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Don Brumbaugh interview, Wright State University Employee

Lewis Shupe

Wright State University - Main Campus

Don Brumbaugh

Wright State University - Main Campus

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 11/10/2011

Interviewer: Lewis Shupe
Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Communication

Interviewee: Don Brumbaugh, former staff

Lewis Shupe: This is Lewis Shupe, Professor Emeritus from the Department of Communication at Wright State University. Today is November 10, 2011 and I am interviewing Mr. Don Brumbaugh as part of the Wright State University Retiree Association's Oral History Project. Mr. Brumbaugh, Don, thank you very much for joining us today. To get started, would you tell us how you first became acquainted with Wright State?

Don Brumbaugh: I was working at Hoak's Greenhouses in Fairborn, which don't exist now, and Mr. Warner was talking to me about what was happening on this land and he said they were going to start a university. And he said, "You know, we need someone that could come and help us get started, to mow the grass, to clean up the house, the Warner House, and get it ready for us to have an office there-

LS: And this was when?

DB: This was 1963.

LS: Okay. And did they say anything about what the university would become?

DB: Uh, no. I think they had dreams but didn't express too much about that.

LS: Oh, didn't they? Okay. So he invited you to come over.

DB: Right.

LS: Okay, tell us about Mr. Warner, would you please?

DB: I didn't know him too well. I knew he was a farmer, and I knew he had the Warner House in the area over there off of Kauffman Road, is it? Yeah. So he was over at the greenhouse getting some things and he just happened to mention to me that there's going to be a university coming over there behind him in the Warner House, that whole area. He said, "We need someone to come over and work with us a little bit to get things started, to get the lawn mowed", we saw it was about 3 inches or four inches high, and he

said, “we need to get the house cleaned up, and there’s a new rug that needs to be put down and some things like that, and we’d like to have someone do that for us.”

LS: And this was Warner House.

DB: This was the Warner House.

LS: Okay.

DB: So I said, “Well, let me talk to my wife and see if I can help you out a little bit”, and so I went home to talk to Mavis, my wife, and she says, “Well, whatever you want to do, honey.” So I went back to him and I said, “I’d be interested in helping you to get it started, and so he said, “That’s great”, then he said, “First of all, we have to get the grass mowed and get the house cleaned up”, and he said, “It’s been empty for awhile”. Then he said, “I want a rug put in the entrance way”, and he said, “My office is going to be in the back”, and he said “Millie will be working for us, she’ll be my secretary”. Millary-

LS: Millie Waddell.

DB: Waddell. She was really a great person.

LS: Now that was the only building on this area, right, at that time?

DB: No, there was a house right down the road around a curve, on the right, just as you go up the road, right in front of that other road on the left.

LS: I’ll get back to that house. What did they use the Warner House for at the beginning?

DB: Actually, to get things established and to have meetings; and they was really planning the development of this area.

LS: Okay, good, and so they used that initially for the new people coming on campus.

DB: Yes.

LS: Was it a very big house?

DB: It was a nice farmhouse, it was probably about four bedrooms and the living room and the sunroom. Nice house.

LS: And that was really the first administrative building.

DB: Yes.

LS: Oh my gosh. Now who from the university, then, hired you or talked to you?

DB: Mr. White.

LS: Fred White?

DB: Fred White, yeah.

LS: And so you worked directly with him?

DB: Yes, I did.

LS: In what capacity at that point?

DB: Well, kind of a runner. Just whatever he would like for me to do; just to keep things cleaned up and to make sure everything was okay when he had meetings and things like that.

LS: Oh, was it? Well, that's very interesting. Who were some of the people that you remember working with in the Warner House?

DB: Just Millie and me and Mr. White. Fred White.

LS: Just the three of you? Okay. Well that's good. Now, tell me about the other house on campus.

DB: It was a small house on the right before you get to the entrance way of campus, and they used it for, um, well, there was a teacher who moved there first, and I can't tell you his name, I'm sorry.

LS: And that was where you lived-

BD: No, I lived at the brick house.

LS: Oh, okay. Okay, tell me about that?

BD: It was up on the hill and there was a bank wall in front and it had a porch. If you walked in the back you walked in an enclosed porch, a screened in porch, and then into the kitchen and then it had a nice, big living room and then a spiral stairway, and it had a fireplace in another room to the left. I don't how old it was but it really was a nice place to live, and warm.

LS: And they asked you to live there?

BD: Yes.

LS: How was it living on campus?

BD: Well, there wasn't much going on at that time. I was really excited. I got rheumatic fever by the time that they was starting to build Allyn Hall and so I walked up there when the walls wasn't even up yet- outside walls and inside walls, too- and I looked around when I had rheumatic fever and then after that when they got that started, I worked in the basement and I was the first mailman and the first duplication person.

LS: In Allyn Hall. But let's go back to the house where you lived. Tell me about what you had there.

BD: What I had there?

LS: The animals.

BD: Well, I had a cow and a horse and a pony, and I had some chickens, and some rabbits, I had a lot of rabbits. I butchered rabbits for market. And that's about it. I had a dog.

LS: And so that was before Allyn Hall was built. Oh my gosh. So you used to ride on horseback around here.

BD: Yes, around this whole campus, without any buildings.

LS: Oh my gosh. That was really neat. Now, what happened when Allyn Hall started?

BD: Well, we met in the first off building to the west. There's a small building there, there's a small building. That was the first building and then Allyn Hall was built onto that. So that's where we really had the first registration, in that area.

LS: Not in Allyn, but in that little building?

BD: No, not in Allyn, in that building. But Allyn Hall was connected, but it wasn't finished yet. So, that's about all I've got to say.

LS: You mentioned that you were the first mail person, the mailman?

BD: Yes, and duplication person.

LS: Oh my gosh.

BD: All the tests.

LS: Tell me about that.

BD: Well, I got well acquainted with all the professors, and they appreciated me because I was very able to do things like they wanted me to do. I only had a duplicating machine

and a ditto machine, and so with that many professors I was real busy. I worked late nights sometimes to get their tests out.

LS: And did you do other things in the mailroom?

BD: Just mail. I got out all the mail. That was a chore, too.

LS: At that time did you have a supervisor?

BD: Yes, Mr. White was my boss. Fred White.

LS: Was there anyone else?

BD: Don Bell. Don Bell came in then after I started working here.

LS: So he was your immediate supervisor.

BD: Immediate supervisor, yes.

LS: How many faculty were here, do you remember? Or do you remember any of them?

BD: Millie and him and I, and that's about it, at first.

LS: What about when classes started, do you remember that?

BD: That's when a lot of the people starting coming in before that, and I didn't get acquainted with them too much because I was busy with my work, but I can't remember too many people that came in at that time. There was probably five or six at first.

LS: Were there? Now, so you grew up with Allyn Hall.

BD: Yes.

LS: Okay. And it all started with your interest in working in a greenhouse.

BD: Yes, and the mailroom.

LS: And the mailroom. What about the greenhouse at Wright State?

BD: What about it?

LS: Mm hmm.

BD: Um, it was the Biology Department's greenhouse. So I grew a lot of corn and tomatoes and things like that that they could mutilate and work on under the scopes, and I don't know for sure what else there was.

LS: Where was that?

BD: Where was that?

LS: Where was your greenhouse?

BD: Oh, on top of Millett Hall. It had an elevator that went clear to the top. I think it still does.

LS: And that was the first greenhouse.

BD: Yes.

LS: How long did you work in the greenhouse?

BD: I don't know, three years. Three years and then I left and went to the mailroom and worked there.

LS: What were some of the most interesting experiences you had in those first years?

BD: I think that it was very interesting to see the students come in and excited, and I felt like the new professors were excited because we had a new school starting. And we all met in the lunch room, at that time on the top of Oelman, or Millett Hall- not Millett but the first one, Allyn [Hall]. We all met in the lunch room with the professors, all the staff and the professors ate lunch together at that time.

LS: In Allyn Hall.

BD: In Allyn Hall.

LS: Now, where was that lunch room?

BD: At the fourth floor.

LS: Oh, on the fourth floor.

BD: There was a room up there where we ate our lunch.

LS: And you all ate lunch together.

BD: Yes. It was a family. It was a family.

LS: It was a family. Well, that's important.

BD: We was all excited about starting a new college.

LS: Now that, the lunchroom, was before they even had a cafeteria, right?

BD: Oh yes, long before. It was over- you took the elevator and went left and it was over in the southwest corner.

LS: And how long did you have- how long did that go, you know?

BD: How long did that last, that up there? Well, as soon as the cafeteria started, it-

LS: When did the cafeteria start?

BD: I think probably in '66, 1966.

LS: So that was three years after you first came here.

BD: Mmm hmm.

LS: What else do you remember about Allyn Hall?

BD: Well, there was office buildings on the right. I mean, as you look at it to the east it was on the right hand side; flat, one story high buildings. That's where Mr. White was and all the faculty was at first.

LS: Do you remember- who were some of the other staff people that you knew at that time? You mentioned Millie Waddell-

BD: Him and his wife was here, and I can't think of their names. I think you might have mentioned him.

LS: Was he faculty?

BD: Yeah.

LS: Was it Bill King?

BD: No, I don't remember him.

LS: The, um... there weren't that many faculty at that time.

BD: There was probably only ten at the most.

LS: Did you think that it would ever grow into a large university?

BD: Well, with the atmosphere that there was, yes, I did.

LD: You did?

BD: Yes.

LS: After the mail room, where did you go?

BD: I went to the Biology Department.

LS: The Biology Department, Okay. Would you describe the area around the campus at that time, this whole vicinity?

BD: Well, the moat was interesting, you know, at the back of Allyn Hall. A lot of kids sat there and they sat in the grassy area and there was a lot of excitement going on there.

LS: The moat was there at that time? Was that built-

BD: That was built with Allyn Hall.

LS: With Allyn Hall. That was right at the beginning?

BD: Yes, at the east end.

LS: What else in the vicinity?

BD: Oelman Hall was built next, then Millett, and then down on the end, Fawcett. And I could see them all going up because I could see the whole campus up there at the greenhouse.

LS: Oh, that's when you were on the top. Well, other than this little complex of buildings, describe what was around you.

BD: Grass [laughs]. Nothing else, other than open space and woods.

LS: I understand that there was a farm and animals around here, is that true?

BD: Yeah. Well, I had animals but I don't know if you mean that. But there was one on Colonel Glenn that had animals.

LS: Now, when you lived in that brick house, you had your animals there, so you were living on campus with your animals?

BD: Yes-

LS: And they didn't-

BD: -and I put up an electric fence.

LS: -and they said it was okay for you to have the animals?

BD: Well, they better. No, Mr. White said it was okay.

LS: They gave you approval?

BD: Yes. Well, he'd drive by every evening going home from work.

LS: You said you put up an electric fence?

BD: Mmm hmm. They never got out. And when they took my barn down then I had to do something about my animals because they put that road in-

LS: You didn't tell me about the barn.

BD: Yeah, there was a barn right on the east side of the road, facing me, facing the house.

LS: As you came onto campus.

BD: And it was elongated, facing east... facing west. I fenced that in behind there and my animals went out there, and then when they tore my barn down I went up in the woods right behind my house with a chainsaw and cut down trees high enough to build a building. So I cut off trees about ten foot high and sloped them so I could have a roof and I built my barn right onto live trees.

LS: And that was here on campus?

BD: That was on campus. And they sprouted out and went through my roof. That gave me shade [laughs]. I had three animals in there; two horses and a cow.

LS: But that was one of the first buildings also on campus. That you built. Gosh, that would be interesting to see whatever happened with that.

BD: I don't know who tore it down.

LS: You don't know what happened to it? You mentioned the road leading into your home.

BD: The driveway? Yes, I think the brick wall is still there. It just went straight in, facing my house from the east.

LS: And what was that road called?

BD: That was the, uh, what was the guy's name that owned the place?

LS: Warner?

BD: Warner, no, not Warner. I told you a little bit earlier, I can't tell you now, but it was his name's "driveway".

LS: But didn't you say that Security told you that they still call that Brumbaugh Rd.?

BD: Yeah, Brumbaugh Entrance, uh huh. Yeah, there's a little raised cement thing-driveway- that goes in there; you can see it.

LS: So you're famous on campus; you have a road named for you.

BD: [Laughs]

LS: That's good. Isn't that amazing? Okay, the campus is starting to get bigger. What do you remember about some of these expansions of when-

BD: If I remember right, I think Oelman Hall was second after [Allyn], and then I think Millett, then Fawcett. I think Millett was straight across from Oelman, and Fawcett was kitty-corner from Allyn.

LS: Did your job change when it got bigger? Your jobs, I should say?

BD: Not too much, no. I had two of the professors come to me and said, "Don, I know you are interested in greenhouse work and growing things and things like that. We've got a store in West Carrollton that we'd like for you to come and run for us."

LS: So two professors asked you?

BD: Hay, and, um, I can't think of his name now. Anyhow, it was the name of the store. That's been twenty-five years or more.

LS: But you stayed on campus, though, didn't you?

BD: [nods]

LS: So all of that time period you basically were with the mailroom and with the printing-

BD: And with the greenhouse.

LS: -and the greenhouse. Boy, you had a series of jobs to do.

BD: Yeah, I had a person to run the mailroom after I got busy in the greenhouse.

LS: Tell me a little bit about Fred White, would you?

BD: Well, I think he was a very, very, very nice person. And he had gray hair- did you ever see him?

LS: Yes.

BD: Okay- gray hair and about your height, about 5'10" and ½, and he was very, very friendly. He was always one to say "hi" and "how are you today" and things like that, until he really got pretty busy and he got pretty much caught in his office. But he lived in Tipp City, and I think this was one of the biggest chores he ever had in his life to get things started. He done a very good job I think. He'd always call me into the office when I'd go by and say, "Come in and tell me what's going on", and things like that. I don't know if I ever met his wife or if he was married at the time.

LS: Initially you worked with Miami [University], did you?

BD: First I worked for Miami. Then when I went over to the Biology Department I worked for Ohio State.

LS: So you remember, then, when it was a [branch] campus?

BD: Oh yeah.

LS: Did you meet any of the people from Miami or the people from Ohio State?

BD: No, I never did.

LS: Those of whom the buildings are named after?

BD: I'm sure they kept with the dignitaries.

LS: Was there any other... what were some of the first developments around the campus that you remember?

BD: Allyn Hall.

LS: No, but I mean other things just than the campus. Was there any stores, or-

BD: No, no stores. No, there wasn't much when I was here- although stores started while I was here, but it was pretty much just Allyn Hall at that time.

LS: So that when you first came out here it was kind of like being really in the country.

BD: Oh, it was in the country. Oh yeah.

LS: Let me come back to the Warner House because that's... a lot of people have mentioned that that's where it all started. How long did that exist? Do you remember?

BD: I think it probably existed five years.

LS: Did it?

BD: Yeah. I think they used it for some other things that I didn't have an interest in knowing.

LS: But the administrative offices moved into Allyn after Allyn was built?

BD: Yeah.

LS: Yeah. Good. Were there any neighbors close here?

BD: There were some neighbors but I didn't know them.

LS: Mainly farmers?

BD: No, there weren't too many farmers, they was pretty much started to build up for a city when we started here.

LS: Did you remember if there were any problems with the university and getting up and running?

BD: I have no- no, I don't know of any problems-

LS: Everything seemed to be running-

BD: Of course I wasn't in administration so I really don't know for sure. I'm sure there was, in getting Allyn Hall built and all that. I'm sure that the drainage and all that kind of stuff was a concern, because they had to get into the city service, you know, for sewer and water.

LS: What was the worst part of your job here?

BD: [Laughs]

LS: I'm going to come to the best part, but I want to know first what you thought was the worst part.

BD: I really don't have any.

LS: You didn't? You were happy?

BD: I enjoyed it so much. No, I didn't have a worst part.

LS: You enjoyed it so much. Other than the people, what was it that you enjoyed?

BD: Well, I'm a grower and a landscaper and so I was just thrilled to death that they was going to build a greenhouse for me, that I was going to be able to operate for the Biology Department, and they was very accommodating, too, to me in the Biology Department.

LS: Were the students involved with the faculty much? For instance, were they allowed to eat in the lunch room with you?

BD: No.

LS: They weren't? Just faculty- faculty and staff?

BD: I don't know if it was not allowed, but they didn't.

LS: Oh.

BD: Yeah, just the employees and the teachers, the faculty.

LS: Oh, okay. At that point was it all just teaching and learning? Was there any events that they had here to celebrate the university?

BD: See, we didn't have a gathering place in Allyn Hall; we didn't have a place where we could go have meetings and stuff, for the whole college. And so I'm saying that I don't know of anything that went on that I was that concerned about.

LS: So student came here, they studied, and they went home. Was that basically it?

BD: Yes.

LS: It's interesting. It would be interesting to know how they gradually started to have some events that they enjoyed.

BD: In the last part when I was here they did have a football team I think.

LS: A football team?

BD: Just a small team, yeah, and it just played other little schools or something like that.

LS: Where did they play?

BD: Um, south of Oelman, in that [area] it was empty at the time.

LS: And so they just played right there?

BD: Yeah.

LS: So Wright State DID have a football team!

BD: Well, I don't know if they called it that. But some kids got together and did, yes.

LS: Okay, now they talk about some of the football teams as club teams rather than the big teams that are now in most schools, so that probably was a club team.

BD: I can't answer that, I don't know if it was just a volunteer team. But I knew they started a team, but I didn't get involved.

LS: Did you ever watch one of the games?

BD: No. I think they went to high schools or something like that.

LS: Oh, did they?

BD: It was very- it was nothing official, I know that much.

LS: What about the Arts? Do you have any remembrances about the Arts- music, theatre, art?

BD: No, they didn't have anything like that when I was there.

LS: They didn't? So that was all started after you were here.

BD: They might have had an art class. I think maybe they did have an art class. But I was in my own domain and I really didn't pay much attention.

LS: And your domain was the mailroom and the greenhouse.

BD: The mailroom and the greenhouse. And everybody knew me. [Laughs]

LS: You'd mentioned way back that the first thing they asked you to do was cut the grass around Warner House to get it ready for the starting of the university. Did you continue to take care of any of the grounds?

BD: Yes, they wanted me to continue that and they wanted me to work part time for them. I started part time at that time.

LS: Oh, so you moved, that kept you busy. Isn't it amazing how much the university has grown now?

BD: Oh my. Very amazing.

LS: What's your impression when you see Wright State as it is now, in comparison to when you first came here?

BD: Well, there was a lot of people that was dreaming about this campus and I feel like that their dream has really come true.

LS: Tell me, in dreaming, when you say they were dreaming about it-

BD: Well, the first people that came, they was professors. And they had big hopes for their classes and the campus getting larger, and they was just thrilled to death to be able to work in a new college.

LS: And so they thought that it would develop into what it is today.

BD: Well, I am sure that they did.

LS: What's the most amazing thing that you can say about the campus today now, from your own perspective?

BD: Well, as a first employee I feel like that it's amazing how things have really worked out and how the prayers have been answered of the people that really were interested in getting it started. And working at the Warner House was the start of all dreams, and I felt like I was a part of helping them with their dreams.

LS: So you feel a part of that now?

BD: I do.

LS: That you were really here at the very beginning.

BD: Yes.

LS: Well that is really-

BD: -and I am honored.

LS: When you started how old were you here?

BD: I was like... 50.

LS: Well, that was like a real change in the directions of what you did-

BD: I think I started at 52.

LS: Did you?

BD: Yes.

LS: If you could describe what Wright State was like at the beginning with one word, what would you say?

BD: Um, I'm trying to get the right word. I would say "fantastic".

LS: Fantastic, at the very beginning.

BD: And that dreams were answered. Because everything worked out so good, I don't even remember of anybody getting mad or getting upset about anything at all. Because I was involved with a lot of the professors and I don't remember anybody raising their voice or getting upset about anything.

LS: Well isn't that nice. Let's see now. If you had to do it over again, would you do it?

BD: Oh, absolutely.

LS: Would you really?

BD: Oh, absolutely.

LS: Do you remember people like Verna Graves-

BD: Oh, yes.

LS: Katie Stoufer-

BD: Yes.

LS: You interacted with all of those people?

BD: Yes, we ate together in the lunchroom. And I would help them a lot with running around and things like that when I wasn't too busy.

LS: What do you mean "running around"?

BD: Oh, going to different offices and taking papers and things like that.

LS: Oh, did you? Well, Don, is there anything else that may have popped into your mind that you would like to say about Wright State? Or the people?

BD: Harold Shearer was the first maintenance manager, and he was a very good man. He's not living today, but he put his heart and soul into everything that he did, and him and I were very close.

LS: What was his job?

BD: Maintenance.

LS: Maintenance.

BD: He was the head of the maintenance. And there were just four or five of us here at that time, you know, so we were very close.

LS: That took care of the whole campus. Wow. That's amazing. Well, I'll tell you what. I think it's been such a pleasure hearing you talk about that you lived on campus, you were one of the first persons to have been on campus, and your reflections of the Warner House, because that's where it all began, isn't it?

BD: Right.

LS: Okay, well listen, thank you very much for doing this interview.

BD: It's my pleasure.

LS: And if you think of anything else, tell us later and we'll add that to your remembrances, okay?

BD: It's been quite awhile back and I probably will think of some things that maybe you should know about.

LS: Well that's good.

BD: I'll let you know.

LS: You are one of the pioneers of Wright State.

BD: And I'm honored; I feel very honored.

LS: Thank you very much.

Chris Wydman¹: What was the name of the greenhouse you said you worked in, in Fairborn?

BD: Hoaks.

CW: Hoaks?

BD: H-O-A-K-S.

LS: It was one of the big ones, the real big ones.

¹ Chris Wydman, WSU archivist, was present during the interview.

BD: Mr. Dan Hoak was the owner.

CW: And you ran into Mr. Warner there?

BD: Yes. I was carrying some flowers out for him.

CW: What was his... did he still own any of the land around here?

BD: Yeah, he owned the Warner House. He still lived there.

CW: He still lived at Warner House when-

BD: He was getting close to moving.

CW: But he was there after Mr. White started working there, he was still there?

BD: Yeah. In fact they were very good friends.

CW: And where exactly was Warner House?

BD: Where was it?

CW: Yeah. Was it down the hill or was it up front?

BD: Go out front, turn left and the first road to the right- what's the name of that road, Fairfield? Right across the street, just a little bit more east, was the driveway into the small house there. Not there anymore?

LS: It's not there anymore. But there is- remember Achilles Hill? That was the hill behind Warner House.

CW: So this was down behind, down the hill from campus?

LS: Yeah.

CW: Down the back side of campus is where Warner House was.

BD: I was kind of out of the picture when that happened so I don't know.

CW: So it was kind of in the vicinity where Mini University is now, is that correct?

LS: Yes.

CW: But across the street, [by] that road going towards Kauffman maybe?

LS: What it is, remember they built this new by-pass, and that came right over where Warner House was.

BD: You go down Kauffman, turn [right] on- what is that road that goes down by Warner House? Is that Fairfield?

LS: Colonel Glenn curves around.

BD: Well, as you're turning to the right, there's a driveway right there and that was his house- Mr. Warner's; first house on the right back in the lane. He had a barn back there, too.

CW: So it was where the University Road met with Kauffman, down around that area.

BD: Yeah, about a mile down the road, on the right.

CW: Oh, okay.

LS: You see the Mini University got started at the Warner House.

CW: But it was at a different location than it is now.

LS: Oh yeah, it was different than it is now.

BD: It was on campus, though. Yeah, the location, it was a different location.

LS: But that was the first daycare.

CW: We have, you know, lots of pictures of Warner House, and I've always tried to figure out exactly where it was.

BD: Can I see some of those pictures?

CW: Yeah, I've got one right on my wall. Let me go grab that.

LS: Okay, thank you very much.

BD: Well, I hope I helped you a little bit.

CW: Absolutely.

LS: Yeah, that was amazing.

