

We are resuming our interview with President Emeritus Thomas A. Spragens and today's date is November 9, 1982. Mr. Spragens, during your service as president you guided Centre through a major rebuilding program, dramatically changing the face of the campus; enrollment doubled, faculty doubled, the number of buildings and remodelings dramatically increased. I wonder if you would give us some of the background of this ten-year plan and the accomplishments you've taken the most pride in.

The first portion of your question is easier to answer than the last, though it might seem the other way. I think I mentioned in our earlier discussion that one of the weaknesses of the College apparent at the time I became part of the institution was the fact that the very small enrollment made it difficult for the College to provide majors with what we judged to be (the faculty, the dean, and I) a sufficient number of faculty members in each of the individual disciplines in which the College had traditionally undertaken to offer major fields, or fields of concentration. We hypothesized that to be able to offer a good major, that is, to expose the student to varying perspectives among persons in the field he is choosing to pursue, we should undertake to build ourselves to the point where in every discipline which we offered as a major we would have three faculty members qualified to teach in it. We felt that in some cases you might have one faculty member who was competent to function as a part of a major committee in more than one discipline. An example of that is Professor Scarborough who has been with Centre ten years or so; he functions both as a part of the philosophy program and the religion program and is certainly qualified by his training and scholarship to function in both fields. Following that principle, it was quite obvious that we could not offer as many as twenty majors, and that's roughly what we were offering at that time, without having a faculty of roughly sixty individuals, irrespective of the enrollment. (We had, as I recall it at the time of our coming here, something like thirty-five to thirty-eight members of the faculty. However, that included persons in physical education, for which we then offered course credit, but it was an area in which we had no major course offerings, no upper division offerings.) Moving further with one hypothesis, we said that the College needed to have something like 700-750 students to make that staffing an economical staffing. We recognized that there were some disciplines in which necessarily you needed more than three persons in the basic areas such as English, language, and literature.

We projected a scenario, if you please, that called for increasing the size of the institution by progressive steps without sacrificing standards; indeed we hoped to raise our standards of admission during the period of the 1960s which, as we have earlier discussed, was a period of great growth. We thought we had every reason to think we could, not double the enrollment as you suggested, but increase it by about 75-80 percent--that's roughly double.

We set out then an overall goal of building the enrollment over the '59 to '69 ten-year period to 750 students, providing a faculty soundly built to serve that, and with physical facilities competent to care for an increase in enrollment of something over 300 on a base of 425, which was roughly the enrollment from which we began.

Obviously, everything else aside, we needed more residence facilities. It was not possible to expect the city of Danville to take up as residents an additional 300 students. There had been a time when nearly all students in the College lived in private homes in the community, but that tradition was evaporating under changes of more modern times when domestic help was less available to the same degree that

it had been. Twenty years earlier many of the local gentry had enjoyed taking a student or two in and were not too burdened with the care of the service of in-house boarders.

We projected then our dormitory needs; along with that and parallel to it, we needed to make plans, clearly, for a new library. Our assessments indicated that the greatest fundamental limitation of the College's academic resources was the then existing library. But in that connection we had the problem of treating with the fact that at that time our women's division was on a separate campus, something more than a mile away from the men's campus on West Main; and we had to project our thinking into the question of how we provided, shall I say, equal opportunity for women students if we built a major new library on the campus of largest enrollment, the men's campus, while continuing the existing expectation that women would get to and from it by bus running on half-hour schedules.

This posed the question of whether we ought to think in more drastic terms to the end of planning for a unified campus. We conducted studies of the cost of maintaining a major library collection on the women's campus, the Lexington Avenue campus. It began to appear that there was only one rational way to go, and that was to provide for a planned removal from the women's campus and for the development of residence facilities on the Main Street campus adequate to handle the relocation of all women students which, as I had indicated, was about 165, while providing also for growth in the amount of an additional 300 students.

To do that seemed feasible just then by virtue of the fact that the federal government was at that time expressing its interest in and support for higher education primarily by providing loans to build residences on college and university campuses. It was also providing great support for research in the larger, research oriented universities, but that was irrelevant to our situation. We could, however, turn to those government sources for low-interest loans to build additional residence halls. We had to persuade the government that they would be justified in putting in money to provide that much housing on a campus so small.

We were successful. Without going into the details of it, we initially arranged for the construction of two residences for women students; and those were the Acheson-Caldwell and Cheek-Evans duplex units on the north side of Main Street; and for the construction of three duplex units, housing 26 students each, that formed the fraternity quadrangle. The latter element provided housing to supplant the existing converted single-family residences in which the fraternities of the College then had their abode and in which some 50 percent of their members lived.

That became a major defined need during our studies of the period of 1957-1958. The need for the library was a clearly defined need. And along with the increased residence facilities was obviously the need of a central dining facility that would accommodate that growing number of students.

By the time we entered the year 1959, which was ten years short of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the founding of the College, we had projected a program which called for an increase to the level of 750 students during that ten-year period, moving in a first stage to providing facilities for 600 and then providing for later development further on into that decade.

We also projected the need later in the decade for additional science facilities. Our earliest plan called for a wing on what then served as our science center. It was a building called, as our present science building is, Young Hall, but it was

located on a site farther south than the present building. The original master plan study projected a wing on that which would project on the east end and north. It would become a unifying unit between Young and the existing Old Main building. Our original studies had led us to believe Old Main could possibly be converted to be the needed larger library if we constructed added space winged to it on the east to provide classroom space replacing that which might be removed in the library conversion process.

So we had a plan during the ten years to provide new instruction facilities both in the humanities, the social studies, and the sciences, and a plan to develop housing and dining facilities progressively over the ten-year period to get us up to the level of being able to handle 750 students.

We added one other assumption to our master planning: With respect to facilities that could not simply be expanded incrementally as dormitories could, we should build in the assumption that they might later need to accommodate as many as 1000 students. This applied to the library and science facilities and to others planned for development in the second decade, an auditorium facility, expanded gymnasium facility, and a new, smaller theatre to replace the theatre which had been completed on the Lexington Avenue campus as late as 1955. The final master plan was done, as I may have indicated earlier, with the assistance of an able group of planning architects, the firm of Murphy and Mackey of St. Louis, Missouri, who had done a great deal of work of this kind with Washington University in St. Louis, whose experience appealed to us and whose aesthetic sense as it related to campus facilities had also appealed to our sense of appropriateness.

Having defined physical plant needs in those terms, we undertook also to assess the adequacy of our endowment. We projected a need to increase the endowment of \$3 million with which we entered the period to a total of \$6.5 million by the end of the first decade.

Putting all those needs together, we projected a need of 1) raising, both for the physical facilities and for additions to the endowment, gifts of \$6.5 million, and 2) borrowing an additional \$3 million or so from the federal government for the construction both of dormitories and of some of the academic facilities. That became a well defined program enthusiastically approved by the faculty and warmly and purposefully adopted by the trustees of the College.

That led us into the Sesquicentennial capital campaign which we launched, as I recall it, in November of 1960. Our kick-off dinner was in Louisville in the Crystal Ball Room of the Brown Hotel. We had a fine turnout of alumni of the College and other citizens of the region interested in education. There we first publicly exposed the Master Plan and announced our intention, during the first phase of two to three years, to raise the initial part of that \$6.5 million in cash. Because the first period involved mostly dormitories and dining halls, our cash requirements were not nearly so great as they would appear when one looked at the size of the building program, so we were seeking \$1,700,000.

We were not very highly organized for fund raising at that time. We had an Annual Fund which was producing \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year and a very limited program of seeking larger gifts through estate plans. So having adopted these goals, we retained external fund-raising counsel; this was, for the record, George Brakeley and Associates of New York, who also staffed our initial fund-raising campaign.

I would just go on to say that as the campaign was moving into its later months, we took the step of going outside to find an experienced, young fund-raising specialist in order to create a permanent mechanism in the College. We created the position of director of development, using a term strongly favored at that time, and brought in a young man named Ray Handlan, who was an associate on the development staff of his alma mater, Cornell University.

So our major fund raising was relying in the first instance on external staff brought in for that purpose, but built into its latter portion a properly trained and competent young development specialist on our own staff.

The objectives of that first-phase campaign were realized. We did not raise as much money as we might have wished during the first phase for endowment, but we recognized that the goal of getting our endowment up to \$6.5 million was something that could not be too tightly planned within two-or-three-year terms. It was a long-range goal, spreading over the full ten-year period. But with some false starts, with a lot of commitment and effort on the part of the trustees and other friends of the College and particularly a large body of alumni, we did successfully complete the first phase from 1961-63 though not in every part in the way in which it was defined.

The second phase involved primarily the library development which, as we had gone along, had changed its definition considerably. We abandoned the idea of modernizing the Old Main building; we abandoned the idea of creating a wing on Young Science Hall. We didn't abandon that fully, but we undertook at least to separate that from the facilities for the library and for instructional facilities for the literary disciplines, I mean social studies and humanities. The outcome of our revised planning was what is now the Doherty-financed library-instruction building. We called it at the time a Hall of Learning to suggest the multiple functions it would serve. I can recall the brochure that we used in its promotion--it had a three-or-four-color cover on it with an artist's rendering of the building which stands there today.

We completed that building and dedicated it in 1966. And immediately, under the impetus of initiatives of the development committee of the board of trustees, chaired by Chauncey Newlin, we turned our thinking immediately then to getting ahead with the science facilities.

Let me go back and point out that the real turning point in the development program in terms of funding physical facilities that were planned came in about 1964. Having completed the dormitory and dining units that we discussed earlier, and having by that time also gotten into the construction of Yerkes House which was the third unit in the women's complex (now coed in parts, as you know) on Main Street, we faced a lack of funds to get ahead with the library, though it was time to begin to think about going into detailed architectural planning. The board of trustees, under the urging of Mr. Newlin, who later became chairman of the board, authorized us to begin construction drawings for the development of this building, even though the funds were not in sight. They said, in effect, that in some way we must bring it about.

Mr. Newlin himself became the agent for providing the assurance that we could get ahead with that construction. Just about the time we were ready to break ground he brought to us word of the successful reception by the Henry and Grace Doherty Charitable Foundation of New York of a grant for \$1 million toward the cost of the

project, which was estimated to cost \$1.5 million and toward which we had something like a quarter of a million dollars in a federal grant available. With that assured, even though all the dollars were not in place, the trustees authorized us to proceed full speed to build the building.

The College, having \$1 million in construction working capital at that point, did not draw down all of that money for the library. Since the federal government by that time had in place an educational facilities loan program (that is, for the academic facilities rather than residence facilities), we took advantage of the highest loan capability that we might command for that.

We were borrowing, not incidentally, at rates that varied between  $3 \frac{1}{8}$  and  $3 \frac{3}{4}$  percent. Your generation has a hard time grasping that at all. It was a subsidized rate, but it was a rate that was established against the going prime rate in the money markets of  $4 \frac{1}{2}$ ,  $4 \frac{3}{4}$ , to 5 percent.

But we were able to borrow money to the extent that we completed the Doherty Library and still had a cash reserve on hand. We had an additional indebtedness to be amortized over a 40-year period. Thirty or forty? Let's just record that I don't recall that at the moment; but we had a base on which to plan immediately to get the science building completed. Here again, the trustees authorized us to go ahead with the planning. We set up a careful working group from the faculty of the sciences and mathematics departments and planned a functional building to serve that area of our teaching program. We borrowed added low-rate funds, and raised more gifts, to the end that the building was begun late in the '60s and finished very early in the '70s. The project completion followed the termination of the ten-year period, though the work was financed, authorized, and under way at that time.

We did during that Sesquicentennial period exceed the \$6.5 million total fund-raising goal. The goal that was considered perhaps too ambitious in 1959 was achieved, and it moved us on with a momentum towards achieving our other needs. We addressed the question of an auditorium and facilities for the fine arts, and also the need for gymnasium facilities for the women students who had come from the other side of town, which had been satisfied earlier when we exchanged the former women's campus to the Danville City School Board for their property which was located on the southeast corner of Walnut and College Streets. (That's the present site of the arts complex today.) I need to go back and interpolate: We acquired the old High School campus when we had moved entirely from the other side of town by exchange with the school board of our KCW facilities. This enabled them to build a completely new high school plant there, after having removed the old Women's College facilities. We used their old high school facilities for instruction and their gymnasium as a women's gymnasium (we spent some \$120,000, I think, modernizing the facility, which was not a small expenditure at that time, in the middle '60s). We moved all of the activities in our Old Main building to give its site to the library-instruction building which became the Doherty Hall. So we had satisfied the gymnasium need by that exchange of properties and had temporary space to make possible our new construction.

I should add for the record: When we exchanged sixteen KCW acres and three major buildings plus a residence and a gymnasium for the high school plant, we acquired two buildings, added four-and-a-half acres, and accepted as a differential payment \$100,000 beyond the property swapped. But that gave us a piece of land that became invaluable to the College as time further developed.

But now to return to the point where we had the science building under construction and its funding through loans and cash availabilities assured. The development committee then encouraged us to go ahead with planning for an auditorium and facilities for the fine arts. When we had made a Master Plan in 1959, we had anticipated an expenditure of, say, \$1.75 million to \$2 million for such facilities, and were speaking of a building with an auditorium to seat 1000 persons and also provide facilities for arts instruction. The College's courage had increased considerably over the intervening time, particularly under Mr. Newlin's leadership. The development committee urged us to think even more boldly about a complex for the arts, including an auditorium that might be large enough to serve not just the College but the surrounding community and be a center for presentation of programs, concerts, gallery shows, and dramatic productions that would go far beyond what we had earlier anticipated. Having had called to our attention, again by Mr. Newlin, a very successful auditorium that had been built on the campus of the Arizona State University at Tempe, Arizona, we looked at that and at another auditorium that had been built in Florida by the same architects. With the unanimous approval of the board, we retained the designer of those two buildings, Wesley Peters, the chief architect of the Taliesen Associates. This was an architectural group that was the working wing of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, which had both an educational objective in which they were training young architects and a practicing objective in which they functioned as architects with an international practice.

They were invited to project the finest facility for the fine arts which might be conceived for Centre College or any of the best liberal arts colleges in the country. They came in with a design which was extremely attractive and which embraced a projected financial investment of nearly \$10 million. It was fascinating and completely beyond the belief of many of us that we could accomplish that. But it was whittled down over the time we arrived at the plan which was constructed and completed in 1973. It was constructed on a budget of about \$5.5 million with an actual expenditure initially of \$5,300,000 for construction and the equipment of the building throughout.

Even this called for far more money than we had planned, but it was a highly attractive goal and still an impractical goal in the minds of most of the trustees. I urged the trustees also to keep in mind, if we built a building of that kind, that the sheer maintenance of it would require an endowment of \$ .75 million to \$1 million, but I encouraged the board to think that we might raise that money. We agreed to recognize that if we built the building we should immediately set about providing some endowment for it in order not to adversely affect the financial stability of the College.

But at the time we were still casting about in many directions for the construction funds, and with very little success. Looking at the fact that the best potential single asset in terms of funds that were not specifically designated was a substantial interest, but a deferred interest, in a group of trusts that had been set up by W. T. Grant. He had placed the College in trusts that he had established, from which Centre would receive one-twentieth of a major estate comprised mostly of stock in the W. T. Grant Company (which, as you will recall, had low-cost department stores scattered all over the country; W. T. Grant was at the time perhaps a larger name than Kresge or Kress or any of the other chains of that kind). But these were only future interests. Mr. Newlin again, with access to the directors of the Grace Doherty Charitable Trust, saw possibilities. (The Doherty board acknowledged a particular interest in Kentucky by virtue of the fact that

Mrs. Doherty, the wife of Henry Doherty and a co-founder of the foundation, was born in the Ashland area in Eastern Kentucky and lived for several years as a child in Danville while her parents were proprietors of the former Gilcher Hotel in Danville.) The Doherty board listened to a suggestion from Mr. Newlin that they consider buying our future interests in that Grant Trust giving us cash in exchange for our rights which would be falling in in the future. Those rights had legal and economic value which could be determined by the use of the actuarial projections-- not too unreasonable when you had twenty different trusts, each of the twenty having life interests invested in twenty different individuals.

It was pretty easy to project roughly what the current value of those ultimate assets would be. The Foundation purchased our rights there for a figure in the neighborhood of two-thirds of a million, giving us a real nest egg to get ahead; and they also, after other discussion, offered to advance all needed construction money to us against funds we would later raise. We had a responsibility to pay back to the Foundation those additional advances. It was an exceedingly generous arrangement.

We we went ahead in all directions. We were undertaking to raise money for the project, and we were completing plans for putting the building under contract and getting ahead with that last major element in the development of a newly expanded plant. The building was completed and dedicated in June of 1973.

I think the record will show that the auditorium, by the testimony of outstanding artists, has turned out to be one of the finest multipurpose auditoriums in the country in terms of its acoustical qualities. In terms of knowledgeable critics, from an audience standpoint it is also one of the most comfortable, with excellent sightlines. Everything about it is outstanding. And the little theatre has comparable merit when compared to teaching theatres or experimental theatres in other parts of the country.

We set about raising funds and raised all we could; we were some distance short of having the funds to repay our obligations at the time. Ultimately the Foundation accepted from us a payment in the lump sum of something short of the initial advances of funds to a considerable extent and excused us of our further obligation in return for our making an effort to raise the needed endowment, which we undertook to do.

We set out to raise \$800,000 in endowment. With major support from the Danville community, which put up half of that, we raised the \$800,000 which was the figure the Doherty board challenged us to raise. Then the last super-generous act of great generosity on the part of that foundation led them to add to our \$800,000 an additional \$400,000 which pushed the endowment to \$1,200,000. It was one of the most unbelievable financing arrangements that I have ever experienced here, or known of elsewhere. The investment of the Grace Doherty Charitable Trust in this campus has to go down in history as the largest investment in the College up to that time.

Tape 2, Side 1 (Part 3) Dr. Thomas A. Spragens Interview (continued)  
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