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Interviewee: Donald Emblen

Interviewer: Annie Pontrelli

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Annie Pontrelli: This is Annie Pontrelli interviewing Dr. Donald Emblen on July 18, 1991. I just about backed us up about a hundred years. Why don't you just tell me a little bit of background information: how you came to the University, the years you were here, in what capacity, those kind of general questions.

Donald Emblen: Well I came to the University straight from working with Eastman Kodak in Rochester, N.Y. I had taught previously at two private colleges in the east, but during the war I worked for Eastman Kodak. Then at the end of the war, I was getting tired not teaching so I applied for the job, but was told by the placement girl at the University of Pennsylvania—where I got my master's degree in business administration—(unintelligible). So they told me to come out. We packed, my family and I, packed up and started out. It sounded like quite an adventure in those days.

AP: That was what year?

DE: 1945. So I came to the school and I didn't find anyone around. The then dean was in Europe and the chair of the department of economics was kind of acting [president] and I expected them to have a place for me to stay right away, but they don't do things that way out here. They do it at private colleges. We got along all right to start with.

I remember the first day I came was the first day that President McCain was here. So he and I came together. We were supposed to go over right away to Helena. I was to attend a [inaudible] to the Montana Society of Certified Public Accountants and he [McCain] had some business, so we went over together and became acquainted. I was sorry to see him leave when he did.

AP: And then you were here for how long?

DE: Since 1945.

AP: Did you retire?

DE: Yes, I retired here in 1971 or '72 somewhere. I don't remember. My wife would remember, but I don't.

AP: So you were here under McCain and who was after that, was McFarland after that? Because Johns was later.

DE: Yes, I guess it was McFarland. And all the others, I don't remember all of them.

AP: Bob Pantzer, Johns, Melby, and Newburn. Do you recall what it was like to work under some of those administrations?

DE: Oh, I always got along all right with them. I particularly enjoyed President McCain. He was a very likable fellow. I got along fine with him. I got along fine with McFarland too. I never had a run-in with him, but a lot of people did. (laughs) I was on the Budget and Policy Committee at the university for a number of years and I remember Lud Browman was the chairman of it. Browman made some remark about the president not doing the right thing so that set off quite a battle. It was interesting. (laughs)

So I came out here. Bob Line who was the dean then (as I say, he was in Europe) called me on the telephone while I was at Eastman Kodak and wanted to know if I was interested in coming out here. I was looking for a job, so I was quite interested. I liked the thought of working in the west. I had been an easterner you know and the west was Indians and cowboys I suppose like that. (laughs) So I came out and was quite surprised when I got here. I was surprised because of the absence of anyone around. First there was the war and there wasn't anyone in the school of business. Roy Elee was in the department of economics not in business, and there wasn't anyone else in business. Brenda Wilson was head of secretarial; she was here. But there wasn't anyone else. So when I started to work, outside of secretarial, there were only two of us.

I was given a choice of whether I would teach accounting or finance. I like to teach accounting. One fellow here that year left at the end of the year to go to Iowa to teach. I stayed on. The school began to grow then, men were coming back from war then and the classes were beginning to grow. I didn't have anyone to help me; I had to use my own judgement on what courses to teach and what courses to offer in accounting. I was here two years before Ted Smith came as dean and I had established some courses that seemed to be working out all right. Ted Smith was a pretty good man. He was here I forget how many years, about ten years and the school developed very nicely during that period of time. I don't know how many people were on staff in the school of business at that time. I forget. About 15 I suppose. That was pretty good sized then.

We did very well the first few years developing the courses. I was in accounting eventually and I took quite a bit of pride in how well students did in accounting here. I think I was quite rigorous with them. We took some national examinations put out by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the students here seemed to do very well. In fact, they placed highest of any in the United States for a couple of years and got national recognition. I have some clippings on that I could show you later if you're interested. But I took quite a bit of pride in that. That was the start, I think, of the development of accounting. It's a burgeoning field right now I understand. I don't keep in contact with any of the fellows over there because I don't know them anymore. But they're doing an excellent job and I'm real proud of them and proud of what we did over the years.

I looked up (I have to refresh my memory for this) I went over to the library and got a 1950 catalogue to look. I wanted to refresh my memory of who was here at the time because I had forgotten. The names don't mean much to you now, but well we had Joe Demaris. He's known here by some. He finally left us to go to Illinois to get his doctors degree and he taught at Illinois for several years and then went to Texas where he was dean and then he retired. He was here last summer. He was a good man.

We had Fred Henningson. He wasn't on the staff officially. He was an undergraduate student at the time, but he helped out in accounting. He was listed in the faculty, but he was kind of a different breed at that time. (laughs) I started a CPA budget coaching course and it's carrying on today. It worked satisfactorily. In their senior year accounting students could take the review course—and it was a tough one—to get them ready for the CPA examination that's given by the state. It was once a year; I think it's twice now. Fred Henningson was in that class, there were about five. He was the first one to graduate from here in that class that got his CPA ticket.

I wasn't a CPA at the time, but I decided I better get one, so went over and took the examination and I didn't pass it the first time. The subject I had to review for and I got it the next time though because it's a tough exam, or that was the case years ago. So, you ask a question now, I'm just rambling.

AP: No, that's part of laying the foundation. What was the University of Montana like when you were here? Some of those things you mentioned, but maybe you could tell me more about some of those things.

DE: Well, it was small. About two thousand was the enrollment that I remember and I didn't want a large school. I had a chance to go to a large school, but I liked the idea of a small school in a rural atmosphere. It was very nice, you knew most everyone. They were very friendly to a newcomer. I remember none of the students had cars. Now you can't park on campus because of them, the cars. We had room to park in those days. Our first classes were over where the physics and math were, I think they still are. I forget the name of the old building on the oval.

AP: The Venture Building that they tore down, next to the math building?

DE: I don't know it as the Venture Building. No, it's still there. We had the second floor. Physics was on the top floor and math on the first floor until they built a new building (well the building is the one we have now). That came during McCain's administration. It looked pretty good at the time. We had lots of room. Education was on the second floor and we had the first and the third floors (business) and we could all be together. Now I understand Larry Giancheta the head of the faculty has distributed it all over the campus because there is not enough space. I don't know what else to tell you.

In 1957 I got an opportunity to go abroad to teach a couple of years in Pakistan and I felt like a change was needed and the romance of going to Pakistan for a couple of years. My wife agreed and I had two boys at the time. The youngest one went with me, but the oldest one was going to Washington State University and had to stay back a year. He came over later. I enjoyed that very much although I became terribly antsy to come back to this country. I taught in a school of business which was called Haley Business College on the University of Punjab in Lahore, Pakistan. I had a lot of fun there. It was hard to teach those students; they didn't want to work. But I think maybe I did some of them some good. (laughs) I don't know. But anyway, it was a lot of fun to be there. We did a lot of traveling: we went to India half a dozen times and I hunted tigers in India, we went up to Kashmir in the Himalayas. That was a lot of fun.

AP: Is this the same program that Fred was involved with too, Fred Henningson?

DE: Yes, I got him the job. They wanted another man and I was there and I wired him and said, "Apply". And he did right away. I met him in Kerachi when he got off the plane in Janum and a girl, she was along with him. So I was living in Lamora country, a couple hundred miles from Kerachi, but we got together a lot. We loved traveling together. It was fun. So, I had something to do with that.

After I retired from here I was offered some jobs teaching. One that appealed to me mostly at the time was teaching at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. So I went down there for a year, well, seven months. I taught one semester and then used the two or three months that I had left to go fishing in all the streams in the country, which I did. They wanted another man to take my place. They offered me to stay on, but I didn't want to; I had to get back here. So, I said, "How about Fred Henningson?" and he went to Pakistan because of me, so I had a kind of a bit of an influence on his life. (laughs) After I taught there I got an opportunity to teach at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I taught there one semester. They wanted me to stay there, but I wanted to quit. I told the dean I didn't retire I had a full time job, so I went back to New Zealand for just a visit and have fun. We've been down there three times now. Can you turn that off when I'm thinking?

AP: Sure.

DE: There was a very subtle difference, but I noticed a difference. Less respect for the teacher I noticed among students.

AP: During the '60s? During the change?

DE: Yes. I didn't have the problem that I would have... I don't know how I would have reacted. When a student came to my class (I'm talking about males) he had to look like a student. If he wouldn't take his hat off, he'd get out of the class. I was old-fashioned I guess. I still am in that regard. So, there was a letting down of the bars from the students' point of view and teachers too to some extent. I know when I was there, I never taught without a coat on. That's silly, no reason why I shouldn't. I would now. But I always had one and had a tie and looked professional, I thought. Everyone did, it wasn't me alone. I don't know what the students are like right now. It's been quite a while, 25 years since I retired.

AP: Were there any changes in your particular teaching philosophy or style throughout the years?

DE: Well, we didn't have computers and that's a big change. I don't know anything about computers now. I didn't have to know and I retired just before they really came into the classroom. There wasn't one on the campus when I retired. That changed teaching. I understand they can teach now with computers building to buildings. They have some classes down there in beads for teachers because they introduced it a year ago and it's going over very well.

Another thing that happened when I was on campus: we were approached by the Air Force to set up a school over in Great Falls at the Malmstrom Air Force Base. At the time I was acting dean

and I asked Jack Kempner to help me which he did and we set up a curriculum for the school of business over in Great Falls, which meant we had to go over there quite often to get it going and hire staff and so forth. It was very interesting, but it was quite a drain on our energy I thought. We didn't get any remuneration from the school out of it, just a word of applause. That just recently stopped, that went on for quite a few years and I guess they did a good job.

AP: What did you like best about the university?

DE: Well, it was fairly small. I had gone to Columbia and Penn and I was used to big cities and big schools. I liked the idea of a small school. I taught at Union College in New York, Schenectady on the St. Laurence University in Canton, New York and they were delightful schools. Ivy League sort of stuff. I enjoyed that this was a small school (relatively).

I had complete freedom when I was here. We had a dean, but he didn't tell me what I had to do. I did what he wanted me to do. We had a good relationship. I liked the idea of setting up courses that I wanted to be set up. All I had to do was put them in the catalogue and make preparations for them and hire staff if we needed them. Jack Kempner was on our staff. I believe it was in '56 or '57. He was only here a little time when I went to Pakistan and he took over all of my classes. You're talking to him tomorrow I guess. No! You're talking to John Stewart tomorrow.

AP: John Stewart tomorrow and Jack I haven't been able to get ahold of. I called right before the fourth of July and couldn't get a hold of him. He lives on the same street that I grew up on. My parents are university alumni.

DE: What do your parents do?

[Break in audio]

DE: When I came here student had to take typing. You had to do twenty-five words per minute and they also, to graduate, had to be able to swim.

AP: Why?

DE: I don't know. Somebody thought that was a good idea, same as being able to type. (laughs) Brenda Wilson who was a very strong member of the secretarial department, she got mad at me because I voted to ban the requirement that every business ed student who graduated typed thirty words per minute. She [inaudible]. We ended up friends.

AP: So you succeeded in banning it?

DE: Oh yes. [inaudible] A student should learn to type, but if you don't graduate because you can't do thirty words per minute, same as if you couldn't swim the length of the pool.

AP: Who were the co-workers or the deans or the certain personalities that stick out in your mind?

DE: In my school or any school?

AP: Just throughout campus.

DE: I have trouble remembering names in my advanced age. When the English teacher—I mentioned him here today—H.G. Merriam...I can't think of them when I want to.

AP: What was Merriam like?

DE: Well, he was an important man on the campus. He conducted himself like a worldly man. He was very friendly and helpful. I was on a graduate school committee with him. He was chairman of it. He was a grand person.

Well we had a lot of important people. They were all good teachers and supporters of the university. The physics man I was thinking of was a math teacher, Professor...I can't remember.

AP: Was it Dr. Lemmes?

DE: Oh yes, Lemmes was one. Lemmes was quite a character. I think he set himself up, thought he was a little too much like God.

AP: Oh really?

DE: Yes. Of course I didn't take courses with him because of having to get my coursework done, but when I came here he invited me to his home one afternoon. It was kind of a summons. I knew it was coming because Clause told me. I went down to his home and he talked to me and I kind of got the feeling that well, I passed his quizzes about the university and my background and I guess I was all right. He did that to some other people I guess when they came here. He had no official title other than professor of mathematics.

At the time, the faculty had a faculty club. It was very informal but we would get together, oh I suppose once a month. The wives and the husbands as the case may be. We got together and had parties and had a lot of fun. I guess there is not a faculty club now. We never had our own building. The prefabs we had after the war, we met in those buildings. We had a lot of fun.

Changes that have taken place. I don't believe the faculty taught as many hours as we did in the early days. Fifteen hours of teaching was not unusual—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

DE: —for me anyway, I was developing new courses all the time and God, I had to work all the time. It interfered with fishing. Then I cut it down. I cut my five hour classes to four hour classes, four times a week and that was easier. Who was president at that time? Jesse.

AP: Acting president.

DE: Acting president. He didn't pull any punches; he didn't like that. I should go back to 15 hours. But I got away with it. He didn't summon me and bawl me out. I just heard he was mad at me for doing that. What would I do with my spare time he thought, fish and hunt I suppose.

That attracted me though to stay here because I enjoyed the hunting and fishing. I had a lot of good friends that were on the faculty that would teach me how to hunt and how to fish. I know that kept me from going some of the other places. I remember getting a call to the University of Illinois. I went over there for an interview and the minute the plane sat down, I wanted to come home. I didn't like it. It was so hot and nothing but corn fields. It's a better school than ours and it would have been a feather in my cap. I didn't want it though, I liked it here.

AP: What would you say is your greatest accomplishment?

DE: Well, developing the accounting department. I had a lot of help. Joe Demaris and later Jack Kempter. We had our own ideas and we always got along together, but we developed a good accounting department. At one time I think practically all the CPAs in Montana had graduated from here. There were students we had worked with, you know. We'd go to any part of the state and we could come up with someone who had graduated from here and was a CPA. I was quite proud of that. It wasn't my work altogether. It was the people I worked with. So we developed the accounting school. There are many references made to it now by the president. So that's my greatest accomplishment I guess.

AP: What were some of the challenges that you met during your years there?

DE: Teaching a course if I didn't know much about it. There were accounting courses that I didn't have proper training in. They developed new courses and they didn't have them when I was going to school. I felt the need of them. That CPA coaching course, I never had a course like that when I took my work at Columbia. I had an awful lot of work to do on that, but I think it worked out all right. I didn't get skunked many times by students. Once in a while I did. (laughs)

AP: When they asked you questions?

DE: I can only remember one of them. That was hard work. Did you ever take any accounting?

AP: I was a journalism major and I wasn't capable of grasping accounting.

DE: I was interested in moving to work at the University of Oregon one time but they didn't offer me enough. I wasn't making much here, but I was one of the highest paid professors. I came here

on \$4,500. I don't believe there was another one, except in law, who was doing as well as that. The University of Oregon offered me \$3,600 and I told them to go to hell. (laughs) I was interested in the school. It was a bigger school and I would have gone if they had paid. My grandson goes there now. My wife's husband before he died taught journalism here, long before your time—Olie Bue. I don't know if you've ever heard of his name. He died about 1970. My wife died about 1971, so I got initiated into the school of journalism by marrying the widow there.

AP: [inaudible]

DE: Oh my wife didn't go to...my present wife.

AP: Oh, okay.

DE: —didn't go to college. She had to go to work. She was raised in Kalispell and born in London. I lost my first wife by cancer. Margerie, my present wife, lost her husband by cancer. My first wife graduated from Cornell University and she was a home economics major. So much for that. I have two sons and two daughters from my second wife, so we have a nice family. We have only gotten together twice. I decided we all ought to get together—the whole combined families. We did it two years by going at Christmas time and promising them a ski vacation. I'd foot the bill if they all came together. One year we went over Bend, Oregon and the second year, last year, up to Big Mountain. A couple grandchildren couldn't get away because of school or something.

AP: If you were to do it all over again, what would you change?

DE: None of it. No, I've loved my work all the time. I like everything in Missoula, although I wish it weren't growing so big. I wouldn't change anything. I've been very lucky I guess. I didn't start out in grade school and high school with very much of a promise. I was a Peck's bad boy and I didn't wise up until I went to college as an undergraduate and I worked hard to make up for lost time.

AP: Any other stories or memories or—

DE: Let me look at this a minute.

[Break in audio]

DE: —ever heard of that? I got my MBA there and I got my Ph.D. in Columbia School of Business. At Wharton School I had a teacher I liked and I had the opportunity to hire him here after he retired from Penn. He was a Montana boy and I was acting dean at the time and I hired him.

AP: What was his name?

DE: Oh hell, Oscar. Oscar...Oscar...Favorite teachers don't apply here.

AP: Were there any favorite students?

DE Oh yes. (laughs) It's awful. Well, Davidson, of D.A. Davidson. Ian, yes. He was one of my

favorites. He graduated from here and did a good job. He went to Stanford and got an MBA and came back here a year to teach. I tried to convince him to stay on to teach and get his Ph.D., but no, he was going to take over his father's business. He ran a little brokerage firm in Great Falls. He went up there and he's a multi-million dollar boy now. (laughs) You know, he built that up all himself. I was very proud of him. We've got two or three other graduates up there working for D.A. Davidson.

Well, I wouldn't do it any differently. I've had lots of challenges here. That's one thing that kept me going I think, because I enjoyed challenges. I may not have met them all satisfactorily. I tried to build the best accounting school in the country, so that's about it.

[Break in audio]

DE: (Unintelligible) I don't think they know how...waltz.

AP: I think it's coming back.

DE: (Unintelligible).They didn't even have contact with their partner, not physical contact. Physical contact was half the fun.

AP: (laughs)

[End of Interview]