

Interview with Don Bottum, Frankenmuth Michigan, August 2, 1994

RMM: Ok, we will start the interview Mr. Bottum, can I call you Don?

DB: Oh sure.

RMM: is that all right? Ok, I would like to start by asking an important question, what is the date of your birth?

DB: January 9, 1896.

RMM: so your a little older than Northern Michigan University?

DB: yeah

RMM: could you tell us a little about what your background, where you grew up, and your schooling and so on? and then we will get on to how you got to Northern.

DB: well I was born on a farm about 25 miles north of Lansing I grew up there. Went to country school I went to school nine years. And it must shocked ones that said "Oh you flunked a year." No I didn't flunk a year. I took the ninth grade in a country school, and they gave me credit for it when I went to town school. And I graduated from the high school in 1913, at St. John's. And I could of thought I'd like to go to college, maybe, but that wasn't the rule in those days. A farm kid was to be a farmer, and that was understood. And my folks thought that too, my mother especially thought that I shouldn't go to college. So I stayed home on the farm for a year and I worked. In the spring of 1914. I told my dad not to count on me in the fall. I was going to go to school. And that's when I started. In September the 28th 1914, my dad took me to town with a horse and Buggy, there were some cars but not very many. And he took me to town, and I took the Grand Trunk Train to Owaso and I changed to TNA, Toledo and Ann Arbor. And that took me to Mount Pleasant. I got there at about 2:00 in the afternoon, and at first I just nicely got off the train when a young fellow stepped up to me and he said "Are you going to college?" "Well," I said, "I hope so but I'm not sure, not yet." "Well" he said, "I'm down here to get students and if I can get enough to form a boarding club I'll get my board as a board club." He had been there a year already so of course he knew all of the ropes. So I told him "well, I'd like to get a room house first." "Well," he said "I can take you to the roading house get you a room at about a half a block from where I want you to eat." So we walked up to a 105 East Arch Street in Mt. Pleasant; we got a room, it cost me a dollar a week. It had a cot in it for a bed, it had some hooks under a shelf, to hang my clothes up and it had a two drawer for my clothes that I had, if I had any extras.

That was about 3:00 in the afternoon. And we got to this rooming house a dollar a week. And we went over to the boarding house where this boy hoped to start and I got my board set for \$2.75 a week. That covered 20 regular meals, and a paper sack for Sunday night. Then I went over to the college and got my first little shock. I saw this whole line of people. So I got in line too and when I got to Mr. Brooks, he says, "where are your cards? Where are your cards?" "Well I came to get permission to enroll as the catalog says." "Where does it say that?" So I said fortunately I had my finger in place where it said get permission from the chairmen of your commission before you enroll. He was a little easier on me then. He said that's alright, so I spent my first hour in the line and got now where. So I started over again. But he was a fine fellow. He was a little short but he was probably one of the best teachers I ever had, K.P. Brooks, Kennel P Brooks. So I paid the tuition and fees, \$7.50. And that was it, So that was a little different from now days. College was based on three 12 week terms and the six weeks summer school. The highest classification of that time was the two year life certificate course. And that's what I enrolled in. And my total expenses for that first 12 weeks was \$70.00. It seemed that my money was going to fast. So I was staying in rooming houses with about a dozen other fellows and about six rate I was

Saturday morning to work. And Mt. Pleasant has a lot of orchards and we used to go out and pick apples. Five cents a bushel. For a while we'd walk out in the bloody orchard, five cents a bushel. the best, this work I did in a short time we walked four miles out there we had to quit at noon because you couldn't pack apples when it rains. I had picked my 27 bushels at five cents that \$1.35. I had all my room for a week. But at the end of the term, our first term there was a dozen, I really don't remember, whether it was 16 or 12 poor guys, financially, that we found a lady, Mrs. (?Welcome?) who's husband had died she had a youngster about ten to twelve years old maybe, and she agreed to take us in . And one of our boys, Ford Nixon, became the stuart he did the ordering and once it got to the house we did the waiting tables, dishwashing, and that sort of thing. The way we got through \$2.43 a week for board. So that wasn't too bad. A dollar for my room 2.43 for my board. And we used to two faculty member dinner, Sunday dinner, to make a little extra show. And that's the way we started. My term cost me \$70.00.

My father was a farmer all of his life, a good farmer. But people were good people, but life was different and you weren't expected to go to college. In fact, my older brother, nearly four years older, was one of the first boys of my relatives to go to high school. And I was the second one. To go to high school, we lived seven miles and a quarter out of town and the first year when I went to town school, he and I drove a horse and buggy to school every morning this seven miles and a quarter without our and walked a quarter mile to get to school by 8:15. And that wasn't but we didn't know any different. So we went

anyway. And after, my older brother was a senior, when I was a sophomore so he graduated at the end of the first year and after that I stayed, all the time when I was there, I stayed with Mothers aunt, and my dad gave her \$2.50 a week. I walked down Monday mornings and walked home Friday afternoons after school, but that was the way it went. There were lot's of (couples??), there were a lot of us at this same horse barn we put up our horse's. There were probably a dozen or fifteen boys who were doing the same thing, that's the way you got to school.

RMM: How did you get to Northern? How did you get the job at Northern?

DB: Well, After I got my two years in at Central got my certificate and went to Lake City as principal of the high school in the fall of nineteen hundred and sixteen (1916). That you wouldn't be able to do these hundred days but that was the way it went. The second year I became the superintendent at Lake City, a little school over near Cadillac. At the end of the second year I got out of college "Uncle Sam" thought I was good solid material so I became a machine gunner of the 338th Machine Gunners Company B. When I was teaching school I thought I was helping kids some. When I got in the army the machine gunners was one of the most efficient outfits for killing people, but that was the way it was then. At Lake City the second year I was superintendent John Munson was in the State Department and the school was operating in what they call them then. They were (County Normals??) to supply the teachers of rural schools. The (County Normal??) operated in there were sixty-four counties I think, that they operated , (county normals??). Our Lake City school did that and John Munson had become the-- was in the State Department and it was his responsibility to count the county normal's. Well in 1923 on the 4th of July, John Munson became the president of the Northern County Normals. In the army I got a letter from the school board asking me if I expected to be discharged in time and if so would I like to come back to my job. Well that was a great thing, you couldn't talk to the boys back then at that time in the spring of 1919 the armistice was signed. Talk with them about them you think in five minutes they are already asking what are you going to do when you get out? Well I had my job, that was really something! So when I got home I went up to see him and we went back for two years to teach there; my wife. Then we both went to college to Central to get our degrees. That would be in 1921 and 23. After they, we didn't look very much for a job, because we were in graduate school and we thought if we didn't get a pretty good job, we wouldn't take one. Go back in the fall 23, to finish a masters. And we went up to her home which is in Vulcan, and Iron Mining town, up East of Iron Mountain we had been there for about a week or two, we were going to stay there and then we were going to my home back to Ann Arbor. We'd been there about a week or so John Munson who had become the President, July 1, called me up on the phone and

offered me a job, and that's how I got my job. I stayed there for 36 years.

RMM: Could you comment on the different Presidents and kind of sum up what you observed of them and their personalities?

DB: Well I don't know. That's a touchy problem with me. John Munson was a stick of a worker and he, things had changed when President Kay was there he was a fine English gentlemen. He came back for summer schools and the winter term for 7 years after I got up there. He was the English product and then he went to the University of Michigan and I'm not sure whether it was Cadillac he was super-intendent in I think it was Cadillac when they hired him as President to succeed Mr. Waldo who was the first President up there. And Mr. Waldo was a very fellow, nice looking chap, he graduated from Albion College and he came up there in the summer of 1899. That was the fall of 1919 we were in married in August 14, and we went there to teach in the city, oh, now I guess I'm back, after we visited my in vulcan, we went back to my home, but we didn't go to Ann Arbor. I didn't go to Ann Arbor till 1923 and Mr. munson was the President at Northern at that time. Mr. Waldo came up there and he covered the Peninsula the first classes were held in the city hall in Marquette. And there were thirty some students the first fall. I went there after 23 the Pierce building was under construction. But the rest of the buildings, the Peter White Science hall, the LongYear building, and what they called the administration building, later became known as Kay hall was all there was. The Pierce building had been sited, the frame work was up but they were not doing anything. They had used up all of the money. The was for one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars, and they used it up and it just sat there for, they worked on the I admit only every two years, they had to wait for the to give them a little more money. And they did that and we moved, the training school started in the attic of LongYear hall, and I do mean the attic, it was on the third floor. There were three rooms up there, under the eves every room had some of the eves in it and we moved into the Pierce building between the winter term and the spring term of 1925. There is no building left there. They tore Pierce down and Longyear and the administration building. That was a unique building, in a sense. It was built from the outside of the administration building was covered with sandstone, dated sandstone it was quarded out in South Marquette. When I first went there were about a dozen on the faculty. And Mr. Waldo was there for five years of it and then he went to Kalamazoo to start Western Michigan College. His wife, his second wife was a Vulcan girl, and my first wife was a Vulcan girl, so that's how I came to know Mr. Waldo. And he used to come up, after he went to Kalalmazoo, he often came, he and his wife would come up to Vulcan in the summer. My wife and I would go up to her place in the summer that's how I met Mr. Waldo. And he had one son and he

was in Ann Arbor when I was there so I got to know him. But the second Mrs. Waldo was a very stylish lady and she was a student at Northern for a year or two then when the first Mrs. Waldo died and he went down to Kalamazoo shortly after he got to Kalamazoo, she went to Kalamazoo too. So that's why they met.

RMM: What was her name? What were his two wives names, the first wife and the second wife?

DB: I just can't tell you. I can tell you

RMM: O.K. it's in there, we can check it. So you met President Waldo during the summer time. Could you comment on his personality?

DB: Well he was a very sharp, dignified individual. He was about six feet tall, not heavy, but not as heavy as his. He was a graduate of Albion College academically.

RMM: O.k. then how about, what do you remember of President Kay?

DB: he was a really nice fellow, educated in England too, but he came over here on his Masters degree at the University of Michigan.

RMM: now did he speak with an english accent?

DB: a little bit, not much, but he was a very man, and that was four or five years that Waldo was there then followed by Mr. Kay and he was a gentlemen on the very mild mannered, and I think the fact that he kind of took advantage of him. Things got a little bit on the slack side so they used to have, classes used to have days off during the week, you didn't teach every day, and so some of them would save up there off days, they would teach their off days, then take a week off for deer hunting. That was one of those tricks of the trade, they didn't do that with John Munston. When Munston came things changed and.

RMM: did, when you where hired, did Munston have you sign a contract?

DB: never had to sign a contract in the 36 years I was over there, never had a contract.

RMM: what did Munston say about, did you ask him if you had to sign a contract?

DB: No, I didn't ask him too many things, I listened to what he said pretty well. I was hired over the phone, no conversation except this telephone call, but he had known me pretty well because he used to come see the county normal when I was there.

And when I went back to Central to get my degree, he was superintendent of training school, so I was a little apprehensive because I had made a mistake, I got my degree in December 1922 and a few days before that he called me in to as we go to Zeland, a town a couple thousand over by Muskegon, he wanted to hire me out there, but I had already made up my mind then that the second semester I would go to Ann Arbor and well I was going to Chicago but I changed my mind and went to Ann Arbor and then when we went to, I thought I had disappointed him, and then he called, he knew me well enough so he offered me a job. And I got 2300 dollars too. I got \$1900 my last year as superintendent, I got \$675 my first year as principal of the Lake City High School, 675 dollars. Now they are hollering I think last year the average college teacher in the United States got some where in the middle thirties thousand dollars, and they are hollering about, I got 675 dollars for the bloody year, but it was a great life, I am telling you, I don't know how much this, this is a lot of personal stuff. The 675, when I was a superintendant that first year, Mr. Wells he wanted to see and he a place picked out for me, gee it turned out to be one of the best places I could ever live. My board and room must be about \$17.50 and my landladies sister came over every Monday morning, and took my suitcase with laundry I had done and done it for 25 cents a week, so that would make a dollar a month, so for \$18.50 a month I had my board/room and laundry, that was something.

RMM: what a minute this is over.

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RMM: o.k. you can continue

DB: the first year, my first year as superintendent after the war, I went down to the post office, oh they had what we called lots a potatoes along Lake City, and they called off school for a week to tell the kids, high school kids could do alot of work, and I went down to the post office you know mail, Arvold Dennis stopped me and he said "what are you doing this week" and I said "well nothing", that wasn't very sharp. Well he said "I will pick you up tomorrow morning at 7 o'clock and we will go out to those potato fields", I had already stuck my neck out so I said ok. The next morning he picked me up at 7 o'clock and we went out to the farm, I got my pitchfork, and except for about 30 minutes at noon when we got off for lunch, I was digging potatoes till 6 o'clock that night. Let me tell you I was pretty sore. We had about 6 weeks of school left to get all soften up. I got four dollars for that days work and but it was a good town for me to start in.

RMM: now let's see, what I would like to do is ask you a

question here, one particular question, what do you remember about a thing called the "Heart of Northern"?

DB: Yes that is where the pines were out there, I wasn't there when that was started, but it primarily used for physical education program in the spring of the year. Gladys Grey was the phyed. teacher and she used to have this program show up on the heart. It was discontinued before I left, but I think the heart didn't last after the drive that went around it, but I just don't remember what happened with it.

RMM: you think when they took the driveway out the heart went out?

DB: I think so, but I can't remember for sure, but it had no significance except for this physical ed. program in the spring. Maybe it had earlier before I was there, but not while I was there.

RMM: ok , do you, did you work with Ethyl Carey?

DB: Yes, very much so. I was answering your question how come gets there with a man like John Munston, well she was there, as a girl she was in high school in Harbor Springs and John Munston was her superintendent and that is how she got to Northern. They were not exactly the same temperaments, but Ethyl Carey was not a very attractive girl and so did John thought so too. But she had a bad automobile accident, and broke her jaw and all, and she wasn't the same pretty girl but that is how she came to know John Munston, she was in Harbor Spring High School when he was superintend there.

RMM: she was teaching in the high school there?

DB: NO, she was going there, high school student.

RMM: Oh, I see. So is there some romantic interest between Munston and her?

DB; Well there is quite a little romantic interest after they both got up there to Marquette, but nothing ever came of it. John Munston didn't have any romantic interest, it was proven. when he was, before he went to, no after he gone to Marquette. He became interested in a lady from Chicago, an impressional singer, and they had a dinner for him as a part of a program for getting ready for his wedding. But John Munston never got married, he never got caught.

RMM: So he had a lot of romantic interest, but never anything permanent?

DB: But it didn't pan out. Mr. Lee was superintendent of the

training school, and he brought in a teacher Selma from Iowa or Nebraska, somewhere out in the Mid-west and after Mrs. Lee, the first Mrs. Lee died, John Munston and Mr. Lee and Ethyl Carey and Selma were often a four-some. Mr. Lee married Selma but John Munston didn't marry.

RMM: now was Ethyl Carey was she hired to bring about the kind of change, to tighten things up among the students, just like Munston came to tighten up the faculty. Was Ethyl Carey brought in to kind of tighten things up?

DB: yup, she kindof instituted a more effective social program, she sometimes, it was a little difficult. Christmas for instance, before we called for the vacation, she would supervise a decorating a building and making it look nice. And sometimes some of the boys got a little on the foolish side. But the students to some extent were not the kinds of students you see these days, they were mostly farm kids and wood love boys and Ethyl Carey was more of a social elite lady, things had to be just pretty much so. But she was a nice person.

RMM: What were some of the rules and regulations that she operated around?

DB: Well, they had for the girls in the rooming houses, because there were no dormitories. She had regulations to what they could do or what they couldn't do, and, but the things that kindof the students a little bit was that they weren't used to that sort of thing. It wasn't true under Mr. Kind and it took a little while for them to get accustom to that. At that time too, after I got there alcohol was a problem on campus for a bit and there were sororities and fraternities. They didn't well the fraternities finally got a house on college avenue just a block from the hospital known as the Tri Mu house and the Theta's had one on the east Arch, old and beautiful home. There were some wealthy people in there.

RMM: the Coffman's house?

DB: NO, they took down the pieces.

RMM: oh the Longyear's.

DB: yes, they took it down and moved it from New York. That was a beautiful place, and the Theta house there they didn't take any membership so that didn't help too much, because the students still had to have the rooming houses, boarding houses.

RMM: Do you remember some of the specific rules that governed the students? You know they talked about you couldn't smoke on campus and Ethyl Carey didn't want the girls to wear red.



DB: Oh that's right, that was one of the things she didn't like, the lights at Christmas were in red.

RMM: so anything in red she didn't like?

DB: she didn't like, well

RMM: now did she have the owner's of the boarding houses enforce the 10 o'clock

DB: Oh yes, she told them what to do.

RMM: now did the, do you remember some of the other faculty members, Grace Spaulding?

DB: Grace Spaulding, very well, a very fine lady of first class. Yeah Grace Spaulding and Ethyl Carey lived together quite a few years the later part of the , but Grace Spaulding had a camp out in middle island point, she was an excellent, good teacher, hard.

RMM: and do you remember Lou Allen Chase?

DB: Oh yes, Oh yes, I'll tell you one thing about Mr. Chase, when we lived, the first two years after I got to Marquette we lived in the attic, the third story of a house that no longer stands. The Methodis Parking Lot cooked that house, and opened up a street and you could go to the church parking lot there and Chase lived on East Hewitt street after we lived in this attic house, then we moved to 131 West Prospect street we lived there 3 years, then we built a house, had a house built for us at 605 West College Avenue. And the Chase's had built a house on the very next street back of us so Mr. Chase, so I had a garden between our house and Chase's house and Mr. Chase used to say I keep track of you, and he could see hardly anything. But he was a musician, he was a pianist as well as a history man. He was a very sort of fellow. Mrs. Chase drove the car for them, Mr. Chase was a good teacher but he had his difficulties because he was blind. And the darn students sometime, he asked one pair of , he asked a question and if the one he asked didn't know maybe the other fellow knew and they would answer it, and Mr. Chase wouldn't know the difference. But he was chairman of the course program, Mr. Chase and the first winter term I was there, Mr. Chase wasn't too well so he took the winter term off and I inherited the course chairmanship. That didn't mean anything because the schedule, what I had to do was to make sure the piano was tuned and make sure that someone met the artist that was coming and see that the place was ready and that sort of thing, but I didn't with that. He was born, Mr. Chase was born in Elsey, Michigan, that's a small town mostly North of Lansing about maybe 30 miles from Lansing and he

was a music teacher, he went around the country to give piano lessons to kids. He was a pretty sharp fellow.

RMM: What did the students think of him?

DB: They thought he was kindof tough. And he was on reading. The interesting thing is being blind you wouldn't expect him too much, but he had student readers, he had readers quit some days, some hours almost everyday, that's how he kept up reading. He came down there from Houghton, he taught in Houghton High School and he came down from Houghton and Mr. Wilinkon was principal of Houghton High School, he came down to be the first principal at the training school.

RMM: Did this fellow Wilinkin bring Chase or did Chase come on his own?

DB: no they were individuals, and the Lansing after come time, after he retired, and he died in Lansing and Mrs. Chase did too. He went to Lansing Central High School as a boy .

RMM: OK were there, who was the president then, did Pierc follow Munston?

DB: That's right, Mr. Pierce.

RMM: and what was he as president? What was he like?

DB: well he was a kindly gentlemen, in contrast to Mr. Munston, Mr. Munston was kindof harsh sometimes, but Mr. Pierce is a very kindly gentlemen. I had him as my Calculus teacher at Central when I went back for my degree and he was a very popular public speaker, he was often used as a public speaker. And in the spring term when they had an awful lot of commencement and that sort of thing and my last spring term there, I had the choice of teaching a class or grading papers. Well to teach a class meant I had to be right on the ball everytime. So I choose to take, I gave up \$30 to grade paper instead of teaching class. And he would sometimes give the tests before he left to go somewhere, so sometimes he would give me the tests and I would give the tests and grade the papers. So I got \$10 a week for grading papers, so I got \$120. My wife was smarter she taught for Amy was a woman lady teacher in History and she taught a class for Amy we had more money at the end of that term than "Hi Bob"

RMM: So you knew Pierce before he came here?

DB: I knew him very well, he was Mount Pleasant, head of the Math Department for quite some time and he had a kindof

interesting hobbies he used to get a old houses and fixing it up and selling it, he made quite a bit of money. Then he ran for public office, public instruction, no I guess not I guess I am off my

RMM: And then the Pierce was followed by Tate?

DB: Yup, Dr. Tate, he came from , he was a superintendent of the training school there, they built a new training school his last year there and he came to Northern then after Mr. Pierce died, they got him, it was not long after he came that they started Lee and Carey Halls.

RMM: and what kind of a personality did Tate have?

DB: Well he was a very modest sort of a fellow, he was no but he , I was a sort of a jack of all traits, the master of none. Dr. Tate sort of kept eyes on that seems Mr. Lee died in December, I was principal of training school at that time, Mr. Lee died in December then I took over many of details that Mr. Lee had. And um

RMM: Now what was your job like, you were then Dean of Men?

DB: Well you had social program, I was chairman of a social committee, and I had one nasty job that was chairman of the education committee, you would think that all of them would be that but, at the end of the term I was chairman of the committee that checked all the grades of students whose graded honor points was less than one. If they didn't have a one graduate point then we put them on probation, sometimes gave them a term or two off, but that was a job I had. I was chairman of the health committee, we had 2 doctors, one doctor was to the girls and one was to the men and I had I was on the athletic committee for about 25 years.

RMM: Now did you have with your participation with athletics did you have some kind of a baseball bat that you used or had or something?

DB: no, well I had a bat when I was at Central but gee I don't know what became of it but I used it for baseball. Mr. Lee , he made a special kind of paddle, you take two flat boards about 30 inches long and you fasten them together at one end with another piece then these extensive ends here about two inches or so, if you spanked the kids with it the boards would clap, really had one of those in his office, but I never had.

RMM: did he use it on the students?

DB: it was mostly for the little kids

RMM: oh the training school

DB: yeah the training, yeah it's terrible it hurt them but that was what he was doing.

RMM: Now was the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women were they all in charge of the kids in the training school?

DB: No, he was in charge of the training school, but Mr. had nothing to do with the training school.

RMM: as principal, Lee is the principal of training school is in charge of the

DB: he was the superintendant, they called me the principal, I made the schedules for the upper six grades, and that was my responsibility for 17 years I guess. Mrs. Carey didn't have any relationship with the training school, just Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee was Iowa, to be superintendant of the training school. And he also had the placement work, I told you was a jack of all traits and master of , the first year I went there I was a great teacher, I was a great teacher for twelve weeks. In the winter term, Mr. Chase wasn't well so he went to Florida and I became the chairmen of the Course Committee. And in the winter term, I taught two college chemistry classes. In the spring, I went back to school full time in the middle of the spring term, the first year I became the principle for the fall. Mr. Willington was the principle when I first went there, a chap. The third year I was there Mr. Lee went to Columbia University to finish his masters degree, and I took care of the training school. I had the whole bloody thing and I taught two classes. That was a stinker. When they opened the dormitory, late in kary hall I was teaching part time and Mr. Lee came in one day and he said, "how would like to run the dormitory?" I knew nothing much about dormitories but I said "well O.K. I'll be the," so I was the goat. I was in charge of the darn thing for all the first year I was alone with one little girl in the office. I shoveled the bloody walks, in the winter time, but that was a year of it.

RMM: Then what did they do, did they get a full-time staff?

DB: No, came the spring I had decided, that I wouldn't be doing that anymore. Because I used to go over there at 7:00 in the morning to be sure that breakfast was ready and that sort of thing, and then I'd come home at 10:00 at night. Many times my wife would come over to eat with me at night. That was a heck of a job. So I was going to go, I had an offer, I was going to go to Negaunnee, a superintendant for \$180 more than I was getting at Northern. But I didn't want to go; we had a home in Marquette. But when Dr heard that he came in to see me so I became the manager of the dormitory.