GLADYS BECKWITH

October 9, 2000

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is October 9, the year 2000. I'm Jeff Charnley, interviewing Dr. Gladys Beckwith for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial to be commemorated five years from now, in the year 2005.

Dr. Beckwith, you can see that we're tape-recording today. Do you give us permission to record his interview?

Beckwith: Yes, I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with some questions about your educational and professional background. Where did you go to school and where did you ultimately end up at college? Where were you raised, to start with? Where were you born?

Beckwith: I was born in Flint, Michigan, so, of course, I graduated from Flint Central. Then I went to what then was Flint Junior College. That no exists. It's turned into C.S. Mott [phonetic] Community College, but it was Flint Junior College then.

Then I came to Michigan State and I got my bachelor's degree here in English. I graduated in 1951, when I got my master's degree and eventually a Ph.D. from Michigan State. So I'm a true Michigan State product.

Charnley: From your perspective as a student, what was the campus like when you came as an undergraduate?

Beckwith: I was thinking about that just today when I was teaching my students over there in Erickson Hall. Of course it was much smaller, you know. It ended pretty much at the river. There wasn't much on south campus. Erickson Hall didn't exist.

Charnley: So the southern boundary was the Red Cedar [River], just about.

Beckwith: Well, there was some things over there, but I've forgotten really what was there because I didn't get over there very much. But the library is now the museum, and there was a library annex that stood where the new library is. But this was the site of the campus, this side of the river.

Charnley: The north side of the river.

Beckwith: The north side of the river. Right. Was really the campus. Of course, this side hasn't changed so much. Well, I guess it has, but fortunately we've been able to preserve the area around Beaumont Tower.

Charnley: Where was the English department at that time?

Beckwith: It was right where it is now. Some things don't change over time. In Morrill Hall.

Charnley: Were you intending to teach high school when you began as an undergrad?

Beckwith: When I began as an undergrad, yes, I think I was. That was the intent of most young women who were in English at that time, that they would go ahead and teach high school, which I did for a while.

Charnley: Where did you teach?

Beckwith: Where did I begin? I taught for a half a year in Ionya [phonetic]. My husband was a student here. He was getting his master's degree. I taught in Sunfield, a little community outside of Grand [unclear]. He and I taught together in Brighton. Then I taught in Athens, Ohio, when he was on the faculty of Ohio University. Then four years in Old Town, Maine. So I had about twelve years, high school.

Charnley: What was his field?

Beckwith: He was in communications.

Charnley: What was his name?

Beckwith: Gerald.

Charnley: So when did you ultimately come back to MSU?

Beckwith: Well, I came back sort of as he was pursuing his graduate work as a part-time student, summers, whatever, getting my master's. You know, I can't remember the exact date I got my master's degree, but through the early fifties there, summers, and I would take some night classes. I took some classes at the University of Michigan, through their extension program. So I put it all together. In fact, I didn't really even realize I had completed a master's until I was reading the requirements one day and I thought, "I believe I've got enough credits here for a master's degree." Added them all up, I surely did have.

Charnley: Your bachelor's and Ph.D., was that in English?

Beckwith: My master's degree was in English. My Ph.D. was in education with a minor in English.

Charnley: After your experience in the high school, what did you do in your grad work here at the university? Did you specialize in any particular area?

Beckwith: Yes, I did. Originally I was planning to go out and work in some field in education. I specialized in curriculum work and in the teaching of English.

Charnley: What was it about curriculum work that appealed to you?

Beckwith: Curriculum development. Well, of course, see, I'd had all this public school experience, so that was just a particular slot that was available, that accommodated some of the interests that I had and related to teacher education. The two went together. And I did a good deal of work in the behavioral sciences as part of the sociology and psychology.

Charnley: Who was your major professor?

Beckwith: Elizabeth Rusk. I don't know, have you heard her name?

Charnley: No.

Beckwith: Well, she headed the developmental English program. That was housed over in the old Quonsets. You probably don't remember those.

Charnley: I remember some of the Quonsets. WKAR was in there, and people have talked about the Quonsets mostly as living quarters, not so much as classrooms.

Beckwith: They were converted classrooms, yes. The developmental English program was there. It was a remedial program. That's what it was. And there were also some of the ATL courses that were taught over there, too. In fact, I think all of them were for a while, till they got Bessey Hall built. She headed that, and I taught there as a grad assistant.

Charnley: In the developmental English.

Beckwith: Yes. I taught one semester there in ATL as a grad assistant, too.

Charnley: At what point did you begin teaching for ATL?

Beckwith: Officially I began the tenure stream in 1967. That's where I began teaching. I never taught outside the tenure stream in ATL. I did teach some courses in the College of Education, courses in gender, during the summers there. Graduate course, actually.

Charnley: That was a field you were interested in, in a scholar area, besides curriculum, gender studies?

Beckwith: Oh, yes. Yes, very much so. That was just the beginning. It really didn't exist as a field yet. Courses were beginning to be taught in that.

Charnley: Besides yourself, were there any others that were on campus that were active in that study?

Beckwith: One other member of my committee, Louise Sause, she developed a course and she taught it during the year, but she didn't want to teach in the summer, so I taught it a couple of summers. When she left, it, of course, left with her. It was never taught again, which is too bad, but that does happen. It's going to happen to our Men in America, I think.

Charnley: That track.

Beckwith: That's an aside, whether it belongs in this interview or not. You can X it out if it doesn't.

Charnley: No, certainly not. It sure does.

Beckwith: But it does happen when a professor develops a course and leaves, oftentimes it will disappear with that person.

Charnley: How would you describe your work in the early stages here in ATL? Did you start full time?

Beckwith: Oh, yes.

Charnley: Who was chair then?

Beckwith: Bert Engler [phonetic].

Charnley: Was that when the department had a dual mission in writing and speaking, or had they shifted?

Beckwith: They had already switched to ATL.

Charnley: Concentrating on writing.

Beckwith: Yes. They had switched out of com skills.

Charnley: Anything about those early years, early in your career? You started as assistant professor?

Beckwith: I was hired in the summer as an instructor because I didn't officially have a degree, but then I did complete it, I think it was in August, so I was immediately promoted to assistant professor.

Charnley: What would you say was your scholarly interest besides teaching? I know teaching was probably a heavy load at that time. Did you have any research interests?

Beckwith: See, I was in a peculiar position, because my research interests were very different from the interests of this department. The dissertation I'd done was a dissertation that dealt with the English teacher role. Most of it was done in sociology, whereas this was a literary historical department with a writing emphasis, though I think at the time I came there was more emphasis on the literary and the historical in a way than there was on the writing. That shifted over time, I think, as rhetoric has come back into more play across the country.

So when I came, my research interests for a while were just really preparing to teach this course again, because I hadn't done that kind of work, though I had the background and so forth. Then I worked on the development of some of the tracks that we began to offer, particularly the film track. That was the first one. Then as the women's studies movement began, of course, the development of the women's studies track. That began in the very early seventies. Yes, it did begin in the early seventies. It did, along with some of the other people in the department.

Charnley: Who were some of those that assisted or that you worked with in developing the women's studies track?

Beckwith: Paul Carson was one. He was a person who was interested in women's studies. Did you know him at all?

Charnley: No, I didn't.

Beckwith: He's dead now. He was interested in women's studies. Joyce Ladenson, certainly, from the very beginning. Pat Detrie [phonetic]. Pat Detrie was, I think, the very first formal coordinator of what became the women's studies program. Who else in those early days? Sandy Gustafson, who was here as an instructor. I don't think Joseleyne [Slade] ever taught women's studies. I'm not sure. She may have, but if she did, it wasn't for long. Those are the names I recall right now. I think Bruce Curtis, too, got involved at a relatively early point.

Charnley: In the early 1970s.

Beckwith: Yes, about 1971, 1972.

Charnley: You were one of the leaders, of course, in the development of the Michigan Women's Studies Association. Would you talk a little bit about how that came about?

Beckwith: Well, that was organized by that same core group of faculty initially right here. We thought it would be a good thing to have a state organization to give some support to other programs. So it wasn't easy to begin a women's studies program. Did you know that?

Charnley: What were the problems that you faced?

Beckwith: Universities anywhere did not greet this with open arms. They did not. I mean, it was a whole process there coming out of the sixties, of opening the curriculum. Of course, if you open the curriculum, you necessarily are perceived as a threat to more established disciplines. We were constantly accused of being "touchy-feely people," [unclear] study, whatever. As resources tightened, too, there was a threat that you'd drain resources of other people.

So I think we had less trouble on this campus than some other schools did. Grand Valley, they had a program that started before we did, but they dissolved the whole college over there. Is it Wheelan James [phonetic]? And it effectively got rid of their women's studies program because all the faculty were gone.

But we had tenured faculty from the start, and some didn't, as I say. Some had non-tenured. If they didn't get tenure and if your program went, some places just didn't get much financial support at all. But we did get more here.

Charnley: Was there opposition on the board to the establishment, or was there support?

Beckwith: I don't think there was much one way or the other. There wasn't open opposition as far as establishing the program. But it's always been a problem obtaining financial support. We're experiencing that even today. For example, I was coordinator for two or three years, and I was over in the basement of Linton Hall. That was when we had the thematic program. Michigan State doesn't have a minor except in education, but other fields don't. You knew that?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: So we had what was called a thematic program. I don't know if those even exist any longer. They got rid of the thematic program in women's studies when women's studies became a major. But that was one of the big

struggles at the time I was coordinator, and we did approval of the thematic program at that time. But another constant struggle was to get out of the basement. [Laughter] Have you ever seen the basement of Linton Hall?

Charnley: I was a T.A. there in the history department.

Beckwith: Then you know what the basement of Linton Hall was like. One day we came, the secretary and I, and they had cleared the snow down there from their parking lot, and in doing that, the snow removal people had smashed the window and the whole desk area was covered with the snow that they'd pushed in. [Laughter] Down there was our conference room, a room that had some broken-down chairs. Literally, they were broken. And that was our conference facility.

So that was a big struggle there, to get out of there, and we did get out of there. Joyce, when I left, she became the next coordinator. They moved her, then the program upstairs, into that suite, which is a very desirable suite. It was the third floor of Linton Hall. I guess they got to move again. But that was very desirable, very attractive, and nicely furnished. So that was a major struggle to get out of there.

One thing that I think could have been kind of a positive for us in this sense, I don't know if any of your people have talked about the Faculty Associates and the move to unionize the faculty.

Charnley: No. Let's talk about that.

Beckwith: You really ought to have something of that, because the Faculty Associates, when it existed here, never succeeded. I was president for a while, as were some other people, like Phil [Philip] Korth and Mary Thompkins, who died not too long ago. Never succeeded in organizing the campus. It was backed by MEA. We were an MEA affiliate. But I think it did have a very positive force in being able to surface some issues.

Also in the early seventies there, we brought a sex discrimination suit against the university, with several named plaintiffs. All of this was going on at the same time that the women's studies program was getting started,

and although I can't say that there was a linkage between the two, I do believe administrations tend to be a little more charitable when a lawsuit is pending.

Charnley: You were involved in that lawsuit?

Beckwith: I wasn't a named plaintiff, no, but Pat Detrie, as I recall, was for a while, and she withdrew. Dorothy [unclear] in the College of Natural Science was. It settled eventually. That was how that was resolved. It resulted in a substantial settlement for the plaintiffs who remained on that, and I think also some closer scrutiny of the salaries of women faculty.

Charnley: Was it equal pay?

Beckwith: Yes, that was what the issue was, and it was pretty well established that salaries of women were not commensurate with the salaries of men faculty. Then, of course, out of that came [unclear] analysis. So that was devised as a means of trying to assure at least that gender didn't enter as a variable. But that was a long struggle to get to that.

Charnley: Some of the other issues about the Faculty Associates, who else was involved in that leadership? You mentioned a couple. Were there any others?

Beckwith: Bruce Curtis was, yes.

Charnley: So some ATL faculty.

Beckwith: Oh, yes, many ATL faculty were. This was perceived as a hotbed of resistance here, or activism. I wouldn't say resistance. Activism, yes. R____ Baer [phonetic], of course, who died not too long ago. But the leadership came out of here, the three of us, Mary Thompkins, Bruce, and myself. [Laughter]

Charnley: The unionization issue obviously is an important one. At that time the activism resulted. How did the administration react to attempts at unionization?

Beckwith: Well, I don't think the administration wanted a union. AAUP was also involved. But after that last selection, when Faculty Associates was decisively defeated, AAUP not so. I don't think that that was taken as a putdown of unionization so much as it was a putdown of unionization by MEA. Many faculty didn't want anything to do with MEA, frankly, because it was classroom teachers. As you may know, many professors feel that's a real putdown. Did you know that?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: But AAUP gained, as I recall. I'm not certain, but I think they picked up substantially. It may have been if they had persevered with their efforts that they might have organized the faculty, particularly considering some of the things that have happened since--the post-tenure review. AAUP is fighting that tooth and nail at Wayne State University. Well, there is no force left on this campus now to fight anything tooth and nail.

Charnley: When was the last attempt to unionize the faculty, at least formal through a vote? Do you remember that?

Beckwith: That was when Phil Korth was president. I don't remember the exact dates of that. I could get them.

Charnley: It was under Dr. [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.] as president?

Beckwith: I think so, yes. No, it was more recent than that. It was in the last year years.

Charnley: Going back to some of the issues that you raised about the Michigan Women's Studies Association, what were some of the activities that you were involved in as an organization?

Beckwith: Well, initially, of course, we had a number of other state institutions that belonged. We don't have so many now because then there was more of a need, as I say, for institutions to come together. Many now have established programs. They don't particularly need an organization. They have a place within the professional organization where they can present papers, whatever. But we had a newsletter. We still have a newsletter. We had the annual conference. We also did a study. We did a study of women's studies programs in community colleges and in four-year institutions. We had some grant funding for that. One of our members at Saginaw Valley did a large part of the work on that. We really need to do that again and see what changes have come about. One that's come about, I know just from little informal studies that we've done, is that women's studies has virtually disappeared from the community college.

Charnley: And initially it was strong?

Beckwith: Yes. It went the way of having resource centers and so forth, which are good, counseling returning women and so forth, but women's studies did phase out. I talked to Percy [unclear] down at Henry Ford just last week. They had one of the first programs. Their program has just been eliminated.

Charnley: How would you assess the programs at the four-year schools?

Beckwith: Most have them, yes, they do, and they are developing in the private schools, the private four-year schools. We are having our annual conference this year at Merry Grove, which is a private Catholic school. They don't have a women's studies program, but they are offering some women's studies courses, and their president is very enthusiastic about us having the conference down there because it is fitting right into what they're trying to do, which is to empower women.

Charnley: Is Paula Stover [phonetic] involved in that?

Beckwith: No, not that I know of.

Charnley: Paula Stover. I thought she taught down there.

Beckwith: She may. That name is very familiar to me.

Charnley: I think she did a study of Michigan midwifery, I think.

Beckwith: Did she? Because we had an exhibit on midwifery. That name is just very familiar to me.

Charnley: She had done some oral histories, too.

Beckwith: Could be that she's still there.

Charnley: So the conference is a key element of the organization.

Beckwith: It was, and we still do that.

Charnley: That's an annual conference?

Beckwith: Annual conference. It's a way, of course, of disseminating research, but increasingly it has become a way that students, graduate students and sometimes undergraduate students, can present their research and gain some experience in doing that, and maybe credential themselves a bit.

Charnley: How would you assess the quality of the papers as a range of research?

Beckwith: I'd say it's good. Yes, it is. Of course, it's been helped a lot, too, by the Internet now, because we can get the word out, so we bring people. People have come from other states. They did last year, as far as Philadelphia.

Charnley: Is the focus on Michigan women especially or is it just basically a conference of Michigan women?

Beckwith: We started having it on Michigan women and Michigan history, but then we've broadened it somewhat, so there may be some sessions. We offer it as an option. No, last year the conference was on New Directions for the Millennium. This year they chose their own theme down at Merry Grove, and what they want to focus on is Preparing Women to Live in a Global Society.

Charnley: So in that respect there has been a change in focus, a broadening.

Beckwith: For the conference, yes, but in the Historical Center and so forth, we're still focusing on Michigan women. That's our major project now.

Charnley: Would you talk a little bit about the development of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame? How are you involved in that?

Beckwith: Well, we undertook that. That's a project of the Michigan Women's Studies Association. It goes back to the philosophy of women's studies early on in the seventies. When women's studies began, philosophically it hoped to bridge the gap between the academy and the community, so there would be cross-fertilization. Time went on, it sort of became clear not a whole lot of that was going to happen, maybe less, because as programs became more established in the academic world, they tended to follow the traditional path. They had to. That is, the professors teaching women's studies and so forth had to credential themselves in the same fashion, research and publication, etc. There wasn't much room left there for community activism or participation in what's going on out here. Does that make sense to you?

Charnley: Sure.

Beckwith: Okay. So that's sort of different from what our philosophy was. So what we wanted to do was develop a kind of facility where you could do community-based education, where we could make use of the research which we had, but make it available not just to the campus, where there's a surfeit and a plethora of research made available, really, but out in the community where there's not so much and where perhaps people could take advantage of this and where we could be of some use in that way.

So we devised that idea of a center, and at the same time we had the idea of a center, lo and behold, here's this fine piece of property, the Cooley-Hayes [phonetic] house, which the city of Lansing is about to tear down. So we were able, over a period of about five years, three or four years, to negotiate a long-term lease with them. We had some little short-term leases, but we got a long-term lease on that property. We had to renovate it and bring it up to code, and that's what we did. We raised the money to do that, and it opened in 1987.

But increasingly a major project of that and of the Michigan Women's Studies Association really has been the caring of the Hall of Fame selection process, which is a huge task, and that has uncovered, I think, a good deal of Michigan history. We've sort of rediscovered women, or maybe discovered women, who we've not known about, and we're doing that all the time. Then, of course, those women are recognized in the Hall of Fame induction that we're getting ready to do again two weeks from this coming Thursday.

Charnley: How does that process work?

Beckwith: Well-- [Laughter]

Charnley: Thumbnail.

Beckwith: It's awesome. No, it isn't. But it is very time-consuming. That is, we receive nominations for this year 'round, but our big time when we really promote the "Send in your nomination, please," is January to March of each year. So each year we probably have about 100 nominations. They're not all new; some of them are resubmitted from other years. But when we close the nominations for that year in March, we generally have about 100. And they're divided between the contemporary and the historic that we have a total of four panels, two for the contemporary and two for the historic.

So we send all these forms out to the initial nominating panel. They get 100 forms to read and to screen. There are probably at that stage about ten, twelve people on each panel, and they read them independently. They don't meet in any kind of meeting. They read them, write them on our ballot, send them back, and we send them out to Maynor, Costeris, and Ellis [phonetic], the accounting firm, who counts them and tabulates them.

Then we take the top twenty, sometimes twenty-one, twenty-two if there's a tie. We send them on to the final panel of judges, who go through exactly the same procedure. Then the board does meet and we end up with no more than ten. The only role the board plays is deciding how many we will take and the distribution of that ten or

eight, will it be more historic, more contemporary, what. Then they are inducted into the Hall of Fame, as I say, at the dinner which occurs every October.

Then we have exhibits, pictures, information about them at the Center. We, too, are about, as I guess I told you not too long ago, about to embark on a videotaping project of the contemporary honorees so that we can preserve their memories and perceptions, too, for future generations. Then we also maintain an archive and build up what information we can about them. Some of them have placed their papers with us. More would like to, but we don't have a lot of space. So if there are any kinds of collections over at the Bentley or the Bertner [phonetic], whatever, we try to ship the papers to another place where there's a little more space for them.

But it's a very good way. We've got a good little collection of Michigan women's history building there. We've done some publication. We have our book, *Historic Women of Michigan*, some essays. Betty McDowell [phonetic] and Rachel Brett Harley [phonetic] have done *Michigan Women: First and Founders*, volume one and two. Betty's currently revising volume one, which has identified Michigan women who have done things for the first time. That's a really good reference, too.

Charnley: Have you found a lot of demand for that book?

Beckwith: Yes, we have. Yes, we have, for all of them. In fact, we're sold out of the first edition of *First and Founders*, volume one. That's why we're revising it. The *Historic Women of Michigan* we are reordering, and this is its third printing. It came out in 1987.

Charnley: Have you had much contact with the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls?

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: This is side two.

When the tape ended, we were talking about the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. Any relationship between the Michigan--

Beckwith: No. They were established a little bit before us. No, we're not connected with them in any way, although we have, I suppose, in some ways. I visited them very early on when they were just getting established. Actually, their opening, they were connected with a college there. Eisenhower College, was it? It closed very shortly, anyway, after they opened. But they had a great--no, that wasn't their opening. That's when they were declared a historic park. But anyway, we have somewhat the same pattern, I suppose, at our facility, in that we've got exhibits on recognizing the honorees and some general exhibits, and that's their pattern, too. They use a different pattern of selection, I think. But other than that, no, we are not connected with them.

Charnley: In the first few years, what were some of the real difficulties that you faced in raising money for the Hall of Fame? Did you encounter major problems or successes?

Beckwith: Well, it was easier to raise money then than it is now, because then there was money available from the state, and we did have some money from the state. You could generally count on about 25,000 or 35,000 a year. That was a large contribution, but it was something that we had, anyway, that you could use for operating money, so you didn't have to have a special project for. Now it's very hard now to raise any money unless you tie it to a project. Did you know that?

Charnley: Yes. I've encountered that.

Beckwith: You have, too, haven't you? Yes, that's right. And there was less fundraising going on. In fact, we got from the Gannett Foundation a $10,000 grant before we even had a lease on the house. Now, you wouldn't get anything like that today. That would be impossible to do.

Also there were some other things. Before the failure of ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]--I don't like to use the term "failure," but I guess that's what it was. Before the defeat, I guess, of ERA at that time, there was a lot of concern. Well, is "concern" the right word? You could get money more easily. Businesses, whatever, would hand over money more easy. The defeat of ERA had a really chilling effect.

Charnley: On fundraising.

Beckwith: Yes, for women's issues. It definitely did. There's no doubt about that. Another thing, while the struggle for ERA was going on, there was a good network out in the state. There was an infrastructure of women's organizations focused around ERA, but they would also participate in helping you raise money, and they did. We had fundraisers to help us renovate that house that were held all over the state, even in the Upper Peninsula, because there were groups up there who were fired up. I mean, they were into women's things.

Well, after ERA didn't succeed, over time now that infrastructure is gone. It just simply does not exist. And there's been a shift, too, and changes, I think, in women themselves who aren't aware of the struggles that went on in the late sixties, early seventies, and are succeeding in their careers if they're in the career world, and raising their families, and are overcommitted and don't have a minute for anything else. Or if they aren't successful there, they are women who are truly experiencing real poverty, and there are many of them. They don't have the resources. So there are a lot of variables now. Plus particularly in this state, where everything is privatized, there's a tremendous crunch, the pursuit of the dollar, by everybody.

Charnley: Going after the same dollar.

Beckwith: Going after the same dollar. I know you've sought funds for your causes, too, haven't you?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: Haven't you found this is the case?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: And at the bottom of it, anything that has--I've looked at letters of where people give. Well, anything that has to do with the history or arts is pretty close to the bottom. You probably knew that, too. And anything that has to do with women is even below that. So if you want a tough life, you just get started in women's history. [Laughter]

Charnley: You've seen the growth both of women's studies from the beginning years. How would you assess the field now?

Beckwith: Oh, I think, as I say, I think that the field has grown a good deal, and I think it is a firmly established field. It's not going to go away. It has outstanding academic credentials in many, many places. Ph.D.s are being trained that will go out and be the faculty for these programs. But as I say, what maybe was the philosophy early on, that women's studies would be the catalyst that would change the academy, women's studies never changed the academy; it got changed by it. You think?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: Yes.

Charnley: And there's still a continuation of the fight for other competing dollars and programs.

Beckwith: Yes, that's right. That is still there.

Charnley: On the issue of women's faculty issues, what changes have you seen?

Beckwith: Now, there I think there is a distinct improvement. Thinking back over it, when I was admitted to the graduate school, to the Ph.D. program, there were very few graduate students who were women, if you take it back to that level. There were next to no married women who were graduate students. Did you know that?

Charnley: Very few.

Beckwith: Very few. I mean, there was a barrier there. I remember applying for admission over at the College of Education, I initially started in the counseling program, and I hadn't had much background there, but went through all the testing program. I remember the interview I had with the person who was chair of the department flew into a temper fit. He threw all this papers across the room. I guess you would call that a temper fit, wouldn't you?

Charnley: [Laughter] I think so, when something starts flying across the room.

Beckwith: [Laughter] He said, "I don't care what her entrance scores are. I don't care. She's a married woman and we can't place her and we aren't having her." You see the assumption there: she'll go with her husband and we can't get her into a prestigious spot that will help our growing program. Well, there was another person there who at that time was very powerful in that field. He was bringing in a lot of federal money. He said, "I will take her as my candidate." So that was how I got there. Then as time went on, I switched away from him and went with Betty Rusk. Another emphasis, but I thought no one would dare to say that to a candidate today. Right?

Charnley: Of course.

Beckwith: They just would not dare to say that. So there have been many changes, positive changes, for women faculty. Well, the battle that we fought on pay, salary discrimination was a very real thing. One would never assume that women were going to make as much as men were going to make. It just didn't happen. So we fought out that battle.

The battle against sexual harassment, which was a real issue in a lot of places, that's ended, I think, too, pretty much. I think it may be ended altogether. But that was hard, harder than you might think.

And now women are accepted, not always easily, but in the fields where they never would have been before. We had a talk on Women's Equality Day by the new dean of the College of Engineering, who was recruited here, and she described in very clear terms how she was definitely recruited. Provost wanted her here and went out to get her and brought her from--where? Case Western, I guess. Was it there or was it Carolina? I've forgotten. But she talked about how she's much in the minority still as a woman in engineering. But she is there and she's there to stay, so even in that field, which has been a male-dominated field, there's tremendous difference. Veterinarian--many, many women students in vet medicine, and many women faculty. So you can look at a faculty meeting now and you will see many women, university faculty women, younger women. When I came, you'd see hardly any.

Charnley: The issue, even in the administration, you mentioned the dean of engineering. Of course, our current dean in Arts and Letters was the first female.

Beckwith: That's right.

Charnley: Wendy [K.] Wilkins.

Beckwith: That's right. Home Ed. Human Ecology. That was the place for women. That was the place for women.

Charnley: And nursing.

Beckwith: And nursing. That's right. Those two.

Charnley: How about education, College of Education? Not recently?

Beckwith: They did have women faculty, though. As I say, my advisor, Elizabeth Rusk, went to the College of Education. A member of my committee, Louise Sause, was in College of Education, in developmental psychology, I believe. But she said in her area she was the only woman out of I've forgotten how many men. So there were not that many.

Charnley: Gwen Andrew was one of the first.

Beckwith: One of the few.

Charnley: In the field outside of those that you mentioned already.

Beckwith: Yes.

Charnley: In social science.

Beckwith: In social science. That's right. And in things like Ag, Ag Econ, they weren't there. They weren't in the hard sciences at all. There was a woman in mathematics. I've forgotten her name, but there was one there. And there may have been one or two in places like biology, but few and far between, whereas now there are a great many.

Charnley: So that's a change within the last--

Beckwith: Oh, that is a change that I have seen.

Charnley: The last forty years for sure.

Beckwith: Yes. I have seen that change. I have seen many, many barriers to the participation of women in the academic world really come down, and it is indeed a new world in that sense.

Charnley: Would you say that the source of that change were changes in the law or was it academic governance?

Beckwith: Probably academic governance fostered it some, but the law was, I think, a basic thing, you know. You have to have the law to beat on people with sometimes. Yes, and then just constant work. Constant work, yes, to do that, on the part of women's groups that worked at this, and academic governance. It was all of those factors put together. It didn't really come easily.

Charnley: Were you involved in academic governance on campus?

Beckwith: Oh, yes, I was to an extent. I represented the department here. I guess it was the college, actually, represented the college on the Faculty Affairs Committee for quite a few years, UCFA.

Charnley: University Committee on Faculty Affairs.

Beckwith: Yes.

Charnley: Besides your work at the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame, did you do any administrative work within the campus or in terms of the department?

Beckwith: Not in terms of department. As I say, I was coordinator of the women's studies program. Other than that, I wasn't assistant department chair or anything of that kind.

Charnley: What years were you women's studies coordinator?

Beckwith: I'd have to dig out those years.

Charnley: We can look those up.

Beckwith: That was before Joyce came. That would have been--

Charnley: Early 1970s?

Beckwith: Much later than that. Much later. Probably mid-eighties. Probably mid-eighties, even later, because we had started on the Hall of Fame downtown, so it would have been mid- to late eighties, yes.

Charnley: Let's talk a little bit about teaching, your teaching experience, maybe students. Did you see any changes or have you seen any changes in students over the years, the ones that are coming in? You're teaching a class right now, even after retirement.

Beckwith: I like to teach, yes. I guess the students in the sixties were very different from the students today. They were much more of an activist persuasion, as the country was, of course. You could have some more discussions of social issues and so forth, which I still think is very hard to get with students today, who either are freshmen and just too overwhelmed by the size of this campus to deal with anything except how to get from one class to another. As one student told me, "I was lost today for a whole half hour, really lost." I think she program really was, too. She hadn't any notion where she was, hadn't a clue. So it takes a while with a campus this size.

But other than that, I don't notice a lot of difference in students, no. They are more, at least the ones I came across, the ones I have--well, in terms of women's studies, I guess, the students we had when the women's studies movement started, when we started teaching women's studies, many of them were students you could really call feminists. Yes, you could. They were very interested in the feminist philosophy and they were thrilled about that. Not so much of that today. They're sort of interested, but I'll tell you, they're also very conservative students. It's amazing to me sometimes, the interpretations they'll put on a piece of material. They go right back more to the fifties than anything else. Yes, they do. Do you find that?

Charnley: Not in my household. [Laughter]

Beckwith: Not in your household, but in your classes, do you?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: You do, too?

Charnley: Yes. And also almost an ignorance of what went on in that second stage of women's studies history.

Beckwith: Yes. Good.

Charnley: Nothing there. More interested in talking about women's suffrage and not what happened since World War II, in some respects.

Beckwith: Yes. Well, we have to take the blame. Not us, I don't think, but I think somewhere out there the educational system, we have to assume some responsibility for doing no teaching or including none of this teaching of an important part of our history for our students. Of course, we teach very little history to begin with, just very little, very little history, and nothing of that. I have students today, God, if they knew anything about Sherman's march to the sea. Not only do they not know anything about Sherman's march to the sea, they don't know anything about Sherman. [Laughter] But that's too bad, this loss of historical perspective, yes, it is.

Charnley: Or they're being taught by a generation of historians who teach it without facts or shy away from that.

Beckwith: Yes, yes, it is.

Charnley: No dates and chronology, some of that, which traditionally was accepted as part of that, what came before, seeing the interrelationship between some major historical themes. Students lots of times don't have that ability.

Beckwith: I haven't found any that do have, have you?

Charnley: Not very many.

Beckwith: Not very many. Very few. Very few. And it's too bad to lose that sense of the past.

Charnley: And for many, World War II marked the end of what they covered in their textbook in high school, so anything recent, or vaguely, if their teaching had been in Vietnam, they maybe talk about that a little bit. But many twentieth century post-World War II issues are not covered frequently in many history classes.

We've talked a little bit about the development of the Men in America course. Were you the driving force behind that?

Beckwith: No, I was not. I wouldn't be the one to take credit for that, because Bruce Curtis was really the driving force behind that. I worked with him, but he was the person who did the major amount of work in designing that. And it's a shame that that course is going to disappear, because there is a real need for that course. It had just come to the place where--well, maybe it isn't going to disappear. I don't know. You probably have more sense of that than I do. But it had just come to a place where in the last couple of years it was attracting a really serious kind of student. Some of our best students were in Men in America, they really were. Serious students who would discuss the ideas. Well, they wouldn't discuss them so much. I found out that was a difference between men and women, that men don't talk very much particularly in a group. You probably knew that, but I didn't.

Charnley: You saw the dynamics.

Beckwith: Oh, I saw it completely. But, "Okay, if you don't want to do that, then we'll just do more writing." So they did. Some of them really have wonderful journals. I had a student not last year, but two years ago, who never said a word in class, that student. Never a word. But he handed in a journal that was--that won't help your tape, but

it was a great big journal of just very thoughtful analysis of the selections, with some personal observations, too. So he clearly was thinking about it.

There is a new book out, I was just reading the review in *Nation*. What's the name of the book? *Are We Attacking Boys?* or something of that kind. Not very favorably reviewed by *Nation*. But anyhow, what the reviewer said was, in this country right now, if we would persevere, we could perhaps truly have a true gender revolution, where we could open up more options for men, as well as for women. We've opened up a lot of options for women, you know. Women essentially can live a man's life if they choose to, or make the same vocational choices, whatever. I don't know whether that's good or bad, but they can. But there aren't really too many options for men. Would you agree with that?

Charnley: Yes.

Beckwith: But we are on the edge of that, if we could get men themselves to entertain the possibility that you could live a different kind of life and it's not an unmasculine thing to do, you know. If you want to stay at home for a while and nurture your children, that doesn't mean you're less of a man. Whatever. But there needs to be another discussion of that and some social support for it. So I hate to see that class go, although I don't know if this is the department where it belongs, but it sure needs to be taught somewhere. But Bruce was a person who really had the ideas behind that.

Charnley: With his retirement, then you took over?

Beckwith: I taught it while he was teaching it. We taught it together. There were several sections offered for a while. Then I didn't teach it for a semester or so, because someone else did. Then I became the only person who did, and I was never successful in recruiting anyone else. So it's not kind of the thing where--well, I don't know.

Tom Dean taught it and he got a job, I guess, a tenure-stream job based on what he did, so it is something that you could do.

Charnley: Changing subjects a little bit, among our university presidents or provosts, are there any that you had direct contact with?

Beckwith: Well, through the union, of course, and I was on the Faculty Affairs. I had a good deal of contact with Lee Winder.

Charnley: He was provost at the time?

Beckwith: He surely was. Then the program was directly accountable to Jack Kensinger [phonetic], who was associate provost in those troubled times with the University College was dissolved and the university was establishing new directions, which it did in fact do.

Charnley: How would you describe Provost Winder's attitude toward University College?

Beckwith: Well, I don't think he regarded it very highly. No, I don't. I think that his was a traditional model of education going on within the traditional disciplines based more on the model of the University of Michigan, definitely a graduate research model as being the priority. Or at least that was my perception. Of course, it was under his administration, his and [M.] Cecil Mackey, though I never knew who was really calling the shots there, he and Cecil Mackey or the board, or maybe just a group of them altogether, who were really redefining the direction of the university, but it clearly was redefined at that time, at least to my way of thinking.

Charnley: Undergraduate education in particular.

Beckwith: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think so.

Charnley: The substitution of the integrative studies both in social science and arts and humanities and that sort of thing, how would you evaluate that compared to what was in place in University College?

Beckwith: Oh, not even close. Not even close. What we had in University College was a college that was--did you ever teach in University College?

Charnley: No, I didn't.

Beckwith: See, what it had, it was a unified thing--that was my perception--really concerned with the undergraduate. In the freshman year, freshman years was sort of a transition year. Students really came as high school students. That's what they are, in essence. They haven't changed that much over the summer. Those students who sit down there that first month or so, they're high school students. But when they left at the end, they were college students and they made that transition in the first year, the second year here.

There was excellent advising. Classes were smaller. The merit system was based on teaching. So people spent a good deal of time with their teaching. They spent a good deal of time with their students. The halls used to be filled with students coming for conferences. That's no exaggeration. You never see a student--or rarely, not never, but rarely do you see students lined up out there now. Do you?

Charnley: Not that often. With some exceptions.

Beckwith: With some exceptions, and there may be more conferring going on through the e-mail. I guess that's effective. I don't think it's the same as sitting down with a person, but to the generation raised with technology, it may be. I don't know. I wouldn't say there wasn't.

So as I say, if you're being evaluated in terms of teaching, that's where you'll put your time, and that's where faculty, for the most part, did put their time. When we were hired, we were told that's what we did here and that publication and research was a secondary thing. Well, as time went on, even though there were people who did fine research here during that period of time, but as time went on, of course, the value system shifted altogether. So I think the students lost substantially, but Michigan State couldn't be all things to all people. This is my analysis. It couldn't have two medical schools. It couldn't have all the development and the graduate program, and at the same time it couldn't provide the small classes, whatever they were proving for the undergraduate.

The undergraduate enrollment could yield some revenue that would help these other things happen, and it has done that and it continues to do that, and it keeps those dorms filled. I don't know if they've got the dorms paid off yet or not. Do they have the dorms paid off?

Charnley: I think most of them.

Beckwith: When they get out from under that debt, that will be a help to them. But it's a different philosophy, you know. It's just a different philosophy. I think that students can still get a good undergraduate education here, but I think a student has to be very selective, and I think this institution is not meant for all students.

Charnley: Any other presidents or provosts that you had any direct contact with? Provost [Lou Anna K.] Simon, have you dealt with her at all?

Beckwith: Yes. Not in any kind of capacity, just as a faculty member. I think Lou Anna generally is a person who has the well being of the institution at heart, I think she does. She has the same view. She was mentored by

Lee Winder, and I guess Lee Winder's still over at the Administration Building, isn't he? He was last year, year before last.

Charnley: Olds Hall.

Beckwith: Is it Olds Hall? Because I saw him coming out of the Administration Building. I guess he retired and came back, too. [Laughter] What does he do over there?

Charnley: I don't know. Advise the president.

Beckwith: Is that what he does? He's a consultant. Okay. So her philosophy is the same. They're clearly building a faculty here of high-powered people. Witness that dean in engineering. That's what they want to do, right? That's their mission. And I guess if that's your mission, that's what you do, and that's where you put your resources. Now, whether or not that's of value, it is, I think, in a sense, an advantage to a student, particularly once the student gets into the upper schools. Then they are well credentialed for the job market, whatever, so it's an advantage to them there.

Charnley: How about President [John A.] Hannah? Did you have--

Beckwith: I did as a student. He was president here when I was a student.

Charnley: Or the Whartons?

Beckwith: I was here when the Whartons [Clifton R., Jr. and Dolores Wharton] were here, yes. I was on the faculty when he was here. I think he was a real academic, yes. I think probably he was closer to the faculty model of what they might want.

Charnley: As a university president.

Beckwith: Yes.

Charnley: Rather than a manager.

Beckwith: Rather than a manager or a fundraiser, yes, which was what [John A.] DiBiaggio's strength was supposed to be and what [M. Peter] McPherson's strength certainly appears to be, raising money and building. He's building the university. He's brought all kinds of things here. That's how you do it.

Charnley: In your retirement, recent retirement--

Beckwith: I didn't really stay away. All of a sudden, there I was back again.

Charnley: What are your plans in the near future?

Beckwith: Well, in the near future is to get through this Hall of Fame Awards Day on the 26th of October. [Laughter] But I'll be at the Hall of Fame for a while yet. I hope to find someone to be there, too, so I'm not tied down to it quite so much. Maybe I'll do a little traveling. I'm just not sure what I'll do.

Charnley: You'll continue in your work at the Hall of Fame?

Beckwith: Yes, but I don't want to be there. I'm there full time now, and I would like to add to our staff so I'm not there full time all the time, because look at this beautiful fall we've been through. It would have been great to have been able to travel out and see the color. I haven't even had one day I could do that.

Charnley: Do you have travel in mind?

Beckwith: I may, but I don't have any definite plans. That would be nice, to do some of that.

Charnley: Among some of your colleagues that you've worked with, who are some that maybe stand out and have been very influential on you or with you?

Beckwith: Well, of course, in women's studies I worked with Joyce Ladenson a lot, who's a very fine teacher. Certainly I worked closely with Joseleyne when she was chair, Joseleyne Slade, I think did a fine job here as administrator of the department. Going back earlier, is that what you're thinking about?

Charnley: Any one that comes to mind that you think for the record deserves mention. Sometimes when people are looking at archival records, it's hard to determine who were the important influences, and in this case, faculty.

Beckwith: I can think of people I wouldn't say who necessarily were important influences on me, but I could think of maybe who were important in this department. Is that--

Charnley: That's fine, too.

Beckwith: People like Fred Reeves. Has anyone mentioned Fred Reeves?

Charnley: No.

Beckwith: Fred Reeves was here. He was an outstanding teacher, just no question of that. Jane Ann Barkall [phonetic], who I'm still friends with, who has had miserable, awful health problems, but Jane is, was--I don't now how to phrase this since she's not teaching anymore--an outstanding teacher. In fact, on one occasion I went down to the emergency room with Jane. She's had, as I say, some awful problems. One of the young residents that we met down there came up to her and said, "Aren't you Professor Barkall, Dr. Barkall?" She said yes. He said, "Your course was one of the best courses I ever took at Michigan State." I think the courses we taught here was that. I say "taught." I'm not sure, since we went to that semester system, just the one semester. But for many students, I think early on it was. But she was one.

Who else? Jane Featherstone, who headed up the developmental program, I worked with Jane. We established a tutoring program. I think Jane did some wonderful things in terms of the developmental program for students who were not quite prepared.

As soon as I get out of here, I'll think of a whole ton more. Who else? Certainly Phil Korth, who I worked with closely in the union movement. Of course, Phil went on into the dean's office.

Chris Bergwell [phonetic], who's still here. Chris is-- [Tape interruption]

Charnley: This is tape two. When the first tape ended, we were talking about faculty that had been an important influence on Dr. Beckwith. One of the things that I usually ask at the end is for some reflective statement. As you look back on your career here at Michigan State University, is there anything that just stands out as maybe most important or rewarding?

Beckwith: I think the experience with the students. Classroom experience stands out to me and the impact one has on these young people. I'll occasionally meet students who've grown up. That's the phrase you use, who are out in

the community and who will meet me and say, "I was in this class" or that class, "and I really enjoyed it." There must be some out there who clearly didn't enjoy it. I probably don't meet them, or if I do, they don't say anything. [Laughter] But I think that that's probably the most rewarding thing to me, and maybe that's where you make the most lasting impact with the things you do in a lifetime, the influence that you have on other people.

And certainly it's been good to work with the people that I worked with her, because there are some fine people in this department. And all the struggles and battles I've had over the years for survival, that's not so pleasant. Probably makes some kind of a statement.

Charnley: I want to thank you, on behalf of the project. I appreciate your insights.

Beckwith: Thank you. Thank you for asking me.

[End of interview]

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