Lucile Speer: —we changed that greatly—a very great difference in the approach to higher education.

Diann Wiesner: I don't believe we have talked about that.

LS: That, I think, it wasn't so heated a debate, but it was intense and it went on and on. We spent two days, I'm sure, on that education article, because of the strong feelings about it. The idea was to remove the higher education from such tight control by the legislature. First of all...Shall I go on on that?

DW: Let’s do.

LS: You might say there were two things we did under the 1889 Constitution. All of education—secondary and higher education—was all under one agency. There was the Board of Education, which was an appointed...appointed by the governor, and then there was an elected, its executive officer was an elected official. That was an ominous thing in the first place to have an appointed Board of Education with an executive officer, who was elected by the people. They clashed constantly. I don't know whether it was a result partly of that contradiction—the Superintendent of Public Instruction actually confined himself or herself—it was usually a woman—to the public education, that is secondary and elementary, while the Board of Education was dealing with the higher education. In fact, they passed a law that called it the Board of Regents, or Board of Higher Education, but it was the same board. They called it the two-head board. One meeting, they would deal with secondary education, and the next one would be the University system. It seemed that the University was shortchanged because the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who did most of the work, spent, it was over 90 percent of time on the secondary education. There was a survey made by the Peabody Foundation back in the ‘40s, I think it was, that pointed out contradictions in the setup, and called for a change, but nothing was done then.

What we did then was, as I’ve already mentioned, we kept the elected Department of Public Instruction and the duties probably were not altered in the constitution. Of course, they are to some extent under the statute. We did set up a Board of Regents of Higher Education, and the executive officer of the Board of Regents was the Commissioner of Higher Education, who was selected by the board and reported to them.

The other real problem was that the legislature considered itself the controlling body of higher education, and in a sense they are. You can't get away from it because they are the ones who
have the money. But a newer concept of the government of higher education is to give more self-government. Yes, they have to be under guidelines and their budget is set, but how that money is used is up to the Board of Regents of Higher Education. Actually here yet, when they came to...The legislature doesn't sit over there and divide up what Bozeman gets, what Dillon gets, and so on. That's one reason you could never close any of those. Dillon at one time had 27 enrollment.

DW: Twenty-seven?

LS: Twenty-seven, and they should have closed the thing. Made it another institution, or used it for some other purpose. Well, it was the longest debate, and it brought very sharp criticism—very strong feeling. I can remember Charley Mahoney (?) [laughs], who was one of the most loquacious of all of the delegates, he would ask to be recognized, and he said, “I'm worried about this matter!” Every time he got on his feet like that, he would begin with this prefatory remark, “I'm really worried about this!” [laughs] We would just break into peals of laughter when Charley got on his feet. He was really worried, and he's a nice fellow. He said, “Keep the University under the umbrella of the legislature. Don't let it out of control!” [laughs] There were a lot who agreed with him really. Of course, all of us from the University system—other units, one from Eastern [Montana College]—did a very good job on it, and Rick Champoux from the community college in Kalispell was chairman of the Education Committee. He did an excellent job of presenting it. I think when he presented his article on...This was the pattern. The chairman would get up and present first usually, and Rick talked for about an hour very eloquently. He was a teacher of social sciences there, and he was from Boston and had a great skill in public speaking and expression, communicating. After about an hour, he said, “Now, I'm ready to get started.” [laughs]

Leo [Graybill] remarked, “What have you been doing?” It took him about another hour to present, because the education article was a long one. We did win a lot, we really did. We didn't try to insert any control, but we kept the general control of the University system. I should have looked that up, but...Supervision and there was some...I suppose one or two other aspects of it. It didn't have control over the curriculum—the legislature didn't—nor the finances, and that was a great deal of doing.

I mean, wait a minute! The legislature did not have control over the curriculum. It did over the finances.

DW: But only in that it could allot a general fund?

LS: Yes, supposedly. This I feel has not been carried out fully. In fact, when this provision in the constitution was implemented by statute, it was not very forcefully presented. I was disappointed in. I felt that the expression of it statutorily was very mild and kind of weak compared with the constitutional attack on it. There wasn't anything that needed to be added because actually you couldn't take out the financial control.
DW: What were some of the major arguments in favor of creating a Board of Regents?

LS: To have a separate board from higher education, because the problems are so different. In fact, this was almost unique to have a board that had all—

DW: Them both.

LS: Certainly, it was unique to have the Superintendent of Public Instruction heading the whole, all of those institutions anymore than you would have the School for the Blind and other state schools like that.

DW: The legislature then basically still retained control of the money allotted to the University?

LS: Oh, yes. But the provision is in the constitution that the Board of Regents of Higher Education and the Board of Public Education—that's the one which supervises the public schools—they are supposed to meet quarterly, and they plan the budget jointly. The appropriation then is divided so that they do not go the legislature squabbling over whether the foundation programs are going to get a bigger share and the University system suffers because of it. Also, it was the intention in the convention that the units would not be fighting there with the legislature. They could be arguing with the Board of Regents, yes, about their needs as opposed to those of Bozeman, say, or the College of Technology, but earlier, each institution went right to the legislature. You can see the political complications and feelings—animosity—that grew out due to that. I think we did achieve a lot there.

[Break in audio]

One of the great accomplishments of the convention, I think—the new constitution—the local government was a great step forward in giving local governments so many new powers, including self-government. Montana has not made much use of it. It didn't get the local government act passed, and the bill they did get passed, only three states have adopted the consolidation...Cities, three cities. Now, they have to submit to the question of whether they want to continue the present form, or whether they want to do it on an alternative form every ten years. They're already beginning to meet—the old committee here in Missoula—because neither the city nor the county got new forms of government. The city was in favor of consolidation, but it was the county that didn't want it. So many of the improvements came from elimination of quantities of statutory rulings. We cut it down to about 12,000 words, I think it was, and it been 30 [thousand] something. We still have longer than the federal constitution and there's still some that's statutory, but in general that was the watchword all the way through. When it went to the Style and Drafting, when we frequently got it back—it went back to the committee as a whole—“Get this out,” it was statutory.
Of course, we did get improvements in the legislative article in the fact that we got annual sessions, but then, you see, it got defeated by amendment. We got the single member districts, permission for the legislature to provide for poll booth registration, oh, any number of improvements in the legislative article. In many ways too, it strengthened the power of the governor. His appointive power was increased, and he is held responsible. You can pinpoint where the responsibility for action lies. We didn’t mention—talking about the governor—his powers. One of the major changes in the executive article was the election of the governor and lieutenant governor on the same ticket. They had to run together. I don’t call that such a major thing, but it makes things proceed smoothly.

Now, shall we come to the last day? I’m not sure...We met for ten weeks, I think. We met six days—a six-day week—the last two weeks, I think it was. We started to have a few night sessions, but I think the president found that was not production. This era of pre-dinner cocktails—people didn’t show any interest in getting things moving at all. Our evening meetings were not productive usually, and so there were plenty of times when we didn’t close the session until 6:00 and sometimes it was 7:00. We’d continue for a long time. We might have a little break about 4:00, and get a bite outside.

DW: Just to keep going.

LS: There was not provisions in the [unintelligible] act. As I recall, that was an act that provided for the setting up the constitution and provided the money for it and so forth. In fact, that was the one that limited our funds to certain amount. Part of it went back to the 1889 Constitution—told how you’d have the same number of delegates as there were members of the House. There was a special committee appointed to plan the final day for the signing ceremony. There were three of us. Jim Garlington was chairman. He’s a lawyer from Missoula, and he did practically all the work. Jim, he had been on the Executive Article, and he was through rather early with all that debate and he’s a very capable person—good speaker. I think it was just honoring older members, they had put me on it and Clark...What was his name? From Billings, he was on our—

DW: He wasn’t the man that sat next to you, was he?

LS: No, no. This man was from Billings. He was retired. He showed me a clipping showed that he was on the board of the Montana Power Company. [laughs] He thought I’d be greatly impressed. I told him my great-nephew was a secretary there [laughs], but that didn’t help me any. He seemed to be quite proud of that. He had said practically nothing in the...Really, I can’t remember either in our committee or on the floor that he contributed very much.

DW: You were on the committee that planned the closing on the final day?

LS: Yes, but as I say, I know we met together three or four times, but actually Jim looked after most everything. It wasn’t so much to be done. The ceremony was held on Friday before noon.

Lucile Speer Interview, OH 046-010, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
think about 10:00 probably, and it as open to the public only that the delegates filled all the seats because we were in the convention hall was the sign that they put over the House of Representatives chamber. There were some seats around the side.

DW: There was the balcony.

LS: The balcony, and it was just packed and then the [unintelligible].

DW: Oh, yes, that would be quite an occasion.

LS: The only thing that had been prepared for the ceremony was the setting up a table at the front. I think there were some roses up there, and it had green felt, which is for legal background. Then the old 1889 Constitutional Convention proceedings on that, and then the sheets that we were to sign. On one side, was one of the clerks, who assisted with the seats and the secretary of the convention, who told us where to sign as we sat down. There were two chairs. She sat on one, because it was a woman, and we sat...They took two pictures of all of us as we went up. They took two pictures. I have that.

DW: I'll have to look at these before I leave today. I'd like to see that.

LS: We had voted the day before—on the first question of whether we would adopt the constitution. There had been a unanimous vote. There was no one who voted in the negative, but we still thought that Archie Wilson was going to vote against the constitution, and Ralph Studer had been saying all the time he couldn't vote for it. Then that last morning I would [unintelligible] and Mae Nan and Arleen Reichert—those two—and he [Ralph] said he couldn't. He was giving excuses. He couldn't let Archie just sit up there alone. He'd have to stay with Archie. Well, it came time to go up. We were ahead of...see Archie was Wilson—we went up alphabetically. [unintelligible]. We still didn't know whether Archie was going to or not. [laughs]

It had gone along. Everyone had gone. We were watching intensely to see; although, those were the only two that we had questions in our minds. I can tell you that we were really on edge about that, really tense about it. I think I said that I told Ralph Studer, who was sitting beside me, I said, “I'm not taking my cane. You have to go and see that I don't tip over Archie.” I don't think that I said that with any ulterior motive. But anyway, he agreed that he would escort me all right. It went pretty slowly. Although in the beginning, there was only mild applause, and then as it went on, why, they began to applaud longer. Because I was the oldest, I guess they had planned this. I heard afterwards I think it was, someone from the Law School, that he wanted to get in to get a seat because he wanted to be there when they cheered for me. I got up there and I sat down, and they were applauding—almost all of them. Then Gene let me get up and start off without signing the other bill. So I sat down again and then I stood up and I wasn't aware, but the applauding had already started. And they were cheering! As I went down the aisle, they cheered and cheered and clapping up in the gallery. I was a euphoria that I really didn't realize what was going on. I was just so carried away with the tremendous...
importance of this historic occasion, and that I had the chance to be a part of it, and here we were signing a new constitution for Montana, putting us up with all those white-haired, bearded old fellows of 1889.

DW: That’s right, that’s right.

LS: We did have—

[Break in audio]

LS: a—also the first of both commissions that had preceded.

DW: Who was the first guest you mentioned from the Supreme Court?

LS: I think it was John Harrison. It wasn’t the Chief Justice, because the Chief Justice at that time was Stuart. Wasn’t that his name? He was pretty old and not very well. I have no recollection of Forrest Anderson, the governor, being there. I don’t think I did say that the convention was opened by Forrest Anderson, the governor. He was the one who called us to order and called for the election of a temporary chairman, Cedor Aronow (?). He presided until Leo was elected. He came from up Conrad or some of those places. An older man.

DW: I’m surprised that he wasn’t at the closing ceremonies.

LS: He may have been. I have no image, unless...He did support us, and they were already using pressure...or that came later on the vote to get a suit filed against the legality of the vote on the ballot—on the constitution ballot. Forrest Anderson used some quick footwork to get down there and get his signature on before those two men, who represented the Farm Bureau, got there to file their suit. One of the interesting facets of that story, which I heard from one member of the staff, was that while Forrest Anderson was doing everything to expedite getting that signature on there, it had to be all typed up after it was approved. They had gone ahead and typed everything but the last—the vote—to be filled in because they had all this long part all typed up. Forrest Anderson slipped in with it in his pocket so that they didn’t see. They were in the hall waiting to go in, and Frank Murray, Secretary of State who was waiting there and he was sympathetic to the Farm Bureau, he did not approve of the new constitution. So he was sort of in the plot with them. [laughs] The one who told it to me thought that Anderson did us a pretty good turn—showed his support and interest. He did give a good talk at the beginning when he opened. If he did talk at the end, I think there was nothing that he added. Marge gave the best talk, and she said that she hadn’t been told before that she was, would be expected to talk, so she would have prepared a little bit more. She had given so many talks on the constitution. She always talks beautifully.

DW: Did the constitution have to be unanimously approved?
LS: No, a majority.

Now, I’d like to go back. I carried it on through the last day. After the signature, then Leo came back to the platform where he had been, stood. He sort of half stood—he had a high chair that he sat in during the convention when he presided—and he said a few words and we were adjourned. Then we were just picking up things, getting to leave, and he said, "I see didn’t read all the program, and it was supposed to have a benediction." So he had to ask us to take our places. Well, we weren’t out. We weren’t that far, but we were just beginning to and it didn’t upset anybody. I think it would be on the tape. I don’t remember now.

DW: Tell me what happened when Wilson finally got up there to sign.

LS: He went. Every one of them went up and signed.

DW: Isn’t that something!

LS: Yes. It was signed by everyone. Yet, here he was within a few days working with—he was one of the leaders of that Farm Bureau—to defeat. There were quite a group of them, those Eastern Montana ranchers and the big cattlemen who voted against it. They voted for the constitution that day, but they were...when it came to vote.

DW: Approval by the people.

LS: By the people, they didn’t. No, they put on a great campaign, and there were lots of public meetings held by the Farm Bureau.

DW: What was their explanation for that? For doing that?

LS: They didn’t want change. They were opposed to—

DW: Why would they sign it, though, if they weren’t going to support it?

LS: I don’t know, that seemed a strange thing. Those were the eastern part of the state. You hear of that sagebrush fellow...

DW: Etchart?

LS: Etchart, well, he was one of them. I don’t know how many of them there were. Tory Johnson (?), Erv Geissler (?). I wouldn’t want to estimate even. I’m sure there were 10 to 15 or those, and they were people who carried a good deal of weight in their areas. For instance, Archie was an important man with the Montana Wool Growers [Association]. Carried a lot of weight there. I recall Rachel Mansfield, a delegate from over in the eastern part of the state. Her husband was a big rancher. She said very little during the convention. I knew she was a...
liberal. Her husband may well have been sympathetic with some of these men, I don’t know. I know she lived on a big cattle ranch. I can recall her telling a story—I saw her afterwards, a month or two after the election—that she was at a Wool Growers Convention, and Archie was there. Archie was being very belligerent. That if she were a man, he'd [laughs] throw her off the platform. She told him, “Come ahead! I can handle you.” [laughs] She was bigger than he was, I think. There was quite feeling among those people. I don’t know specifically of anything in the tax and revenue ones that they were complaining about. We took out the one that had given so much privilege to the mining interests. But we didn’t have mining interests up there. That wasn’t being fought anymore.

DW: What was that, Lucile? What privilege?

LS: They were taxed just on the land. There was no taxation of the mine, where they went sprawling all over the place. Also it was a gross tax rather than a retail tax on the mines, so that we got very, very little money from the mining interests of Butte and the copper from the Butte hill.

DW: That’s quite the story about the signing. I wonder how many people in the spectators recognized that Archie might not sign or Ralph might not sign.

LS: Oh, I think there was lots of publicity. We had very good reporters. I’m sure that the public was pretty well-informed of that. Anyone who was at all interested in following, anyone who was there, would have had enough interest to follow it in the papers.

DW: I bet there was quite a bit of applause then when Archie went up, since there was...

LS: I expect, although they were really not demonstrative. Archie was a very quiet, gentle, gentlemanly sort of a person. That remark, or phrase, that he said, “If you were a man, I'd throw you off the platform,” was not...creates an image that did not represent Archie at all. We’d had our big party the night before, so at noon when the convention was over and we had signed, that was the end. I remember most people had friends and relatives there, and I can recall four or five of us together and others down at Jorgenson’s. There wasn't any reunion of the...or the gathering of delegates themselves because there were lots of relatives who had come over for it.

DW: Where had you stayed while you were over there?

LS: I was in one of the motels. What one was it? I can’t remember the name. It was down on Last Chance Gulch, and it was reasonable. Attached to it was the 4-B’s Café, one of theirs. I didn’t have to go outside for my meals at night or in the morning, and I was always up to have a good breakfast. They provided a bus service for our delegates who were there, back and forth to the Capitol. It was a very cold winter, and the first two weeks we were there it didn’t get up to 23 below.
DW: My! No wonder you were glad the café was attached. [laughs]

LS: There were lots who had a great preference for Jorgenson’s, but that had quite a little distance and a lot of ice too, to get to the dining rooms. They didn't provide bus service, and I didn't want an expensive motel like that. They were larger than mine. I had just the one room with bed, and they had a little coffee shop where you make your own coffee.

DW: Oh, in the room. I see.

LS: So I had my coffee in the morning, but then I didn’t always go down to have a real dinner. I ate there regularly at 4-B’s except one night. I always got my hair fixed on Monday nights. That was the night—we were off on Mondays. The rest of the time I couldn’t be sure that I would be able to get downtown because we might be one of those nights, 6:00 and 7:00. I had my hair shampooed. At that time, my hair was still curly. [laughs] I had it done every week because otherwise I would have probably been a special occasion.

It was really a very nice party the night before the final ceremony—signing of the constitution. I have pictures. I think I gave all of those to Dale [Johnson] for the archives [University of Montana’s Archives and Special Collections], didn't I?

DW: I haven't seen them, but I know where the boxes are.

LS: All the committees...I bought the whole set of convention pictures. They didn't have a picture of the whole group of 100 together. I think they had to have two divided, as I recall.

DW: Where was your dinner the night before the signing?

LS: At the Montana Club. We had another room for the cocktails on another floor, and we had quite a gala time that night. Usually, it was very informal. Those who wanted some had drinks, and there was a place right outside on the third floor, I guess, the big dining room. That's really quite an elegant old place. I don't know whether they've done...they talk about restoring that but I guess they've not done it.

DW: I'm not sure. They are restoring a lot in Helena, I know.

LS: It's been pretty well kept up. I have a nephew in Helena, and he's just retired now. He worked for the Highway Commission, and his wife is a Butte person. She had some money so they could be members of the country club and they could be members of the Montana Club. It was kind of nice. They could go there whenever they...because not everybody could go there. You had to [be a member]. May was telling me that anytime I wanted to go there, just tell them I was with her. So I have gone there with friends and with David and May. I knew it before.
DW: I'm sure it's quite elegant. Were there flowers and all that sort of thing that night, or were there any speakers or [unintelligible]?

LS: We had one of those amateur stunts.

DW: Oh, just like always.

LS: We didn't have any formal speech.

DW: Had the final skit?

LS: I think I can remember some of it, but it was just a series, not any final—

DW: Did they ever do a skit with you and your flag or anything?

LS: No. That never got... [pauses]

DW: Dramatized.

LS: No. [pauses] No, I don't think that came up. I guess I did use it once. That last, on Thursday morning we met, and it was sort of a time when any loose ends could be cleared up—anything you wanted to say, grievances or compliments and so on. I thought well, yeah, I'm going to say it. It really irked me because Leo always called me Mrs. Speer from the very beginning, and for the first week or two, I'd correct it so it would be correct in the journal. I finally decided that I wasn't getting anywhere and was just wasting my time, so I wasn't going to continue that anymore. I just ignored it. But here it goes down in the book “Mrs.” [laughs] So I got up when we were told we could and said that I had a grievance, how I had tried to have it corrected, but I hadn't been able to achieve my correct title of Miss and the president and others had continued to call me Mrs. I said, “I consider this a gross example of discrimination, and I think I should have taken my problem to the Bill of Rights committee.”

Leo said, “We can change it to Ms. in the journal.” [laughs] The next year at the reunion...No, we had a meeting...yeah, that was the next May, it was a kind of reunion, yes. They played some bits of tapes, and that had been selected by the woman who was sort of a clerk and she had that and they played that.

DW: Oh good. So you'll be remember by everybody that was there one way or another?

LS: Yeah. I'll show you—

[End of Interview]