

Oakland University Chronicles

Interview with

George T. Matthews

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Interview date: October 24, 1996

Interviewer: David George Lowy



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October 24, 1996

Photographer: Rick Smith
Oakland University Communications and Marketing



George T. Matthews
Associate Dean for Humanities
Professor of History

Photograph of George T. Matthews
MSUO Yearbook 1963

Oakland University Chronicles

DAVID GEORGE LOWY, Interviewer

Date of birth: November 4, 1929

EDUCATION

B.A.	Drake University	1950
M.A.	City College of New York	1952
Ph.D.	University of Tennessee	1956

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

7-1-62	Director of Counseling Service and Assistant Professor of Psychology
9-1-64	Clinical Psychologist (<i>10 months</i>)
7-1-68	Associate Professor with Tenure
8-15-77 • 8-14-78	Associate Professor of Psychology and Acting Chair, Department of Psychology
8-15-95 • 8-14-98	Chair, Department of Psychology



Oakland University Chronicles

GEORGE T. MATTHEWS

Date of birth: May 27, 1917

EDUCATION

A.B.	Columbia University	1939
M.A.	Columbia University	1940
Ph.D.	Columbia University	1954

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

9-1-59	Associate Professor of History with Tenure
7-1-60	Professor of History and Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty
7-1-61	Professor of History and Associate Dean for the Humanities
5-1-65	Professor of History and Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
7-1-72	Professor of History and Vice Provost
4-1-80 • 2-28-81	Interim President
3-1-81	Professor of History, Vice Provost, Special Assistant to the President, and Acting Dean, School of Nursing
8-1-81	Professor of History, Vice Provost, and Special Assistant to the President
8-15-82	Professor of History
8-14-85	Retired Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History
1-2-91 • 4-25-91	Acting Director of the Honors College



Photograph of George T. Matthews
October 24, 1996

Photographer: Rick Smith
Oakland University Communications and Marketing



George T. Matthews
Associate Dean for Humanities
Professor of History

Photograph of George T. Matthews
MSUO Yearbook 1963

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Interview with GEORGE MATTHEWS
October 24, 1996

DAVID LOWY: This is one of the interviews for the Oakland University Chronicles Project supported by the Oakland University Foundation. The goal of the project is to collect oral histories dealing with the beginnings of Oakland University. We are going to focus on the first years, that is the time prior to the first graduation. Today is October 24th, 1996, and we are in Varner Hall on the grounds of Oakland University.

My name is David Lowy, Chair of the Psychology Department, and I have been at Oakland since 1962 for a grand total of 35 years. It is my very great pleasure today to be talking with George Matthews, a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History, who has been at Oakland for 26 years, from its beginning in 1959 until his retirement in 1985. George and I have known each other for the entire 35 years I have been here.

Well, George, it has been a long time. You know, the one thing that I have always found intriguing, because I came to Oakland in year three, was how did you hear about Oakland U., because Oakland was not here really?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It didn't even have a name.

DAVID LOWY: It didn't even have a name and yet they gathered people who came.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I first heard about the place from the first dean, Robert Hoopes. He called me up one day in my office at Columbia and he said, "I would like to talk with you." I said, "Sure, come on." He showed up at the office and we chatted and he told me what he knew about the project of establishing a new campus—a new university, just north of Detroit. We went out and had lunch and had a couple of martinis apiece and we continued to chat. I gathered much of the information about the place from Bob Hoopes who hadn't been out here [more than on a short visit]. He didn't know anything more about it than the man on the moon actually. And that's about it.

DAVID LOWY: Was there anything that happened that made you finally decide to come here rather than [elsewhere]?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I actually had a few offers from other institutions, big ones, and I was kind of nonplused as to what to do. Woody Varner called me up, incidentally, shortly after Bob Hoopes came to visit me and made me the offer for me to come out to Michigan. So I had that offer and I had others, [including] the University of Illinois—I am not going to get into that. I was really up a tree, I didn't know what to do, whether I should go to a big and established place or risk, in a sense, coming out to a brand new totally unknown situation.

I hit upon the notion of talking with a very old and learned friend of mine. I said, "Joe, what should I do?" He thought for awhile and he said, "You know, I know you pretty well. If you go to a big established institution like the University of Illinois at Urbana, you will have to live with all of the mistakes which your predecessors have made. And if you go to this new place, you will have the great satisfaction of seeing your successors live with your mistakes, and I think you ought to go to the new place."

I said, "Okay, Joe, that sounds good to me." Woody Varner called me up, I think, shortly after that conversation and I said, "Woody, I am going to be your boy." I remember using that expression, and that was it. So he had me out here, out to visit, with my wife. We were put up at the Bloomfield Hills Country Club, and he really rolled it all out and we were much impressed. We had just come back from a trip to Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico was very different than Michigan, believe me. That's about it.

DAVID LOWY: You say that you were given the opportunity of making your own mistakes. I am sure you didn't make any, did you?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I have made plenty. I will talk about one of them in a little bit.

DAVID LOWY: Okay. I guess we should make it clear who Woody Varner was.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Woody Varner was the first chancellor of what became Oakland University. He was from MSU, from Michigan State University. He was a vice-president there and I think rumor had it that he was the chief lobbyist for MSU. He is the one that is credited, at least, with having put through the Legislature the name change from the old College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, which was the ancestor of MSU, and he lobbied to get it changed to Michigan State University. So he was very familiar with the politics of Michigan. So that's Woody Varner, a great man, really.

DAVID LOWY: Oh, I remember him very well, lots of energy, very creative, and a nice, nice human being.

Of course, our initial name was MSUO, Michigan State University Oakland. I guess it had to be affiliated with MSU in order to receive accreditation.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, yes, but it's more complicated than that. Mrs. Wilson, whose land we sit on, had been a lieutenant governor of the State of Michigan and she became also a member of the Board of Michigan State University. Through that connection she knew John Hannah, who was the president of MSU, very closely and admired him and he was very fond of her.

Let me back up a little bit. The origin of MSUO goes back to before there was any discussion at MSU. At that time there was a great surge of university branch building all over the country and community colleges were springing up all over the place. The powers that be in Oakland County appointed a committee—a commission actually, to study whether or not Oakland County should have a community college and where would they locate it. The man in charge [J. Robert F. Swanson] also knew Mrs. Wilson very, very closely and he discovered that she was getting ready to give the land to Michigan State. He was lobbying for this to be the center of the Oakland Community College. But she decided that she would give the land to Michigan at Michigan State [and not to a community college]. And here we are, 1600 acres.

DAVID LOWY: A pleasant little plot of land, comfortable. I remember Mrs. Wilson.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: She was a charming lady.

DAVID LOWY: She was a grand, grand lady. I think I remember the big party she had for the freshman class.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Oh, yes, she had a couple of parties but the big one, of course, was the graduating class. She had made for every person graduating, a special ring with little diamonds in it. But she gave parties for the students and they flocked to her and she was always very gracious and open and very, very charming.

DAVID LOWY: I remember when I first came, she had a sit-down dinner for the new faculty and staff. It was quite impressive.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It was impressive, yes.

DAVID LOWY: I don't know how many hundreds of people she had for an intimate little dinner.

What kind of school did you think it would be when you came? Was there any notion?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, I will backtrack a little bit. John Hannah of MSU established on the East Lansing campus a series of committees which were charged with studying what do we do with this acreage which we have acquired. Some, of course, said to turn it into a cow pasture. Others said, "We will build a campus." They didn't specify what kind of a campus it would be. He turned the question over to these committees which met for at least a year, a year and a half, and reported finally in a report, which is over in East Lansing now, their conclusion that MSU should establish, 75 miles away, a campus which should have autonomy with MSU. And John Hannah lived up to that and accepted that recommendation.

The committee over in East Lansing—which was comprised of a flock of deans and full professors and things—they felt that it should be made into a kind of honors college. That notion persisted to the present day, as a matter of fact—an honors college on this acreage, 1600 acres of land, beautiful land,

70-odd miles away from East Lansing. They didn't specify what size, but it was going to be an honors college—they emphasized college, not necessarily university. There is a distinction.

Then they proceeded to recommend that it be an innovative place free of the usual entanglements of a college, by which they meant football teams—no football, no professional sports—that these were distractions from the heart of the matter which was academic and pure in a sense—no fraternities, no athletics. At that time—perhaps I should remind you that in '57 there were a lot of scandals going on about fraternities, malfeasances and manipulation and bad practices. So fraternities were out so far as this new campus and this college was going to be.

Most of these recommendations Hannah accepted and proceeded to then gather together eminent people, academics mostly, who met in Meadow Brook Hall to make recommendations as to what should this new campus be, how it should develop. This is known as the Meadow Brook Seminars. They made a report—a dozen of them, actually, which in my opinion ratified what the committee over in East Lansing had already recommended basically. I think that is the case.

So the Meadow Brook Seminars which became rather famous on campus and elsewhere were staffed by most eminent people from around the country. Presided over by Woody Varner, they were charged with making recommendations for this new campus. Now, they recommended high-flown things, most of which actually the committees over in East Lansing had already recommended to John Hannah. The Meadow Brook Seminars became a kind of a Holy Grail for the faculty of this new institution, for the newspapers and so on.

Most of the things which the committees over in East Lansing recommended, the seminars also recommended. But they did it in language which was high-flown. I remember there was one paragraph in one of the reports from the Meadow Brook Seminars which likened this to the possibility that we could become an Athens, a city—a bright city on a flashing hill—and everybody nodded and said, yes, it was a good idea. And so that's about what happened. Then the faculty arrived and then the student body, and then reality set in. But there was always a residue of this fantasy, that kind of charged the initial group of people who came out.

DAVID LOWY: So the Meadow Brook Seminars consisted of a lot of rhetoric, I gather, not much very concrete.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I think basically you are right, yes, nothing concrete. They never talked about how you do this—they never talked about money, for example, how you fund these things. It was a state institution. They never talked about the internal organization of such a place. They didn't mention the honors college conception but basically that's what they were talking about. There were several of these seminars stretching from August into December of '58. The second one was devoted entirely to education—it specified a school of education which would embody for that group of students these basic ideas. The third one was business administration, and the next to the last one, I should say, was a kind of an afterthought in my opinion, it was the liberal arts. What function would the liberal arts play in this new institution? Basically what they were talking about was a group of courses which would be preparatory basically to the sciences, to economics and business administration, or to education.

The Athens notion disappeared. And as I say, these became a kind of Holy Grail. Woody Varner and others would always mention the Meadow Brook Seminars because those were great names that attended these.

[Later] Riesman came in to study this new place.

DAVID LOWY: You know, his name was mentioned frequently but without anything specific—it is as though he put on a stamp of approval, therefore this is great and noble, and that stuck with the place—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: For a long, long time. He is probably still around, there is still a charge.

DAVID LOWY: So when you came, this was prior to classes starting?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I came out in July and classes started in September of '59. I came out and I wanted to rent a house—to find a nice place to live and to placate my wife who was a little dubious about this whole affair. She was a Midwesterner by birth and she had gotten accustomed to the East Coast so she was not entirely sympathetic to the whole idea.

DAVID LOWY: How did you feel about leaving the East Coast?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I felt very strange. My father was convinced that I would be scalped by Indians trans-Appalachia and so on. So I came out to rent a house, and to get my wife settled in and so on. And also to meet with the first group of faculty, three or four, who were to teach in the course that I established, called Western Institutions and Social Ideas. This was basically a course modeled on a similar course taught at Columbia College in Columbia University, and we used the textbook that was used at Columbia.

DAVID LOWY: Was this the beginning of the UC courses [university courses]?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It was the beginning of the UC courses. The UC courses were established very quickly, they were general education. The first faculty latched onto the idea of a liberal education as being fundamental to all students, in courses which would be taught from freshman year up through senior year. And they were labeled university courses to distinguish them from departmental courses.

One of the things that the Meadow Brook Seminars and the East Lansing committees were adamant about was that there should be no disciplinary departments, no department of mathematics, no department of history, and that there ought to be an emphasis upon general education—general liberal education which indeed we followed through on, and hence the UC courses.

DAVID LOWY: I know there was one in social sciences, too.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Right, and there was one in the sciences, but that was very different.

DAVID LOWY: But by the time I came, which was year three, we had departments.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: We had departments; right. It was simply automatic in a sense. It had to be, because the whole academic world was organized around departments and one of the functions that the first group of faculty had, which was never specified in a job specification, was recruiting the next year's faculty. So we were busy building a curriculum for the first year and then scouting out the second year, and building the curriculum for that year and recruiting a faculty to teach it. And then this went on until the fourth year. So that was really what we were up to.

Now I remember gathering names of likely people for the history department which [included] the UC course and so on. I would write letters introducing myself and [asking], "Would you be interested in an appointment out here?" and I would try to describe the place. But I would always sign them simply my name because I wasn't a chairman or anything of the sort. So I began to say this was ridiculous, and I listed myself as Chairman of the Department of History and pretty soon everybody agreed and we had departments and chairmen.

DAVID LOWY: So in other words, it [having departments] is all your fault?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: That was one of the errors I made [along with others]—

DAVID LOWY: —that we are still living with. If I recall correctly, the first [two] years before I was here, things were a bit in a state of transition—perhaps that is a kind way of putting it, because there were changes from year one to year two. By year three—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: —the changes [came thick and fast].

DAVID LOWY: What was going on then?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, the whole institution was being invented and then re-invented and invented yet again. The rhetoric was that it was a clean slate, that you could write on this clean slate all of the things which your heart desired. We then, as you said, ran into reality because we are not separate from the academic world, we are part of a highly complex and highly

stratified—a hierarchical stratification—set of institutions all over the country. So we did the best we could but we had to change.

Now among the changes very quickly was [one made because] we started on a quarter system. MSU was on a quarter system and we were on a quarter system. There are some virtues of the quarter system. There is more flexibility to it, you can cover more ground [i.e. subjects]. There are all kinds of reasons why a quarter system is not a bad thing. But the group that was the faculty at that time, maybe 30 or 40 people, were convinced [otherwise]—most of them came from institutions which were on the semester system, and that was their habit and they were used to it. So we promptly then, somewhere within the [second] year, changed from a quarter system to a semester system—a trimester system actually. All that it entailed was pretty complicated.

Then to compound the difficulties, the original curriculum was on a [quarter] basis with a full load being [three] courses. So we went from a quarter system to a semester system [with a full load being four courses at four credits each]. That, of course, was just incredibly complicated, and that was one of the sources of great confusion because we had transfer students who came from places with three credits on a semester [course] or some of them from a quarter system, and no one knew exactly where they were until the chips finally were cashed in. I think that the move from a quarter to a semester system [with four credits per course]—I think that's a fundamental error, that's one of the errors which I said I would talk about. We're still there. I won't go into the details—it is kind of a technical business—but it was not a good move to have done and I think it haunts the place still.

[Editor's note: The preceding paragraph was edited for greater accuracy, with the interviewee's concurrence.]

DAVID LOWY: I think it's intriguing for a historian, of all people, to start a new venture trying to wipe out the past.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: A clean slate. But it was fun. One of the characteristics of this early place was that it was gay and always sort of laughing at itself, and very, very happy in a peculiar kind of a way.

DAVID LOWY: Oh, I think when I came that was one of the incredible charms—I like to think of it as "we were all young." I always remember Woody Varner bragging that the average age of the faculty was 32, and that figure remained 32 until the time he left. So it was marvelous for almost ten years—we didn't age at all, and then it hit us, wham.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Then we had a great solidarity. I think there were obviously disputes and so on but everybody knew everybody, everybody was pretty new to the whole business and there was much visiting back and forth—parties all over the place, of which Woody was one of the chief motivators. He had the whole faculty over to his place several times, and there was much celebration.

DAVID LOWY: In looking back at it, I guess it's because everyone came at about the same time, everyone was new to the area.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Just basically that's true.

DAVID LOWY: So you looked amongst your colleagues, and it was small enough because we all had offices right next to each other, we weren't separated.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: And there weren't departments dividing us.

DAVID LOWY: And there was great collegiality at that time.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Collegiality is the word.

DAVID LOWY: It was really a great deal of fun. So the times, the Zeitgeist, at the beginning were very different, very different.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It lasted for about three or four years, then things began to solidify and become more characteristic of established places.

DAVID LOWY: And began to resemble many of the universities with departments and all of that.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: We still don't have a football team, but we have a basketball team and a swimming team and so on—but we don't have a football team yet.

DAVID LOWY: And we don't have a physical ed requirement.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: That's right, that was our glory.

DAVID LOWY: George, how would you characterize those early years, what were they like?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I would say they were exciting and they were full of fun. This was not a grim place, it was a very open and a very laughing place, a great deal of fun and excitement. The idea of creating a new thing is like having a baby or something. And inventing a curriculum is kind of like having a carpet rolled up and then you roll it forward to the next semester and then roll it forward to the next and finally they graduate, a red carpet just rolled out for the students and the faculty.

DAVID LOWY: I find that intriguing because it is very much like bonding. You create something, and you see something, it's yours and you are part of it and you just want to see it grow and see how it evolves.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: That is exactly it, this feeling.

DAVID LOWY: I think maybe that's what provided the bonding so many of the old-timers have for the place.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I know it is true of the old faculty—I don't think we could ever recreate it, it had to be kind of what it was.

DAVID LOWY: It was a very unique set of circumstances, and I think many of us were very fortunate to be here at the time.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It was a great opportunity actually. I have never regretted it, never regretted it. I have had offers from other places and turned them down. I just didn't want to leave the place, I guess.

DAVID LOWY: You know, when I came, I heard rumors about the grading difficulties, and at the time there was all of the talk that we were going to be the Harvard of the Midwest.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: That was PR, a public relations affair that was obviously absurd. You don't build a Harvard overnight the way we were doing it. But it did give a certain cachet to the place, a kind of audacity—I think that's the word—we were audacious. Partly it was because we all came from some other place and most of the places we came from were prestigious and highly regarded. It was almost as if I was "one jump ahead of the sheriff" all the time, constantly working to create something which would live up to the rhetoric or at least approximately live up to the rhetoric.

DAVID LOWY: But wasn't there a danger that some of the people here believed it?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It is always the case, yes.

DAVID LOWY: The rhetoric was glorious and it may have been PR but it became part of the myth. And do you think that had any impact on the expectations of faculty?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Oh, I think it did, not to everyone, of course, and not as time began to go on. But I am sure it must have. And then I think what we tend to forget is that by the middle of the '60s, departments had come in and that it was necessary. The departments and their disciplinary orientation are rather different from the orientation of, let's say, the East Lansing committees or the Meadow Brook Seminars. They were concerned with establishing an educational experience which was a broad and generous opening of students' minds and less concerned with the particularities of chemistry, let us say, or history and so on.

But when departments are formed then more and more of the faculty become oriented towards their discipline, which is normal. I think that happened a little bit beyond our time frame. By 1970 a real transition had taken place in which instead of general education being the Holy Grail, the center, that became increasingly irrelevant to most of the new faculty who wanted to teach their subjects, which was also understandable and reasonable.

DAVID LOWY: Once we got larger you started to have enough people together to form a department. Prior to the time there were departments, your colleagues were someone in the next office. It would be sociology, psychology, chemistry or whatever. Then once you start to have departments you are surrounded—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: There is a narrowing. [The liberal artists feel surrounded by specialists.] But it was fun. In the first few years it was fun—it has always been fun, as a matter of fact—but it was exciting and fun.

DAVID LOWY: Wasn't there a grading crisis somewhere—I know it was prior to my time?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Yes, there was a crisis. I think it goes back to a misunderstanding or a set of expectations which were unreal on the part of students—who after all had come here mostly as commuters from the local area—for most of whom this was the first time in any college for their families or themselves. They were caught up to some extent in the myth that we had created.

So when exam time came at the end of the first semester, it was disastrous. The number of flunks and so on were way out of line with the expectations. And the faculty was much concerned with the crisis, as it were. The *Detroit News* at that time had a headline which read, "Brainy Flops," because there were so many kids that had flunked. But, you know, the faculty rallied around, it was generous—and it moved along and here we are. Now our grading is pretty much normal and natural.

DAVID LOWY: There is a lot that probably reflected the discrepancy between the Harvard of the Midwest and the reality.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: And the reality, yes. I can remember much being made of the fact that our buildings were new and were not covered with ivy—you know, the Ivy League. And there were some students who objected very much to sprigs of ivy growing on South Foundation Hall; that somehow was disruptive of the myth.

DAVID LOWY: I think also it must have been traumatic for everyone, both faculty and students. How do you think the students responded to the grade crisis?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, I am told—and some of the telling was on your part as a psychologist—that there was a very important set of reactions or responses from the students, and I think from the faculty too—a kind of sense that we have done it wrong. Here they were, "first time in any college" type students, fed with the notion of Harvard of the Midwest, they take their exams and they fail. Now, who is to blame? "These teachers of ours come from Columbia, Harvard and so on and so forth, and we must be at fault, the blame is on us." A kind of guilt is set in here. And it took a long while, I think, to surmount.

DAVID LOWY: I think it was intriguing. My recollection, by the time I came, was that the students somehow felt guilty for not living up to the myth. And think it is very different from the way things are today with college students.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It is a very different world.

DAVID LOWY: Today college students feel they are entitled to good grades.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I don't know the figures anymore, they are not in my head, but North Central [Accreditation Association] was interested in the retention—or the flunk-out rate. Actually we subtly made it not that, but retention, how we were retaining students. And Dave Beardslee then ran a study on this whole question and came up with an important question: What do you mean by retention? We had students who started in 1959 who graduated in 1971. Now is that retention, [or do] they show up as the

dropout rate? But the number of students who come back, sometimes at great sacrifice—married and so on—and finish up their degrees: the figures are kind of overwhelming, so you have to be careful.

DAVID LOWY: I have often thought that we sometimes have to realize that getting an education is a process rather than a specific period of life.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Yes. But now, of course, there is the process of education which is at the front.

DAVID LOWY: Today when they want to know how many people graduate they do it within five years. But that wasn't sort of the accepted stance back then because the students did feel guilty and the faculty felt guilty.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I think the faculty felt a bit guilty, too. Actually Don O'Dowd who came in with you, I think in '62—he was here for the crisis. He ran a study taking faculty who had experience elsewhere and students and their grades. And he determined that faculty who had come from another institution and had been teaching for a fair amount of time in the other institutions, they tended—on the bell curve—they tended to grade along the top of the bell, whereas new faculty who had never taught before in any place tended to be the most severe in their grading. When this notion came out, I think faculty began to shake their heads and say, "Yes, maybe some of the fault is ours."

DAVID LOWY: Things certainly changed there after that. But we finally did end up graduating a charter class.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: And old David Beardslee—along with Bill Hammerle who is deceased now, I think those two were the authentic geniuses of the campus—Dave did a study about what happens to the Oakland graduates. He called this study "OU, Mother of Doctorates," for the number of graduates who went on to get doctorates was totally unprecedented.

DAVID LOWY: Particularly for the population we had, which really were kids for the first time in college and so on.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: So the truth is, we did okay.

DAVID LOWY: But by the time you had the graduating class we were no longer MSUO—we were Oakland University.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: That's right. In 1963, I think it would have been—

DAVID LOWY: —when the first class graduated—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: —we changed the name. The board said, okay, you can be Oakland University. Then by 1970, we were independent, had our own board of trustees, and were independent of MSU. That was a critical year in 1970, but that gets ahead of our story.

DAVID LOWY: But even at the time of [the first] graduation—because students graduated from Oakland University rather than from MSUO—so MSU or someone must have said, "Okay, guys, you can grow up"—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Yes, that is kind of what it was like.

DAVID LOWY: —and do your own work. I know at the time everyone felt this was a great and glorious thing that we are independent and so on and so forth.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: There was some nay-sayers but basically faculty—

DAVID LOWY: They wanted the independence and the autonomy. So those early years saw an awful lot of change and an awful lot of growth. I guess in terms of mistakes, we have already covered them. They really weren't that bad, were they? I mean we tried things, they didn't work—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: We tried a lot of things and it didn't work. We also tried a lot of things that worked, so you have to balance it.

DAVID LOWY: But I think also we were concerned with the students, so that if errors were made, we did take care of them.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I think you are right, we were generous in our regard to students.

DAVID LOWY: We didn't sort of handicap them or make them pay. I think that's one of the wonderful things about Oakland that endeared the university to many of us.

Do you think there was a loss when the university got larger and we [changed from] the small group of us who were there, who were trying things and it was exciting and dynamic and—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: —and you could get things done without too much bureaucracy. It hadn't set in yet.

DAVID LOWY: That is what there was, there was very little bureaucracy—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Practically none.

DAVID LOWY: —because we were the bureaucrats.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, yes, I was one of the bureaucrats.

DAVID LOWY: Yes, you were the "El supremo" in those days.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: I had no idea that is what I was during those days.

DAVID LOWY: Oh, yes, you were, you were.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Oh, yes, and then the growth and the size and so on. Actually there was a lot of dispute on campus about the size of Oakland. There were those who wanted to cut off enrollments and hence elevate the quality of students in an academic sense and there were a lot of arguments about it, a lot of meetings and so on. The people who said, "Oh, we ought to

grow" won out. It was indicative, I think, of the sense of the faculty that such a question would emerge as a vital question.

There were those who didn't want the university to be any larger than it was then or to grow larger. To have graduate work was regarded with some suspicion on the part of some faculty. But there was no way around where we were. We were, after all, a state financed institution [in a state] that recognized that it had an awful lot of young people who wanted to go to college, and created Oakland and other places like Saginaw Valley and Grand Valley and so on, because there was great pressure on higher education to expand and to give education. I think it was largely commercial in a sense, but nonetheless, we had to grow, there was no question about it in my opinion.

DAVID LOWY: So the old wonderful notion of a college had to really—

GEORGE MATTHEWS: —be put in the background. We are too big to be a college. What do we have now?

DAVID LOWY: 14,000 [students].

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Almost 14,000, from [570] in 1959.

DAVID LOWY: I remember when we got to be 1,000 [students]. I thought, boy, we are really getting into the big time.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: So lots of things had to be done and we tried to compensate a bit for the large campus. But I think it is remarkable.

DAVID LOWY: I guess from where we are sitting, it doesn't seem that long, does it? But we saw an awful lot happening—I guess a university like Oakland had to grow and it was inevitable that it grew in that direction.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: It had to be. Lamentably I think it had to be, we had to grow. If we didn't grow by adding programs which were of more appeal to students, then I am convinced that at some point the Legislature

would step in and say you have got to grow and we will see to it that you grow. This was articulated by the Legislature at several points.

DAVID LOWY: The grand tradition of the [liberal arts] college is really a private well-endowed relic of another day.

Well, we are just about done, are there any other last comments?

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Well, to emphasize my feeling about the early days—now I am talking of the first three or four years—I never have regretted coming. I have rejoiced in the fact that I was here and I still do and it was fun, and I am sorry that it is over. It has been over for me now for going on ten years since I retired. I am really out of the loop, I don't know what is going on half the time. But, yes, I have some regrets that some of the notions we had didn't work out, but I think on balance I am right in saying that I am proud to have been at Oakland when I was at Oakland.

DAVID LOWY: George, it's been wonderful talking with you.

GEORGE MATTHEWS: Good to see you, Dave.

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