

Philip Conn – George T. Young Interview
Our Appalachia, 1982

Conn: Welcome to *Our Appalachian* my name is Phil Conn, I'm your host for this series. Today we're going to discuss the beginnings of educational opportunity at the college level, indeed training for teachers in Eastern Kentucky, because we're going to deal with the early days of what is now Morehead State University. Of course, before we get to the point where it was Morehead State University we have to talk about other points in time when the institution had different names. We have with us today George T. Young who is professor emeritus of government and public affairs with Morehead State University. And the reason Professor Young is well qualified for this discussion today is because he has been here with Morehead State for 50 years as of this spring. I think you told me as of April.

Young: Thursday morning, April 7th, 1932.

Conn: 1932.

Young: My first day of entry here.

Conn: I see, so at that time Morehead State, and by that I mean the institution as a state facility, was only 10 years old. And actually, I understand the legislature in 1922 decided that this should be the site of a state institution for the training of teachers.

Young: When they passed the Organic Act that could create one year later an active school to start - to be called Morehead State Normal.

Conn: Now I should tell the folks that you are a native of Bath County, so if you were born in this general area. You went off to school at Centre College and eventually got your master's degree at Columbia University. You had to go all the way to New York City, but not too long after that you were well entrenched here in Morehead, Kentucky as a part of the Morehead State family.

Young: I'm trying to still be entrenched.

Conn: Well, what I understand you will be entrenched and a very revered professor here and a man of the community.

Young: But I thank you. I thank you Vice President.

Conn: Let's back up and talk about the origins of Morehead State as a facility for training teachers. Now before the state got involved in 1922, there was already an institution here and I understand that was Morehead Normal School. What was Morehead Normal School and how did it originate?

Young: Morehead Normal School originated with the help of private hands in the fall of 1887, and it was nurtured by Mrs. Phoebe Button, whose name is on the inside the normal building down here for ladies where married people live today. You know, Phoebe Button came up on this area and went into a home that stood on the side of where Bob Bishop's mother lived, which is now the site of the Doran Student House [ADUC Building] and started the school with her son Frank C. Button, who would later be the first Principal of the Normal School. It operated with the help from CWBM, Christian Women's Board of Missions based in St. Louis, which I think still operates as a missionary group, and with the funds from the CWBM helped by also Mr. Hargis from Louisville and Mr. Withers from Lexington with land and

money. By the beginning of this school and it was so good that people were brave enough to come up here and start this school. Morehead had just come out of the throes of a small civil war, you know, when we had a big feud - that's true and people here need help. The school came near dying in its infancy, but it held on.

Conn: So, it was basically a missionary effort?

Young: It was a missionary effort by the wing of the Christian Church.

Conn: What led to the designation of Morehead State Normal School, in other words what efforts were underway in the State House to locate a state facility here?

Young: Governor Edwin P. Marrow, before his term as governor was out in 1922, had appointed a survey commissioned to survey the State to see if we needed other Normal Schools than Western and Eastern.

Conn: They were already established?

Young: They were already established as Normal Schools, but they would become universities like we did in 1966. And through that survey there was a need for an additional Normal Schools and the need was to put it to put one in the Eastern end of the state and one in the Western end of the State. So, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in our General Assembly in 1922, Jim Thompson - his name is on Thompson Hall, the first men's hall to be built here which is now a girls dorm - selected a group of people to locate the school that the survey had been formed and proved that we needed one or two more of these training schools for the training of teachers. And several prominent men were appointed by the Speaker of the House, his widow just died in Paris not long ago, Matilda James Thompson she was wife of Jim Thompson. And Jim Thompson the Speaker of the house in '22, appointed several people to locate the school. I don't think Judge Young was on that committee, but he was behind the scenes to see that it was located where it is this afternoon.

Conn: This is State Senator Allie?

Young: That's right. State Senator Allie Whittington Young.

Conn: He's related to you as I understand?

Young: Yes, he is. My father looked very much like him. I have known him since boyhood. The committee was composed of people like Judge Ed C. O'Rear, whose second wife still lives in Versailles. He was a very fine old fellow; he was on the committee. Judge O'Rear of Versailles, he had formerly been Chief Judge of the old Court of Appeals. And on the committee stood Judge Earl Senff of Montgomery County and Sherman Goodpasture, whose son is the president of the Farmers Bank in Owensville, was on that committee. Several others were, but Judge Young came in to pull strings to get it located where he was living at the time that this commission was set up to make a site for this school.

Conn: Now he was a native of Fleming County?

Young: He was a native of Fleming County, I think he was born in or near Elizaville which is a small place near Flemingsburg. He had moved though from there to Flat Creek in Bath County and then practiced law for a while before moving up here in Mount Sterling. That's where he'd learn to know Judge O'Rear, who was born in Camargo, and Judge Senff who was the Montgomery County judge. So, he was living

here at the time, Judge Young, and was able with the help primarily of Sherman Goodpasture who was on the committee to locate the school - to get the school where it is this afternoon.

Conn: And there was a great deal of competition among the towns and counties...

Young: And in fact, just like when the burley loose-leaf markets were placed here in Rowan were also sought by people in other towns that had loose leaf tobacco warehouses and it was right to have one here for Morehead, see.

Conn: But Senator Young was a very influential legislator...

Young: He certainly was. Almost the sole person to locate the school here through the strategy that he used. And he could also be called an early founder but not of course like Mrs. Phoebe Button and her son, Mr. Withers or Mr. Hargis.

Conn: I guess one of the major arguments was that there was already a Morehead Normal School with a facility to train teachers.

Young: ... that had been operating privately through a wing of the Christian Church in 1887.

Conn: Now, did the State purchase the facilities of Morehead Normal School or was it given...

Young: It was a gradual process and it's still going on you know. It was purchased from the Withers and the Hargis heirs, buildings as well as the grounds. It's been added to though down through the years and many of the buildings that were purchased that had been used by the old private normal were used for years even after I came here.

Conn: Now, the first name for Morehead State as a state institution was Morehead State Normal School then adding the name "State" to Morehead Normal School.

Young: September the 23rd, 1923 in the closing days of the William Jason Fields administration that's when the first classes opened for instruction. The buildings, there weren't no buildings on the campus that are here now. At that time, they used buildings that had been used by the old Normal School and it was called the Morehead State Normal School.

Conn: Now President Button was his title president from the time it became a state facility?

Young: He had been a principal at one time of the old private normal and became the first president of the school when it became a State school.

Conn: So actually, the administration did not change I don't guess the faculty changed significantly in the beginning, did it?

Young: Many were even here when I first came, they've been on the old Morehead private normal faculty, like Miss Inez Faith Humphrey and many others. It can be seen in our Museum of Morehead History on the third floor of the Doran Student House [ADUC].

Conn: What was the nature of study for schoolteachers at that time during the normal school era? It was not a four-year curriculum that resulted in a baccalaureate degree, was it?

Young: Not in the very beginning, no sir. They added a year as the years went by after the opening, see. I think the first class graduated with a four-year degree in 1927. They entered in '23, it was a freshman class, and they ended the sophomore year I guess in '24.

Conn: And about that time, it became Morehead State Normal School and Teachers College, didn't it?

Young: Yes sir, sometime in the '20s, the middle '20s in about 1925, I believe. It became known as the Morehead State Normal and Teachers College. Yes sir.

Conn: And at the time you came then in '32, I think the name had already been changed to Morehead State Teachers College and dropping the Normal School designation.

Young: Yes, the Normal School was dropped when Breckenridge, which is the offspring of the Normal School, was open for teaching in it you know back in 1930.

Conn: Okay, so the University Breckenridge facility, in other words instruction one through twelve, is really the main thing that was left of the old Normal School.

Young: You are exactly right and that's the reason why I hate, in a way, for history to see the school change things out. Yes, for I probably taught there longer than any person has in its history for 35 years.

Conn: Now, at an early point in time where there a lot of students here who were taking elementary and secondary subjects as well as people who were trying to get more advanced training?

Young: We had quite a number of people who were students in Breckenridge. We had to have in order to make the school a lab school for the prospective teachers who did their student teaching.

Conn: Were there a lot of people in teacher training though who were actively involved in the training school program - a lot of student teachers at that time at Breck?

Young: Gradually it grew. We had to build a program up but all the prospective teachers that had lab training for years after Breckenridge was opened had their lab practices just with us in Breckenridge.

Conn: And you told me there were times when you'd have twelve to fifteen student teachers assigned to you at a given point.

Young: Mainly in the summertime, when we would have the two five-week programs and sometimes then the regular semesters. I would have as many as eight and nine.

Conn: Was Morehead State Normal School and Morehead State Normal School and Teachers College - was it pretty much a place where folks came in and lived here and took room and board here?

Young: Yes, indeed people were living here more than they do today.

Conn: Percentage wise it's more of a suitcase campus now than it was then.

Young: Well, I hate to say that but it's true that it is. Yes, there so many of my Breck pupils lived in girls' and boys' dorms on the college.

Conn: And these were people in elementary and secondary grades?

Young: Some if they were old enough and to be permitted to live with the here. Yes, they just slept and ate here for the full week.

Conn: Now, at that point were individuals coming in from outlying counties to Breck?

Young: You bet, we had quite a number of Breck students who came in from Carter and lived with us and from Elliot, from Fleming, and from Bath. Yes sir.

Conn: At that time was there a great deal of camaraderie between faculty and students?

Young: Oh yes, just the other day a student asked me how to get to a certain person and I couldn't tell him this and I thought back how simple was in the days when I first came. We all knew each other, the faculty. We all knew each other within the faculty and within the student body. And there was an intermixing of faculty with students, yes.

Conn: What about social activities? Were there quite a few social activities?

Young: Social activities were limited. The school, you see, had been founded as a church school, so we'd have good social activities but not as much of it as we have today. So much of the social activity, part of the student life here, was done on the college level with county clubs where they organized if there were quite a number of counties furnishing pupils to our college. And have - oh they'd go to Rodburn Holler, or they Broke Leg Falls near West Liberty, or they would have nice meetings on the campus. Right, but there wasn't too much mixing when you had with those county clubs, or clubs with other clubs. It was just this kind of fraternity thing.

Conn: By county clubs you mean these students from a specific county gathered together.

Young: That's right. Lawrence County had such a nice Club really and Rowan did too. They were formed by people who had been coming in from Rowan, Lawrence, or other counties, you see, but they would have social activities.

Conn: But do you think so far, lifestyle and even ethical attitudes there was a lot of carryover from the church school days into the State school?

Young: Yes, the program was good, but our program today is just as good but in a different situation.

Conn: Let me ask you about some of the early presidents and the contributions they made. Of course, what you might call the original president certainly, so far as the State facility goes, was President Button what were some of his interests in?

Young: Button was a rail splitter, he certainly was. I never talked to Button, but he was great in that he was the first person to do things that are still the custom today, in some ways you see. In some cases, he was the first.

Conn: Was he greatly concerned about serving the region and having strong ties?

Young: Yes, he was concerned with the inner heart of the student too. Not only socially but academically.

Conn: So, he was concerned about the total student?

Young: I can see him now, puttering around in a building where I still have an office, now called Rader [Hall] then the called the Ad Building, with a celluloid collar and puttering around trying to do what he could as a retired president.

Conn: Now who was the second president and when did he come?

Young: He was in the harness when I first came. He came during a teaching break, Dr. John Howard Payne. He formerly taught and he had formerly been the principal I believe of the Maysville City School or the Mason County School System. Then previous to that, probably, had been in Richmond to be the head of the lab school at Eastern. He came from one of those schools directly. I forgot which one was first. He had a very dignified bearing, he resembled Harding in in his looks.

Conn: He was from East Kentucky though.

Young: Dr. Payne had relatives in Bourbon County, but I think he might have been born somewhere around Covington. But he was a native Kentuckian but not born right in this very area but had administrative jobs near here in Madison County and in Mason County prior to coming.

Conn: You've indicated to me though that from the beginning, at least in 1922, it was expected that faculty members either have a master's degree or be working on...

Young: That's true, I could not have continued here as I came only with an AD from Centre unless I had gone to school six weeks after starting teaching at Breck.

Conn: To work on your master's degree?

Young: Yes.

Conn: So, as a result though, a lot of the teachers originally came from outside of this area?

Young: So many did not only serve on the Breck faculty but also on the college faculty. I can see them now; I know their names and a great number had PhDs. I recall them, Dr. Black who is now a retired former physics teacher here later went to Eastern and is still living in retirement over in Richmond. He was a great PhD and the husband of, oh I forget his name, Mrs. Graves had a very fine PhD husband he taught chemistry for years here. I say he died early but she is still alive.

Conn: After President Payne who came to the presidency and when was that?

Young: Well, after President Payne's term was over, and probably, he was a great orator he was almost as good as Dr. Doran. He could make a nice appearance especially with his speech called "Armageddon." Next would come Mr. Harvey A. Babb, he was our president of this school still to be called Morehead State Teachers College from '35 until 1940. He was a former superintendent of the Mt. Sterling City School System when he came in '35. He had some real good points, he brought people west of the Licking River for the first time in big numbers. He'd come from Montgomery County as an administrator over there in the Mt. Sterling City School System just before coming here. And he wouldn't swallow the bait and was directed to bring Bath people here too even though they came in small numbers before Dr. Babb came.

Conn: Now after World War II, the name of the school changed just to Morehead State College is that correct?

Young: That's right that about '48 about the time that Dr. Baird was coming here as the fella who replaced President Vaughn who had been the president after Dr. Babb - came Dr. William Jesse Baird.

Conn: And he came from which area, you say he came from Barry College...

Young: Dr. Baird had been the head of the Barry School which I believe as you said was in Rome, Georgia. That's right, yes sir, he came directly, I think, from there but formerly had been the head of the Berea Academy prior to going to Barry before coming here. And he had such a fine wife, she was educated in the East - Mrs. Baird. She has a great nephew who today is on the Board of Regents from Pike County. He was a kind of a Centre College type. He loved color, he put pastel shades in the halls of Breck and in the halls of the buildings which existed here. He had a veneer on him, you know that through the name that's on the Music Building. He loved music. I can see him now; he would invite us in groups right to his home in the state reception room to read poetry to us. We'd get in a circle around him sitting on the floor and he would read [Kipsams] from [J. C. Cottonaugh]. Oh, he loved the classics, and he loved flowers he would get Mr. Haggen, whose daughter lived over here and is married to Tony Phillips, to plant bulbs in the islands that were in the boulevard, but when the cars came we had to tear up the boulevard and the tulips went with it.

Conn: He also had emphasized the academic quality of this institution...

Young: Of course, he did.

Conn: Do you feel that during President Baird's administration that a great deal was accomplished in academic quality?

Young: I think there still is and I feel his imprint.

Conn: And that was a time when the University came to be the University, that the college began to diversify and to look for other student groups other than teachers is that correct?

Young: Yes, just the beginning of it. Yes, and then Dr. Spain who took the office from Dr. Baird. Dr. Baird was the only person to die while in the harness. In Deaconess Hospital in Cincinnati in 1951. Then came Charles Spain a native Tennessean who's had previously been the head of the School of Education at UK. He came and he was the first president that I can remember whoever - who would bring in national meetings or regional meetings to this campus of an educational flavor. That's right he was...

Conn: President Spain began to look for groups to have meetings throughout...

Young: So, he would be more than putting a half a million dollars underground - I said with the turning up of the pavements for a new steam pipe, he did do that but that wasn't the greatest thing he did. He brought national recognition to campus by offering our campus for national meetings and it was done well too and there were good speakers here.

Conn: Take us from President Spain on to our most recent presidents and then we'll go back to the early days for another minute.

Young: All right sir. Do we go into Dr. Doran's administration?

Conn: Yes, that was after President Spain.

Young: President Dr. Doren came here in real early 1954 and by November of '54 he was inaugurated as our seventh president. I think he'd previously taught at the University of Georgia in Athens. Oh, in the spring of '54 but he came here that following summer and then started in the fall. He's a great man. Oh my, I check on him every once in a while through Mr. Burgess. He's now living in Sarasota owning a condominium down there, but he also rents in Lexington a home where he stays with his wife but not as many months as in Florida.

Conn: The University became a university during his administration in '66 and also experienced tremendous growth as I understand.

Young: You bet, basically tremendous physical growth but not too much at the expensive of academic improvement but he did have an eye on expansion physically.

Conn: Then of course, our current President Morris Norfleet became president in '70...

Young: He became a president in January of 1977. Doren had an office here for a while after he retired and then Doctor Norfleet was inaugurated the following late September of '77. I want to say right now that I want to thank him for the things that he has done for me since he has been inaugurated.

Conn: Well, let's go back to the early days for a few minutes and let me ask do you feel that Morehead State can attribute its growth to being responsive to the region's needs and changing? Or do you think that its growth is more in keeping with just the obvious needs in the area?

Young: It's always been a school that just reached out, even when it was a church school. It reached out with the Bible preachers there; you know the Bible has the verses of reaching out and this school was based on biblical principles. But the quest for community has grown, oh my, it has grown. We now have just so many different bureaus and sections that quest for community, where we go to them. They still come to us, but we go to them with the programs. It's an interchanging thing. It is the campus and then our campus is a community.

Conn: The origins of the school of course were as a teacher's training institution. What was one of the major reasons for that? Why did people want to go to school to learn to teach?

Young: Well, they had requirements even though they were not hard to realize - to teach you had to qualify to teach back in those days. You had to pass an examination to be given by your county superintendent or in Frankfort and they have to qualify by going to school.

Conn: But of course, in areas like business or agriculture or domestic arts at that time you didn't consider college training as necessary as we have come to.

Young: Oh no.

Conn: So the diversification of the university has a lot to do with the change in the attitudes of Eastern Kentuckians as to...

Young: The trends that have brought our new fields, we have kept pace with them by having a curriculum that would satisfy people.

Conn: Well, that has to have a great deal to do with our strength and our vitality. I want to thank you Professor Young you've been a most interesting guest. We feel that the history of Morehead State

University is very closely in time with the history and the culture of the Appalachian region. And we have a lot of other things we can discuss but right now I have to tell our viewers that we are concluding this segment of *Our Appalachia* and we want to thank Professor Young and ask you to join us again.

Young: So, thank you I thank you sir, Vice President Conn, and for your tremendous growth in research that you're the head of here on campus.

Conn: Thank you very much.