

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Edward M. Foster
Second Lieutenant, Sanitary Corps, Army, World War II

2006

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Foster, Edward M., (b. 1917), Oral History Interview, 2006

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Edward "Mike" Foster, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, describes his experiences in the Sanitary Corps in the Army during World War II. First, Foster describes at length his family history and upbringing in Texas. He was born in Alba (Texas) and grew up on a farm in Raines County. He mentions attending a two-room schoolhouse until high school when he moved in with a sister in another town before eventually graduating from a school in Emery (Texas) as valedictorian.

Foster touches upon the effects of the Depression on his family: the farm put his parents in debt, and as a boy he recalls dreaming of a better life. Foster relates he studied biology at North Texas State Teachers College. He tells how, as a teaching assistant in bacteriology, he met his future wife, a home economics major. In 1938, after getting his Masters, Foster went to the University of Wisconsin to get his Ph.D. in bacteriology. He mentions he briefly taught at the University of Texas in Austin before the U.S. joined World War II. In 1941, in part to avoid the draft, Foster explains he enlisted in the Army Sanitary Corps. As a second lieutenant in the Sanitary Corps, his duties included inspecting barracks and mess halls to prevent epidemics. Foster comments he occasionally examined soldiers when the Medical Corps was understaffed. Foster spent a year at Fort Dix (New Jersey) before he was transferred to Camp Dietrich (Maryland). At Camp Dietrich, Foster reveals he worked in an anthrax lab, growing cultures of botulinum and anthrax for the Army. Foster claims that these toxins were originally created to send to the British Army. He describes the equipment and ramshackle nature of the lab, which was built inside an airplane hangar. Also, Foster lists other members of his team including: Captain John Schwab, the leader of the team who got his Ph.D. at Ohio State, Lieutenant Bill Durcell, another University of Wisconsin bacteriology graduate, and Alwin Cuppenheimer, a civilian researcher from Harvard. Foster characterizes the anthrax research as "a Wisconsin plan" and mentions that his former professor, Fred Baldwin, "was in charge of the whole program" and "had something to do with getting me where I was in the Army." Near the end of the war, Foster states he was transferred to a plant in Terre Haute (Indiana) where he continued to work on producing anthrax and other aerobes. He expresses relief that the war ended before his anthrax research was complete, and he criticizes biological warfare in general. After the war, Foster reports the government sold the plant in Terre Haute to a pharmaceutical company that later made antibiotics with the same equipment he'd used to grow anthrax. Foster reveals he continued to work at Terre Haute for a short time before he became a professor of Agricultural Bacteriology at the University of Wisconsin, a job he kept for forty-two years. Foster discusses some of his professional projects funded by the Pillsbury Corporation. He also mentions working with influential bacteriologists at UW, including: Bill Frazier, Fred Baldwin, and E. B. Fred, who later became President of the University. Foster expresses ambivalence about his time in the Army, stating he felt sorry that the

war happened, and that he'd rather be doing something else, but ultimately doing his part was necessary to stop Hitler.

Biographical Sketch:

Foster (b. 1917) was born in Alba (Texas) and attended several high schools before graduating from Emery High as a valedictorian. He got his B.A. and Masters in Biology from North Texas Teachers College. He met his future wife, a home economics major, while he was a teaching assistant there. In the late 1930s, he got his Ph.D. in Bacteriology at the University of Wisconsin. During World War II, Foster became a second lieutenant in the Army's Sanitary Corps where he inspected barracks and mess halls. Later, his job changed to researching anthrax and biological warfare for the Army. After the war, Foster and his wife moved back to Madison and he taught Food and Dairy Bacteriology for forty-two years at the University of Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2007.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009.

Interview Transcript

John: Okay. This is John Driscoll, and this is an oral history interview with Edward M. Foster, "Mike" Foster, and today is August 15, 2006, and this interview is being held in the conservatory at the Attic Angels Center, on the west side of Madison. And, Mike, thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview, and good morning. And why don't we start at the very beginning? Where and when were you born?

Mike: I was born in Alba, Texas.

John: I may ask you so spell some words.

Mike: That's A-l-b-a.

John: Alba. Okay.

Mike: Down in East Texas, fairly near to Tyler. If you've ever heard of Tyler. Background here, my mother was operating a small hotel in Alba for mostly traveling business men who came to town to service the local stores, and so on. And so her small hotel was near the railroad station. And she had two boys, young teenage boys. Herman and Durwood Ivey. I-v-e-y, was her first husband's name, He was, of course, deceased. Sometime in there, I don't know when it was, or how it was, or why it was, but she met my father. He was a widower. He had lost his wife. He was a carpenter contractor. He would go out and build a house for you, under contract. He would hire the help and buy the materials, and so on. Well, he had come home then, after two weeks or so, and get re-acquainted with his family. He had a young teenage daughter, named Lois.

John: [Lawn mower noise from outside.] Well, we'll do it, and if he gets close, we'll just pause. Okay? Mike, when were you born?

Mike: When? January 1st, 1917. Very easy to remember. I can calculate my age in a moment. Yes, January 1st, 1917. But before that, my father was a carpenter contractor and he had a young teen-aged daughter named Lois. She was about twelve or thirteen, or fourteen. I don't know exactly how old she was. Anyway, my father and mother somehow got together. I don't know just how they arranged this, but he continued to do his contracting work, and she continued her hotel, and pretty soon, in a few months, they decided that wasn't any way to live. And so they decided to buy a farm. They found one up in Raines County, Texas, about forty, fifty miles from Alba. Maybe not that far. And got a government loan, and bought the farm, and away we moved. He boys, her sons, meanwhile, had went off on their own, and the daughter did too. They got jobs and went to work. They

were teen-agers. Anyway, the farm started. And I remember a little bit about it. That was when I was three or four years old. But after a while the debt got pretty heavy on them, and they decided to let the-- actually they bought two pieces of land. One had a house on it. The other one didn't. We lived in the house, of course. But anyhow, they decided to reduce their debt by letting the house and that part go back. He built a little four-room hut, you might say. A little more than that, on the other piece. And that was our home then, for the next forty, twenty years, something like that. Anyway, he had to clear all the land, and so on. And he grew cotton as a cash crop. And he had livestock. And we had a pasture, and all the other stuff that goes with being a farmer in East Texas. Meanwhile, my mother's sons, Herman and Durwood Ivey, and my father's daughter, Lois Foster, were off working. And this went on. I started in a little two room country school. About a mile from our home, maybe a little more. And my mother went with me to get me started. I don't know how old I was. About five, I guess. And anyway, I went through that. It wasn't hard. I remember one year we got a new teacher, and she said, "Now, would all the fifth-graders come forward?" And she put her hand on my back and pushed, and I went from third to fifth grade just like that.

John: Okay.

Mike: It didn't seem to matter. I survived it. And that went on through the seventh grade. And then I had to go to high school. I had to go back to town. That was seven miles away. So that was a struggle. High school was a hard job. My sister, by this time, had married, and she lived two hundred and fifty miles away, in West Texas. She invited me to come live with her, and go to high school, and eighth grade. Well, I went out there, but her husband loved bourbon whiskey an awful lot, and the marriage was quite rocky. I finished the first grade, I mean the first year. And went back for the second year, and it lasted six weeks, I think it was, before they split. I had to go home. Well, I won't give you all the details, but going back and forth in high school was a rough go, but I graduated valedictorian of my high school graduation.

John: Oh, tremendous, Wow.

Mike: I graduated from the first high school I went to. Emery. That is near our home. Well, then, come college. What did I do? Didn't have any money, but a cousin of mine got a job teaching school at North Texas State Teachers College. And he was teaching business administration, shorthand and typing. And he lived with his widowed mother. And they invited me to come live with them and go to college. That got me through two years. And then I got a teaching assistantship and I was on my own. As a junior and senior, I got my own, I earned my own way as a teaching assistant. And in the course of that teaching assistant, we had a class in general bacteriology for, well, I guess for anybody who wanted to take it. And it

seems like the home economics people had a requirement that their bakers take bacteria, take that course in bacteriology.

John: Oh, yeah? That's interesting.

Mike: Oh, yeah. They learned a little, rudiments of why they had to be so sanitary. And so, in the course, there was, oh, I don't know, eighty students in there. And we had a little overflow laboratory. So that was my job. The professor took the other one, the big one. And in the overflow lab was this little blond home ec. major that I kind of liked the looks of. And I finally got her to marry me. But that was much later. Anyway, I finished a master's degree. Then, what do it do? I was ready to go out teaching biology in high school. I was prepared and commissioned and certificated, and all that stuff. But my professor urged me to go on and get a Ph.D. And I applied for financial assistance everywhere I could think of. Harvard, in the East, Berkeley in the West. I got one offer. And that was a Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation scholarship. Forty dollars a month. So that is the one I took.

John: And this was in what year?

Mike: This was 1938. Maybe it was the fall of '37. And so I went off and left everybody in Texas behind, and came to Wisconsin.

John: That must have been a change.

Mike: It was, but it was a very pleasant change. I had no complaints. I won't burden you with the details of my arrival but I got here about twelve o'clock at night on a bus from Chicago. And nowhere to go. So I went up to the men's room, and laid down on the wooden bench, and slept as best I could until morning. And next morning I got up and started looking for a room. Came to the university and met the old boy who was the chairman of the department. And it has been duck soup ever since.

John: That's great.

Mike: Yeah, it was a wonderful experience. Three years later I walked out with my Ph.D. and they kept me on as an instructor, which they routinely did for help in their advanced laboratories, and things. But here a job opened at the University of Texas. And I took it. She was teaching school about two hundred and fifty miles away, but she managed to come over for a weekend, and we got married.

John: Okay.

Mike: That was, I'll quit there, if you want.

John: No. That is a tremendous experience.

Mike: Well, we were married. She had to finish her teaching, her term, so she went back to Curville, Texas, and finished that. I was still working at Austin. She got through. She come back, came back, and rented an apartment and we were now man and wife. Without any question. So it went on. I don't know. What was it? Two years, maybe? Almost a year. But the war was going on. So, obviously I was either going to get drafted or something else. So I applied for a commission in the Sanitary Corps. The Medical Corps was only for doctors, you know.

John: Okay. Okay.

Mike: I was a doctor, but not a doctor of medicine. So I got a commission as a first lieutenant in 1941, in the Sanitary Corps, and went to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

John: Oh, yes.

Mike: You know that? Have you been there?

John: I've been there. Yeah.

Mike: And my job, at first, was to inspect mess halls and barracks, and well, I guess that was it, mess halls and barracks. Be sure they were sanitary and make sure they didn't have anything that might start an epidemic.

John: Sure.

Mike: And also interview troops who were coming in, be sure they didn't bring any disease in with them. You'd think a medical, but they didn't have enough medics to go around for all this stuff.

John: I see.

Mike: They would take us for that. And that went on for, I guess, a year. That sounds about right. Well, anyway, one day, lo and behold, and oh, by the way, my job changed about half-way through that. I was transferred to the station hospital laboratory, where I could practice bacteriology. And make cultures, and read slides, and all of that stuff. But after about a year at Fort Dix, I got orders to go to Camp Dietrich, Maryland.

John: Oh, yes.

Mike: You even hear of Camp Dietrich?

John: Yes. I was there a year ago. I took a course on Civil War surgery, at Fort Dietrich.

Mike: Oh, you did?

John: But, go ahead.

Mike: Well, I got down there. I was, it turns out that they had a temporary pilot plant built. They were building a regular plant inside the hangar. You know, there is a hangar there. I don't know if you would know it. But that is where they kept their airplanes. But the Army took this over. And they didn't need the hangar anymore for that purpose, because there was nobody using the airport anymore. So they were building a pilot plant inside the hangar to produce anthrax.

John: Oh, wow.

Mike: But, in the meantime, they had built a little temporary, they called it a pilot plant, it was a little, out in the middle of a field they had put up a shack, I guess you'd call it. Had some tanks and centrifuge. And the steam came from a boiler that was manned outside the, well, this thing was all in an eight-foot high, or ten-foot high wall. For security reasons.

John: Yeah, sure.

Mike: And so, it turns out that was put there purely to make some botulin and toxin. The British wanted it. Our allies, the British, wanted it. So they put together a crew of four, and they had some old used equipment, and Sharpless Super-centrifuge, real fast thing, and they had some enlisted soldiers who were operating the boiler. A small boiler they got from a pressing parlor somewhere. I don't know where they got it. And that was to make steam for us. And then those of us who were inside, working inside, were to produce cultures of botulin and toxin. Botulinum. And then collect the toxin. The crew, I think, would interest you. There was, I was a first lieutenant. Bill Durell was a second lieutenant. We were both from Wisconsin. John Schwab was from Ohio State, and he was a captain. And Alwin Cuppenheimer was a civilian, a professor from Harvard University. So the four of us were the crew. And we took turns, that is we worked shifts, growing cultures of botulinum and then collecting the toxin with a centrifuge, and putting it in the jar. And, supposedly, we were told it was going to the British. They wanted it for some purpose. And that whole thing was done for that purpose. Once that was fulfilled, they knocked the whole thing down, that is, the plant. It was all a bunch of used equipment, anyway. So, that was the beginning of it all for me. Meanwhile, they were setting up, they were equipping a fermentation plant, is what it amounted to. They put in big tanks and centrifuges, and everything else.

Inside the hangar. Now, the hangar, remember this was an airport. The hangar was for security purposes. They didn't want anybody to know what was going on in there. You couldn't see it.

John: Sure.

Mike: So I was in charge, no, I was number two man in there. John Schwab, I think, was in charge. Our job was to learn how to produce anthrax. And so we went through all the rigamarole that is necessary. Using what they call simulants, that is a harmless organism that forms spores, just like anthrax does. And so we would produce that, and one day we took our breath and said, "We were going to grow anthrax today." And we did. And we foamed it over. It went out the air tanks and, well, we cleaned it up. It wasn't all that bad. Sure would shake you up, at first.

John: Oh, yeah.

Mike: So, anyway, that went on for a while. Meanwhile, though, the government was planning a full-scale production plant, for aerobes, or, well, anything. Aerobes, and anthrax is an aerobe. That is the ones that require air, by the way. Anaerobes are the ones that don't require air. All right. That was at Terre Haute, Indiana. And so I went out there. I was in charge of the production plant. That is, to produce the anthrax. And, well, just to make a long story short, thank God the war ended and we never got it in there. So they sold the plant to a pharmaceutical house, and they been making antibiotics ever since. Same equipment. That is about the story of my military life.

John: Fort Dietrich is still the anthrax center, isn't it?

Mike: Oh, yeah. As far as I know. They didn't tell me a thing, but I hear about it, now and then.

John: I know what I see in the news.

Mike: And it's probably, well, I wouldn't call it the anthrax center, but it's the biological warfare center, no doubt about that.

John: Okay.

Mike: Because they may get out of anthrax. See, anthrax is an old-timer. That is what used to be. There is all kinds of things they could use now.

John: Yeah, I know.

- Mike: Thank God I don't have anything to do with it. Anyway, that is pretty much the story of my life up until I came to Wisconsin.
- John: Go ahead. Then, after the war, you came to Wisconsin?
- Mike: After the war, the minute the war was over and they rang the whistle, my wife and I got in the car. Her car. I didn't have one. And drove it to Terre Haute, Indiana. And, now wait a minute. We were already out there, weren't we? We had to come back and get my discharge. I know that. That's right. We went right to work at Terre Haute, after the war. Well, I can't remember exactly what happened. We didn't come to Madison yet. At the end of the war, we went back to Frederick, and I got my discharge from the Army. And went to work at the University of Wisconsin. There forty-two years before I quit.
- John: That's great.
- Mike: Well, they knew me. That is, Fred Baldwin. Well, I went to school here. And they knew me. What happened was, the chairman of the department, Bacteriology, Agricultural Bacteriology, they called it. There is a Medical Bacteriology, and there is an Agricultural. Well, the chairman of Agricultural Bacteriology was a good old gentleman named Hastings. E. C. Hastings. And he retired. So my chief, Frazier, Bill Frazier, was appointed chairman of the Department of Agricultural Bacteriology. And I was his protégée, And so I don't know if that helped me more than anybody else. But, anyway, I had a job. And I had a good job, too. So, one thing led to another and, well, I don't know how many years it was. Twenty or something like that. I was teaching Food and Dairy Bacteriology. Those are two courses. And Professor Hastings, who I replaced, was a dairy bacteriologist. Professor Frazier was the food bacteriologist. And he was my major professor. Well, when they hired me to replace Hastings, Frazier suggested that I teach one course one year and the other one the next. Dairy bacteriology one year and food bacteriology the next. And he would alternate.
- John: Oh, okay.
- Mike: So, he was qualified in both of them. And so that is what we did. And we had a year off from the advanced course. Each one of us did, every other year. Well, anyway, we had plenty to do. We had regular students about running out our ears. And so, there was never a lack of work, shall we say.
- John: That is tremendous. To go back just a bit, to the Army, do you...
- Mike: Back to where?

John: To your time in the Army.

Mike: Oh, in the Army.

John: You were a young man. You were newly married. You were starting out in life.

Mike: First lieutenant.

John: Well, even before that, though. You didn't intend to go into the Army, did you?

Mike: Oh, no.

John: How do you feel about-- the war happened, they came, they took you. They took so many years of your life. What is your reaction? How do you feel about that?

Mike: I don't know. I just had to do it. It doesn't bother me.

John: You know, that is what every vet I've talked to says. Had to do it.

Mike: I never had any emotional reaction to it. I felt, gee, I am sorry this happened. I'd rather do something else. But then, everybody else was doing the same thing I was. We were having to come in. So, I wasn't discriminated, I didn't feel discriminated against. By going into the Army, it was the thing to do. Everybody had to do it, because we had enemies at our throat. The Japanese and the Germans both. And I got good friends in both of them, too. But, that was beside the point. At that time, Hitler was Hitler. And we had to do something about him. I felt it was just to do it, and I was glad I didn't have any more to do than I did. I didn't lose my life, or anything.

John: Did you stay in touch with any of the people you were with in the Army? In the service? You were all scientists.

Mike: Oh, well, yeah, these were, many of them, I knew them not only in the Army but I knew them back here in Wisconsin, as graduate students and things like that. Baldwin, of course. Who was in charge, really, of the whole program. It was a Wisconsin plan. The whole thing. Do you know him?

John: No.

Mike: Did you ever hear of him before?

John: Baldwin? No.

Mike: Oh, he was a professor of agricultural bacteriology, that is where I met him. I took his course. And then, later on, I am sure he must have had something to do with getting me where I was in the Army. E. B. Fred was the dean of the Graduate School back in those days.

John: Yes, I've heard of him.

Mike: And I know he later became president of the university. Well, I took his course, too. He was the same department as I was. And he was on the National Academy of Science, which did a lot of the, I guess you would say, scientific background of the biological warfare program. I don't know just what they did, but there was a bunch of them down there that seemed to know what it was all about. Now, those were the two big contacts I had. Meanwhile, the man I did my Ph. D. under was Bill Frazier. W. C. Frazier. And I came back here, and he was chairman of the department that I joined. In other words, he got me, he hired me back here, is what it amounted to. And he stayed on until he retired. And, oh, that was a wonderful experience for me. Everything I did led to interesting and better things.

John: Sure. Sure.

Mike: I was lucky to be able to contact here. Of course, I took their courses. These men, I took their courses as a graduate student and they became, and they went up, and I am sure that had something to do with my going up. And then, when it came to coming back here, there was a vacancy that had developed, because the chairman of the department, Hastings, was retiring. And he was being replaced by my chief, Frazier. And then Frazier, of course, I am sure was the agency that got me back here. After the war. I took Hastings's place. And that was forty-two years before I quit.

John: That is tremendous. It worked out wonderfully.

Mike: I used to think when I was a boy on the farm in Texas, looking up at that hot sun and thinking, there has got to be a better life. And, by golly, I was right. Yeah, I found a wonderful woman for a wife.

John: Hey, this is wonderful there.

Mike: And I had a wonderful job for a career. Yeah, sixty-five years. We lived with two different families in Frederick, and we kept in touch with them for years. They were quite good friends. They sort of adopted us. Which happens in few cases. Housing was really a problem.

John: Oh, yeah. Sure.

Mike: Anyway, I proved that I was right. There was a better life.

John: That's great. I don't know how it would apply with you, but I'll ask anyway. Being in the service, you got the GI Bill. Did you ever use the GI Bill after you came out for anything?

Mike: I don't know of anything I ever used it for. I was through the education, yeah. I just wonder, I did do a job on the faculty. Some of our peers did, and they came back for one more year.

John: That's tremendous. That's a side of the World War II story that I've never heard. As I said, I am going to flip this tape over.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

Mike: Okay.

John: I write on American history, and normally the nineteenth century, before, during, and after the American Civil War. Not so much on the war itself, but the events leading up to it, and the aftermath. And I went to Fort Dietrich to take a course on Civil War surgery.

Mike: Oh, you did?

John: Not that I am qualified to take off an arm or leg. But they have the Civil War Medical Museum there in Frederick.

Mike: Yeah, I've seen it.

John: Of course, South Mountain is right there.

Mike: So you have been to Frederick?

John: Oh, yeah. When I came out of the service, Carole and I got married and we lived in Alexandria, Virginia, right outside of Washington. And that is how I got interested in American history. We had a bunch of kids, and we didn't have any money, so on Saturdays, we'd pack a lunch and go tour a battlefield. And all the battlefields are right there.

Mike: Oh, yeah, they got scads of them.

John: Antietam, and Harper's Ferry. And all that. Well, this is a tremendous story. It

really is. It's one more story of those millions of, I have a good friend who passed away just a few years ago, Stephen Ambrose. The writer. And Stephen was giving a talk one evening to some World War II vets, and he was praising them, and telling them what a wonderful job they had done. And most of them said, "Nah, I did my job" "I drove my truck." "I carried a rifle." "I did this, I did that, but I just did." And he said. I don't know if you ever met him. He was a big BSer.

Mike: He was here for a short period.

John: Yeah. That is when I met him. And he said, "Would you World War II vets stand?" And they stood up, and they were a little self-conscious. And he said, "You were giants! You went out and saved the world!" And, you did. Everyone doing his or her part of it all.

Mike: If we hadn't done it, Hitler would have been the world ruler. There is no question about it. I don't claim any credit myself, but if the country hadn't done it.

John: You were part of it. You were part of it. I am going to shut this off. This is a tremendous story. Anything else you want to get to before I do?

Mike: I don't really think there is anything else. You are talking about war time, aren't you?

John: War time, or your life as war time affected it.

Mike: Well, I came back here and spent forty-two years on the faculty, and I guess you don't need that.

John: Well, no, that is great. That is tremendous.

Mike: I mean, since I got here, I've had a few successes, and I don't know, do you want them on there?

John: Sure. Absolutely.

Mike: Well, I came, as I said earlier, to replace Professor Hastings. E. G. Hastings. And he taught dairy bacteriology, in the Department of Food Microbiology and Toxicology. Wait a minute. Called Dairy Bacteriology in the Department of Agricultural Bacteriology. I am sorry. I got that wrong. That is another department. Anyway, I took over his job of teaching it, and my then-chairman, and my former major professor, and the guy who hired me back here, Frazier, was teaching food bacteriology. And he proposed to me, instead of me teaching just dairy bacteriology, and he just teach food bacteriology, we rotate. We'd take them

- both one year, and the other would take then the other year.
- John: That's great.
- Mike: This way you get a year off from teaching an advanced course. Well, we did that for God knows, for twenty or thirty years. Quite a long time. And each one of us taught when our time came, and we had students and graduate students running out our ears.
- John: That's great.
- Mike: Then, about twenty years or so later. Oh, more than that. I can't remember the exact year, I was approached. I had a lot of contacts with the food industry. I had former students in them. And I'd go to their meetings, and the food technology meetings, and dairy microbiology meetings, and so on. And I got to know these people, and one day, one of my former students, who was a vice president of Pillsbury Company, came to me and said, "The Food Research Institute, in Chicago, University of Chicago, is about to lose its director. A fellow named Dack (?) who invented practically all of the food poisonings we ever heard of." That isn't really true, but that is what his Food Research Institute did. They did research on botulism and on salmonella, and on staphylococcus. And Dr. Dack has added a man who is interested in viruses, because there was a lot of worry about viruses, food borne viruses. And he had a family. I mean a faculty of about four people besides himself. And each one of them specializing. And then he got a lot of support from industry. Industry was just as interested in keeping that stuff out of the food products as the FDA was.
- John: Sure.
- Mike: And so one of my former students, graduate students, was a vice president of Pillsbury. And he came to me one day and said, "You know, Dr. Dack is going to retire. Could you use the group up at Wisconsin?" This was back in the Seventies. And, sure enough, that is what happened. I got four new professors and I think about a hundred and fifty monkeys. They used monkeys to test for staphylococcal toxin because they have a vomiting mechanism, just like people. Monkeys can vomit like people.
- John: Oh, okay.
- Mike: So, if you want to see if something has got staph toxin in it, give it to a monkey and see if he vomits. That is one way. There are other ways, too. But that is what they did then. So, anyway, one thing led to another and, could we use this group here? And the dean, Dean Pound, you've probably heard of him. He seemed to figure we could. I thought we could. So, we got them up here. We got four

professors and about a hundred monkeys. It fell to Dean Pound's job to find a place for them. And it took over a building down by the lake. The food service building for one of the dormitories. It was available, and so we remodeled it, and fixed it up as labs, with monkey cages. We had a lot of monkeys. And we moved down there. Then we had a lot of joint appointments, they called them. These were people in other departments having interests in this. And, Lord, at one time, I think I had seven or eight faculty members. And trying to find a home for them was always a problem. But Dean Pound saw that and he said, at that time we were just an institute, he said, "Well, that's all right. We'll just make you a department." So it became the Department of Food Microbiology and Toxicology.

John: Wow.

Mike: And it is still today. I was chairman of it for twenty-odd years. And now there is a fellow named Barezza, Mike Barezza. He is chairman of it. I hired him in the first place. So it is a department now, Food Microbiology and Toxicology, and it's about six or seven faculty members. I've forgotten exactly.

John: That's great. Wow.

Mike: And they are moving into the new Bacteriology Building that is going up just west of Ag Hall.

John: Yeah.

Mike: It is just going up now. Maybe it's finished. I'm not, I haven't heard.

John: I've seen it. For the last ten years, before I retired, I was the Chief of Construction for the state. So every time I see a crane, I ask, is it one of ours?

Mike: Yeah, another building going up. There was Fred Hall, just west of that. They knocked that down. This new building is going up where it was, except it is a lot bigger. And it is going to house, by the way, not only Ag Bacteriology, and Food Bacteriology, but Medical Bacteriology. They are coming over. Yes, sir. That was something I worked on for forty years, but I never got anywhere. Tried to make peace between Ag and Medical. It went back to some early days when some, oh, they had some *prima donnas* on the faculty. And they couldn't get along.

John: Yeah, I know. Turf and politics.

Mike: While, anyway, they finally got together, and now all three of them, the three departments, are going into this huge new, and very expensive building, just west of Ag Hall. They knocked Fred Hall down. It's no longer there. It's kind of mess

in the interim, because people don't have a home. But it will come out all right.

John: That's great.

Mike: They'll borrow space, from Biochemistry, and one thing and another. But that is about it. I got out of there just in time before all of that happened. I retired in what was it, '88? Or '98? No, no, '88. And I turned it over to a man that I hired in the first place.

John: Who was that?

Mike: Mike Barezza. You know Barezza?

John: No.

Mike: Well, he's a very nice fellow. And apparently doing very well, as far as I can see. I hired him in the first place, because of a, oh, problem that a lot of concerns about, well, he started off trying to answer the question, is food safe? Not microbiologically. We knew all that. But there were a lot of enemies of the food industry who were saying, if you eat this, it will make you sick. Or it is bad for you. And so, I hired him to try to answer some of those types of questions. And he did. He did a wonderful job. Yeah, there were people who claimed that hamburger would make you sick. Wasn't good for you.

John: Makes you fat, I know.

Mike: COA. Conjugated Onalaic Acid. That is what came out of his work on hamburger.

John: Okay.

Mike: The outcome was that, instead of hurting you, it was good for you.

John: Well, okay. I am going to wrap this up. This is tremendous.

[End of Interview]