William R. Dickson Oral History Project
Interviewer: Susan Crowley
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Miscellaneous Items on Architects, Contractors, etc.

INT: Bill Dickson and Sue Crowley. Go ahead, Bill.
WD: Take it away.
INT: Take it away.
WD: Well, this is probably the last tape. I thought I would have a brief discussion of some of the architects and engineers and contractors that made an impression on me, one way or another, and end with two or three humorous anecdotes of certain things that happened during my tenure. I'll start with architects, and I'm going to talk about mainly in the '60s and '70s, when I was actively involved in Facilities, as opposed to later on.
INT: Okay.
WD: And I'm not going to hit everybody, but the first one I want to talk about is Pei and Associates -- I.M. Pei was the principal partner at the time, and Pei, of course, did the Green Building, the Dreyfus Building, the Media Arts Center, and oh, Chemical Engineering, and I guess the Landau Building. So they're all sort of grouped in one area. Three of them are reinforced architectural concrete, and one of them is quite different – which would be the Media Center, being more of a metal panel skinned wall. Well, Pei was the architect and I would have to say the principal designer. He also traveled extensively, and so the buildings were actually -- the day-to-day design work -- was done by other people. But when Pei would breeze into town, he would look at what had been done and agree that it was going down the right track or make changes, and then they would carry them out. The biggest -- the thing I think about I.M. Pei the most is that he was quite a gentleman, and he could sell snow to an Eskimo. [Laughter] And whenever he wanted to really sell, like to the Building Committee or something else, it was sort of a pleasure to sit back and watch the talent that he had. And by the time he'd leave a meeting, they'd all think it was their idea. And I can remember vividly him doing that to Jerry Wiesner, who is not the easiest
person to get one to change one's mind. But he knew exactly which buttons to push, and he pushed them all.

INT: Now, is he an MIT graduate?

WD: I.M. Pei was an MIT graduate, yes; architecture. He was also -- and when I say he, but -- the firm -- but basically he was also one that would spend hours on details, and although they got a substantial fee on jobs, perhaps a little more than other people might have been willing to do the job for, I never could figure out how they made any money, the way they spent so much time arguing about what I would call relatively small points. But if it had to do with aesthetics, they would really argue the point.

The next people that we did a lot of business with was Skidmore, Owings & Merrill from Chicago. You might know that Skidmore had a few offices -- one in New York, one in Chicago, and I think one on the West Coast, but we dealt with Chicago, and Walter Netsch was the partner in charge of most of our jobs. He was partnered up with [Al Rockert], who was sort of an administrative architect, and very, very smooth and a pleasure to deal with. Walter Netsch was okay to deal with, but he was the kind of guy that sulked if he didn't get his own way. And I would not put him in the same class as Pei as being able to sell snow to an Eskimo. He might be able to sell ice to an ice house, but he was a good architect -- got his fame and became a partner in the firm, being for his work in designing the Air Force Academy.

INT: Oh, really?

WD: Which has a couple of very striking buildings, including the chapel. I believe that he was not a partner in the firm until after that took place. And he was soon made one. Walter was a -- as I said -- different than Pei. He was a very tall, pitifully thin guy, and the striking thing about him is he used to always wear a vest, and it had two upper pockets, and those two upper pockets were lined with about every color Pentel pen that there ever was made.

INT: Ha.

WD: I bet he carried 20 or 30 of them at all times, so he could reach in and pick one out and make a sketch in any color that he wanted. As I said, he spent a lot of time on the job; he was an administrative architect, and he was top-notch. He really was crackerjack at his trade, and so the two of them made a good combination. The other
thing that was interesting in working with Skidmore was that they had all their own engineers as part of the firm.

INT: Yes. I used to think it was an engineering firm.

WD: No. But they had a structural engineering department, which was very famous. Fazler Kahn was one of the original ones, and he's a well-known icon in the structural industry.

INT: Hmm.

WD: And followed by Al Picardi, who was a very good structural engineer and again, a graduate of the Institute. And then they had their own mechanical and electrical engineering department. So it did make a difference when you were dealing with them because you were -- you were dealing with one group of people, as opposed to have them go out and hire engineers, and like most people did.

INT: That is true. That's unusual now, right? There's not many firms that have that?

WD: No. I think there aren't. And they had some good people. Sam Sachs, I recall, was the head of the mechanical department, and he was very good. And we dealt with an electrical guy named [Ray Koeker] who was a very good electrician -- electrical engineer -- and of course, it got very good because they knew all the people at the Institute, and it wasn't like introducing a new group every time you did a job. Now they did the Bush Building, the Center for Advanced Engineering Studies, which I think is one of the few buildings at the Institute still unnamed. Is that true, Sue? Building 9?

INT: I think so.

WD: And then they did the Center for Space Research, the old computer center, which is now the chip -- microelectronics facility, and the electrical engineering wings, both for RLE and for EE, and then the in-fill between the two of them.

INT: Wow.

WD: So they actually did a lot of jobs.

INT: Pretty concentrated, all over in that one area, though.

WD: Well, that's what the Institute used to tend to do. That's why Pei's are concentrated, and Skidmore's was concentrated.

INT: Yes? That's interesting.
WD: So they were an interesting group to work with; plus, there were lots of other characters that showed up on the job, but those were the principal people involved. And then another architect that we did three buildings with was Catalano. Eduardo Catalano was a professor at MIT, and he did the student center after Saarinen fell ill and the commission had to be taken away from him. I never awarded him. And then he did the Hermann building, and he did the Eastgate housing job, so that Catalano was -- well, in lots of ways a one-man gang. He was a one-man gang. He used to come around all the time -- of course, his office was at MIT -- and discuss matters with me.

INT: So you're saying he was an active faculty member?

WD: He was an active faculty member.

INT: While he was doing the design of that?

WD: Yes. And if you look at the student center and the Hermann building, he was sort of the fortress mentality -- lots of concrete surface and small, slit windows, etc.

INT: Yes.

WD: He more than any other named architect spent a lot of time himself personally with me. He would come over and say, I'm thinking of doing this. What do you think of it? And we'd have some great discussions. In the end, he probably did what he wanted to do anyway, but no, that isn't fair. He did give me some things that didn't matter that much to him. He did listen very carefully.

INT: So did he have a firm?

WD: He did have a firm -- Eduardo Catalano and Associates -- a very small firm.

INT: Okay. So when you're saying a one-man gang, though, he did have a firm that he --

WD: He did, and he had some good people. I would say he used to have [Using] Jung, and [Buzz] Brannen. And Brannen was really the fellow that did the legwork on the Hermann Building, and Using Jung was principally involved when we did the student center.

INT: So that's how Jung Brannen formed?

WD: So then Jung Brannen broke off and formed a very, very successful firm --

INT: Oh, wow. I had no idea.

WD: -- that did some major work in Boston.
INT: Yes.
WD: And other areas. But that's Jung and Brannen. He also had a couple of good fieldmen, one in particular, [Crawley Cooper].
INT: Oh, I remember that name.
WD: E. Crawley Cooper.
INT: Yes.
WD: And that made the job run relatively smoothly when they were under construction.
INT: Um hmm.
WD: So Catalano was another and he didn't have his own engineers, as did anyone else that we worked with for the most part. But he had his favorite engineers, and I believe that Weidlinger Associates, a structural firm from New York City that eventually opened an office in Boston, perhaps because of Catalano, were the structural engineers on the student center, Hermann Building, and I believe the Eastgate Tower. So he found them good to work with; they were a good firm. And we had no problems in agreeing with that. The mechanical and electrical engineers for the Student Center was [Syska and Hennessey] from New York. And the same on the Hermann building, Syska and Hennessey from New York. I say New York because they hadn't yet opened a Boston office.
INT: Oh, is that right?
WD: However, the Eastgate Tower was done by [Green Leaf Associates]. [Said]Green Leaf was the principal, and they were located in Cambridge and they were mechanical engineers, and plumbing engineers, so that he used whatever -- whoever fit him at the time. Now the other firm that we did a substantial amount of business with was Anderson, Beckwith & Haible, and all three of those firm members were Institute professors -- not Institute Professors, but professors at the Institute, and they went back a long time, well before my time. Anderson of the firm was the principal architect of the swimming pool, which was quite well thought of in its time and in the future as a first of the modernist buildings on college campuses. In my years there in working, the partner in charge of all of the structures I worked on with Anderson, Beckwith was Herb Beckwith. Herb Beckwith was an interesting character. He did the Whitaker Building -- Building 56 -- and McCormick One and McCormick Two,
and so that was a fair amount of work throughout the '60s that we did with him. Herb was, as I said, an interesting character. His most notable feature is that no matter what time of the year, whether it was 70 or 90 out, or 10 below zero, he always a small flower in his left buttonhole.

INT: Oh, really?
WD: I don't know what kind they were, but I think of things like asters or something like that.
INT: Yes. Sounds kind of dapper.
WD: Yes. He was a dapper little guy. And I say little -- he was fairly diminutive.
INT: Hmm. Same as I.M. Pei.
WD: Yes. And Herb Beckwith's wife was also an architect, and she worked for the firm, although I never had much to do with her. Herb was great friends with my first boss, Carl Peterson, and I think they enjoyed doing business together. Now, of course, any of these people I mentioned, the firms only succeeded because of the people they had working for them. The day-to-day person on Herb Beckwith's job was [Spiros Cantasy] -- particularly I recall on the Whitaker building, Herb [had] a very good laboratory man, and he had a guy working for him that did a lot of the drawing and stuff named [Tony Autry], and we eventually hired Tony Autry at the Institute.
INT: I remember that name, too.
WD: And he was there for probably six or eight years, and he was a good laboratory designer. As far as the -- well, the other architect that -- two more I should mention. I don't mean to leave people out, but because of the quantity of work, Hugh Stubbins and Associates of Cambridge -- Hugh Stubbins, in particular, the principal -- they did work on -- they designed Westgate, and what's now Tang graduate building. So they did those buildings to the far west of the campus. And Stubbins’ firm had done some great work. I personally would not put the two projects that he did for us in that category. They're adequate, but I don't think I'd classify them as great pieces of architecture. Then the last one that did multiple buildings was Sert, Jackson, who did New House and Next House.

INT: And what's the name?
WD: Sert, Jackson.
INT: Boy, I never heard of that.
INT: He was the principal -- he was the designer -- got his fame for designing Peabody Terrace.
INT: Oh.
WD: So a graduate housing complex on Memorial Drive.
INT: Is that Harvard?
WD: For Harvard, and also the Harvard Community Center, down in Harvard Square.
INT: Oh, really? Boy, that's a popular thing.
WD: Sert was certainly the principal designer on New House. He might have been less the designer on Next House, since he was getting older. But those were two interesting jobs. They were done design/build. Turner was the contractor in both of them. And we actually had them form one company for the job.
INT: Why?
WD: Well, so we felt that we wouldn't have arguments between the contractor and the architect if they were one company and one fee structure. And let them balance architecture versus construction costs. And in the Next House -- I'm sorry, New House -- which was the first one we did, we hired Sert and then we told him that he could hire one of three contractors, but that he then had to form a partnership for that thing so that we would deal with one entity. And they elected to hire Turner.
INT: And why on that particular project did that seem important?
WD: It was a time that Paul Barrett and I decided it was time to try this. Design/build is something the Institute hadn't really done before. So it worked fairly well. And well enough so that Turner used to come around after the job was done every three or four months to try and convince us to do another dormitory with that combination, although this time -- and we did -- we did Next House -- and this time, Turner was the lead, and they hired Sert.
INT: Oh, wow.
WD: And I don't know, one of them was called West Campus Housing and Associates. I'm not sure which builder was called that. And it worked again well. I could -- you know, you could say, well, give an example. I can remember on New House, Sert wanted very much for aesthetic purposes to have a penthouse on one of the stairways,
so it would protrude above the top of the building. And Turner said we can't afford it, and so they argued it out. The Institute stayed out of it. At any other job, the Institute would have had to decide whether to spend more money or leave it off. And we weren't too good at telling an architect he didn't know what he was talking about, so we probably would have done it and spent more money to do it. In this case, we never had to enter into the discussion, and Turner finally convinced Sert that they couldn't do it because they were going to exceed the budget. So that's the one thing that sticks in my mind. I'm sure there were many more. But we didn't have to worry about those things on those jobs.

I should mention a couple of other architects: Goody and Clancy. It used to be Hamilton and Goody when we first started with them. Hamilton passed away, and I never knew him, as a matter of fact. And Marvin Goody was the principal. Marvin eventually joined up with Joyce -- I'm sorry, John Clancy. Marvin and Joan were both Institute graduates. And it became Goody and Clancy; Joan Goody, Marvin's wife, was also a member of that group. We used to send Joan in the early days out to deal with dormitory students, if we were going to make a renovation in the dorm or something. Joan was a very good-looking person, and very informal, and would sit around on the floor so all the students were sitting on the floor in front of her. And I always thought to myself that she sat cross-legged just to intrigue the boys as what might be under that skirt. In any case, she was very good dealing with them, and most of what they were doing at the time were with dormitories that were all male dormitories, and Marvin met an early death. He was out sailing one day with his wife and had a heart attack and died.

INT: Oh, is that how he passed away?
WD: Yes.
INT: I thought he was sick.
WD: Right there, I believe, on the boat. He was not an old person.
INT: Was he older than she?
WD: He might have been a little older, but I don't --
INT: Not significantly?
WD: I'm 70 now, and I don't believe that he was older than I was. Maybe a little. But this was many, many years ago.

INT: Yes.

WD: So he died relatively young --

INT: Right. And suddenly.

WD: And suddenly. So at that time, the firm was Goody, Clancy. His wife came in to be the principal with -- as the Goody. And they did the Center for Cancer Research in the old Brigham's building, and the Biology Building across the street from it.

INT: Oh, yes.

WD: And the Whitehead Institute.

INT: Yes? I didn't know they did that.

WD: And now the Center for Brain Research, which was the McGovern Institute. So the thing that made them so good on laboratory works was a guy they had working with them that may have become a partner in the end, a guy named [Bob Pelletier]. And he was a crackerjack as far as laboratory work. And so he was a pleasure to deal with, he was so knowledgeable. And Goody, Clancy were good architects, relatively practical; tried to provide -- or combine good architecture with some practicality, and very good listeners.

INT: Now I knew they were doing Brain and Cognitive; I was thinking it was a different building. But they also have that Charles Correa.

WD: He's an associate architect, yes.

INT: Yes, yes.

WD: I think they wanted him for architecture purposes.

INT: Hmm.

WD: And then, lastly, I should talk about Harry Ellenzweig. Harry is in my mind a great architect. He's really the principal designer of the firm. So that's got to change soon because Harry's no chicken anymore. And Harry did the -- I don't know what it's called -- the Tang Center down at the -- near the Sloan School.

INT: Right.

WD: And did major renovation of the building next to it, which used to be Northern Research -- Building 51 -- E51. And he did the architectural shell of the cogeneration
plant, and lots and lots of renovations with MIT. Oh, and he did the renovation of
Building 56.

INT: Oh, yes.
WD: Which shows you how time flies, when you've got a chance to participate in a
building and then its renovation 30 years later. Now Harry is a very good architect.
He's best known now, I think, for his laboratory designs. And I like to think I had
something to do with that because we were going to do some major renovations to
Building 6, which was chemistry after we built the chemistry building, and we were
in a position where we could empty some space and renovate it and then reuse it for
chemistry, and I hired Jackson & Moreland, who I'm not sure whether they changed
their name yet. They united into [inaudible words]. But I'll say Jackson & Moreland.
They were very good engineers -- structural, mechanical, electrical -- and they even
had a small architecture division. But I thought we probably could stand some better
-- a different architecture, so I put them together with Harry Ellenzweig. That was
Harry's first laboratory job.

INT: Really?
WD: And he's gone on to do laboratory jobs all over the United States. So he's not the first
guy I've put in business -- in that kind of business, but he did a good job. Even
though we had hired Jackson & Moreland, Harry sort of took the whole thing over.
You would have thought you were dealing with [Eledgery], and that Jackson &
Moreland were his engineers. But in any case, it came out relatively well. So that
that was interesting. I should mention Harry also did the Brooks Center at Endicott
House. So he's -- my disappointment has always been that the Institute didn't give
one large major new building to him. Well, they did, the Tang Center, but that's half
a major building. In any case, he was very good and remains good today. I'm not
sure what will happen when he fully retires. Well, that's the architects. There are
more, but those are the principal ones that did multiple buildings.

INT: Um hmm.
WD: As far as contractors, I have a lot less to say about that. There were really four or five
major contractors in Boston -- Vappi, Turner, Macomber, and eventually Jackson,
although in my original time during the '60s, Jackson -- Phil Jackson worked for
Wexler, who did a lot of buildings, but I would not consider a major contractor. When I say major, I mean able to do work in an excellent way without a lot of hassle. Gilbane, of course, from Providence was also a well-known firm. I've always tended to shy away from them because they always seemed to us to be relatively bureaucratic. But I can give you one example, which shows how different these firms were in some respects because they could all build you a fine building. But we decided when we built the medical center and Whitaker College Health Sciences Center that we would interview contractors and hire one to work on basically a cost basis plus a fee, and have them available to work with the architect for most of the design phase. So I can remember being in a room when we interviewed -- let's see? -- four contractors, I believe. The first was Gilbane. We did for some reason -- I think -- I'm not sure why, but we did interview them. And Gilbane came in with seven people. They were dressed in identical dark gray pinstripe suits, and they each had a part in this presentation. These were basically presentations of why we ought to select them, and they had everything but the clicker; you know, when a guy would get up and he'd talk long enough, you'd feel like you should use the clicker to click and he'd sit down and the next guy would pop up? Well, they went through what I would call the world's greatest GSA interview. They were obviously used to working with people like GSA. They had this thing down pat, and they covered all the bases in estimating construction services and ownership. I think both Gilbanes were there -- Tom and Bill -- and it left me absolutely cold, although if you had written out a list of questions, it was almost like they were answering a questionnaire that's probably sent out by somebody like GSA. They were so used to it, that that's the way they reacted. Anyway, you couldn't say it was a bad presentation. It was actually pretty good, but it just made me think I really didn't want to do business with them. The next one was Turner. Turner strolled in with three or four guys, and their approach was, well, we built a lot for you before. Why don't you just ask us questions? Why should we sit here and waste your time? And so that's the way that interview went. We sort of had a discussion of various things and it was good interview. Then we interviewed Vappi. He, again, came in with four or five people, and the lights were on bright and you practically got blinded because all five of them had MIT rings on.
INT: Oh, God!
WD: Vincent, Jack [Foley], Bob [MacDonald], Dick Finn.
INT: Dick Finn used to work for Vappi?
WD: Oh, yes.
INT: No kidding?
WD: Dick Finn was the project manager for Vappi on Eastgate.
INT: Ha. I didn't know that.
WD: And someone else; I don't remember who it was. And of course, they wanted to tell you that they could do the best job because they're all so loyal to MIT. And it, again, was a pretty good interview. And then, in strolled the fourth: George Macomber.
INT: All by himself?
WD: All alone. I don't even think he had a necktie on. And we had a great discussion. George's firm had been the builders of Building 56, and one thing I admired about him was that we had a big squabble, or there arose a squabble between [Limbah], the mechanical engineer -- his sub -- and Macomber about who was going to connect up all the piping to the fume hoods, and there were a lot of fume hoods. It was a big [ticket], and George told us once, during the construction or near the end of it, that they had this argument, but he said you people -- you, the Institute -- ought to not be concerned about it whatsoever. This will be decided by the Macomber Company and Limbah. And if it costs the Macomber Company money, we'll pay it. And so we never did get involved. And so George was a very principled individual. Yes. A pleasure to do business with.
INT: Yes.
WD: I don't remember all the reasons now, but we decided to do the job with Turner. So Turner was the people that did it.
INT: Hmm.
WD: You notice I left Fuller out because Fuller had gone out of business in the Boston office and was only working out of New York. They were once a very, very large firm. I'm not quite sure what happened to them. They did -- they built the -- at MIT they built the chapel and the Kresge Auditorium.
INT: Oh, they did?
WD: And McCormick One and Two, and a major renovation to the Building 10 library -- major renovation; a very difficult job. And when they decided to break up in Boston, Ken [Leach], who was the principal at the time in Boston, went to partnership with George Macomber.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WD: Well, I'm not sure what happened, but I think he had two relatively strong people with ideas of how to run one company. And I think -- So Ken went into business for himself, not as a contractor, but as a consultant. And had some fairly significant work. I think he worked on the first convention center -- the Hynes Center -- representing the city. And I know he worked for a long time on the rebuilding of the Common Garage.

INT: Oh, really? That's a big job, huh?

WD: Which was a big job.

INT: Yes.

WD: So -- well, the other contractor I had mentioned was Jackson. Jackson used to work for Wexler, who built the student center, the East -- not the East, the West Parking Garage, and Westgate One -- Westgate. And Jackson was their principal construction guy, and he finally went into business for himself and did two or three buildings for us -- did the Center for Space Research and then the computer center next door because we started that while the other building was still under construction. That was sort of -- we need a computer center, let's build one. And we started driving piles 39 days after Gordon Brown said let's build one.

INT: Wow! That must be a world record.

WD: We had no design for the building or anything. Jackson may have built MacGregor House, too. I'm not sure. I draw a little blank on who built MacGregor and 500 Memorial Drive. I can't tell you who. Turner, by the way, built the Green Building, as I said, the Health Sciences, the medical building, the Brain and Cognitive Science building, and the Center for Cancer Research, and the total renovation of Burton
House. So I just made a mistake: Goody, Clancy were the architects for the Center for Cancer Research, but I don't think Turner did build it, and I don't remember who did build it, but I don't believe it was Turner. So you can see that these contractors built multiple buildings. Vappi built Eastgate and the Landau Building. And actually built the Electrical Engineering -- the RLE Building, so that they shared a lot of work, these contractors. Vappi eventually went out of business, and Turner is still going strong. I would say Macomber is -- from what I've heard -- sort of so-so. I'm not sure whether they'll make it over the long term. So Turner is the survivor of all these. As far as engineers, I told you that Skidmore, Owings & Merrill had their own.

INT: Right. Of the mechanical engineers we used a lot, during my era, most of the work was done by Syska and Hennessey of New York. They had a chief mechanical engineer, [Cy Deriananty], who was probably one of the smartest and innovative mechanical engineers I ever met. He was Indian, and eventually committed suicide.

INT: Really?

WD: Well, no one today -- to this day -- knows why.

INT: Huh.

WD: He rented a car, and days later they found the car either on or near the George Washington Bridge and he apparently had jumped into the river.

INT: Oh, wow. That's sad.

WD: They also had a very good plumbing engineer. And o these things were constant in all the work that we did with them. He was Joe [Manfredi].

INT: Oh, yes.

WD: Joe Manfredi was an excellent plumbing engineer. And Syska and Hennessey did -- I'll miss some, but did the Green Building for Pei, the Hermann building for Catalano, the Student Center for Catalano, the Whitaker or 56 for Anderson Beckwith, and renovation on the President's office, where they used a fellow -- [Dmitri Gorchev] -- the first variable volume valves.

INT: Oh, God!

WD: And I'm sure several other jobs. But they were very well-known. When Herb Beckwith did the -- McCormick Hall, he hired a firm from Virginia -- [Hankins and Anderson], and they did the mechanical and electrical work on those buildings -- at
least two; I'm not sure about McCormick One, but they opened the Boston office because they were working on that, and something else with Herb. They eventually decided to retreat back to Virginia and some of the guys over here wanted to stay, so they started a firm -- BR Plus A.

INT: Oh, is that right?

WD: And I also gave BR Plus A their first job as a new firm. And they are now one of the two big mechanical firms in Boston -- BR. Plus A, and -- oh, what's the other one’s name? The one that Manfredi works for? [Vanderweil.]

INT: Oh, is that where he is now?

WD: Yes. Joe eventually took over the Cambridge office of Syska and Hennessey when they opened one, but he eventually left there, and went to work as the principal at Vanderweil.

INT: He must be getting --

WD: Oh, yes. Joe's up there, but he's still working, I believe. Structural engineers? [Weidelinger], [Wiescoff], [Beckwith], [Suddridge]. It used to be [Severed, Ellstead and Cruger]. It finally ended up, I think, as [Severed and Associates], and [LeMessurier]. They all did a fair number of jobs for me -- and [Viking Stamps]. LeMessurier r was one of my instructors when I was in school at MIT in steel design. As far as specialties, there were foundations contractors because of the -- or foundation engineers -- because of our poor soil condition, and perhaps the best of all was [Haley and Aldridge]. Hal Aldridge was a professor in Civil Engineering when I was here, also. And then they started Haley and Aldridge, which is a very preeminent firm, even to this day; still does work for the Institute.

INT: Yes.

WD: And then the principal acoustical people -- where you had a problem with Bolt, Beranek and Newman and Bob Newman was usually the one involved with our work, and Bob was my instructor in architectural acoustics when I was here at MIT. That isn't why they did work for us, but it so happens that I knew him very well. I also got a hundred on his examination.

INT: Wow.

WD: The final examination.
WD: Two exams in one day, three hours apiece.
INT: Oh, my God.
WD: I got them all right on both of them. The other was electrical engineering.
INT: Oh, my God.
WD: A good day; I felt good when I went home that night.
INT: [Laughter] Yes.
WD: Nine to twelve, and one to four.
INT: Oh, my God!
WD: So I'm sure I've left a lot out, but those are the principal people that I think I should talk about. Now, as times change, there's new players and stuff, but that's for some other era. I ought to end with a little humor. Our Dean of Engineering was one great guy -- Gerry Wilson -- and unfortunately, once he developed a severe case of kidney stones, very painful, and he was in the hospital, so [Gene Brammer] and I decided that we ought to do something for him, so we got a small box. We filled it with small, regular size gravel and sent it to him at the hospital. Now this gravel was affectionately known as P-stone. That's what it's name was. And so we thought this was sort of humorous. So the poor guy suffering kidney stones would get a box of P-stone. Well, Gerry didn't think it was too funny and -- or at least he let us know that he didn't think it was. In any event, some time later, not too long, Gerry was well and good. He was the first person, by the way, in Boston that they tried this sound wave thing --
INT: Oh, right.
WD: -- where you shatter the stones?
INT: Right. That lithotripper thing?
WD: Yes. And it worked, so that he didn't have an operation or anything.
INT: Right.
WD: So one day we're in Academic Council. Paul Gray was presiding as President, and for some reason, David Saxon, the Chairman, was there, although he usually didn't come to these things, but there was something that was going to be talked about, where they wanted him there. And part-way through the session, a knock came on
the door, and in came the custodian who worked down in Building 7 near the shipping room -- or Building 3 -- and he was a guy that looked just like Fish.

INT: Oh, yes.
WD: Remember Fish?
INT: Yes. From Barney Miller?
WD: Well, he looked exactly like him.
INT: Yes, yes.
WD: And he said, "I have a package for Mr. Dickson." And he had this small box, and he brought it over and handed it to me and left. And of course, here we are in the middle of Academic Council, and I just took it, and was going to leave it there until we got through, and I'd open it afterwards. Well, Gray must have been in on this, so he said aren't you going to open the package?

INT: [Laughter]
WD: So I opened the damn package. This won't be funny because people who don't know my reputation, but inside this box was a dead pigeon --

INT: Oh, God.
WD: -- with the compliments of the Dean of Engineering. [Laughter]
INT: Oh, my God! Oh, I remember that. Yes.
WD: Ha. I had some fame around the Institute for --
INT: Pigeons.
WD: -- pigeon’s crap.
INT: Oh, my God. I do remember that.
WD: So I was embarrassed at the time, but everybody had a good laugh. And the other thing I wanted to -- it has to do with pigeons -- I made a -- might have said this before, but I was sitting at my desk at about 5:30 one night, and the phone rang. It's a student, and he said I'm over here in the basement of Building 26 in front of the vending machines. And he said there's a pigeon walking up and down in front of the machines, and he keeps falling over and he'd get back up and he'll fall over again. I said, oh, it sounds serious. I said, I think you'd better call the medical department. [Laughter] So okay.
INT: He did?
WD: So I guess he did. I don't know.

INT: Oh, my God!

WD: And then I had the kid that came in to see Larry [Picard], our grounds foreman -- superintendent. He said I've been noticing a fair number of dead pigeons out in the MacGregor Court. And Larry said, oh, no, not again. And the kid said what do you mean? And he said, well, there's a battle of the turf out there between the pigeons and the squirrels, and depending on who gets the upper hand, they leave the demise of some of the others. And he said, you know, it was a very heavy acorn season, so the squirrels might -- must now have the upper hand. [Laughter] The kid said, gee, I never knew that and he got up and left. [Laughter] Now, in fact, we had hired -- now, I hadn't, but Larry had hired a guy from Somerville, I think it was, that used to put out laced pigeon corn, and told us that it wouldn't kill them, it would just make them want to leave so they'd all go to BU.

INT: Oh, God.

WD: And the last one is the famous building cozy caper. [Phil Trussell] -- who was a classmate of mine and came to work at the Institute as their real estate officer -- got a catalog one day, which was a [spoof book] --

INT: Wasn't it L.L. Bean?

WD: L.L. Bean catalog. Had the bird dog on the front and everything. If you noticed carefully, though, the bird dog had a bra on. [Laughter] And in this thing, there were things you could order for the holidays or for the season. And one of them was a building cozy. You've heard of a teapot cozy, where you put it over the teapot to keep the pot warm, well, this was a building cozy. It came in three sizes, and three colors. One of them was -- I remember it was gingham check, I think. So Phil, being the guy he is, ordered one. And it came in pieces -- this was all a spoof but he said, oh, let's have some fun with them. So he ordered one for the Green Building. [Laughter] Suitable in size, and I think checked gingham. And he was telling Larry Picard and myself about it at a Christmas party that we had over in Lombardo's over in East Boston. Right as you went through the tunnel, there used to be a club there. And he just couldn't contain himself, he was laughing so much. So Larry, who knew Phil well because they went to the same high school -- Milton High School -- said -- I
said to Larry, you know, let's deliver the thing. So we got together with Graphic Arts -- Jim [Coleman] and Al [Paone], and Larry called up one of his big riggers that had flat beds that they used to bring in bulldozers and stuff on them, and we made arrangements that a certain day, this flatbed would roll into the Building 20 shipping room with this enormous crate. I mean -- and it was big, kind of something that the rigger got. And it had all sorts of labels and big print on the side of it: Deliver to Philip A. Trussell, Institute Real Estate Officer.

INT: I remember that.

WD: Oh, you were there, then?

INT: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. Jim [Coleman] and --

WD: And so we were there, and I knew the date and time and I called up [Marsha Edmunds], Phil's secretary, and I said, Marsha -- well, I think we told her what was going to happen.

INT: Yes, yes.

WD: And I said we'll have to make arrangements that Phil is available to go to the Building 20 shipping room. Well, it so happened that unannounced, he was in the office all right, but unannounced in came [Hank Spaulding], and Hank was talking with Phil about something. And I showed up at the appointed time and was taken aback a little by Hank's presence, and all I said to him -- I got him in the corner sort of, and I said, Hank, for the next ten minutes, whatever happens, just roll with it.

INT: [Laughter] Oh, God.

WD: He said okay. So Marsha came and announced that they had a package for Phil at the shipping room, and he said, well, I'm busy now. I can't go. And she said, well, they said they must have your signature or they're not going to leave it, and it's rather large. So he said, oh, [bother]. I said, no, come on, Phil. Hank and I will go over with you. So we go over there and Phil looks outside, and here's this enormous crate. [Laughter] And with all this writing, and [stamps] going on it and stuff, and the shipper is standing there handing him a bill of lading for $54,000. [Laughter] And he said, you've got to sign this, or they won't leave it. And Phil looked out again at it, saw where it was from, looked at the bill, looked again out at the crate, and said, oh, what the hell. And he signs his name to this thing. In the meantime, Paone and
Coleman are over in the parking garage taking pictures of this thing. [Laughter] So it was really a jovial occasion and it was something. The rigger had a big part in pulling this off because the truck and the men and everything else -- the box -- they were all said for nothing. And so Phil thought this was so funny after a while he said he sent a thank you letter to the people that he had ordered this from, and they had a little communication, and suddenly one of the pictures appears in "Publishers Weekly," a magazine of --

INT: I remember that.

WD: -- of the industry. And so it found its way into the book on some of the Institute's best hacks.

INT: Yes.

WD: And it was a good one.

INT: It was a good one.

WD: And all I have to say in ending is I doubt that it could be done today at MIT.

INT: Yes.

WD: Things have changed.

INT: Yes.

WD: People are too serious and there's no more fun in the world. So I think that's it.

INT: Okay.

[End of interview]