MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: **Ernest C. Oberholtzer**

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INTERVIEWER: Evan Hart

No tape recording is extant.

Transcript: 31 pages, draft

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED:

Oberholtzer's job as vice consul in Hanover, Germany, ca. 1911;

Oberholtzer's friendship with Conrad Aiken and their trip to England in 1908; seeing Aiken later;

Samuel E. Morison, a college friend and later a professor at Harvard University;

Fred Winston and his contribution to the Quetico-Superior project;

Struggle against E.W. Backus for land for Quetico-Superior forest;

Mrs. Martin, secretary for the Minneapolis office of the Quetico-Superior Council.

INTERVIEW, MARCH 13, 1966

EVAN HART: Lucile had left some topics. I'll read them first. She's left three things that she would like to have you discuss. The first is Conrad Aiken. She would like to have you tell the rest of the story of your association with Mr. Aiken.

The second topic would be to have you talk about Fred Winston's contribution to the Quetico-Superior project, and Lucile says she has the story so far as your meeting with Fred Winston.

The third topic is to pull together the whole story of your association with Samuel E. Morison.

Mr. Oberholtzer: Now, this descends on me very suddenly, and I have to –

Mr. Hart: Well, she'd he particularly interested in your recollections of Aiken and his characterization of yourself in one of his books.

Mr. Oberholtzer: The name of the book will come to me, probably when I get to talking. This is a biographical book, and the only one he ever wrote of that sort. I guess it must be about ten years old now. It must have been published about that long ago. And it's a stream of consciousness. Aiken is very much impressed evidently by some of these new people, by Joyce, the man who wrote Ulysses. This book very much impressed Aiken, and that style of writing, which is also carried out by the famous French novelist -- and anybody that's at all up on these things would recollect his name. When I saw Aiken a good many years ago (I hadn't seen him for a long, long time) he immediately referred to these people, and said, "Now, Oberholtzer, I think you should read such and such, and I hadn't read any of it. Nobody probably is less of a reader than I am, strange to say. I've had periods in my life when I read a great deal. When I was a boy, I read before I went to school. I was reading fairy tales when I was a little bit of a kid, and all through grade school I was a great reader. When I got into high school, I read very little.

I was in different kinds of activities, including poker. The violin became quite a large activity, up to the time of my very serious illness when I was seventeen and then everything was dropped. That was a very desperate illness of rheumatic fever. I had to drop out of school. I had to drop half a year behind my class and go into another class.

And then I had to prepare for special examinations for entrance into Harvard. They wouldn't let you in on what you now call college examinations. There were so many points that you had to make. I took up Greek, because it counted for a lot. You could learn as much Greek in six months as you could in some of these other things, and get more points for it. So I did do that, and that's the way I got into Harvard. Some things I flunked. The things I didn't care about I flunked. I liked mathematics as long as they didn't get into geometry. I flunked geometry. I never liked chemistry or anything like that, and so I flunked chemistry. You would think I would have been very much absorbed by history, but, strange to say, I never was, except history of exploration. Political history was just the most tiresome thing in the world to me, so I flunked history. I went to Harvard with those three conditions. But Harvard was a very liberal place. I think they must have been very good to me. I had taken German, because we had to study Cornea all the time I was in Davenport. Half of the people there are German, you know, so it was always on the schedule. My grandfather wanted me to speak German, and I never liked it. I never had any interest. When I took my examinations, I was sure I flunked it, but I got a good mark. The only way I can understand is that perhaps they never read it. Perhaps they read my name and said: Well, we don't need to read that, you see. So that was fine. Everything went swimmingly good.

After graduation from Harvard, I did become Vice Consul at Hanover, Germany, for eight months, just by accident. I didn't want to do this, but I needed the money, and I was going to Hudson Bay as soon as I could get a little money. I went for six months, but told them, frankly, that's what I was doing. They said, Oh,

you'll never want to leave at all. Well, they just didn't know me. That was just before the First World War, so I saw all the preparations for the war, and I saw the Germans when they were under this great pressure and so tense. It was very disagreeable. I didn't like it at all. Everything was regulated, you see. You could hardly open your mouth without being in trouble.

Mr. H.: What year was that?

Mr. O.: 1911. They pretty near went to war while I was there, over the Algeciras Conference, you see. Britain and France and Spain were dividing up Africa, and Germany wanted a slice. So they served notice on Britain, especially, that they'd have to be consulted, that they'd have to be in on this, and Britain refused. That's while I was there. Kaiser Wilhelm was reigning at the time, and strange to say, he backed down. Well, he backed down because his own military advisers told him the time hadn't come, you sea. They were getting ready though. My Consul, who was 7 deeply pro-German, said that it was just a matter of time before they war would come and that then it was all over for Britain. He said, it's done for. People won't realize it until they have the war and Britain is put in its place. That's what he said. He used to point to the troops going by outside and say: Now look at this. Do you think that any other troops in the world could do this? Do you know how many miles they've come today? Well, I didn't know. But they just looked like -- they didn't look like human beings. They were covered with thick dust from some old macadam roads they had gone through and they were just going along like automatons. They'd come some incredible distance and carried heavy stuff in hot weather. Well, none of that influenced me very much, but I'm getting off my subject.

How I happened to get quite so far away from Aiken is a little mysterious at the moment, except that I finally got in Harvard. I had these conditions, and so I was supposed to make those up and take other examinations later. They agreed that I should take my mathematics later, but I had to take a course in chemistry and a course in history the first year, and I didn't like it. You were permitted to take

as many courses as you could carry. Four courses were required, but I carried five or six every year that I was there, because they weren't limiting you then the way they do now. You didn't have to specialize or major in some one subject. I think that was good for me, except that I never had a trade. I never learned anything that I could earn money with, but I could find out more about myself and what my interests were, you see. So I took everything that seemed extra good - fine philosophy courses under the wonderful philosophers they have there, including

Santa Ana and James. I had a wonderful geology course under Shaler. But I had to take this history, which was a huge course and very disagreeable.

Mr. Hart: Was it world history or American?

Mr. O.: It was world history. They had the class all divided up into sections. There was a little man that you'd meet with. When he saw that I wasn't applying myself, he made himself just as disagreeable as he could.

Mr. H.: Well, I think the method of teaching history has changed considerably since the early 1900's, and it is now more vital and more real.

Mr. O.: Oh, yes. If I had had a man like Sam Morison, it would be totally different.

But it was a horribly cut-and-dried thing, and so I did only enough studying to pass it in order to get rid of the condition. It was the same in chemistry. In all the other things, I easily got good marks because I was interested in them. I carried five or six courses without any difficulty. After a while they decided I was all right, that I was capable of going on in Harvard, you see, and they never asked me for any more geometry.

I guess I've told how I met Conrad Aiken and maybe I told a little about him. Now, this book is called Ushant. Just exactly why, I can't tell you now. I never read the book through. It's very difficult reading. I used to read it at night after I went to bed, up at the island, where I was doing a lot of physical work and had many other things on hand. But, of course, I was interested, and liked to read. Besides, Conrad's cousin, through whom I first met Conrad, had written me, and said, "Ober, you're in it, too." And, a man who wrote the review of it for the New York

Times, said that he had read it six times and that it was the most wonderful thing of this sort that he had ever read. It is very involved and difficult. I don't know how he ever read it six times and how a man who didn't even know Aiken could have felt that much interest, except that a man who was interested in the English language and its development and the new tendencies would be fascinated by it. I don't mean by that that I was critical of it, or didn't think it was a wonderful piece of work, but it was difficult for me to read, even though I knew Conrad so well. But I read enough to discover some of these passages where I was involved.

Mr. H.: Were there symbolic names for the individuals he was discussing?

Mr. O.: No, they didn't seem symbolic. Of course, I was the only one I knew about. Well, I knew who some of the others were. They were people for whom he had a particular dislike -- relatives.

Mr. H.: Do you recall the name that he used for you?

Mr. O.: I can't remember. I think I'd have to look that up and let you know afterwards, but I think it began with "0". It was something like "Ober," but I haven't opened the book for many years -- not since it first came out.* I found myself coming in most unexpectedly, quite a number of times. Maybe it was five, maybe it was ten times -- but there were little incidents. For instance, we went over steerage on our trip in 1908. They called it third Nass. But, it was after the very sudden panic we had here. You're too young a man to know about that…

Mr. H.: No, I remember this.

Mr. O.: The country was just knocked flat. It was called a banker's panic. Everything was shut right down, practically the world over. In England, thousands and tens of thousands were marching in the streets, carrying banners. Some of the women were dressed in gunnysacks, and kids were barefoot in the muddy, nasty, slimy streets. But they were never -- and that was so characteristic of Britain in those days, and I guess it still is -- they were never violent or disagreeable. It was

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* Mr. Oberholtzer later recalled that the name given him was Ebo.

just marching to show that…

Mr. H.: Passive resistance?

Mr. O.: Yes, that's exactly the way to describe it. It was pathetic. The children would go in the streets where somebody had started to eat a sandwich and thrown the sandwich down in this slime and pick it up and eat it. I saw them do that, barefoot boys. A lot of these boys had no homes and so they would sleep in doorways and hallways at night. There were many of them in those days who would think it was wicked to have the government do anything for these people. But there was an opportunity for charity, and the people were very charitable.

Mr. H.: You observed probably most of this in London?

Mr. O.: Liverpool.

Mr. H.: Yes, that's a big industrial center.

Mr. O.: Yes, I was in Liverpool half of one winter, after I'd been with Conrad. I had learned early in the summer, as soon as college was out that one could go by train from Davenport, Iowa, to Quebec, and take there a Canadian steamer, the Empress of Britain, third class, and that they were empty enough so you could even have a little room down there in third class. You could sail from Quebec to Liverpool, with the privilege of a train ticket from there to London if you wanted, for $42.50, which included all your food on the steamer. When I learned of that, I got in touch with Conrad. Conrad was very much impressed by that, and we decided that we'd go over.

It wouldn't cost him much from Boston, you see. We'd meet at the "Plains of Abraham" in Quebec, and go on the steamer, and then go by bicycle up into northern England and Scotland. So we did that. We had a nice clean room. The passengers in the third class were immigrants who had come to America within the last three years or so. There were all kinds -- every nationality. They were mostly people who had prospered, and they were going back for the first time on this wonderful opportunity. There were Scandinavians. There were rabbis. There were all kinds of nationalities. I had my violin along, because I thought if we got hard up, I could make some money

fiddling. I was ready to fiddle on street corners, or anyplace. It would be an adventure, you *see.*

One of these immigrants was a preacher. I wish I knew what his name was. He had been very successful in Minneapolis, and he'd built up quite a church of his own. He was a very nice fellow, and he was really the leader of this whole crowd. We got pretty well acquainted with him. They were very much interested in the violin, and so they kept asking me to come out and play. I didn't want to do that, and I was hoping to keep it quiet. There was no immediate need of taking up a collection. Conrad never said anything. He never encouraged it or discouraged it. He didn't seem particularly interested. But of course Conrad was always deeply immersed in thought. He just lived in poetry.

Mr. H.: What sort of an individual was he?

Mr. O.: He was a very introspective fellow -shy, extremely shy. He was very handsome, tall, fellow, with a great shock of real light hair.

Mr. H.: Did he get along well with the other people in the group, or was he pretty reserved?

Mr. O.: He was pretty reserved, yes. He was agreeable, but you had the feeling all the time of his great shyness. That was the main reason that he didn't respond more. Perhaps people didn't think they understood why he'd have the contact, but there'd be practically no interchange at all. I never had had that difficulty with him. From the first time I knew him, he appealed to me as a very remarkable fellow, very deep, dealing with ideas and sensations that most people just sort of took for granted. It was a psychological field. I think it was closely akin to what in some cases becomes insanity. You know that his father committed suicide and killed the mother. At that time Conrad was only twelve years old. His father was a doctor. He wanted to do research work and had this family to rear, and so he had to have immediate returns. They were living at Savannah, Georgia, and they had three children. Conrad was the oldest. One morning this extremely sensitive boy, the most sensitive person, by far,

whom I've ever known. I don't mean when I say "sensitive" that he was just guarded against what anybody would say or that he was hurt in his feelings. I mean that he was sensitive to things that most people would be completely unaware of, until they read about it in these books. You get a whole new dimension when you read Conrad Aiken. That's true of every book that he ever did. He opened absolutely new horizons, I think.

Mr. H.: Did his characterization of you in this book reflect his experiences on this trip that you made?

Mr. O.: Well, a little, because right in the midst of something else -- maybe he'd be discussing Georgia experiences or something else -- why, here would be this fellow coming in, playing the fiddle out on the deck, you see. It comes in most unexpectedly, not seeming to be related in any way logically, but related in his feelings, you see?

Mr. H.: Well, it's sort of like symphonic music -- a recurring them coming in?

Mr. O.: Yes, in a way. It doesn't occur by any rule. It occurs accidentally, you see. He's just opening this inner, almost unconscious thing -- this stream of consciousness, they call it. That's the way you find yourself coming in. Evidently these are things in his life that for one reason or another have impressed him. I'd like to read all the books sometime and see how many more of these there were. Of course, I did not recognize a lot of the incidents in Ushant.

Mr. H.: Well, in a sense, this book must be autobiographical.

Mr. O.: Yes, it is. It's deeply autobiographical, because it's an autobiography that goes way into his stomach, his liver -- and everything.

Mr. H.: It's a solidification of his stream of consciousness.

Mr. O.: Oh, yes. It's not anybody else's. It's all his own.

Mr. H.: He introduces people whom he had met throughout his lifetime, who made an impression on him, and his reaction.

Mr. O.: He doesn't say, "This is my reaction," or anything of that sort, you see, but he's just turning himself inside out of things that at one time, emotionally, have

made an impression on him, you see. He doesn't say what the emotion may have been.

Mr. H.: Well, our lives are really a combination of things we've seen and experienced and people that we've met. I think these are the great contributing factors to the development of one's own character.

Mr. O.: That's right. But most people are so unaware of those other sort of mystical things. He's the only one -- except these others, like Proust, who led the way in that kind of thing.

Mr. H.: I picked up a book on metaphysics one time and made a valiant effort to read it and comprehend it, and it certainly stimulates deep thinking. But some of these ideas are so strange that it's just an entirely new experience, and you don't really have any preconceived way of reacting or responding to these ideas.

Mr. O.: No. That's it. Well, in reading Ushant, of course, I had my own natural feeling toward all this. I had a sort of protective feeling toward him, because he was one of these people you felt needed shielding. He said to me when he told me about this thing happening to his father, "Ober, that day a great poet was destroyed." Well, that wasn't just talking. To have a thing happen like that, to that boy, would be such a shock. The ordinary person couldn't understand it. It would be terrible physical shock to anybody at that age, but to a boy organized as he was - it could do serious damage to his whole psychic character. I think he was very discerning that way. When he said that he was speaking from feeling, it was feeling that was more than that -- a lot of depth to torment.

Conrad was a person with a very sweet disposition. Always, when he knew somebody well, he was very friendly, and very accepting in his attitude toward the other person. But underneath it all, there has always been in Conrad Aiken a strange undercurrent of -- not animosity -- but an undercurrent of almost annoyance. It's there, if you can ever get down to it. Of course, I never saw it very much, but I did get to see it when we went on this long trip. It was partly the result of penetrating this sanctity of his that he regarded as his own, and he was deeply immersed

in that all the time. And anything that sometimes pulled him out of that to the mere petty things of life like eating, picking up your spoon, or something like that, would be…He was so sensitive to that kind of thing, you see – not sensitive because you said something that displeased him, but sensitive just about these little petty annoyances of life. And just not annoyances, bat sensitive about little aspects that completely go over the heads of most people, you see. He'd see through a whole lot of those things.

Mr. H.: Well, possibly, this reflected as sort of a frustration, his realization of the tremendous opportunities of intellectual pursuits, and the fact that the world, in general, is occupied by such trivia, that people don't utilize their minds.

Mr. O.: That's right. When you say "trivia" you've hit a long point. A lot of stuff that the rest of us handle all the time, you know, that is trivia.

Mr. H.: And it certainly is irritating to a person who's concentration is on a particular project, and you get these outside interferences that take you off of this.

Mr. O.: That's true. And that accounted for a whole lot, and it set him on edge. That's one reason that I feel sure his married life hasn't been a great success. He did marry quite young. I never met his wife, a very lovely person, I guess, and he had two or three fine children. I don't know what they're doing now. They're all grown. Finally his marriage broke up, after the children were nearly grown. Just think of it. They lived in England. England was a natural setting for him. I can understand that. I don't know any place that I've ever been in my life where life goes on with so little friction as it does if you're just living there, and say, you want to write, or something like that. Of course, it's a little different thing if you get into politics or if you go among the Cockney Englishmen down there in London, who get a little smart. But most places you go around in the country everything's beautiful, everybody's agreeable. I don't know any place in the world where there's such courtesy as in England.

Now, back to the trip. Conrad had a bicycle of his own that he took over. I bought one over there. I had to be a little more careful about riding than he did because of this little difficulty that I had left from my illness. I couldn't get winded. He could go up and down hills. He was in perfect health so far as I know. I never knew of anything wrong with him. I never knew him to have a cold or anything else. He was slender, and he could peddle like everything. My outfit had three gears, which helped. We rode great distances, but my job was to make the arrangements for staying nights. He couldn't do that. If he had to, I suppose he would.

Mr. H.: It was his shyness.

Mr. O.: Yes, and it would have been better, maybe, if he had been forced to do that, you see, but that was always up to me. We had a very limited amount of money, and so we set a price. That was another thing that reflected the good nature of these Britishers, you see, because I'd do so, quite boldly.

Mr. H.: What, generally, was your tour through Scotland and England?

Mr. O.: Well, we went up through the English lake district first, and we did that very thoroughly. It was very beautiful, and we lingered there. We happened to strike a place called the "Sun Hotel" at Lake Windermere and there was a woman there who ran this lovely little place called the Sun Hotel. She was a widow. I think she just saw these young American fellows and she thought, oh, well, whether it pays me or not, I'll take them. She didn't have anybody there. She sent her son out up in the hills, and he'd shoot hens and bring them down. We had wonderful grub, and we paid only two shillings, six-pence a day. Just think of it -- 60p of something like that, you see. We limited ourselves to two and six a night, and that included bed, breakfast and supper for each of us. Generally it wasn't elaborate food. At noon we'd buy a whole loaf of what they called Hovis bread, which was advertised all over Britain and was a wonderful whole wheat bread, very solid and crusty. It was just marvelous. We'd start at the southeast corner and eat right through to the northwest corner. Once in a while when we were flush, we'd buy a piece of ham with

it. Only rarely did we exceed the two and six. A few nights we slept outside. Well, I don't know whether Conrad was with me when we did sleep outside. I slept out a number of nights. Finally we parted. From the time we were at the Sun Hotel, where we lingered a while, Conrad was deep in reading. He read, and read, and read.

Mr. H.: Did you visit Stratford?

Mr. O.: No.

Mr. H.: The Midlands?

Mr. O.: No, we didn't get there. We were going to Scotland. And, of course, I am always more interested in the wild places. I wanted to go out to the Hebrides.

Mr. H.: Johnson's tour?

Mr. O.: Yes, I thought Conrad was going to do that with me. That was the understanding, you see. But soon after we left the Sun Hotel where we'd stopped for a number of days, he'd got deep in thought. I guess he was writing something. He was always writing something.

Mr. H.: Did he keep a journal or a diary, or just -

Mr. O.: No, I don't think so. He was writing poetry all the time, on any piece of paper he had.

Mr. H.: Do you know if these were ever published?

Mr. O.: No, I don't think so. I doubt it. I don't think any of them were long enough at that time to be qualified. I don't know. But, anyway, as we went on, up from there, he seemed more and more reluctant to go ahead, and I didn't know why. He spoke less too. He seemed to get more deeply involved in what he was thinking about, you see. I don't know how far we got -- about a hundred miles north of there -- and one night, he said to me, "I think, Ober, we ought to go back, because I have to be in college this fall. I want to go down to Oxford first and then go back, and I'd like you to come down with me." I said, "Why, Conrad, I thought we were going up into Scotland." That's what appealed to me, you see -- the Hebrides. "Oh, no, let's do that," I said.

Well, in those last two days, he had hardly spoken to me at any time. There didn't seem to be any ill feeling, but you just couldn't penetrate it. It was a little bit hard to go around that way, and so I began to wonder, if it was the best thing to continue to make all these arrangements for him, when maybe it would be better for him to have to do some of that himself, to bring him out of this. Through life he's got to deal with these practical problems. So, I thought about it a great deal, and I tried every way I could to get him to commit himself. I didn't say, what's the matter, or anything like that, but I thought maybe he'd tell me something, but he didn't. Finally I said, "Well, now Conrad, I think I should go on up. You've got this other idea. Much as I regret it, I think, if necessary, you and I ought to go different ways here." It was a hard decision for me to make, because I was very fond of Conrad. So I parted with him with very great regrets. That is something that has always bothered me. That morning I took care of our account and I brought some sandwiches out, done up in a little package for him, and tied them on his handlebars, and he got on the bicycle and rode south.

Mr. H.: He went to Oxford, and you went to Scotland?

Mr. O.: Yea. And, of course, I wouldn't have missed that Scottish part. I was through college and a year of graduate work, and he hadn't finished. I stayed in Liverpool that winter until Christmas time, and then went back steerage, alone, with four hundred Finlanders, in a terrific storm. That was in 1908. My thoughts have often returned to that episode and I wouldn't have lost Conrad as a friend for anything in the world. I could understand this way he would get immersed in his own thoughts, and just forget everything else, and not want to be taken out, but he'd want you there just the same. When I got back, his aunt, whose husband was Assistant Librarian at Harvard and the guardian for Conrad, wrote me, and she said, "I don't think Conrad will ever forgive you for that." But I had no correspondence with him. Once in a while I'd send a card and I'd get a card back. No letters. I never expected letters, but the cards were always friendly and nice, just the same as ever.

Then about twenty-five years later, I had to go to Boston about our conservation work. I went there to get the editorial support of some of the Boston papers. We hadn't got the Shipstead and other bills through. It was around 1929 or 30. I decided to go up on the Fall River boat, which always used to be a very lovely trip from New York to Boston. You'd be on the boat overnight. Then when I was getting close to it, I began to think: Well, what do I want to do when I get there? Whom do I want to see? It was Conrad Aikin. I sure wanted to try to get in touch with him. I wanted Sam Morison, if I could, and Copeland, under whom I had studied English. Those three people above all. Where I had a chance, I wrote them in advance, and the others I wired, hoping they were there.

Mr. H.; Excuse me, Mr. Oberholtzer, but this leads you into the other question that Miss Kane would like you to comment on -- your association with Sam Morison.

Mr. O.: I haven't quite finished yet with Conrad, but it is part of the same story. I had had practically no contact with those fellows. I had had a few notes from Sam, and a card once in a while. He and I had been very close in college. I wanted, if possible, to make sure that those three people were there. But I did it with great diffidence, because I had led this life so absolutely different from theirs, and possibly on that did not have their approval. I didn't know, you see, for they never said. But they undoubtedly expected me to do very different things. They might even scorn this kind of life I was living out there, like a wild man, such a physical life. So I didn't know, and of course it would have been an awful blow to me if I had come into contact with these people and found that they were no longer interested or friendly. That would have hurt me terribly.

As I approached Boston that night, I was thinking: Let me see. Where was this anyway? Where did Sam Morison live? I knew he lived on the hill near the Capitol, near Beacon Street. His place was called Brimmer, one of the oldest streets in Boston. I used to go there every day for a year, tutoring his brother, and I often walked quite a distance. And I thought: How do you get there now? I

was going to go there first, you see. And you know when I got there, it was a very strange thing. There's something automatic, I guess, in our movements. I didn't think about it anymore. I just let my legs go, and they walked me right to Sam Morison's house. I can't tell you how it ever happened. All those years, I'd never thought about it, you see.

I rang his bell that morning, and he came down to the door. It was quite early when the boat got in. We shook hands and went up in his office. I said, "Sam, it beats all, you know. That seems to be just inbred into my hones, as to how you go here, because I could never have told anybody, and yet, here I came. As I came around the corner to your house, here was the parrot that used to be there hanging out of the window. It seemed to be the same parrot that was there every single morning twenty-five years ago when I came to tutor Bradford." He said, "What parrot?" "Why, that parrot that was always there when I came to see Bradford." He paused a while, and he said, "You know, Ober, I never thought about that parrot. It's been there all these years. I didn't even know it was there. You're the first person who called my attention to it. I guess those people did have a parrot all this time. " Wasn't it strange that he could be so oblivious, but he was concentrating on his work, and, of course, I had come into a new environment, and those things had impressed me.

Well, then, I'd passed that gauntlet. When I was with Sam, it was exactly the same as if I'd walked in years ago when we used to do various things together and knew each other so well. I couldn't see the slightest difference. Sam was always rather reserved and dignified and a marvelous scholar. I told him when I went to college with him, "Sam, some day you're going to be president of Harvard." And he would have been. They offered it to him before Conant became president and he wouldn't take it because he didn't want administrative work. He's a scholar above all, you see.

He has had a marvelous record. He is a marvelous man, and here I was leading

the life of -- in some ways, a recluse. Some people call me a hermit, you see, but of course I was anything but a hermit, though I lived alone on an island. There were hordes of people coming there all the time. But, my life was anything but scholarly. I wasn't reading. I was always traveling by canoe, mingling with the Indiana, and had great numbers of Indiana as intimate friends. There was nothing scholarly about my life. But, we were perfectly at ease when we were with each other, as if it were the old days, as if there had been no difference whatever in our lives.

But, I didn't know how it was going to be with Conrad Aiken. He had told me when I wrote him, "You telephone such and such a number," and he told me where he lived, in Harvard Square. So I telephoned from Sam's about coming to his house, because the time was short. And he said, "Yes, you come out and have dinner with me." He added, "I don't know whether you know that my wife and I have separated." That was his second wife, and he was warning me in order to avoid any embarrassment. But he didn't say anything about a third wife.

I went out there to this place. It was an old hall in Harvard Square, a very well-known place. When I got to the elevator, I found it was one of the very first of those that had been made automatic, and I didn't know how to operate those. They'd come in since I was in city life. So I had to whistle up through the tube, and he said, "Is that Ernest?" "Yes," I answered. "How do you get up on these things -- I don't know; Then he told me what you do, you see, and so I went up, to that floor, and it stopped automatically. There at the door stood a man that at first sight I believed I never had seen before -- stocky, heavyset, sort of sagged, and tired looking. But it was Conrad, because when I looked in his face and heard his voice, it was Conrad, unquestionably. So we shook hands, and by the time we got into his room, I felt exactly the same as if we were back in our college days, just as free and everything else. I had that feeling instantly.

Then we sat down and began to talk, and I was looking at him. His hair had changed -it was somewhat faded. He had light hair. And then he had this very

stocky appearance, overweight, you see. But there was an expression in his eyes that he has always had, but it had become emphasized -- a sort of repressed pain in his eyes. A kind of look -- in the back -- of sadness. Then he said, "Ernest, I'm sorry, but my (I think he said wife) can't come tonight. She works for one of the newspapers in Boston, and so she won't be able to come here and prepare dinner. But I want to go out to such-and-such a place." He told me the name of the place, in one of the suburbs and said we'd go out there and talk. I think she came later, and I met her, because at some time I did meet her. But I never saw her again, and she finally faded out of the picture. I don't know what this was a temporary arrangement or whether he was married to her. Later he married, and he has remained married to this third woman. That may only be his second marriage. Maybe this other woman just helped him, but anyway I never heard very much more about it. His present wife, to whom he's been married almost all that time, is an artist, a portrait painter.

So he took me out to this place in a suburb that was sort of a modern place, where you stand all around in a sort of a balcony. There was a dancing floor in the center, poorly lighted -- purposely, you see -- but you could get good food and you could watch the dancers, and you could go down there and dance if you wanted.

Well, we sat up on our platform there, ate supper, and just talked until it was about midnight or one o'clock, as long as they were open, I guess. And this talk just flowed on. There was no trouble about it. We both just went right ahead as if it had been the old days. There was no reference to that parting -- none whatever. I've never mentioned it to him, except that once since, I think the last time I saw him. Maybe I was a little indiscreet. I said, "Conrad, you know, there is nothing I'd like better than to have you come out to Rainy Lake sometime with your wife. If you'd come, I'd promise you, you could -- if you wished -- be left entirely alone. Nobody would speak to you." I shouldn't have said that, you know,

because I wasn't referring to that incident, but to what I knew to be true -- that he would like to have that kind of freedom. But he's so sensitive, he might have picked that up and thought it was a little reference.

But I have seen him since that first meeting and that's when I gave him this message when I went to my fiftieth anniversary. Every time I go to Boston, I look him up, so I've seen him two or three times in the last years. But our correspondence has never been very much more than a post card during most of that time. Yet I feel very close to him, and apparently he does to me now, because he's certainly demonstrative, for him, when he sees me. We have a very, very nice time. It's always hard to leave. Not long ago somebody sent me… This is another friend of mine, who once drove me from Albany to Boston. We went to Conrad's home out on Cape Cod, which he called, "The House of the Forty-One Doors," something like that. It's an old kind of tumble-down place where they live. They haven't got any money. He had a competence left him, but it wouldn't have been satisfactory for these days. It provided very well for him when he was in college, because his brother and sister had been adopted by some very fine Philadelphia people, so that whatever estate there was could go to Conrad.

Mr. H.: Were his books financially successful?

Mr. O.: No, I can't imagine that any book he's ever done has brought him in any worthwhile return. They are not popular books. His poems are read by the poets; he's a poet's poet. He's written short stories which I think are sore of the most wonderful things he's done.

Mr. H.: Have these been published in magazines or collected?

Mr. O.: They've been collected. But they're top stories. Some of them are as fine as I've ever known in my life. He's an absolute master of the short story. He hasn't written great numbers of them. Then he wrote this autobiography, Ushant and he wrote three or four books of fiction, some of which I have read. Most of

them frankly, I found difficult to read. They are in this sort of a no-man's land where it's a little hard to follow, but they have this same extreme sensitivity.

Mr. H.: When was Ushant published?

Mr. O.: I should think it must be about fifteen years ago.

Mr. H.: Did his characterizations of you refer to any other meetings following this early experience and your trip to England?

Mr. O.: I didn't read it all the way through. Of course, about the only places he had had a chance to know me were in his college days, when I was in Boston, or Cambridge, you see, or on that trip, and then he didn't see me any more. There may be other references, but there was nothing up to the time I stopped reading it about half way through.

Mr. H.: These eight or ten references that you recognized were in the college period?

Mr. O.: No, they were mostly on the boat going over.

Mr. H.: On the trip to England?

Mr. O.: Yes, but there may have been other references about some things that happened in the earlier life. Of course, I'd like nothing better than to be able to sit down and read that book, but I just can't turn aside for that now.

Mr. H.: Did he include responses to people he had met?

Mr. O.: No, there was none of that anywhere in the book. They were all just recalled feelings, or sensations that were related-- not by time, or substance, but by the way it affected him and the flow of his mind at the time. That seems to be it, and that was the stream of consciousness. I guess that's what it's called. But it was a supreme example of that in autobiography, you see. That's the only place I know where it was used in autobiography, unless it was by Joyce in Ulysses. Have you ever read Ulysses?

Mr. H.: Yes

Mr. O.: But, now then, Sam Morison. I'd had this contact with him, and the situation remained exactly the same way -- very few exchanges over the years. But I've let him know whenever I was going to be in Boston. It is very rare that I am there, but I went to my fiftieth anniversary. I told him I was coming, and I told Conrad, and I saw both of them. Sam happened to be there; he asked me to come and stay at his home. I did, one or two days, but the rest of the time we were supposed to be with our classmates at the college. I saw Conrad very briefly out there, only a few words, that's about all. The last time I saw him I made the comment about how much I wanted him to come out and about bow, if he wished, he would be left entirely alone. It was unfortunate that I put it that way. I thought so afterward, but I was saying it very sincerely, in view of his reticence, and thinking maybe he'd like to he left alone when he got out in the country like that. But there wasn't any immediate sign that I had disturbed him by saying that.

Sam was extremely responsive. We were just planets apart in our experiences, in our achievements, and all, but there was something there that united us. And apparently it continues. Then finally, you know, Sam came out to see me two years ago, (It will be two years next autumn), and he was only there me days. He had his wife with him and was on a speaking tour to some of the universities, and so he came up there. That renewed our association and since then I've been hearing much more. Of course, he has the aid of his wife, because she writes occasionally, and when they don't hear from me often enough now, she writes to inquire about me. Then finally they have invited me to come and live with them. That wasn't too long ago. Sam said he'd take care of all my expenses of moving there and everything, which was surely generous. He said that if I didn't mind climbing all the stairs, I would be on the third floor, with a whole suite of lovely rooms. I've stayed there. I'd have a fireplace, my own bathroom, and everything else, an opportunity such as I've never had in my life if I had wanted to do something like written work, you see. It couldn't be finer, except that I'd be out of my locale, you see, and it

would be away from all of the people that have been my life, and I couldn't do it. I'll probably have to die up there. And I hope I do. I don't hope I'm going to die yet, but I hope that I can spend my last days up there and that I don't have to be in an institution or something for a long time. I'd like to see Sam often, though. I wish that he could come out there with his wife and spend quite a long time, but he probably never can. And I'd like to be able to go to Boston once in a while to see both of them.

Then there was Copey. He was the other one I visited the first time I was renewing acquaintances after I'd been away nearly twenty-five years. I'd never had any correspondence with him in that time, but he had responded at once too. He had his little idiosyncrasies that made him more interesting. He had lived on the top floor of the building where I lived for two years, while I was in college on the yard, as they called the campus there. He said he lived there closest to the angels. When I wrote him, he wrote back and said, "Now, Ernest (none of them called me Ober) when you come, I would like you to come to the corridor exactly as the clock strikes nine in the yard, and then go up the stairway, and I'll be waiting to see you." So that was the first evening, or the second evening, I guess. When Conrad heard I was going out there the next evening, he said, "Come to my place first, and I'll walk over there with you -- it's only a short distance." So, at exactly 9:00, I was there.

Mr. H.: What significance did this have?

Mr. O.: It really didn't have any significance, except it was Copey. It may be that he'd arranged his schedule, too, so that he'd be through something else he was going to do. But, anyway, Conrad took me to the door, and as the clock struck 9:00, I stepped into the hallway, and at the same time, I heard a footstep on the third floor, and as I went up, I could hear footsteps coming down. Wasn't that lovely? It was Copey, and he met me half-way and shook hands, put his arm around me, and led me up to his room. Wasn't that wonderful?

Then he began to ask me question after question -- "What have you been doing? Oh, how interesting that is. Ernest, I want to write you a note to Perkins." (Mar Perkins bad been in our class and had become the head of Scribners.) I knew him in college. I served on the Advocate with him for a while. But I didn't know him well. He wasn't a personal friend. "Ernest, I want to give you a note to Perkins," Copey s aid, "so that you can publish some of these experiences you've got." "Oh, no, I don't want to do that," I said. "Why not?" "Well," I said, "I don't know. I have a sort of a feeling about doing anything of that sort. Years ago, when I read Tolstoy, I couldn't help but feel the way he did that most of this writing business is overdone, and it's just a kind of an indulgence for these people, and that it's not beneficial to the world to have them do all of this writing." So, I didn't have him write that note. W ell, Perkins was the fellow that got behind Thomas Wolfe, a later Harvard man who became very well known as a novelist. He's dead now. He wrote these tremendously long novels. He's become a world figure now. But anyway, I saw Copey two or three times afterward. He was getting older and older. He got to be over ninety, and the last time he didn't recognize me. His mind was going. It wasn't very long before he died after that.

He was easy to caricature. His very appearance led in that direction -- his large head and small body and his dry smile, when he knew that he had something funny to say. His assumed timidity when he stepped on the stage alone caused a laugh and pleased him -- his dry comment still more a moment later.

He was a born actor, even when he commented on his students' themes. He wanted to get a rise out of them, one way or another, and took secret satisfaction in it, I'm sure.

He was sometimes sharp in his comments, especially when he thought they were not well-taken, but never malicious. He was the heart of kindness but not always frank. It was hard for him ever to be completely impersonal. He chose his students even more for personality as revealed in their themes than for any final merit but

did recognize something that he considered worth encouraging.

The actor likes attention. So did Copey. There is nothing wrong in that but it rubs some students the wrong way, as it did with Copey. It would have helped in these cases, if the student had realized that Copey was above all an actor. He was only a greater reader, because he was less an actor. He would have been an actor, if he could. If his stature had been as good as his voice, he might easily have been among the great actors of his time. He became famous the country over. A little more and the same fame might have been his as an actor.

Well, those were the three people that were really closest to me at Harvard, of all the people I knew. And I'd managed to see all three of them at one time. They're just as different as any people could be, different ages and everything.

Mr. H.; There is another topic that Miss Kane would like to have you comment on -- Fred Winston's contribution to the Quetico-Superior project. You apparently have spoken to Lucile about this, but she would like to hear about your meeting with Fred and early experiences with Fred.

Mr. O.: Fred died, you know, on the thirteenth of this last month. I was at his home at Christmas time. I've been going there for quite a number of times at Christmas as their guest, and they have very delightful parties. Fred was one of the most cooperative men I've ever known. He was completely self-forgetful, that is, when he was helping, say, our Quetico-Superior. He was the chairman of our executive committee from the time it was formed. The original council is still alive. Though we haven't had meetings for a long, long time, it's never been disbanded. So he remained chairman of the executive committee until his death. He wouldn't have wanted it that way, but it got to be too much trouble to wind it up, so we still let it go on. We still use that same stationery. Of course, I've been inactive in the council myself for some years. I'm busy working all the time on the project...there's never any end to this -- but I don't take any public position. I'm on the President's Committee, and I was chairman of that for over

half the time we've had it, from the beginning.

Well, of all the people, there is nobody really that was more helpful and more sincerely loyal in every way than Fred was. Now, I don't mean to reflect on anybody else, because somebody like Charlie Kelly was able to give just untold services. He's been a member of the President's Committee from the beginning, when Roosevelt appointed him. We had the choice, through Ickes, of who was to be on that committee. There was Charlie Kelly and Mr. Tyng, a New York lawyer. I'll have to tell you about Sewell Tyng sometime. He was a great fellow. He has been dead a long time now. He knew a lot about the country. He'd been coming to me for years and taking these long canoe trips. He was married to a daughter of Norman Hapgood who became so famous as editor of Collier's at one time, and was then Minister to Denmark under President Wilson.

Well, Charlie Kelly put in a great deal of work. He and Mr. Hubachek have all the copies of my letters. There has been nothing that I've written concerning Quetico-Superior of which Charlie hasn't a copy. He was kept fully informed at all times, and they had girls who would file and produce a copy at once. If I couldn't find s omething, generally I could call on them. Then for years they held the President's Committee meetings in their own office, and Mr. Hubachek was extremely generous. We would have beautiful offices to meet in. And if we had outsiders, we would have lots of room. We have a good many Canadian officials and various people from the Forest Service -- not just the top ones, but those who arc dealing with land acquisition and roads, and many other questions. We may have as many as twenty people present at one of these meetings.

Then Mr. Hubachek takes them out to lunch -- oh, a very elaborate lunch. Sometimes the lunch is served right there, but usually we go out to some club, or something of that sort. Then at the end of the meeting he invites them to a dinner. I haven't been going to these dinners lately. They are quite elaborate, and I'm pretty tired when these meetings are over. There's always plenty of liquid

refreshment, and I haven't felt that I wanted to share in that so much. I like a little of that once in a while, but now it isn't so good for me. But they add a great deal, of course, to the sociability and the amenability of the occasion. Some of these people have come there from places like Canada, and some may have had some reservations about it. The sociability gradually gets them in a somewhat better attitude.

So now Fred is dead. He was very close to me all of the time, and he was one fellow whom I could count on always for extreme loyalty and intelligence in handling things. He had one very fine quality; he was open-minded about people. He never condemned anybody in advance. He never liked to condemn them anyway. He liked to say something good about them, and he always liked to believe the very best of them until he was terribly disillusioned. And then he would not say anything, but he would just seek some other person. He was fair, and he was not partisan in any way, on any subject, including politics. He was very firm -- unshakable when he had convictions as he did have about our work. And he was ready to back you up right to the hilt. If he thought you were wrong about something, he didn't hesitate to say so.

My dealings with Fred have been wonderful. He managed to carry on a little bit of an office when we couldn't keep our fine stenographer. We had had a very good stenographer for about two years, Mrs. Martin, a wonderful woman. Well, we couldn't pay her. She was getting a, mall salary as it was. She had a nephew to educate and her old mother to take care of. She finally moved to Washington and went to the Tariff Commission, and she went to the very tip-top of the Tariff Commission. They just thought the world of her. She won everything there was from the Tariff Commission, until she reached the retirement age a few years ago. But all that time she kept in close touch with our work. If she saw any reference to our work in the Tariff Commission or other publications, she always sent us copies of it. She lives in Minneapolis now, and she's gone through an awful time [siege of health] the

past few years. They despaired of her life, but she's better now. I hope that Miss Kane will interview her, though she might have some hesitancy. I don't have much hesitancy in talking like this, no matter what anybody thinks of it. I might regret some of the things I say and maybe if I saw them afterward, I'd want to change them a little bit. But even so, I feel that I'd rather speak freely than maybe hold something back, because most people do have preferences and opinions of their own, and I've had to deal with that a lot. I've had to change my opinions, and I've been willing to. So I haven't so much reticence as a person like Mrs. Martin. Mrs. Martin promised me that she would do it, and Miss Kane wants to do it and said she'd go over there with me some time where she lives. But I had a letter since then from Mrs. Martin, and she said she'd rather wait a little while. She wants to think about it. What she can add to the story is her recollections and viewpoint on the beginning of the program. She was a stenographer in one of the hotels over in Minneapolis. I never had had a stenographer in my life. We were organized before I was getting paid anything and before we had an office. But the work had started. There was an amount of correspondence that would have taken me more than twenty-four hours a day. So I went to Mrs. Martin, and I found that she did beautiful letters, and what was more wonderful to me was that she could reproduce a letter without taking notes. I could sit behind her and dictate, and she could type as fast as I dictated. She was a marvelous typist, and rarely did she get anything wrong. I'd sit right behind her and I'd see it coming right out. We'd sit all day in the little office that we got for ten dollars a month in the Flour Exchange. At that time we were trying to assemble our Board of advisors, and we were asking all these very wonderful people all over the country to become members. We had a marvelous board. We had a jewel [in Mrs. Martin], and I knew that. I had never had a secretary before so I kind of took it for granted that all of them worked that way. But one morning I came down to our office early -- we just had a glass partition between our office and the next little office -- and the man there, whom

I knew pretty well from coming down there every day, was there. And he said, "Ober, you are surely a woman-killer." "Well, what do you mean?" I asked. I heard Mrs. Martin taking your dictation at eight o'clock yesterday morning, and you went out to lunch, didn't you, for just half an hour, and you came back, and she was working still when I went to dinner, and I came down after eating, and you were dictating to her until eleven o'clock last night."

She took all that, and welcomed it. A marvelous person. A lot of people don't know about that, and they take it all for granted. It hurt me that we couldn't pay her what she was worth, or anything of the sort.

When I found we were going to have a little office, with some office furniture (all of which was lent to us), I asked her to come with us. I thought it over a great deal, because I knew she must make very good money in that hotel where businessmen would dictate to her. But, of course, their letters were, "Yours of the 16th received, and shipment made yesterday," and she didn't like that. She liked letters with a larger vocabulary and more scope. She loved it. She thought it was an education, and she had never had much chance, except self-education. But, I'll tell you, she's a bright woman, and loyal.

So I hesitatingly asked her, "Is there any possibility, Mrs. Martin, that you could consider coming to us as our secretary?" "Oh, yes," she replied. That's what she wanted to do. So she came and we never had such loyalty and such fine production. You could never imagine anything so fine as it was, and we got out all that early work. Nobody realized what it meant, for we were just going day and night. I was, and she was, and of course, in addition, in those days, I had to go all around speaking at everything under the sun. I spoke to every service club in Minneapolis, and a lot of places outside, and I wrote a great deal for organizations like the Wilderness Society. Then, of course, there was the legislature. One of the first things we had to get was a memorial resolution by both houses of the legislature to Congress urging passage of the Shipstead-Nolan Act,

and that was the first big piece of work. And if you ever got into something hot, it was the conflict with Mr. Backus that came when we began our program. You never saw anything like it. It was just a knock-down. I was called every kind of name, and there was no limit to it. Fellows would come up and shake their fists right under my nose, you know. Of course, I never got into a scrap with anybody. I didn't feel capable of knocking any of them down.

Mr. H.: Did this opposition come largely from commercial interests in the area?

Mr. O.: Oh, yes, and from Mr. Backus-almost completely, although he was reaching around in all directions to make it seem broader, don't you see, and to steer it away from him. For instance, he contacted the Pigeon River Lumber Company, which had certain rights on the Pigeon River that presumably might have been developed for power some day, you see, and he got Bibiam to help him on the power side. They appeared in Washington and down here and everywhere, opposing all these things we wanted to do, because they claimed they were protecting valuable rights. Where ever Mr. Backus could get allies of that sort, he did. He sent somebody up to the North Shore in order to set against us as many as possible of the men who served on county boards, county assessors, and in other positions by telling them, "They're going to shut up the roads. You're not going to have electricity. You're not going to have schools." Whether or not these stories were believed, we were accused in Washington and elsewhere of trying to turn the whole area into a wilderness and go back to the Indian days. Well, we had lots of that kind of thing.

Well, then Mr. Backus bought a magazine called Trails of the Northwoods. We had the backing of all these outdoor organizations, like Izaak Walton League, and the game commissions, and everything of that sort, you see, so he wanted to have something comparable and acquired this magazine. He bad a man with a plane who went all around up through the North visiting the people who were in anyway affected. His man went to Winnipeg and places like that. He got the Mayor of Winnipeg to come out with a statement that our program was going to be harmful to

Canada. The man who was the editor did things like this as he traveled around by plane.

In the first place, the editor came to me, introduced himself, made himself very agreeable, and said, "Confidentially, now, Ober, I'd like you to have lunch with me at the Athletic Club. I know Backus well. I see him often. And I can tell you a whole lot of things that will be helpful to you." He tried to make appointments with me, night and day, and continued to speak in this way. Then I went up north, and one of my friends, who had a small resort, said, "Do you know, Mr. So-and-so?" (I've forgotten his name now.) "Why, yes, I've met him," I replied. "Do you know -- he surprised us -- he was in here to see us. He's surely friendly, isn't he? He says that they are willing to take an ad from us without charge until we see how helpful that will be to us. And then said, 'Do you know Mr. Oberholtzer' 'Oh, yes, we know Ober, sure.' 'Well, you know, he's a funny fellow, isn't he? The way he's working against you down there, and you think he's helping you.' 'Why, no, he's trying to help us.' 'Oh, you don't know that fellow -- you should see what he's doing.'"

And I'd hear that sort of thing from many places up there. They sent him to Port Arthur, Fort William, Winnipeg -- anywhere that they could get publicity. The statement from the Mayor of Winnipeg was only a small part of what Mr. Backus did. He started a club in Minneapolis, called the Outers Club, which was supposed to help counteract our support from the Izaak Walton League and organizations like that. When these various statements from organizations supporting our program were read in Washington before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, the Chairman of the Committee said "Well, Mr. Oberholtzer, how about the Outers Club?" "Outers Club? Why I don't think I know that group." "Oh, yes, that's a Minneapolis organization. I think it's strange you haven't said anything about the Outers Club." And he had a telegram which he read claiming that the group had around two thousand members, I believe, that the group was positively opposed to the project, that it would be one of the most harmful things that could ever be

done.

Well, I said, I'll tell you frankly that I don't know anything about it, but as soon as I go back, I'll investigate it. So when I did get back, I found that the President and Secretary of this organization worked in the office of Backus' company and that they had originated the group. It only cost two dollars to belong, so they'd got up this large membership among people they knew. Then, without having a meeting, or even consulting the membership, they sent that telegram.

When we found that out, we demanded a hearing. We found that there were a lot of people in the group who were for us. They had no idea of what had happened. They called for a hearing. The Minneapolis Journal at the time was devoting itself to our campaign. They'd taken a position backing us right at the start. Jeff Jones was the one who initiated that. They had one reporter who went everywhere. So, when we were given a chance to go before the Outers Club, this reporter was to go the same night. I don't remember where it was, but when we arrived, we were told that there would be a little delay -- would we go upstairs and sit down, please, for a while, and they'd call us. So we went upstairs, and for a half an hour, you could hear great thumping and shouting downstairs. Oh, it was awfully funny. Then we were told to come down, and we went down. Various people then spoke up from the audience and said they would like to hear Mr. Oberholtzer. These people were some friends that we didn't know that we had in that group. So I told what had happened, and how shocked I was to get this resolution. Well, then the man who had asked me to speak said, "I have a resolution I'd like to get in now, because that other was not official." So he got up and read a resolution, and it was overwhelmingly accepted. The two officers were sitting right there with red faces. Well, there was a great deal of that sort of thing to deal with. We had to wear all that down.

So, we were very busy people, and Mrs. Martin knows a lot about those things. I forget the total length of time she was with us, but she was a very competent,

intelligent, hard-working person.