

Tape Index
Of One Hour Interview With
Leslie Lyle Hanawalt

Date of Interview and Release: 21 November 1980; Detroit, Michigan
Interviewer: Douglas M. Haller
Indexer: Douglas M. Haller

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RECOLLECTIONS OF
THE HISTORY OF WAYNE PROJECT
AND
A PLACE OF LIGHT

Leslie Lyle Hanawalt

Interviewed on November 21, 1980

By

Douglas M. Haller

Prepared as a requirement for:

History 786 (42069)
Oral History: A Methodology
for Research

Ms. Patricia L. Pilling
Oral Historian,
Walter Reuther Library
Wayne State University

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Preface

Professor Leslie Lyle Hanawalt was interviewed by Douglas M. Haller on November 21, 1980. The interview was conducted in the study of Professor Hanawalt's home at the Art Centre Apartments, which are located on the edge of the Wayne State University campus in Detroit. By Professor Hanawalt's request, the one hour interview took place at 10:30 A.M. due to considerations of health. Professor Hanawalt wore a hearing aid during the interview. His wife, Dorothy Miles Hanawalt, was at home but was not present in the study during the interview session. Tea was served during the session, and the sound of saucers scraping across the desk surface is sometimes audible on the tape.

The interview was focused on Professor Hanawalt's experiences as Director of the History of Wayne Project (1956-68) and his authorship of A Place of Light, The History of Wayne State University (1968). The interview was conducted as part of course requirements in Oral History methodology under the direction of Patricia Pilling. It is intended for inclusion in the Wayne State University Project initiated by the University Archives in the Walter Reuther Library-Wayne State University.

Biography of Interviewee

LESLIE LYLE HANAWALT

Leslie Lyle Hanawalt was born in Harlem, Ohio on January 18, 1898. After serving in the United States Army, he began an academic career as an Instructor in English at Syracuse University (1922-23), Oberlin College (1923-26), and the University of Michigan (1926-29). In 1929 he joined the faculty of the College of the City of Detroit as an Instructor in English. He remained in the English Department while the parent institution was transformed to the Colleges of the City of Detroit in 1933, Wayne University in 1934, and Wayne State University in 1956. In 1944 Leslie Hanawalt became a Professor of English and in 1945 he became Chairman of the English Department, a position he would hold until 1955. In 1956 Professor Hanawalt was appointed University Historian and Director of the History of Wayne Project. This Project was initiated in preparation for the writing of a centennial history of the university. In 1968 Leslie Hanawalt published A Place of Light, The History of Wayne State University. As a Professor Emeritus of English he retired in that year.

During a long and distinguished career at Wayne State University, Professor Hanawalt was involved in a variety of activities. Together with Clarence Hilberry he developed the university's English placement system. He was the Chairman of the first University Library Committee, which acquired a professionally trained Head Librarian: G. Flint Purdy (1936). Professor Hanawalt was the university's first full-time Admissions Officer (1942) and served on the Editorial Board of Wayne University Press (1949-52). In preparation for the writing of the university's history, Professor Hanawalt started the University Archives (1956) and aided in the acquisition of a trained archivist: Philip P. Mason (1958).

Biography of Interviewer

DOUGLAS MARTIN HALLER

Douglas Martin Haller was born on July 28, 1951 in Detroit, Michigan and was raised there. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Interdisciplinary Studies at Wayne State University in 1973. After residing in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Washington, D.C. he returned to Wayne State University in 1979 to complete a Master of Arts degree in History with the major field in Archival Administration. In 1980, the year of his interview with Professor Hanawalt, Douglas Haller was a Graduate Assistant teaching courses in the History Department at Wayne State University.

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Edited Transcript (Excerpt) of
Interview with Leslie Lyle Hanawalt

Date of Interview and Release: 21 November 1980; Detroit, Michigan
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Transcriber and Editor: Douglas M. Haller

Side 1

Counter 223 Oral History Interviews
 Problems With Equipment

DH: In 1948 the first oral history interviews were conducted at Columbia University by Allan Nevins. You began to use oral history in 1956 for the History of Wayne [State University] Project. Would you tell us something about your experiences with oral history at that time?

LH: Do you mean about getting (information) down in oral form? Well, let me tell you one episode. I was much impressed with the first interview that I rigged up. I had one of these great big machines as big as two suitcases fastened together and a very fine microphone and all. I reserved a nice wood paneled room in the basement part of Old Main, which became later the Home Economics room. It was a quiet afternoon, a wonderful time. I'd got together three men not easy to get together, who were in on the foundation of the College of Pharmacy, which had its beginnings actually down in Cass High School. These three men were all familiar with that. They'd been in it. We talked along and had quite a long interview. I was very happy about it.

I was anxious to see how (the tape) sounded. I went home that evening and settled down with my pipe to listen to this tape. It was wonderful, but all of a sudden in the midst of ^{all this} quiet there came out a loud, most raucous, raw kind of music: "You don't owe me a thing but love, baby."

DH: (Laughter)

LH: It turned out that this was sung by somebody named Johnny Ray, I was told. Somebody I wouldn't listen to voluntarily, certainly.

I decided that I must try to get that interview out of there. There was no way to get those three men back together again. They were elderly and they lived at a distance. So I spent most of that night and a good many other hours with the headphones clamped on and my typewriter before me trying to listen to our gentle voices

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LH: (cont.) back of this radio music. It was an awful ordeal, but I was able to dig out most of the essentials because I could remember a phrase here and there if I could hear something.

When I took the machine up to the Supply Department they said: "Oh well, we know what happened all right. We've had it happen before." I wanted to ask them why they didn't prevent it, but apparently it didn't occur all the time. The trouble was that the microphone cord, by some kind of radio quirk, had become like an antenna. So Ray's voice was coming in on my microphone cord just as plain as could be.

DH: He was broadcasting at the same time and the music came right over your microphone?

LH: That's right. His program started at 3:30 in the afternoon and that's when my trouble started.

DH: Amazing!

LH: This was one of those big old machines. Now a little later when I had a somewhat smaller machine, maybe as heavy as a large portable typewriter, I went downtown to interview a former member of the [Detroit] Board of Education. He was a lawyer, and not very talkative. I got all hooked up in his office and was sitting there with the machine running. I started to ask him questions when I got a smell. I knew right away what it was; it was burning insulation. I grabbed the button [plug] out of the wall [outlet]. There was a little wisp of smoke going out of the machine, but I trusted that the machine wasn't ruined and I went ahead with the interview. Luckily it turned out that the interview didn't amount to anything *so I hadn't missed anything.*

When I got this up to the technicians again they said: "Oh yes, you were in the Hammond Building* and that is the last of the buildings downtown that are on direct current. All others are on alternating." Nobody had told me about direct current.

DH: So the interview was ruined. It didn't come through at all?

LH: Yes, but I didn't care because he didn't say anything worth listening to anyhow. He didn't know *anything* much.

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*Editor's note: Professor Hanawalt must have conducted this interview in 1956- the first year of the History of Wayne Project. The ten story Hammond Building, Detroit's first skyscraper (1890), was demolished in 1956 to make way for the National Bank of Detroit. See: W. Hawkins Ferry, The Buildings of Detroit (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1980), pp. 135-136.

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