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## Millie Waddell Interview, Administrator, Wright State University

Alyce Earl Jenkins

*Wright State University - Main Campus*

Millie Waddell

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# **Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University**

## **Interview with Mrs. Millie Waddell**

Date of Interview: August 16, 1991

Interviewer: Alyce Earl Jenkins, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Millie Waddell, Administrator

[Note: Video and audio begin perceptibly going out of sync after 8:00]

Alyce Earl Jenkins: Hello. Thanks so much for allowing me to share with you my video proposal about African-American contributions made by faculty, staff, students, and community leaders here at Wright State University. It is my opinion that the larger community is unaware of the many positive experiences that African-Americans have had here at the university. We began this tape by talking with Millie Waddell. Mrs. Millie Waddell was among the first employees hired here at Wright State University. She came onboard in July of 1964. At the end of her career here in 1988 when she retired, she was the Assistant Director of Development and Foundations. Millie will tell us about some of her many accomplishments during her twenty-seven year tenure at Wright State University.

Today, we're very pleased to have with us Mrs. Millie Waddell, who worked at Wright State from the very beginning until 1988. Thanks so much for being with us today Millie.

Millie Waddell: Thank you for having me.

AJ: Great. Listen Millie, tell us about when you came to Wright State. What was it like? What was your job when you first came?

MW: I came to Wright State in July of 1964. Our offices, at that time, was in the Warner House, which is now I-675.

AJ: How many people were here when you came?

MW: At that time...administratively there were approximately ten people including secretaries and what have you—ten to twelve, somewhere in that number.

AJ: And so all ten of you were in this house. Is this the house where you were?

MW: Yes, that's the Warner House, and as a matter of fact, my first job was in this [*top-left corner in the photograph*] bedroom on the second floor—

AJ: I see.

MW: —was our office.

AJ: I see. So in 1964 in July, you were one of the first, among the first people to start working at Wright State in Warner House.

MW: That's correct.

AJ: That is great. How do you feel when you look at the growth of the university now?

MW: It's impossible to word it. I feel that Wright State was not a job. I felt that it was an opportunity to participate in an institution from its beginning. Few people, I feel, have such an opportunity, and it is one of the most outstanding things that have happened in my career.

AJ: When you talk about starting in July of 1964 with ten employees, and we look at Wright State today and we have two thousand employees, over four hundred faculty, we have about sixty-one buildings including the buildings in Selina, we have a student body of sixteen thousand nine hundred and seven; that's a lot of growth in twenty-seven years and you were part of that growth. That's great. Tell me about the various positions that you had while you were here. You were first employed as a clerk typist?

MW: As a clerk typist. From that point, let's see...I started as a clerk typist; one of the first things that I had to do was to help pack up the office so that we could move in the first building.

AJ: Oh okay. And that was Allyn Hall.

MW: Allyn Hall. And we spent about a week packing papers and what have you, and we had one vehicle and I had a driver's license, so we moved the office with me driving this old vehicle down Colonel Glenn. Of you must realize, at that time, all of this was a wooded area. It's just no comparison to today.

AJ: How long did you work as a clerk typist?

MW: About the first trimester; we were on the trimester system—

AJ: I see.

MW: —at that time. And Don Bell, who was assistant to Fred White who, at that time, was the business manager—and by the way the very first employee—that was hired to negotiate the purchase of the land and oversee the first building. And Don Bell was his

assistant, and I worked with Don Bell. After the first trimester, I became Don Bell's secretary. And with a new institution like that, titles were not important. There were jobs to be done. As a matter of fact, I had never touched a cash register, but Mr. Bell announced with our first registration that I was to be Chief Cashier.

AJ: I see. So you had to be a quick learner.

MW: Exactly. As a matter of fact, they delivered two cash registers to us by noon. Someone from NCR showed me how to operate the cash register, and during registration we ran out of tape and of course I got a screwdriver and called somebody in and we rendered that cash register inoperable for the rest of the evening—

AJ: About how many—

MW: —trying to change the tape.

AJ: About how many students did you have to register? Do you recall?

MW: Oh I can't recall.

AJ: Maybe about a thousand?

MW: Oh I can't recall the number—

AJ: Or two thousand?

MW: —of students because we had lines that went the entire length of...the corridors in Allyn Hall, in that the area where the Registrar's Office is located now.

AJ: So what was your next job then after that? When you were promoted from that position.

MW: Well, having worked in the position as a secretary to Don Bell, we handled the financial aid, we handled everything because all of the administrative areas came under Fred White. From that...in I guess about a six-month period, I became secretary to Fred White, and later I became executive secretary to Fred White. As we grew and responsibilities changed and became much more involved into the activities of the university, I became his administrative assistant, and I worked in that capacity until his retirement.

AJ: And then when you retired what position did you have at that time?

MW: I was Assistant Director for Foundation and University Development.

AJ: I see. You really did move right on up the ladder there. I imagine you had some mentors along the way and that they perhaps helped you to progress professionally?

MW: Yes. One of our past presidents, Dr. Robert Kegerreis, was, I would say, my chief mentor. Also Fred White. It was necessary to learn and to know as much and absorb as much as you possibly could because of the rapid growth. And not having a full staff; Mr. White did not have an assistant, so I had to act, to some degree, in that capacity, as assistant. Particularly when he became the first vice president and senior vice president for administration. Under him came personnel, purchasing, and all the administrative areas. He also was treasurer of the university and secretary to the board of trustees. And in order to be of assistance to him, it was, I felt, necessary to learn and the opportunities were provided for me to attend seminars, and the American Council of Education, I read everything they published on college and university business administration. And in later years, as a part of the development and fundraising function, I did attend many seminars provided by CASE. That's the Council for the Advancement and Support of College Universities.

AJ: I see, so your professional development was very good and helped you to grow and prepared you for the additional responsibilities that you assumed.

MW: Well, you had to really look down the road and see what was ahead and to make an assessment of your own potential and then go for it. And the opportunities were there if.... One of the things that, I think perhaps, particularly with younger people coming in, if they could realize their own potential and not wait for opportunities, but to assist and have the opportunities...

AJ: That sounds like you're talking to me: you make your opportunities.

MW: That's it. That's it.

AJ: That's great. Listen, since you were working so close to Mr. White, when he was the business manager and in charge of all those various offices, and you worked so close where you had a key position in the University of Development and Foundation, I imagine that you had opportunity to initiate or implement various programs of which you were pretty proud of. What are some of the achievements that you are proud of that you made during your twenty-seven years at Wright State?

MW: Looking back historically, it was possible to...sort of be a first with many things. I was one of the readers that critiqued our first affirmative action plan. I was also on the Affirmative Action Council, and EEO officer, and in that capacity, I think—at least I hope—I was able to render services, particularly to minorities and on behalf of minorities.

AJ: I think it's interesting that you started talking about your achievements with affirmative action, the things that were happening in that line, because when you came to work it was in 1964 and that was when the Civil Rights Act was passed. And so you

were one of the early people realizing the results of the implementation of that act, and then you followed through with the affirmative action. What else did you achieve during those years?

MW: Well, I was fortunate enough to be one of the committee persons that instituted the Bolinga Scholarship Program.

AJ: Okay. Which is still going very strong.

MW: —Going strong today. In addition, I was one of the founding members of the Organization of Black Faculty and Staff.

AJ: Which is very active today.

MW: But I think, as I look back, my work in development, particularly in the area of scholarships, is the thing that I feel closest to.

AJ: Now you were the first person to direct and implement the Wright State Scholarship Fund. When—

MW: The Campus Scholarship Campaign.

AJ: —when did that start?

MW: That started in the academic year of 1976-1977 I believe. You know, we old retirees, our memories sort of grows dim.

AJ: Okay.

MW: But about that time.

AJ: And how much were you able to raise at the first campaign?

MW: That first campaign, we set a goal of \$15,000. About halfway into the campaign, we realized we had raised over \$15,000 because our faculty and staff are so supportive of the program. So we raised, in that first campaign, I believe we raised about \$35,000. Each year the goal was increased. The last campaign that I conducted was 1988, and that campaign we raised over \$100,000.

AJ: Isn't that great? Just in twelve years.

MW: And during that period of time, oh I can't recall the figures now, but a number of students were assisted.

AJ: That's really worth it to be—

MW: And those are the things that I feel closest to and fortunate—it was really a surprise upon my retirement when President Mulhollen named the general fund in that campaign the Mildred H. Waddell Scholarship Fund.

AJ: Oh, isn't that great?

MW: That was just really—

AJ: A nice honor. So often we do things and we're not recognized for our contributions, so that was really a nice way to publically recognize your leadership in that area. You...going back to the 1960s, that was during a time that we were having a lot of campus unrest on all campuses. What was going on here at Wright State?

MW: Of course we had unrest. We had problems, discrimination, we had problems with the Vietnam War period, but Wright State has a unique—particularly at that time—a unique student body in that our students were commuters. For the most part they still are. But at that time I think we could house maybe three hundred students max on campus. So we did not have that kind of close campus-oriented student body. Many of our students were employed, they lived at home, they would come to class, they would leave, go to work, go home, and they had a life outside of the university. And I do know that during that period of time there was a tremendous concern on the part of the administration of not having the facilities and the organizations to create that close cohesive atmosphere that you find on a more residential campus.

AJ: Now—

MW: So our situation was a little different from most of the schools and we did not experience the unrest to the degree that more established universities...

AJ: Was it during that time that the idea of Bolinga Center and the Organization for Black Faculty and Staff surfaced? You mentioned that you were involved in those two groups.

MW: Mm-hmm, early on. And that was during that period—

AJ: During that period of time.

MW: —of unrest and, what have you, particularly the racial problems and what have you that was coming along, and the need for black studies and to really...that was the administration's effort to create an academic atmosphere for students.

AJ: I don't know what the enrollment of black students was at that time during those years, but I think now we're somewhere around 800-850 at Wright State including graduate and undergraduate students. So we have more students on campus now, but then the overall student body has increased, so percentage-wise it's probably not that

much different. What do you think could be done to attract more black students to Wright State University?

MW: ...That calls for some real in-depth thought. One of the things that I think is so necessary and it's incumbent upon the faculty and staff to devise means and methods of bringing together the black community and Wright State. I can't address, with any degree of knowledge, how the recruiting and whatnot efforts in predominantly the schools wherein you'll find a majority of blacks, but this may be an area wherein a closer working relationship with the schools, particularly those schools that have a large minority population.

AJ: I think you're right on target there because one of the concerns many black students have is that they feel so alone and that they're isolated and that no one really cares, and we don't seem—even though we have various organizations, they don't seem to be—

MW: Really integrate—

AJ: No, they don't bring us together to work closely with each other and to help each other. We are trying to do some of the things that happened to you when you were here and that you did, and that is to mentor various students and faculty, but it's not as successful as we would like it to be. Along that same line, I imagine in 1964, we probably had one or two black faculty. Now we have about thirty-two black faculty.

MW: At that time we had two.

AJ: You had two? Okay.

MW: Two black faculty.

AJ: That's great.

MW: As a matter of fact, one is still here. One person is still here.

AJ: And that's?

MW: Alphonso Smith.

AJ: And who was the other?

MW: Heanon Wilson, I believe his name is. [*Actually Heanon Wilkins.*]

AJ: Heanon Wilson?

MW: I think that's—if I remember correctly. And I believe he's currently on the faculty at Miami University.

AJ: I see. That's interesting. How long was he here; do you recall about?

MW: Oh, just for a year or two.

AJ: Just for a year.

MW: Uh-huh...Mary Wylie...perhaps could hold the distinction of really being the first minority hired by Wright State.

AJ: I see.

MW: Because she worked for Miami University, its academic programs that were held at Roth High School, prior to Wright State. When Wright State came into being, Wright State inherited that program and Mary came in with that program. So she really kind of was before—

AJ: That's right! Before you. That's interesting. When we were talking about the achievements that you had made while you were here, you mentioned the campus scholarship and you mentioned being in a position to make various decisions to influence various decisions. I happen to know that you were involved with the establishment of the Handicapped Students Services Office. Do you want to share with us what you did with that?

MW: That's an interesting program, how it came about. And I think there are very few people who are aware, but the Goodwill had a student that they had trained in secretarial work. Nancy Ferris. She was a paraplegic, an excellent secretary. Members from the Goodwill came out to see if there was employment, if Wright State would hire her. And Mr. White, who we handled personnel at that time, asked me if, you know, I would look around and see, you know, what we had available and if it could be accommodating, and I could find no reason why not. And so she was hired. We were still in just this building.

AJ: Allyn Hall?

MW: Allyn Hall was still our only building. Oelman Hall was under construction at the time. And Nancy came to work. Well shortly afterwards, we realized that it took two people to see her to the restroom, to the ladies' room, and to assist her. However there was only one restroom that was large enough, the doorway was large enough, to get a wheelchair into. And that was back where receiving is now; that used to be our duplicating room.

AJ: Okay.

MW: And Nancy, with this problem, I mentioned it to Verna Graves, who was one of the original employees, and the two of us went to Mr. White with this problem. Nancy had

difficulty reaching the elevator buttons from her wheelchair. So Mr. White says, “Well, you know, that building is underway, and I’ll talk with Ed Lykins.” Lykins and Williams—whatever that architectural firm is named—was the primary contractor for building the new building. [*Actually Lorenz & Williams.*] “No problem. We can raise the elevator buttons; we can widen the doors,” and it just took off. We had another student that was in a wheelchair; he was a black student, a male. His wife would bring him up and she had difficulty getting him over the curb, and the only—the lowest curb was the main entrance to Allyn Hall, but there was a slight incline. And just a matter of cutting out an area. And this was before the handicap programs became very important. You know, there were rules and regulations for building for the handicapped. The original plan for Wright State was to have all the buildings tunneled. That was part of the plan, and with this concept the other buildings was just minor adjustments to accommodate handicapped people. But Nancy Ferris really is the person that brought this to light.

AJ: I never knew the history of that. I was aware of the fact that, in Ohio, the architectural accessibility law had been passed in 1967, which was during the time Wright State was doing all of this building, beginning to build new buildings here, facilities, and so I always thought that Wright State was aware of the new, revised code and they were trying to be in compliance—

MW: I think we—

AJ: —but you were a little ahead.

MW: I think we were a little bit ahead of that.

AJ: You were a little ahead of that.

MW: Yes.

AJ: That’s great. And now we have one of the best-known offices and programs for handicapped student services in the United States, and we’re also known internationally. I also know that you had some involvement in developing a personnel handbook?

MW: Well, I worked with the committee that wrote the first unclassified employees’ handbook. We used to make a joke about all unclassified employees were pleasure appointments, but we really had no working rules and regulations and what have you. The classified employees of course, at that time, was under the state rules and regulations, and of course the faculty was, but the unclassified employees [28:09?] just came out there. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the committee that wrote the first unclassified employees’ handbook, which I think has been revised, but I think for the most part it’s still...

AJ: So when we think about your contributions to Wright State and the role that you've made, that you've had in shaping Wright State, we can look at affirmative action, Bolinga Center, the Organization of Black Faculty and Staff, the Handicapped Student Services Program, the Campus Scholarship Fund, the personnel directory: you help in all those various areas to make Wright State responsive to different groups of people and helped to shape it, helped it to become the metropolitan university that it is. Are you proud of that?

MW: Dr. Golding, our first president, was not only a president, a good leader; he was also a good friend. And I think my very presence kept him aware of the need, and I think he was very sensitive to the needs and whatnot of minorities, of the student body, and what have you. And...which made for a good situation, really.

AJ: Yes.

MW: He and I very often would, we'd kind of bump heads—

AJ: Which is good.

MW: —over things, but he always took it well and I always respected him as president.

AJ: So you had a very rewarding experience here at Wright State.

MW: I can't think of anything that...it was never a job to me.

AJ: That's great.

MW: To me it was always an opportunity.

AJ: That's great.

MW: And I may have been kind of officious in thinking that they couldn't get along without me, but I just enjoyed it to that extent. In the early days, it was nothing to come in at 7:30 in the morning and work until 11:00-12:00 at night. And you just felt that—and not only for myself, but we had faculty, staff, everyone—had one single objective, and that was to build a good institution that we would all be proud of.

AJ: And I think you did us well. I understand that you had a son to attend school here, so you enjoyed your work and you enjoyed what was—you were proud of what was happening here at Wright State to the extent that you had your son, Eric?

MW: Yeah, my son Eric, and my son Jimmy also attended Wright State. He didn't graduate. My daughter took some courses, but...

AJ: So how does Eric—Eric did complete his—

MW: Mm-hmm.

AJ: What did he major in?

MW: Eric in business...what area of business...I know he was finance management, and Eric was one of these people that wanted to know everything about everything.

AJ: So do you feel that he was satisfactorily prepared in that area?

MW: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

AJ: So he's doing very well.

MW: He's doing very well. He is in administration with one of the big companies...

AJ: Very good.

MW: ...and doing very well. Couple of steps he might make Vice President.

AJ: That's great, that is great. Well Millie, can you tell me what your vision is for Wright State now? You saw it from the very beginning, you were here during the building and the growing and the embellishment of all of these various ideas and what have you. What do you see, what would you like to see happen at Wright State in the future?

MW: Well Alyce, I'm wondering whether or not at this particular juncture, Wright State has kind of reached a plateau, and perhaps the thinking at this time now is to find those areas of excellence and really look forward and pinpoint that, rather than trying to be everything to everyone.

AJ: To everybody. I think we're moving in that direction with our strategic plan. I think there's certain areas which have been identified, and we're moving in that direction.

MW: Oh, that's another thing. It was for a very brief period of time, but I know President Mulhollen asked me to work with the Director for Planning and Institutional Research—

AJ: Yes.

MW: —primarily because of my background and experience and having been here so long, and for a year, a year and a half, I did leave the development office and I did work with, at that time, the new Director for Planning and Institutional Research. I believe now he may be an assistant vice president for planning—

AJ: Okay.

MW: —but that was also a very pleasurable experience.

AJ: And that was looking way into the future as to what Wright state would be later.

MW: Well at that time, I think we were interested and really establishing the—what do we call it?—really the purpose of the university.

AJ: The mission statement?

MW: The mission statement.

AJ: Revising the mission statement.

MW: So I had an opportunity to run around and assist with research and whatnot to help the director in writing the mission statement and the purpose of the university and whatnot. So that was fun.

AJ: I'm sure. I'm sure it was... Millie, I really appreciate your coming here. You've had such a broad experience here at Wright State, and you've contributed in so many different ways, and it's obvious that you're proud of your involvement, your association with this institution. And I think that that speaks well for the institution and it also speaks well for you. Thanks so very much for coming.

MW: Thank you so much for having me.