

7-2-1979

Latta, Ph.D., John S.

University of Nebraska Medical Center

Tell us how you used this information in this [short survey](#).

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unmc.edu/oral_hist



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

University of Nebraska Medical Center, "Latta, Ph.D., John S." (1979). *Oral Histories*. 4.
https://digitalcommons.unmc.edu/oral_hist/4

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at DigitalCommons@UNMC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNMC. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@unmc.edu.



SUBJECT: JOHN STEPHENS LATTA, PH.D.
DATE: JULY 2, 1979
INTERVIEWER: BERNICE M. HETZNER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

HETZNER: This is an interview with John S. Latta, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Anatomy, University of Nebraska College of Medicine. The date is July 2, 1979. I am Bernice M. Hetzner, Emeritus Professor of Library Science.

Dr. Latta, would you mind telling me the story of how your happened to come to Nebraska?

LATTA: I was at a meeting at the American Association of Anatomists in Philadelphia in 1921, I think it was, and I happened to see an exhibit put on by a Professor C.W.M. Poynter from Omaha and I was very, very interested in the exhibit and Dr. Poynter because he was quite a personality, and I mentioned this when I got back home to Ithica to a fellow professor, Dr. Papez, and he happened to mention that he had seen the same exhibit, and I said, "Well, I must be looking around for a place to go, because it will be a long time before I can advance much here." He said, "Well, why didn't you let me know when we were there because Dr. Poynter told me that he was looking for a man; I will write to him tonight." And he apparently did write him that night and within a very few days I got a letter from Dr. Poynter telling me about the position and what they could offer me in the way of compensation and asked if I was interested, and if I were, would I give my qualifications, which I promptly did and sent it to him and within a few more days I got a letter back from Dr. Poynter saying that he was recommending me for the position of Assistant Professor of Anatomy. A few more days after that I got a letter from Dr. Irving S. Cutter, who said that I had been appointed Assistant Professor of Anatomy. It's interesting to note that between you and me that the person who wrote the letter was my future wife. (laughter) I thought that was kind of interesting. So that is how I came to Omaha, because my chief, Dr. Kingsbury, from Ithica, said that was a very good offer and incidently, he had another one of his students who had been made Assistant Professor of Anatomy out at the University of Colorado; this was a couple of years before. So, that kind of interests me, too. So, that's how I came to Omaha.

- HETZNER: That's great. When you arrived in Omaha and the campus, what was the campus like at that time, in 1921?
- LATTA: They had three buildings. There was the first unit of the hospital, the North Laboratory building, and the South Laboratory building. There was a building behind the one unit of the hospital which was called a nurses home, which was a stucco building which later burned down. So they had quite a time. There was another building being erected though, and that was Conkling Hall, that was in the process of being erected. With the interim, there was quite a bit of difficulty housing the nurses.
- HETZNER: Well, that interests me because I had always thought that the nurses home, the dormitory that burned, was behind the hospital, but recently someone tried to persuade me that it was down where the service building is now.
- LATTA: Well, that's not quite right.
- HETZNER: Did they have two places?
- LATTA: Well, they may have temporarily had some place around there, I don't recall, but when I came here that was a stucco building behind the first general hospital and when it burned down they cleaned it all out and put in a tennis court back behind it and I used that quite a bit.
- HETZNER: You're a tennis player?
- LATTA: Oh, yes, yes. I enjoyed tennis for a long while until Dr. Mac Quiddy told me that I better stop because I was breathing too hard when I ran to the net. But I had a real good time. There were two or three graduate students around that I played tennis with after I got through work about five o'clock or a little later.
- HETZNER: This was before you were married?
- LATTA: Yes, and in the basement of the North building they had showers, too, so we used to have all the medical students take showers after they had been in the gross laboratory. Whether they do that now, I have some doubts. (laughter)
- HETZNER: Well, I'm happy to have this cleared up about the nurses' dormitory because the pictures I have show a building behind the hospital. The pictures that the College of Nursing now has in the historical review appears to be maybe surplus army barracks. Do you remember any building on campus that looked like that?

LATTA: The only other building on campus that I recall was a building that housed the carpenter shop and the electrician's shop.

HETZNER: Where was that?

LATTA: That was straight west of the North Building and underneath that was a garage housing the dean's car. (laughter)

HETZNER: Let me ask you this: did the college furnish the dean's car or did he furnish his own?

LATTA: Well, I'm sure he furnished his own, but they furnished the quarters.

HETZNER: I think so.

LATTA: But, they had one carpenter and one electrician. That was the work force aside from the janitor force, of course.

HETZNER: There was only one unit of the hospital?

LATTA: That's right.

HETZNER: How many students did they have in the freshman class?

LATTA: Ninety six students.

HETZNER: Were they all Nebraskans or did they come from...?

LATTA: Oh no. Most of them were, practically all of them were. I don't remember how many outsiders there were, but there were some.

HETZNER: How many women?

LATTA: I don't know there were any women in the first class, but the second class there were one or two women. But, that was an unusual event to have women in the class, but Dr. Poynter and Dr. Cutter both said that women had just as good a right to study medicine as any one else. They just didn't want to; that's apparently true. But, there was no objection to having them. Of course, I have to admit that the women sometimes took a rough going from the fellow students because they would tell bawdy stories and sometimes the women would get shocked by it. (laughter) But, otherwise, they were acceptable always through all my career and some of them were very brilliant, too.

HETZNER: Their record was as good as the fellows?

- LATTA: Oh yes. In fact one year, I can't remember the year, but one year there were two girls who were number one and two in the class. They didn't actually practice medicine the way that other people would because one went into pediatric research in Denver, and the other one went to work at Smith College; she was a graduate of Smith. You probably knew her, Booth, Marion Frances Booth was her name.
- HETZNER: I remember the name.
- LATTA: And she is the head of student health service, or something of the kind at Smith for many years and she is now passed away.
- HETZNER: At one time you had a school for morticians in the Anatomy Department, didn't you?
- LATTA: Not in my time. We taught them ourselves. During my career we would hire the morticians from town who had learned their embalming business elsewhere and we had a pretty tough time with some of them because they weren't very reliable alot. During my time as chairman of the department I had a man from in town here who would come any time and embalm the bodies and we paid him a certain salary. But, he was available and he was pretty adequate. But some of the boys that we had earlier were very unreliable and one of them had actually developed cerebral lues and he almost went crazy before we finally had to get rid of him. He was a very good embalmer, a very good man at his work, but he was unpredictable otherwise. But, that's as far as he went. We just explained to them what we wanted done and what embalming fluids were. That was up to the State Anatomical Board to decide that business.
- The school paid a certain amount depending on what our expenses were and Creighton paid the rest of it. They charged the Department of Dentistry, the College of Dentistry for the bodies we shipped to them, according to what the body's cost was in embalming. And most of the bodies which were received were unclaimed dead, in the early days. Nowadays there are a good many people that will their bodies to anatomy for research or for medical instruction.
- HETZNER: This is still under the State Anatomical Board guidelines?
- LATTA: As far as I know, they're still under the State Anatomical Board, yes. That was a state law, that was established by state law and it worked well during my time. We were almost overcome by bodies during some of the days during the

depression years. We had a transient shelter downtown and alot of people that came to that transient shelter died there and we had about twice as many bodies as we needed some of the time for instruction purposes. But we went through a lot of experiences that I wouldn't want put on record.

HETZNER: You mean, during the thirties depression years?

LATTA: Well, I'm thinking of some of the troubles with these embalmers we hired. I shouldn't put it down on the tape.

HETZNER: The department or division or what you might want to call the medical illustration was part of the Anatomy Department for you, wasn't it?

LATTA: Well, we had an anatomical illustrator and that was Miss Reynolds and after some years working for Dr. Poynter or for me, after he left to become the dean, she worked for me. Dr. Lowell Dunn conceived the idea that he could use part of her time and he would help pay for it, her salary. And that's when she started to split off as a medical illustrator. As an illustrator in the department she did alot of outside work for the doctors, the volunteer staff that were on campus. We had a very nice relationship for many years. When she didn't have anything to do in anatomy illustration, photographic or drawing, then she would work for these other people. That was entirely voluntary; it was up to them to pay her if they wanted to. Some of them paid her, some of they didn't. She was very happy doing it apparently.

HETZNER: Well, I remember she designed some drawings for the library, the bookplates.

LATTA: Sure, sure. She was an all-around person, and very good at photo micrography too. We did alot of work on various things. She was the illustrator for many publications and she worked for Dr. Keegan quite a bit after he left the deanship.

HETZNER: Tell me a little bit more about Dr. Poynter.

LATTA: Dr. Poynter was one of the most interesting men I ever knew. He was very open and frank about everything. His father had been a populist governor of Nebraska and he learned alot of techniques from him (laughter), I think which put him in good stead. He was very well known in

anatomical circles and he was an excellent teacher of anatomy. He had been a surgeon and adjunct professor of anatomy when he was a surgeon in Lincoln. He thought that he had acquired tuberculosis and he was advised to quit his practice and that's when he became professor of anatomy. So, he had the background of knowing what some of the medical problems surgeons had and he knew how to instill that information into students. He was a very excellent professor of anatomy and a very great student of history of anatomy, as you probably know yourself.

HETZNER: Also, wasn't he interested in anthropology?

LATTA: Yes, he was. You're right. He worked with this artist...

HETZNER: Gilder.

LATTA: Dr. Gilder for quite a number of times; they went on digs over to those old campsites down on the bluffs in Council Bluffs. I have right now, have a picture of one of those skulls they excavated which Gilder painted. I have it in my office right now. I think that was a very interesting point of Dr. Poynter's background.

Hrdlicka, they once had, who was a famous anthropologist and Hrdlicka kind of brushed all their work off and that kind of cooled him off a little bit (laughter). But he did have a great interest in anthropology.

HETZNER: Tell me something about what you remember about Dr. Cutter.

LATTA: Dr. Cutter was a very...he came here before my time, as a professor of biochemistry and he was secretary of the faculty. The dean was W.O. Bridges. Dr. Bridges soon tired of the job, and Dr. Cutter sort of inherited it. He really developed the place. He had a great deal of talent in convincing the authorities in Lincoln, that is, the authorities in the university and the legislature both, that we needed money and we needed plenty of it. That's the reason that place grew as it did during his period. And I think that it was during his time that they collected enough money to build a second unit of the hospital. During his tenure as dean, Conkling Hall was erected and I swear, almost every piece of pipe that was put in there, he inspected before (laughter). He was well known in academic circles and he became president of the Association of [American] Medical Colleges.

HETZNER: He held offices in the AMA, didn't he?

LATTA: I don't know about that. I do know that he was president of the Association of American Medical Colleges and they

had an annual meeting here at one time. It was very interesting; I attended many of those meetings myself. So, I was very well aware of Cutter's ability and so were some other people because shortly after the meeting here he was offered the deanship of Northwestern Medical School and went to Northwestern. He promptly became acquainted with the Montgomery Wards and people like that. It didn't take him any time at all to build up that place.

- HETZNER: I understand that some of the people from here went to Northwestern.
- LATTA: Sanford Gifford was one of them. He became chief ophthalmologist at Northwestern Medical School and he was a real brilliant man. That's Harold Gifford's older brother.
- HETZNER: Didn't the librarian go to Northwestern also at that time?
- LATTA: The librarian during that time was Wilson.
- HETZNER: Hallie Wilson.
- LATTA: Yes, now whether she went to Northwestern during that time I don't know; I don't recall.
- HETZNER: We can check that out. Was there anything to the rumor that or the inuendos that Dr. Orr put out that there was a feud between Poynter and Cutter?
- LATTA: I heard the same rumors, let's put it that way (laughter).
- HETZNER: Was it apparent to you?
- LATTA: Yes, it was. Something was apparent to me and that was, when Cutter resigned as dean, he made a recommendation. Obviously he was the one that I thought, that everyone thought, obviously the man to replace him was Dr. Poynter. But, Dr. Poynter didn't replace him. Dr. Keegan was director of the dispensary at that time and Dr. Cutter recommended him for the job. That's when it began to be fairly obvious that there wasn't any love lost between the two of them.
- HETZNER: Well, according to the story I heard, Dr. Poynter was on the faculty when Cutter went to school and he flunked him in anatomy.
- LATTA: Well, I didn't know that. He never told me that.
- HETZNER: Well, maybe there is no basis for this story at all.

- LATTA: You know, Dr. Poynter was a real character and everybody knew it and everybody respected him, and Dr. Cutter was a character and everybody respected him and everybody knew him in a different way. I think there was a little jealousy, shall we say, between the two because they were both very prominent characters in early medical history here. That's the only thing I could think of that was causing the riff between them, was a little jealousy. But, that was never very obvious to me until Dr. Poynter did not get the position immediately after Cutter left.
- HETZNER: Well, it was about this time that they opened the Unit II of the hospital?
- LATTA: Keegan was dean and he superintended the building of the second unit. I still say that there was just one mistake made in building the hospital and that is that the width of the building was such that you could hardly get beds in and out. You're supposed to have beds on each side of a center aisle and it was very difficult physically to move beds from one side to another because of the narrowness of the whole building.
- HETZNER: This was in the initial planning, then?
- LATTA: That's right. Because the second unit was almost exactly like the first and by the way, you wanted to discuss the move of the library to the second unit.
- HETZNER: Well, is it true that the library really got its start under Dr. Cutter?
- LATTA: That's right. Dr. Cutter actually gave money or he gave permission, I'd better put it that way, permission to Dr. Crummer to pick up any old historical volumes that he thought were valuable when he went on occasional trips to Europe. He did make several trips to Europe and he picked up the first of our historical collection. Dr. Cutter would find the money to pay for it after he got home. He was quite an operator, Dr. Cutter; there's no doubt about it. He was a very good friend of Mr. Wyer's.
- HETZNER: Oh, the librarian in Lincoln, Malcolm Wyer.
- LATTA: He understood the problem and apparently he found the money. Both Dr. Cutter and Dr. Poynter were well acquainted with him and he thought that was a real good chance to improve his image, I mean Mr. Wyer. It was a good chance. That's where Mr. Lundy fell apart, because he didn't see that at all.

HETZNER: The library was in the North building when you first came?

LATTA: It was in the first unit of the hospital when I came; it had been moved to the first unit of the hospital. I remember seeing where it had been on the second floor of the North Building. We inherited all the shelving (laughter), but that was about as big as the shelving here, if you cover this whole wall. That was the Medical College Library.

HETZNER: I've seen pictures of it. Then it moved to space above the dean's office.

LATTA: Above the dean's office, that's right. Above the dean's office and the superintendant of nurses office. It covered both sides, at the end of that building. That's when I knew, is it Miss or Mrs. Wilson.

HETZNER: Miss, I believe.

LATTA: I shouldn't say this, but she was a very good friends with Dean and Mrs. Cutter and the dean used to spend alot of time in the library and that's how he got interested in it. There's something else about that that I ought to remember. Oh, Miss Hillis came when we were still in those quarters.

HETZNER: Up over the dean's office?

LATTA: Yes,

HETZNER: I believe she came in '22 or '23 or something like that.

LATTA: She was an assistant librarian in our time and when Miss Wilson left, that isn't when Philip Moe came?

HETZNER: No, that was after Miss Hillis. Miss Hillis came and then she recruited Beulah Evans.

LATTA: But she must have had somebody to help her. I think we had mostly student help.

HETZNER: Yes, well Madeline Hillis' assistant was Beulah Evans. Do you remember Beulah? She was here when I came.

LATTA: That's right; I had forgotten all about her.

HETZNER: To go back to Unit II, when they opened it up didn't they have a hard time financing the equipment and paying for staff?

LATTA: They didn't have much staff to pay because practically all medical care was provided by volunteer faculty.

(End of Side A, part of transcript lost)

HETZNER: Well, I can remember that Dr. Jahr was in charge of pediatrics and the question came up about a full time person who would be paid with federal funds for maternal and child care help. There was a faculty meeting at which there was a big argument as to...

LATTA: We had a whole series of meeting over there and I was on such a committee where we had such meetings. We conceived the idea of having anybody who came on staff to have the opportunity to work outside 1/6 of his time, and that would get some extra compensation. Well, that created quite a furror in the place and it actually didn't work very well because nobody actually ever figured out how much 1/6 time was in the first place and whether they were living up to their agreement or not. Some people, I know, that some people didn't live up to their agreement and do you suppose that the dean would have the courage to tell them that they were off the faculty because they hadn't lived up to their agreement?

Well, it never happened, that's all. So, it gradually evolved into letting them do as they pleased. But, they were still supposed to be full time on the faculty and some of them actually left the school because they didn't want that restriction. They went over to Clarkson or some other place, or the Doctors' Building and set up offices of their own. Right now, I think that's how most of them work. That is, they're here full time but they also have the privilege of having offices elsewhere.

HETZNER: But, they ask them to report income and that's what the big fuss is about now.

LATTA: I remember the early hassle about it.

HETZNER: Another hassle was when they decided to expand the campus, when they got this 1/4 mill levy and they should expand. They had some plans to tear down...

LATTA: They had a plan to move everything across the street for awhile. That was Dr. Roy Holly's idea, I think. But we had a faculty meeting over in Conkling Hall, I remember, and voted that down. Lowell Dunn was just filled with excitement about expansion west. I suppose that the move for the expansion west now is an outcome of his early activities. Of course, the real expansion came about through Dr. Wittson because he got the money and he got the consent and cooperation of the national group to help support it and he and Dr. McGoogan in respect to the library itself. But otherwise, that money came through Wittson's contacts with the Public Health Service. To me, that was a step

backwards because at the same time that they did that they were beginning to go on a pay-as-you-go basis. Everybody had to be paid and everybody had to be self supporting and every department was supposed to be self supporting and that's because we went on this Medicare and all this medical support for illness and there were no longer any people who were totally charity cases, you see. So all that old charity business is out the window.

HETZNER: Now it's all third party pay, so either the government or an insurance company is involved.

LATTA: That's right. They take any case now. They only accepted charity cases in the good old days.

HETZNER: When you spoke about everybody's expected to make their own department pay, do you mean in terms of securing grants and delivering service?

LATTA: That and serving the public in such a way they got enough income from fees to take care of it and to take care of their own salaries. But, I don't know if they ever, they never did accomplish all that because the cost of operating a hospital is constantly going up and the salary expanded. Part of that is inflation, but there is another part and that is the increase in the volume. It isn't the same atmosphere that we once had,

HETZNER: Not the way it was when we first became acquainted, We knew everybody on campus.

LATTA: That's right. I don't know anybody now. Well, that's part of it that I'm retired, but that's the same with you, I suppose.

HETZNER: Oh, yes. There are people...

LATTA: Well, I'm real proud of the fact that I spent plenty of time helping out with the library work.

HETZNER: Well, I'm sure that all of the people in the library appreciate everything that you've done for the library - given us good guidance.

LATTA: One thing I want to call attention to specifically, is that we decided we had to increase the capacity of the library when it was in the second unit. We conceived the idea of a mezzanine floor. We actually got the funds to buy the equipment. Then Mr. Saxon, what was his title?

HETZNER: Ruben Saxon was the operating superintendant.

LATTA: He said we don't have funds to put it up. And I said, "Well, that sounds real strange, why don't you go down to your boss in Lincoln and find out about that?" He said, "We still don't have the funds." I remember Dr. McIntyre and I were on the committee together and everyone said, "Well, if we can't get it put up, we'll bring up screwdrivers and monkey wrenches and put it up ourselves." At that period Dr. Moody was Acting Dean; he was also chairman of the department, I think.

HETZNER: That was after Dr. Lueth left.

LATTA: Yes, that's right. He said, "I'm going down to Lincoln, why don't you come along and we'll talk to Mr. Selleck," who was Acting Chancellor then. And we went in and talked to Selleck. That was the first order of business; Moody kind of saw to that, too, that we'd go in and press our case and Selleck listened to our story and then he turned and said, "Call in (what ever this fellow's name was)."

HETZNER: George Miller?

LATTA: No, it wasn't that high up. He was up there and he told us that he didn't have the money, too.

HETZNER: Well, I know who you're talking about; I'll have to think of his name. [Fowley]

LATTA: Anyway, Selleck called him in and he came in and he said, "I want this put up." That's the end of the story right there, because they did put it up after that.

HETZNER: You had to go clear to the Chancellor to get it done.

LATTA: That's right.

HETZNER: But wasn't that some of it occasioned by the split between Lundy and the medical campus?

LATTA: Well, yes, but Lundy wasn't about to put up the funds for that, I know. But then that was a duty of the operating department of the operating superintendant, I think.

HETZNER: Buildings and grounds.

LATTA: Yes, buildings and grounds. Because Lundy, I kind of hate to get into this, he was constantly wanting to build up his own image in Lincoln, but he didn't want any part of this place. He resisted expansion here, it seems to me.

Then I was never so pleased as when Wittson, after one trip to Lincoln, said, "Well, we've finally gotten loose from Mr. Lundy so that our budget comes directly instead of through Mr. Lundy or through the main library." That really made a tremendous difference.

HETZNER: That was a great step forward.

LATTA: Absolutely.

HETZNER: The library never had enough money until then, until we had a separate budget with the College of Medicine.

One of the other things that you've done is to work with the Eppley Institute. Tell me how that got started, the whole thing...

LATTA: Well, after I was deposed as chairman of the department because of age, that was in 1960, I was on a year-by-year appointment with the department for three years. That was part of the university rules. And I taught my classes regularly for those three years and during that time we had to find somebody to run this Eppley Institute. I was appointed to help discover, and to meet with the people they had discovered to find out what I thought of them. So one day we had a meeting with a person who had been the Associate Director of Roswell Park Memorial Institute. It was Henry Lemon, anyway, and it was in Boston, and he appealed to me very much. He not only knew what he wanted to do, but he knew how to do it. So he was appointed, I think, during my last year of teaching. When he came and started putting up the building, Dr. Holyoke and I, I think, inspected every board that went into the building (laughter). But, at any rate, after he moved in, I got a grant from the American Heart Association for a microscope, an electron microscope, and where were they going to put it?

Well, Dr. Lemon said, "Why don't you come over here and we'll pay you from Eppley funds as long as you want to stay and put up your microscope here and that will still belong to the department," and I would have a say so as to where, if ever, it had to move.

Well, I was over there; I went over there for three years and I really enjoyed work over there and had a number of graduate students that did electron microscopy. I think we all learned a great deal from that experience.

I was really surprised to find that we had a new director all of a sudden and Henry, I think, was just as surprised

as anybody. It turns out that they had met with Dr. Shubik in Chicago, he was connected with the Chicago Medical School at the time, and he was unhappy and they wanted a big name man to run the institute, so they brought him in here and asked Lemon if he would recommend that he be put on the faculty and he did. That put Lemon out of the institute. At that time Dr. Shubik, the new director said, "Anytime you want to stay here, we would be happy to have you." I stayed on for awhile and I still have a desk over there, let's put it that way. I used to advise some of his people, occasionally and talk with them about the kind of work they were doing and what I thought about it and where I thought they could make improvements.

That's pretty well over-the-hill now and I don't do much. I hardly ever go over there at all, as a matter of fact. I must go over and meet Dr. Cromwell, sometimes, because I've known him for a long time. But, that was a pleasant experience for me. Particularly when Dr. Lemon was there. He would drop in and we would share ideas quite often and I felt rather badly that it passed into other hands. I know that it's expanded a great deal since then; maybe he wouldn't be interested the way it is now.

But, that was a...Finally, they woke up to the fact that the funds that were operating at Eppley were actually funds given to the university, so I was being paid without proper credentials or something. At any rate, they told me I had to quit.

HETZNER: They took you off the payroll, they want you to stay off of it (laughter).

LATTA: Yes, that's right. Because that was part of the university payroll and Lemon, apparently thought it was separate funds at his disposal and I worked for three years. Of course, during that time my wife became real bad and I was not really doing much anyway. So, it didn't hurt me at all. Except it hurt me that she was going bad.

Well, you've got enough to work on?

HETZNER: Just great. I think we have a nice...

LATTA: Well, it's kind of disjointed; I didn't plan any special speech or anything.

HETZNER: We're not supposed to. At the end of this tape, then, I will, if you will let me have your corrected biography, then, I will read that onto the tape so it becomes part of the permanent record. I will revise and check it with you again. Now, we need you to sign a release which...

LATTA: When you get anything to sign, then I'll release it.

HETZNER: Did there seem to be a controversy between Dr. Lord and Dr. H. Winnett Orr?

LATTA: Yes, that's right.

HETZNER: Well, there's a little bit about it in the Orr files, but what was the...

LATTA: I think Dr. Lord wanted Children's Hospital,

HETZNER: Crippled Children's Hospital.

LATTA: He wanted that to be based in Omaha and Orr wanted it to be based in Lincoln where he was. Both of them thought that they were the biggest experts in the business and Lord got the job here. But as long as he got the job here, Orr wasn't about to take part in any teaching.

HETZNER: Oh, that's why he stayed away from the campus. I thought that it was because he and Poynter didn't get along.

LATTA: Well, that's part of it too, because Poynter backed the other party. Because he became a very good friend of Dr. Willard. Dr. Willard taught down in Lincoln for a long time, and they became very friendly. Mrs. Willard was a very charming woman and they became very friendly with the Orrs. When they moved up here, Dr. Orr thought that Dr. Poynter mistreated Dr. Willard and maybe there was something to it. Dr. Willard was a very great scholar, but he was one of the poorest teachers you ever could imagine. He just didn't get anything across to students. He would go through a course, he is supposed to cover certain subjects in a course which is a semester course and he would get about half way through by the time the time was up.

You know, you can't teach that way. I can still remember Dr. Poynter telling me, he said, "Listen, Dr. Willard has been teaching organology for a long time but he is not getting anything over to the students." He was the Dean at the time, "And you're going to have to take over that course." I was ordered to. Dr. Willard said, "I understand, I understand," he knew where the fine Italian hand was. But, they really didn't see eye-to-eye and had totally different personalities.

HETZNER: You mean Willard and Poynter?

LATTA: Willard was a meticulous technician but just didn't handle students well, that's all. I said many times, I could tell a student that he was just not getting the material and he had to do something or he was going to be out of school. The same person could go over to Dr. Willard, he'd thank me for advising him, and that same person would go over to Dr. Willard, and he would tell him exactly the same thing and he (the student) would go out of the place boiling mad (laughter). It's just the personal approach was totally different. But, that's where many of the differences between Orr and Poynter came about because Orr thought that Poynter mistreated Willard.

HETZNER: Well Orr was a Cutter man too, wasn't he?

LATTA: Yes, so was Palmer Findley, you probably don't know anything about Palmer Findley.

HETZNER: Yes, I know about Palmer Findley.

LATTA: Palmer Findley wanted to be chairman of the Ob/Gyn very badly. He was a very brilliant man, as a matter of fact, too. But, Dr. Cutter thought that they ought to divide that up and have him for gynecology and (hesitate), oh, you know.

HETZNER: I know. McGoogan talks about him all the time.

LATTA: He delivered my two kids, so I ought to remember his name. Pollard - he wanted Pollard to be chairman. Palmer said, "Well if that's the case, then I'll just move out," and he did. Dr. Cutter didn't stop him (laughter) and the first thing you know, Pollard is the chairman of the department. So he faded foolishly. But, Palmer was a very stubborn man. I talked to him many, many times and I talked to his boys a good many times. He was dominating over those kids, and I think that's part of the reason why one of them became a real drunkard and he finally died of his excesses.

HETZNER: Well, that's too bad.

LATTA: It certainly is.

HETZNER: Well, this has been great.

SUBJECT: JOHN STEPHENS LATTA, PH.D.
DATE: JULY 20, 1979 (FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW)
INTERVIEWER: BERNICE M. HETZNER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

HETZNER: The date is July 20, and I have asked Dr. Latta to supplement his remarks of July 2, 1979, on a variety of subjects which I felt were important and that I had neglected to talk to him about on July 2, 1979.

Dr. Latta it's nice of you to give us some more time, particularly since it's my fault that we forgot to talk about this.

The Legislature in 1927 passed the Basic Science Law and this required that before an applicant could be examined in any of the healing arts, he must secure a certificate of ability in basic sciences and these were anatomy, physiology, chemistry, bacteriology, pathology and hygiene.

Now, you had a long association with the Basic Science Board and as I understand it, it was unique and it was a very important Board and I think we'd like you to tell us about it.

LATTA: Well, I think it was important; I always thought it was very important to have students have certain basic knowledge of the different features of a body operation before they became licensed to practice any healing art. The biggest trouble we had when the boards were first established was that some members who had been appointed as examiners, members of the Board of Basic Sciences in their state, thought that basic science referred to things that were basic to the healing art to such a degree that they would talk about or examine, general chemistry, or general physiology, comparative anatomy and subjects of that nature. It took quite a bit of understanding and explanation to get the examiners themselves to realize what was the intent of the law.

Finally, I think practically all of the examiners had such an understanding of the nature of the law and what it was intended to do.

HETZNER: Are you speaking now of the Nebraska Basic Board or all of them?

LATTA: The Nebraska Basic Science Board almost invariably understood what this intent of the law was. But, there were some other boards which were members of the National Association of the Basic Science Boards, or I guess it was the American Association, that didn't understand, and in our national meetings we'd go over and over and over what was the intent of the law. Eventually there were about thirty states, I think which had developed Basic Science Boards and examined in the basic sciences. For a long time, the so-called cults just failed to be able to pass any examination in the basic sciences,

I'm perfectly sure that we kept a lot of really bizarre medical practitioners out of the state of Nebraska and that was also true with the states which had the Basic Science Boards. I'm trying to think of some of the other features. I recall, finally, that the Federation of State Medical Boards put up an examination of their own. It was comparable to the American Board of Basic Sciences. They had agreed almost all along to accept the American Board of Medical Examiners, the basic science part of the American Boards, now, the Federation of State Medical Boards, and they wanted to put on an examination which was similar to the American Boards and they wanted our Board to accept their examination as well. Well, we tentatively agreed to do that and that almost put our Board out of business.

The next step was to have the Federation do all the examining in the basic sciences, and I said, "Well, we might just as well forget the whole thing and dissolve the Basic Science Board." The State Legislature finally did do that.

HETZNER: And now they accept the American Board.

LATTA: The American Board and the Federation of State Medical Boards Exams, either one. And their own exam to license people as medical practitioners in Nebraska. But, at the same time it must be remembered that there are other types of practitioners.

(End of Side 2, part of tape lost)

There were other healing arts boards who examined people in their discipline and as a result we have more practitioners of those other healing arts in Nebraska now than

we used to have because as long as the Basic Science Board was active in the state of Nebraska, I don't believe there was a single member of a certain board which I shall not name that was licensed in the state of Nebraska because they couldn't pass the Basic Sciences Exam. As a matter of fact, they were so ignorant about the actual facts in anatomy, for example, that the President of one of these boards came up to me in the state capital one day and he said, "Dr. Latta, if you would only examine our people according to the way our textbooks are written, why they would pass the boards." In response, I said, "Well, there is only one anatomy and if you don't know that, you just don't know anatomy, that's all."

That's the type of examination that we gave and that's the type of response that we got from these people. They would appear before the American Board of Basic Science again and plead their cause and it was just pitiful, how little they knew about the basic facts of medical science. So, I think it was an excellent idea and I think it was carried out very well and it protects the people of the state; it protected the people of the nation in the states where they had such boards.

HETZNER: Well, at the time that some clinical people came to the campus, I can remember that they needed to pass the Basic Science Board here in Nebraska because their examining system where they came from was not acceptable in Nebraska.

LATTA: Well, in most cases, they were acceptable. That is, if they passed a state board examination which had basic subjects listed and we could review the papers and we found them adequate, they were given a basic science certificate by reciprocity.

In most cases, that is what actually happened. There are a few cases where they didn't, that's very true. And that's their fault, not ours (laughter); that's the way I look at it. Because obviously they didn't really know very much. It was very fundamental questioning we had in our basic science examinations and if you couldn't pass them, you needed to review the subject matter, that's all.

HETZNER: If I remember correctly, some of these people had taken National Boards but the papers had been destroyed or it was an objective test that was not reviewable and they used to come in and get the examination questions from

the library and study and here's this mature person who had an advanced faculty appointment, but couldn't get a license to practice in Nebraska.

LATTA: I think those were very isolated cases.

HETZNER: Well, yes, but those are the kind of cases you remember, I guess, from my point of view.

LATTA: Very isolated cases and I remember so well Dr. [J. D.] McCarthy, quite a ways back. He had a section with members of our Board and he went and saw the American Board Examination questions being constructed in Philadelphia and we agreed that they were very adequate examinations and we pretty faithfully accepted the American Boards after that session with Dr. McCarthy and the visit in Philadelphia.

HETZNER: Ordinarily did the students take the Basic Science Boards after they received their degrees or at the end of the second year?

LATTA: During their second year, mostly.

HETZNER: That's the same way that they do the National Boards, Part I.

LATTA: That's correct. Occasionally we have one that waited until his senior year and he wished he hadn't, because he forgot a lot of basic science, which, of course, they shouldn't do. But nonetheless, they do, that's all.

HETZNER: It was more difficult. They've been through the clinical years.

Well, are there other things that have come to mind since our last interview that you would like to tell us about?

LATTA: Well, I really haven't thought much about it (laughter) as to what I had said.

I still remember the difficulties we used to have with the Director of Libraries and those difficulties had to do with our part of the budget. He wanted to have full control and that made life a little difficult for the librarian and for the Library Committee and for the physical activities of the library, as a matter of fact, too. So that's the biggest headache we had as a member of the Library Committee.

HETZNER: As far as the library is concerned, yes, that was the big hang up.

LATTA: As soon as they became somewhat autonomous, why things changed remarkably.

HETZNER: They certainly did.

LATTA: I always thought that the Director could have made quite a name for himself if he had the support of the library.

HETZNER: Well, I'm sure he could have, but it apparently didn't work out that way.

LATTA: I guess it was Mrs. Wilson way back in 1925 or so.

HETZNER: Hallie Wilson?

LATTA: And I've been on that Library Committee ever since, I think.

HETZNER: With Madalene Hillis?

LATTA: Yes.

HETZNER: Philip Moe?

LATTA: Yes, that's correct. And Mrs. Hetzner, and

HETZNER: David Bishop,

LATTA: Even David Bishop and to the present Librarian,

HETZNER: Robert Braude,

LATTA: Well, it's been very interesting to see the library grow and I have a slight feeling that I've had some part in its growth.

HETZNER: Oh, you certainly represented us well with the Executive Faculty. I always appreciated the contact that you had in participation in the Executive Faculty and you always brought that kind of information back to us that we needed in order to do the planning. And you see, without that kind of communication between people that are making the decisions, and somebody who's trying to build a collection, it makes it very difficult.

LATTA: Do you recall the time, maybe it was before you became Librarian, when during the war the periodicals were almost cut off from the foreign sources? And Dr. McIntyre and I gave money from our own departments and that was supplemented by funds from, he was called Chancellor then.

- HETZNER: Gustavson, wasn't it?
- LATTA: Chancellor Gustavson, to build up this collection of periodicals from abroad after the war was over. And that saved alot of continuation of the periodicals.
- HETZNER: Yes, it was a problem that I inherited when I came here in 1948, because the plan put together by the Association of Research Libraries was to stock pile these periodicals abroad and they got back to this country about 1948 and then the various libraries who belonged to the Association would have an opportunity to fill in their sets with them. And we did pretty well.
- LATTA: I also remember that we got duplicates of some and correspondently put them up for other libraries to take them.
- HETZNER: But, again, this was all done through Lincoln and Lincoln had first pick of whatever was allocated to the University of Nebraska and we got what was left over. We managed to put together a pretty good collection anyway.
- LATTA: Well, that saved some of our series, our periodical series, I'm sure. Well, as far as I was concerned, I was using the library pretty consistently then and it was very disturbing to find this period when there was no numbers.
- Oh, one other thing that I always was interested in was having everything, at least catalogued in the library; in the main library. I had had the experience before I came to Nebraska with branch libraries; they were all over the campus, the agriculture college and the veterinary school and the chemistry department and on you go. And you have to run yourself ragged to find it and then usually it was out, in the hands of some other faculty. So, I was personally insistent that we just keep everything within the library, and if possible, keep the actual book or periodical in the library.
- HETZNER: Well, this was great support when the question came up for a departmental library and when we...
- LATTA: It's still coming up and it always will, I'm sure.
- HETZNER: It always will.
- LATTA: Now we maintain that if, when I was heading the Library Committee, we maintained, and you were supportive of that, I know, that if the department wanted a library and the book or periodical in question was part of the day-to-day work, the reference work, that they had to have there available, that they should buy it, buy that

buy that copy just as if they would buy a microscope or a test tube. And that's the way it worked for as long as I know. I don't know if it's still working that way or not. Do you know?

HETZNER: I don't know either (laughter).

LATTA: Well, there are such problems.

HETZNER: Well, I think that we saved the University money by making decisions like that.

LATTA: Because they could buy those of their research funds, you know, and even that far back we did quite a bit of our research on federal or other grants from outside, not state funds.

HETZNER: And it avoided unnecessary duplication.

LATTA: That's right. We also had problems and still do and always will, I suppose, with people taking books and periodicals out and just keeping them. I think Mr. Braude is doing very well and is insisting that they be returned and penalize them some way if they don't. I think we started that sort of thing in your day.

HETZNER: Well, a circulating library always has these problems.

LATTA: But, that's the sort of problems that they have the Committee for, to help support you and your projects.

HETZNER: I heartily agree on leaning on the Committee for that sort of support.

LATTA: Well, you need to have faculty support, that's all. And they represent the faculty and if it goes any further than that, they can go to the Executive Faculty and finally to the Dean...

HETZNER: Chancellor.

LATTA: What do they call him? Chancellor.

HETZNER: Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor.

LATTA: Oh, yes, we go through all kinds of channels, now.

HETZNER: Well, it's been very nice, Dr. Latta, and this is going to be a cornerstone of our collection in the archives. Thank you so much.

LATTA: Well, nice to see you again.