

Interviewee: Grant O. Gale

Interviewers: Barbara and Russell Tabbert

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Transcriber: Russell Tabbert

Grant Gale
Side One

This is Barbara Tabbert [BT] and Russell Tabbert [RT]. We're interviewing Grant Gale [GG] on March 10, 1992, for the Friends of Steward Library's oral history project about Grinnell during the Great Depression and World War II.

BT: Grant, could you tell us where and when you were born?

GG: I was born in north Wisconsin, a place called Prentice, which to locate it, it's west of Rhinelander and south of Ashland. It's up in the north woods.

BT: Um huh. My father was from Spooner and my grandfather and grandmother from Ashland. So I know that area.

GG: Well, I spent the fourth of July in Spooner this year. So I know that country.

BT: Yes, I like it very much. What year was it that you were born?

GG: December 29th, 1903.

BT: And where did you receive your professional training?

GG: At the University of Wisconsin in Madison in electrical engineering. I graduated in 1926 in electrical engineering. And then I received my work in physics at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. I'm really not a physicist; I'm really more of an electrical engineer. Physics was pretty small fry before the world war. So anybody interested in electricity, for example, would go into electrical engineering instead of physics. After the war it was different.

BT: When was it that you came to Grinnell?

GG: 1928. My first job was in electrical engineering with Illinois Bell Telephone Company in Chicago. And then I decided I didn't want to work all my life on the twenty-first floor of 212 West Washington Street. Most of my family are in education of one sort or another. And so it seemed I'd like to give it a try. So I've been here ever since 1928.

BT: You gave it a short try. [laughter]

GG: Right. Right.

RT: What attracted you to Grinnell originally?

GG: Well, that's a long story. As I say my family, immediate— My children are all in education and their spouses are all in education. But the Gale family is sort of a long line of preachers and teachers. Actually Knox College at Galesburg, Illinois, was founded by my relatives. That's where they get the name *Galesburg*. So, while I was working I sort of looked around at all the colleges in the Middle West. I applied obviously at Knox [word unclear], around Beloit and Carleton and St. Olaf and Lawrence and Knox. It sounds a little trite now, but actually at that time I had never been west of the Mississippi. And Grinnell is west of the Mississippi. [laughter] And so this was a real trek coming out west here. The other attractive thing about Grinnell—I did have several other offers, offers from Lake Forest and other colleges—but the senior professor here, Professor Almy, was not in very good health. And the prospects of promotion and advancement looked better at Grinnell. And so that was one of the deciding factors.

BT: Do you remember what salary they offered you for your first—?

GG: Sixteen hundred dollars. [laughter] Yes, I have kept a pretty good record of faculty salaries through the years. And during the Depression we took a twenty percent cut in salaries for the scholarship fund. So I think my take-home pay was—we were paid on a ten-month basis—so my monthly salary was sort of a pittance.

RT: Could you describe a bit what the town of Grinnell was like both physically and socially when you first came here?

GG: Well, the town wasn't actually booming. But it was before the stock market crashed in 1929. We were married in June of 1929. And in October of that year the stock market crashed. The result of this, the effect on Grinnell was pretty much unemployment. There was lots of unemployment. But when I came there was a washing machine factory that was trying to compete with Maytag—called the Laundry Queen. This was operating. The Spaulding Company had just gotten out of making buggies and then they tried to make automobiles. Spaulding was essentially just closing up in '28.

But the town—there were two theaters and two newspapers, two weekly newspapers. It was a very attractive town. After the crash things sort of went downhill because of all of the unemployment. And then it sort of hit a climax when bank holiday came on March fourth of 1933. That's when all the banks closed. I've just finished a paper on the bank holiday and the issue of script in Iowa. Did you ever hear about script? The town issued script in 1933 after the bank holiday. This was largely distributed to the unemployed people. Of course the banks closed so everything was done either on sort of on IOUs or cash. So the town was really quite active up until the bank holiday. And then the Depression came and things kind of folded up.

BT: About how many people were living in Grinnell at that time?

GG: Well, the college enrollment was about 700 to 750 when I came in '28. And I think the population was around, oh, 6,500 maybe. There was some industry here.

BT: How did you see the economic conditions worsen? You mentioned the washing machine factory closing. What other kinds of things were changing during those years?

GG: Well, many of the people that were connected with so-called industry in town actually went bankrupt. A good illustration is the big house at the north end of Broad Street, what we call the Fellows house. It's the big brick house on the west side of Broad Street right by Merrill Park. He was the president of the washing machine company, Mr. Fellows—Jesse Fellows. So he was—When the washing machine company went bankrupt, Jesse essentially lost all his money and he lost his house. So the house was actually sold at the sheriff's sale for just a song. We could have bought that house in 1933 or '4 for five thousand dollars. Harriet and I looked at it very seriously. We didn't have any children at that time. But we used to play bridge with Mr. and Mrs. Fellows. And they offered us the house for five thousand dollars. The reason we turned it down was mostly on the strength of Jesse Fellows sort of evaluation of the heating system. It had a tremendous heating system. And he said if you buy it you'll have to put a whole new heating system into it. We couldn't quite afford that. So we bought our house over on Spencer Street for four or five thousand dollars.

RT: What were those Depression years like for you personally and your family. Did it affect you in day-to-day ways?

GG: Well, it didn't affect the faculty so much as the town people. Because most of the unemployment was in town. We gave up twenty percent of our salary for scholarships. Living was relatively simple. Prices were low. We didn't have any children until '34; our first daughter was born in '34, the next one in '37. But actually we saved money during the '30s, enough money so that we bought our house on Spencer in 1940. So, as I say, even on salaries of around two thousand, twenty-two hundred we saved money. Prices were cheap. I bought a new Ford in '29 before I was married. This was a deluxe job with special wire wheels and all the accessories and it cost \$585. But we could get six gallons of gas for a dollar. And we could drive to Amana. This was before Amana—it was still a communal enterprise until they broke up in '32. So we could drive to Amana and eat family-style for twenty-five cents. And come back home. So this made a fairly good outing, very inexpensive. A good meal—a meat and potato meal with drink and and vegetable, desert, gravy—the whole thing cost about twenty-five cents. So that living for faculty was pretty good because we were paid regularly. The faculty was pretty well off.

RT: Did you get caught in any of the bank failings? Did you lose any money as a result of the closures?

GG: I just finished writing a paper about the bank holiday. None of the local banks failed actually. But they closed when Franklin Roosevelt closed the banks on the fourth of March. All the banks in the country were closed. Yes, we lost money in that. Actually, we didn't get all our money out—we got it in little installments from '33 until almost 1940. But we had a little money in postal savings. I don't know. Do you remember postal savings?

BT: Not real clearly. How exactly did that work?

GG: Well, the post office had a system whereby, for a dollar, you could open an account at the post office. And we put some money in postal savings for the children. So when the banks closed we had this money in the post office. So essentially we lived on the money that we had in postal savings.

RT: That could be drawn even though the banks were closed?

GG: Yes. The federal government paid us actually in cash then. So I would say the faculty lived fairly well during the Depression years.

RT: Could we go back a little bit and could you describe what Grinnell College was like when you first came here.

GG: Well, yes. I've written quite a few articles on various aspects of the college. But I've often made the remark that it seemed to Harriet and me that the faculty was sort of a bunch of old folks. [laughter] And I've actually compared the ages and the tenure. And it actually wasn't much different from what it is today. I mean the young faculty, I'm sure, look at me and the rest of us as a bunch of old fogies.

BT: Very interesting how one's perspective changes over the years, isn't it?

GG: Yes [chuckles]. But the college, as I said, was about 700, 750 when we came. In the science division, for example, each department had two people in it. We had two people in physics, two people in chemistry, two people in biology. I take that back. Biology was separate. Botany and zoology were separate departments. We had two in botany and two in zoology and two in mathematics. And that was the whole science division.

Teaching loads were fairly heavy at that time. There was no leave system; we had no sabbatical leaves. I taught twenty-six years without a leave of any kind—from '28 until '54. That's when I went to Baghdad on a Fulbright. But salaries were low and the academic year seemed longer than it does now. There were fewer breaks. Teaching loads were heavy. But nobody complained. I'm sure we did less so-called research than they do now days. Probably less scholarly work and less publication.

BT: More energies devoted to teaching and working directly with students?

GG: Yeah, I remember hiring staff in the '30s and essentially told them this was an eight to five job five and a half days a week. And that's what they expected. But we turned out some good students in the '30s.

BT: Was the college atmosphere more formal in those days?

GG: More informal—well formal and informal both. They were formal in the sense that many of the social occasions were real formal. We had a formal Christmas dinner where you wore

tuxedos and the women wore their long dresses. The students had formal dances. We did a lot of chaperoning, because I think the students thought we were the only young couple on the faculty. [laughter] So we did a lot of chaperoning. All the dances had to have chaperones at that time. In 1929—I guess that was some special year—anyway Gary Cooper came back for homecoming. And Harriet and I were chaperones, with Gary Cooper, for the homecoming dance. [laughter] The faculty wives had a tea every week, a faculty tea, which was kind of nice. And the faculty, including the men, would go [phrase not clear] Thursday afternoons.

And then there was regular vespers service at the chapel every Sunday afternoon. President Main spoke. And the chapel was practically filled every Sunday afternoon. So in a sense it was more formal; in a sense it was more informal. We had lots of picnics and lots of parties. It may be just that Harriet and I were invited to many of these. I don't think they do much of that sort of thing now. I know they don't have faculty teas.

BT: And there probably isn't quite the same kind of social contact among the faculty as a whole group as there might have been in the past.

GG: No, I think there was a much greater sense of community at that time. The college was smaller. For example, there was Science Club, where all the science people got together. Now each department has its own specialized meeting. Physicists never talk to the chemists and the chemists never talk to the mathematicians. And botany and zoology are off by themselves. So it's much less general than it used to be. Of course the curriculum shows that too.

RT: What were some of the most dramatic effects of this growing Depression on the college?

GG: Well, there was a lot of what we now call deferred maintenance in the college, which the college is now trying to remedy. But the dormitories were new in 1916, both the Quad and the dormitories were built in 1916. ARH was built in 1916. So when I came in the late twenties I sort of thought of these as fairly new buildings. So actually there was very little done to these buildings until later. The war was very hard on them. We had about twelve hundred men here in various Army programs. We had the SATC—that's the Student Army Training Corps. We had a STAR unit; that stands for Student Training and Reclassification. And we had an OCS—Officers Candidate School. So during the war—'42, '43', '44—we had men living in both the dormitories and the quadrangle. And they were very hard on the buildings. So after the war there was lots of maintenance that had been put off.

I think the other change, as far as the curriculum goes— See, President Main was professor of classics—essentially Greek and Latin. And he died in 1932, and Mr. Nollen came in. He was a linguist, essentially. He taught some Italian and some German. So that up until the war we had pretty much what you would call a classical curriculum. Greek and Latin were required when I came. Soon after that you could substitute mathematics for Greek or Latin. I mean these were disciplines. And there was a science requirement. All of this changed, of course, after the war, or during the war. And the GI's came back on the GI bill. The campus was pretty much covered with Quonset huts. We had married couples for the first time. So all along Eighth Avenue and actually right here, these were all Quonset huts that housed veteran students, married couples. And of course with that came the changes in the curriculum.

The other thing that happened—well, this didn't actually happen till later. The big change came when the college had some money. During the Depression and during the war and pretty much through President Stevens's administration the college was operating on a shoestring. The endowment—well, practically it didn't amount to much. There was no income. So the big change came essentially when the college began to prosper—mostly from one of my physics majors. [laughter]

BT: During the Depression did you see a change in the student body? How did the Depression affect the students? Did they have more difficulty paying their bills? Was the student body smaller?

GG: Yes, in a very real way. It was not unusual for a student to literally work his way through college. And this was quite common in the '30s. The whole college operated pretty much on student help. The meals were sit-down meals with white tablecloths. In the Quad, particularly, you couldn't sit down till the dean of women sat down. You couldn't leave until the dean of women left. But the whole college operated on student help. All the laboratory assistants were students. The bookstore was run by students. The service bureau was run by students. All secretaries were students. The whole dining facility—the waiters, the bakers, the cooks—were all students, with adequate supervision.

As I've said on several occasions, this was a very good learning process. Couple of illustrations. The manager of the bookstore was a fellow by the name of Howard Warrington, as a student. And in this capacity he, of course, had to deal with representatives of publishing companies. And so he graduated—without graduate school it was very uncommon at that time—but since he graduated Prentice-Hall representative asked him if he'd come and work for Prentice-Hall. And so Howard now is vice-president of Prentice-Hall. And he's worked for them all his life.

Another fellow named Humphrey Carleton worked in the Quad dining room and he helped the baker bake bread. And so they had to buy flour and they bought the flour from Pillsbury. And so Humphrey—I call him Hump—Hump got interested in the salesman from Pillsbury. And so when Hump Carleton graduated, the Pillsbury guy said, "Come work for us." So Humphrey went and worked all his life for Pillsbury. And I could name many of these illustrations where the training they got was really a good part of their education. And now that sort of thing never happens.

And they worked in the shop. We had a shop mechanic. He got a job with Eastman-Kodak and ended up in charge of their moving pictures. He turned out to be an engineer, although he had no education except what he had at Grinnell. But he worked here in the physics shop. So the college was student-operated.

BT: And that gave a real practical aspect to their education.

RT: Were there any of the special government-subsidized programs on campus or connected with the college?

GG: Well, the WPA. Yes, we had a rather extensive connection to the Works through Harry Hopkins. And Florence Kerr was in charge of the women's part of the WPA. She was a Grinnell

graduate and a very good friend of Harry Hopkins. So we had quite a little apparatus actually built by WPA help.

RT: What kind of projects did they do, for example?

GG: Well, some of it was in the nature of what you might call busy work. [laughter] But some of it we're still using in the laboratory. In the back I showed a student some of the switches and things that had been mounted and these were done during the WPA days.

BT: What were some of the made-work-type projects?

GG: Oh, they probably made things that we didn't need. [laughter] Well, they did janitor work. Things like that. It kept us busy thinking of things for them to do, which were profitable in the long run. In your field they wrote books. Like here, somewhere here I have a book on some of these programs.

RT: Were faculty members assigned the responsibility of finding work?

GG: It usually ended up that whoever was chairman of the department had to find work. Each department had two people in it during the '30s and so one of them— For example, I was head of the physics department almost perpetually from '32 till after the war. So it all sort of fell on my shoulders. But it was, in a sense, a good training experience for the whole college community. Aren't there books in your field that were written by WPA people.

BT: Oh, yes.

Side Two

RT: I was going to ask if, during the Depression, you noticed any differences in the kinds of courses or majors that students selected. Did they become more practically oriented? Or was the curriculum geared toward more practicality?

GG: Yes, after the war—I think the GI's sort of demanded or expected to have a little vocationally oriented courses. The college at one time taught a journalism course. You actually got credit for learning to type. We had a department of business administration and accounting. And courses of that nature came in after the war pretty much. We had a new president come in—President Stevens came in 1941. And with him the curriculum expanded quite a bit toward more professional courses and more vocational courses.

RT: But during the Depression it stayed pretty much the traditional classical curriculum?

GG: During the '30s, yes. This was largely, I think, because of the staff. There was very little change in the staff during the '30s. The old faculty [?]stuck [?]with [?]Steiner. Mr. Wood in the English Department, Eleanor Lowden in the English Department, Mr. Norris in Biology, Mr. Conard in Botany, Mr. McClenon in Mathematics. The faculty was fairly stable during the '30s,

and most of these people retired in the early '40s when Stevens came in as president. So there was very little change in the curriculum during the '30s. It was largely the classical program of Mr. Main and Mr. Nollen.

BT: Did the college make any particular effort to help the students find jobs after they graduated during that time?

GG: Well, there was a lot of effort. In fact, you could go back to the old *Scarlet and Black*. There was what was called the "job hunt." I think it was the class of '33 that out of a class of about a hundred and some graduates there were only eight kids in the class that knew what they were going to do when they left Grinnell. And so the college organized a formal—it was called a "job hunt." And they went in by train to Chicago and hunted for jobs. Mostly the hunt was organized through graduates of the college. I know there were cases where— Well, the Harris Trust Company—one of our graduates worked for the Harris Trust Company. So he took a bunch of students to the Harris Trust Company. And some of them ended up working for Harris Trust, the insurance company. So there was this formal organization called the "Job Hunt which went on for quite a few years in the '30s. As I said in one of my papers, "Why go to college, because you couldn't get a job. On the other hand, why not go to college, because there wasn't anything else to do." So the two sort of balanced out. It didn't take too much money in the '30s.

BT: How much? Do you recall at all?

GG: Well, the tuition was, I think, \$670 or something like that. One of the exhibits out here is a collection of meteorites that was taken in in barter during the '30s. This girl from Denver, her father is an internationally known collector of meteorites. And during the '30s he had lots of meteorites but no money. And we had no meteorites. So a deal was made between the college and Mr. Nininger. His daughter came as a freshman and we took in a selection of meteorites. And when she came as a sophomore, we took in more meteorites. [laughter] So she never paid anything, except we got these meteorites.

RT: How did you arrive at their value?

GG: Well, that's a good question. Mr. Conard did most of the negotiations. But the Smithsonian now says it's a very valuable collection. And we periodically get requests from other universities. You can always saw these things in two. So it's an active operation.

BT: Do you know of any other instances like that? Of parents bartering for their children's tuition?

GG: Well, there's a kind of a Horatio Alger story. I'll try to make it fairly brief. Someone named Don Snook was one of eleven children down at Darby, Iowa. Darby is south of Des Moines. So when he graduated, there was nothing for him to do. I think he graduated in '38 or '39. And he got a job driving for Ben Younker of the Younker family in Des Moines. There were two sisters that never married and Ben, I think, never married. So he took this job as their driver—not really a chauffeur, because he didn't wear a livery or anything. Ben didn't drive, and he was an old bachelor. But Don Snook used to drive the Younkens down here. When Nollens were president

there was a lot of interplay between Des Moines and Grinnell. See the two other Nollen brothers were presidents in Des Moines. One was president of Equitable of Iowa and the other was president of Bankers Life, I think. So there were three brothers that were all presidents. So Don used to drive them down here for teas and parties and concerts and things. So he'd just sit. And then he started drawing books out of the library. And the books that he drew and the books that he read were sort of interesting. So finally Mr. Younker said, "If you'll apply to the college, I'll pay your tuition." So the dean of men called up my wife, Harriet, and said, "We've got this kid and Younker will pay his tuition if we can find a board and room job for him." So we took him in as our babysitter and he lived at our house. And we gave him his breakfast and his room and he waited tables. So essentially he went through Grinnell, I think it's fairly accurate to say, without paying anything. And turned out to be very successful. He went in the Air Force and came back as a captain and graduated. Then he went to the Fletcher School of Diplomacy and got to be very fluent in Arabic. So when we went to Baghdad, he was a cultural attache in the embassy in Damascus. So we spent some time with him in Damascus. I think his whole Grinnell experience— He literally worked his way through college. And I could name, oh, probably dozens of cases like that where the college has encouraged them. Many of them turned out to be very successful. So it's quite different now. All they do is write a check for the tuition and I'm not sure they appreciate the education as much as they used to.

BT: I think still some of the students here are working very hard in college jobs. But I doubt that it's possible for anybody to really work their way through these days

GG: Yeah, the expenses are much different than they were then. It's surprising. Most of them think they have to have an automobile.

BT: Yeah, that amazes me. I think the campus was nicer before there were so many automobiles around.

GG: Yeah.

RT: I wonder if you remember what relations were between town and gown during the '30s. What was the relationship between the college community and the town community?

GG: It's probably better now than it was then. There was sort of a strong feeling so-called "south of the tracks." And the college unfortunately through the years has gotten—it's more true now but—sort of an elitist reputation. I think the tuition is the highest in the state of Iowa. So even back in the '30s this sort of persisted. I mean it's relative, but it's the same. The feeling between the town and the college was sort of the north against the south. A good illustration is the school board, for example. I once ran for the school board and Mr. Nollen—President Nollen—supported my candidacy. And I lost. And all my friends—and I had lots of them south of town—said, "Well, the reason you lost is because Mr. Nollen supported you." Mr. Duke—Les Duke, the track coach—ran once for school board. So for years and years there was this feeling that the town didn't want the college running things, particularly the school system. And so bond issues were voted down repeatedly until a compromise was reached whereby a school—the so-called middle school now—would be built [in] the south part of town. I think it's fairly true to say that if it'd been [in the] north [part] of town, the people in the south part of town wouldn't have voted for it. But since it

was [in the] south part of town, people in the north voted for it. So it's clear out—you know where it is—it's clear out on East Street. Which is a good place for it. But I think the feeling early on was the town people were not too happy, as I say, to have the college running things. It was the biggest employer in town. And much of the activity was up here. The high school athletics used all the college—the football field and the swimming pool the basketball court and all this until the new facilities were built. I think now there's more cooperation. There's still a little feuding, a few incidents, not so much violent, but they antagonize people.

We had a Japanese student living with us during the war, a Nisei, and this sort of caused— And I had a Nisei in the physics department, Al Yamakawa. There was an element in town that sort of felt that—they called them "the Japs"—didn't belong. He had trouble getting his hair cut and that sort of thing. But not too much unpleasantness.

I think it's less now, because the college doesn't charge for anything—no athletic tickets, no concert tickets. So the town has free access to almost everything the college does. So I think most of the town appreciates it.

RT: I wonder if you remember the severe drouth years during the '30s and how they affected the town and college.

GG: Well, the '30s—'33, '34, '35, '36, '37—were the driest, hottest summers and the coldest, wettest winters for some reason. I used to teach meteorology. We were right on the edge of the Dust Bowl. And I kept a fairly careful journal for a long time. And in my journal I've mentioned dust storms. These were real dust storms, where the visibility was clear down towards zero. On Memorial Day in 1934 the official temperature here was 108. And it hadn't rained for months. I mean it was just a miserable spring. The reason I remember it so well is Harriet was pregnant at that time. And there were no electric fans. We had ice boxes instead of refrigerators. We lived in a second-floor apartment right under the roof. And there was no way to keep comfortable at all. So the only thing to do was to get outside. We had an open car. We used to take a ride. But the rivers dried up. There were no pastures. Nothing germinated so that this was really the beginning of the Great Depression. It was right after the bank holiday, which was in '33. If you read the accounts in the Grinnell paper, the cows were—there was no feed for the cows. They were eating the leaves off of the trees. The trees were dying. The rivers dried up. Ice came from the two rivers—from Cedar Rapids from the Cedar River and from Ottumwa from the Des Moines River. And you couldn't buy ice. So it was—'34, '35, '36 were extreme weather conditions. I've talked to some of the farmers, some of the farmers' wives down in the Mayflower Home. One of the farmers' expressions was "Three cents corn and five cents hogs." You couldn't sell anything. I talked to one of the women in the Mayflower who lived down toward Montezuma. And I said to her, "Is it true that you actually burned corn during the Depression years?" And she said, "Yes, it was ten cents a bushel, but the reason we burned corn was that we didn't have anything else to burn." The snow was so bad that the trains couldn't come through. And there was no coal. And there was nothing else to burn. And they couldn't sell the corn anyway. And if you sold it, you couldn't get through the roads. But the college opened its dormitories and the gymnasium during the winter of '36. The college opened the dormitories for people that couldn't get coal. And the town people came up and actually slept in the gymnasium. The college at that time burned coal

and it had a siding right here. And so they had a big coal pile that ran clear along the track. So the college had a good supply of coal. But the trains didn't get through for days and days.

We lived in a college house that didn't heat well. I can remember getting the superintendent to come out and look at it. It's over on Summer Street, but it has an outside chimney, if you know what I mean. The chimney projects out from the house instead of being contained inside. So he came out and said, "Well, the trouble is you have a cold chimney." Which means it wouldn't draw. And said, "Paul, I know the chimney's cold, but the whole house is cold!" [laughter] This was the winter of '36, and Kathy was a baby. But we had this terrible northwest wind that swept across the football field. We lived over this way. It was twenty-five below zero and I remember staying home that day. And I just shoveled coal in one door and ashes out the other door. It was a case of recycling. I think the warmest it got that day was twenty-five below zero. And this wind just swept across the campus. Yes, those were difficult times. But we all seemed to manage and carried on. And I think, as I said before, the sense of community sort of kept us all together. Adversity sort of brings people together.

BT: Mr. Pearce, who we interviewed a couple of weeks ago, talked about that as well and said that people really helped each other. But that was never quite the same again, he thought, after the war.

GG: Well, I think that's true, that's true at the college. Of course the social life at the college changed when the veterans came back. Many of them had children. That's when all the so-called "social rules" sort of changed. The fact that the college sort of supervised the lives, and the GI's wouldn't go for that.

RT: I wonder if you could recall anything about how the college community reacted in the late '30s to the growing tensions and possibility of war and then fighting in Europe. Were feelings strong one way or the other among the faculty?

GG: Yes, there were during the '30s. Professor McClenonn's wife was a native German. He'd married her in Germany. His first wife had died and he remarried his first wife's sister in Germany. Almost every summer during the '30s they would go back to Germany. And all during the early part of the '30s he would come back with fairly glowing feelings about how well things were going under Hitler. I think it was partly prejudice because his wife's family was still in Germany. It was sort of the idea that Hitler and Mussolini kept the railroads running on time and everything was efficient and everything was operating well.

And so there was a certain amount of this in the college. Dr. Steiner was quite active as a pacifist. And the college at that time had a reputation as, quote-unquote, "just a bunch of pacifists." The townspeople felt that the college was just a bunch of pacifists. But we did have conferences on international relations which started in the early '30s. And many of these were essentially aimed at sort of a peaceful solution to some of our problems. And anti-war. I remember a dinner at the dormitories about the time the war broke out. And after the dinner the feeling was that Dr. Steiner is no longer a pacifist. I mean this was the student comment. He'd made this speech at this Christmas dinner—it was essentially the beginning of the war. The facts had come out about Hitler. Britain was in the war and it was about the time we entered the war.

So Steiner was in favor of the war! This was sort of a major issue. Because here he was the leading pacifist on campus, and now he was in favor of the war.

During the war, as I said, we had a Nisei living with us. He had to walk to the campus. We lived up on Tenth Avenue. There was a neighbor named Longnecker. He was a first-generation German. Longnecker was his Anglicized name. And he was sort of pro-German. So he gave this Japanese boy kind of a hard time. I remember one of the other neighbors saying to Longnecker, he said, "You lay off that Japanese kid." He said, "Both his parents were born in this country. He's a citizen of this country." He said, "Both of your parents were born in Germany." And he said, "We're fighting Germany as well as Japan." He said, "So you just lay off this kid. He's a citizen of this country." So there was a little feeling in the town.

And of course some of the other German communities— I'm a native of Wisconsin. I know Berlin, Wisconsin—they took to calling it "Bérlin" instead of "Berlín." And they actually wanted to change the name of the town during the war. Some colleges stopped teaching German. There was quite a little feeling.

RT: Did the pacifist sentiments on campus cause problems with the town people? Were the town people more in favor of the war?

GG: Yes. They felt that the college was— And I suppose— It was sort of that version of the protest during the Viet Nam War.

RT: How was it possible for the college to operate a regular college degree program alongside the special training programs that were so dominant?

GG: Well, this was partly my problem. I was really called back. I was not here. I was on war work, so to speak, at Pratt and Whitney in East Hartford. The college applied for a V-12 program and didn't get it. But the college did get these three other units I mentioned: the ASTP, the STAR unit, and the OCS.

BT: What was the V-12 unit?

GG: That was a Navy program that was more selective than the Army program. It was one that most of the colleges hoped to get. The premedic students could finish their education. There was certain privilege connected with it. And it was more of an academic program. We didn't get that. But we did have twelve hundred students, you see. And the question is, how did we manage? Well, the men lived in some Quonset huts, but they also took over some of the women's dormitories. They took over Read Hall. So we had a staff that we got together. I had nine people teaching physics because we had to teach physics to practically all of these people. But that's when I hired this Nisei, Al Yamakawa, to come and teach the college courses, which were all women. There were only seventeen men in the college at that time.

Side Three

GG: As I say, the physics department was rather small, because the men were all off to war. And as you know, physics is not very popular with the women. [laughter] But we did have one major, in 1945. Her name was Gerry Ross. But she had a photographic mind. She could— She went on to Wisconsin and got her master's degree. And she came back down and helped teach in the Army program. So that she and Al Yamakawa actually handled the college physics courses. The other physics staff, as I said, we had nine people teaching physics. Then the other part of the Army program was a language program. Part of the requirement, so far as possible, was to get native speakers in the Army program. It was mostly a program aimed at oral communications instead of reading, grammar, and writing. It was mostly spoken. So that they wanted native speakers. So we had quite a collection of natives come here. You probably remember Odette [?]De la Cluse?

BT: Yes, I do.

GG: Well, Odette came originally to teach French in the Army program. And then Odette stayed on as professor of French. We were teaching French, we were teaching German, we were teaching Japanese, and teaching Spanish, and some Italian. And so the language program was separate from the science program. And Stewart Brown. You remember Stewart?. Oh, he was probably gone by that time. He headed up the language program and I headed up the science program, which [word not clear] both general mathematics and physics. It was a heterogeneous crowd, instead of homogeneous, because we had students of all sorts of preparation. I had one student in general physics class who had a Ph.D. from MIT. [laughter] But he'd been drafted and had to go through the channels. He was nice to have in class. The physics faculty was equally diverse. One of them was from music, but he'd majored in physics in college. But he taught piano. And we had a couple of chemists and a couple of high school teachers. So as I said, we got together a faculty of nine teaching physics and a similar group teaching math and a similar group teaching chemistry. But the curriculum was pretty much prescribed by the government.

RT: Did these groups come in as a single unit and then leave as a single unit? Or were they coming and going?

GG: Coming and going most of the time. And our job was to keep them profitably busy. So it was a real challenge. It was sort of interesting because some of the college girls teamed up with these GI's and several marriages resulted from this. And there was competition between the Army units. I remember a football game between the STAR unit and the ASTP unit. Because there were no other men on the campus, so that they had their own intramural program.

RT: Did they wear uniforms while they were here?

GG: Yes, they wore uniforms. They had drill practice out in front of the dormitories. I have a picture of the troops all in formation out in front of the dormitories.

RT: Were there officers assigned other than faculty?

GG: Yes, Yes, the regular Army supplied the officers in charge of the units. We had a colonel here. He sort of took charge of things. We had a military ball. Instead of a homecoming dance, we had a military ball.

RT: Did the military sort of overwhelm the college?

GG: Yes. Well, the military was essentially the college, because there were so few women in college.

BT: I was about to ask how many women were there that were in the college at that time?

GG: Oh, I suppose a couple hundred.

RT: Were there tensions ever—problems between the military and the town?

GG: Well, not so much. I think the town sort of looked at them as an asset at that time. Because most of them had money to spend. As I said, we had two theaters. And they were always down at the theaters. And the town was always pretty much full of what you might call "troops" that were trooping down there. So the merchants really profited by this. At the officers candidate school they all had to have, oh, Sam Brown belts and uniforms and high boots. And so the merchants, really I think, were glad to see them. So there was pretty good feeling between the Army and the town.

RT: Did the standards of instruction have to change for this special group? Or did you still apply the usual college standards?

GG: Well, no, I think the standards changed. Because each unit had its own prescribed curriculum, which meant, essentially, that they supplied all the instructional materials and their own textbooks. And there was a certain amount of military instruction that went along with it.

Early in the war I taught the CPT Program—the Civil Pilot Training Program. And this was before the war started. And we were training pilots for essentially to send over to Britain for the Battle of Britain. So we had twenty people at a time in the Civil Pilot Training Program. And most of them soloed in, oh, eight or nine hours. And we had flight instruction. We had an airport out east of town. They all went into the Air Force. So this essentially was sort of a prerequisite for admission into the flight program in the Air Force. One of the sad commentaries—there are several of them— We had one boy who helped in the physics department here. And he used to help me out at the house, mowing lawns and putting on storm windows and things. They were students in the college at that time. But he finished the Civil Pilot Training Program and then was commissioned as a second lieutenant and was sent to England. And he was shot down over his second mission over Germany. We had another one of them that was a German war prisoner. I corresponded with most of these kids while they were in the service. But that program pretty much stopped when the war started. That was a pre-war program. But we sent a lot of troops to England to help with the Battle of Britain before we got in the war.

BT: Were you a pilot yourself?

GG: No, I was the coordinator of the program and I had never been in a plane. [laughter] But I taught the meteorology and navigation. The flight instruction was by the [?]Niederhausers up in Marshalltown. The flight instruction was subsidized by the government. So they came down here

and they learned to fly in a Piper Cub. I took lessons in a Piper Cub. But I never soloed. The war terminated the program.

But there was lots of activity going on. Students weren't allowed to have cars. And it was interesting what little issues came up in connection with these programs. Students weren't allowed to have cars. The question is how do you get the students out to the airport? [laughter] You know, things like this that you never think about. So the program had to have an automobile but the students didn't have an automobile.

BT: Were they allowed to drive that car then?

GG: Just out to the airport. Oh, there were lots of interesting problems.

BT: What were some of the effects of the war on community life in Grinnell? Things like rationing and blackouts and those kinds of things?

GG: Yes, we had— Apparently the proximity to SAC in Omaha— We were apparently close enough to Omaha so that we were in a designated district around Omaha that had some special conditions that had to be met. One of them was blackouts. I remember sitting down at Candyland— It was during a blackout. I remember Les Duke and I were sitting in the car with all the lights out. Candyland was lighted by candles, I think. But the town was just pitch black. But the policeman came up and rapped on the car window and motioned that he wanted to speak to me. He had a flashlight. Well, it turned out I had my foot on the brake pedal. [laughter] So the lights in the back of the car were showing. I was breaking the law. But, yes, we were all blacked out

Of course, the rations—we were all rationed with red points and blue points. You've heard about all these?

BT: I've heard about it, but I really don't know too much about how it worked.

GG: Well, the red points were meat. That was the chief thing. And the blue points were for sugar and cooking oil and some other things like that. That was the blue points. I still have a sample of red and blue points and I have my ration book. The big issue for families was meat. You couldn't get much meat. We lived what at that time was [?]very on the outskirts of town. And so I had three lots. So we raised chickens. We used to have chicken every Sunday. I had a big log—you know about killing chickens—with two nails. You could put the chicken's head there [phrase unclear]. The children wouldn't help me kill the chickens. [laughter] So we raised chickens. There was a fellow in the art department that sort of cooperated in this venture. And so he and my wife caponized the roosters. So they got a caponizing outfit from Sears and Roebuck. So the two families sort of jointly—we had these capons which supplemented the meat, the red points. So we got along.

The only ration hardship I remember was butter and things like that. It was before the oleo days. Of course the oleo thing—being up north in your country. Minnesota and Wisconsin were the last two to—

RT: Yes, I remember that red pill that you had to break and knead the dye into the margarine.

BT: Oh, I remember that too, especially when we would go to visit my grandparents in Wisconsin we would take them margarine—that was probably in the '50s, I suppose, because they couldn't buy it.

GG: Yes, my daughter lived in Minnesota and there was St. Ansgar—

BT: That's his town.

GG: Oh, is that your town?

GG: Well, there was this place in St. Ansgar—that's right close to the Minnesota line, isn't it? We used to stop in St. Ansgar and get all the oleo we could to take to my daughter up in St. Peter, Minnesota. That sign stayed there for a long time, that place where you could get oleo—colored oleo. That one place where we always went. That sign just stayed there for a long time, even after Minnesota opened up.

Sugar was another problem, particularly during canning season. We used to get a lot of fresh fruit from Michigan. My home was in Michigan. But we couldn't get enough sugar during canning season. So there were, not real hardships, but sort of problems.

RT: Somebody has told us about something called the Poweshiek Club. Were you involved at all in that?

GG: Oh yes. I'm one of the few people left, I guess, that was in the Poweshiek Club. There were two clubs: the Fortnightly Club and the Poweshiek Club. The Fortnightly Club still meets. The trick in each club was to present a learned paper, preferably on some subject outside of your specialty. So that you wouldn't talk about English and I wouldn't talk about physics. And you were to pick a subject of general interest and work up a paper. The Fortnightly Club still meets. And some of the papers are pretty well researched. I mean they get interested in a subject and— I used to say the difference between the Fortnightly Club—I belonged to the Poweshiek Club—and the chief difference between the two as I used to put to people was the Fortnightly Club met in people's homes and they ate but they didn't smoke, which meant that the woman of the house had to supply food of some kind. Or sometimes it was dinner. Or sometimes it was just dessert or cake and coffee. But they met at people's homes and they ate and they didn't smoke. The Poweshiek Club met downtown at the offices of Iowa Southern Utilities. And we smoked but we didn't eat.

RT: When did these groups begin? Do you recall?

GG: Oh, the Poweshiek Club met originally way back in—about World War I. It was a real honor to be invited into one of these clubs.

RT: You were asked to join then.

GG: Yes, and it was supposed to be a representative group. The Fortnightly limited the number of faculty people that they could have. They didn't want it to be loaded. I was asked to join the Poweshiek Club. President Nollen, he was president of the Poweshiek Club at that time. But we had a good representative of doctors, professional people. Sharp Lanham was in it. He was the glove factory, the jacket factory, the Lanham outfit. And Professor Stoops and a couple of doctors and businessmen.

RT: How often did this group meet?

GG: Once a month. And you can guess when the Fortnightly club met. [laughter] After the oldtimers in the Poweshiek died off, then the club stopped meeting.

RT: When would that have been?

GG: Oh, it would have been twenty years ago probably. But the Fortnightly still continues. So they're still meeting. Occasionally I'm invited to sit in on the Fortnightly Club. But I would say that's about half faculty people.

RT: Was there some competition or status implications?

GG: Yes, there was certain prestige and status symbols connected with it. We thought we were the better of the two. You know, we had the president of the college and we had all the business leaders in town, like Lanhams and Jesse Fellows that owned the washing machine factory. But I think the Fortnightly was a little more like a literary club. John Kleinschmidt belonged to it. Remember John Kleinschmidt? That sort of people—[?]of [?]that [?]ilk— belonged to it. So it was a little more of a literary club, I think.

BT: Can you give us some examples of the kinds of papers that were presented at the Poweshiek Club?

GG: Well, one of the first ones that I presented was on Billy Robinson. He was the local genius that built an airplane in Grinnell. He built the engine and he built the plane. And he flew plane in 1914. He had a world's distance record. He flew from Des Moines, Iowa, to Kentland, Indiana, nonstop. I think it was in 1914. But he built a radial engine. Grinnell was to be the center of the world as far as aviation was concerned. So I heard all these stories when I first came. And [at] that time the college had Billy Robinson's engine. I have oodles of pictures of Billy. But when the new airport was dedicated, we moved the engine out to the airport. So if you ever fly into Grinnell, you can see the engine out there. So my first Poweshiek paper was on Billy Robinson. And I did quite a lot of oral history. I have tapes down here of people that knew Billy Robinson. So for all these years I've been sort of the local authority on Billy Robinson. I knew where he crashed down by Montezuma. Dr. Parrish's father went out in his Cadillac and bring him back to town. All that sort of thing.

Charlie Duke belongs to [indistinguishable] Charlie invited me to come to his Fortnightly paper. Charlie gave a paper on communications and the changes when the communications industry was deregulated. And the effect that it had on, particularly, telephone service. Luther Erikson is

left-handed. He gave a sort of interesting paper at Fortnightly on left-handedness and some of the famous people that were left-handed and how awkward it is at times, because you don't have left-handed scissors and tools. And there have been papers on, oh, biographies. I read the biography of Agatha Christie at Christmas. We met Agatha Christie over in Baghdad. We met her at the Anglican Church in Baghdad. She invited us to come up to Nineveh to the digs and spend the day with her. So I found her autobiography very interesting. So oftentimes there will be biographical papers.

BT: So actually most anything that someone is interested in?

GG: Um Huh. It's a whole variety of subjects. One paper was on—the fellow collected watches—so he sort of gave a history of chronometers and things of that kind. He brought some of his watches. So some were on hobbies.

RT: In the Poweshiek Club was there a limited number who were invited to be members?

GG: Yes.

RT: Do you remember what that number was?

GG: I think it was about twenty-five.

RT: Was there occasionally politicking to be invited to join?

GG: Yes, there was quite a lot of politicking, quite a competition in that respect. There's a little hangover of that now, mostly in connection with the women's clubs that meet in town. It's the Entre Nous and it's the Levart Club and it's the Tuesday Club and the Magoun Club. Magoun was president—I think the third president. The bylaws of the Magoun Club state—it's a women's club—and the president of the Magoun Club is to be the college president's wife.

BT: Oh dear. They have a problem there. [laughter]

GG: So the Magoun Club now has a problem.

BT: They never foresaw that there would be a woman president, did they? [laughter]

GG: So it's a hangover as far as this club effect. Harriet belonged to the Levart Club, which is *travel* spelled backwards. And it started out as a travel club. They still invite me to special occasions. So we reported our travels to the Levart Club.

RT: Was the Poweshiek Club strictly male?

GG: Yes, and the Fortnightly is strictly male too.

RT: Was there ever any pressure or agitation by women to open up the ranks to women?

GG: No, no. They had their own clubs. I've got some material around here on the Poweshiek Club. People bring in here— See since I retired, I've sort of been the college historian. So they bring in all this stuff they don't know what to do with [laughter] like this ROTC sign down here and the B and G people are very good. If they take something out to the dump they'll bring part of it in here and say, "Would you like to keep this?" [laughter]

BT: You may have to have a general college museum, not just a physics museum.

GG: Yes. Well some of the things are quite unique. For example, out here I have a WPA sign which was retrieved from the dump. They said, "Do you want it?" And I said, "Sure." So when Harry Hopkins House was dedicated, I brought George Drake over here and tried to give him this sign to put in the Harry Hopkins House. And he said, "Oh, I think you better leave it here." He said, "More people will see it here than will in the Harry Hopkins House." So it's hanging on the wall out here. So it's that sort of a problem.

BT: How to draw the boundary.

GG: Right. It has nothing to do with physics. My colleagues here say, "Well, you're filling the walls up here with stuff that has nothing to do with physics."

BT: Well, that's the end of our list of questions.

RT: We'd like to thank you very much.

GG: Well, glad to get acquainted with you. Anybody from Spooner I ought to know. Or St. Ansgar.