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Prof. L.L. Benbow

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INTERVIEW WITH
MRS. AGNES BENBOW
WIFE OF LEWIS BENBOW, SON OF
PROFESSOR L. L. BENBOW
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND 1909-1913 (APPROX.)

September 12, 1978
Seattle, Washington

T: You knew Professor Benbow?

Mrs. Benbow: Oh, yes. We were married in 1943 and I met him the year before. He was living in Seattle in a hotel downtown with his son. Then he went to the Masonic Home out at Des Moines.

T: In some of the material, it mentions Kapowsin.

B: They had a resort there. It was the most heavenly place you ever saw. Tiny, my husband (we always called him Tiny), was interested in agriculture. I believe it was after Mr. Benbow was Pierce County Superintendent of Schools that they bought about 500 acres up there—all virgin timber and everything.

T: It mentions that the faculty often had their retreats out there and tells about the Benbow Inn.

B: They had a different type of clientele; I mean the people who came there. Most of them were doctors here in Seattle, and when the hospitals had their picnics they went up there, etc.

T: When did you meet Professor Benbow first that you recall?

B: That was in 1942. I was teaching in Downers Grove, outside of Chicago. My home was in Chicago and I had signed a contract so I had to go back the next year. Then we were married in 1943. Mr. Benbow spent most of his weekends here.
T: Describe him to me. What kind of man was he?

B: He had a very dry sense of humor. He had the most spectacular eyes that I ever saw. They were just as bright and shiny and he was almost 80 then. He had interesting things... of course, he was more interested in education than anything else.

T: Did you ever hear him talk about the College of Puget Sound?

B: Yes. But after that first year, he started to go down hill and he passed away over at the Masonic Home the next year—about 1944. He just lived a year after we were married.

T: Do you remember anything he said about the University of Puget Sound?

B: Well, yes. He just talked in general about how wonderful it was there.

T: In about 1908, he organized the faculty and they had a summer school; he did such a good job of it that the trustees asked him if he would make it a permanent thing, and then, of course, they came on difficult times, financially, and the trustees asked him if he would be dean of the school, and then about that time they really hit bad times, financially, and there was a question of whether they could continue and he was drafted to be president of the College and he did a very good job of it, and they were very appreciative. Do you know anything about this?

B: Well, I have the Maroon, for the year 1910.

T: That has now become what we call the Tamanawas. This is a very interesting document. When you are finished with it, I would be very happy if we could have it for our archives. That is a beautiful picture of him. He is listed as
one of the 13 presidents of the school.

B: It tells all about him in that publication.

T: As I told you, we have a former employee who told me about working for you and seeing this loving cup. Can you tell me about it?

B: The students gave him the silver loving cup and his English history class gave him a deluxe edition of the "Rise of the Dutch Republic" and he just really enjoyed it. I have that there, too. The students had written quite a nice article about him in the Maroon.

T: What is on the loving cup?

B: I've been going to have it replated, as you can see how old it is--1910. It says, "Presented to Professor Lee L. Benbow as a token of love and esteem from the students of the University of Puget Sound. Tacoma, Washington. January 27, 1910."

T: Isn't that wonderful. It is a beautiful loving cup, about 8 inches across; gold embossed on the inside and silver with two very beautiful handles. Who will, ultimately, get this cup?

B: Well, I don't know because we didn't have any children. He came from a large family, though.

T: If no one has any desire for it, we would love to have it. It is the kind of thing that is passed on from generation to generation and that would be the natural thing, but I am sure we would be extremely pleased if, ultimately, it could come to the University for our archives.

B: Yes, I think that would be a good place for it.
T: It is such a beautiful thing and what it really says is how much the students loved him.

B: His mother kept a lot of things but not as much as I hoped to find. He came from a large family and his mother died. They lived on a farm in Indiana. He was really a brilliant person and he ran away from home, I believe, when he was about 15 and went to Mount Morris, a prep school, I believe. Anyway, at that time, he worked his way through by filling all the lamps, which, of course, were all oil then, cleaning the lamps, and working also in the kitchen—for his room, board and tuition.

T: In this newspaper article, it says, "The esteem and respect in which Professor Benbow is held at the University has been strikingly exhibited. His English history class presented him as a farewell token a deluxe edition of Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic", and on Thursday morning at chapel a beautiful gold and silver loving cup was presented on behalf of the student body. The speech of the presentation being made by Mr. Matthews of the senior class who bade him remember should the clouds ever come to let the cup remind him that in the student body he had many friends and that this remembrance would cheer him on his way." Isn't that nice?

B: Yes.

T: Do you suppose I could borrow these and copy them and send them back to you?

B: Yes. And he has this book, Pierce County, Washington, Biographical Histories, Volume 3, by W. B. Bonney; and I had some copies of his biographical
xeroxed which tells all about him and you can have a copy of that.
T: That's wonderful. W. P. Bonney was historian for the State for a long
time and Executive Director of the Washington State Historical Society. That
is a very interesting set of books. It probably has quite a little value.
B: I just found this the other day; an article when he was presented the gold
watch while he was County Superintendent of Schools--from the teachers of
Pierce County.
T: He must have been very highly respected all the way through. I see that
Dr. Padleford was one of his friends. I knew Dr. Padleford.
B: I just found this article today.
T: That's a good picture of Bonny Macdonald, Dr. Todd, Bishop Lowe,
Mr. Blaine and Professor Benbow. This was in the Tacoma Times, Thursday,
February 16, 1939.
B: I was going to have this Class Chronicle piece xeroxed but I never got
around to it. It was written by Mae Reddish.
T: Oh, yes. I remember her. She was very old when I came but she was very
precious.
B: I imagine Mrs. Benbow had cut this out of a copy of a Maroon.
T: That was the yearly annual.
B: There is another one here that tells about when he was County Superintendent.
Then I thought this one was very interesting.
T: (Reading) This is dated April 9, 1908. "To President L. L. Benbow,
University of Puget Sound: We, the faulty members, present wish to express our
hearty congratulations on your election to the presidency of the University of Puget Sound. Please allow us to express also our unanimous approval of your past leadership and our unanimous sentiments of cooperation in the future of building this marvelous institution.

By the Committee
Unanimously approved
Faculty meeting April 9, 1908"

That is wonderful, particularly in view of the fact that they had been having such difficult times, you know.

You said his son's name was Lewis but you called him "Tiny".

B: He was big--six foot three, and he weighed about 280 or 260.

T: What did he do?

B: They were up at the resort or inn until the depression came and they practically lost all of that then. He was with the Army Engineers. He went to Pullman--Washington State--and was on the football team and he injured his spine, so he was rejected when he tried to enlist in the service; so he was with the Army Engineers.

I thought this was rather interesting--just ran into it today--from Herbert Hoover.

T: Reading: "January 18, 1930. THE WHITE HOUSE

Mr. L. L. Benbow. I have your considerate letter of January 8. I wish to thank you for the warm friendship and support.

Yours faithfully,

HERBERT HOOVER"
Do you know whether Professor Benbow visited the University of Puget Sound campus very often after he left it?

B: That I wouldn't know because I didn't meet my husband until 1942.

T: Professor Benbow was really in education all of his life, wasn't he?

B: Yes, he was.

T: Superintendent of Schools and then with us. Did he go from the superintendent of schools to Puget Sound?

B: This article from the Pierce County History tells just where he was and all the different things he did. He went to Kapowsin in about 1920 and they were there till about 1939, I believe it was.

T: Actually, his election to the presidency was in 1908. (Quoting: )

"In 1894, Mr. Benbow came to Tacoma, Washington, and due to the business depression of that year was glad to pick hops and do such other work as he could find in order to make a living," etc. The Panic of 1893, of course, was one of the very difficult years, nationally. That's when the University lost 640 acres overlooking the Narrows, which is now called University Place.

B: I didn't know that.

T: Do you think of anything else about the relationship of Professor Benbow and the University?

B: My husband talked a lot about Miss . Did you know her?

T: I knew of her.

B: We had so many pieces... she must've been in art because she painted so
many pieces of china and gave them to Mr. Benbow.

T: In those days they tried so hard to keep the University going and they had such a difficult time. Many of the people secured a portion of the tuition of the students, like 40%, so the faculty got out and tried to get students. The art group did that and so did music and they were, sort of, off shoots, like a conservatory. It was very difficult for a lot of those people to make a living and they worked hard at it. Of course, one of the interesting things about Mr. Benbow was that he brought some kind of order, financially, to the situation. When I read the history, it almost makes one ill to hear of the terrible times they had. The trustees would meet and decide they couldn't keep going another year; then we had a trustee by the name of Everell S. Collins of Portland and the minutes read that he hadn't said anything until finally he said, "Gentlemen, you only need $6000 to continue another year. I'll give $3000 if you'll raise $3000." With great joy Mr. Collins' challenge was accepted, etc. This happened at least twice and maybe three times that Collins saved it. The family gave us considerable money for the library, so we have the Everell S. Collins Library. But it goes right back to the time when Mr. Benbow was actually making great sacrifices to keep the school open.

I had a minister's funeral about 15 years ago and as we were leaving the cemetery I walked with the daughter to her car and she said, "You know, Dr. 'T'"!, I hated that school when I was little. When I needed shoes, my father
would say, 'Honey, I guess you're going to have to put cardboard in the soles because we have to send the money to the University to help keep it open.'"

It is sacrifice like that that really kept it going, and, of course, now it is the largest private school in the State, and we have 5500 students and $9 million in endowment, so the sacrifice of men like Mr. Benbow and Mr. Revelle and some of the others made it all possible for us to be what we are today.

B: We had a little girl over here a couple of weeks ago, Diane Donahue; she lives in Puyallup and just graduated from the University of Puget Sound. She, of course, is so interested in everything, you know.

T: If you find anything more, I would be thrilled to look at it.

B: He has a lot of books, two bookcases of books, and I never have gone through those books.

T: If you get a chance sometime, go through them and see if there is anything in them.

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R. Franklin Thompson, Interviewer