

# Oakland University Chronicles

*Interview with*  
**James H. McKay**

Transcript of Oral History Interview

Interview date: March 12, 1997

Interviewer: Harvey Burdick



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## James H. McKay

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# Preface

## About the Oakland University Chronicles

The **Oakland University Chronicles** is a set of oral histories dealing with the beginnings of Oakland University, mainly focusing on the years prior to the graduation of the first class. The purpose of the Chronicles is to provide insight into those early times, and record the perspectives and personalities of some of the pioneering individuals who built the foundations of the institution. Special emphasis is placed upon information not readily available from written records.

Starting in 1996, a number of oral history interviews of early faculty, staff, and alumni were recorded as videotapes and transcripts, one of which is in this volume. The videotapes and transcripts are available for scholarly studies, research on institutional history, or outreach purposes of Oakland University; other uses are not permitted.

Bound copies of the transcripts are available from the circulation desk of the Kresge Library at Oakland University. Circulating copies of the videotapes are available from the university's Instructional Technology Center, where many of the interviews were recorded. Archival copies and supporting documents are located in the archives of the Kresge Library.

## Editing of the Transcripts

Each transcript was prepared initially by a court reporter based upon the reporter's records and/or the audiotape of the interview. The transcripts were edited by the Project Coordinator, but only as necessary to clarify the meaning, consistent with understanding the intent of the interviewee. Thus, the transcripts differ in some places from the spoken narratives.

The editing followed accepted practice for oral histories, and included:

- correcting factual content, usually indicated by square brackets [ ]
- adding clarifying words or phrases, also shown in square brackets
- correcting usage or unintended errors in speech; may be in brackets
- eliminating unnecessary repetitions, interjections, or false starts
- breaking up lengthy dialogue into shorter sentences or paragraphs

Each interviewee has approved the edited transcript, and has granted Oakland University the rights to the videotape and transcript of the interview, with the proviso that these will be used only for research, scholarly studies, or outreach purposes of Oakland University.

Alice Tombouliau, Project Coordinator  
Paul Tombouliau, Project Director

**Photograph of James H. McKay**

March 12, 1997

Photographer: Alice Tomboulian

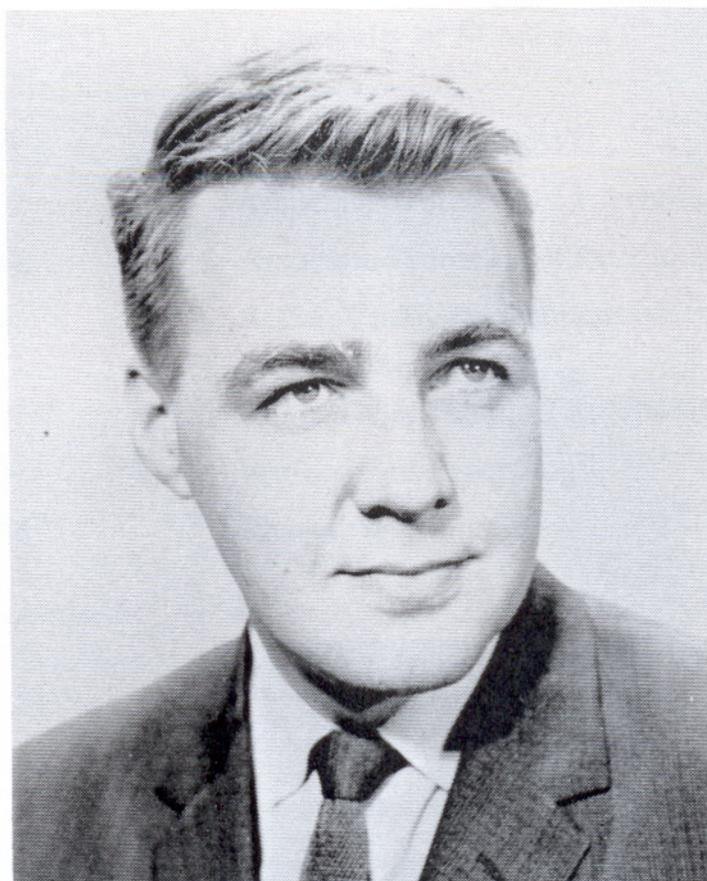


## Photograph of James H. McKay

MSUO Yearbook 1963



*James McKay  
Associate Dean for Science and  
Engineering  
Assistant Professor of Mathematics*



James McKay  
*Associate Dean for Science and  
Engineering*  
*Associate Professor of Mathematics*

## Oakland University Chronicles

### HARVEY BURDICK, Interviewer

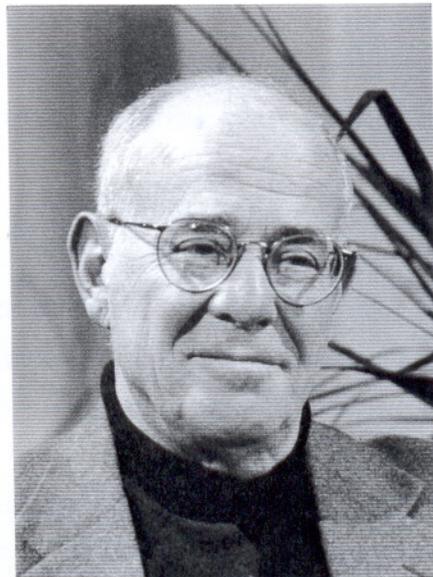
Date of birth: February 18, 1926

#### EDUCATION

B.A.	Syracuse University	1949
Ph.D.	University of Minnesota	1955

#### OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

8-15-62	Associate Professor of Psychology
8-15-64	Associate Professor of Psychology with Tenure
7-1-64	Acting Chair, Department of Psychology
7-1-66	Professor of Psychology Chair, Department of Psychology
7-1-69	Professor of Psychology
2-15-96	Phased Retirement



## Oakland University Chronicles

### JAMES HAROLD McKAY

Date of birth: July 23, 1928

#### EDUCATION

B.A.	Seattle University	1948
M.S.	University of Washington	1950
Ph.D.	University of Washington	1953

#### MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

1953 • 1954	Instructor of Mathematics
1954 • 1957	Assistant Professor of Mathematics

#### SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

1957 • 1959	Assistant Professor of Mathematics
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#### OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

9-1-59	Associate Professor of Mathematics
7-1-60	Associate Professor of Mathematics and Assistant to the Dean of Faculty
7-1-61	Associate Professor of Mathematics and Associate Dean for the Sciences
9-1-61	Associate Professor with Tenure
7-1-63 • 9-1-65	Professor of Mathematics and Chair, Department of Mathematics
9-1-65	Professor of Mathematics
8-15-91 • 1-31-97	Professor of Mathematical Sciences and Chair, Department of Mathematical Sciences
1-31-97	Professor of Mathematical Sciences

*Current as of March 12, 1997*

**Oakland University Chronicles**  
**Interview with JAMES H. McKAY**  
**March 12, 1997**

HARVEY BURDICK: Today's interview is one in a series being conducted for the Oakland University Chronicles Project. The goal of the project is to collect oral histories dealing with the origins and early years of Oakland University. The project is supported by a grant from the Oakland University Foundation. Today is March the 12th, 1997. We are in Varner Hall on the campus of Oakland University. My name is Harvey Burdick and I'm a professor of psychology and I have been at Oakland since 1962.

Our guest today is Jim McKay who came to MSU Oakland in 1959 as an associate professor of mathematics. One year later he was made Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty, and in '61, Jim was appointed Associate Dean for the Sciences. He remained as associate dean until 1965, serving as well as chair of the department of mathematics. He was promoted to full professor in 1963. In 1965, he turned the chair over to a person he had recruited, but then Jim assumed the chair once again in 1991, and just this year relinquished the chairmanship to assume the task of representing the department of mathematics as it moves to new quarters in the new science building.

Professor McKay has been a major player in the early design and later development of Oakland University, and for that reason, I want to welcome you as a guest, Jim, and thank you for sharing your memories.

JAMES McKAY: Happy to be here, thank you.

HARVEY BURDICK: I'd like to begin with having you tell us a little bit about where you were before you came, what you were doing, how you first heard about Oakland, how you were recruited and why you came, how's that?

JAMES McKAY: I'll try to fill that in a little bit. When I was recruited, I was at Seattle U., Seattle University. I had done my undergraduate degree at Seattle University, studying mathematics in the one year they had a competent teacher there. This was a faculty member from the University of Illinois. She taught all the mathematics that the school was offering and fortunately she was there at the time I could study these courses. And then there was no

more mathematics available, but I did complete an undergraduate major in mathematics in that one year that she was visiting. She is a graduate Ph.D. from the University of Washington and has a home in the area, but was normally in Urbana. But she took a year and came out and did this great service of teaching people at Seattle University that year.

Of course that was about the time that a lot of veterans were returning and there were some very large classes in the low level courses, but there weren't many students at all in the advanced courses that I was studying with her. I took my degree from there in '48, and then started graduate work at the University of Washington, and was there until I finished my Ph.D. Then they carried me on for one year as an instructor, and then I looked for jobs.

I remember the various offers that I received. Seattle, of course, is a very pretty place, and the first offer was from Nebraska. They said, "Well, if you're going to think about this offer, why don't you go and talk to the graduate dean? He's from here, and he can tell you something about it." So I went and talked to the graduate dean, and he said, "Living in Seattle— You can't get a change in scenery if you go to Nebraska until you travel 500, 600, 800 miles." And shortly thereafter, I received an offer from Michigan State University and accepted that and came to Michigan State. This was 1954—my degree was '53.

HARVEY BURDICK: You came to MSU in '54 as an instructor and [then] assistant professor?

JAMES McKAY: Yes. Seattle University, on the other hand, wrote to me after I was there for three years, and asked me to come back and teach at Seattle University, and I wasn't really interested in that. But I made one of my mistakes in my career. I thought the tactful way to deal with it is to say to them, "Well, I can't come unless you pay me this amount of money."

HARVEY BURDICK: Some enormous amount of money? Well, you thought it was?

JAMES McKAY: If I mention it now, it looks like a very small amount of money. At that time [it wasn't small], because my salary as an instructor at the University of Washington was 4,200.

Now, that was a big improvement over what you got paid as a graduate assistant when I first went, which was 900 a year. And these are the kind of dollar figures—

HARVEY BURDICK: That wasn't bad—4,200.

JAMES McKAY: My wife would like to have gone back to Seattle, and so I thought, "Well, I can take care of this, I'll just simply say I won't come unless you pay this amount of money." And the dean said the president agreed. So I honored my contract and went.

HARVEY BURDICK: As a man of honor, you had to go?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, right. But the dean did honestly tell me a short while later that the president thought it was a 12-month salary. Now I guess it's wise to get things in writing and agree to them in writing and sign them, but that's not the first time I perhaps agreed to something without it being in writing.

HARVEY BURDICK: But these were lessons you learned that worked well for you later on?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, and I didn't use them on people when I was trying to recruit them. But that put me back in Seattle at a time that MSUO was coming into existence.

HARVEY BURDICK: Had you heard anything about MSUO before you left Michigan to go to Seattle?

JAMES McKAY: I don't [recall]—there might have been some announcements, but it wasn't necessarily anything that I would have been following at that time.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, you're back in Seattle now in '57, right? Then tell us how you got around to coming here to MSUO?

JAMES McKAY: I had a good relationship with the chair of the math department at Michigan State. He and I, we got along very well. He heard about MSUO from [Woody] Varner at a meeting of the department heads, and wrote to me saying that he felt that what Varner was describing, he thought I could provide. He described what the position was and why he thought I would be fine for it, and wanted to encourage me to consider the position. And that was in April of '59.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, the chairman of the department at [MSU] wrote to you telling you about this new school and how he thought you would be a good candidate, and he described the new school to you. Is this the first time you really remember hearing about it?

JAMES McKAY: I think [in] any kind of detail that I would take an interest in it. But certainly having been at Michigan State for three years, I knew I liked Michigan better than Seattle, which is a little weird.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you told the chair that you would be interested—

JAMES McKAY: That's right, I wrote back and told him I would be interested. He then responded to that letter by saying he immediately took the information over to Woody Varner, and encouraged him to make me an offer.

HARVEY BURDICK: Can you tell us the sequence of the occurrences and the dates, because I think you mentioned the other day—it sounded very interesting—it was very short, very quick [that] this all happened?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, it all happened very quickly. I think probably within three days, maybe, to allow mail to go back and forth between Seattle and Michigan, but everybody was responding. I responded immediately to his letter and then he responded to mine.

HARVEY BURDICK: Are we talking about March, April?

JAMES McKAY: Just April.

HARVEY BURDICK: Just in the month of April these letters went back and forth and when were you appointed?

JAMES McKAY: I think it was the [16th] of April the Board of Trustees appointed me.

HARVEY BURDICK: It moved really quickly?

JAMES McKAY: Yes. And I don't remember signing anything, but Woody did talk to me on the phone and told me the salary, and I said that's fine.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, then, the description of Oakland came through the chair, you became interested, you talked to Woody, and I don't know what Woody told you. Did he continue with the description of Oakland and what it's going to be, and so on?

JAMES McKAY: We had a fair amount of interchange of mail after that first telephone conversation, because he needed my help in trying to recruit additional faculty in mathematics. I gave him some names to follow up on, and I was calling some people to see if they might be interested, and he was reporting his lack of success in getting somebody else. He left it to me at that stage to try to recommend some people. I assume he was also seeking advice from [J. Sutherland] "Sud" Frame who had been the chairman at Michigan State.

HARVEY BURDICK: You were coming to head up the department in mathematics, was that your understanding?

JAMES McKAY: No, I don't think it was that way, it was just to be one of the faculty members.

HARVEY BURDICK: You wanted to be a faculty member in mathematics. You then come and visit, as I understand, and that doesn't happen until the summer—

JAMES McKAY: Early in June, yes, I arranged an appointment to come by. My wife and myself, we flew out and we arranged to spend about three or four days in the area. A part of that dealt with the fact that there was a faculty subdivision being established and there were homes being designed by architects, and that we would probably be interested in building a home there. And so if we could get in touch with the architects, we might get a head start on a home in the subdivision. Also, I needed a new car—cars are cheaper in Michigan, so we arranged to buy a car when we were here.

Bob Hoopes was visiting, he was the dean in the first couple of years of the institution, and so I had a chance to meet him. I remember there was also a music faculty member, Bob Holmes, that was being interviewed at the same time. So Miggie [Margaret] Hoopes, and Bob Holmes's wife, and Virginia [McKay], and myself and Woody were touring homes in a subdivision around here, checking it out and giving advice about whether this would suit the Holmes as a residence.

Another thing that happened was that Virginia and I did go and talk to the architects and we had actually had some drawings and floor plans, some architectural sketches that we could work with back in Seattle and see if we could get some plans. We moved to getting a plan, but when the bids came in, it was not for our budget. But we did build a home in the subdivision very quickly.

HARVEY BURDICK: You did build a home. When were you able to move into the subdivision, when were all the houses ready for people like yourself?

JAMES McKAY: Those who went along with the architectural plans, people like Hoopes, Matthews and Stoutenburgs, they moved in fairly quickly. We were—I think it might have been a couple of years before we moved in.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you had to find other living arrangements waiting for the house to be built in the subdivision?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, but Lowell Eklund was in charge of that, and I wrote him a letter and described exactly what we needed and he found one. The children were going to go to St. Andrews School in Rochester and we'd like to have the house fairly close to that, and he

found a marvelous house that served us very well.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Lowell went out of his way, in a sense, to find you housing?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, he was doing this—weren't they doing it when you came?

HARVEY BURDICK: No, I think it changed a little bit.

JAMES McKAY: They expected the existing faculty members to help.

HARVEY BURDICK: I would like to sort of capture your image of the time. The chair at MSU told you a little bit, Woody told you a bit, you came to visit, you were talking to the Holmes and the Hoopes and so on. What was your sense of Oakland at the time, do you recall that? What were the features that you liked, what appealed to you, what made it interesting, exciting, whatever?

JAMES McKAY: We could all participate in shaping it to what it would become and it wasn't already set in stone. And that we could bring some fresh ideas and it was a very exciting environment.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were you given, essentially, a blank slate, is that what you're saying? I mean, here are these young [faculty] people who are coming along, and [they are] saying "Okay, do what you want?"

JAMES McKAY: I think that in order to attract students, they had indicated a set of courses that would be available, but we would decide on the textbooks and the syllabus and the follow-up courses. The faculty participated in designing majors and also recruiting the additional faculty members.

HARVEY BURDICK: I guess I'm pushing for the notion that there was some idea about what Oakland was about. It wasn't as if—"Okay, thank you, Jim, for coming and now let's create this place"—there were already some notions?

JAMES McKAY: Woody was very thorough in his putting together information, and so, there was a lot of documents. Also I was impressed by the tendency in planning Oakland of bringing in some experts, some gray hairs, to give them advice. They relied on the deans at MSU, but they also took people from a lot of other major universities that had ideas about—what if you got a chance to start a new university, what are some of the things you ought to be thinking about?

HARVEY BURDICK: That's a referral to the so-called Meadow Brook Seminars?

JAMES McKAY: Sure, yes. Those were distinguished people that were called upon and had a chance. But some of them also were right in the area, and so Woody not only got them to help and give advice on the institution, but then they were influential in helping raise money for the institution. Woody was a great fund raiser.

HARVEY BURDICK: You made some reference to some MSU people, there was some sort of [advice]—

JAMES McKAY: [MSUO] was under the same Board of Trustees right from the start, I think, until it separated. So if this is a curriculum that's under the MSU Board of Trustees, I guess they would want to have some sense that the faculty and deans at MSU were aware of what the planning was, and were supportive of the planning. So there were curriculum groups that looked at it and met [about] it. A close friend of mine represented mathematics, he was the only—

HARVEY BURDICK: Who was that?

JAMES McKAY: Gene [Eugene] Deskins.

HARVEY BURDICK: Gene Deskins, he was on some sort of committee helping design what Oakland ought to be looking like? And was he part of that group who recommended that in mathematics, that all the students begin at the level of calculus?

JAMES McKAY: I don't know if he was involved in that, but that was certainly an appealing feature. I thought that's the way universities ought to run.

HARVEY BURDICK: If you're coming to a university, you should have gotten all of that other stuff out of the way and start with calculus?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, sure.

HARVEY BURDICK: And was that part of the image that Oakland was trying to create or present to the world—this is a school with very high standards, things of that nature?

JAMES McKAY: I think so. It got a little overblown by Loren Pope in some of his publicity, but I enjoyed reading it.

HARVEY BURDICK: Come on, Jim! Now, of course, in retrospect— But at the time, when you were a young man getting excited and all?

JAMES McKAY: Oh yes, I believed it could be so.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay. You believed that somehow this very high standard kind of education could be given to what kind of students?

JAMES McKAY: Well, they [have] got to be excited about learning.

HARVEY BURDICK: Got to be excited about learning, that was it?

JAMES McKAY: Well, yes. Unfortunately I find that the universities need to do something more about bringing that about. Over the time that I've been here, I've done a variety of things in math competitions. And also one very satisfying thing was that I decided I'd like to work with some very bright high school students, to let them know something about Oakland.

I went in and talked to Woody one day, and I said, "I want to bring in two bright high school students from each of the good high schools around the area, based on teacher's recommendations. But I know that we shouldn't have to ask them to pay tuition for this,

and so I need somebody to pay for the tuition." And so Woody says, "Just a minute." He dials the phone and talks to this person on the other end and all that person said, after he listened to Woody for a little bit, was, "Where do I send the check?" And so, that does happen—I mean, there were those people that would be willing to do that.

I brought in a large group and we met in the evening—two from each of the several good high schools around. That created a bond between Oakland and those high schools, which as I recall, was much better in those days than it is today. I think there's still not the same energy being put into that.

But many of those [students] have gone on. One of them[whom] I met at a math meeting was a woman from that class, who has a Ph.D. in mathematics. What else happened then is that those bright students heard about Oakland. Many of those from those special classes then came here as students, and in turn went on and got Ph.D.s. And so, in the early years, the math department produced a lot of math majors who earned Ph.D.s at Cal Tech and those schools.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let me try and you tell me if I'm off base. [You had an] understanding that somehow these were going to be students recruited who might come to [MSUO], you know—nothing special about them—and that somehow Oakland was going to create an excitement, was going to participate in generating that kind of intellectual curiosity and motivation?

JAMES McKAY: That was our determination, right. And it can be done.

HARVEY BURDICK: You were going to grab them by the neck and get them all excited about what we were doing, and you felt very slowly it could be done?

JAMES McKAY: There were a lot things that were done over the years that hopefully increased the number of those who decided Oakland was the place to come to.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were you unique in having those kinds of ideas in trying to get involved with students, and pouring energy and effort beyond what is normally expected in your colleagues?

JAMES McKAY: Oh, I think there was an atmosphere generally about that, and interacting with the students. I can't recount the various efforts, but I know that the sciences did a lot with the high schools: science nights and interacting with the teachers. We were producing a lot of teachers for the Oakland County schools in those early years. They took their master's degrees with us, and they are the department heads at these good schools now, and have been for some time. So we got some good relationships going.

HARVEY BURDICK: So the very fact that a lot of what we were doing at Oakland was preparing people to go out and teach—these people were going to be [given], not just the normal school kind of preparation for teachers, but you were going to give them a high level of operation and ended up carrying through—you're very proud of that.

JAMES McKAY: Sure, yes. And I'm running summer math camps now, but that nucleus of bright, former students that have been chairing the departments are retiring. I've got to get a new group, because I need the department head to recommend the brightest students for these summer math camps. It was an exciting one last year and I think we'll have another exciting one this year. So there's a long delay.

HARVEY BURDICK: Okay, so you're carrying on a long tradition?

JAMES McKAY: Tradition, but there were some gaps when other things were consuming my time.

HARVEY BURDICK: I have read the curriculum which I'm told that Woody sort of put together in preparation for the first class, and what comes through clearly, of course, was that Oakland was going forward on engineering, and teacher education, liberal arts and business administration. But throughout all the forums there was a good strong emphasis on Western civilization, liberal arts, science. Very soon after you came, you became involved with the sciences—that was your bailiwick, right, you became Associate Dean for the Sciences in '61?

Now, I want to talk about that, but before we do, I wonder if you could go back briefly with me to the problems you were faced with, when you had to move these students into calculus that first year. Tell us a little bit about it—all these kids were not ready, right?

JAMES McKAY: No, they weren't. I didn't have much background on them, but [Herb] Stoutenburg had told me that he knew that some of them, he admitted, didn't have trigonometry. So it was agreed very early that we would be offering trigonometry [because] it's a crucial background.

HARVEY BURDICK: Come on, I read that you weren't going to have any remedial courses!

JAMES McKAY: Well, they just had to do this and pay extra, and not have it count towards their degrees—just to get them up to speed so that they could do the other material.

HARVEY BURDICK: So there were no credits, they weren't given credits for taking trig [trigonometry]?

JAMES McKAY: No, whereas we now do give credit for trig, and we give credit for a lot of courses below trig.

HARVEY BURDICK: That's a big change.

JAMES McKAY: Well, we're [now] serving a broader clientele than we might have thought we would be serving here.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, go back to the fall of '59. Here you're coming in, you're setting up mathematics. Mathematics is taken by what percentage of that first class, would you estimate?

JAMES McKAY: Oh, probably a higher percentage because there weren't many different courses available. If they're going to pick between those four subjects, they still need the mathematics for business, they need the mathematics if they're going into engineering and if

they're going into teaching. Depending on what they go into for teaching, they should have good mathematics.

There were many of them in [our mathematics classes] who, if they were to go to Michigan State, would have found other curriculums. My children were still fairly young at that stage, when we first came here. But when they were going to college (which was—I now have grandchildren that are going to college), they pointed out to me that all of their friends were taking programs at MSU and picking the curriculum on the basis that they didn't have to study mathematics—and that's gotten worse.

It's gotten worse in terms of the students' backgrounds in mathematics, but it's also gotten worse in terms of the need for mathematics in more programs. There were programs in the past where they allowed students to go through without learning much mathematics, but they realized they're not serving the students at MSU—although they still have a lot of general options. I don't know what they do about their jobs when they graduate.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let me give you a number and tell me if I'm off. Was it 40 percent, was it 50 percent who were involved in taking mathematics, was it that high?

JAMES McKAY: I would not want to guess. We had—what, we had 570 students—and I would say we probably had at least 200 students taking mathematics that first year, taking calculus.

HARVEY BURDICK: Taking calculus, at least those who thought they had satisfied the requirements for going to a calculus course. What happened to them?

JAMES McKAY: I think about 40 percent of them got F's.

HARVEY BURDICK: So very large numbers just couldn't "hack it," essentially?

JAMES McKAY: That's right. Well, I'm not sure that they couldn't hack it. I would hope to believe that if they were to work at it, and realize what the standards are that they have to meet, that they would. I think many students did, too. We're very proud of our first graduates and what they've accomplished.

HARVEY BURDICK: How many other people were with you in mathematics?

JAMES McKAY: Orrin Taulbee.

HARVEY BURDICK: And then, as I understand it, you heard that some [students] needed some trig, so you brought in some part-timers or people who would come and teach a course in trigonometry?

JAMES McKAY: Sure, yes. And I remember Alice Tomboulian teaching, and Trudy Karas.

HARVEY BURDICK: Alice Tomboulian—she was raising her children and came over and taught a course in trig?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, and the wife of the chairman at WSU also came over and taught some trig.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let's go forward to your appointment as Associate Dean of the Sciences.

JAMES McKAY: You've got to realize that [Paul] Tomboulian was there and [Bill] Hammerle was there, and they were very capable of taking the full responsibilities in terms of chemistry and physics. We would meet and talk and share ideas and share equipment. I didn't have equipment to share, but chemistry and physics shared equipment.

HARVEY BURDICK: A piece of chalk, right, and your blackboard?

JAMES McKAY: Well, now it's different. But biology fell to me, to see that biology got started.

HARVEY BURDICK: You begin with chemistry, physics, mathematics. Those are the three people in the sciences, and you haven't had biology yet. So you go out and one of your first tasks is to start thinking in terms of recruitment for biology. You want to tell us about that a little bit?

JAMES McKAY: I remember having somebody in mind that I wanted to appoint, and I was thinking, "Gee, I'm going to need to get some help on this." And I remember—since Woody had all this persuasive power, and all these friends that even had more persuasive power, and Max Fisher was going to go to this [biologist's] institution—and I said to Woody, "Could you get Max Fisher to sort of give us a good word, to get this guy to come?" Then I went back to Woody, and I said, "No, you don't have to turn to Max Fisher; we can do this ourselves. We'll figure out how to get him to come."

HARVEY BURDICK: Who was this?

JAMES McKAY: That was Herman Lewis.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Herman Lewis was a man of some reputation?

JAMES McKAY: Oh, indeed, sure.

HARVEY BURDICK: So you thought, "We'll get Herman Lewis?"

JAMES McKAY: I did a lot of checking with the best universities to get some ideas for that experience of trying to hire people the first year, and continually trying to hire people. If you're going to get a person who's going to start the program, I think it's very important to get somebody that has real stature in their field and comes from an excellent university, and has had some experiences. So I did a lot of touring to try to get some names from people.

HARVEY BURDICK: But what I'm getting at is, that you felt you could strike out and get the best people, you had the legitimacy of recruiting the best people to come to Oakland University?

JAMES McKAY: Oh sure, I believed that. And sometimes I did [get them].

HARVEY BURDICK: That's marvelous. It wasn't as if [you thought], "Why would they come here?" No, you felt you had a product you could sell.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, definitely.

HARVEY BURDICK: Tell us about Herman Lewis: how did you sell it to him?

JAMES McKAY: Well, I can't recall, but I did not use Max Fisher's help.

We were in trouble, we didn't have a lot of equipment money in physics and chemistry. Of course, physics was headed up by Hammerle—and Hammerle at the same time was taking care of engineering, and the engineering program had to get going.

We were dealing with very small amounts of equipment up at our new building, and so I encouraged Herman Lewis to delay a little bit in trying to get some of the biology labs up and going. He took a directorship at NSF [National Science Foundation] and spent a couple of years down there, and then decided not to return. I was able to recruit Cliff Harding: a very good appointment, an excellent appointment.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let me just review that. In other words, you got Herman Lewis to come, and he—what, spent two years here?

JAMES McKAY: I think he was maybe only one year on campus.

HARVEY BURDICK: And it was disappointing because he just didn't have the financial wherewithal to establish the department, with the laboratory requirements and so on. So he leaves and goes to NSF, and you then have to go out and seek another gentleman, that you also thought would be an important person, and you got Cliff Harding?

JAMES McKAY: I did.

HARVEY BURDICK: And I see you're smiling. You're very proud of that because Cliff had a good reputation, right? Do you want to tell us about how you—I mean, are you so extraordinarily charming that they just come because they think Jim McKay would be a delightful colleague? I know these people need some promises.

JAMES McKAY: I think that when you look at the collection of people who were already backing this institution, from the corporate world in Southeast Michigan and from the foundations, and to have those people already having signed on in some way for helping to forward this institution—I don't know how I lucked out in getting Cliff to come, but I didn't pursue that, because he was an excellent person.

I did go around to many of the major universities, the biology departments, and talk to the heads of those departments to get names. [I tried] to go to enough institutions to begin to get some names that I could then check back and forth with other people. But [Cliff] accepted and he came.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, what I just heard, Jim, is that one argument you were making, legitimately, is that this was Oakland County, it was a fairly wealthy county and there were a lot of potential wealthy donors?

JAMES McKAY: This was pretty evident already, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: So in a sense, if you didn't have the money in hand, it was a reasonable investment in the future?

JAMES McKAY: Somebody like Don Ahrens, who was in charge of the Republican party's money in Oakland County (if not all of Michigan) was on our [foundation] board. I mean, Woody put together some excellent people, and entertained them and got them together and got them to interact with the faculty, and so they were available to help us out. That's what led me to say to Woody, "Why don't you get Max Fisher to help me out?"

HARVEY BURDICK: Right, I understand. In other words, that's certainly part of the persuasive arguments: that this place was going to grow, you said this was not going to remain small.

JAMES McKAY: I still believe that, sure. I think that this new Ph.D. program that I helped put in over the last ten years, this is the institution that can do that Ph.D. because of where this institution is located. The other institutions are not going to make the transition from what they have been doing to what needs to be done: that is, to link up with and help the auto industry with the mathematizing of the design periods.

HARVEY BURDICK: So there was again the notion of the flexibility, the ability to move with the times, for the needs—that this place isn't laden down with old habits.

JAMES McKAY: Yes. Many of the state Land Grant institutions are located in farming communities, and that's where the industry was when they were founded. They helped that industry survive and succeed, with doing the research on agricultural issues. Michigan State is a prime example, but there are many around the country. They're not located any longer near the industry, where the industry needs them to be. Like the auto industry: I mean, there is Oldsmobile in Lansing, but it's [mainly] in our area, and so Oakland needs to make use of its location to shape the institution and service this area.

HARVEY BURDICK: I know you have a normal tendency to go to the present time and the kinds of things you're involved with, because that's what you're thinking about. So I'm dragging you back again. At that early period where this school was going to develop and you were going to help it get created, was it also in a place where you thought there was lots of potential financial support that would flow in?

JAMES McKAY: Sure.

HARVEY BURDICK: So I think, in recruiting, it wasn't, "Come here, we're small, we're poor" or anything like that, but that we have a potential of being fairly wealthy. So you recruit

Cliff Harding, a man of some repute. I'm sure you were very proud to have that feather in your hat. Did you recruit now for biology, mathematics, physics?

JAMES McKAY: Physics, yes, I did play a role in physics. Hammerle was more into engineering at the time, I think, and that took most of his energy, because there weren't many people in engineering. Hammerle had recruited [Ralph] Mobley early in the institution's history; Mobley has a Ph.D. from Wisconsin. Mobley was sort of becoming the physics chair while Hammerle was being the engineering [chair]. Mobley knew of [someone]—they were graduate students together. I mean, that frequently happens: that you know some people quite well, and they get to know you and trust you, and they join you.

HARVEY BURDICK: That's right, it's called the "young man's network" or something.

JAMES McKAY: Right. So he recommended Bob Williamson. I remember, I think Paul and Bill were in my office when I called Williamson. He was at Duke at the time and he agreed to come.

HARVEY BURDICK: Again, with the same pitch, this is an exciting place to come and so on?

JAMES McKAY: I'm particularly proud of having Bob Williamson come ([including] on the personal side).

HARVEY BURDICK: Right, I know there were a lot of benefits from having Bob come. You were Associate Dean of the Sciences, along with George Matthews who was Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities, and Ken Roose who was for social sciences. How did the three of you work together, just tell us briefly?

JAMES McKAY: Well, I think that we worked as the gang of three.

HARVEY BURDICK: The gang of three, that's an interesting image!

JAMES McKAY: Well, I didn't always hear directly sometimes what was said about me back in those days. I learn [about the past] from my wife now, but that's to keep me humble. It fell to us to make many of the reappointment decisions in those early years. There wasn't an FRPC [Faculty Review and Promotion Committee] and other structures that came in later.

HARVEY BURDICK: I don't want to dig into the secrets of your thinking, but was it fairly casual, the three of you getting together and looking over people?

JAMES McKAY: We were looking at what would be the best interests of the institution.

HARVEY BURDICK: [Looking at] the people, to see if they fit in, if they didn't fit in, and so on. So you made a number of decisions on letting people go, I take it?

JAMES McKAY: There were some that were let go, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: What about that faculty, that early faculty, could you give a general sense of them?

JAMES McKAY: There were 24 of them, and I think that maybe by the end of April [1959] Woody had appointed four. So between the end of April and the start of school he had to appoint 20, I'm just guessing. When I was trying to recruit in May for faculty around the country, it was very difficult for them to agree to leave their current position. So it was not as if you've been working for a year, and calling and plotting and considering and getting letters of recommendation before you make an appointment—he had to appoint a lot of people in a very short time. This is the rationalization that I come up with now. We just did the decision on the basis of what we saw.

HARVEY BURDICK: Jim, I think for the first time I have a good image of what happened. Before, [all] I knew was that Woody was going around, looking for people, asking questions. It turns out, on April the 16th the Board of Trustees appoints you, Dick Burke, Bob Hoopes

and Peter Amann. And that's the beginning of the faculty?

JAMES McKAY: Well, yes. It had to be, because Dick Burke was the first one appointed and that's when that happened.

HARVEY BURDICK: The four first, and then between April the 16th and the beginning of school, you had to add 20 more people? And I'm just repeating what you said: it's very difficult to start recruiting good faculty at that late stage of the game.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, it was clear that it was. There were a lot of people who might be interested in coming, but they would not tell their institutions that they were leaving, that late.

HARVEY BURDICK: Right. So the first year you were kind of (permit me) limping along in the recruiting world, getting people—

JAMES McKAY: The first few years.

HARVEY BURDICK: The first year—I mean, the first year was a tough one, getting these people on board.

JAMES McKAY: But for the sciences and engineering, I wasn't working alone. I mean, Paul [Tombouliau] and Bill [Hammerle] were working and recruiting people.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Paul must have come right after, and Bill Hammerle.

JAMES McKAY: Hammerle was at Michigan State on the physics faculty there, so that might have been a relatively easy transition for Bill to make.

HARVEY BURDICK: Were you sort of an elder statesman kind of person?

JAMES McKAY: No, I was a youngster.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, of course you'd been an assistant professor at MSU, then you went to Seattle, and so you'd been out five years teaching, and a lot of these people were fairly new.

JAMES McKAY: It was six years, I was one year at Washington.

HARVEY BURDICK: Six years, so you'd been out for a while. I was just wondering whether you had some slightly older—

JAMES McKAY: I was older than Tomboulian at the time.

HARVEY BURDICK: Everybody was older than Tomboulian!

Okay, so you are now building the sciences as best you can, recruiting, but of course, this chair of mathematics, this is your major responsibility?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, there were quite a few appointments in those first years in mathematics.

HARVEY BURDICK: Do any stand out for you, do you want to talk about some of them?

JAMES McKAY: One that is, I think, a very important one is Bob Wisner. He was a fellow graduate student at the University of Washington. He'd gone to Haverford [College] after taking his degree, and he was named by the head of the Math Association of America to head up a national major program. This was shortly after Sputnik, and the federal government was putting a lot of money into the math curriculum materials to get the country to know their mathematics better. (The Math Association of America is the association for collegiate mathematics.) They were preparing new course materials, holding conferences and meetings with all the important people, to plan how to meet the country's need for mathematics instruction.

I was talking to him [Wisner] at a meeting and I said, "Bring it to Oakland." So he went and talked to the chairman of the committee, who may also have been the president of the association, and he [the chairman] said, "Gee, a new school like that—that might be a good idea." So he brought it to Oakland, and ran it from here. That, of course, gave this institution

a lot of visibility throughout the mathematical community. If we approached somebody we wanted to [ask to] come here for a job, they had heard about us and recognized that we must have something going for us, if we had the headquarters of that national program here.

HARVEY BURDICK: And Wisner stayed for how long?

JAMES McKAY: I think two years as a faculty member, but he stayed in the area. He moved off campus for one year and ran it from off campus. There was a little disagreement: the president of the association said he was Wisner's boss—but if he was here on our faculty, Woody was Wisner's boss. And so the way that was resolved was that it was moved off campus.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Wisner then leaves, takes the program with him to another school?

JAMES McKAY: I think, to Lake Orion at that time. Maybe just for that year and then he moved it.

HARVEY BURDICK: But that period of time, you felt, was another way that Oakland presented itself to the country at large as more than just a minor state university?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, definitely.

There were other good appointments during that time. I think of Beauregard Stubblefield, for example, as an excellent appointment: one of our first black Americans on the faculty, and had his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, did his undergraduate work at Prairie View [College] and was a marvelous teacher. He was good for us.

HARVEY BURDICK: So there was a lot of good recruiting going on for Oakland in those early years. Maybe the first year was a little tough because I know the people varied, but after that, at least in the sciences, you felt you had a way of presenting—

JAMES McKAY: The sciences, I think, were running on their own once we got biology—Cliff Harding—and he did a lot of the other recruiting for that department. That's the way the group met: it was just sort of Hammerle and Tomboulion and I for a while until we got some more people in, but about that time I was out of the position anyway. Harding was there and then he could make a lot of decisions for the biology [department].

HARVEY BURDICK: Cliff served as chair of the department? And then he brings in Reuben [Torch] and [Walter] Wilson?

JAMES McKAY: He brought in Wilson; Reuben didn't come right away. Wilson came, I think, with Cliff. That's a very good department and it's due to being started basically by Cliff Harding. He was also able to be instrumental with the [Kresge] Eye Institute. He was here and the Eye Institute was at Wayne State, and because of a mistake that Wayne State made (I don't know the details), it moved.

HARVEY BURDICK: They were ready to leave, and somehow Cliff was very useful to be here, and now we have this very fine Eye Institute which is known throughout the world.

JAMES McKAY: Yes. When Phil Johnson (whom I later recruited for chair of the department) made some comments at some speech, he ranked my appointment of Cliff Harding as the high point, rather than the appointment of Phil Johnson!

HARVEY BURDICK: I'm not surprised he said it so modestly. You got Phil to take over the chair of the department in '65.

JAMES McKAY: I wanted to be out of it, and I was allowed to go and recruit somebody to fill it.

HARVEY BURDICK: Then you returned to your faculty position as professor of mathematics? And then you were able to work in some [other] areas. I'd like to hear about that: some prizes, competitions, things like that.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, continuing some of the earlier work where we were able to teach these high school students. Shortly after I came to Oakland, we had a dedication ceremony of the science building [Hannah Hall]. I remember somebody approaching me at that dedication and asking would I be willing to be chairman of the Michigan section of the Math Association of America? I said I'd be happy to do that. At that time, the major activity of that [section] was the Michigan Math Prize Competition. It had started at Michigan State and some of my former colleagues had run it for a while, but they lost interest in it, and it had been left in poor hands for a while.

So I took that over and ran it for several years, and this put Oakland in communication with the brightest high school students throughout the state. So I felt that it was good for the association to be doing it and good to have Oakland's name [on it], and we were able to add a lot of special features to it. I remember a banquet at one time—all the banquets were held on our campus for the winners—and one time [U.S. Senator] Phil Hart happened to be on campus. So Woody Varner—I talked to him, and he said to bring him in. So Phil Hart stood up there and made a few comments in front of the group. And so it's been a very satisfying activity.

That, in turn, led to my being asked to run the national one, the William Lowell Putnam [Competition], which I ran for several years. The person who had been doing it for many years was retiring, and the person that was grading it—the person from the University of Minnesota—would never get around to grading it, because just he was supposed to grade all of these [tests].

HARVEY BURDICK: One person? And how many—

JAMES McKAY: I think maybe 5,000; ten problems each. The students don't attempt all ten problems, but that's a lot.

HARVEY BURDICK: That's ridiculous, for one person. So what did you do?

JAMES McKAY: I got about 12 or 15 people together and met in a hotel down in Chicago—these are people from various universities around—and we spent three or four days grading them. I took the group—the next year I went to San Francisco, and I took them to New York, and took them to Washington. But in the later years, I just did it here at Oakland.

They all came here, and they had become close friends with one another.

HARVEY BURDICK: So Oakland benefits from this again by having you here, and you running the competition, and bringing people here to grade?

JAMES McKAY: Well, it's a part of my job to try and do things like that.

HARVEY BURDICK: We're going to move into a very interesting period and spend some time on it, and I want to let you go and talk about it. But I want to pull you back one more time if that's okay; it may be something I should have asked before.

I asked you what the faculty were like in regard to the students. I want you to give us a sense of what the faculty were like with themselves socially. We talked about your moving into the faculty subdivision; this is a place where a lot of faculty lived. I'm sure there must have been a great deal—in fact, Jim, let me tell you this. I have a memory of you in the faculty subdivision. I brought my kids one Halloween, and you had created some God-frightening thing with a loud booming voice coming out of a loud speaker—terrified my kids, I remember that! And that's what you were doing, wasn't it?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, I remember that.

HARVEY BURDICK: Can you just go back a little bit and talk about it, your colleagues, did you party with them, did you meet with them outside?

JAMES McKAY: I remember something Dolores [Burdick] said once at a picnic, when one of your boys was riding on her back or something. As best I recall, she said—she referred to me as a man, "There's a man here," so I found that very flattering—that the subdivision was also called a "ghetto."

HARVEY BURDICK: It was called some kind of a ghetto.

JAMES McKAY: "Faculty ghetto," although there were a lot of administrators there. It was very good to be able to be there and to have that interaction. But we talked earlier about how your property values don't go up there.

HARVEY BURDICK: Financially it might have been a difficulty later on. In the beginning, it probably was a good deal.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, definitely.

HARVEY BURDICK: Got you into a house and so on, and the kids were interacting with one another.

JAMES McKAY: Oh sure, sure. Don's oldest son, Danny [O'Dowd], would come over while he was still in high school, bringing a junior level physics book, and asking me to explain some things he was having a hard time understanding. I said, "I'm not much help, but I can point you in the direction of somebody who can help." Danny has gone on to wealth and success and [it was good] to have him as a friend. He also was in a summer math camp I ran once.

Also in that camp was somebody that has gone on to even greater wealth, much greater wealth, like he moved from being worth three billion to being worth five billion last year. [Professor] Don Malm kept track of this other person, and so a couple of years ago I decided I would write him a letter. So I wrote him a letter, and out of that, I suspect that we will have funding for this activity which he thought was the greatest thing that ever happened to him. His memory of it is much clearer than mine, but he met Danny O'Dowd in that camp, and they have been life-long friends. So it's nice to see some of these things that happened and what's developed in the long run, and it's good to keep track of people.

HARVEY BURDICK: I must say it would be nice if, out of that great wealth, someone might give us a surprise chunk of money. I read in the newspapers it happens to other schools, and that would be nice.

JAMES McKAY: Well, he believes that that [math camp] made a big difference in his life, and he would like to do the same for others.

HARVEY BURDICK: Jim, we sort of left off at the end of the '60's, and we were going to begin talking about, I think, some very significant events at Oakland.

Oakland begins as an undergraduate school, begins small, everybody knows one another. Everybody is delighted, everybody is pouring a lot of energy into it. And for a lot of the faculty, there was a sense that this was an undergraduate school. And I think they didn't think about too far down the line. They were sort of reveling in their relationships with one another and with the students and so forth. And the "Harvard of the Midwest" [image] was not so much the "university" of Harvard but the undergraduate. It was the fine Eastern school, and that was the image that people were not only throwing outside, but probably trying to persuade themselves as well. But there was also a push, from the beginning, for growth and to develop graduate programs as well.

JAMES McKAY: True.

HARVEY BURDICK: So there were two streams and perhaps they got into conflict with one another. The St. Clair Shores meeting comes to mind as a time in the middle '60's when this thing was confronted. You were present at that meeting, I wonder if you'd talk about that with us.

JAMES McKAY: I don't remember many of the details except that it was a very important meeting. It's true a lot of the people who had been here for five years or so, came thinking that we were going to be the Harvard of the Midwest, the liberal arts college that didn't get into any graduate work—and that everybody knew one another, and interacted, and studied things for the pleasure of studying them, not the higher education or graduate education.

We had some conflicting views among the faculty. I'm not sure how you break it down, other than the fact that some had a certain image that they wanted to see come about and others had a different image. It wasn't a clear image at the start, there was language and there was hope for some kind of directions for some.

But by that time, I think some of us recognized that if we tried just keeping ourselves small, like a liberal arts college, we wouldn't survive. I mean, we're a state institution and we didn't have a lot of endowments, and we needed to serve the people of the state. That's what our mission is, and I'm glad that at that meeting it was essentially decided that we had to follow

in the direction of a place like Western Michigan. MSU is a large, complex [place], it's got a lot of agricultural stuff around there, and it will continue to have that.

But the future of Oakland University—with its location in Oakland County, a very rich county, and with the backing of the political powers in Oakland County—is that we can shape a university that doesn't have a hundred years, 150 years of leftover remnants that have shaped its policies over those years. If we were to just unite and go ahead, we could really improve the greatness of Oakland University, and at the same time, serve its students.

So the graduate programs began to come into existence. We had master's students in mathematics and chemistry and physics almost as soon we had graduated our first class. We had graduate assistants in mathematics. The mathematics department is the only department in the university that has an authority to use graduate assistants as instructors of record, based on a very careful review and reports and consideration—[after] a trial period given to us by the Board of Trustees, and carefully documented and reported to them. We moved into that, and that's a step towards funding of the graduate programs and giving the graduate students teaching experience under supervision.

Then other graduate programs came on top of that. It was very early, for example, that the Ph.D. in engineering came into existence. I don't remember the date on that, but clearly about the same time I left the position as chair and associate dean, the next year Jack Gibson came in as dean of engineering, and he moved it ahead with the backing of some major leaders in engineering, and put in a Ph.D. He wrote a fine proposal.

When it came time for me to write a proposal for the sciences, I borrowed the [engineering proposal] copies out of the graduate office from Sheryl Clark and kept them in my office. She knew where they were. I referred to them often and used it as a model to write the Ph.D. program for the department of mathematical sciences, which went sailing through without any dissenting votes, even at the state level. That's a remarkable accomplishment; I'm very proud of it. And that's a Ph.D. to help industry in this area.

HARVEY BURDICK: So, just to leave that now: it was Oakland struggling for a clear sense of itself. For the first few years of course people were able to see it could go many directions, legitimately, because we were small. But by the middle '60's, it was clear that Oakland was going to be moving to getting larger—

JAMES McKAY: Had to grow, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: —if it was going to get funded by the state, if it was going to meet the needs of the students who were coming here. But up until then it was still that fantasy maybe of a small—

JAMES McKAY: I guess some of us may have even felt that we may be left in that position because of the state formula funding. I mean, we've been handicapped as an institution for a long time because they've never been able to use formula funding for the university in the time of the existence of the university. And so, right now, for example, Wayne State receives support from the state at about twice the dollars that Oakland gets per FYES [Fiscal Year Equated Student]. Now, they've got a lot more complicated programs, but if we're going to expand in this area, and have the same degree of complexity and expertise in these graduate programs, we're going to need to get that corrected.

HARVEY BURDICK: In order to compete for the money at the state level.

JAMES McKAY: Right, and one of the ingredients in that is getting our Carnegie classification changed, and [President] Gary Russi is working on that very hard. There are other people helping in that, but that means you only change that classification based on the number of Ph.D.s you award. And that's where we've got to pick that number up and get that funding.

HARVEY BURDICK: We're obviously going leave the interview with a sense of where Oakland is going to go, but I want to come back once again. I always feel that I'm pulling you back. '69 comes along, '70, and Oakland now enters into a very interesting period of turmoil—if you like, tumult of change, of questioning. Woody Varner leaves about this time; O'Dowd takes over as chancellor, and the faculty become very much interested in collective bargaining. And you all were very much into that.

JAMES McKAY: I was against it.

HARVEY BURDICK: Originally you were against the collective bargaining thing?

JAMES McKAY: Yes, that's true. Yes, I was.

HARVEY BURDICK: Very good. But once the faculty voted to [unionize]—

JAMES McKAY: Then I wanted to do it right. I was on the first [bargaining] team.

HARVEY BURDICK: You got put on the first team and you wanted, as you say, to do this thing properly. Tell us about it. What were some of the tasks you were confronted with?

JAMES McKAY: I haven't thought about this for a while, Harvey, but as it turned out, we wanted simply to make sure the policies and practices that we had been operating under would not change. We wanted to simply encode them into our agreement. That meant that we wrote a fairly small agreement in 1969.

HARVEY BURDICK: I remember it was a thin little book.

JAMES McKAY: A little, very thin little book.

We led—there was Rutgers and one other little school that had used the AAUP [American Association of University Professors] chapter as their bargaining unit—but we were a major player in dragging the AAUP fully into collective bargaining. [The faculty proposed that] we were going to use the faculty [handbook] that existed, that had been written by Don O'Dowd, with all the references to the [AAUP] Red Book, and simply agree with that as our contract. There was a strike the first year.

HARVEY BURDICK: Well, as a member of that team—and Marilyn Williamson was chief negotiator?

JAMES McKAY: She was for the first year, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: And you, if I recall, tried to be pretty reasonable, but you had confronted a lot of antagonism, a lot of anger.

JAMES McKAY: Yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: Let's talk about it. That was a significant split, I think, in the University. Before that, people were pretty friendly, the administrators, faculty and so on.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, yes. I certainly didn't anticipate the strike. But certainly the stances that were being taken meant that we had to strike. And this faculty were very united in that strike. That document was a fine simple document. Some of the things that we put into there have always stayed throughout, but a lot of other things had to go in and that fell to me in the second year.

HARVEY BURDICK: In the second year you became the chief negotiator.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, and there were the Oakland Four. For the first time, Fred Obear, as provost, denied reappointments to four faculty members after the official faculty body had recommended their reappointments.

HARVEY BURDICK: At that time, there was now a faculty committee to make a recommendation and there was an administrative committee to receive it—

JAMES McKAY: No, a provost, just a provost.

HARVEY BURDICK: Just a provost, it was just Obear?

JAMES McKAY: Yes. And we grieved it, and we had a grievance hearing over in the club house with a lawyer, jointly chosen. After an exchange of statements about what our policies are, [the lawyer] decreed that we didn't know what our [reappointment] policies were. We had them—I found them—but it was the administration was interpreting them differently.

So he said, "Give everybody here, all of these people, another year's extension, and you put into the contract what the policies are." So that fell to me to do. I remember, I guess I got a little too heavy-handed sometimes, in that Lou advised me, "Let [Robert] Maxwell [the administration's bargaining lawyer] write some of the language."

HARVEY BURDICK: Lou Beer? You're talking about our attorney?

JAMES McKAY: Lou Beer, yes. He said, "He'll feel better."

HARVEY BURDICK: A good negotiator makes the other side feel they're getting things too, right?

JAMES McKAY: Right, and we worked it out and that all went in.

HARVEY BURDICK: So that second contract was now incorporating these things that were sort of floating around, into a very clear articulate form?

JAMES McKAY: Oh, I think we both knew what the policies were. It's just that the administration couldn't agree in front of the arbitrator on what the policies were. (My file-keeping for this [interview] event has not been very good; my file keeping for those events was excellent.) Relative to this, those [policies] were all there and nicely protected: we really had the Red Book policies built in. We also had to put in a salary system, which I put (in the meantime) into the first contract.

HARVEY BURDICK: You designed the salary structure, if I recall.

JAMES McKAY: Right. And I remember telling Freddie—Fred Obear—that his life will change. That salary system will mean that no longer will faculty members be coming to his desk asking for raises and complaining, because it's in the contract, and it's beyond this one-on-one negotiation. I don't know if he was happy to hear that, but if I were provost, I'd say that's fine.

HARVEY BURDICK: Sometimes if you're the controller of someone else's financial destiny, it gives you power.

Could we go back to the strike a little bit and the impact it had? Do you have any sense of that? I had made some reference to the antagonism that seemed to have occurred at that time.

JAMES McKAY: I never felt that in Fred. Fred was a perfect gentleman, and open, and interacted very warmly and honestly with Marilyn [Williamson] and me, or in any of the discussions that either of us had with him, wherever they were. I remember observing Don[O'Dowd] at the final closing of the settlement, and think he felt very defeated.

HARVEY BURDICK: But there were other administrators who would now stop talking to faculty, do you remember?

JAMES McKAY: No, no.

HARVEY BURDICK: I had that experience on a couple of occasions, a sense of somehow we were folded on two different sides.

JAMES McKAY: In speaking about the strike—your [Harvey Burdick's] cell system was what made that all be successful and happen. You kept people in communication, and then we went together to tell the chapters around the United States.

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes, we did a dog and pony show.

JAMES McKAY: Yes, right, I remember those very well. We helped a lot of other chapters, you know, protect themselves in going to collective bargaining. It was another place where Oakland has given leadership to the profession.

HARVEY BURDICK: I think you made a glancing reference on how, having unionized under the AAUP banner, it was, you feel, exceptional. There were only about two, three, four other schools that had done that?

JAMES McKAY: Right, and Oakland would not be the place it is today if it had unionized under anything other than the AAUP.

HARVEY BURDICK: Yes. Well, we're coming to the end, and I have some ending questions. Now, in looking back on those early periods and on your career at Oakland, how do you feel about it? Was it a good choice for you?

JAMES McKAY: Absolutely, absolutely, yes.

HARVEY BURDICK: No regrets?

JAMES McKAY: No regrets, no.

HARVEY BURDICK: I know that (correct me if I'm wrong) that after you see the mathematics department into the new [science and engineering] building, you're intending to retire at that time? And so that won't be too far in the future, will it? So it's nice to be able to look back over your career here.

JAMES McKAY: But I'm still going to stay around and continue to do some things.

HARVEY BURDICK: Still cause trouble, Jim?

JAMES McKAY: No, help the institution.

HARVEY BURDICK: Of course, absolutely. You've been a marvelous asset to this institution, I know that. And I want to thank you very much for coming and sharing some of these [memories]. I know how tough it is to remember some of these things.

JAMES McKAY: Well, the emotions aren't quite as strong now as they were long ago.

HARVEY BURDICK: Thank you again.

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**JAMES H. McKAY**  
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