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INTERVIEW WITH MR. E. L. BLAINE, JR. AND MRS. ETHEL B. SANDVIGEN
BY DR. R. FRANKLIN THOMPSON
Tuesday, May 16, 1978

T: This is an interview with the son and daughter of Mr. E. L. Blaine who was a member of the Board of Trustees at the University of Puget Sound for forty years. The tape is being made at the home of Mr. E. L. Blaine, Jr., in Seattle and his sister, Mrs. Ethel B. Sandvigen, is also present.

You said your father was born in Lebanon, Oregon.

B: Yes.

T: There was a rumor that he was one of the first white babies born in this geographic area. Is that true?

B: No, because his brother, Uncle John, ...

S: Uncle John was born right here during the Indian uprising, so they took Grandmother down on board the Decator and after awhile she came back but she had to go back right away.

T: Was the Decator a boat?

B: A gun boat. Sloop of War Decator. It was here to protect the settlers.

T: Didn't your Grandmother take your father out to the boat to protect him?

B: That was Uncle John, his brother.

T: How much older was John than Edward L.?

S: Seven years.

T: How many children were there in the family?

S: Three. There was a daughter, Louise, and she was married to a Methodist
T: Was she younger than the boys?
S: Yes, about two years younger than father.
T: Wasn't your Grandfather one of the first Methodist ministers in this area?
S: Yes.
B: He was the first Protestant minister in Seattle. As a matter of fact, he was the first minister of any faith permanently assigned to Seattle. There was a Catholic priest, Prefontaine (Prefontaine Place downtown here), but he was a circuit rider and he stopped in here from time to time, but to the best of my knowledge, they had no church or anything, any more than the Methodists had when they first started.
S: Grandfather built the church.
B: Yes, he built it, personally.
T: Literally.
B: I don't know where they used to meet prior to that time.
S: In Denny's home.
T: Was that Professor Denny?
S: F. A. A. Denny.
T: Oh, yes. Your Grandmother wrote many letters back home, didn't she.
S: Yes.
B: Right.
T: I have read those letters and they are some of the finest historical material that you could possibly imagine. We have copies of them in the library at
the University and it is wonderful to have them, because those people were
in on the very beginning of the history of the Pacific Northwest. As I recall,
your father went to Wesleyan University.
B: That's right.
T: He talked to me often of his days at Wesleyan. Did he talk much to
the family about it?
B: No, not particularly. Mother, lived there in Middletown, Conn., so they
both spoke of Wesleyan and Middletown. I spent my first college year at
Wesleyan.
T: Then where did you go to school.
B: Right here at the University.
T: Did you go to the University of Washington, Mrs. Sandvigen?
S: No, I didn't.
T: What was your father's work?
B: To the best of my knowledge, the first job he ever held here was with
Osborne-Tremper Company, an abstract house. That later became, what is
now, Washington Title Insurance Company, through a series of mergers.
I worked there later during the summer months as a sort of office boy.
T: Was this your father's main work most of the time and did he work at it all
of his lifetime?
B: Oh, no.
S: He taught school to begin with. He had charge of an Academy, didn't he?
B: That was back East. He was head of an Academy in New Hampshire. When he came out here, the first job he ever held was with Osborne-Tremper.

S: Wasn't he with the Seattle Trust and Title?

B: That was the successor to Osborne-Tremper and then Seattle Trust sold the abstract business to what is now Washington Title Insurance.

S: He dabbled in many things, didn't he? He built the Liberty Theater Building.

B: That wasn't a job, though.

S: No, but he was connected with it, and the theater building had the name Blaine on it, I know that.

B: He was administering Grandmother and Grandfather's estate. They owned the property.

S: Yes.

B: They owned that property and it was a "dog" because there wasn't any important business there. I think most people thought it was a "dog" when he started to put up the theater. But it turned out that he had found a smart architect who came up with the idea that the old staircase that you had to climb to get up to the balcony in all theaters should be done away with and they put in the first ramp theater. The only other ramp theater for a long, long time was the Coliseum. The owners put a ramp in because they had leased the Liberty Theater and found it so successful that when they wanted to build their own theater they got father to get this architect (I don't remember
what his name was now) and they did that. Then when they built one in
Butte, Montana, they got father to go over and supervise the general con-
struction of the building, so he was there during that time, with the same
architect again.
S: Rialto, that was the name of the theater in Butte.

B: But that was not a job. His job was with the title
company. Then he ran for the City Council.
S: He was on the school board, first, wasn't he?
B: I think he had served in the meantime. I don't look on that as a job--
it is, but I'm thinking of something that was earning him money. His first
term on the City Council was when Hiram Gill was Mayor. I don't know whether
you ever heard that name, but he was an old-fashioned mayor with a corncob
pipe. His chief of police went to the penitentiary for graft, and Hi Gill was
recalled and then there was a period (I can't tell you just what the years were)
that father was off of the City Council. I can't remember whether he went back
and did any work with Osborne-Tremper or whether he just filled in the time
and then he went back on the City Council.
S: He did quite a bit of construction work.
B: He was part of a company which had the Neptune built and the company
then operated it for many years.

T: Did your Grandfather acquire quite a bit of property while he was a
minister?
B: I would say no, not while he was a minister, for the simple reason that
he was only here as a minister for approximately three years. Then he went
down to Oregon where he was assigned to various congregations and ultimately became head of Santiam Academy in Lebanon in 1859. Father was born in Lebanon in 1862 and the family returned to New York in 1863 and resided in and around Seneca Falls, New York. Father was educated at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. He married Julia Hubbard of Middletown in 1886 and after a few years as head of an Academy in New Hampshire came again to Seattle about 1890. For awhile the family lived on Jefferson Street out Leschi Park way and then built their home on Highland Drive on Queen Anne Hill next door to Grandfather and Grandmother.

T: In the history of the University, it says that E. L. Blaine became vice president of the Board of Trustees in 1905. Do you have any knowledge about how he happened to become a part of the University of Puget Sound?

B: Well, I won't say I have any concrete knowledge. While Grandfather was here, one C. D. Dorin gave a tract of thirty acres adjoining the village survey to be used for a seminary. The church didn't have the money, of course, to go ahead and do any building and sometime, not too long after that, the University of Washington was started, where the University Tract is in downtown Seattle. The time came when they had some money in the church, but by this time, Grandfather had gone to Oregon where he ran the Santiam Academy in Lebanon. Later, a decision was made not to attempt to compete with the University of Washington, which was already functioning, so I think they got a grant from somebody of property in Tacoma and they put up what was to become the College of Puget Sound.
T: The school actually started in 1888 and had about 640 acres and it was in a very tenuous financial position. It was then called "University Place". Then in the Panic of 1893, they lost it and we have folders, for instance, showing Old Main and articles stating "Send your daughters here because there is no malaria" and all this sort of thing. Then your Grandfather was very much involved in this.

B: Yes, he was the head, if you want to use that term, of the Methodist Church in Seattle. He was under a minister whose headquarters were in Olympia. That was the region.

T: District superintendent.

B: The four Methodist churches in this area were located at Olympia, Steilacoom, Seattle and Whidby Island.

T: Yes, there is a monument there at Steilacoom.

B: Grandfather and Grandmother landed at Alki Point November 26, 1853, and at that time there was nothing where our business district is. There was one family that was up by the Duwamish River, in what is now Georgetown. There was another family out at what is now Smith Cove (Pier 91 or 93) and the rest of the city consisted of about twenty families at Alki and across the Bay.

S: They had come over to this side of the Bay, which is where Seattle is now, because they found out that the water wasn't deep enough off Alki.

B: He preached his first sermon at Alki on Sunday, November 27, 1853.

S: Yes. On Monday they went across, to where Seattle is now, in dug-out
canoes.

B: The menfolk there found or decided that there was deeper water so the whole group, for the most part, moved over and settled. It was all woods at that time, right down to the waterfront.

T: I remember your father describing to me how they washed the hill down and made the level area.

B: That's where the first regrade was—where the Washington Hotel stands; the hills were washed down by hydraulic pressure into pipes that carried it out into the Bay and filled in the area south of the Union Station. For the second regrade (back to Denny Way) they hauled the earth down in trucks to the waterfront, loaded it in barges, towed them out and then shifted the ballast in the barge so it turned over and dumped the dirt in Puget Sound. The barge was hauled back, the bottom filled with dirt, and then the process was repeated.

T: Then your father's association with the University of Puget Sound was the natural following of his father's interest in it?

B: Sure.

T: As I said, he was vice president of the Board of Trustees in 1905, and in 1909 he became Chairman of the Board of Trustees. In the history of it, it says that he was involved with four presidents. Do you people remember anything about that or any discussion of his involvement? Reading from the
history written by Dr. Todd, it says, "Mr. E. L. Blaine was elected vice president of the Board in the fall of 1905. November 1909 he was made president in which capacity he served during the administration of four presidents and played an important part in selecting three of them. He resigned from that position in the fall of 1945 and was elected chairman emeritus of the Board. His devotion and loyalty to the college have won him a deservedly high and worthy position in the annals of this institution. His record has been such that the history of the college would not be complete without giving his name a prominent place." Do you remember any discussion at home about his work with the college?

B: No, there was very little...

S: Well, Dr. Todd used to come over and have dinner with us.

Mrs. B: I remember that; it was when we were first married.

B: I'm trying to think of the names of the other presidents.

T: Well, there were...

B: Todd was there a long time.

T: He came in 1913. You remember from 1909 to 1913 there was a financial crisis and they had about three in two or three years--there was Boyer, Cherington.

Mrs. B: I thought I read just recently that he was President of the Board in 1908.

T: He would have been. He came on in 1905 and then it was probably in
1908 or 1909 that he was elected President of the Board of Trustees.

I came in 1942 and I had three years with him. He was a wonderful person with whom to work.

Mrs. B: He was responsible for your being here.

T: I am very pleased and very happy because it was a happy solution.

B: I remember when he was searching for a successor to Todd, and I don't remember anyone before Todd.

T: It would probably have been problematical because they were only there for two or three years.

B: Todd was there from 1912, you say.

T: From 1913 to 1942.

B: I would only have been a little over 10 years old so at that time I wasn't paying too much attention to what he was talking about, at the time Todd came in. You mentioned a Boyer.

T: Yes, Boyer and I think it was Cherington.

B: That name -Cherington--I didn't think it was Cherington. I would have said Harrington--that name has a little ring to me.

S: There was a Dr. Harrington that father knew; he used to be an old Methodist minister and sat in the front pew at First Methodist Church.

T: You said Dr. Todd used to come to your home.

S: Yes, he used to come in and have dinner with us quite frequently.

We couldn't talk because they were talking. (laughter)

T: What do you remember about Dr. Todd?
S: Well, he was always very jovial.

B: A small man, relatively.

S: Always seemed very happy.

B: Quite a bit of enthusiasm and energy, bubbly sort of a character.

S: Remember in Sunday School when we used to have to say, "Our University." He'd have us all say that.

T: To this day I meet people who say, "Yes, he taught us to say, 'Our University--our University.'" And it did a great deal. He was a very dedicated person and a very wonderful person.

B: Yes, he was.

T: Your father and Dr. Todd made a very good team.

B: I know they used to work together on soliciting help for the endowment fund and things of that sort.

T: Do you recall anything about your father being very instrumental in getting the Hill Challenge--the James Hill Challenge from the railroad builder.

S: They both went East one time. Was that the time?

T: That's it. That the time.

B: I have a very vague recollection but I don't remember the details.

T: You may recall that your father and Dr. Todd went to talk to James Hill. He was just building the railroad out here. They got him to agree that the Hill Foundation would give $250,000 if the University would raise $750,000. So that Challenge was made and that's how we got our first million dollar
endowment. Your father had a lot to do with the move to the new campus from downtown. Do you remember anything about that?

B: No, frankly, I didn't know that he had anything to do with it.

T: He was Chairman of the Board when they had about nine acres at 6th and Sprague in Tacoma. In 1924 they bought the new campus, way out in the wilderness.

B: I know where it is.

T: Your father was very instrumental in that. As a matter of fact, when Dr. Todd was going East to meet with the Board of Education of the Methodist Church, there came an opportunity for them to buy the campus and to sell the old one to the School Board and your father and Mr. Lister, who was on the Board of Trustees, together decided to sell the old campus and buy the new one. Of course, it was one of the greatest thing to happen in our history.

B: I don't know why I always thought that Norton Clapp had quite a bit to do with that.

T: Norton Clapp didn't come into the picture until about 1932, and he had a lot to do with the development of the school.

B: I didn't know they moved out to the new campus that early.

T: 1924. Your father had a lot to do with it and he and Dr. Todd were very great teammates.

B: Is it possible there was an interim location?

T: There were four locations all together--in the Panic of 1893 they lost the
640 acres and they moved downtown into what is now an apartment house; then they moved to another building, which was an abandoned school building; then they moved to this other place which is where the junior high in now located; and then in 1924 they bought the sixty acres which is where it is now, and your father, Dr. Todd and Mr. Lister were the ones who really did it.

When I came, I wondered if all the meets and bounds are proven up, and I found there were fourteen gaps so we had to go to court and get a quieting title. They did a marvelous job.

I used to go around Seattle with your father, raising money. He was a genius at it. I remember we went to see Mr. Swabacker and Dr. Spector, and a good many others, and they had the greatest regard and respect for him . . .

B: He had been active politically here for quite some time, not politically in the true sense, but he held a political job but he was not an aggressive politician in that sense. He ran, and if he was elected, fine. I think he had a pretty good reputation. I never forget the story he told me. Old Hiram Gill, whose appointee went to the penitentiary and Hiram was pretty rough sort of character . . . When father first went on the Council, he wasn't getting very far in getting the things he wanted, and he was sort of a lone voice there for those things, and he told me about going in to see Hi Gill at one point and Hi Gill said, "You've got to learn how to get along in politics." Father said,
"I know I'm not too well informed, but what do you mean by that?" He said, "Politics is a game of compromise. If you want certain things and the other fellow, he wants certain things, you're going to have to occasionally vote for what he wants if you want him to vote for what you want." He told me that and I'll never forget it, because he, of course, being a strong church-goer, was not very much in favor of some of the things the others on the Council were interested in.

T: I notice that there is the Blaine room in First Church. That's named for his father, wasn't it?

B: Yes... Well, now wait a minute. I'm sure it was...

Do you know whether the Blaine room was named for Grandfather?

S: Yes, it's named after Grandfather.

B: I was wondering. You see, Father was so active in the Sunday School work at First Church and on the Board of Trustees for years and years and years.

S: He was well and active when that room was named, though.

Mrs. B: Yes, it was named for your Grandfather.

B: I would assume so, but I just don't have the facts as to...

S: If they had named it after he was gone, I could have believed it, but I think it was named after Grandfather.

T: I came in 1942 and it was there then. There is a Blaine Avenue or Blaine Street.

B: Blaine Street, here, I think, is named after James G. Blaine of Maine.

T: Now is that any of the family?
B: No. He was the Republican candidate for president of the United States.

S: They have a Garfield right up along side of it so I imagine that is true.

Mrs. B: We have a great difficulty over this whole problem, because I read somewhere that Denny Blaine was named for E. F. Blaine because they lived out there.

T: Your father's initials were E. L. What did that "L" stand for?

B: Linn. Named after Linn County, Oregon, where Lebanon is.

T: Do you recall any of the unusual events in his life that related to the College?

B: No, frankly, I can't think of anything. He was pretty regular attending their board meetings, and toward the end, when he couldn't get around too well, Norton Clapp used to come over and pick him up in the car and drive him over to the meetings and bring him back. He was active at all times but he was not involved in anything specific that I can think of.

T: He was very, very good and he used to call me and say that if I could spare a day, to come over and he would go out with me. Then he would say, "If you're going to be in Thursday afternoon, I'd like to come over and sit down and talk with you." Then we'd talk about what were the next projects and what committees should be made and which trustees were serving well and which were deadwood. He was very active right up to the end.

B: Yes, he had a keen interest in it at all times.
T: How long had his hearing been impaired?
B: I would say that he was in control of all of his faculties up until about five years before he died.
Mrs. B: He lost his eyesight and he lost his hearing, too.
T: Did you say he used to read to the family?
S: Oh, yes, every evening almost.
Mrs. B: He read to me.
S: That was after Mother had gone.
B: While you were ironing he would come out and read. He enjoyed reading, and it was sort of a performance.
S: He'd use different voices for the characters in the book.
T: What year did your Grandfather die?
B: I would say about 1900.
Mrs. B: Your Grandmother died in 1908.
S: She was only in her 70's, I think, when she died.
T: Do you people have copies of her letters?
B: Yes.
T: Have they ever been published in a book?
B: No, not as such. They have been typewritten. Father had them typed one time and there is a copy, if I remember correctly, at the historical society in Olympia; then he gave others to various people. I don't know how many copies he had made. Then we've had sufficient demand so I had six or eight more run off, not individually typed but photocopied.
T: We have a copy in our library and some of the original letters are in the
Methodist archives in Nashville. They wanted them as part of the primary sources of the Methodist Church of the United States.

The End