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Rough transcript of a February 1990 session at Lincoln University with Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb for the German Historical Institute.

(Audio only, 39:01)

Recording starts after interviews began. An unidentified woman is speaking; a group of people are in the background.

I particularly remember him [Dr. Fales] looking at children. He loved children; he loved his own children, Corinna and Evan. But he shared that with other people's children, and my daughter, Susan, thought that he was a beautiful man.

Gabrielle Edgcomb: Did you come here about the same time as Dr. and Mrs. Fales?

I think we were here, weren't we? We came here in 1946. We were hired by Dr. [Horace Mann] Bond. Lincoln had gone from 71 students during the war to something humongous, like 340? [voice in background] 350. Good grace. We had triple-layer bunks in the gym. Not this gym, the old gym. The old, old gym.

This was during the war that this population tripled?

No, just after the war. People coming back on the GI Bill. So Lincoln had a huge change and Dr. Bond was, he was a very wonderful man.

When did they start admitting girls? I can ask Ruth [Fales] that. I know a little. I'm going do that tomorrow.

That's a long story. [Laughter.]

[Break in tape. Resumes with unidentified man speaking.]

... moratorium. To take in girls on campus. '65 is the first class. They had girls long before that but they had to live off-campus. I had a classmate of mine—I graduated from Lincoln in 1934—and this young lady came in 1954 but she lived in my house. They did not have dormitory facilities until 1965. The first class of women graduated in 1969.

[Break in tape. When it resumes, Gabrielle Edgcomb is speaking to a group.]

Edgcomb: ... Tuskegee and said he [unidentified] took night courses at Howard [University]. And what a revelation it was to him to meet some of the faculty there, among whom were both refugees from Europe as well as people who had been fired during the witch hunt [House Un-American Activities Committee]. And he particularly singled out a man named Otto Nathan; Otto Nathan was an economist, who only died a couple of years ago, who taught at Howard part-time. Otto Nathan became quite famous for two reasons: First of all, he was a well-known pacifist and second of all he became a very close friend of Albert Einstein's and became his executor. He died a couple of years ago in his early 90s. And he wouldn't let me interview him but he never would say why. He said, "I'm too depressed and I'm too old" but I think he was a little angry because he didn't get tenure at Howard, but what that whole history is about, I don't know. He was at Princeton and he taught in New York. He sort of commuted. That led me

to think a bit about this issue and how interesting it was, potentially, to find out about this encounter between two such very diverse groups of people, both of whom had a history of persecution and oppression on racial grounds, albeit with very different histories.

And then the Smithsonian office of what was then called symposia and seminars and has now got the graceful title Office of Interdisciplinary Studies, which I would hate to have to say on the telephone, had a colloquium called "The Muses Flee Hitler" [in February 1980] and I was invited to listen to this as a guest. It was all the big shots, Einstein and Mann and Brecht and Weill and so forth—the luminaries about whom there's an endless amount of literature. And the project director [Carla Borden] who became the editor of the book that was then published, all the talks that were given, which were according to fields, there was an architect and a composer and so on, and she and I became quite friendly. And I said, you know, I know that there were refugees who taught in historically Black colleges and I don't know if there was enough of this to be of interest in terms of exploring this, and she got interested.

She's full-time staff at the Smithsonian and she secured \$2,075 as a staff to explore this in her spare time with me. We used this \$2,075 for travel and other expenses. The Smithsonian gave us logistical support in terms of copying and telephones and stuff like this. And we identified somewhere around 50 people in this category in close to 20 colleges, most of which of course are in the South. I tried to go on with this by myself because she had to stop because of her normal work. I had an awful time getting any kind of backing and this went on and on and I had a very unpleasant experience with the Phelps Stokes fund, which made commitments they never met, I will be honest, which made me very angry, but that's neither here nor there. And then I decided I had to give this up, I had been doing this on my own for four or five years, and not only didn't I get paid or get my expenses paid. I was very devoted to the subject but I could not go on and partly it was because, supposing I amass all of this documentary stuff and all of these wonderful oral histories, if nobody backs this, what am I going to do with this stuff? So I quit. Or I thought I'd quit.

I live on New Hampshire Avenue and one day I was walking where I walk all the time and I saw a sign which said "Parking Reserved This Side for German Historical Institute." And I said, What's that? I never heard of it. So sometime later I called to find out what, who was this. They were new. The woman I talked to, I identified myself and I told her what I'd been doing and she said those would be of enormous interest to us because we are interested in any kind of immigrant history from Germany. And then the director who was abroad came back in a couple days and she spoke with him and he invited me to have lunch and we talked about this and after lunch he told me he was going to apply to Bonn; and this all comes out of the Ministry of Research and Technology in Bonn. And that's my story; I'm a research associate at the German Historical Institute. I have almost finished the research and I now have to write a book. That's why I have to learn the word processor. So that's that.

I have to answer one more question which you haven't asked, since you haven't had a chance to open your mouth. I am often asked why am I doing this or how did I get interested in this strange subject. My experience in Nazi schools as a Jewish child was very unpleasant. I had no sense of racism before and the first manifestation of persecution was really extreme segregation, which I experienced as a child. And I came to New York and I immediately went to

public school—high school as it was—and I was utterly horrified of the racism in this country, which I did not expect because I didn't know very much. Most people who came from Europe didn't know very much about this country. I had seen Hollywood movies [chuckling from audience], I had read James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Upton Sinclair, a little Sinclair Lewis, but I was 15 years old and my knowledge of this country was very limited. I knew there had been slavery, I knew there was no equality, but I thought that was in the South, and when I hit this in New York City in my school, I was completely horrified, and that has remained with me.

So I have been involved in this issue and continue to think that the issue of the American past in terms of slavery and racism has never been dealt with by white people in this country to the extent necessary, and I think one way of doing that is to continue to try to make people to confront their history, because I think a people that doesn't confront its history is doomed. I think there's plenty of — I'm going to shut up now.

So if you have questions or comments, tell me. And I'll pass this around. [Audience member, inaudible. Recording stops.]

We wrote to every black college. We found that NAFEO, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, sent us a list of all the colleges and Carla Borden, my associate at the Smithsonian, wrote letters to every one of them, asking if they could tell us if they had had any refugees from Austria of that period on their faculty. We had a fair number of answers that were positive. And we put an ad into the New York Times Book Review and into a German-Jewish paper called Der Aufbau in New York. And we got answers from those ads. And that started the process; it's like a networking because people answered and we got letters and we got names and so we pursued all these leads.

I now have 51 individuals in this category at 19 colleges. I have really at this point given up trying to find more because you can do this forever and I have got to start the writing process. If I get leads I will pursue them but I cannot go on with this exploration. It is very difficult and there are colleges that will not respond; even though I know from witnesses that there were people in my category, I cannot get any archival material. The most extreme case is one in which I was promised material and the president finally told me that this was violating rules of privacy, which of course is nonsense because these people are listed but I can't do anything unless I go there and confront this, and I give up. Some colleges just don't seem to be able to find any archival material. I had that experience at Dillard in New Orleans, where I went, and I went to Xavier and they have very little, although we have evidence of people who were there and taught there. So on some colleges I have this much and on others I have this much and so it's a very mixed picture in terms of the amount of documents. I have enough stuff to make the point and to write, and at this point I have to be satisfied and when it's finished and people say, But you forgot so-and-so, so be it.

Does that answer your question? Okay. Next?

Audience member: I'm trying to think of a way that we could be helpful to you. I'm not sure from what you've said what areas we could be helpful. I'm not sure whether you're referring to Lincoln, whether you've been able to get sufficient material here, or whether we would have contacts with other black schools to get more information from them or not.

Edgcomb: There were three people who taught at Lincoln whom I know of: Dr. Fales, of course; one Simon Green, alias Grünzweig, who taught mathematics [murmurs of recognition], who went subsequently to Philander Smith, whom I talked to on the phone, but he's a little shaky. And the third person is a Dr. Furth; he lives in Bethesda, which is a— and he taught economics here and I talked with him, I have a tape recording and I have a lot of documentary things from him.

Audience member: When was he here?

Edgcomb: I would have to— Let me go upstairs and get you something I brought that I forgot to bring.

I was going to say that I'm sketching out the history of the time, in terms of the situation of the German people, what caused them to leave, what they found when they arrived in this country, what their needs were. And I'm doing that briefly but enough so people can make connections.

[Inaudible comment from audience.]

That's part of it. Then I'm going to talk briefly, as best I can, or write, about the situation in this country in terms of the racial stuff, and specifically the situation in the differing institutions because they varied a great deal. If you go, for instance, to Talladega, Alabama, where I spent a couple of days because there were a fair number of refugees who taught there, compare that to, say, Howard University, which was in a big city, it's a totally different life. In Talladega was a totally self-contained community: They had their own schools, they had their own clinic, they had their own movie theater, and the people who taught there, whether they were white or black, did not relate to that little town, although if you walk from the campus into the town, it takes two minutes. But the political difference [inaudible remark from audience; laughter], the political difference at that time was such that there was simply no contact. It was dangerous; it was a Klan country. But there you have a good many— that's just a very extreme of one end as opposed to the more urban— So that's one thing I will write about; I will write then.

The thing that I find most intriguing are the anecdotes, the stories. I have a number of wonderful stories, some on tape, about the impact that people made on each other as individuals, as teachers and students and it's a two-way street, of course. I have some tapes, I have some documentary stuff, and that is really very engaging and some very moving but most important historically, very revealing and something we can all use in quotes. So that's my answer and, of course, I'll put in all the factual data but that's cut-and-dried.

Audience member: I did have Dr. Fales as my teacher of logic and I remember him quite well as an excellent teacher.

Edgcomb: Will you identify yourself for my tape?

Audience member: Isaac Mapp of the class of '49. And that is about what I have to say.

Edgcomb: And how did you find him relating to this world, which is a different world from what he knew before he came to this country. That's an interesting question, if you have any thoughts about that.

Isaac Mapp: Well, I thought he did remarkably well. He—both of us—were from abroad.

Edgcomb: Yes, I realized that by your speech [he has a slight accent].

Isaac Mapp: And therefore there was something in common.

Edgcomb: Where were you from, sir?

Isaac Mapp: At that moment I was from a country called British Guiana. And the “British” is now being removed. So we did have very interesting things to talk about. He was an interesting man.

Edgcomb: I gather from all I've read and heard, and I'm hearing more.

Unidentified audience member: I believe that the Philosophy Club met in the guesthouse, the old guesthouse and there they had very spirited meetings and there was a lot of dialogue and the students, I'm trying to think now, some of those students whom I knew were members. I believe a student who was called **Geek Scott** was a member of that club. And he is now located in Newark, New Jersey, as a pastor of a Baptist church and I wish it were possible that you could talk with somebody like Geek Scott.

Edgcomb: I talked with George Carter [murmurs of recognition from audience], whom I knew from Ghana times, and I have a tape of him and he spoke very eloquently of Dr. Fales and that was very interesting.

Audience member: Did he mention the Philosophy Club? Because that was a pretty big club when I came to Lincoln, and that impressed me.

Edgcomb: Would that have been called the Fullerton Club or was that another one? Because I will ask you about that.

Audience member to another: Ruth, don't you remember that club? the Philosophy Club?

Woman's voice: Sure. Yeah.

Edgcomb: Well, we'll find out more from Ruth. Anything?

Dorothea Murray? [wife of religion professor Andrew Murray]: When you were describing Talladega, it was a similar situation here, when we first came in 1949, which would have been the time Walter [Fales] was here. There was very little contact between Lincoln University campus and Oxford, which is three miles away. We were pretty well self-contained. We had our own movie theater, our own—

Edgcomb: And this is what's known as the North. [Laughter.] That's what I mean.

Murray?: There were two movie theaters in town, segregated—

Edgcomb: In Pennsylvania.

Murray?: There was no swimming pool. The Red Cross came in to a private pool for two weeks in the summer and that's where our children learned to swim. We had our own organization on campus, we had our own recreation—

Edgcomb: What was the— for instance, I'm always, medical care. At Talladega they had their own clinic. If people had to go to the hospital they had to go to Birmingham, which is a good hour's drive.

Several people chime in: We had a doctor. There was a doctor.

Edgcomb: You had a doctor and nurse, what like an infirmary and so on? So, for immediate things you had your own medical care, too.

Murray?: I think most families went to private physicians, though.

Man: Yes.

Woman 2: Some did, some didn't.

Edgcomb: That's really interesting, you see, because people absolutely today cannot imagine what life was like, and that's not long ago.

Murray?: And we had our own nursery school on campus.

Edgcomb: Talladega even had a high school.

Murray?: In fact it went up through the second grade. And then when the schools were consolidated in Oxford, then all of the grades went in there. She continued with the preschool for awhile.

Edgcomb: When did integration come to Oxford? After '54?

Jumble of voices: It hasn't come yet. '47, '48.

Edgcomb: I mean school.

Jumbled voices.

Murray: The school in Oxford was always integrated. But the consolidation came in— the first year Phyllis went to school, 1954?

Edgcomb: Is this a question of high school we're talking about?

Murray: No, all grades. But the middle school down in the village was segregated.

Man: There was a brick building in Lincoln and there's where the white children in this area went. There was a frame building across the street, where the black children went. Dr. Bond, who was the president at the time, brought a suit. They decided to let the black faculty children go to the white school in the village.

Edgcomb: So it became a class issue.

Man: And the black children who lived in the village remained at the little frame school. And then of course when they had consolidation then they all went into Oxford.

Edgcomb: The Lincoln schools were closed and so the kids were bused into Oxford?

Man: After a little bit when they took busing all over the area, they all went in to different schools.

[Break in recording]

Man 2: — the community, we owe a lot to people like Dottie Jones and Ruth Fales [wife of refugee professor Walter Fales] because they on Saturday nights we would square dance or

play cards or have a lot of fun. We had really a lot of fun. It was wonderful and very often we had nice food and refreshments.

Edgcomb: So this was the community. So as I was talking about Talladega it rang a bell for Lincoln as well?

Man comments in background: Yeah, but the description that Dorothea [Murray] gave you is true.

Edgcomb: Even though you didn't have the Klan around.

Woman: The Klan is three miles down the road.

Edgcomb: Was that true a long time? Because we have new Klan in Maryland.

Multiple voices.

Edgcomb: Hey, you guys, excuse my saying "you guys."

Man: During the 1960s the Klan was active just south of the Pennsylvania border, over in Maryland. They had rallies there and we had protests then in the churches in Oxford against the Klan rallies. We took out ads in the paper. That was the first time that Catholics and Protestants worshiped together because they had a mutual [inaudible].

Woman: Yes, we met in the Catholic church.

Edgcomb: If you say '60s, then I begin think that was at the time when the civil rights movement was gaining a presence, but in the '40s or '50s was there Klan in this area?

Affirmative sounds. Definitely. Oh yes.

Mapp [?]: When we, if I may use the word, resisted the movie theater in Oxford and we went into Oxford they chased us back, between '46 and '49 and they chased us back. As a matter of fact they had guns; they chased us back to the campus.

Edgcomb: And was that Klan, or was it just racists? [Laughter.]

Mapp: It had to be Klan inspired. The Klan was very popular. ... There were a great Klan people.

Edgcomb: Did they have like cross burnings?

Vocies: Absolutely. Oh, sure.

Woman 3: I was married in 1954 and my husband and I lived in a large apartment building just across the street and one night we saw a cross right in the front. From there we moved over next to the little education building that is on then campus, a little white building then, and next to us lived a white family, the Gunns lived next to us. The oldest daughter was dating a black fellow, who was a student. They have since married, they have a lovely marriage and lovely children from this. But I remember one night we heard noise, my husband and I, and we went outside, and somebody had left a cross on their yard. Virginia and all the children were out and we were all trying to put this fire out.

On the campus, in the late '50s. But one night, my husband and I used to walk a dog every night—this was not Duke, this was before Duke, this was another little dog someone gave us—

and we walked down the campus walk and later I found out that somebody had ridden behind the president's house and had thrown something in Dr. Bond's back window, I don't remember whether it was a bomb or what. But as my husband and I were walking, we were just about in front of the guesthouse here, on the sidewalk, a car with a bunch of kids—and they were white kids—slowed up and threw something out of the window as they pulled past us, and it turned out to be a cherry bomb that just missed my foot. And from that night we never walked the campus walk with our dog, we always walked on the lawn from then on. But I remember that very vividly because it was the same night that someone threw something in Dr. Bond's window.

Edgcomb: How are relations now between Lincoln and the town's surroundings? Quiet?

Woman 3: They're quiet, I think. I haven't heard of any outbursts or anything. I don't know if there's any more of the [inaudible].

Man: This fall a Lincoln professor was elected to the school board in Oxford and that was a step forward.

Second man: Second time.

Man: And many of the churches in Oxford have become integrated now. I think that's a step forward.

Murray?: I think it's more the typical town-gown, more than race now. More of a normal.

Edgcomb: Is there a traditional black population in this area?

Murray?: Not a large one.

Edgcomb: And how do they relate to the college or is that nothing—

Man: It's more a class difference.

Edgcomb: That's what I thought. So that remains. Their kids don't necessarily relate to the school or they don't come to functions here, if you have lectures?

Various voices: Some of them do. Some of them have come to college.

Edgcomb: So that the school is some kind of a presence of significance, is what I'm trying—Well, that's important, isn't it.

Mapp [?]: You know, something of interest that I remembered here as a student, a friend of mine came from Trinidad and he asked us what is the situation like here? He said he'd always heard of Mississippi and so on. And I only had to say to him was, you came right to Oxford. Between '46 and '49.

Edgcomb: What would you say to him today?

Man: It has changed considerably. I would say this.

Edgcomb: Well, yes, just not enough.

Other voices: There has been real progress.

Woman: I always think there's real progress in the spring. Late fall and winter, I think—
[Laughter].

In the spring, optimistic.

Mapp: Personally I think there has been progress so far as the relations between Oxford and Lincoln are concerned.

Murray?: My daughter went to school in Oxford and —

[Recording abruptly ends.]