

Ted Simon

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Jeff Charnley,  
interviewer

Simon: ...Michigan, which is in the western part of Clinton County here in Michigan. I attended the local schools and went to a one-room high school for three years. They didn't have a twelfth grade at that time at the village. I finished Fowler High School in 1936.

One of my teachers highly recommended that I go to college, and I really hadn't planned on that, but since they encouraged me so much, I came here in the fall of '36 and tried to enroll in engineering. Well, I didn't enough science credits, and so I went to East Lansing High School for a semester and made up my shortages. I started school in the next year. I worked some on a construction project that winter, the winter of '36 and '37, on campus. It's the year they were building Sarah Williams Commemorative.

Charnley: Was that WPA project?

Simon: Not WPA. It had some PW, I think it had some Public Works funding, a small amount. No, it was part of the South Liquidating Program that they had started, and Christman Company were the general contractors, and I worked some for another contractor in northern Michigan.

Anyway, I came back to school in the fall of '37. I had a few hundred bucks saved, and that was a lot of money at that time. Tuition was low. So I started school. I ran out of money, so

I got a job in 1938 for a contractor, building electric lines in northern Michigan, and I came back, I believe, winter term in January.

So the result of this was that it took me about six years, from 1936 to 1942, to get my degree. In the meantime, I picked up some credits towards a master's degree and never completed that. I had intended to, but we got into World War II. So I went to work for General Motors and ended up within a few months being classified essential to the war production.

I was expecting to go into the service, because I had four years of reserve o training, but they wouldn't give me the commission because I had poor hearing, and that ended my military career. So from General Motors, I came here. It appeared like my future with them would be to become part of their central engineering office in Detroit and then travel worldwide to projects that they had under way, and I wasn't much interested in doing that. This place here was bustling with new construction in the fall of 1946, and so I get involved.

I was appointed as assistant construction engineer. The campus was generally torn up. The North Campus had a lot of construction started. During World War II, they were unable to do any construction for lack of material and funds. This set of facilities was used by the military to provide educational opportunity and training for recruits into the military program. So the facilities were kept busy during World War II, but right after there was a complete turnover of students. The military pulled out and a new class of young people came in, and a lot of them had been in the service and they were generally known as GIs, because they had some government help in their tuition and expense.

Now, the enrollment, as I recall, was around 4,000, and these numbers aren't clear; they would be in the record. It was somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000. It increased very rapidly. I think people have to understand that this was a small organization, a small place, but the people

here made every effort possible to accommodate the influx of young people coming back from the service who wanted an education. So they built on South Campus some barracks housing, 1,100 apartments. They were one-story buildings that were moved in from some of the army camps around the country. They also, west of the state police posts, put in about 500 trailers. Now, that was quite an undertaking.

Charnley: Were you involved in that?

Simon: This was well started. I came in November of '46. I helped finish it, yes. I became involved, very much so.

There wasn't any staff to speak of. I was a recruit, new, with the background that they wanted, and plunged into the middle of the process and asked to go ahead and set up an engineering service for the campus. They had engineering professors who were teaching. They had a former carpenter that was doing some inspection work, but they didn't have any graduate engineers or professional engineers. All the planning was done by consults from off campus, and they reported directly to the president.

So that was the start of my career at Michigan State, coming in here. I thought I'd stay a year or two. It was exciting. They were digging and building all over, and I thought I'd stay a year or two. But I could soon see that there was a lot of opportunity here to set up an organization and provide a service that would be essential, coordinate the program. So we did. There was a lot of master planning had to be done. There really weren't master plans that reached out to accommodate what was being predicted, that enrollment would go up rapidly.

Quietly, we talked about 35,000 student enrollment down the road. Now, if you mentioned it publicly that a small college on the North Campus, generally people thought that a bunch of loony people out here, but that's what we quietly planned for when we laid out the water system on paper, the sewer system, the electrical, and future road plans.

We developed a book of standards then which sort of provided to the outside consultants guidelines for the type of building components that we would accept as standard. Generally, we tried to get durable construction, exteriors made of brick and good windows and so forth. The interior and the machine rooms we tried to standardize on a few different makes of parts, like your return pumps in the machine room. They had a wide variety, and every time one broke down, sometimes you could find the part, sometimes they had to junk the pump because parts were no longer available. And I name that as one item. There were hundreds of components in the building that needed to be standardized and still remain in a way that there could be competition of the buildings. So we named three or four named companies as standard or approved equal. So there was a lot of work to be done, besides what met the eye, as far as public.

Charnley: Who else was involved in that planning?

Simon: There was a Mr. Harold Lawtner [phonetic] who came back, who headed up the site planning. He came back from the service. He was about the same age as Dr. [John A.] Hannah. They knew each other. Of course, there was a Philip May [phonetic], who came here in '46, about the same time I did, and became vice president of business and finance. He was a key person.

Another man that returned was Emory Foster , who had been in the hotel industry. He was a graduate from here, and he was appointed to head up the housing program, which was under considerable pressure to expand, because East Lansing was really a small town. There was very little housing available for rent by students. Students were sleeping in cars, believe it or not. There wasn't anyplace to go. Jenison Gymnasium, the year that I came, that fall and winter the top floor was filled with army cots. Students slept up there. There weren't any rooms for them. They used the locker rooms and shower rooms. It was an extreme situation as far as comfort, but Michigan State leadership and board of—they called it State Board of Agriculture—were quite determined to accommodate the GIs and the young people that were looking for an education.

It was generally accepted that Michigan State was putting forth more effort than any other institution in the country. So, our enrollment started jumping up 3,000, 4,000 a year. Now, you can imagine piling that much increase on a small established college, the people that we had to hire and train for the service area. In the housing, to staff a dormitory when they opened up a dormitory, it took a couple hundred new people. And professors and instructors had to be brought in. It seemed like we were overloaded year after year, but there was a job to do, everybody was committed to doing it, and we worked whatever hours it took. There weren't any questions asked about whether you worked eight to five or eight to midnight. You just went in there and got the job done.

Charnley: Who hired you when you came back.

Simon: Mr. Kenny, Ed Kenny [phonetic], was superintendent of buildings and utilities. He interviewed me. Now, I had been downtown Lansing to lunch. In those days, downtown

Lansing, Washington Avenue, was bustling with business. It was the place to go from the Oldsmobile and General Motors plants. So I friend of mine told me there was a lot of activity out here, and they really desperately needed someone that had my kind of experience and background. So I came out, interviewed. It was a verbal process, nothing put on paper, and as we finished, after about twenty minutes, he said, "You'll be hearing from us."

So I went home. I went back to work the next day at GM. I didn't hear a thing for a couple weeks. I came home one night from work, and my wife said, "What have you been up to now? You made headlines in the *State Journal*."

I said, "How? In what way?"

Well, she said, "You were appointed assistant construction engineer by the Board of Agriculture."

So that's how I was hired.

Charnley: So your wife knew before you did.

Simon: She did. So I called the next day. I said, "Is this a joke or did someone just release something by mistake?"

"Oh, no. We want you to come out, come to work." Still nothing on paper.

After I worked a day or two, they said, "Well, you better go over to Olin Center and get checked over physically." Well, that took place. Now, I don't know when I was entered into the record. I did get a paycheck. It was very informal.

Charnley: Do you feel that your education that you got here prepared you well for that job, your first job?

Simon: Very much so, that along with the experience that I got working for contractors as I was struggling to get a few dollars to continue the education. I worked on Jenison Fieldhouse building, when that was under construction. The contractor gave me part-time work during the week. I worked with the bricklayers, carpenters, and the engineer that did the layout. Then on weekends, they had me on site, on duty, to keep inspecting the building after it was up part way, keep the trespassers out so people wouldn't get hurt stumbling around over lumber and so forth, and I would water the new-poured concrete, which is necessary to get it properly cured.

I had a bunch of odd jobs on weekends, so I earned enough there to pay my expense and save a little bit. But that's one of the contractors I worked with. But that was very helpful. I knew the terminology when I was out of school, construction terms that are used in describing various components that they used to build and set forms. But the education certainly was the main part.

Charnley: Who were some of your professors that you remembered?

Simon: C. Allen, I think it was Chester Allen [phonetic], was head of the civil engineering department. A Dr. [Henry B.] Dirks was dean of engineering. Hall, H-A-L-L.

There was a Professor [Ira B.] Baccus who taught engineering, electrical. His major was electrical. I was going in the direction of civil engineering and structural engineering. I remember we took a class from him in high-voltage AC power, and we were supposed to wire up

something in that lab. We apparently crossed some circuits, because when we threw the switch on, it shut the campus power off for a short time. [Laughter]

So I remember when we finished our final, he said, “You civil engineers, you’re all going to pass. You all worked hard, and you learned just enough so that you should know enough about electrical to keep your fingers off. Let someone else handle the high-powered, high-voltage electrical design. You stick to your field.” [Laughter]

Now, there are people in their world who think they’re jack-of-all-trades, can do everything. They usually get in trouble doing that.

Charnley: How about General Motors and your work during the war? Was there anything that you picked up in dealing with the corporate world that you later found useful?

Simon: A lot about organization and methods and procedures. They’re a very highly organized company as far as supervision and administration. Time factor was just a very important matter, whatever we did. Cost control, something that in some areas is not very popular. People don’t want to hear about cost control. “Forget the cost. I’m important. I’m going to get this done, regardless of cost.” Well, you don’t do that at General Motors. If you can’t control your cost, you’re out the back door, because they have to compete worldwide. That was true in those days, and it’s more so now. Yes, I learned a lot over there in the five years I was with them.

Charnley: We talked a little bit about the temporary housing that you mentioned, the trailers. Did they come from the government or were they just privately--



Simon: No, they came from an army camp someplace.

Charnley: And the Quonset huts. People have talked about those before.

Simon: There were a hundred and some of those brought in, set up. And those projects were not spread out over much time. In a few weeks, they'd haul them in. You put a concrete slab down, you set them up. You ran temporary wire in. The first that were occupied had electrical wires hanging from the ceiling, with sockets and light bulbs stuck in. No fixtures. They put the oil-fired heaters, stove, in one end. It was pretty crude living, but the guys who had been in the trenches in World War II, to them it was pretty luxurious. They came to get an education.

Charnley: Was this for married students?

Simon: The Quonsets were mostly used by single students. I don't know of any married couples in there. The barracks, they had apartments, and the trailers had married couples. The trailers were on the site that now has University Village. The barracks were on the south side of Shaw Lane, from Shaw Lane to the railroad track and from Harrison back to what is now the Communication Arts Building. A big acreage was filled with those buildings.

Charnley: So in those early years, you were involved in the construction projects that were going on?

Simon: Here?

Charnley: Yes.

Simon: I was at General Motors, too. We did a lot of rebuilding, conversion, from one contract to another. We set up facilities in less than two weeks for some production contracts, war work. Now here, with this onrush of students, there wasn't much time. We put projects together in a hurry. So, yes, as assistant construction engineer, I was very much involved, coordinating, inspecting.

Charnley: Did President Hannah take a hands-on approach or did he turn it over to the people that knew what they were doing?

Simon: He had his eye on things a good share of the time. He was the kind of person that was an early riser. He used to go for a walk out in the country. He'd go horseback riding between five and six in the morning with the superintendent of farms. He knew what was going on.

I give this as an example. University Village apartments were under construction. They were at the point where the frame was up and we were putting insulating blankets in the wall, getting ready to put the exterior up. Well, we had a terrible windstorm on a weekend, and it tore some of that loose.

He was coming back from northern Michigan, where he had been, and on Sunday night he cruised through that project. Before eight o'clock Monday morning, I had a call. He said, "Ted, is that the way you're going to build those?" He didn't know we had a windstorm.

I said, "No. I'm aware of what happened. We had a windstorm. It'll be corrected."

"Oh, okay," he said, "okay."

Now, he was not prowling around in the buildings every day, but he was around enough so that we knew the man knew what was happening.

Charnley: What were some of the notable construction projects that you were involved in, in those early years, that you remember as being very memorable?

Simon: Well, they were all important. The Natural Science Building was under way when I returned. On North Campus, Berkey Hall was being started. I guess I'd have to look at this chronological list. Union Building was getting an addition. Well, anything that was being built on campus, I was involved in that.

Charnley: Did your job title change at all over the years?

Simon: I stayed as assistant construction engineer until the early fifties, and sometime along the way they appointed me as, gave me the full title, construction engineer. If you got a five-cent-an-hour raise, that was a big deal at that time. Believe it or not, that was a big raise. But in the early fifties, I became construction engineer, and then in the mid-fifties I was named superintendent of buildings and utilities. That was the top job in that service organization.

The man that interviewed me originally, Mr. Kenny, retired, and subsequently there were more name title changes, from superintendent of buildings and utilities to director of physical plant, and I retired as assistant vice president for physical plant facilities, and I was one of three individuals that reported to Roger Wilkinson direct. I handled the facilities matters. Emory

Foster was assistant vice president in charge of all the housing, and Steve—why don't I think of that? It'll come to me. Fill that in later.

Charnley: We can add that.

Simon: He handled the finance, accounting and financial control. We'd have a meeting, a breakfast meeting every two weeks, which would last an hour or so. One of us would be appointed to stop and pick up the rolls and get the coffee made. That was breakfast.

Charnley: In the development of the power plants, how did you take a direct role in that? How did that change during your tenure?

Simon: That's a story in itself. When I was in private industry, I kept hearing about the amount of waste that was taking place on the campus. People were wasting money, not only here, but generally in higher education.

So I was meeting with one of the assistant engineers in the state building division one night at a dinner meeting, Grand Valley Chapter of Engineers. I was attended that, and I sat next to him and I said, "I keep hearing about this waste that's taking place. What is that all about? Michigan State is supposed to be wasting so much money." That was right after I moved out here.

He said, "Well, you're burning more fuel per cubic foot of space than any other college in the state. Even up at Houghton and Hancock, Michigan Tech, they don't use as much fuel as you do. It's being wasted out there, and something should be done about it."

So I said, “Ralph, I think we could do something about that.”

So we started putting into our standards book some requirements. The lobbyists generally had control of what went into specifications, believe it or not. They were putting 100 foot-candles of lighting into classroom space and offices. You don’t need it. It’s hard on the eyes if you have that much brightness. Now, you need it for task lighting. So we cut back on that, for instance. The design that we allowed after we got our standards to go up permitted general lighting of 50 foot-candles, cut it in half. We made hundreds of changes in the requirements in what we allowed in construction.

The other thing that they had at Michigan State, they had some capacity to generate their own power, and that concept, the dual energy or co-generation concept, existed in the old North Campus power plant. It’s now gone, but it was on that site just north of the Administration Building.

Charnley: Where was the original power plant?

Simon: Right there north of the Administration Building, the current Administration Building.

Charnley: Close to Wells Hall?

Simon: No, this way from Wells Hall. If you look out the front door of the Administration Building and look right straight northeast, and it’s not too far from this Circle Drive that comes by there. There’s a big underground chamber. The tunnels that carried the—

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about the original power plant and the location and the steam tunnels came together right there.

Simon: Right. And the basement is still there. Of course, there's been a big slab put over it, and there's earth on it, landscaping.

At the turn of the century—and I read this, now. Don't date me as being here. At the turn of the century, they had a professor, and his last name was Myers [phonetic], and I'm now recalling something I read many years ago. He read about—and he called it an engine—an engine that would produce both heat and electricity. And he said, "If we had such a thing, we could save some money." Now, this is around the turn of the century. Not this century; 1900. They carried this idea and put it into formal recommendation, and the state Board of Agriculture approved it.

So they built a little plant. Prior to that, there were heating stoves in these buildings and kerosene or some other lamps, I don't know. And they put in a small boiler, and they got a small generator, with a turbine on the end of it. So they put the steam from the boiler through the turbine, turned the generator and made power. Now that, if I remember right, was a 200-kilowatt machine. They now have well over 60,000 kW capacity. You can divide that out, and it'll give you an idea how many times the demand has increased.

So that became a top priority on my part to make our facilities very efficient as we built the new ones, and also to continue the co-generation concept on this campus. Now, a power plant of that type alone will not be successful unless you have a load condition, heating and

electrical and air-conditioning, that provides a balanced demand, heating demand, electrical demand. Now, the air-conditioning utilized both steam and electrical.

The other thing that made it very favorable here was that we were building housing on campus, and our population moved from early morning to the Shaw rooms and breakfast, then to the classroom, and then at night back to the housing, and so the load was spread out from early morning till close to midnight.

Now, an office building downtown is in use from eight or eight-thirty till five, not a good load for co-generation, because you want to keep this equipment loaded equally. If you just have a high electrical load, then you produce steam to make electrical, and the steam that goes through the turbine then has to go through a cooling tower, and you put a lot of energy in the air. Here we take the byproduct, steam, the byproduct from making electrical, put it into the distribution system on campus, and heat the buildings, and in the summer, cool them. It's complicated, but we pursued expansion of that idea and obtained the facilities, over much resistance, by the way, because not very many people accepted the fact that we could do it. Not very many around the country had these kind of facilities, this kind of a composite load. It was designed then here. The whole campus planning was coordinated.

Charnley: Certainly in terms of saving overall resources, it must have been important in saving coal resources or whatever was used for the firing, wasn't it?

Simon: It saved millions of dollars. The savings this year that result from having these facilities the way they are is upwards of \$20 million. Now, guess how many colleges or how many departments that will support? A lot of them. If you didn't have this combination of facilities

with the capability that exists, you'd have to spend it to purchase power. There isn't any alternative. People are going to have the comforts of air-conditioning and lights and so forth, right?

Charnley: Yes.

Simon: If you don't believe so, try turning them off on them. [Laughter]

Charnley: Or even shut a portion of them down.

Simon: Now, there's still quite a lot being wasted.

Charnley: After that older plant, where was the power plant located when you first took over?

Simon: Well, the old plant was expanded quite a few times here on the north side of the river. Right after World War II, they decided that this site was not big enough, too valuable to have a dirty old power plant on it and haul coal in on railroad cars. There was a bridge across the river, railroad trestle bridge. So they started a new plant on the east side of the stadium, Shaw Lane plant, and that was put in production in late '46 or '47, 1947.

By the sixties, by the late fifties, we realized that we needed a bigger site than that. Wells Hall was either under construction. The whole area there was being committed to academic and research programs, all except the stadium and the athletic fields. So it must have been about



1955 when we started analyzing our load conditions, the demand, and did some preliminary planning on what to do to take care of the future for decades to come.

It was about 1959, we were now talking a big project, and our estimates were that we would need around \$8 to \$10 million to build a new power plant. No one had ever asked for anything that big. Even the new library only cost \$4 million. So there was a lot of resistance on this campus. Committees opposed the idea. It didn't take the capital outlay to just go buy the power. Who cares about cost? Just buy it. So we went through some years of resistance.

But finally, in the early sixties—oh, there were special consultants hired by the state legislature on and on. It became, really, a big issue statewide, and I was kind of the focal point. I was being attacked by some as being an empire-builder and all I cared about was getting a bigger staff. I could have cared less. I could go work anyplace I wanted to at that time, I thought anyway.

But we finally got preliminary approval to go ahead and develop plans, and by 1965 we put the first boiler and generator in production at the site that's out there south of the railroad track.

The engineering analysis and cost analysis conclusively showed that we could pay for a new generator in savings in two and a third years. What bigger return can you get on money? The generator part, we had to build a boiler plant anyway to heat the building. The generator part only was only about a million dollars extra, and we could pay it off in two and a third years. Now, that sold the project, finally.

Charnley: Did Consumers Power oppose it?

Simon: There were several power companies that opposed it. I, over the years, made it a point to get acquainted with people. I was active in the professional organizations. I knew people in the Consumers Power organization. I personally met with the president of the company, showed him my numbers. I gave him a copy of our report. I told him, "If you can prove to us that there's some flaws and errors in our plan design, I'll give up. If you can't, I wish you'd keep quiet and quit fighting us."

And he said, "Okay, that's a fair deal." But it took a few years to get to that. I wouldn't want that quoted.

Charnley: Okay.

Simon: I have a lot of friends in that organization right today. They helped us many a time. I remember having a big storm out here. Our power lines to the wells went down as a result of the storm. They were running low on water. Now, the storm was pretty much citywide. Consumers Power Company, which had the lines out in the farm area, provided the power. They had very high-priority needs for their personnel and manpower that night.

Well, I bumped into the general manager of the power company in the locker room at the club. I knew him personally very well. I said, "Bill, we're in trouble."

"Oh, what's your trouble?"

I said, "We're going to run out of water. It's going to cause all kinds of damage in the research program. There'll be a family of rats dying that they've been tooth decay study on those rats for eleven years. Can you help us?"

“You bet,” he said. He got on the phone. They directed some men out to the farms and put the power line back in service, wind and rain and stormy weather. We had that kind of cooperation.

Charnley: It wasn't just confrontation.

Simon: Right.

Charnley: The power plant has your name now.

Simon: Right.

Charnley: When was it dedicated to you, do you remember?

Simon: We never had a formal ceremony. It was in the fall of '83. I don't remember what month. I had requested retirement for February 1984. The fall of '83 they were having a board meeting at Kellogg Center, and shortly after eleven o'clock that morning my secretary came in. I was having a staff meeting. She gave me a note. She said, “They want you to come and meet with the board at noon at lunch.”

And I thought, “I wonder what I did wrong this time?”

So I went over at noon, and that's when they announced that they were naming the plant after me. It was a total surprise.

Charnley: The plant itself, how would you describe it in terms of its construction or what role did you have in either layout or anything like that?

Simon: Well, there were some major decisions regarding the type of fuel that we would use. There was a choice between coal and oil and gas. All had to be pursued. Of course, we had a consultant to design it and plan it. It was too big a project. It's a giant machine room, too big a project for our little staff on campus. You need people that specialize in that work and make a lifetime career out of it.

Now, we tried to get a commitment on gas for that plant, a five-year commitment, guaranteed supply. Couldn't get it. We investigated the source of oil. It would have required semi-trucks of about ten or more loads per day, and the road system wouldn't handle it, plus it would have been much more expensive. Gas was more expensive.

In the sixties, the impending shortage that appeared in the early seventies was already obvious to people in the industry that that was going to happen. I had good contact with one of the top geologists at the University of Houston known worldwide, and he predicted that we would have oil shortages, not necessarily because it isn't in the ground, but the capability to produce enough and get it to the user, and he said we're depleting our supply in this country. We're producing less than half of the oil that we burn now in this country. It's all imported. We're at the mercy of the foreign countries. So people wonder what's all the battling about in the Mideast. That's the source of oil, right?

Charnley: Yes.

Simon: That gets beyond my—but the major decisions had to be made regarding the design of the plant, so I'd consult with the consulting engineers. We provided the inspection service, but we did the coordinating of the planning with the various parties involved. Yes, I was involved.

Charnley: What was the advantage of the coal, coal-fired?

Simon: Coal, at that time, was several million dollars a year less expensive than any other fuel that we could get, or couldn't get, even if we could get it. A big saving, and there's an abundant supply in this country. [Pause] Do you want more?

Charnley: Well, those are pretty good.

Simon: There's a disadvantage. We had to make some major investments in air cleanup devices. Now, the air that comes out of those chimneys, what you see, that plume, that's heat. That is cleaner than any air that comes out of any residential chimney in town.

Charnley: Is that right?

Simon: We know that to be a fact. It wasn't back in the fifties, but there's several million dollars involved in cleanup devices in that plant.

Charnley: What about the coal pile? I've heard some references made to the size of the coal pile in the assents.

Simon: There is some coal dust there.

Charnley: I don't mean that. I mean in terms of putting year-end savings or buying ahead or anything like that, was there--

Simon: Well, because of the handling process, you want at least two-month's supply on hand, and you prefer three months, because it has to be mined, and these dudes sometimes like to go on strike. You have to ship it, and you have some horrible weather between here and the mines. Sometimes the coal shipments are delayed on account of weather. There are all kinds of factors that can cause delays in shipment. So you can't depend on having it come every day as you burn it. You need a good inventory.

Charnley: Are they still using the coal-generation concept?

Simon: Very much so.

Charnley: Did other universities come and look at Michigan State's setup after, probably, the energy crisis in the early seventies?

Simon: We had visitors come here from quite a few of the top 500 corporations in this country. We had visitors from many universities. We had visitors from the major organizations in Washington, D.C., science. I don't remember all the initials, but the science group, the people that divvy out the money for research around here. We had heads of those organizations.

We had, after that plant was built and in production a few years, and then as the oil embargo hit, we became so popular it was unbelievable. We had visitors almost every day, including Consumers Power Company, Detroit Edison, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, Chrysler, the University of Michigan, Central Michigan. You could pick any name you want around there, they came to see us. I had one guy assigned that knew the plant very well, and he'd kind of give them a tour and explain what we were doing, and also what we had done on this campus to make it all feasible.

Charnley: The advance planning in the fifties helped a lot.

Simon: Absolutely. It's still going on today.

Charnley: People have talked a lot of the folklore associated with the tunnels, urban legend related to that. Can you relate some of those stories that you'd heard or that you encountered that you had to deal with, students getting in there or report of things happening? That all seemed to be part of the history of the university.

Simon: Well, infrequently someone would get in, but we had to improve our security. The doors between the end of the tunnel, where the tunnel approaches the building and joins onto the building, there's a door. That had to be kept locked. There was a time when they didn't have to be locked. The manhole covers, there are vaults, underground vaults every few hundred feet in the tunnel structure that houses expansion joints. Those covers had to be locked down, and I hope that they keep them locked now. There are curious people in this world that'll jeopardize

their own safety to crawl into a place like that, and they can get hurt. Yeah, we've had a few intruders. Not very often.

Charnley: In terms of your working with the other presidents, besides President Hannah, you worked with Dr. Wharton and Dr. Mackey, interim presidents, Ed Harden. Any reflections on working with them as from the physical plant?

Simon: They were all very understanding. The bigger this place became, the less frequent the direct contact, the bureaucracy developed. You probably have a good feeling for that. To get to the provost is kind of a chore for a professor, or the president. The time that they have for each area has been carved up into more areas, so that there isn't much time left. And the outside contact off campus takes an increasing amount of time.

With Dr. Hannah, we were building and building and accommodating the great influx of students, which percentage-wise was huge compared to what we had, from where we came from, required more of his time proportionately than it takes now by this president, and you won't have the time, either. It's a very different organization. But I enjoyed working with any and all of them. Each one was different. Surprisingly, Hannah had an understanding, an aptitude towards facilities, more so than some others. They used to say that he could name any and all of the trees on this campus by species. Fabulous memory. He was interested in what we were doing. So were the rest, but I guess he was a little more inclined towards that interest.



Charnley: Besides the power plant, your own personal experience, even working on Jenison Fieldhouse, was there any other project that you really took a great interest in and/or had a special pride in its completion?

Simon: Well, I didn't single out Jenison because of a special interest. That happened to provide a few dollars a week income for me. [Unclear], that's all. These projects were all very interesting. They were all important. Now, the dormitories, we started—I can't think of the name. I think we had Wonders Hall under construction and another one over there. When I was asked to attend a breakfast meeting with our vice president, Phil May and Emory Foster, who was in charge of housing, the three of us would meet on occasions when we had some major decisions to make, and I was asked to attend a breakfast meeting. So we got over to Kellogg Center for this meeting. We said, "What's the subject today?"

Phil May said, "Well, we need another dormitory built and completed between now and next September." Now, the day that we met was October 11, which gave us eleven months. No site selected, no plans.

So we said, "Impossible. We're importing help from as far away as Kansas City as far as skilled trades. There's a shortage of help in this city. The state are building, General Motors are building, and the construction industry is just badly overloaded."

He said, "I'll report that back to the president." So the meeting didn't last long.

Tuesday night he called and he said, "We're going to have another meeting tomorrow morning."

We went to this meeting, and he said, "Well, today I'm not asking you can you or will you. Today the word is, get it done. What do you need?"

So we said, “Well, we need a site.”

“We have that. It’s the wooded area south of the river, east of Shaw dormitory, east, down in there, loaded with trees.”

“We need a set of plans that’ll be a duplication of what we’re building.”

“Just transfer a set of plans over there, adjust it to the topography, and start building.”

“We need to start building this week. Can’t wait till next week. Got to start tomorrow morning.”

“Okay, you got it. Whatever you need, go ahead and get it done.”

And so we started the building. The next morning we start cutting trees, and by weekend we were excavating and starting to put in foundations. We moved in in September, the following September.

Charnley: Was that McDonel?

Simon: Yes, McDonel Hall. There were a lot of incidents.

Charnley: That’s interesting in how just eleven months you can go from a wooded acre to a dormitory.

Simon: Now, nowadays—I shouldn’t criticize.

Charnley: It takes a little longer?

Simon: Probably take them that long to get the permits. [Laughter] The paperwork was incidental. We got hold of an architect. They adjusted the building entrances and so forth to that site. And the foundation was going to be the same, because we copied, we used the same plans that were being used at Wonders Hall, except modified to suit the site.

Charnley: I see. It's interesting. I saw on the state news today they were talking about the older dorms on campus, and I think some on West Circle.

Simon: That planning changed a lot, because you went from what you call gang showers to private bathrooms or one bathroom for two rooms, and then individual rooms for the bathroom. It was changing almost every other year. The demand and what people, what students expected. Plus, the academic work, the research work was changing rapidly from just plain old classroom work to a more complicated study in research. So we would build a mock-up.

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about dormitories, and you were indicating that you made a mock-up.

Simon: We built a mock-up. We built a set of rooms, one room for the bathroom or two rooms when it was a combination. Then the students could come, walk in, look at it, the student committees. They'd appoint a committee. We had that kind of planning in the sixties, when we

started making some major changes in the dormitory layout. I personally had a briefcase for each day of the week.

Charnley: Tell me about that.

Simon: Well, rather than have a secretary go through the file and find what I needed for the meeting of the day at noon, I had a briefcase marked for Monday. The meetings that were on Monday, I had paperwork in that briefcase. And the same for the rest of the week. So between meetings, if I had time I'd stop in, if I had different meetings in the afternoon. Well, some of them were labeled by project, too, like if we were meeting on a dormitory project in the morning, let's say Erickson Hall, which was under construction, meeting there in the afternoon with the contractors and architects, I had a briefcase for that. I'd stop and pick that up.

We had a lot of noon meetings, especially when we were building dormitories. The man in charge, Emory Foster, was pretty generous. He knew that if he offered a good lunch, everybody would show up. [Laughter] But they were not social meetings. A luncheon meeting, you'd get your business done and you'd be on the way in an hour or so.

Charnley: Did you have a secretary that stayed with you a long time or did you have a variety of them?

Simon: No. No, the paperwork that went with the construction projects was done by the architects and their staff. The architect representative would be there, attend the meeting. We'd discuss the problem, and as a rule, arrive at a solution. He'd make notes. If it required a change

order, if it generated a change in cost, then he'd dictate the change order, sometimes on the way back to Detroit or wherever he came from, put it on the recorder. It would be typed up and be in the mail the next day to the contractor, get a price on it.

In the meantime, we had enough authority, especially Foster and I, if it wasn't major, involved hundreds of thousands, we'd authorize it the same day, go ahead and get it done, tell the contractor. Send in your estimate. We'd have kind of a verbal agreement on the amount of money that this should take, and we had a nice relationship with people. They didn't gouge us.

Charnley: Were there any construction companies that did a lot of the dormitories or that you worked with extensively?

Simon: Christman Company did a lot, and Ranager [phonetic] did some.

Charnley: Were they both local?

Simon: Yes.

Charnley: In Lansing?

Simon: I think Utley [phonetic] did one or two, and they were out of Detroit. The work was mostly done by local contractors. Now and then a Detroit contractor would be successful in bidding.

Charnley: How would you say that your job changed over time? Did it become more complex?

Simon: Well, it became a position of remote control. Rather than my personally attending a meeting, I had a few staff people that would attend these daily meetings on the sites. To start with, I was it, and it took a few years before I had very capable people on board. I had a fellow by the name of Henry Duckelberg [phonetic], who was a year or two older than I was. He graduated before I did. But he was an excellent construction man. He worked for local contractors. In fact, he was job superintendent at Kellogg Center. He came with us as one of our field engineers, very valuable man to me.

Charnley: Was he a MSU grad?

Simon: Yes. He took a lot of load off of my shoulders. My activity changed a lot, from kind of instead of being a quarterback running each play, I was more of a general manager. I'd visit the jobs, but not to attend a detailed meeting.

Charnley: Did you have direct contact with the board of trustees at all or did you have to make presentations?

Simon: Not very often. It would be one-on-one on the side more than a formal presentation. Sometimes a board member would single me out or call me and have a question.

Charnley: Were there any board members that took a particular interest in the physical buildings of the university or were there any that stood out as being particularly supportive?

Simon: Oh, boy, I can't think of the name right now.

Charnley: There's been a lot of board members that you've seen.

Simon: Yes, there were a lot of them. We had F. Mueller [phonetic] from Grand Rapids, who I think had owned some furniture manufacturing company. I'm not sure now. When I go into this, I really don't want to be quoted. But there were board members that took a keen interest because the construction was somewhat related to the business they were in. Some took more interest than others.

Charnley: In your own approach to work and work ethic that you had, were there any guiding principles that you had in terms of university work or anything like that that guided you?

Organization, obviously, you've mentioned already.

Simon: Very simple. Be fair, firm, and honest. Face the issue. If you've got a problem, get it settled, resolved, corrected, the quicker the better. Don't let it fester. Not everything was happy-go-lucky, I can tell you. There were problems.

Charnley: In looking back at your career, what was the main reason you were interested in or that you ultimately retired in? When did you retire?

Simon: 1984.

Charnley: In '84. Were there any main reasons that came? Was it the university policy?

Simon: Age and I was tired.

Charnley: Age and you were tired. [Laughter]

Simon: I did some consulting around the country the last year or two that I was active here. I didn't have time before. The University of California wanted me to come out to their campus at San Diego. No, it was not that one, another one just north of there. I had announced my retirement. They wanted me to come out for two years. They would have moved me and on and on. I said, "I can't do it."

And the vice president, who I knew personally, he said, "What's the problem? Why not? We'd like to have you share your experience with us."

I said, "I'm tired. I need a break. And I don't think I can face another two years of making major changes in an organization. I'm just tired. I want out." I was past sixty-five at that point.

Charnley: In looking back at your career at Michigan State, which obviously was a very long one, including the time you were a student, is there anything that stands out? You mentioned the fact that when you came, did you think you'd be here almost your whole career?



Simon: Well, the thing that stood out here, the same at General Motors, dynamic organization. They were organizations that wanted to get the job done. It was not a matter of putting in time and stalling. And when I got here on this campus, I soon found that the driving force here, the president and the principal people involved, were here to get a job done, and while political considerations were important, that was not the governing guideline. The governing guideline was, get it done, ask questions later. I enjoyed that. I like to get things done. There's great satisfaction in having a day end where you can feel that you accomplished something rather than having engaged a verbal battle which ended up in nothing. Yeah, that's what bound me here. Within a year, I was satisfied that this was the place. There was a time when the political heat got to be pretty strong in the sixties, when I thought of leaving.

Charnley: Were there any other, since your retirement, have you had other contacts with the university or things that you've done?

Simon: Here?

Charnley: Yes.

Simon: Nothing significant. When I retired, my mind was made up that that was the end. I didn't want an office. You can have an office and a little secretarial service for free if you want. I didn't want that. I wanted to cut loose. My thinking was, has been, when I came here, they gave me freedom to do what I thought was right. Mr. Kidde [phonetic], who I reported to, called

me in after a year or two. He said, “The more decisions you make on your own, the better I’ll like it.” Now, isn’t that a wonderful opportunity that the man presented? So I could make decisions, profit from my mistakes if I made one. Now, that was crucial to me. I’m an independent man—person, I should say. Some call me stubborn, but so be it. [Laughter] But I don’t think I am.

Charnley: Is there any legacy, as someone drives around the campus, that maybe you’d like them to remember you and your experience that you think?

Simon: Well, I had a visitor here from Hamilton, Ontario, in charge of a small campus, and I picked him up at the airport and we came in the Abbott Road entrance, past the Union Building. We drove around Circle Drive, and we came as far as the Music Building. He said, “Please stop.”

I said, “Okay.”

He looked around, and he said he had seen those beautiful dormitories, Gothic, slate roofs. Got to the Music Building, beautiful building that stood out, not overwhelming big. The high-rise building, the six- or eight-story building wasn’t there yet. He said, “You know, my trip has been worthwhile to come to this campus,” and he had been here only a minute or two. “It’s been worthwhile.” He said, “What a great combination of layout and materials put together to form this facility.” He said, “It’s wonderful. Seldom see it. It’s coordinated. The exteriors aren’t identical, but they’re compatible. The layout is open.” And he went on.

Now, he had planning experience and background at home, but having someone make those comments, which kind of reflect the work of a group of us, not one individual, and having

been part of that team, yeah, that's great, and I hope that the general atmosphere that has been created is not going to be destroyed by overcrowding and building in too much.

I personally believe that there's a limit as to how big you make a campus. You can get so big that you destroy that intimate contact. So I hope that this team that put together the combination of facilities back in the fifties and sixties will be remembered as having created something pleasant, doable, not slapped together. We wouldn't permit sheet metal siding, even though it would have been cheaper. You could paint it and make it look pretty good, but temporary.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project, and we appreciated your insights and especially the time that you've taken to share them.

Simon: Okay.

Charnley: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

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