Oral History Interview
UA-T20
University Archives
New Mexico State University Library

Interviewee: Luke Shires
Date: April 14, 1978
Place: NMSU Library, Las Cruces, NM
Interviewer: Herb Minter

Herb Minter: Well just keep talking and we'll see if it picks this up.

Luke Shires: I think we should because it would be a darn shame to try and get that on tape and then find it once again if it's not there. (pause in tape)

When I first came to this country was the first time that I had been west of Chicago. And having never seen the desert before or irrigation I had imagined somewhat like it might be, but my imagination was not at all true to the picture that I saw when I arrived. I arrived on the train that was carrying the body of Rudolph Valentino from the East and West coast. So at every crossing there was always someone there to greet you or wave at you and so we had lots of people along the way to greet us as we passed through. There was one thing that worked to our disadvantage and that was the Valentino party consisted of three cars plus the car where his remains were being carried. And they had first call in the dining room. No one else in the rest of the train could get in until they got through. So when they finished their breakfast then we could get in and eat. When they finished their lunch or dinner at noon, well then the rest of the train could get in. As a result you were lucky to get about two meals a day. They took up most of the time that the dining room was open.

When I arrived in El Paso I was somewhat surprised at the way things looked and it was rather hot. And I wondered if I should put up in El Paso for the night, call up my former boss in New York and see if he'd give me my job back. Maybe I just shouldn't come up here. But uh... Well, I thought it'd be rather of a dirty trick. They were expecting me the next day and I promised I'd be here. So I decided, yes, I'll go up.

I came up that evening and stayed at a hotel in Mesilla Park. There was a lady there by the name of Mrs. Coats. She ran the Coats Hotel, oh there were some four or five rooms, I suspect and a little grocery store in the first floor. And I spent the night there and then the next morning I called up Professor Bodkins and he came down and brought me up to the campus. And I, frankly I wasn't impressed with the campus at all. There were, oh , about five or six permanent buildings. Only three of them were used for instructions. The old gym over there was not used for instructions and where the Air Force is now, that was the YMCA building which had been built after World War I.

And two of the buildings about where Foster Hall is now, were not permanent buildings. They were built out of wood. Two small rooms in each building. One held the business

administration department. And the other music department. There was no central heating plant on the campus. Those two buildings had a stove in each room. And if you had an eight o'clock class there, that was the first class, you found that the stove was piled full of wood and everything all ready for you to put a match to it and light it, to warm up the classroom. I had a class in one of them. And that was true with some other buildings on the campus. Science Hall over there, there was a heating plant in the old gym and it heated the gymnasium and the Science Hall. That was all it heated. But it was not large enough, they thought it wouldn't be large enough to heat all of Science Hall, so the room in the northwest corner on the second floor, still had a cold stove in it. And they used that, that was biology then.

HM: Well, you said that you weren't very impressed with the campus. Where did you come from ? Tell us a little bit about your background before you came here.

LS: Well, I did my undergraduate work at Ohio Northern at Eida, Ohio. About a thousand students. Which wasn't large of course, but it wasn't so small in those days. 1920's , early twenties. Then I did my graduate work at Penn State, and we had about four thousand students there. And then to come on a campus where there was less than three hundred students, some place between two hundred fifty and oh, maybe two hundred and ninety. Naturally the classes were very small and well, not many buildings and the facilities were not as good as they might have been. I think probably we had better facilities so far as laboratory equipment and such things went. I wouldn't say it was good, but here somewhat it was practically non existent yet. And then sort of the some of the sort of the makeshifts they had. Uh and we see why in such a small place that they didn't need. A very large staff nor a lot of buildings to accommodate that number of students.

And well, I was also made at the student body in the twenties. Most of the colleges back east all the students would wear trousers and you wouldn't see a blue jean in the campus. And most of them would wear either a sweater or a coat to class. They wouldn't come in a short sleeve, and most of them would wear a necktie. Well, some wouldn't wear a necktie, but the majority of them did. While I was at Penn State, that was the year when, the two years, when everybody was wearing Plus Four, a golf thing. And when I came down here I had some and I wore them. And I know one of the faculty members even told me he didn't think it was very becoming for an instructor here to wear those things. (laughing profusely) And there was a student on the campus by the name of Robert Stewart and I still keep in track of Bob. He and his wife live over in Dallas. He also wore bloomers. Where was Bob from? He was from Mexico. Had been. His father was connected with mining down there and he had just left Mexico. I don't know where they moved when they came back to the states. But Bob and I, he was the only student who wore Plus Fours and I was the only member in the faculty that wore Plus Fours. (laughing)

Unknown: Had yourself a Plus Four club, huh?

LS: Well, then the classes. Oh, I had class, I had one class with three in it. I guess that was my smallest one. And if I had six or seven, that was a big class. I did have one class with about eighteen or nineteen in it. But that was true for a good many classes except freshman classes. And I didn't teach any freshman classes for almost twenty years, I guess, later. Beginning of World War II. (laughing) When they took all the students, sent all these army trainees. Well, then I taught some freshman classes. Well, I wasn't accustomed to big classes, but usually the smallest class back east would have at least six or seven in it and oh, maybe a lot of them around a dozen or so. Then come and find only two or three in a class, it made quite a difference. I mean a class that small we don't have many opinions. When you get up about six or seven, well, that's all right. That can be an interesting class, but two or three is rather small. But, and you say, "That seems queer." No, when we had commencement at the end of the school year, we'd have less than thirty graduate. Twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight total graduates from the school of arts and science, engineering and agriculture. And so no department was putting out more than oh, four or five at the very most. Usually three or four, something like that. Oh ,what they attempted to do to a large extent make certain courses mandatory for everyone.

For instance in school of Arts and Science, when I first came here, Dean Taylor was Dean of Arts and Science. And every student in the school of Arts and Science as a freshman took a certain course. And there were no exceptions. Chemistry is one, Mathematics was one, I believe biology was one. I'm not sure about biology but I know chemistry. And that was it if you went to Arts and Sciences. If you went to engineering the same thing was true. As a matter of fact for a number of years we did not list freshman as civil or mechanical or chemical or electrical engineers. They were just listed as engineers, because they'd schedule a uniform. Even the chemical engineers took[inaudible] I know we tried to sort of , no they were going to keep the freshman year in uniform. You took what was offered your freshman year. And they were the same way with the college of agriculture. And so that way you did cut down on the number of classes somewhat. You had no choice, the students didn't. If you came here as a freshman regardless of which college you went to his program was all set up for him. He had no choice, you just signed up.

HM: Well, do you think that was better or do you think the way we've got it now is a better way to do it?

LS: Well, I think that you ought to have a choice, but when you have such a small number you can't offer a very large choice. No, I think students should have some choice. At that time I think that my idea was that if a student applied himself he would be able to get through almost any course. I changed my mind in that somewhat because I think there are people, when it comes to certain things, maybe due to their previous training whether in mathematics they'd have a very difficult time passing a freshman course. Like you take people, some people, when it comes to music they're sort of stone deaf to it. They have no ability at all. So ability does differ, and I think it is enjoyable to have choices. So I think that today we've made a big improvement from that.

And then well, the general attitude was different from what it was in the east. Some people still think it is today, I don't ...Not nearly as.. The difference is not nearly as great as it

was though. But then it was still southwesterners. However one thing that you could always depend upon when you met anybody you said, "Where you are from?" Because eighty percent of the people were not born in New Mexico. They moved here. So I'm from Texas, I'm from South Carolina, I'm from Mississippi and New York and wherever it might be. And you would find very few people who were native born New Mexicans. Very few.

And what they, they seemed to adopt a oh, southwestern attitude. Sort of a rancher attitude, I guess. And it was somewhat different that I'd ever encountered in the east. Because there was not such a thing as the east. But uh...And then another thing that struck me as being very funny about a second or third night I was here. There was a group of the faculty that said they were having a picnic that night, would I like to go? and I said yes. Well, we went out here in the desert and a half way to A mountain or somewhere and got out some baskets and started a fire and cooked some hotdogs and things like that and that was one of the queerest picnics I had ever attended.

Back east we'd go on picnics but they'd prepare all the food before we left. And you usually didn't build a fire. And whatever you had you took it along and you might not have a table, you'd spread cloth on the ground and people sat around eating and talking and spend the evening. But here, oh, no! You always had to have a fire. And you had hamburgers and hotdogs and oh, somebody might prepare a potato salad or something like that. But sometimes not just what you took with you and ate there. And then they wanted to sing these western songs. Well, to me, Little House on the Prairie and so forth, I'd never heard it before. (laughing)

HM: No musical training at all.

LS: Well, I thought that was some place to go. And back east if you went for a picnic. You usually picked a site where there was water. Or water close by. Well, here in the desert you had to take it all in jugs. The filling jugs or something. And that seemed pretty queer too.

Unknown: Well, right after you came here Robert Goddard was electrocuted. Did you know him very well?

LS: Well, he was dean of engineering. He was the second dean of engineering. The engineering school was founded about, separate, I think about 19 oh....I think it was 18 or 19 or in there someplace before. You see here for years, whether you took agriculture, arts and science or engineering, there's only one dean. There was no school of agriculture or arts and science and engineering. They were granting engineering degrees, but it was a degree in languages or english or something, but there was just one school. They were not differentiated at all. And Goddard was the second dean. And he was also head of the EE department. And he was a great radio fan. He was the one that started KOBE. Of course it finally moved to Albuquerque and what dissolved up there and they have the same call letter back here now at a station in Las Cruces, I think.

And he was a man that was highly thought of and he was quite close to president Kent.

I'd say he was probably one of Kent's advisors. That is if Kent wanted to know about some things that he thought Goddard might know, why he didn't hesitate to ask him. For instance, this was about '28: I went, I attended a science meeting in Albuquerque and Dean Goddard happen to be along. And that year this was along in April sometime, the legislature had closed and they had appropriated money for Kent Hall over here and the Dairy building that sets over here. And Goddard told this, Well, I oh, it was a hundred and fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. And Kent Hall cost around, what around a hundred thousand. Maybe only ninety thousand. But anyway, Kent told Goddard that he didn't think he oughtta spent all that money, he oughta save ten thousand or so. And Goddard said, he said, " No, I told him don't do that! Because when you go back two years from now and ask for money for something they'll say, ' Well, we'll cut whatever he asks for because he didn't need all we gave him before. He didn't spend it all' " So he said, " Spend every cent of it."

And he was a very enthusiastic man and a real pusher so far as the college went. In 192..What was it? '27-"28. There was the Pan American Convention of Engineers. It took in Canada, United States, Mexico and I think the rest of the Central American Republics it was held in Mexico City. I went and Dean Goddard was along and he was oh, a big pusher for the place here. And rather queer he was from Massachusetts. That was his home, but he liked the country down here and he thought they had great possibilities. And I don't know, but his death was very unfortunate. Very unfortunate. But in the long run I don't know whether that made a great deal of difference or not. Because somebody else....It was true that it was sometime before we found a man as dean of engineering, say to pick up the torch and carry it, push it forward and I think that was General Milton.

And in the meantime, I forgot we had a dean come. He came from the University of Illinois. He was an E-man. He only stayed two years. He didn't get along well with the set up down here. And then we had a man by the name of Fleming. Fleming had married a Las Cruces girl and I believe, maybe he had taught here once before. I think he was from the University of Iowa or something. He was a very capable man, but he wanted a job and it was during the depression. And the job he had, somewhere, they did away with. Well, this, I think, was just sort of a fill-in for him. Now I don't say that in a derogatory manner, because he was very capable and very nice man. But after a couple of years when another job opened up, considerable higher salary, why, he left of course.

And then General Milton came in as dean of engineering. And he was dean of engineering and he was appointed president. And he was another man who has always been a..what other word can I say? Pusher. He wanted to get things done. Do this and I think he spent a little time daydreaming, but I think one has to. And so he had a lot of ideas. As a matter of fact these buildings that were built with WPA, the one they just tore down in the outer circle. Walden Hall and addition to Garrett Hall and the beginning of Milton Hall all took place during that time.

I remember one Sunday afternoon, at the old swimming pool. Oh it was located there I guess, at the south end of the present athletic field. And I was up there and I was setting on the sidelines there [inaudible] got wet or something and President Milton came along and sat down he said, " Shires, you're gonna get a new chemistry building." And he said, " I just got back from .." I don't remember where it was Washington or someplace. " ...and I think we can get the money." Well, if it hadn't been for World War II, I think maybe, it would have developed. The plans was drawn, the architect was the same man that made the first unit of the library here. He

was from Clovis. And the chemistry building would straggle the road between the present chemistry building and physics building. Of course the road doesn't go through anymore, been using it for a parking place. But that and there were plans drawn up. Chemical engineering was in the basement and it was a three story building. In addition to the basement. You can still find a picture of it in the Round-up , or the architects idea of it. But World War II came along and of course that was the end of that. But he was, he wanted to get things done. And he tried to keep people, so to speak, I'd say, on their toes and go off in the corner and snooze.

Unknown: He still does. He comes by to tease us all the time.

HM: He's a great promoter.

LS: And I think the university owes a lot to him. I think he was the first one, maybe, that envisioned it's possibilities. I don't want to believe some of the things. I remember Clyde Tingley when he was governor addressing the faculty and the students up here and this was during the depression. And he said, " Why Las Cruces some day may reach twenty-five thousand." And everybody said, "Hoooooo!!" (laughing)

HM: That's a big number for Clyde Tingley to have said.

LS: So these things, well, when you look back they were things to look forward to. But most people didn't think that anything like that could happen.

Unknown: Well, what were some of the effects of the depression on the college? You mentioned the building by WPA and ..

LS: Yes, the PWA, I think it was the PWA. One of the alphabetic outfits did considerable work here. As a matter of fact it could easily be that we ended up at the end with more floor space and accommodations for classes and other departments, like the extension agriculture experiment station and so forth, than we would have if there'd not been a depression. Money from the legislature was not easy to get. Oh, they feed you a little along, but not very much. And it could be no way of telling but we didn't do too bad when you consider what we added to Goddard Hall, Walden Hall, and the Arts and Science Annex and starting the student center. That was unheard of. That was a lot of people. You just couldn't be a success.

And then that first unit they closed the door on Rhode's Hall. Well, we had old McFee Hall down here for the girls dorm. And wasn't it good enough? Of course it couldn't been good enough very long because the state condemned soon after that I think.

HM: That was not uncommon for a number of the buildings....

LS: But the dream when he became president in 19..What was it? '38 until he left for World War II, about 1942, I think, or '43 he instigated a lot of...

Unknown: Along about that same period we lost our accreditation, what kind of affect did that have?

LS: Well, I don't think that it had that great deal of affect. That there came up during the period that our board of regents were politicians and not regents. And that was another thing. When Dr. Kent had a stroke and came back, well, he had to have a period of rest. And he didn't get along too well with some members of the present board. I think Dr. Kent was ready to compromise, he was not the sandy man as my Dr. Kent. I think he was a real educator. A real educator. And I suppose that when you're in a position like this and the board of regents, you have to do some compromising. He was willing to I think, but some things he just wouldn't do. You couldn't push him too far.

Evidently for a number of years, maybe always, I don't know how far back it went. In some cases you could not hire, and you say, " What cases?" You could never tell. You couldn't hire a man or a woman for certain position unless it was passed on by the board of regents. Now with sometimes it was an automatic OK and that was all there was to it. I think that was true in my case, it was an automatic ok. There was no pressure brought at all. But another case I remember this and this is a real case. There was a person hired in a department, it came out in the newspapers, and neither the president of the college nor the head of the department knew anything about it. (laughing) And some of those things happened. They weren't too common, I guess, but they happened.

One thing was,I think, from the beginning of the college the local people felt that they wanted to run it. And a good many of the regents were ofttimes were sometimes the majority from Dona Ana County or an adjoining county and the local people in Las Cruces, they thought that they ought run it. For instance, I know a man up there, a well-known man, and he wasn't the only one who thought they ought change presidents every three or four years. They'd get new ideas, new blood in and you just ought change 'em even though they were satisfactory. And so you had this, one thing you hear about Monroe in charge of extension service. He left in the spring, and I came in the fall, so I wasn't here so I never met Monroe myself. I don't know what the charges were or what the trouble was, all I know is that when I would hear extension people speak of him, after I came, I would say on the whole , they all spoke very well of him. But the why's and wherefore's of his leaving I don't know anything about.

And then I can think of another instance. And this is during the depression. The dairy inspector, you see this college has always been the department of agriculture for the state of New Mexico. And when the legislature would pass anything, well, it's up to you to enforce it. For instance, after I came they passed a law that all nurseries had to be, in the state of New Mexico, had to be inspected. Well, it was up to the [inaudible] to inspect them. And President Kent appointed professor Crawford, in biology, to do an inspection. And I knew Crawford quite well.

He occupied the upper floor at Science Hall and so he would, every spring or so, have to go out on nursery inspection for a while. And then they had to license the cotton gins. Well, the license had a license on the cotton gins in New Mexico. And for some work like that, routine work, well, it began to grow. And professor Guthrie, or Dean Guthrie of the business administration, he was an assistant to President Kent for a few years just to take care of things like that. Licensing cotton gins and little chores like that.

HM: Well the state chemist here for a long time.

LS: Oh, yes the state legislature said that the head of the chemistry department and the employees should be the state chemists. And so that was him. And the feeding fertilizer, that wasn't in the law at all. You could have sown fertilizer and you didn't even have to put what was in it on the bag. And the same way with feed. Well, so finally they passed that. Well, that was going to be a full-time job. In fact one man couldn't do it very well cause you had to travel over the state and take samples here and bring 'em in and have 'em analyzed and there wasn't any place to analyze them so they appointed a man and then they hired a chemist. And they thought that wouldn't be enough work to keep them busy.

Elick was the first man, Louis Elick, he was half-time in chemistry and half-time in feeding fertilizer. He'd teach about oh, eight, nine hours half-time and then do the feed and fertilizer analysis.

Unknown: Well, how many hours did you teach in those days?

LS: Oh, twelve hours was considered about a minimum low. If you didn't teach twelve hours something was wrong. But I can tell you this: In nineteen hundred and sixty-three, I taught fourteen hours one semester. (laughing) I had to to get some students out, but it wasn't there fault, due to some other difficulty and I had fourteen hours that semester.

And then twelve is the minimum. Fourteen, they didn't want you to teach over fourteen at the most. Finally they cut it down to twelve, then they cut the heads of departments down to, oh, first ten and then I think eight. Or something like that. Because even when I taught in '63, the fourteen. I wasn't expecting to teach more than about eight, but I didn't have anybody else to do it. So I did it myself.

HM: Considerably reduced lowly over what had gone one very early. Because one time, Hugh Milton, was listed as the instructor for something over twenty hours of class time here in a week. That's when he was in the chemical engineering department. I think we talked about that sheet that [inaudible] that I hung on to. [inaudible] having been on the faculty and retained a number of things that he thought were interesting. And at that point up, which showed the faculty lowered at the time.

LS: Well, that was carried on, but in some of these courses you did have that many credit hours and you didn't. It depends on how you look at it. And that was carried on and may still be in the art department. That is in some of this design work, you would have two or three classes and you would have them all in the same room and there weren't many in anyone of the classes, so since it was designed or you could take care of it two or three classes without much difficulty. I don't know what they do in the art department, but Manon did that in the Art department.

He would take two or three different classes that had more of the same studio there where they were doing there work, and without much additional effort he could take care of say three classes in what was one. None of them were too large.

So that sometimes was the case when you had twenty hours or something like that. Yes, I know Dean Jett, this was before he became dean. He was signed up for about twenty hours one semester for something. But in those days long hours were long because when you came to a laboratory all they gave you credit for was the credit hours. And, if you had twelve hours, well, that didn't mean you were only busy twelve hours. If six hours of it was lab, well you had to have three hours of lab to one hour of credit. And that only assigned you one-hour of credit. As a matter of fact, you see, at that rate you would have thirty-six hours of laboratory hours a week had you taught just twelve hours and nothing but laboratory courses.

HM: There were no student assistants?

LS: No, we didn't have any student assistants. The nearest we had to them, occasionally I think people in the english department would have maybe senior english majors read freshman papers. That was the nearest thing we had. But they were not listed as students assistants or anything like that, they just hired them at so much per hour or something and that was it.

Unknown: Well, what about academic freedom? You know that was an issue in the late 1930's. It resulted in 193..'38 or '39 with the establishment of the academic senate.

LS: That uh...Milton started the academic senate after he became president. And during the regime of the politicians, the fact they was not satisfied. They didn't like it, but as I say, what could you do about it? It amounted to something like that. As far as I'm concerned they never bothered me. I don't know why, but they didn't. And there was no tenure. You got a yearly contract and sometimes you didn't get it until the last week of the school year in the spring or maybe they just issued the ones that you wouldn't get it signed then. Usually not until next fall I guess. But you would find out if you were going to be here the next year. But this wasn't the only place. That I don't think was too uncommon in other institutions. And you would like to know if you were going to be here next year, a little earlier, cause I mean, first of the year to give you a little time. And there was a lot of dissatisfaction there, in fact there as a whole, I'd say none of them liked it. But I don't know whether it was so much different from other places or not. Things have just changed a great deal since then the way they do things. And the bad thing here was, of course, no one could ensure. Even the president was helpless. Now I think in most

cases, they probably did, I don't know. Or I'm just doing a little guessing here. They did consult the president, but I think some places they simply told him, " We're gonna fire that person." And if he didn't agree, well, the person was fired anyway. I don't think, maybe for a long time, it was too bad. Now and then. But during this period in the thirties there, it did get pretty bad. I remember one regent who ate at the.. We had a boarding house by the dubbing of the faculty, and this person had to come up and sign the checks. Every check per doubt one of the regents had to sign. And they would eat there with us. And one day while they were eating there it was brought up: What did we think of a certain person. They wanted to get our idea on it. Well, I don't think a regent has any business coming in and asking a dozen faculty members things like that. But that was sort of typical. The regents did have a great deal of power. Too much!

In fact I think when Milton took over the presidency that was the turning point. Because he, I think in some things he'd have to compromise but there's certain things he wouldn't do. Unless I can run that I won't be here. In fact, I believe, I've heard him say publicly more than once that... and I see, and when he did have trouble with the board of regents, see he called up the governor and the governor removed them. The regents. And that brings us to this accrediting situation.

Unknown: Hold it for just a second please.

LS: Well, I don't think that the accrediting situation affected the university too much. It was, I think, most of the faculty felt that it had been decided before the team ever came here to check us. Because the faculty members who did, I think, talk with them, all reported that well, "Anything you said you may as well not say it." They gave the impression that they'd already made up there mind. And so we lost our accreditation.

HM: Do you remember anything about who made up the accrediting team?

LS: No. At the time I could have told you. The chairman anyway, but at the present, I just forgot.

HM: Well, I ask because, I was wondering if that was significant in their having made up their mind before they ever came to the college.

LS: I don't know. Now was enough. I think he's from the Midwest, but I could be mistaken. And so far as the students went, I don't believe that it had too much affect. It was during the depression of course and after all a good many of our students were local and probably didn't have money enough to go anywhere else. And maybe those that didn't live here. I don't think it affected them too much. It may have had a little, but you didn't hear too much about it. However, as it turned out, really nobody graduated when we were not accredited.

When they discontinued our accreditation it was not until after commencement. And about two days before commencement, two or three days before commencement, the next spring they put us back on. The president got a telegram that we were reaccredited. So nobody really graduated from the institution when we were not accredited. We were out for just about one year, but uh...

Unknown: Was there a lot of concern about it while we were off the list?

LS: No, I don't think there was a lot of concern. Of course in the meantime we got a brand new board of regents. And they were an excellent board. One of the best we ever had I think. And I don't think there was any question, but what eventually we get back on. I really didn't expect that quite as quick as it happened. I thought it's probably another year. But I think the consensitive opinion " Oh, uh, we'll get back on with a new board." No question about that. But when? That would be another question.

So that was not one of these.. I don't think anybody got too excited about it.

Unknown: Well, do you think it had any affect on the long range plans for the university to grow?

LS: I doubt it. I doubt it.

HM: You think that was mostly World War II?

LS: Yeah, because [inaudible] came through in the depression and it was a few years before World War II before we got in it. But I don't think it had any long range affect on the institution. As I've said before jobs were scarce and a lot of people would work almost anywhere. Accreditation wasn't taken very much into consideration for somebody who wanted a job. If they could get a job that's what they wanted. And I don't think we lost any faculty members due to that. I doubt if we lost many students.

HM: Well, it sounds as though the loss of it may have been more because of the politics of the board of regents than because of ....

LS: I think that was probably maybe the reason for it, and yet I don't think on the whole the academic situation had deteriorated at all.

HM: Seems as though that had not even been questioned.

LS: Of course, I have a feeling that in some of these accreditation visits they are not interested very much in the academic part. They are more interested in, oh, how you run your business and so on and so forth. I remember at a convention on the chemical engineering division, ASEE this was, that, I can't tell you who it was , but one man said that we had been accredited for what was it for fifteen or sixteen years now and the accreditation has never looked at our laboratories.

Of course at the time you don't have one they won't accredit ya. But he said they never looked at them. I tried to get them a couple of times to go look but, no they always had something else to talk about.

HM: It seemed as though we got a wrap it once over here too. From this last most immediate passed check. And that was a quick one, because everyone had assembled information about all the classes and prepared a syllabus, that in some cases had been previously lacking. And it took about ten minutes going through all the papers which were indicative to the types of examinations and responses that the students gave. The types of reports. The quality of them. And this stack of papers was looked at and, I think, perhaps, weighed more than evaluated. A little bit like you do with reports, put enough staples in 'em and you get a good grade.

Unknown: What other things were happening in 1930 besides the depression and accreditation laws? What...Do you know if there were any campus attitudes to what was going on in Europe at the time, with Hitler and Mussolini?

LS: Not particularly. You would find, I think, small groups of students then maybe a small group of the faculty or something or individuals talking about it. But there was not a lot of agitation on the whole. They were against Hitler. They were for the allies, but actually there was no great movement. When President Roosevelt decided to give aid to England I believe, in the way of supplies and so forth, there was a general opposition, I think. A little public opposition to that because they were afraid that we would become involved in another war. And the general public didn't want to.

HM: That was a land lease arrangement wasn't it?

LS: Yes.

HM: Well, we had among other people, Lindbergh, who was actively against such involvement.

LS: Yes, they were against. But I would say the opinion among both the faculty and the students were very much the same as what the public opinion was on the whole. Well you found some who were against this, against that, but you know, a very mild agitation.

HM: Then comes the question about Pearl Harbor.

LS: Well after that, I think then the opinion was pretty well made up, it was firm that we had no alternative. That we just had to enter the war. And there was I'd say, practically no opposition. You might find one here and there but, not any to speak of.

HM: I think that brought more of a feeling of unity.

LS: Yeah I think it did too.

HM: Perhaps than we may ever have experience before or will again. Simply because all at once there were people who at least looked somewhat differently than the average American to whom we are accustomed. We knew someone had done something dastardly and they should be punished. Further than that, this portion of the country had a major loss at Pearl Harbor, because so many of our men were in the groups who had gone there for maneuvers. There were for the national guard, at that time, there had been a choice given as to whether they wanted to go on maneuvers in Alabama or in Manilla. And obviously these fellahs hadn't been there and they would like very much to go.

So the vote, and that's the way it was decided, was that they should go to Pearl Harbor. And that result was there were an immense number of New Mexico and Arizona, all the groups that might have made up national guard composite, were there at Pearl Harbor. I guess one of the first ships that went down, was the battle ship New Mexico. And it was on that, the personnel was, was immense. So there was no small town in New Mexico that didn't feel as though it had lost more people than any other town in the country. There was an immense personal feeling carried over into everything that was written. There were things which were broadcast. All the things which were popular including the songs, which immediately became available to most of the recording stars of the time. And because radio was such a pervasive part of our life, that and the newspapers, which were the other part, in combination with magazines, immediately took up the cry. And I think disunity was something that people would punish a whole lot more than they would if they found someone who was a spy in the neighborhood. They just did not like people who were not going the same direction and had a ward a way and they were gonna do it and do it certain.

Unknown: Was that fairly pervasive on campus? Is that the way the students felt?

LS: Yeah, I think the students and faculty just, there feeling was the same as oh, the general public. There was no opposition to the war or to the draft to speak of or anything.

HM: We had such an active ROTC unit at the time here on campus. Plus the fact that it was aired very shortly. December the 7th was a memorable day, I think for all of us. But in particular it was a thing which was one which was greeted with a great deal of disbelief. For numerous hours after the announcement were made on the radio that this had happened, there were people who said, " Well, that's the worst joke I've heard." And didn't believe it. But by the end of that day it was a building feeling.

LS: Who were they anyone on the campus should have known better if they thought it was a joke. Because by the eight o'clock or nine o'clock classes, may have been the nine, practically all classes were dismissed and they listened to President Roosevelt make the declaration of war before congress.

HM: I remember that. I remember that.

Unknown: Were you on campus then Herb?

HM: Yup. In fact for some reason, I was residing in Kent Hall. The part about " for some reason" is I can't imagine having been up early on Sunday morning for any justifiable purpose at the time, but I did get up early and heard that. And there were numerous fellahs who came by and I accosted them and told them what had happened and they just wouldn't believe it.

It took a while for anyone to figure out just what had happened. First word Pearl Harbor and what could that possibly can that have to do with us. And then when it was realized that we had brothers and fathers and sisters and cousins and all sorts of people out there on these ships that were being , on which partial reports were coming in. The idea began to spread pretty rapidly
that there was something here that had to be taken care of. And it was not long thereafter, sometime early in the spring semester when we, I think, we were told that if we were gonna go to school at all, we were really gonna go to school. And we were gonna get in three semesters that year and there were no plans made whatsoever for any reduction, so we got in three full semesters. And one way we did it was, I'll never forget the seven o'clock classes of H.O. Smith. And he was hard to take a ten o'clock. (laughter)

Classes were going all day and labs at night. So all the engineers, physicists, chemists, and mathematicians in particular, were going to school on an extremely irregular schedule from January through December because everybody was supposed to graduate the following spring who was in any one of those groups went out that Christmas.

LS: Did you take unit operations in December?

HM: I must have, yeah, that's because

LS: That was a seven o'clock class.

HM: That was a fall...That would have been a fall class, so it was backed up to the summer. Yes.

LS: Because well, I'd teach it and I'd already signed up the project as an experiment station.

HM: You were drying chile.

LS: And so I didn't have any time and let's see, who was...I guess Gardener was president, was dean of the college of agriculture. And well he and Branson then, I think, agreed to this and suggested it. Rather than break into that, they decided to rearrange the contract and commitments. Would I teach at seven? So I taught the class from seven to eight and then put in an eight hour day for the experiment station. This doesn't have much to do with it, but I know I was surprised. I didn't understand it. When I got through I got a check, extra check. And I couldn't understand, oh, they said that was for teaching unit operations in the morning and you got paid for the experiment station. I fulfilled that contract so I got this extra money.

HM: Well, didn't you have a laboratory class or two at night? I know we had labs at night, all during that summer.

LS: We may have had.

HM: Because they seriously interfered with my courting. I found a girl I wanted very much to marry and this going to school at night was an unwanted interruption just because we had a war on. (laughing)

Unknown: Was there any bad feeling about the draft laws that were started prior? You know, now, they began before Pearl Harbor. Was there anybody going and complaining about the order conscription?

HM: No. No, I don't just think there were. Unfortunately you're not old enough to have been there when it happened, but the prevailing mood was that this is something that you did. And the scramble to get in was such that even those of us who after graduation or at graduation, I guess, we pretty much got the story. We knew then, pretty well were told, whether we were gonna wear uniforms or take an industrial job [inaudible]. And there was just no question which way we were going to go and nobody was mad about it. Because there were some that were going to be in industry or whatever it may be. And there were others who had difficulty getting uniform. The interesting thing about it is that there was a scramble from that time on for many of us who did not get the uniforms. Who would go in and volunteer regularly. It was always sort of a tinger knot and I, to find the company you were working for, then and going to whatever appropriate government agency it was to get a deferment. You were not...There were so many reprimands too. Such as "What are you doing trying to volunteer when we are trying to keep you here? We've already got enough trouble trying to keep our personnel and you're trying to get out." So the attitude is one that was not a thing that any one person had. This covered the country. And the people who did not go along with it were just not excepted.

LS: I think that was particularly true of this section of the country. I don't think you'll find much opposition anywhere, but the opposition here I'd say was just nil. And when, I know, well, during some of these other wars, the Korean to some extent, and there was opposition to that. So but of course the great opposition came in the Vietnam. But previous to that, well, you just couldn't imagine such things would happen.

HM: It certainly wouldn't have been accepted by any, within any age group. Not only within that group, but by those above and below it. There were things which went on such as aluminum drives and things like that. When aluminum of any kind was being collected because everybody knew that's what you made airplanes from. There were many times when the local hardware store would have it's stock exhausted, by people who would go in and buy a perfectly new item, take them to wherever the aluminum was being collected and use hammers on them to be sure that they were going to be going into airplanes instead of somebody else picking them up and having a frying pan. And that was not unusual.

LS: I collected even safety razorblades. But oh yeah, I would buy 'em, top on 'em and they just wouldn't top or something the whole you could drop 'em in.

HM: Tires.

LS: And if you had an extra automobile tire, you were supposed to turn it in. There was a certain date for it. And I happened to have one because that summer, previous summer, in the east, out in the wilds of New York state somewhere, I had a flat and ruined a tire. And came to a little village, a small town, there wasn't another one for forty miles. And I just had to have a tire,

and they didn't have one quite the right size. It was a half inch off or something. But I took it because it would get me to the next town. Even though it was quitely correct to have the sides side. So I bought it for oh, I think three or four dollars. And it got me to the next town I picked up the size I should have then. Well, when I came back home, I had it. And I asked a used car dealer or filling station, what they'd give me for it. It wasn't a bad looking tire. And oh, they said, "Two dollars." And I said, " Well, I'll burn the thing first and watch the black smoke go up." So I rolled it in the garage and that was it. But then this came along. And it had to turn it in. And they were turning them in down here at the depot at Mesilla Park. So I took it down and got twelve dollars and something for it. (laughter.)

HM: Well it may appear to be expensive of publicly to be prosecuted. Nobody would get you for that now, but then, then you were a criminal.

LS: Oh, no, you didn't have anything to say. They looked at them and evaluated them. And that's...You didn't have anything to say.

HM: You couldn't ask for more and you got that. There's a question too, Luke, about what happened relatively to the influx of the native naval training. It was the ASTP program. And you had a lot to do with that because you were teaching those scholars and that was in addition to your regular load.

LS: Well, there wasn't so much of a regular load and it kept sending out, but they sent army and navy people in here, almost by the hundreds it seemed. And well, you were to teach them this. No outline or anything, but you...They were supposed to take chemistry for three months. Not in the semester system, it was going to be in the quarter system.

So the first group or two they sent in wasn't bad. They stayed for three months. Then it got so, "Here's a new group for three months." And say in six or seven weeks or something, why, they'd decide to take them out and out they would go. You couldn't plan ahead, they were supposed to be here for twelve weeks, but oh no. They'd pull 'em out when they pleased. So it got down where, well, we [inaudible]. Well, I don't know how long it lasted, maybe for a year or maybe a little over a year. We did get quite a few, but at the last when they came, you never knew how long they were going to stay.

HM: One of the first programs was training machinists.

LS: Yes. They built a building here particularly for that. It's the oh...on the ...It's this old building I don't know what they use it for now. It's just across from the post office on the opposite end there. That was built for metal workers and machinists and various things like that. And of course they didn't take any university work, most of those people. They spent all of their

time there.

HM: And those were all, at least in, through 1942 the ones within my [inaudible] ones that I got to know were all naval trainees. All going to be machinists of some sort, but they needed in quantity and they ran them through in a hurry. And that's the way the dad jets supported a number of indigent students at the time. I was one of them. Because grading their papers was an experience. Something like you probably encountered. They divided up into, oh what usually turned out to be about groups of five. But the groups of five, then, had an overlord someplace. And it was within about three or four weeks, if you were grading the papers, with each group, that you could spot the lead man. And it would only be a few very variations on all the papers that were turned in from that. So when you found his paper and graded it, the rest of them were almost automatic.

So you could save an awful lot of time. You were supposed to spend a certain number of hours given a certain number of papers and it was nice money.

LS: Yeah, that operated for some time, and I have no idea about it's operation because it was, well, an entirely separate part. I don't think those students took any college work at all.

HM: They had some simple mathematics.

LS: Yeah, but that was especially for them. They may have had special classes for them, but they were not mixed up with the other students.

HM: V.E. and V.J. Day. Responses.

Unknown: What happened?

HM: You have to tell him about that. I was someplace else.

LS: Well, of course, it was expected. There wasn't any question of what it was going to happen, it happened soon. And there was a lot of excitement and so forth about, just like any thing like that. It's over soon. Everybody's happy and glad and they celebrate, but I don't know what the lasting affect is. I suppose if you've won, you feel elated and maybe it does give you and added push, so to speak. But outside of everybody celebrating and feeling good about it, I don't know what the prolonged effect was.

HM: Well, in the precedent set by Harry Truman on VJ Day, if you remember, because he declared a two-day holiday. And these were both work days and that had never been done before. It also has never been done since. And the elation was simply, it was almost beyond belief.

I had a wife who was trying to give birth to a baby. And I had previously contracted with the taxi organization in Pittsburgh, who guaranteed me that under no circumstances would she be lacking transportation to the hospital. And when I called, it happened to be on the morning of V.J. Day. And they said, " We're sorry , but we cannot get our cabs more than a few blocks from where they are." Because the traffic was so heavy. The traffic became burgermeiered in Pittsburgh because people were so delighted in all the office buildings that they began throwing paper out of the windows.

Well, the paper included records of all kinds and that was an immense loss. And one of the interesting things, that seldom happens, is that they threw out so much paper that the street cars couldn't get through on the tracks in the central part of town. So the street cars could only go to the outskirts to the main business district and then they had to find a way to turn around and go back because they could not get traction on the tracks. There simply was no contact. The amount of paper was just beyond belief. But that was part of the celebration and for two days, I think more and more batteries probably ran down because of honking of the horn because of starting of the cars or stopping, than most almost anything else. But traffic was an unbelievable thing.

LS: We were fortunate here. We didn't have traffic jams. (laughter) Las Cruces is still a town of four thousand.

HM: Well, that was an interesting time.

LS: Well, there was things, if you go back to World War I. They've prematurely, they said that the Armistice didn't sign the day before it was. It was in November 11th, November the 10th I guess. Well, November the eleventh was, and we were in bed and somebody came in, this is in Fort Ogalthorpe, Georgia. And we all get up and celebrated and so forth and then the next day we found out it wasn't true in the morning. And I had a pass through Chattanooga. So I went down to Chattanooga. Well, on my way back word leaked in somewhere, the Armistace had been signed, but nobody believed it. We didn't believe it, we didn't celebrate at all. We went back to camp and slept the morning, then we found out it was true. (laughter) We celebrated, but the day previous.

HM: Celebrating it twice makes the second a little hard to believe. What happened here for the advent of the atomic bomb? Were the people here aware of what's going on?

LS: No!

HM: What are your personal recollections of the....?

LS: Well, my first recollection: That summer we had Dr. Roberts from the University of Arizona teaching here and he roomed over at Professor Cunningham's. This house over in University Avenue that sets back quite a ways from the street. And the next morning he said, "You know I had the queerest experience about five o'clock this morning." He said, " I awoke and it was some sort of noise and a flash light. I could tell it and that was all and what could it have been?" And he said, " It wasn't my imagination I know!" And that was it. But, and then of course nobody knew anything more about it. Some other people then that was coorberated from, oh other sources, but nobody knew what it was. And when you did find out, well, I think there was a general feeling out of satisfaction and accomplishment and so forth.

Back in 19. .about 1937 or '38, I think it was. The Saturday Evening Post published an article about what you might do with Uranium. And I remember one thing it said was that well, or very small amount maybe a couple of pounds, you could run a huge ship from New York to Europe and back, I believe. And some other things, number of things it might be. Well, I had made that a required reading in, I think it was physical chemistry. And I had for the library and then I had a copy or two of my own that I kept. Well, during the war, after war had been declared, when I assigned it, the library said it wasn't available. Well, I couldn't understand why it wasn't available. I went up, no and that was all I could get out of it, was unavailable. Well, I thought they'd lost the damn thing.

And I had two copies of my own so, that I kept, so I put those on. I was investigated, I didn't know it until last it was over with, because the library was forbidden to put out or let anybody get that issue of the Saturday Evening Post and they found out that I had a couple issues and my students was reading it. What was I? What was I trying to do? (laughter)

HM: We had an industrial parallel. In our library, at Westinghouse research, it was within a matter of a day or two that virtually every book on basic physics disappeared from the shelves. There was no explanation to be had and the books were completely unavailable. There and at all the local universities and at the Carnegie library. Everything having to do with atomic physics just disappeared. And anyone who persisted in asking received the same treatment that Luke did. Namely, "Why do you want to know?"

And there were people who did and they were pretty well accordened off and put to work in areas that became, as we later learned, not only highly classified but, they were doing some strange things down in Tennessee. We know it as Oakridge. And that's where they were separating the isotopes. So the history of that time is full of great stories that perhaps lack a little of interest now, because it was so difficult to comprehend that anything could have been nationwide in a matter of hours. And I really think that the libraries and records areas were swept clean. And if it took a week, I think that might be an exaggeration. And for a librarian to tell anyone, that it had happened or admit it, or say why was just inadmissible to them, to their peers, that was part of being in a war. But you didn't say that that had anything to do with the war.

When White Sands first began. How did it begin? Was there a massive movement of people?

LS: No, I really think White Sands began, you have to go back a little bit. Dr. Gardener came here as head of the physics department in the thirties. Oh, I don't know, '33, '34 or some time in there, why there was no major offered in physics. In fact about all the physics that was offered was taught in just about one year. Or maybe it was they had another course or two, but there wasn't a major offered. Well, of course, he was interested in offering a major, so he finally found some jobs. Not local jobs, but outside. I believe I heard him say, although I wouldn't be too sure about whether he told this or not. He had a ...His wife's brother was a physicist that had received quite wide recognition. In what field I can't tell you now. But there were two brothers and they had really mad a name for themselves. And he told Dr. Gardener, oh you might get a little work to do with some things they wanted. And among the first things that Dr. Gardener did was make round metal balls. For who I don't know, I don't have the least idea today. Now the reason why I know that is because Daniel Bodkin was making them. Daniel was going to major in physics.

HM: Daniel Bodkin was the oldest son of Mr. Bodkin, who was the head of the chemistry department. And that was the first work that Dr. Gardener had for students. Well, then he got a little more work. Then there were two things, and I don't know which came first. They sort of came in together I think. One was the tabulation of data and plotting it from various things. And they had a whole room full of oh, tables that they worked on and the other was developing films. That was you might say the beginning of White Sands. It was all military, that is true because that's the only thing there was to do here. And the work was available so he took it on. There wasn't any other work available and the work needed to be done so he took it on. And the film developing oh, it finally developed into quite a business and it was carried on in the basement of Kent Hall. They put in new stainless steel tanks and I don't know what all because they had trouble with some of them. And they did quite a business over there.

Previous to that where did they carry it on? I don't know. But I remember they put in the new equipment and some of it they had corrosion problems and other problems that they didn't expect. And that was big business for a while and then plotting the data when they fired the first rockets and so forth. That was big business. Oh they had rooms with, I guess, twenty-five thirty people in it. Plotting this thing. I guess they do it with computers today, but they didn't have computers then.

HM: They had slide rules then.

LS: So that. And from that grew, out of that grew the physical science laboratory....