FREDERICK D. WILLIAMS

October 1, 2003

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Wednesday, October 1st, the year 2003. We're in East Lansing, Michigan. I am Professor Jeff Charnley interviewing Dr. Frederick D. Williams for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution to be commemorated in the year 2005.

We're at Dr. Williams' home, and for the record, at the outset we should probably say that Professor Williams and I had a teacher-student relationship, and he directed my dissertation and I was his teaching assistant for several years, from 1978 to 1983.

Williams: A good student and a good assistant.

Charnley: As you can see, we have a tape recorder here today for this oral history interview. Professor Williams, do you give us permission to record this interview?

Williams: I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with some general questions about your personal background. Where were you born and raised?

Williams: I was born in Braintree, Vermont, which is in Orange County, about thirty-three miles south of Montpelier, on a 300-acre farm. My parents moved two years after I was born, to Palmer, Massachusetts, where I did all my elementary and secondary education.

Charnley: What year were you born?

Williams: 1918. I'm eighty-five years old.

Charnley: Did you come from a farming family, or they just lived on a farm?

Williams: My father had farmed, but he had also gone into the steel industry, American Steel and Wire Company, when he lived in New Haven, Connecticut. He had done a number of odd jobs, as men at the turn of the century did, including weaving. But he got interested in steel, steel products, and he became foreman of the testing department of American Steel and Wire Company in New Haven. But he missed farming a lot, and so he moved back to the farm that his father was keeping where I was born and where he was born.

That was in 1914. He was there until 1920, but he could see no progress being made, because his father didn't want to share. So he wrote to a friend that he had known in New Haven at American Steel and Wire Company, who is now superintendent of the wire and rope factory in Palmer, Massachusetts, and wrote a letter asking him if there was anything available. The letter that came back apparently said there sure was, because my dad was general foreman in no time and then became superintendent of the wire section of the wire and rope mill. The man that he had known in

New Haven was superintendent of the whole plant, Carl King. That was the position that he held while I was going through school in Palmer.

Charnley: Did World War I production affect the demand for the steel and wire rope?

Williams: Yes, yes, and as a matter of fact, in order to make things go, he had to go out and trap, and he trapped muskrats, foxes, raccoons, and so on.

Charnley: To supplement.

Williams: Yes. He got a pretty good price for pelts then, too.

Charnley: Where did you go to high school?

Williams: Palmer.

Charnley: Did you play sports?

Williams: I played tennis. I would like to have played baseball and football, but I loved fishing and hunting too much to show up for the practice. So I just played tennis, and I was number one on the tennis team.

Charnley: Were there any high school teachers that had an important influence on you or directed you toward college?

Williams: No, no, I don't think so. I had it in mind to go to college from day one, I think.

Charnley: Where did you go after graduation?

Williams: Well, first I worked four years in a steel mill.

Charnley: Oh, you did?

Williams: Yes, I went in and worked in the rope mill, and I said that I would work until I had what I thought would be enough money to go to college. In the spring of 1940, I felt that I had enough money to strike out, so I applied at Middlebury College in Vermont and was accepted.

Charnley: Obviously World War II was going on while you were in college.

Williams: Yes.

Charnley: How did that shape your educational career and life?

Williams: Well, we probably knew—well, not probably. We felt strongly that we were going to get into it sooner or later, and, of course, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of '41, we did. Then it was a question of what service you were going to be in, and at Middlebury I had a history teacher and who had been an ace in World War I. His name was Waldo H. Heinrichs [phonetic]. I visited with him one day in his office, and he said, "Why don't you go down to Rutland and sign up for the Air Corps."

So I did that, and on the particular day that I went down, there were nine of us from different parts of the State of Vermont, and I was the only one that passed both the physical and the intellectual exam.

Charnley: Did your teacher tell you what he flew in the war?

Williams: Yes. Well, he flew fighter planes, and on his thirteenth mission, he was shot down. I mean, not thirteenth mission, but after he had shot down thirteen planes. He was an ace. He ran into trouble with his guns as he was attacking a German plane, and, lo and behold, two were on his tail in no time while he was trying to fix his guns, and he was shot down. He had a left arm that he had to carry in his pocket, and he was shot through the mouth. He said that when the bullet came out, he spit out about sixteen teeth. And, of course, he couldn't see, and he tried to wipe off the windshield and did.

But he just wasn't going to make it, so he went in and saw he was going over trees, and just before he was going to hit the ground, a field appeared. He hit a telephone pole with one of his wings and was turned upside down. In no time, Germans were there, and I think it was a German

captain, whatever, asked him what his name was. He said, "Waldo Heinrichs." He looked at him and said, "Ich bien Heinrichs" also. [Laughter] But he got some fairly decent care, and he was a marvelous man.

Charnley: Had you flown at all before going into the Army Air Corps?

Williams: I went up to Vermont one weekend to visit my grandmother, and there was a barnstormer there when I was twelve years old. My dad and I went up in an open cockpit plane. That was the only time I'd ever—

Charnley: A biplane?

Williams: Yes.

Charnley: I know your grandson has talked with you about your war experience, and one of the things that we've been talking about in these interviews are how many MSU faculty in the fifties and sixties were World War II vets. Would you talk maybe just briefly about your war experience?

Williams: Sure. I left Vermont for Maxwell Field, Alabama, in Montgomery, Alabama, in June of '42. Then after preflight, which is when you get your hazing and so on and so forth as an underclassman, and went through upperclass, then we got assigned. We didn't know where we were going. As it happened, I was assigned to primary training at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and you

had to put in sixty hours at primary and basic and advanced, if you made it. Of course, the one fear was washing out, and you worried about that all through your cadet training. But we flew in primary a PT Stearman, a biplane.

One of the craziest experiences I had was when I was up doing some aerobatics, which I loved, I happened to fly into a flock of buzzards and one of them hit the plane and it was flown over and lodged in the wing. Of course, I was very concerned about the prop. I was lucky, and I came in and landed. We had African Americans to park us, and he signaled me in, and all of a sudden, he bent over laughing. When I came out, I could see why. The front of the plane was just covered with feathers and other stuff. [Laughter]

Well, then after sixty hours, I was sent to basic training in Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. That was a hellhole. The base had just opened, there were no sidewalks, mud everywhere, and the satisfaction was that you were flying a plane that had some real pep to it, the Basic Trainer. After sixty hours of that, I was sent to George Field for advanced twin-engine training, and after that I was assigned as an instructor right there in the same squadron that I graduated from. I had put in for combat, but, as I told Andy, if you didn't get a pink slip all the way through your training, you were eligible to be an instructor. So I instructed for about fifteen months.

Charnley: Pink slips were like demerits? Bad flying.

Williams: Yes. The field was deactivated in the summer of 1944, and I went to Chanute Field to train for transition in B-24s, the Liberator.

After the training there, I was sent to Tucson, Arizona, Davis-Monthan Air Base, and did my combat training there and then was sent to Topeka, Kansas, and there I picked up my plane. I'd already picked up my crew at Tuscaloosa. I picked up my plane and flew from Topeka to G_____ Field, New Hampshire, and there we were given our orders in a sealed envelope and told not to open it until we were at least a half an hour out of base. So we opened it and we found out where we were going.

We were going to Italy, and we flew from G_____ Field to Bermuda, where we were weathered in for about eight days. They finally sent us off, and they sent us off in an awful storm. Boy, it was just a son-of-a-gun. We broke out of it about two hours before we got to the Azores, so after we broke out of the storm, we broke out coffee and sandwiches, and there was some shouting because the air was just so smooth after that.

Charnley: Quite a contrast.

Williams: Well, yes. Then from the Azores to Marrakech, Marrakech to—what do I want to say?

Charnley: Did you go right to Italy from Marrakech?

Williams: No, right across.

Charnley: Tunisia?

Williams: No. The state next to Morocco.

Charnley: Tripoli.

Williams: Tripoli, absolutely. We landed at Tripoli, right where the Germans had evacuated, and you could see all the remnants of their evacuation, rusting hulks and stuff. Then we flew from there to central Italy, where we were assigned to our squadrons and group. I was assigned to a group that was stationed near Taranto, Italy, in the heel of the boot where the British in 1942 had just about destroyed the Italian Navy completely. Where we flew in Italy was C_____, where the so-called West Point of the Air, Mussolini's principal airbase, or one of them.

Charnley: The base at that time was secure, wasn't it?

Williams: Oh, yes. The line at that time was up at D'Arno.

Charnley: So, quite a bit way north.

Williams: Way north, yes.

Charnley: Some of the combat experiences that you had, how many missions did you have in total?

Williams: Eighteen. I must say that having instructed for as long as I did and so on, by the time I got over there, the old pilots that flew Ploesti and so on would say they were milk runs, but, of course, none of them are really milk runs. But comparatively speaking, they were. So I can't say that we had anything like they experienced, because I only saw one German fighter on the missions that I flew, and he was shot down.

I guess the most harrowing experiences were two. One, we had to bomb Linz, Austria, and it was on the rail line from Germany through to the Russian front. But we were bombing it on this particular occasion, because the Tiger Tank Works were there. So when we got up there, the clouds had dropped to about 18,000 feet. We usually bombed at 24, 25, 26, not any higher than that, but usually at that altitude.

Of course, the Germans knew where the clouds were, and our window, that is, the tinsel that we dropped out to throw off their radar, didn't amount to anything, because they knew. We were flying just below the clouds. So they hit us with pretty good ack-ack. I would look out on the left wing and see holes that hadn't been there when I took off. I have a piece of the ack-ack from an 88. Those were good guns that they had.

We got out of there as quickly as we could. But it so happened that after we dropped our bombs, one of mine hung up, and the bombardier, as we were turning, let it go, and he got the devil for dropping a bomb when we were turning, because there was danger that he'd drop it on a plane in the formation right behind us. When we got the pictures, one bomb hit the Tiger Tank Works. All the rest fell short.

Charnley: Was it your bomb?

Williams: Had to be. He said, "I get the only hit, and I get hell."

Then the other time was when we flew to Vienna. That was the worst target we had, because they had 800 88s there, and the reason they did was because Vienna was not only on the line to the Russian front, which the Germans had to keep open to supply, but it was also the home of the F_____ oil refineries; still is.

On the way home, my wingman said, "You're leaking some gas." He broke silence to tell me that. I looked out, and I had to look back. I wouldn't ordinarily notice it. So I shut the engine down, feathered it, and the engineer transferred the gas to the other three engines. We flew solo over the northern Adriatic. The PBYs, they were rescue boats, and they were pontoon planes, a couple of them picked us up and flew us till we got to shore.

Meantime, I called in at Folger [phonetic], which is at up at the spur, halfway up the western coast of Italy. That was where our main base was. I called them and told them that I was coming straight in, that I was on three engines. I landed and taxied up and stopped and shut the motors down, and I said to the enlisted man that came up to service the plane, I said, "Would you tell me how much gas I've got?"

He said, "Sure." He stuck his pole down in there, and he came up and looked, he says, "You ain't got any." [Laughter] So we were blessed on that one.

Those were the two most harrowing experiences that we had.

Charnley: Did you feel that your training prepared you for what you encountered in combat?

Williams: Oh yes, yes, absolutely. And, of course, by the time I flew combat, I had about 1,600 hours in the air.

Charnley: How would you describe the B-24 in terms of flying?

Williams: Well, it was a plane that was hard to fly, because it had a large fuselage and a modified Davis wing. But the best thing about it were the Pratt & Whitney engines that we had. The roughest part of a flight when you were in enemy territory was taking off, because every twenty-seven seconds, a plane took off. So at about twenty-five seconds, as the plane in front of you was just leaving the ground, you revved your motors up and took off. Of course, there was an awful lot of prop wash, and your plane was tipping left and right. You couldn't use your aileron because there's too much of a drag and you had to use your rudders. You were really kicking rudders for a while until you got out of the prop wash.

Charnley: I forgot to ask you, where were you when you first heard about Pearl Harbor at the beginning of the war?

Williams: I had just eaten dinner, Sunday dinner. We had dinner always on Sunday, but usually we'd have it at night, but Sunday was dinner. After dinner, one of my fraternity brothers and I decided we'd go for a walk, and we walked for about a mile out to the golf course and back. It was a snowy day and cold, and we came in. In the big living room to the left of the foyer, as you came

in, there was a couple of fraternity brothers straddling the piano bench, a couple were down behind the chairs and the sofa, and they were shooting one another. "What's going on?"

"We're at war." That's how I learned about Pearl Harbor.

Of course, the next day when [Franklin D.] Roosevelt spoke, we were all sitting around the radio in the dining room, and we sure were at war for sure.

Charnley: How about the end of the war? How did you hear about the VE-Day?

Williams: As a matter of fact, you started hearing church bells ringing, and then it came. I think one of the fellows in the ground service heard it and then spread the word. We weren't flying that day. We were flying that night, but not in airplanes. [Laughter]

Charnley: Did you have any orders to go to the Pacific, or did you have enough time?

Williams: When we came back, I came back on the USS *America* and landed at Norfolk [Virginia], and we were expecting to be sent to the Pacific in B-29s, the big four-engine planes. So, after a month's leave—incidentally, in the meantime, I had gotten married in April of '44.

Charnley: What was your wife's maiden name?

Williams: Florence McKay Green [phonetic].

Charnley: In 1944, you were married.

Williams: April of 1944, yes. We were sent to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and we were waiting there the summer of ’45 for orders, but we kept hearing rumors that there was something like, oh, I don’t know how many thousand pilots and so on were waiting, and it seemed that we probably would not be assigned for some time.

Well, it got boring, so it turned out that the farmers in the area needed some help shocking oats and so on, so we used to go down and we would sign up with a guy and he’d agree to take us out and bring us back the same day. A couple times we stayed overnight. But one time there was a captain, two or three lieutenants, and a major that were in the back of the truck, anxious to shock oats because the food was so good. [Laughter]. Oh, boy, it was good.

Charnley: Better than base food.

Williams: Oh yes. So that was the deal.

Then when the bomb was dropped, we figured it was not going to be very long before you heard the end of the war, and that’s, of course, when it came, August of ’45. A lot of the guys went into town to celebrate, and, as a matter of fact, you could hear the noise, even though we were quite a distance from town. I decided I’d do a little different thing, and I went into church on the base and thanked God.

Charnley: What rank were you when the war ended?

Williams: First lieutenant. As a matter of fact, I met one of my students, who had been a student not long after I had started instructing. He was in about the second class that I had, and he had gone right over to England and flew with the Eighth Air Force, and he was a major. It was partly why all of us wanted to get over there and fight, because you didn't get any promotions. Well, I got one. You didn't get many promotions flying as an instructor. But I stayed in the reserve and retired as a major in the middle fifties. The day that I sent in my resignation, I got a notice that I was going to be promoted to lieutenant colonel. [Laughter]

Charnley: Bad timing. Did you continue to fly or was it mostly administrative then?

Williams: No, no. I just flew because I wanted to do whatever I could, and what I thought I could do best was fly. I had no interest in flying. Well, of course, it's too expensive, for one thing. I didn't want to fly commercial, so that was the end of it.

Charnley: So where was your wife at the end of the war?

Williams: When I married her, she taught school. She was a kindergarten teacher, and she had been with me when I was instructing and when I was going through transition and combat training in Tucson. Then she went back to New Haven where her folks lived, and was living with her folks and substitute teaching, and by then she was pregnant. That's what she was doing all the time that I was overseas, she was living there with her folks in New Haven, and substitute teaching.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two.

When the tape ended, you were talking about the end of the war and what your wife was doing as you were getting out of the service.

Williams: Yes. Well, as I said, I was at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, when the war ended, and because I went over so late, I knew that I didn't have as many points as a lot of the guys did that had been over there a long time, but I knew I had enough. I qualified to be dismissed, but it would be in turn.

But one day I went down to look into things and see exactly what the story was. I went down to headquarters and was walking along in the hall, and a corporal had gone by me and he said, "Sir." I turned around. He said, "Are you Lieutenant Williams?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "We played tennis against one another." He was the number one man for the town of Munson, Massachusetts, about ten miles from Palmer, and we had played against one another. So we visited.

I said, "Say," I said, "maybe you know, if you work down here, where could I find out what my points were and when it would be likely that I could go home."

He said, “That’s my office. Come on in.” So we walked down to his office and went in, and he looked up my record. He said, “You have—,” I forgot what it was, but it was a little more than enough.

I said, “When do you think that would get me home?”

He said, “Could you leave today?” I looked at him. He said, “There’s a four o’clock train out here for the East.” I don’t know what time it was, late morning or early afternoon, but you never saw a guy clear a base so fast as I did, and I was on the train.

I was sent to Fort Devons, and then I was allowed to go home for a few days until the paperwork was ready, and had to be back at a certain time. Then on the 11th of September, I went home, and my wife’s folks were sitting out on the porch when I parked the car in the yard in the driveway, and I got out and I looked and I said, “Where’s Flo?”

Her father said, “Congratulations.” The baby had been born that morning. So Sandy’s birthday was 9/11, and it so happened that my mother died on 9/11.

Charnley: Nine-eleven. That’s interesting. That’s an interesting story.

What were your plans at the time right after the war?

Williams: I had thought that with just two years in college and I wasn’t getting any younger, that I might—my wife was very good about saving money, and I had enough money to start what I thought would be a sporting goods business. I went to New York and visited different companies like Wilson, went to Chicopee, Massachusetts, visited Spaulding and so on. Well, they had old accounts, and they weren’t going to start a guy with a new one when they had old ones that they

hadn't been able to fulfill because they were making things for the Army. So I decided then, I said, "I think I'll go back to college," and that's what I did.

Charnley: You went back to Middlebury?

Williams: Went back to Middlebury, finished my four years there. Went back in '45, finished in '47.

I was accepted at the University of Pennsylvania for graduate work, couldn't find anyplace to live in Philadelphia, and on the way home, I stopped at the University of Connecticut. I had my papers with me from Middlebury, and they accepted me right away. All I needed to do was find a place to live. It so happened that an English professor was going to finish up his Ph.D. coursework, and he wanted to rent his house. It was a farmhouse and a nice one, and it was about five miles from the university at Storres. So I did a year's work there and got my master's.

While I was studying there, a professor, we called him Dr. G., he'd gone to Indiana, and he called me in one day and he said, "You're going to go on, aren't you?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "I think you ought to go to Indiana. They've got a strong American history suit there, and I think you ought to try it."

So I wrote, and they accepted me. I drove out alone, and my wife was staying with her parents with the baby at the time. When I got out there, I found that I had an assistantship with the fellow that taught Civil War in the American South, so I guess you can tell what happened from there.

Charnley: Who is that professor?

Williams: Chase Mooney.

Charnley: What interested you in history study, maybe for your master's? Had you majored in history at that time?

Williams: Yes, at Middlebury. I became more and more interested in history, at first in English history, and then I drifted more towards American history the more I read it, and wound up in not only American history, but in the Civil War in the South.

Charnley: What was Indiana like? Obviously, you were among the group, probably a large group there, who were returning GIs.

Williams: Yes. As at most universities, you're in a college and a department, and it was pretty friendly and close. I had some good professors there. My own professor who directed my dissertation, Chase Mooney, and Oscar Winter, who was a famous western historian, and F. Lee Benz [phonetic], who taught European history, those are three that I remembered in particular. Although I'd never taken a course from R. Carlisle Buehly [phonetic], who won a Pulitzer Prize for his two-volume work on the old Northwest, we became good friends, and we golfed some together.

Charnley: When did you graduate, or how was it that you came to Michigan State?

Williams: I had completed my coursework in 1950. It so happened that the chairman of the department had gone to a meeting, and he had talked about positions. He recommended me to Wayne State University, and they hired me without an interview. I had to ask them for an interview, and so I guess Barnhardt [phonetic] gave me a pretty good recommendation.

I taught at Wayne. It wasn't Wayne State then; it was Wayne University. I taught there for four years, and it was in and out with an instructorship there in four years. So I got word that they were interested in a historian for the humanities department, and so I came up here to East Lansing and talked to Dr. Kimber, who was head of the department. After we had gone through all the formalities of lunch and discussing this and that and so on, showing me the campus, he asked me what I thought. I said, "Dr. Kimber, I'm a historian, and I don't think I can honestly say that I'd be happy in humanities."

Well, it so happened that the history department needed a professor, and he was in charge of all of the departments—history, social science, and so on at the time. He recommended me to Dr. [Walter R.] Fee, and I was hired for one year.

Charnley: So what year was that then?

Williams: That was in '54. I came here in September of '54 for a one-year position.

Charnley: When you first arrived, how would you say the campus differed mostly from—

Williams: [John A.] Hannah was in the process of building, but it wasn't anywhere near as expansive as it is today. Nothing in the way of the medical buildings, for example. Engineering, horticulture, crop, soils science, all those big buildings were being put up. While the campus was large, it wasn't anything like it is today.

Charnley: What was your impression of the student body when you first got here, or the students in general?

Williams: I was very favorably impressed. I enjoyed teaching. Of course, as a first-year assistant professor, you've got eight o'clock classes and the 101 courses, so what you had was oftentimes people that were neither interested in getting up that early or that interested in history. But I enjoyed it from the start, yes.

Charnley: Who were some of your colleagues in the history department then? You said Professor Fee was the chair at the time.

Williams: He was the chair. Jack Garrity, who became a chair at Columbia [University] when I became chair at Michigan State, as a matter of fact. Madison Kuhn [phonetic], he was my office mate, as a matter of fact, a wonderful man. Marjorie Gessner [phonetic], Harold Fields, Hal Glick, they're all dead.

Charnley: Was Paul Varga [phonetic] on the faculty then when you arrived, or he came later?

Williams: He came a few years after I was here. John Harrison.

Charnley: Dick Sullivan, later?

Williams: Dick Sullivan came the same year I did, yes.

Charnley: I remember in Western Civ class at Central Michigan, we used the Harrison and Sullivan text, and when I interviewed Dean Sullivan, he signed my copy. I pulled it out, the old book. He said, "You still have this?" I told him I did.

How was it in terms of developing your Civil War course? Did that take some time?

Williams: Well, what happened was that the department was not in shambles, but it wasn't organized, and your professors that had been there a long time, one of them was teaching colonial history, diplomatic history, and something else. I don't know. So Garrity and one or two others decided that there should be a change and that people ought to have courses that were theirs and that they taught. I think it was in 1958 that the organization took place, and that was when they established the Civil War course that I taught.

Charnley: What was your approach in terms of teaching that course? Did that change over time? This was just before, obviously, the centennial of the Civil War, so interest was probably increasing.

Williams: Yes. I had a pretty good idea of how I wanted to organize the course, and then the broad scope, I took the courses, the background, first of all, of the war, and then the period of Confederate ascension and then the period of Union supremacy. In other words, the beginning of the war to Gettysburg, and then Gettysburg on was the period of Union ascendancy or Union supremacy, I should say.

Charnley: Did you cover Reconstruction within that course, or did that end basically with the end of the war?

Williams: No, it ended because Harry Brown—there's another professor that was there when I came. He taught the post-Civil War period.

Charnley: At what point did MSU history department start offering a Ph.D.? Do you remember in terms of sequence? Did they have the Ph.D. when you arrived, or did that come later?

Williams: I don't know of any Ph.D. that was granted the first couple years that I was there.

Charnley: Then with the centennial in 1955 and the change from college to university—

Williams: To the university, yes.

Charnley: I didn't know if they expanded at that time.

Williams: Then they started in granting the Ph.D. Now, whether there were any granted before that or not, I can't say. You're talking history.

Charnley: Yes. In terms of the Civil War class, what were your enrollments in those early years? Do you remember the size of the classes?

Williams: For the first year, of course, it was elective class. In the first year, I had 169 students, which was unheard of, you know, and they had to move me into the Engineering Building. I guess they thought that it wouldn't stay, and so next year, I had 280. The most was 348, in 100 Engineering.

Charnley: Was it right in Olds Hall?

Williams: No, the new Engineering Building. I taught a lot in the bear pit, as they called it, in the Horticulture Building, the old Horticulture Building.

Charnley: Were you involved in any academic governance in your early years?

Williams: Well, not my early years. I became involved in early 1960s, and I was elected chairman of the Student Life Committee, I believe it was called. I was elected chairman of it by the committee, and that's when we had a very controversial case, Paul Shiff [phonetic], the famous Shiff case, at Michigan State University.

The SDS [Students for Democratic Society] was starting to function across the country, and that was when Dr. Hannah called me in and asked me if I could draw up something in the way of a document for students rights. So I took the committee, and he recommended that Charles Killingsworth [phonetic] and Russell Nye serve as ex-officio members. that was a blessing, because both were very, very sharp, especially Killingsworth. He was in economics department, and he was a very sharp guy and very sensitive to both student and professor rights.

So we put together a document that was presented to the academic department at the end of that year that we worked on it, the academic year, and there were revisions and so on. That was when I gave up the chairmanship and John Rino [phonetic] became chairman.

Charnley: Of the committee.

Williams: Of the committee.

Charnley: What was the document called that you produced?

Williams: The Academic Freedom Report.

Charnley: So it dealt mainly with student rights and faculty responsibilities?

Williams: Student rights and responsibilities, right. It has been changed, revised, naturally. We provided for revision, as you do with a document of that kind, and for all practical purposes it's the constitution of the campus today as far as rights and responsibilities are concerned.

Charnley: Was this something new in higher education?

Williams: Yes, this was a pilot program, no doubt about it. We got a lot of letters from other universities, or I did as chairman of the committee, asking about what we were doing and so on. In a couple of cases when the report was done, I sent them the report. It was in pamphlet form.

Charnley: How did the students react to it? Was there support, opposition?

Williams: There was no strong opposition at all. I don't remember any opposition. They felt, I guess, that it was quite fair, and that the penalties for violating the academic freedom report were fair. We established an ombudsman.

Charnley: And that continues to today.

Williams: Yes.

Charnley: What were your other dealings with President Hannah?

Williams: Well, he appointed me to the Academic Athletic Council, and I guess it was because he knew I put in a lot of extra time on the committee and took it from research, but not from teaching. I put my teaching first all through my career. He appointed me to the Academic Athletic Council. As a result, because we had the good teams then, we, my wife and I, got to go to the Rose Bowl with other members of the Academic Council, one of whom was Gordon Guyer. He and Norma and Flo and I became very close friends, and we have been. And, of course, Norma died a couple years ago, but Gordon and Flo and I are still good friends.

Charnley: He later became president of the university.

Williams: Yes, he did.

Charnley: That sports link was interesting. Was he on the same committee?

Williams: He was on the same committee, yes. That's when we became close friends. We had served on an academic committee earlier, the Dean's Advisory Committee, and that's when we became acquainted. But when we went on the trip to the Rose Bowl, that was when we really became close friends and have remained as such. Out at Los Angeles, we had rooms next door to one another and did things together out there.

Charnley: What was the Academic Council's purpose? Was it to advise the president?

Williams: The Athletic Council? Yes, to advise the athletic director, who was [Clarence L.] "Biggie" Munn at the time. Biggie was a nice guy. I liked him very much.

Charnley: Were there any key issues? Obviously, there was a lot of interest in football and probably basketball, especially in the 1960s.

Williams: Yes, there was, and, of course, interest in prices that were charged and in the buildings and in the golf course. The golf course was just getting under way.

Charnley: This is Forest Acres Golf Course.

Williams: Forest Acres, yes. Just Forest Acres west then, you know. But, yes, those are the main things.

Gordon and I got together one evening, and we were talking about the need for a student events building. So we brought it up to the Academic Council, and Biggie and Duffy [Dougherty] looked into it, and the basketball coach, I think maybe it was Horace Anderson [phonetic] then. I've forgotten. Anyway, the word came back that it was going to cost $9 million, and they couldn't afford that. So the Breslin [Student Events Center] building was subsequently built for 39 million.

Charnley: To replace Jenison [Fieldhouse]?

Williams: Well, really, yes, for the big events, Jenison is still used, of course.

Charnley: Of course.

Williams: For track and—

Charnley: Volleyball, I know.

Williams: —volleyball.

Charnley: So you're an avid fan and developed at that time.

Williams: Always, yes. I've held season tickets in football since 1954 and in basketball since, I think, 1956 and in hockey since the building of the Munn Arena, and had to give that up because I couldn't sit on those benches anymore for three hours. Hockey's a long game.

Charnley: I've talked with other people about Jenison during a basketball game. What were some of your impressions of Jenison during the championship season?

Williams: Well, first of all, you knew that the other teams, the coaches in particular, didn't like it, especially Bobby Knight.

Charnley: He didn't?

Williams: He called it something like a barn in an old cow pasture. I don't know those are exact words, but that would reflect his attitude towards it. And, of course, it was barely satisfactory for the time, but you had bench seats right alongside the court, and it lacked a lot of the class that modern buildings have.

Charnley: So you've stayed interested in Spartan athletics?

Williams: Oh yes. Gordon and I and a couple other professors that we both liked, Ed Everson [phonetic] and—let's see, who was it? Well, anyway, we got seats together up in the faculty area, up high, and then when they built the Spartan Stadium, it had the seats ten rows up, down low, Gordon and Norma and Flo and I got together and we got seats. By then we had such a good record of season ticketholding and so on, we were about the second or third. I know that Russ Mawby joined us, and that didn't hurt our selection any, I'll tell you.

Charnley: He was head of the Kellogg Foundation at the time, wasn't he?

Williams: Yes, and he's also a trustee, yes. So we got together; we sat together. We still have the seats. I don't know whether I'll keep them on anymore, because they knick you for $2,500 a year, just for the privilege of sitting there, and the tickets are in addition. You do get good parking as a part of it, but—

Charnley: Let's talk about President Hannah again. So you had some contact with him.

Williams: Yes. At that time, members of the Athletic Council would get to go on one trip, football trip away.

Charnley: To an away game?

Williams: So we went. Gordon and I would go together on those trips. We went to Penn State one time when we were supposed to lose big. I'll never forget it. After breakfast with the team, we came up onto the lobby, and some of the guys were looking at the papers. "Look at this. They think they're going to beat us, " what the paper was saying. Well, we won 24-3.

Then we went to Illinois. We lost out there. That was when [Dick] Butkus was playing. Of course, I met and talked with him a few times during the Rose Bowl visit, but I wasn't a personal friend of John Hannah. He was far busier than to bother with me very much.

Charnley: But he called on you sometimes to do some important work.

Williams: Yes, yes.

Charnley: What about the other presidents of the university that you've had any direct contact?

Williams: Well, I became chairman of the Faculty Affairs Committee, and I was chairman when [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.] came as president. I talked with him when he started his presidency and told him that I thought that he should develop good relations with the faculty, because without the faculty's support, which was so important, he would not function as well as he would with it. He agreed. He was a very nice man. I still have contact with him through the mail.

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two of the Frederick Williams interview.

When the last tape ended, we were talking about President Wharton and then also your work on Faculty Affairs Committee.

Williams: Yes. Well, major problems that concerned the faculty were taken up by the Faculty Affairs Committee, and then the decision of the committee was referred to the Academic Council. I was a member of the Academic Council through the time that I was on the Student Affairs Committee and through the time that I was on the Faculty Affairs Committee. Then the Academic Council would act on it. There was, I'm quite sure, a lot more faculty input into the affairs of the university than there is today, because I just say that on the basis of what I hear.

But I became close to Wharton when he appointed me to the committee to investigate the football charges in violation of NCAA regulations, and that went on for three years, from beginning to the end, when finally we found up before Congress. We had, at the time, an athletic director who had done some wrong things, and we had a couple of coaches who were charged with favoring football players. Even though we protested vigorously, probably more so than any university at that time had protested the NCAA charges and methods of dealing with them, we got slapped with a heavy, heavy fine in terms of not being able to go to post-season games and cutting down on the number of football players we could have and so on.

At the time, one of the universities that was being charged was University of Nevada-Las Vegas. Tarkanian [phonetic] was the coach there, and he got in touch with his congressman, who was chair of the subcommittee and the oversight committee. Lo and behold, they asked MSU and the Mississippi State University and the University of Nevada, maybe there was one more, to present to the subcommittee the things that they thought were wrong. So we got together, and as it turned out, I wrote the report and read it before the subcommittee. Our chief complaint was that there was no due process, that the enforcement officer who brought the charges before the committee was close to the committee, worked with them, and gave the NCAA an unfair advantage.

The appeals program or process, we appealed the decision that was made by the original group. We said that that was a joke, really, that it was just pro forma that they were going to endorse what the first hearing had presented. As a result, some changes, significant changes, were made in the NCAA regulations.

Charnley: It's interesting. Some of those same issues are ongoing today.

Williams: Yes, yes, they are, sure are.

Charnley: The answers haven't been provided yet.

Williams: No, that's right.

Charnley: The relationship between student athletes or athletics and scholarships, how to balance that, that's a tough issue.

Williams: Well, even back then, a supporter of the university, you know, is not supposed to give anything to student athletes. So, for example, if I, as a donor of $2,500 a year to the Ralph Young Fund, were to give any money to a student athlete, it's a violation, see.

University of Michigan, I think, got off real easy. Think of it, 600-some-odd-thousand dollars that Milton [_____] gave to those three players.

Charnley: That's amazing, yes. It sure is.

So obviously, the athletic director was replaced, the football coach was replaced at that time.

Williams: Yes.

Charnley: Did President Wharton testify in front of Congress?

Williams: He sure did. He went with us to both hearings and he testified in front of Congress, too, but by then he was with the New York University system, chancellor of the New York University system. So we didn't see him but a few minutes in Washington [D.C.]. He sat with us, but then he had to leave right after he testified. He's now writing his autobiography, and he's been in touch with me a couple of times about the hearings.

Charnley: We'll have to read that in his memoirs.

Williams: Yes.

Charnley: Did you have any contact with President [M. Cecil] Mackey or Ed [Edgar L.] Harden? You probably knew him from—

Williams: I knew Ed Harden. I didn't have any significant contact with him. But Mackey, as a matter of fact, on the recommendation of the Faculty Affairs Committee, appointed me faculty grievance official, and I served there for about one year.

Charnley: That was in the early 1980s?

Williams: 1980, yes, I think it was. I served there for about—let's see. I think maybe it was 1980 to '81, I served, or '81 to '82, but anyway, it was about a year. Then one day a member of the history department came over and said that the chairman was leaving after five years and wanted me to be chairman. I said, "No, I'm not interested. I'm going to work at this job as faculty grievance officer until I'm sixty-five and then teach until I'm seventy."

A couple more came over, including Ron Corn [phonetic], who was chairman of the steering committee, and it became clear to me that if I wasn't going to agree to become chairman, that I wasn't going to be very popular when I came back to teach after I was sixty-five. So I agreed, with the understanding from the university that I would be able to stay on as an administrator from sixty-five until I became seventy. So I became chairman in '82, and I was elected unanimously, as a matter of fact. That was unheard of in the history department.

Charnley: What did you see as the strengths of the history department at that time, would you say?

Williams: Well, I think that we had strengths and weaknesses. There were some very, very good professors, some who were excellent at teaching and research, and some who were more excellent in research than teaching, and some the other way around. But you always had those that didn't pull their weight, and I had to get rid of just one person for that reason.

Charnley: That probably takes a lot of time, too.

Williams: Oh, the amount of time it takes is unbelievable.

Charnley: From the time that you started in the 1950s at Michigan State, is there anything you can say about the history department itself in terms of how it evolved over that time?

Williams: Well, as I say, the department became more attractive to prospective members when we developed a program so that the professors would teach in the field, like when we started, the Jefferson-Jackson period, the Civil War period, Reconstruction period, progressive period, and then modern period. Those were developments that made the department more attractive to people who might be interested in coming and joining the department.

I think, on the whole, the output in research increased, and I think that the department had a very good reputation as a teaching department on the whole.

Charnley: Your Civil War class, that continued to be popular in all during your time that you were teaching it?

Williams: All the time during I was teaching. The worst time was during the Vietnam War when people were so opposed to war. I also taught military history at the time, and those two courses were not as popular as they had been, but they recovered. I think there was one time during the sixties when my enrollment was down to about eighty-five.

Charnley: Eighty-five. That's still larger than many classes nowadays.

The military history course, how did that come about?

Williams: Well, when Hannah was president, you had compulsory ROTC, and then they changed that to voluntary ROTC. The students that were taking ROTC were very unhappy with the teaching of military history, and so Dr. Hannah invited me to teach the military history. I said, "Okay, but I would like to have a chance to visit the academies." So he provided money for a trip to Annapolis, West Point, and Colorado Springs, which I never got to because I didn't think it was necessary to spend the money after I'd visited the two military academies. Neither one taught the course the way I wanted to teach it. They were what I would call the nuts-and-bolts approach, and I wanted to teach military history as part of the total history of the country.

So in 1960 or '61, I started teaching military history, and it was then required, but it was going to be changed to voluntary program. I was glad, because I had, when it was required, I think four classes of about 400 students, each one. I had six graduate assistants. Then when they changed it to voluntary ROTC, the enrollments dropped to about, oh, roughly, seventy-five total. Then they opened it up to women, and when I finished teaching, I think I had about 100 students, and about half and half split between the ROTC students and those that took it out of personal interest.

Charnley: This was still an elective, for the most part, except for the ROTC.

Williams: Except for the ROTC, yes.

Charnley: What would you say in terms of teaching? You obviously were an inspiring teacher.

Williams: Well, I hope so.

Charnley: I've heard some, and was witness to, the standing ovations that you occasionally got at the end of the class. Do you remember when that first happened? Not the year, per se, but how'd you feel when that happened?

Williams: I was absolutely amazed. I was awestricken. I guess I showed it, because, you know, that they would stand up and clap at the end of a class. I guess that's about all I can say. It was almost unbelievable to me, but much appreciated.

Charnley: What would you say, is there any guiding principle that guided your teaching?

Williams: Orderliness in presentation. Balance, so that if there were controversies, say, over why Lincoln sent the expedition to Fort Sumter, that you would give, in this case, the three most important interpretations. And fairness in exams, in both the context of the exam and in the correcting of them, because so much work went into them for students.

Charnley: As I recall, you frequently would have a work of fiction. *Killer Angels* was a favorite of yours.

Williams: Yes, yes, and I guess that in view of the fact that Ken Burns relied on it so much and did such a wonderful job, I can feel that it was perfectly appropriate. That was a historical novel, but I also had a good solid history, for example, the Civil War history and the biography of Lincoln.

Charnley: How did you handle some of the pitfalls? I know here you were a former New Englander transplanted to the Midwest, and then the controversies over southernism. Did you ever have any students who were obviously looking at it only from the southern perspective? How did you handle that?

Williams: Oh yes. I would tell them from the start that I was pro-Yankee and that I thought the Civil War was an example of a war that was fought for a purpose, and the purpose was good and so on.

I remember one time this very pretty young lady come up, with a southern accent, and she says, "Sir, I want y'all to know I enjoy your class very much, but I'm from Atlanta and I don't agree with a lot of the things you say," in this southern accent. [Laughter]

Charnley: I think before we started the interview, I told you a little bit about this course I'm doing in terms of the generation that went through the Civil War and that which people like Tom Brokaw have called the greatest generation, yourself and the generation that fought World War II. Through your study in the war, did you see any parallels, similarities between when you were over fighting and then what you maybe have studied about the soldiers and that who were at Gettysburg and other battles?

Williams: Well, in both wars you had unbelievable frontal attacks. In the Civil War, when you stop to think of Fredericksburg and Gettysburg and the attack by Burnside's men at Fredericksburg and Pickett's men at Gettysburg. Then you think of the D-Day invasion, landing on those beaches and scaling the mountains or the hills and the cliffs and the slopes where at the top of which the Germans were shooting. There was that similarity. It's amazing that men can be brought to do those things, you know.

But in both cases, the people that were fighting believed they were fighting for a worthy cause. The southerners felt the same way as the northerners did about their cause. And, of course, in the case of World War II, what Hitler and Mussolini and company stood for, and Tojo, not only fight to establish supremacy, but they were fighting Christianity. They were atheistic, and so the cause seemed to be just and noble in both wars for the people who fought it.

Charnley: In terms of shaping the nation, the changes that both wars wrought, either on the home front or how the society was affected afterwards, do you see any parallels there?

Williams: Well, of course, the Civil War ended slavery and established the basis for industrial economy, and saved the nation. No longer was secession even considered, despite what's happening in southern California right now. [Laughter]

But those were very important changes, and even though you freed the slaves in the Civil War, there was still the question of race relations. Now, it was a couple years before soldiers,

blacks, were allowed to fight in the Union Army. In the case of World War II, blacks played a very important part in Army,Navy, and Air Corps and in the Army and Navy itself.

As far as changing things are concerned, perhaps the greatest change for the world was the economic recovery program or the Marshall Plan, which was a marvelous plan for the recovery of the European countries, including Germany, that had been an enemy. There was a time here, especially when Italy was in such a precarious position, I think it was about 1948, I believe, there seemed to be a real chance that Italy might go Communist. But the European recovery program, I think, saved Europe from that fate.

Charnley: What about that issue of regionalism? Obviously, in the Civil War, northern soldiers went to the South. Some of them loved what they saw down there. I mean, not during the war, per se, but in terms of the climate. Then some settled there and then vice versa. Then you mentioned your training, where you went literally all over the world and also all over different parts of the country that you might not have been before.

Williams: Well, that was quite an experience, but I don't think very many people were lured to, I mean, the United States of America.

Charnley: Oh, no, no, no. Well, but what about the concept of broadening the view of soldiers in terms of supporting the global role of the United States or something like that?

Williams: Well, I think that there was quite a bit of that, but I still think that people, as a whole, when it comes to foreign policy, that are dealing with countries outside the United States, they expect when decisions are made, that results will take place quickly.

I can remember when the cold war started and we became at loggerheads with Russia, the [Harry S] Truman administration adopted the plan of containment. Now, that was never expected to be something that would produce results right away, and from the start, I felt that it was a very sound program to work to contain communism, on the assumption that capitalism was far superior and communism would rot from within.

I think that even though many of my students didn't believe that, and that some of my colleagues in the department felt it was a copout, that it wasn't going to work, it worked. They tore down the [Berlin] Wall and the Soviet Union fell apart. I think that the Second World War helped to increase the belief that people want to be free, and that's true. That's one of the fundamentals, I believe, of American philosophy.

Charnley: When you first came to Michigan State, did you anticipate that you would spend almost your entire career here?

Williams: I had no idea. No, as a matter of fact, halfway through my first year, I was wondering where I was going to apply and so on, even though Dr. Fee had told me that he would permit me to teach—what was that course that he taught? Social studies or something. It was a college, now university college course. I appreciated that I had something to fall back on, but I didn't really want

to teach it. Then one day in the spring of '55, he asked me how I would like to be a member of the history department, and I said, "Are you kidding?"

Charnley: So what was it that kept you here all those years?

Williams: I liked East Lansing, I liked the university, I enjoyed the sports and the panorama, and I liked the people. There weren't very many people that I met all the time I taught at Michigan State that I didn't like. There were a few, but there always are, and I'm sure there were a few that didn't like me.

Charnley: In looking back, obviously, your role as a teacher and as a professor here, with class sizes like that, you have certainly influenced many, many students. Have you heard back from them to any great degree?

Williams: About three weeks ago, I went down and went through letters that I'd received from students, and it was very gratifying. They were very nice, not only about the teaching that I did, but also about the way I treated them. We used to advise students. Now graduate students do it. But I have a lot of letters talking about how they appreciated the treatment that they got.

One I remember, in particular, from Bob Morgerge [phonetic], who became a teacher at Boyne City, and a good history teacher at Boyne City High School, and he lives in Charlevoix now, he was a good student, married, and he worked while he was studying, and he did a great job. Getting a letter from that kind of a person makes you feel awfully good.

Charnley: When did you retire?

Williams: I retired, left the department, in ’87 and had a year’s administrative leave, so my official retirement is ’88.

Charnley: Did you have any other contacts with the university since your retirement, or involvements?

Williams: Not very many. I’ve not gone back to the history department but a few times, and I put a book through the University Press after I had retired. A number of the universities in the states that carved out of the old Northwest celebrated a centennial, and I was able to get money, and invited, I think, five different people.

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two of the second tape.

We’re talking about this was the bicentennial of the Northwest Territory.

Williams: Yes, that’s right. We had five professors who were right in that field come and talk, and I took their papers and edited them and published them in a book, which Michigan State University Press published. I think Fred [Honhart] was director of the program then.

Charnley: I forgot to ask also about your other publications, in terms of how did you get interested in President Garfield and his diaries?

Williams: Well, Harry Brown and I were talking one day at lunch, and he mentioned the Garfield diaries. I had read the Theodore Clark, I think, biography of Garfield, and it wasn't the best it could be. He wrote a letter, when he found out we were working, saying that he couldn't be as objective as he could because Garfield's wife was sitting right across the table, so to speak, you know, watching everything that was said.

We got to visiting, and one of us said that it ought to be looked into for presentation editing. That's how it started, and then we got copies of the diary that were in the [U.S.] Library of Congress, and found out that the youngest son of Garfield was still alive. So we went out to see him, and he was a world-famous architect. He was then in his eighties, and he lived in an area right outside Cleveland, in the Gross Pointe of Cleveland area, and beautiful home. We told him what we were doing, and he gave us permission to do whatever we wanted to and whatever was scholarly.

We pointed out that we knew there was a European diary. We figured it was in the vault out at the home in Mentor. After a lot of shenanigans that we had to go through, because a grandson had charge, we finally got into the vault, and he had a key to a safe that was in the vault. He opened it up, and there was the European diary, his trip to Europe, and that made it complete. As a result, we went to work and, over a long period of time, got it done.

In the meantime, I'd published *Garfield's Civil War Letters*, because the more I came across them, the more I felt that they should be published.

Charnley: How many volumes were the Garfield diaries when you were finished?

Williams: Four volumes. He kept a diary of about nearly 800,000 words. My wife helped a lot going through that manuscript and figuring out what was being said and so on, and working on the manuscript that we had. She would work nights, sometimes two, three o'clock in the morning. She got interested, and she's an omnivorous reader anyway. She helped an awful lot in that regard, and we dedicated the volumes to Garfield's son. He was the youngest son.

Charnley: Did he live to see any of the volumes published?

Williams: No.

Charnley: You saw him just before—

Williams: His second wife did. She lived to see all of them, and she got all of them.

Charnley: That's interesting.

Well, in looking back maybe at a half century at Michigan State, and now we're celebrating the sesquicentennial coming up, is there anything that maybe just stands out most important in the last fifty years here?

Williams: Well, of course, my family grew up here, my children, and my grandchildren, as a matter of fact, except for two. But as far as the university is concerned, no, I think that the physical development and the intellectual development have been quite satisfying, and I've enjoyed my years at Michigan State University and East Lansing.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project. I've appreciated the time and the insights, and thank you very much.

Williams: You're welcome. I'm glad to do it.

[End of interview]