worked but we moved to White Place which was only a few blocks away. And, uh, one day, I guess we ran into Minor and Minor was...we were sort of talking about it and looking at the library. And Minor said as only Minor could to my husband, he said, "You know what? Right here, it's where the John Wesley Powell, um, statue is"-

Miner: Mhmm

Muirhead: - he said, "Right here this is where your kitchen would've been".

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: And, it was the last complaint from my husband. I never heard another complaint... about Wesleyan and our house, and it was you know the—

Miner: So, you think he found some peace with it...with—

Muirhead: He found some peace with it!

Miner: —that knowledge.

Muirhead: Right! He was actually sort of excited about it—by it. [laughs]

Miner: Almost he called the statue-

Muirhead: Yeah, there you are! There was our kitchen.

Miner: How fun is that?

Muirhead: Yeah, it's just something..one of those spontaneous things-that-that...one of those things that Minor could do.

Miner: Cause he remembered it—

Muirhead: Yes

Miner: —and he remembered its significance to you—

Muirhead: To us, yeah. So, very typical of..so, yeah.

Miner: You wanna tell a little bit about the search committee process? Or your impression...

Muirhead: The search committee was interesting. Um, it was...if—if I am..it—it was one of the first times that the faculty were brought in with...more or less equal partners with the board...or at least the structurally...

Miner: mhmm

Muirhead: We were—we were equal. As, I recall Robert Reardon was the chair of the committee, at the time, a wonderful person, and we were divided in...as we went through the process we were rereading lots and lots of paper of course...they divided us into two, um, airport interview teams. Half the faculty, half the board members that were board and alum members that were on- on the search committee. We were a very large group. So, our half went for our turn and we got half of the candidates. And, we...you know...we're sitting there. This is for two days. Overnight, hours, no daylight. Um, and we'd seen quite a few people at this point and we

were getting a little bit towards the end and in walked this really interesting person, who immediately began to question us, about why we weren't better known. And, what he—what he did, what he had done was to go back through his collection of college catalogs. Who—who would think of such a thing?

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: And he'd gone back...I think even to the 1800s...and he had in his head at his fingertips this eccentric, but fascinating history of how Illinois Wesleyan has operated which stunned us. We did manage to ask him some questions. We had already wrote questions to ask. But, in fact the whole discussion/interview went on a very different trajectory from what we had planned.

Miner: Hmmm

Muirhead: And it was-was fascinating. I could remember after we sort of got together and began to toss—talk about the candidates that the faculty we had coss—caucused our little group. We—we—we weren't sure that the Board of Trustees people would find this odd character interesting. And as it turned out the board members had caucused a little bit and they had wondered if the faculty would find this odd character interesting. And, when we got together and discovered for the both of us that Minor was far and away the person we wanted to recommend, even without hearing the other, who the other candidates were. Um, we-we got a big laugh out of that.

Miner: That's great.

Muirhead: So, um, and, you know, that of course didn't seal the deal, the other half of the committee, you know, everyone had a meeting, we had to come to campus, which I think he did after some astonishing, heroics because of the weather—

Miner: Oh

Muirhead: —and I think he drove down from Chicago in the middle of the night. I...there's some stories Carl Teichman knows all those stories. Um, and Minor-Minor came, um, and he...it was not a one-time thing, the Minor that we saw. This was...the quintessential Minor, but we began being introduced to him because of through a collection-

Miner: Through his books

Muirhead:- his books.

Miner: You know, um, he donated a collection of college and university publications and that was one of the reasons I was hired was to process that collection.

Muirhead: [gasps and laughs] I didn't realize that's how you came!

Miner: So I'll have to go back and see what-which-which years of Illinois Wesleyan are represented in that. Yeah, that was, um, it was funding that they got for that from Minor and through some other sources...uhh...for the catalogs and for digitizing the Argus. And, I only met him once, and it was in relation to him coming to the workroom I was in the basement of the Ames Library—

Muirhead: Of course. [laughs]

Miner: —working on that and just in a whirlwind came through and we had one five-minute conversation...

[Muirhead gasps]

Miner: Yeah, right after I started. So, it was funny that the catalogs I had...I wasn't aware that he had done his research in his college catalog collection. That's interesting. Cause that's one of the questions that I have about the kind of collector that he was, is. Did he use those books as basis for research, and he certainly left a publication trail, but his, um, his range of topics in his personal book collection far exceeds what he ever published on so—

Muirhead: Mhmm

Miner: Anyways, sorry to interrupt I just thought I—

Muirhead: No, no

Miner: —thought I would offer that.

Muirhead: No, that's, that's a wonderful connection—

Miner: It is.

Muirhead: I remember walking away kind of astounded as if oh why haven't I taken a look at some of these things...

Miner: [laughs] you could. [laughs] you know, in your spare time. Right?

Muirhead: Well, you know.... [laughs]

Miner: I know. The thrill has gone...

Muirhead: Well, the library is there and so you can't...

Miner: Yeah...

Muirhead: Yeah...

Miner: That's fun...

Muirhead: And, it was in—when I took students...this little, um, sticker, um sort of, ID tag that one of my students made to hand out as souvenir to all of us as we were leaving his house, came about because I was teaching in-in, um, a practical criticism class, uh, English 280-

Miner: So, before you get into this story, because we're audio recording-

Muirhead: Oh, of course-

Miner: —why don't you describe the sticker for the audio audience?

Muirhead: Um, this is a Illinois Wesleyan, one of those peel-on name tags, and one of the students wrote on it "I hung out with President Minor Meyers English 280 Practical Crit November 15th, 2002" and which, of course, if you'd ask me what year was that we went to the visit, I wouldn't of remembered, let alone the day, um but the students were excited to—to visit that—to visit him. And, I was, I was a little surprised by that. I knew...what I thought of Minor, how much I liked Minor, but I—I wasn't really as aware of the students' strong connection to him, especially these are fairly young students, these are first year, second year students English majors and minors, and, we were in Shaw, um, on the park—we had a classroom on the Park Street side, and at a certain time in the morning, I taught a lot of morning classes, it didn't matter what was going on in class, everyone just sort of turned and looked out at the window. They had—and I noticed very discreetly but their heads swiveled in a small group and they looked out the window. I thought, I wonder, where are they looking? So, I kind of got an angle on it, and I realized Minor was walking by. And then, I noticed, this happened every class period, Minor walked by and they all looked. So, finally I made a joke about it and said, "Oh yeah he's really cool". I said, "Well wanna visit him?" That was one of the most popular things we did was that I—Minor was happy to host the students, so we went over for no particular reason and he just opened up things out of his collection, "Look at this", he said, "look at this, you know what this is?" I remember him passing around a something that had been printed by a—okay I'll think of it in a minute...um..alright it'll occur to me, bingo. But called from the early-early history of, um, early American history in imprint of that.

Miner: Hmmm

Muirhead: —he had—because he collected musical instruments...uh, antique instruments, he happened to have had a harpsichord and he showed us the harpsichord, and—and one of the students, um, he asked if anyone played the harpsichord...and one of the students said, "Eell I tried once." He said, "come on, play!" So she played some Scarlotti on the—

Miner: Oh my goodness

Muirhead: —on the harpsichord. And it was—it was sat around the dining room and the living room, and it was just no agenda, no particular...topic. Oh I remember! It was a Ben Franklin piece that...that...was, was I had forgotten Franklin was a printer. And so here's a—a an authentic piece. So..um...yeah.

Miner: What do you think that did for your students?

Muirhead: You know, I...I don't know how to s—their enthusiasm...for...his enthusiasm...carried over what was happening in the classroom. I mean, we're reading out of an anthologist, and we're looking at a lot of secondhand material where we're talking about ideas, but here's someone who's with Minor who was enthusiastic, not only about the ideas, but about the material objects, the artifacts, the letters, the imprints, the art, the—the and—and not in a reverent, you know, this is a—a sacred piece and we put it up here and put it under lights, put it under glass but in a hand around here, everybody put your hands on this, this thing from Ben Franklin. Look at this, and so, it went round and for-for them, it was being in his presence with his enthusiasm, kid-like enthusiasm. Um...

Miner: On his part.

Muirhead: On his part.

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: On his part. And an enormous enthusiasm on—on their, on their part as well. It's so odd, Minor walked through the campus, like with the students, like a rockstar without ever condescending or being anything or anyone other than Minor.

Miner: Hmm! What did that do for you?

Muirhead: Well, um...it was...their...it was enjoyable to know they enjoyed Minor. Because I enjoyed Minor, hugely. Miss him still.

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: Um, and I know there are probably, and I've heard often there are many impractical things about Minor that must've made it more difficult for—for people who weren't always in on the fun, um, but his enthusiasm for Wesleyan and for whatever the most eccentric things we were involved in—

Miner: We being?

Muirhead: Faculty.

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: Faculty. Faculty and staff. Um...I was...I taught a course on the Harlem Renaissance and Black Jazz Age. And, Minor had collections of sheet music that would've been published in the period. And, the interesting thing about it for me and for the students was the imagery of blacks, how the jazzers, or even the other folks were—were, you know, slavery that, you know, that the—the sense of nostalgia for the old times that is portrayed in the covers of sheet music, and so, I borrowed sheet music from him to let the students both have, see what sheet music was, and also to—to look at the images, the popular images that were being used at the—at the time. I went out to—to Yale to look at some Langston Hughes materials, and yet, I got very excited because among lots of things that Yale that Beinecke Special Collections, um, because Langston Hughes, who has a small connection with Wesleyan and with town, had collected postcards wherever he went that depicted, uh, blacks. Usually, these were...not the most flattering images.

Miner: Right

Muirhead: But he was fascinated, Hughes, apparently about these and he would write on the back Chicago Union Station, where he got it—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —where he got the images. And...that sort of interest my curiosity about why he, um, someone who definitely did not represent these images in any way and wrote against them, why he might've collected them and preserved them and so they got them in Beinecke, and, Minor would understand that.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: My—my interest in those. You know, he would—he would not find that—find that delusive—

Miner: Do you think that other people found it odd?

Muirhead: Yes, other people have found it odd. Um, I have had, I have a- I have things that are...that represent some of the collected and I kept them in my office and displayed them. Things that did not represent the best of American race relations. I found a sign from the Cornbelt...no, Cotton Belt Railroad that said "Colored Waiting Room" and it was framed, and I hung it in my office where everyone—anyone came in would see it. And, it startled people—

Miner: Made them uncomfortable?

Muirhead: Well, um..it...some of my students who weren't when first meeting weren't quite sure what to think about that and finally someone said, "Isn't that an odd thing to have?" Um, scholars of course don't find these things odd, Minor never found them odd, found it odd...um...that I might have some of these-some of these images.

Miner: So, what did those images then do for your...um...I'm trying to think of how, so if Minor was doing this sort of thing or was in on this sort of thing, what, how could you articulate how that would influence an interaction with students?

Muirhead: Well—

Miner: Or—or others on campus. There are other scholars on campus. You know, if this is something that a lot of people thought odd and you were pushing on the envelope a little bit with that and he was as well, what does that do for this campus?

Muirhead: I think one of the things is that it—it makes, it opens up the conversation. You can talk about these things without necessarily thinking someone is going to be terribly wounded or destroyed by it or upended in some—some way by it. Um, Minor is interested in history. The artifacts that told a story of how people lived their lives, how the material world...shaped what happened to them every day. So, it was important to me for my students to see what people saw on a regular basis. You can tell them that waiting rooms were segregated in the public transportation, on the railroads. You can tell them—see show them a photograph of water fountains, white water fountains, black water fountains or colored water fountain to be polite, but if you hand them a sign that hung in the waiting room...it begins to...that begins to change some of those—those ideas, um, those experiences become more real or pertinent, and it's important to be able to talk about them.

Miner: So, the physical connection.

Muirhead: The physical connection—

Miner: With the past.

Muirhead: Yeah, with the past. Great.

Miner: What, um, what was the progression of, I mean this we jumped from—from 19... well if you've met 1989-1988-89 would've been when the search was going on, we jumped into 2002. Then we skipped right over, you're being dean of the faculty—

Muirhead: Dean of the faculty. [laughs]

Miner: —you wanna talk about how—how that happened and uh...

Muirhead: [laughs] I'm not sure how that happened. Some people, Acting Dean of the Faculty.

Miner: Acting. Okay

Muirhead: Acting Ellen Hurwitz

Miner: That was during the transition from...

Muirhead: Ellen Hurwitz to Janet, yeah.

Miner: Okay, thank you.

Muirhead: Um, [laughs] most of the time people, these are—are career moves for people to be acting dean. I absolutely in no intentions of being an administrator. That—I took my turns in being chair of the English Department, because we rotated through—and had been doing it for years. Sometimes, quietly and against the grain, but we had done this so you had to take a turn. Uh, but I had absolutely no desire to be um-um administrator. And, in fact, that...I guess...propelled...oh not propelled me that's entirely wrong. I got asked, because I had no enemies at that point [laughs]—

Miner: Oops

Muirhead: —and, I did not want—I didn't really want the job—

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —I got on-I got along with most people, and Ellen Hurwitz was also...um...our first woman...dean we had a dean of, no, our first female dean of the faculty, and—and Provost. We—we had, you know, had-she had been trained, attempting to train younger women faculty to promote them in the sense that push them into various experiences that would enlarge their sense of how the university operated, and if they then wanted to move on, they would have some of those experiences. So, it—so she was great sort of confidant and mentor. Ellen had her moments of not necessarily getting along with certain factions, in the, um, in the university, but she got along with the young women, really, really well. She was amazing. So, um, I think it was Ellen that might've suggested, you know, she said, "I really don't want to, do you want to jus—just—just a year." The budget is set, Roger Schnaitter was actually Provost and so he had the curriculum and the things that I just, you know, dealt with faculty—

Miner: That's all?

Muirhead: That was it. That's all—

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: —yes—had to deal with the faculty. And I had been—we'd been through these routines, I've been, you know, on the personnel council, which is one that deals with most of the faculty, a chair personnel and all of that. So, you know, okay had I had this range of experiences, and I had been here for a while. I was an alum, and so there were...some things going on in our relationship with the Methodist church at the time.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: Um, I was Methodist at that time, and so there were a lot of things that meant for one year, what—what harm could she do? Right—

[Miner and Muirhead laugh]

Muirhead: —which was the guiding—

Miner: I'm sure there was a little more than that—

Muirhead: I don't know. So that—that's how I came to be that—

Miner: But Ellen left on good—I mean she wasn't here for very long-

Muirhead: Right.

Miner: —she left on good—

Muirhead: Yes.

Miner: —terms, right?

Muirhead: She left on good terms-

Miner: —she left to get a President—

Muirhead: To get a Presidency. But, it was a quick transition—

Miner: It was.

Muirhead: —they really didn't leave enough time to do a full search, you know, to—to replace her.

Miner: And the nature of the job had changed, cause she was the first combined.

Muirhead: She was the first combined.

Miner: Provost and Dean.

Muirhead: Right.

Miner: Right.

Muirhead: Right. That's right.

Miner: So...you...and she ran up against a little bit of resistance being a female leader on campus?

Muirhead: Being Ellen..

Miner: Okay—

[Muirhead laughs]

Miner: —her personality doesn't necessarily her gender, huh?

Muirhead: Well, gender had something to do with it, I think. But—but Ellen was, she was very much an East Coast personality. Uh, she was, she could be blunt, she could change her mind, um, she could be take no prisoners at times, and she was out of the humanities and didn't really kowtow out to the—to the sciences. And, there was some head-butting.

Miner: That's never happened since then.

Muirhead: No, and from the humanities point of view we just smiled—

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —cause it was their turn.

Miner: Yeah. Oh, really? So, that hadn't been the norm.

Muirhead: Hadn't been the norm. Hadn't been the norm, so...

Miner: Yeah, cause that's another, you know, really interesting part of the conversations that I'm having with people, is the dynamics on campus, right? Everything...everything is synthesized and sanitized and written and filed away and then some of the way things happen, and how different people got different opportunities on campus aren't really recorded, so.

Muirhead: Uh huh

Miner: —but, she came here before Minor. So, she was here a year before Minor, right?

Muirhead: Uh huh

Miner: —but they got on pretty well—

Muirhead: They did.

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: They did get on.

Miner: -cause he's not really East Coast, but he certainly was of that...um, area right before you—

Muirhead: Right before. Right, right, right. He came out of what he was, uh, Hobart and William Smith Connecticut College. Um, yeah that's—that's compared to us that is much more an East Coast vibe. [laughs]

Miner: Right, yeah. But, I mean, he grew up in-

Muirhead: Yeah, yeah he grew up in-

Miner: Ohio.

Muirhead: Yeah, in south Ohio. Right-

Miner: So, went to school in Minnesota—

Muirhead: —right, right went to...did he go to Carlton?

Miner: Yep.

Muirhead: Yeah. Um, yeah he...that...but...I don't know where we are. We're in the corn. The corn, corn country. He was not quite the corn countr-

Miner: Corn guy, yeah.

Muirhead: —and Ellen certainly wasn't—

Miner: Is that right?

Muirhead: One of the nice things about Ellen and this—this carried over with—with Minor, um, Ellen, you didn't have to explain racial issues to Ellen. You didn't have to explain issues related to the experience of women in—in the academic community. Ellen knew these things. Um,

her—her—her daughter was, as she called her, Jamaican Jewish Princess. She had interracial marriage, and, um, yeah they were just- there was just a lot of ways in which women, especially the younger women on campus were quite compatible with Ellen and the—the humanities people were.

Miner: And, so your time then your year, how'd that go?

Muirhead: Well, it was...Ellen did a really good job at her usual way. She said, "Okay here's what you need to know. If you need to get Minor's attention for something," which apparently was—was a bit of a trick, she said, you know, "you can get what you want, get what you need, no more than three sentences" —

Miner: Oh, bulleted—

Muirhead: "Whatever it is you want. Bulleted three sentences and attach it to something", and I may not quote her exactly, "attach it something shiny."

Miner: [laughs] Like?

Muirhead: If you've got something you've collected or you have an odd piece of something or other that, you know, that—that you're working at—

Miner: Oh, so physically—

Muirhead: Physically—

Miner: —tangibly.

Muirhead: Tangible. Something of interest, something odd, something that is in it of itself of interest. And, I can remember it was the time when...I don't know...I was wrapping, I had a piece of wrapping paper...that had was one of those holographic images on it, which were just being used in kind of everyday printing objects—

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —and she pointed she said, "Like that. Something novel, something a little unique, it can be something novel, something a little unique, it could be something antique or historical, but just something odd like that. Flip it to it. Send it on."

Miner: Did it work?

Muirhead: She said, "You'll—you'll talk for twenty minutes about whatever he's interested in at the moment and then you'll get to your three little items there." —

Miner: Wow.

Muirhead: —it worked.

Miner: Wow.

Muirhead: It was—was perfect.

Miner: So, it didn't have to necessarily be grounded in something that he was already familiar with.

Muirhead: He was interested in everything.

Miner: Yeah. Hmm.

[Muirhead sighs]

Miner: Huh?

Muirhead: Yeah...no I was... yeah.

Miner: Did you get a sense of how that—that looked? I mean, did you ever have any conversations about—

Muirhead: About how it—

Miner: —that—that kind of wide-ranging interest that he had?

Muirhead: No, I—I never asked, because, usually as we were talking it was about some particular object or if something had happened or something that I was interested. You know, we dive right into the—the thing of the moment. But there were—there were a few times when...I...I saw Minor...protecting the space that he needed...to...

Miner: His personal space?

Muirhead: His personal space. Um, one of the times that—that he needed to continue on with whatever his collection was or his obsession was at the moment. Interest, I shouldn't call them obsessions, since the whole thing was a massive obsession—

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: —but his interests at the moment and for the year, 92-93, when I was-was acting dean, um, much to my horror, I found myself attending a lot of events, oh, convocations and things, you know, you were on the stage, you were in a—in a robe, you were robbed—

Miner: Oh, that was the horror part? Not the event?

Muirhead: Oh, no, no, no. Not the event. I had to be there, I had to be on the stage—

Miner: Yes it—

Muirhead: —yes, instead of sitting back there in the-in the audience, um, with my English Department buddies, which meant I had to be robbed. I had to be dressed, I had to be kept—keep my knees together...for...you could not print that [laughs]. I'm joking, I'm joking.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: It all goes. You know, anyone of a certain age knows what I'm talking about. So...so, you had to, so, yet, you had to sit there and occasionally I would have to say something. I hate public speaking, just detest it. And, I always admired Minor, because he could. We'd have a speaker who would go on. Sometimes, it was interesting sometimes not, but, then, Minor would get up, thank the speaker and...comment substantively on what that person had said...It was an extraordinary talent, and I always assumed watching from the audience as Minor said on the stage with his little notepad out, um, or cards that he carried in his pocket. He was making notes about the speech, because he'd say, "and what you said about Michaelangelo, was..." such and such, and he would connect it to something, so I thought that wow he's sitting there the whole time. After sitting on the stage next to him for a while, I discovered once he was taking notes, vigorously taking notes. I couldn't quite see what he was doing, and I was trying to stay alert, and afterwards, he stood up immediately and make this very eloquent connection a—as he could. I can't remember the topic. And, afterwards, I said, "Wow Minor were you taking notes? And is that's how you're able to do that?" And, he said, "oh no, I was just uh putting together the list for my book dealer in California, San Francisco." And, he—he showed it to me, and it was—it was list of books that he wanted this person to search for.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Muirhead: It wasn't about the speech.

Miner: His head wasn't even there.

Muirhead: His head was not—his—he had to be there to the extent that he heard what this person was saying and made the click, made—made the liberal arts connection?

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —but, basically, Minor would use that time...

Miner: To?

Muirhead: To be interested in whatever he was—

Miner: the nth degree

Muirhead: Wasn't it-

Miner: Never heard anybody say he made book lists for dealers, so that's interesting to, another aspect of that scribbling. While many people think he was scribbling notes about the talk, cause I've heard—I've heard [laughs].

Muirhead: I—I can't speak for every speech, but the ones that I sat on the stage next to, there may—may have been something here or there, but, for the most part, no. He had an amazing memory. I once accused him of having a photographic memory. He said, "no,no,no I don't." I—I don't know about that.

Miner: Yeah, the people who can reach back that far make those connections that he makes—

Muirhead: Make the connections. Once, he, um...I had to give a speech to when we had prospective students and they were the students who were the, um, the potential double majors that we had the—the, sort of, high potential students that came. And, they would...drag faculty out, um, and I—this was I'm sure this was—was before I was stand—they had to drag a faculty member out I think Jim Rudy recruited me to give a, you know, speech, you know, fifteen minutes or something, which was dreadful, and, I thought oh lord, what can I say that won't humiliate the university and might interest these-these pretty smart kids and their parents. So, I came up with something which had to do, Ames was new, and, uh, about John Wesley Powell, and Ames, Powell's, and so on, so on. I worked on it quite a while. I got a pretty good reception from it, and there were two of these things, two of these—it's on the next time, the next day, or the next time they came, Minor, of course, spoke first. He took the guts out of my speech from memory. And, there I was with, okay...well he's speaking. I had to do a Minor, just to think of some different way of opening...the speech to get to the...core of it. I said, "Minor! You stole—

Miner: —stole your

Muirhead: speech!"

Miner: Have he heard you the previous day?

Muirhead: Yes, he was with me!

Miner: Ah! Dirty dog.

Muirhead: Wasn't taking notes.

Miner: [laughs] He was listening.

Muirhead: He was listening.

Miner: There ya go. There ya go.

Muirhead: I said, “you—you can’t do that to me, Minor.”

Miner: [laughs] What did he say?

Muirhead: He laughed. He laughed, or at times when we would have to work on things, um, I’d say, “Minor, I don’t do numbers. I told you that the beginning. I’m okay with my checkbook and a basic calculator. When you start doing percentages and average and this”, or “Minor I don’t read Latin”. So, occasionally, he would—he would hand me things [laughs] “here that, here this is for you, this is in Latin.”

Miner: Ohh.

Muirhead: It was teasing. It was teasing. That was teasing—

Miner: That’s fun.

Muirhead: He was very sweet and lots of fun...

Miner: So, you got on well with him and at time—

Muirhead: I did—

Miner: and that one year—

Muirhead: —and I enjoyed Minor. Couple of things Minor did, which has nothing to do with collections, maybe, maybe. Minor loved to be the first person to go to any res—new restaurant in town.

Miner: Hmmm

Muirhead: The first in the social circle of Wesleyan...to...go.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: He’d—he’d hear about this place, “There’s this new Mexican place opening, and such and such and such, over on so and so. Have you been yet?” We hadn’t. This is where in Holmes, right, so haven’t been yet. He said, “Well let’s go. Let’s go there for lunch.” So he’d round up whoever was hanging around at the moment, off we’d go to the new restaurant. Those

sort of collecting of experiences or there was a new, hot movie out that had just come out. It's the middle of the afternoon, Minor said, "Well you know this one has got great reviews. Have you seen it yet?" "No." "Okay, let's go."

Miner: I didn't know he was a movie fan. I knew he was a food fan.

Muirhead: Off—off we'd go to the movie. We'd go to the movies.

Miner: Wow.

Muirhead: Um, we had a fairly elaborate evaluation, self-evaluation structure when Minor—when Minor came, and I was accustomed to these with the faculty's side, and we all hated it.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: And-

Miner: Like, annual? Everybody?

Muirhead: Annual. Oh yeah. Like an-

Miner: Wow

Muirhead: Like an annual something or other. Yes, it was a bit of a nightmare. But, um, and an annoyance and most of us with the advent of computers would cut and paste—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —cut and paste and shifts slightly. And this, of course, came round when Minor's first year it was time for the staff and the offices and everyone to write this mass of annual reviews. So, usually, you'd get a call for it and piece of paper it's due by so and so, and so and so time. And, Minor was informed of this, and...um...Minor came around and he said, he said, "You all are doing a wonderful job. No report this year."

Miner: Oh, wow. Another reason he like—everybody liked him.

Muirhead: I don't know that that continued, but at least for the first year round he knew that he had absolutely no interest in reading these—

Miner: So, they would all go to the President?

Muirhead: Yeah, they—whoever—

Miner: Wow.

Muirhead: —or the—or the—or to the Dean—

Miner: —to the Dean. Lucky you. Wow. I never heard that before. I wonder when that started. I've certainly never seen any of them—

Muirhead: I think it—the beginning of time.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: Might've even been the start. [laughs]

Miner: Oh my gosh.

Muirhead: So, yeah.

Miner: Well, you mentioned two things, that I wanna come back around to, well three actually. Well, this one I think will be kind of brief, the numbers thing. Was Minor a numbers guy—

Muirhead: Oh my God, yes—

Miner: —was he a budget guy—

Muirhead: Oh my God, yes.

Miner: —kept his eye on things?

Muirhead: He was—

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: —he was, um, he was very good with statistics...he understood—he understood, he understood how numbers worked. Now you're talking to a person who understands that there are such people, who understand things, but, when he'd—he'd talk about, um, he'd talk about percentages and how we'd grown or not grown or what was happening here or there, what percentage of our students we needed to have full pay. You know, I mean the—the statistics, um, behind policy always came up when he was discussing policies.

Miner: Okay. Cause some people have characterized him as more of a big picture guy and let other people take care of the details.

Muirhead: You know, that was, that's probably fair enough.

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: Um, if he...when he was coming as a to...to be President, the recommendation had come from our—the Connecticut college, um, was he Hobart Williams—

Miner: Hobart Williams Provost-

Muirhead: He taught at Connecticut Carleton—or was it Hobart Williams—

Miner: —for a long time.

Muirhead: —that he needed a-an assistant who took care of all these little details who manage and that was Carl Teichman—

Miner: Oh, interesting.

Muirhead: —that he—he did—he loved projects, he was at many, many interests. There was somebody you had to make all the arrangements and, sort of, do that kind of detail work. I—I think as I learned during the presidential election, um, he needed a bodyman.

Miner: Hm, interesting.

Muirhead: Someone who took care of those...and put that together. But, he—he understood some of the larger—larger trends. I can remember with—with Bob Eckley—Bob Eckley and went to pass that Bob Eckley knew the decimal points of Illinois Wesleyan.

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: He—he—he truly did that, I understood that. Minor...knew...how the—how the big picture operated and I mean he might, you know, just as I said, he might know that if we had a certain percentage of full pay students then, we could afford something, you know, on the other—on the other hand. Um...once when...when Monica Taylor was the head of our minority—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: ...um, minority students—Student Affairs Office, we had a summer enrichment program, which was essentially, we still have it—

Minor: Mhmm, yep.

Muirhead: —essentially funded by State Farm, although not officially, but had funded by State Farm, and, we went through the process of selecting students to be a part of that enrichment program. And, out of the pool of students, we had more students that really qualified than we had been, um, authorized to find. So, Monica and I were gonna sort of bring this issue to—to—

to Minor, and you do the usual you gotcha—you got to say it's gotta be three points—three points, shiny something—

Minor: You were still Dean?

Muirhead: I was still Dean, yeah-

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —pretty sure I was still Dean at the time. And, um...it was not, not my budget.

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —not my budget. So, we went in and we talked to Minor. Minor, whatever Minor wanted to talk to us about for twenty minutes—

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: —then you find one, find this, we said we got one more, you know, it's not in our budget. He said, "Oh it doesn't matter. Go ahead and do it." I said, "but it's really not." He said- he said, "the money, you're just moving money from one column to the other."

Miner: Hmmm, hmmm

Muirhead: "One more student is not gonna make any difference. We're just moving it from one column to the other" —

Miner: Except for that student—

Muirhead: Except for that student, he said, "for us."

Miner: No, biggie.

Muirhead: No, biggie. It's not a biggie. We have to make a case for this type, we'll do it. One or two students or something. Something that, you know, by the time you finish with housing and stipend and put on a low vibe representative money that seemed to run up the bill, budget, he was, brush it off.

Miner: Not worry?

Muirhead: Nah, don't worry about it. Go ahead....so the small part of the money, either we worried about it and didn't know how the money worked or he knew how the money worked or he just didn't worry about—

Miner: Or he just did it.

Muirhead: He just did it. There was a bunch of, he just, he didn't—

Miner: He just did things.

Muirhead: He just did things, yeah.

Miner: How was he on race relations on campus? I mean, it's something that we've struggled with for as long as I can tell in Illinois Wesleyan history and—and trying to, you know, thinking of your...cond about balancing, um, campus. Was he—was this something he was on board with is, uh, is it important value for Illinois Wesleyan? Or..

Muirhead: I think he thought it was a very important value for Illinois Wesleyan. Partly through what he articulated...but also...there may have been people that Minor was uncomfortable with...I never saw it. I don't—I don't think I've ever seen anyone who was as comfortable, as at ease with people in that—in that way as Minor. I don't know quite how to explain it. So, he related well...to...black students without rewait—relating to BLACK students as a group, you know, for the quotes around. He knew...that the President of student senate was interested in such and such, such and such. He knew a student was actually an English major who...were that it she wanted to...she was interested in modeling. And you'd think, really? [laughs] Liberal Arts education, you wanna be a model, be in modeling? And, the next thing, she'd mentioned this in some context with Minor, the next thing I knew she was a model for something that the Pantagraph did. So she appeared- he knew someone in the Pantagraph, they were doing a bread or I don't know what—

Miner: Oh, how interesting.

Muirhead: —and Minor made that connection. Boom, there she is, and, I'm sure she—she may have been the first model for a Pantagraph, black model for a Pantagraph ad, um, that at least I can recall, but, I don't, Minor never said anything about oh, now we got the first black model. It was something she was interested in, he didn't look down his nose at it, he didn't say “well I hope after you have this expensive education that you can aim higher.” No. It was something, it was dear to her that moment, and boom. He remembered, he made it happen. So—so when it comes to, I guess, to say he was...had an international mindset...and in that way...he encouraged students who, to look beyond what seem to be the limits of whatever our narrow preoccupation about race—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —might've been.

Miner: Uh huh and I would say the, um, the same question about Methodists. You say the same thing about Methodism?

Muirhead: Well..maybe not so much.

[Miner and Muirhead laugh]

Miner: These are—these are themes that are coming up elsewhere, right? So, and you were in, certainly, in a unique position, uh...for...for observing some of these things so—

Muirhead: Uh, yeah, yeah. In—in many ways Minor could be a cultural snob. I won't say many ways, because, okay it was an elitist, intellectual elitist-

Miner: Was he?

Muirhead: —despite the modeling job, which he just thought if it's something a student is interested in—

Miner: Why not?

Muirhead: We were just as on the side, we were complaining, some faculty members were complaining about, something about students [laughs] —

Miner: Mhmm

Muirhead: -and Minor scolded us. "They're eighteen years old!" [laughs]

Miner: What do you expect—

Muirhead: "Every year, you get a fresh batch of eighteen years old, eighteen year old. They're eighteen years old! That's—this is what—if some student is interested in modeling or whatever it is, they're eighteen! Be happy with that." You know, this is a wonderful thing to him. Um, Methodism...the Methodist church...the hold of the Methodist church on the university had been loosened, was loosening earlier. He did not...begin that...um, there was a time when the Bishop, the conference Bishop sat on our board, and the, whatever the biggest Methodist church in Normal, and Wesley Methodist in Bloomington, those ministers sat on our board. We had a—our board was very heavy in Methodist ministers. And, Carl knows the history better, but, I have a feeling that—that Bob Eckley loosened that hold...as I recall the—the history.

Miner: I know it happened in the seventies, but I don't know all the details—

Muirhead: Yes. Yeah, that's—cause, I came in '72, and I—I remember that happening. Um...when I came for a campus visit as a high school student, it was under the auspices of the Methodist Church, 'cause, I was introduced to Illinois Wesleyan through the MYF—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —Methodist Youth Fellowship, and, we apparently had a Methodist Youth Day, and we more or less guaranteed admission to the—to the children of Methodist ministers. You know, and I suppose there was some monetary support that went with it. So our ties, we were not a church school, but our ties—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead —were pretty close with—with the Methodist Church, and, Bob Eckley started to loosen this and that, and then Minor...oh it was a big break.

Miner: Why?

Muirhead: Um, Minor...thought that as long as we, and I—I this is only through observation—

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —and the process, that as long as we were tied culturally to the parochialism of the church, we would never be able to make a step up into the ranks of liberal arts colleges, the—the top echelon.

[phone rings]

Muirhead: Oh, I'm sorry—of liberal arts colleges. Um, and he saw this in a couple of ways, and he wasn't the only one. Jim Rudy, who was the head—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —of admissions at the time, finagled a way to kind of do away with the—the Methodist with the, uh, Methodist Youth Day—

Miner: Oh, really?

Muirhead: —and part of Jim's argument, which he'd be an excellent person to talk to about this, um, part of his argument was...we cannot, we—we—we've evolved so that our admission standards really won't allow us to take every kid who's coming here from every little congregation...the average kid is not going to meet Wesleyan's, um, standards. We—we had grown beyond that in terms of who we were...as a school, and he said, "We bring a lot of these kids here, and, you know, we give them the tours and all of that." He says that at one point a lot of them could've—could've have been admitted." He said, "but that's not true anymore." So as a recruitment tool, it's not the most efficient use of our time and resources," and, I remembered that argument, all right, so that sort of went away. So for Minor...there are a lot of things about the church, which that tight connection, what the church expected us to do as a school, alcohol.

Miner: Mhmm, sure.

Muirhead: Many things--*in loco parentis*. The things that would be loosened, the university was pushing ahead of where the general parameters of the church would—would be. Um, one of the things we did...and this had to be my job—

Miner: Ought oh

Muirhead: —the church, or a faction of the church, a particular committee of the church, and Carl Teichman knows the details on this, wanted us to sign on to an agreement saying that we, that any company from the community that we did that Wesleyan did business with, um, would have to sign an agreement concerning the diversity in their hiring. In other words, if we bought...supplies from a local business, that that business would have to agree, in order to do business with us, uh, to a nondiscrimination clause. Carl may have the exact language or some—there was something of this sort, and the expectation was that Wesleyan, as with its historic relationship to the Methodist Church, would sign on to that agreement and then make those agreements with all the business we...

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: All of those companies we did business with. Well...Wesleyan said no. And, we were called to a committee to answer for our behavior, why we would not comply. Um, I think it was in Peoria, and the two people the university sent, me and Carl Teichman. [laughs]

Miner: Oh dear, oh dear.

Muirhead: So, here I was!

Miner: Yup. Right?

Muirhead: Oh, oh Carl and I both with these Wesleyan connect- we're both alums-

Miner: Right? Yeah.

Muirhead: —Methodist Church connections, all of these kinds of things, and here I'm black, so there we are.

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: So we had to go before this—this committee, which was really...they were really annoyed with Wesleyan. It was among, I think it was one of those times when there was a threat that we should be formally disconnected from the church, although we had step-by-step, bit-by-bit been separating ourselves. But this—this was a racial issue and this was...this was difficult—a difficult moment.

Miner: So, how was that decision made then? Was it just Minor saying we're not gonna do this? Was there—

Muirhead: I'm sure not.

Miner: -some sort of discussion?

Muirhead: I'm sure this had to be a board and I, you know, I...it was just this resistance. And, in terms of Illinois Wesleyan it made sense our ties in the community, there are a lot of different ties to the community, and how—how can such a thing be enforced—

Miner: Yeah, why would it be your job?

Muirhead: —how would you know and, and I think one of the—the major issues at that time would be that with, in order to participate in this program, which they warned us to participate in, it would cost us thousands of dollars. It can, check with Carl.

Miner: Yeah, that's interesting.

Muirhead: I remember, I remember this.

Miner: But, that's quite a burden to place on you and Carl to carry that message.

Muirhead: Well...

Miner: It must've been—must've been pretty uncomfortable.

Muirhead: Well, they wanted someone to show up, but Carl has a great sense of humor. And, um...I guess I've been in uncomfortable situations before. Um...yeah it—it was...you sort of knew [laughs] you knew what was happening and why—why we were—we were being sent, and we were somewhat amused by that. I was at least a little bit of amused by all the situations one might be in, this one I had not anticipated—

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —and, um, wow okay, um, it—it wasn't...it was difficult but not miserable—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —you know, let's just know the university can't, they can't do that. And, we didn't and, obviously, we're not—we were not evicted wholesale.

Miner: Right

Muirhead: Although, our, the issue on alcohol I think, um...was different. I remember it, the, only from a distance of the argument, was essentially we—we'd be liable. 'Cause, we cannot guarantee that there's no—so, they ended up being on legal grounds. We—we couldn't—we couldn't maintain it because we couldn't ensure it.

Miner: Then, no alcohol?

Muirhead: Then, no alcohol.

Miner: No, ye-

Muirhead. Yeah. If we made the pledge, there was no alcohol-

Miner: Right.

Muirhead: —and there was, that we were—we were legally liable and, at least, that was the way they got around it. And faculty then were-were much happier being able to drink on campus.

[Muirhead and Miner laugh]

Miner: I'm sure. Makes for long receptions.

Muirhead: I—I'm sure that the-the-the, um, residence hall staff were not pleased, but, um, cause it—it could not have made their jobs easier but—

Miner: There's always trade-offs.

Muirhead: Yeah, yeah so.

Miner: Well, thinking back to the beginning of our conversation and your—your comments about how your students saw Minor as a rock star, can you also talk a little bit about his interest in, um, students who had a lot of different talents? Did—did you say double majors and things—

Muirhead: Double majors, yeah, yeah.

Miner: I'm getting the sense that—that was really a new thing in the Minor era too. Do you agree with that assessment?

Muirhead: No, I think we had always had it, but I don't think we'd ever marketed it. I mean they—the—the idea was to celebrate, you know, we would say oh it's a liberal arts school. You don't have to come in with a major—

Miner: Right.

Muirhead: —and Minor sort of pushed the fact that you don't have to have just one major, why would you have just one interest?

Miner: Why would you limit yourself?

Muirhead: Why would you limit yourself?

Miner: So...but I would imagine quite a few students did just have one interest—

Muirhead: Yes, he did

Miner: —and—and faculty too, right? I mean, that we're quite content with—

Muirhead: Quite content with one.

Miner: —one—one thing or one focus in their lives. Do—did you get the sense that he was okay with that or was in some—

Muirhead: I think he understood...if faculty members' obsession—

[Muirhead and Miner laugh]

Muirhead: He truly understood that, you know—

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —that something fascinated you. You know, it may not have been—been entirely academic, you know, but, it—it, but you were, this was something that totally engaged you and you had this kind of enthusiasm for, he—he understood that. The—the fun thing about Minor was that he could be interested in your craziness.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: It wasn't just, "oh, yes that's nice". He for a moment might be fascinated by, and remember—remember the charm of Minor. You would remember that you were fascinated by such and such and that he saw a such and such just like the whatever it is you're fascinated—

Miner: Later on.

Muirhead: Later on and some point—

Miner: Would recall

Muirhead: His recalling, or he was traveling, or he said, "Have you seen this? Because this is about such and such, and I thought you were interested." You know, it was what he ran into, what he heard about, what he—from high to low. You know, it didn't, with his sort of, kind of snobbery about the—the intellectual pursuits, he still had a broad range of interests, you know.

Miner: Did he tell you about things that he saw? You might be interested in?

Muirhead: Oh, yes. I remember his...he was interested in coins. What wasn't Minor interested in?

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: And our daughter—our daughter's name is Lakshmi, and one of the early coins had an image out of India of the goddess Lakshmi—

Miner: Oh, my goodness.

Muirhead: —on it. I wasn't aware of that, but Minor called it to my attention and sent me a photocopy of something with a Lakshmi coin.

Miner: Oh, how interesting.

Muirhead: Yeah, just yeah. The sheet music, the stuff related to—to Harlem and the Jazz Age, yeah.

Miner: Touchstones for him?

Muirhead: Touchstones, yeah.

Miner: But he was an intellectual snob you think?

Muirhead: Well...oh let's say this...he liked...esoteric pursuits...were fine with him. I mean, it was not that he would not have a beer, but he was antiques, print material. Uh, history of the books, old instruments even if they couldn't be played [laughs] especially if they couldn't be played. Um, what I—what I think of is being the kinds of things that a university nurtures, encourages, um...enjoys, and its faculty and students. That, sort of, everything's—everything's welcome, you know, no matter how odd. I can imagine I—I have a-a one of our church members is a retired geography professor from ISU, and he is fascinated with ice. The way ice forms in the natural world, their kind of ice. Yeah, I get, Minor...I think Minor would be-would love talking to Jim.

Miner: Compare crystals.

Muirhead: Compare crystals

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: That—that's—that's kind of.

Miner: Interesting.

Muirhead: Yeah.

Miner: So, what kind of...impact does a character like that have on a place like Wesleyan? You have—you have a wonderful perspective, because you are student pre-Minor, on faculty, in the administration, and-and have had time to now reflect. What do you think?

Muirhead: I think...oh, I think about that, I think with Minor...it is possible with some administrations and at times in university administrations that faculty and staff are employees...they're employees. The bottom line is important. I don't [laughs] I don't want to suggest that it isn't. I really, really know it is, but sometimes the spirit of the place has to do more with the employees and the employees not making waves, and the employees here and employees there—

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —right. Keeping things in order, keeping students going through, keeping them graduating, you know, all those things—

Miner: The day-to-day.

Muirhead: The day-to-day. Um...I think Illinois Wesleyan has gone through a fit-by-phase where we, earlier, where we were the employees, and Bob Eckley worked very hard to get us on a financial footing and which we could start as a university to move beyond—beyond that. Um...when Minor came, in terms of the spirit of the place, the creativity, the liveliness, the spontaneity, we could imagine ourselves to be like other schools we may have admired from a distance. Other small liberal arts colleges that had these little nooks and crannies of odd, intellectual interest and passion.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: Yeah, we could be passionate. We could—we could be passionate.

Miner: The catch phrase.

Muirhead: And—and Minor was passionate, had a lot of sympathy and interest as, for the passion for teaching. I mean, for—for many ways you-you had a sense that this was, if you were passionate about teaching Minor would be interested in that, because that was-that was what he—that's where we connected with—with students. And, so, that seemed to be fundamental to

me. Um, it wasn't that you taught so that you would have a place to keep your book collection, or that you—

Miner: Or that you taught so that you could do research—

Muirhead: You could do research, right. And, you know, you could go and you talk to students for seventy-five minutes and go off and you do what you really wanted to do. I think, for—for Minor the connection and that's why I think he connected so much with students is that it was—it was the teaching. The teaching was important, and your intellectual passions fed into that, and the teaching fed your intellectual passions. But, we could be a place where there wasn't so sharp a divide between the classroom and your—what you're passionate about. Yeah.

Miner: Some people have thought that he didn't think very much of people who were not interested in pursuing research, and were more focused on teaching, but sounds to me like you would disagree with that—

Muirhead: I'm not—I was not and I'm not a scholar of the—of the kind that I can name scholars, you know. I never—that never—

Miner: Never entered into it.

Muirhead: —that was not—that was not what I did. I knew my field, and I was certainly up on the scholarship of my field, and I developed things and so on. But not—but it was—it was the classroom that was always of interest, and he—he knew people who did scholarly work. He was proud of it as a product of the university as they were and he was of them, but he—he—he understood how important teaching was.

Miner: Great.

Muirhead: Yeah, I never had the feeling, I never felt second-class...because of that. Yeah.

Miner: That's great. Um, can we talk a little bit more focused on collections now? And that's great—

Muirhead: That's—that's what you wanted to talk make sure—

Miner: It's—are you okay on time?

Muirhead: Yeah, I'll just—okay, sorry—

Miner: So, I—I don't know if you were aware before we talked today that university purchased his—his collection—

Muirhead: I've-I've been hearing that—

Miner: You do, okay. And, I mean, obviously the—the end of his life and the end of his time here was really, um, very deeply tragic for everyone involved. Um, but one of the things that I am sort of interested in and—and have heard over the years is how he would emphasize or push or influence different parts of campus in a direction if he didn't feel like perhaps the people there were doing what he thought they should be doing, right?

Muirhead: Uh huh, Uh huh

Miner: I'm trying to think of how can I, you know, not make a leading question here—

Muirhead: No, that's alright—

Miner: —but

Muirhead: —I know what you mean [laughs].

Miner: Okay, so and—and the books come into it, because of the library, right? So, um, one of the things that I understand was he was not pleased with the librarian who was here when he first got here, was Clayton Highim.

Muirhead: Yes.

Miner: And was wondering if you have an assessment of, um, that individual that you would care to sure, 'cause I think one of the difficulties with oral history is, you know, I—I've been thinking of it as, sort of, is the blindfolded person and the elephant, right? You know, so, people have little bits of pieces of information but trying to get a sense of a whole. So, what was going on in the library certainly before he came, after he came, and then through the transition to Ames is deep and abiding interest—

Muirhead: Yes.

Miner: —to me and is still quite important on campus today. So, can you take that and run with that?

Muirhead: Well, yes. Um, without having too large, because...the transition occurred when Roger Schnaitter was Provost, and I was acting Dean of Faculty. The facility, which...was one of those spanking new buildings was adequate, Sheean was adequate for us at the time and was quite a change from Buck.

Miner: Right

Muirhead: But, it quickly became clear that the windows, eventually years later, the windows leaked, we didn't have quite enough room for the collections, students were not using the library in the way which they had when I was an undergraduate.

Miner: Oh, really, in Buck?

Muirhead: Yeah, in Buck. It's a very different use of the, or even the way they had begun to use, you know, the new—the new so-called new library. Its uses had been shifted as the students' housing situation, the student population had shifted, and there were—there are many ways in which the physical facility was not was no longer adequate and that was—that was very clear. But, we also had cultivated, um, situation where our librarians were part-time librarians who really aspired to be faculty members.

Miner: Oh, really? Okay.

Muirhead: In the sense that the—the library was sort of what they did on the side and what they were really interested in was teaching classes as adjunct faculty or pursuing those particular interests. So, the library rather than the dynamic place that it is now, it really had become the study hall in the book lending space, which was an extension of what Buck had been but not quite what we needed moving forward.

Miner: As far as the librarians being more directly engaged with students and collections or in what way? What did you need moving forward?

Muirhead: Um—

Miner: Rather than librarians—

Muirhead: —we needed

Miner: —adjuncts

Muirhead: —we needed, uh, we needed collection development. We needed more aggressive collection development. We needed more books. We had a space that was central to the campus, in the center of the campus but not central to—

Miner: Sure

Muirhead: —what was happening in the campus. Um...

Miner: And, so, the leader of that unit on campus was Clayton Highum.

Muirhead: Was Clayton Highum, yep.

Miner: —and what—and you, um, he was retired then at that point or he became—

Muirhead: He became retired—

Miner: He became retired, okay.

Muirhead: I think he retired and then did take another job with the Professional Library Association, I believe, but, one of the things I think just from my sense and I—I think that Roger Schnaiter, who would probably know a little bit more about how the budgeting went, but I have a feeling that...the library budget was restricted. So, Clayton was caught in an awkward position. In order to innovate, you had to have ideas, but you also needed money. And, we were not putting, we were not getting the ideas.

Miner: From the library staff—

Muirhead: From the library staff, but, we also wouldn't have had the money devoted in the budget. Now wish—what should come first, or go together? There we are.

Miner: The—the eternal dilemma.

Muirhead: Yeah, dilemma. But, this had been going on for a while.

Miner: I don't know how long he was on campus. Was he—might've been?

Muirhead: It's been a while

Miner: Years too-

Muirhead: Yeah, no.

Miner: Was he also teaching?

Muirhead: No, he did not teach. No, he did not. Bob Mowery taught. I believe Bob Frizzell taught...um..hmm, I'm just trying to think what comes to mind about Bob Mowery taught Biblical Greek. Hmm, yeah, there you are. Plus, there's a technology revolution.

Miner: Exactly, yeah, big changes.

Muirhead: Which was already...already happening.

Miner: Yeah, yeah. And, it was interesting to me, because I didn't know anything really about Clayton before I started looking into this time period, and his particular passion, I think, was the early version of what we now know as our library catalog, our online catalog. He was very involved in that—

Muirhead: Uh huh

Miner: —so...that seemed to be his main driving thing getting in here. So, but he would've been...um...been gone about '91 or '92? Was it—

Muirhead: '92—

Miner: You were—

Muirhead: —yeah it was '92, '92/'93, yeah yeah.

Miner: So, um, Sue came in. Sue Stroyan and now Anderson came in and had, I don't know what kind of a mandate she had to change things, or...were you on any of those kinds conversations—

Muirhead: —no, what I remember, of course the building of Ames, I remember what seemed to me an outrageously short turn—around time from the here's the money, here the plans, build the library—

Miner: Oh, okay so later—

Muirhead: —for some—

Miner: —not in the early time was for—

Muirhead: —in the early time, yeah

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: I—I—I do remember Sue deciding or wanting very much to have librarians that were...primarily librarians and not teachers who happened to be librarians, and, this is one of the things that did happen over there. She managed to make that case or had managed to make that case about how to do that so that our libraries didn't essentially shut down during the summer, which is more or less what happened.

Miner: Oh, really?

Muirhead: So, she wanted to extend the contracts of the librarians so that wasn't the typical nine month contract the faculty members had—

Miner: Which is what they been under—

Muirhead: That's what they'd been under—

Miner: Oh, wow.

Muirhead: —that's exactly—

Miner: —that usually con-

Muirhead: —and again talk to Roger Schnaitter-

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —cause he knows the details. And, she had figured out how this was going to happen, which meant that some faculty members, Bob Delvin for one, would be, I remember Bob's response to all of this, there was a meeting in which people had been told were going to these ten month or eleventh month contracts, and we're increasing your pay. That's how it happened.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: Obviously

Miner: Yeah, well. You gotta work there longer—

Muirhead: You're gonna get x more money—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: And the money—the money was...it was essentially a—a pay raise as well as an increase for time worked—

Miner: Okay, okay.

Muirhead: But, Sue was...was very, very much in the library as the public service aspect of the library was one of her passions rather than the teaching. And, you know, any of the librarians there would—were, obviously, devoted to the—to the library—

Miner: Yeah

Muirhead: —and I don't wanna suggest just that they—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —that they weren't, but the—the status came not from the library but from their connection to the classroom. Sue...

Miner: Changed that.

Muirhead: Changed that.

Miner: It must've been hard for...the people who were teaching.

Muirhead: Yeah.

Miner: It must've been...really difficult time. It could not have been comfortable conversations.

Muirhead: Yeah. These were very, very uncomfortable conversations, yeah.

Miner: But, those people stayed on, right?

Muirhead: Yeah, mhmm.

Miner: Cause Bob Mowery was here for quite some time. He was an interim archivist or had archival duties.

Muirhead: Yeah.

Miner: And is still a scholar.

Muirhead: Is still a scholar—

Miner: So there—

Muirhead: —very much a scholar, right.

Miner: Yeah, active. Interesting. So, finding a way, I don't know much about Frizzell.

Muirhead: Bob Frizzell was in social science, and he moo—you know, where does he—where does he, where did he—

Miner: I think he had responsibilities in the archives too for a while.

Muirhead: And, he went to another small school...I thought in Illinois, maybe a Methodist related school.

Miner: But not immediately?

Muirhead: Not immediately. No, no, not immediately. He'd been—

Miner: So—

Muirhead: -he'd been disgruntled; shall we say for Frizzell—Frizzell reasons—

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: -for a while, and finally, yeah, finally went off. He went to someplace else.

Miner: So it's not like there was an immediate change.

Muirhead: No, I don't think so.

Miner: Well, the other thing that I understand about this time period with the library is that Minor started getting donations of books and—and arranging for those kinds of things. Do you have any—you're smiling what are your stories?

Muirhead: What I—what I recall is Minor seeing, and Minor whether—whether the situation served Minor, or Minor took advantage of the situations to serve Minor, I can't say, but, in all of these surveys in which they rank colleges, the size of the library, the number of holdings in the library would be important. And, Minor decided that we needed, we can't remember the number, say for 400,000 items—

Miner: That was the number.

Muirhead: That was the number! Oh my gosh. And, how would we get there? [laughs] Minor—Minor had a way to get there.

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: So, these collections added to our total. Now, Minor loved collections anyway, so, but, at least, you know...the public face of it was well we're gonna get to 400,000.

Miner: We got books.

Muirhead: We got books. We got stuff.

Miner: Yeah, that's interesting and—and certainly is—is something that it is, um, resonant in the library today. That attitude of quantity vs. quality, and it's-and it's not just in the library it's in conversations on campus. I have conversations with my faculty about this too. Yeah, so...I don't know where to go from that question. I mean, just sort of the observation of, you know, him having the library take on quite a bit of responsibility—

Muirhead: Huge.

Miner: —with which, with managing things that were not relevant to our curriculum and not of a good quality for our students—

Muirhead: The U-Haul, the infamous U-Haul collection.

Miner: —so, it—it—did that really happen?

[Muirhead laughs]

Miner: —did a U-Haul bring a collection to our campus?

Muirhead: We call—it was called the U-Haul collection, because however it was stored and then brought-

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —the exact—

Miner: Right, right.

Muirhead: —however it had arrived, I can't refer to it—

Miner: But, it was widely known as the—

Muirhead and Miner: The U-Haul collection.

Miner: Yeah, I think that's the corn belt, when the—there was a library system that collected—

Muirhead: Yeah we ended up—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —with the—with the, yeah I—

Miner: But, you don't think that the library suffered, I don't know, suffered is too strong of a word under, because it sounds like perhaps librarians who were teaching might've been welcome on campus, and then there was a shift away from sharing and teaching responsibilities. And do you think any of that hadn't been, you know, suddenly they're getting the President telling them what to do with their collection and, I mean, I don't know.

Muirhead: I know it was—it was difficult for the librarians—

Miner: Oh, yeah definitely know it was difficult for the librarians—

Muirhead: Oh yeah, real—

Miner: —I mean just, sort of, that you were—you were mentioning about the—the reputation, right? So—

Muirhead: Right, right.

Miner: —the librarians had their version of a reputation, how were they, was there a reputation on campus?

Muirhead: The reputation, the areas in which, and I—Bob Mowery, because he taught me humanities, I knew Bob best, um, and what he did, he taught in an area that no other faculty member taught, yeah that kind of thing. And, so, there—there was no question about his expertise or the demand, the need students had for that there-it wasn't—it wasn't that per se. There was a little bit of the sense, because we had students, we had our comp students go through to an introduction to library and to research—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —and there were these information sessions—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: —that were not always...skillfully taught, let's just say it was one of those hideous things. Why would anyone have to do it anyway?

Miner: Oh, it was a very careful way to put that. You're very kind [laughs].

Muirhead: And, yet—yet, it was a kind of situation that I don't know that any of us could've done any better given the odd group of fifteen or sixteen, eighteen-year olds who were in a huff, because they had to do it anyway.

Miner: Yep.

Muirhead: Who didn't—didn't have the information they needed necessarily when they got ready to do something and trying to give it to them ahead of time seemed to be, um, annoying to them. [laughs] So, so I had sympathy for whoever—

Miner: The thing that class—

Muirhead: —for whoever was trying to do it, you know. But, um, I think a lot of marching everyone through under the circumstances in the way in which we did is a much more of, you know, by the time we're in Ames and we got the dedicated classroom, it's a much more dynamic process, and things changed enormously.

Miner: Librarianship changed.

Muirhead: Yeah. It was—it was—it was different. It was different in that way. So, I don't think it was that the faculty minded librarians in the classroom. I—I think Sue saw that there was so much work to be done in the library, for the library, um...that she saw that, um...I mean, I had the feeling that it—it wasn't that their professionalism, um...wasn't appreciated, but that it—the time could be spent in this dynamic library. That they were the experts...and we needed them. I think, also, one of the changes (make sure cause I'm supposed to be someplace at lunch) I think one of the changes that...happened to the faculty is I used to...when I wanted African American Lit materials, I went to ISU.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: I sat on the—

Miner: Many faculty did that.

Muirhead: We got, and then when the system from U of I was always ordering books. I—what I basically needed, you know, in—and part of it is that ISU's collecting in Milner that big library of African American materials had gone back so far that they had the one edition that came out—came out one year. And, when African American literature being taught in the curriculum heated up, we only had spotty things, because of the size of Buck or the way things worked in the curriculum. We—we were trying to play catch-up, and for a lot of faculty, you know, we had limited funds for buying books and limited place to put them, but limited funds. So, if you were branching out or developing a new course or someone you went elsewhere, and increasingly we began to come with Ames and with the change we came here.

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: There were resources, there's money, and, of course, there's much more electronic material, and our librarians know how to use it, how to access it, how to teach us and the students how to use it. So, that shift...we began to see ourselves as having a very vibrant resource, but that was a transition. That was what—

Miner: Would it be possible for you to tease out the cause of that as a—as a Sue's emphasis on the library focusing on the library, or Miner's emphasis on getting more stuff in the library, is—is it intertwined?

Muirhead: Intertwined.

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: Intertwined. If you have that enthusiasm and that passion, um...I have spent hours in the... Bates and Merwin room—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: reading whatever—

Miner: Uh huh

Muirhead: because it was interesting and there they are and the seats are great.

Miner: The seats are wonderful, aren't they? Yeah—

Muirhead: So, that—that was, I mean, if it were a library only about what my—my own teaching area was or even my own personal development research for my teaching areas, that would be a very small panel.

[Muirhead and Miner laugh]

Muirhead: But, yeah a lot of us in the liberal arts tradition really humanities tradition, all of that stuff was of—would be of interest. And, part of it was Minor's...validation of saying, "you know, even these cookbooks."

Miner: [giggles] You have knowledge of his cookbooks?

Muirhead: I remember the cookbooks.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: Well, I mean, when you have Carolyn Nadeau, right? Who has done a major part of research on food and culture, you don't laugh at cookbooks quite as-as readily. So, it was—that—that sense...the...yeah. Yeah, Minor's—Minor's collection, although I'm aware it had to tax the library in some—

Miner: Well, the, now the Bates and Merwin collection—

Muirhead: —that's a different

Miner: Yeah that's—

Muirhead: —award-winning. Its collected—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —award—winning—award-winning books. But, um, processing and cataloging, and it cost money to—to maintain. I know to maintain and to catalog—

Miner: Yeah.

Muirhead: —prepare it for the show.

Miner: Yeah, so, when Minor died and the university purchased his collection, we ultimately auctioned it. And, one of the things I mentioned that I'm trying to write about it, you know, how all that happened and what he had, what we sold, what remains. How do you think he would've thought about that decision? What do you think he would've that about that?

Muirhead: You know...it's hard—it's hard to say...he had things because he was interested in things. And there were—there were some things that I found that I used for class for a while and then, eventually, I just gave him music, like sheet music that I found in various places, because it would fascinate him, you know. Um...but he—and he lent stuff to us, you know, if you needed for the classroom, I wanted to have that sheet music to show the Jazz Age kids or if Dan Terkla needed early manuscripts, you know, something that—that you could always get it from Minor's collection. So, I am—I imagine in a perfect world, in an ideal world everything might've been...available for us when we—when we needed it, but, without Minor's enthusiasm...we had to be practical, unless we're planning to build a—an addition to Ames. Um, yeah. I'm not—I'm not sure, I'm not—I'm not sure.

Miner: Some collectors enjoy collecting, and then, dispersing their collection, and then, rebuilding it. Do you have a sense that that was him, or he would collect in a mass and keep—you said he lent things but did he—did he—

Muirhead: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Miner: —did he give you things? Well, you said he didn't, but he showed you—

Muirhead: He showed me, he showed—

Miner: —and told you things

Muirhead: —showed things that there's anything I needed or wanted for the classroom, off he went. There you are. Yeah, show your class, class or the students. So, there was always that making it available, you know, having—having that. And, I—I can't—I can't imagine Minor dispersing his collection as long as he was there...to impersonally enjoy it.

Miner: And, his enthusiasm—

Muirhead: His enthusiasm—

Miner: —is—is...sounds like it was equally important if not more than the objects and the things that he was sharing.

Muirhead: You know, that's really the case. That—that was—that was what was on. Yeah.

Miner: Are there other things you think of that we should know about Minor or...

Muirhead: Hmm...I think, um...there are times when for the sake of the, um, shall we say for the sake of the community or process, you would want Minor to do something. Let's say...follow up on a rule, or guideline, or a process that did x, y, or z should happen, and he was most reluctant to do things that...not that he didn't do it, but do things that injured people.

Miner: How so?

Muirhead: I think there had been a few times I have heard that Minor fired someone.

Miner: Like a faculty member or—

Muirhead: No a staff—

Miner: Staff.

Muirhead: —staff member.

Miner: Okay.

Muirhead: Or something, in that way in which he was kind of direct, um, but you had to do something that was egregious that—that injured...the—that injured the body of the com—the—the academic—

Miner: Sure.

Muirhead: —it was illegal, or it was, you know, something—

Miner: —with cause.

Muirhead: —with cause, with serious, serious cause. There are other times, if you were just an idiot...some my years as Dean—

Miner: Right?

Muirhead: —if you were just an idiot, and something should happen to you...Minor was...[laughs] well...well, kinda, maybe something sorta.

Miner: What do you mean?

Muirhead: Well, he would—he would—there—there was a faculty member who...um...cost us, essentially a chunk of money because of something that person...did that was more in the violation of—of—of contractual, somewhat contractual nature. And, there should've been a repercussion, in other words, some money that was caught should've been paid back...and Miner just said, "Well...how bout a little of the money." [laughs]

Miner: [laughs] So, you could be lenient in some cases.

Muirhead: Yeah, it was, sort of, you know, we—were were all human in that sense, and if you violated, if you put the university in some kind of real, real situation that sort of violated ethics of sorts, or your job, or...did something really egregious to students, yeah, but, Miner, I think as we were hiring Miner, people had said that he had a way of allowing people to maintain face while...moving them on. This was his, he would have that reputation.

Miner: Oh, even coming—

Muirhead: People coming in—

Miner: Interesting.

Muirhead: —hearing that about him. And, I think, to the—the short time I—I saw things of this sort, he really did...pretty much allow people to say—to save face.

Miner: So, you got the person you interviewed and knew coming in, and that's how he turned out to be.

Muirhead: Turned out to be, yeah. It's great. Not a perfect person, I suppose in any ways, but we—we got a real jolt of energy...that—that and playfulness and entertainment.

[Muirhead and Miner laugh]

Miner: It's great.

Muirhead: Yeah.

Miner: I really appreciate...your stories and your time.

Muirhead: Thank you. I was taking so much of your time, I realize.

Miner: I—you can take more. I just wanna be respectful of your time. If you have other stories, I got—you are welcome to stay.

Muirhead: It's only—that's even more than I thought of when I was—came in. You reminded me of quite a few things.

Miner: Well, if you think about others—

Muirhead: Some of those—

Miner: —happy to hear em.

Muirhead: Um, [coughs] one totally irrelevant story, but, of course, this is Ellen, Minor's Ellen—

Miner: —oh, yeah, the other Ellen

Muirhead: —that's the other Ellen

Miner: —okay

Muirhead: -Minor's Ellen, who I really, really liked Ellen. She was quite the character.

Miner: Did you?

Muirhead: Yeah. She was quite the riding round town on her bicycle [laughs] totally unpretentious. Very much the egalitarian—

Miner: Oh, was she?

Muirhead: Yeah, she was a—a, she is still a neat, um, a neat person. But, Dan Terkla, a faculty member, English and Stacy Shimuzu got married, and they sprung the wedding on...on their friends. We—we kind of thought—thought something was up—

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: —Dan's family was visiting, and I can't remember if Stacy's sister was here, some of Stacy's family. And, they were just having a party, and, um, her family here, and, as a matter of fact, a couple of us who read the Pantagraph, which apparently not that many people noticed in the—in the Pantagraph publishes marriage licenses when you apply for them, and, so, I noticed [gasps] they've applied for marriage license, but this wasn't widely known. So, there was a party like another couple days and then, night, and in the middle of the party, as in Minor and Ellen were there, and everyone, you know, was there and dances. "Well, since we have you all here, we thought this would be a good time to get married."

Miner: Oh, aww.

Muirhead: And, they did!

Miner: Oh, my gosh.

Muirhead: They did! Um, but, Ellen had figured this out.

Miner: Had she?

Muirhead: Miner had not.

Miner: Oh [laughs]

Muirhead: [laughs] So, Minor, I remember Minor, as Minor said—Minor said—said to Ellen, “Ellen! Are they—are they getting married? What? Are they?” She said, “Oh, Minor! Didn’t you figure what the party was for?”

[Muirhead and Minor laugh]

Miner: Oh, that’s funny.

Muirhead: When Minor—party if you were having a party, dinner, an open house, a what—
Miner: They were there.

Muirhead: Minor was there.

Miner: Oh. Oh my gosh, that’s great. So, they had a somebody to officiate or—

Muirhead: Yeah—

Miner: They already had it all set-

Muirhead: —right in the living room they had all-they had all set up.

Miner: Oh, how fun.

Muirhead: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Miner: That’s great.

Muirhead: It was fun. Yeah, I remember Minor, one of the few times Minor was caught off guard by something.

Miner: Like, what’s going on.

Muirhead: [laughs] What’s going on.

Miner: Oh, that's great.

Muirhead: Oh, Minor, of course they're getting married.

[Miner laughs]

Muirhead: Her family is here.

Miner: Do you keep in touch with her and the—

Muirhead: No, I have not. I know some people who know—who know her and who see her occasionally and are in contact with her, but I haven't kept in touch-

Miner: I hope to be able to go out and see them in March.

Muirhead: Oh, wonderful.

Miner: Been in contact with Minor, so—

Muirhead: Yeah, yeah.

Miner: Minor loves her, so. Well, thank you so much-

Muirhead: Thank you

Miner: —and, I really appreciate it—

Muirhead: I enjoy—

Miner: —it's been fun!

Muirhead: -being able to talk about Minor.

Miner: Yeah, anytime.

Muirhead: Yeah. And, I hope there are a lot of people on—on your list of—

Miner: Yeah, I think I've had like fifty out. I should stop and count—

Muirhead: Oh, gosh. Oh, you poor—

Miner: Yeah [giggles].

Muirhead: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah. Well, thank you, again.

Muirhead: Well, thanks, thanks. This is fun