Samuel Mohler interview

Samuel Mohler
Mr. Mohler: I was born in 1900 at Warrensburg, Missouri.

Mr. Overland: What were some of the key circumstances of your youth before entering college?

Mr. Mohler: I was brought up on a farm and attended all eight grades of a country school, but apparently I had very good teachers because I never felt any handicap, attending an eight grade school. My father was a country minister and farmer, he never received any pay for his services as minister. He made his living farming and as an insurance agent and the Land Bank appraiser. I was the only boy. He was gone a great deal so I grew up by myself pretty much, I had four sisters but they were all younger. I went one year to high school and became a dropout. I had the measles just before the end of the first year and it kept me from taking my examinations and I discovered that I couldn’t get any credit for the second semester, so I quit. My father though, as a minister, was not satisfied with that since I was the only son. He had in mind that I should be a minister myself. That was my mother’s hope, too. So, after about two years there at the farm he insisted that I go out to McPherson College Academy, in McPherson, Kansas. That was a church school and it was kind of a preparatory school. So, I went there two years and dropped out again, this time to become a farmer. I was about through with school. Then in 1924 my farming activities were not very prosperous, the ’20s were a very bad time for farmers. I wasn’t getting anywhere and I decided once more that maybe I should go to school. I went to college. I had not finished high school yet, but they let me into college because I was twenty-four-years-old. I went to McPherson College. I had been to the academy before. They let me in on condition I went there two years and then transferred to Manchester College in Indiana. If I stayed at McPherson I still would have had to pass those high school courses which I hadn’t passed, but in Indiana there was a State Equivalency Examination for persons who were of mature years. If I could take the Examinations I would never have to take those courses in high school so I went to Manchester College in Indiana. Sure enough, at the end of four years I graduated, but I didn’t get my diploma cause I hadn’t yet finished school. So, I went to the County Seat and took high school examinations in my college subjects and I did very well, got excellent grades in history, which was my major, and English, which I had a number of courses and so forth. So, as I say, my education was a bit unusual. I graduated from college before graduating from high school, but they wouldn’t let me have my diploma until I did pass those Equivalent Exams. I majored in history in college, but I didn’t want to teach and I didn’t take any education courses so the question at the end of the four years was, ‘What next?’ I got interested in a number of different things, industrial art for instance; in botany; I just majored in history because...well, I thought the best professors were in history. By the way, the man chairman of the department was Andrew Cordier, who was later Chief Assistant to Dag Hammarskjold and Assistant to his successor at the United Nations. In fact, he became a very important man in the United Nations. I did my major work with him. About that time....see my father had always been telling me that I should go into the ministry, my mother too. My father, my great-grandfather, my grandfather had all been ministers...all of this unsalaried kind. I was the only son, so...about that time I got a scholarship to Yale University Divinity School. The scholarship would pay the tuition and I was assured that I could get part time work, so I decided...I wasn’t convinced that I should be a minister, but these other people were saying that I should be. Here was a scholarship, so what could I lose except time. So, I went to Yale in the fall of ‘28. I was there three years. In that time I had some very serious doubt...’This is not my job, this is not what I want to do the rest of my life.’ But, the scholarship continued, part time employment continued and what else... I had plenty of time it seemed, so I graduated there at the age of thirty-one. Then again the question, ‘What next?’ Well, I was offered a pastorate, kind of a missionary pastorate in Seattle. They really wanted a married man, but I thought maybe I could arrange that. Anyway, I went to Seattle the fall of ’31, most unhappy time. I wasn’t a minister, I didn’t think the way a minister ought to think. I did have the technical training, but not the interest and not the temperament far it. But, I stayed by it three years and in the meantime I took graduate courses in history at the University of Washington and decided that I want to be a college professor and teach history. But, those were depression years and there weren’t many jobs so I got a
Masters Degree there and still no job. Again, I didn’t want to teach in high school so I didn’t take an education course and there I was. The man under whom I had done my masters work was a man of a good deal of wealth and he suggested that I go back to the University of Chicago, or I could go to Yale or Harvard. I chose Chicago, and he would lend me the money. Meanwhile, I had married. My wife was a librarian at the University of Washington Library, she had a job and she gave that up and we went back to Chicago in the fall of ’37. I was there then until 1939, working principally in American and Latin American History and working part time in the department of history, so that I was finally graduated with a doctor’s degree in December, 1940. I should have added that at the University of Washington I was teaching American history for two years as a teaching fellow and also director of congregational student work at the University at the same time. Each was a half time job and I was doing graduate work half time, too, so it was kind of a full life. Then after getting the doctor’s degree in Chicago, in Colonial American History I got a job, a temporary wartime job, at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. I was there one year and then came here in January of ’43.

Mr. Overland: What motivated you to apply for a job at Central or accept a job?

Mr. Mohler: Well, I suppose the important thing was that I was available and I needed a job. I had made an application here before going to Pacific, in fact while I was still in Chicago...we wanted to come back in the Northwest and I had written a letter of application, and Dr. McConnell had filed that in his file. While I was still at Pacific, as I say, on a very temporary appointment which could end anytime, Dr. McConnell had made arrangements for the Army Air Corp to come to the campus and he needed more teachers. Well, I was not to teach in that program, but to take the place of someone who was. So, that’s how I came here.

Mr. Overland: Could you relate to us your first impressions of the school when you arrived?

Mr. Mohler: We arrived...I think it was the last day of December, there was ten inches of snow on the ground and the temperature was ten degrees above zero. I remember that so very well because during the war one couldn’t buy chains and in Oregon we didn’t need chains. Coming up the Yakima Canyon at a snail’s pace because of the ice, we finally arrived. We came to this very house, as a matter of fact. At that time it was a very small school, actually it was smaller than Pacific in enrollment...275 students. This was just before the influx of army air corps cadets. Practically all the men students had left the campus when I came. Almost no civilian men. My first impression was that it was a cold place, but people were very friendly. I was a little overwhelmed by the emphasis on education courses. I shouldn’t have been surprised, I guess, but it was so different from what I had been accustomed to. I had never been in a teacher’s college at all. I was brought up in a town, in Warrensburg, Missouri, that had a first rate teacher’s college, but I wasn’t interested in going to college at home so....it seemed to me that the curriculum and emphasis was just over-much in education......that bothered me. Students were about the same as I had known at Pacific and University of Washington. I have always said that our good students are as good as anybodies anywhere. Unfortunately, we had a lot of just average and mediocre and poor students, more than our share of those.....but, our good students are as good as anyones, in fact they demonstrate that as they go from here into graduate work, they can hold their own. But, we do have a larger share of people who either don’t know why they are here or they don’t know what to do when they get here.

Mr. Overland: What was your first impression of the town?

Mr. Mohler: I had seen the town before, we had gone through here on a very windy day in the summertime, I remembered that. The town was not notable in any respect, it was just a small town, country town, college town...but, the college didn’t seem to have a great deal of a barring on the town. I didn’t have any real impressions I suppose, I was so busy those first few months. One reason why I was brought here was to teach a course in Northwest history...the required course in Washington history and government. I never had a course in Northwest history, not one! I had a vague remembrance that there had been a Lewis & Clark, but I couldn’t of said for sure what it was explored or... I just didn’t know any Northwest history, so that first quarter I had my nose to the grindstone constantly. I learned more that first quarter than I ever
learned since…in any one quarter, I should say. I don’t remember the town as having any special impression.

Mr. Overland: During your first years of instructor, what type of relationship did the college have with the community?

Mr. Mohler: Oh, it’s a little hard to generalize, I think in every college and university city, since the middle ages, there has been a conflict between ‘town and gown’, if not an open conflict at least a kind of subtle psychological one. I think it’s natural. Certainly in every college town that I have been in there was that kind of mutual suspicion—not an open quarrel, but just the feeling... well, the townspeople say, ‘Well, that’s what you expect of the college professors, college students.’ On the part of the college the attitude is, ‘Well that’s what you expect of people never going to college,’ that kind of thing. It’s very natural. I don’t know that it is any worse here than elsewhere. I do think that President McConnell, who was here 28 years had an unfortunate way of antagonizing people without wanting to. There were a lot of people downtown who thought that he was arrogant, and who had no use for him at all. That was unfortunate because he was a very strange man in some respect, but he did want to be loved, and nobody really loved him. He just didn’t have that rapport with the community, which he could have had. I always say that he meant so well and tried so hard he was almost a tragic figure because people just didn’t like him.

Mr. Overland: What type of problems did the history department or division have when you first came here?

Mr. Mohler: Well, the visible problem was lack of man-power; there were just two many of us in the history department. I was on the American side and Mr. Harold Barto was on the European side. He was also registrar and I think he must have given about half time to history. I was here full time, and that was it! Worse than that, the man in Political Science had gone to war and I took over his American Government course, that was the only course in the Political Science taught during those years. The Sociology man had gone to war and I taught the only course in Sociology that was taught on this campus, in addition to all American History and Canadian History; Latin American History; I was teaching American Government and Sociology. That was the principal problem and then I was in this Northwestern History course…it kept me working very, very, hard the first quarter and in later quarters. That was the only real problem we had I should think. We had excellent students in history in those years. I think the quality was maybe better than it was later, at least I remember those people as being outstanding. One should never generalize about students, of course, different generations... I knew these better because there were so few, that may be the difference.

Mr. Overland: Could you relate how the department grew an expanded during the 1950’s from the two-man division to more modern times?

Mr. Mohler: During the war it was Barto and myself and then a sociology teacher came and I no longer had to teach sociology and eventually a political science teacher came so I no longer had to teach that. The first historian, full-time historian, well, I should qualify that...during the war, what was known as History 100 was required of all students. As Mr. Barto said, ‘We’ll put this in before the American Legion makes us.’ This was a required course in American History. As enrollment grew the two of us no longer could handle it so there were some other people brought in, Mr. ? Several members of the division of social sciences taught this course, History 100, which was simply a survey course in American History in one quarter...it was also thin stuff, but there was a strong demand in war days that American History should taught...required, and so we taught it. Dr. Walter Berg and Floyd Rodine, full time historians came in 1955. Then as the time passed others were brought in. Most of them stayed, not all. By ’69 the time that I retired, I believe there were 13 members of the department...the division...by that time it was a department...I think. Yes, well the first increases came because of the required course in the history of the United States. By 1947 the enrollment was booming, I believe there were at thousand enrolled that year. It went up and then it dropped down a little bit and then in the late ‘50s and ‘60s of course it reached the level of five
Mr. Mohler: I became a member as soon as I came over here and I was a member then for 27 years. I was president 1945-46 and it happened that this was the time that we worked out the Code of Personnel Policy and Procedures. President McConnell in 1940 had fired a member of Psychology-Education Department without adequate reason and the National AAUP censured this administration...not the school, but the administration. President McConnell, a. had been the President of the Local Chapter over at Cheney so he should have known better. But, he had gotten himself into that jam and he was awfully eager to get off the censored list. It was a mark against his record and it hurt. Well, I was President of the Local Chapter, that was in ‘46 I believe. Anyway, this story is in the book, The Strayer Committee came to evaluate the school. One of the Strayer men suggested to me, ‘Why don’t you do something to get the President of the censored list.’ I said, ‘What?’ (The President had tried for a couple years to get off) Well, he suggested that we draw up a code of personnel policy and procedure, and get it into operation and then apply to the AAUP to get us off the censor list, which was fine with me. I was a little concerned though, because it might not work that way. I didn’t have tenure and I was little afraid that if the thing turned sour the President could blame me. But, as it turned out he was very cooperative, almost pathetically so. He realized that we had a lot of leverage and he was willing to make concessions. The Board of Trustees were willing to make concessions because they did want off the censored list so badly. So, we drew up a pretty stiff code. It was by far the most democratic, at least among the tax supported schools, in Washington....more democratic than most across the country. But, the President agreed and the Trustees agreed and it was put into operation in 1947 and continued so until quite recently. I purposely have not become involved in this recent fracas between President Brooks and the faculty, but I must say that I think he has made a great mistake and that eventually it will have to reinstated, some kind of code made up by the faculty. A unilateral code made up by the President is not a code, it may be a temporary solution, but it’s not a code in which the faculty have any direct participation.

Mr. Overland: The censorship then did have a deep impact on McConnell himself.
Mr. Mohler: I would think so, I think so.

Mr. Overland: How effective was the code that you described in dealing with faculty members?

Mr. Mohler: Surprisingly effective I would say. The Trustees were sold on it. Mr. Bouillon who was the Chairman of the Board for 31 years, he was all for it. I talked with him before even starting on this thing because I wanted to know whether he was with us or against us or if we could depend on him, He was determined that this thing had to work. I would say that I don’t know of any case where the code was challenged by the President or the Trustees as long as McConnell was here. I think he didn’t like it. I think he felt that the code was trespassing on his prerogatives, but there it was and the Trustees said, ‘This is it.’ So, that was the way we worked. Every question so far as I know, was satisfactorily handled through the Faculty Council or the Faculty Senate. Not everybody was happy, but justice was done, that’s all one can expect.

Mr. Overland: What impact did the influx of veterans have on the school?

Mr. Mohler: Well, it had a lot; they were older, they were men who had made up their minds about a lot of things. They couldn’t be kidded along. I think I noticed in the college history that the faculty members discovered that they wouldn’t take everything that was handed out to them...they had some questions and they made objections and faculty men discovered that they better get a little more information on certain things. I think that was all for the good. I think I mentioned giving...in the history...a good deal of attention to student government, veterans didn’t care for it. This was kid’s stuff as far as they were concerned. They made their own rules. The Honor Code was a joke...that’s what most veteran’s had to say. So, there are advantages and disadvantages. They did bring a maturity and indicated a challenge to faculty people. They had to improve their offerings or be ridiculed. That was to the good. There was more drinking of course, and more rough stuff. Most of the veterans, though, knew why they were there and took it seriously. Some were taking a free ride on the government, but not very many I think.

Mr. Overland: Was there a large gap then between the regular students and the new veterans?

Mr. Mohler: I think that would depend. Many of the veterans were married and they lived in apartments, that made a difference. There was an age difference. I don’t know that there was any conflict, they just had separate areas of interest. They didn’t have as much in common as the students had in pre-war years.

Mr. Overland: What type of leadership did Dr. McConnell provide for the school?

Mr. Mohler: I think I’ve indicated that on commenting on other things. He was utterly devoted to the school, he didn’t go off into politics, for instance. He didn’t try to make a living writing books. He was dedicated to the school and it’s best interest. If he could have moderated his temper somehow he would have been a great President. But, unfortunately he had people mad at him most of the time, students or faculty or even townspeople. That was his problem of temperament. If I were a physiologist, which I am not, I think I would suggest that President McConnell’s chief difficulty was a feeling of insecurity. He was only 34 when he came, pretty young, and I think he was never really sure of himself, even after being here a long time. Perhaps because he felt insecure... now, I’m out of my depth here, but as I say, if I were a physiologist I would be tempted, I think to speculate in these areas...that’s the way it looked to the layman. A man who was unsure of himself and made some mistakes. There was a group of young faculty members here before I came ...most of them went off to the war and didn’t return, but I think they compensated for a dull life in small town by needling the President. This was where their recreation...it was/'good sport. Well, this added to his insecurity of course, and to what came to be his arrogance. Arrogance, I’m pretty sure, was a result of insecurity. He was an interesting person, very interesting person. He could have been a great President. In some respects he approached greatness, but in other respects...no. As I say, I admired him in a way and I wondered why he couldn’t be a little more human, a little more understanding. I think it was his insecurity...he just didn’t dare let it down.
Mr. Overland: What were the events that lead to his departure in 1959?

Mr. Mohler: No one thing...just an accumulation of things and the coming to the Board of Trustees of two or three young people, much more progressive people; Herb Legg had been active in student government. I forget now whether he was actually ever a student body president, but he was in school and he was baiting the President then. When he became a Trustee he had more leverage, of course. A second alumni Trustee was Dr. Roy Wahle, who had been a president of the student SGA, in fact Roy had been the founding father, really, of SGA. He had run-ins with President McConnell and now he was a Trustee. The Governor, Rosselini had appointed these two men, perhaps by the aid of suggestions from members of the faculty...Democratic members that is, of course. Then there Roy Wilson...over at Richland, a young chemist, Ph.D., he was appointed to the Board. He was a very progressive man who wanted very much to have an on-going and progressive administration and then there was...well, those are the three I would say who were most responsible for forcing changes which the President could not accept...that was about the size of it.

Mr. Overland: To sum it up on a positive note, what would you say were McConnell’s major accomplishments during his tenure?

Mr. Mohler: Well, he liked to think of himself as a builder, that is of brick and mortar and he did get together a strong faculty. He was insisting always that the faculty be the equal of any of a similar type school in the country. He was very proud of the faculty. When one of us did something that worth noticing...he was greatly pleased. As I say, he kept the school out of politics and many presidents get all messed up with the legislature and with political factions, he kept clear of that. He did observe academic freedom; that man that was fired was fired not because of what he taught, but because he left campus at commencement, without permission, which was against the rules. Academic freedom was never really questioned here. In fact, one of the President’s most vocal critics was being lambasted...I forget now the circumstances...it happened before I came here, I believe, anyway there was an organization that demanded that that man must go...‘that man is subversive, a communist,’ The President stood up for him. He didn’t like him and didn’t agree with him, but stood up for him...academic freedom. So, we had it. And I would say that he made strenuous efforts to get the best in the way of equipment and so forth. He was good to the school. Towards the last, the increasing tensions and the dissatisfactions were growing. These new Trustees were quite critical and they demanded that he give account of what was going on. Well, he hadn’t been doing that. Most of the time there had been only three Trustees, Mr. Bouillon, a local man who wanted to avoid any kind of trouble; then there would be usually one in Yakima, Mr. Tunstall for many years, a personal friend as it turned out. The third one might be in Seattle. But, here were five members, the number had increased from three to five, and these two young alumni Trustees added and they demanded answers. He was just less sure of himself, he wasn’t accustomed to be told what to do and to account for. So, he was on the way out, no question about that. Then this offer came from this government agency, which saved everybody…we didn’t have a real stink and I think we were heading for it.

Mr. Overland: During the 1950’s how successful was the History Department in placing its students?

Mr. Mohler: I wish I had more information on that, I don’t. One of the problems always has been that people that major in history want to learn to teach in high school and there just aren’t that many jobs opened up in high school. That has been a problem. Now those who majored in history in the elementary area, even junior high, had a much better chance. I think it’s still true that in high schools the coach is likely to be the teacher of history. That’s the way that its been. Some high school administrators will deny, but I think it checks out pretty well. It’s been a problem, it’s always been a problem. More people like history and want to teach history than there are openings, that’s true at the graduate level, too. Every year there is a crop of Ph.D.’s that just don’t have jobs. I don’t want to discourage you, but that’s the way that it is.

Mr. Overland: In general what effect did James Brooks have on the school when he arrived?
Mr. Mohler: ...I had had him as a student in several classes in which he did good work. He was not a history major, he was a geography major, but I knew him and I liked him. He had been here several summers, I think, as a professor of geography or perhaps assistant professor of geography...anyway, he was a favorite of Dr. Shaw who had been the geographer. After Dr. Shaw’s death Brooks came. I think he spent a whole quarter, maybe the best part of the year. Anyway, he was no stranger to the campus. When we learned that the Trustees had appointed him most of us felt really relieved at least he’s one of our own. He hasn’t much experience, heaven knows he didn’t have much experience. He was still very young. But, hoped for the best and I must say that the first faculty meeting where James Brooks conducted the meeting was one of the best that I have ever known on this school. He had written out his own philosophy of education, of administration. In which he said, among other things, ‘I am not numbers minded, I’m not building minded, I am faculty minded.’ And he spoke humbly and as a former student who needed help. And he had, I’m sure, the goodwill and best wishes of anybody there. It was so different from the things we were accustomed to. We all hoped and all promised to help. I don’t know what’s happened there. I know at the first he asked for criticism and he got an awful lot of it, maybe too much. He was very resilient and of course he was young and had lots of energy and he could take lots of punishment. I have a feeling that perhaps after a while he had enough and went on the defensive. He’s on the defensive now, I’m sure. That’s too bad because that was not indicated. That first faculty meeting, I mean, he had everybody with him. He lost that...I don’t know how. I purposely kept away from all of these recent controversies. All I get is secondhand, and I don’t ask for that, but people do come to me and talk to me and wonder what can be done. I say, ‘I don’t know enough about the situation, I have no answers.’ That’s true. I haven’t spent a lot of time on campus. When I was through teaching there I noticed some retired people just hanging around, some of them interfering with the work that we were trying to do and just wanting to talk to someone and I said to myself and other people, ‘That’s not going to happen to me. When I retire, I retire…I keep away, I’m not going to interfere with other people’s work.’ And, I haven’t been back very often since. It’s like any other job, I think, when your through with it your through with it. Why hang around? Especially for someone who was as much involved in controversy as I was, I shouldn’t stay around at all. I was kind of a vocal point for trouble. So, I don’t know very much, but I do know that Jim is very much on the defensive and it seems to me that the administration organization is so very large I don’t know how they keep Out of one another’s way, I really don’t. The school, I’m sure, is over-administered. What I know of it I would say that we have enough administration there for a University of 30,000 students. These recent controversy about the code is I’m sure most unfortunate. We got along so well under it that I think this is a great mistake. I understand that it was not Brooks himself, but one of the Trustees that brought about this confrontation about the code. But, as I say, I don’t know.

Mr. Overland: When Brooks assumed control what major problems did he face in general with the school?

Mr. Mohler: I think the unparalleled growth in students. This was not unique of course, this was happening everywhere of course. At many schools the growth was much more rapid. But, take this...when I came here there were 275, when I left there were over 6,000, that’s a 2000 plus increase, more than a 2000 percent increase. That takes a lot of adjustment. That was one of his problems. It was no longer a teacher’s college, of course. It hadn’t been for many years. It was a liberal arts college in many ways, long before the name was changed and...that was in ’61? That I would say was the biggest single problem. Then he did break up the divisions into departments and I think that was wise. It does result in fragmentation in curriculum and emphasis, but those divisions were rather unwielding.

Mr. Overland: What effect did the creation of the divisions have on the history department?

Mr. Mohler: Oh, not very much. History had been, I should say, the largest branch within the former division and the Chairman of the Division, several times, had been also a professor of history. I think it did allow the addition of staff and the introduction of new courses. I hadn’t thought of that question, but my first reaction would be, not a great deal. We went on about the way we had been doing.

Mr. Overland: During your years in instruction, what types of general courses did you teach? You mentioned that you taught Northwest history...how did it change?
Mr. Mohler: Oh, of course it would change by the passing of time...the government side of it has changed considerably. The history side, of course, I think hasn’t changed an awful lot. Other general courses...is that what you asked? Yes, what used to be called History 50 and 51, that is the two quarter survey courses in American History...I taught that many years, both parts. I think that is now divided into three parts, isn’t it? It probably should be.

Mr. Overland: The U.S. is still two parts.

Mr. Mohler: Still two part survey, huh? History 101, a one quarter class, was a required course for a while. The odd part about it was that even those who had the two quarter survey course in American History were required to take History 100, after they had had the other ones. I taught the first unit of Western Civ. for a number of years. That’s from the beginning down to the coming of the renascence/reformation. Those were the survey courses, I believe. Latin American History was always fascinating to me. I had a very good professor of history at Chicago in that area and traveled down there,...we have been down there four times, into South America, Central America, Mexico. I think that that was my favorite upper division course, Latin American. I wasn’t really a specialist in it, I had a number of courses and as I say we traveled and wide reading....but, I never felt that I was really qualified to give say a graduate course. I welcomed the coining of Dr. Earle Glaurt, in fact I insisted that we ought to have a specialist. My specialty was Colonial History at the University in Chicago. We wanted to come out to the Northwest and...Colonial History seems a long way off for people out here, so I turned to other things. Because of the war and all...I think I noted this in the history. I taught 24 different courses. Now, this doesn’t mean changes in course numbers, this means 24 different subjects, which is too much. It shouldn’t happen. I think it won’t happen again, but the war made it necessary to teach all of these things. Canadian History was in the catalog, so I taught that, I learned that from scratch, too...of course Latin America was in the catalog so I was glad to teach that one. Sociology, American Government. Don’t think that I would do it again. I would say to myself, ‘I should concentrate in four or five, maybe six areas and this is where I stop.’ Of course in a way it was a good experience. I never got stale, never had a chance to be bored by the course, because I was always doing other courses. I was never able to say, as I suspect some University professors are able to say, ‘Well, I’ve got that one licked, I won’t do anymore work on it.’ It did keep me intellectually alive. But, it was quite contrary to what was supposed to go on in the academic circle, your supposed to become a specialist and stay with your specialty,...and write and write and write. Well, I didn’t do much writing obviously. I never wanted to really do much writing. I liked teaching...I liked students until there became so many that I didn’t know them except as a row and chair numbers and that wasn’t any fun. The only students that I got to know in those last few years were the very, very good ones who stood out and the ones at the bottom who had to have help, who came into the office and said, ‘What can I do to avoid flunking this course?’ I never got acquainted with the rest of them, but that was rather unsatisfactory.

Mr. Overland: So you think with the increasing enrollment the quality of education may have started to change a bit?

Mr. Mohler: It’s hard to tell. I wouldn’t want to be dogmatic, but I would say as indicated earlier, the students that I remember are the students in those first years, even though that was now over 30 years ago. I could take my old class book, as I say ‘43, ‘44, ‘45 and I can picture all those early names there...these are the kids I knew. In that first year, when there was only 275, I think I least I knew the names of half the students. By ‘69, when I retired, I couldn’t have recalled the names of anything like half the faculty. There is a difference. I don’t like to say that larger classes makes for poorer learning...I don’t think that is necessarily so, but I think it can be so.

Mr. Overland: In general what type of relation did Brooks have with the faculty as compared to somebody like McConnell who you mentioned was a bit…

Mr. Mohler: Well, as I indicated at first, very, very good...very cordial. The man did actually welcome criticism, but that’s gone. He seems as much on the defensive now as McConnell was, at times.
Mr. Overland: What were some of the problems the college faced during these growth years?

Mr. Mohler: Principally growth. Well, of course the argument of the current administration is that if we had more money we wouldn’t have any problem, but that isn’t so. One reason is the general lowering of academic requirements for admission...this went on in the 60s... we have got to have more students so that we can go to legislature and say, look, we’ve got this many students and we have to provide for them. We have to have faculty, we have to have classrooms, we have to have buildings...now what are you going to do about it, we’ve got these students? Well, some of us who have been around a long time said, ‘You never catch up with that sort of thing, you’ll always be behind.’ If you get more students, get more buildings...you have to get more students next year to justify more buildings...this is an endless circle. But, I have never been an administrator, never wanted to be. I was Chairman of the History Department one year and that as all that I would take. So, I...I just don’t see through administrators eyes. It seemed to me this constant growth of more and more and more can be distorted. You can distort the real purpose of it...an institution of learning.

Mr. Overland: What were some of the positive accomplishments under the leadership of Brooks, at least during the years that you were there?

Mr. Mohler: As I indicated, I think that this re-organization of the faculty from divisions into the departments was a constructive thing. He tinkered with it several times, but I think the end result has been good. Certainly during the first years there was a freedom and openness that hadn’t been there before. You could talk to Brooks anywhere on the campus, President McConnell was usually courteous in his office, but out on the campus he could look straight through you and never see you, probably because he was occupied with something...but, it was not good for public relations. Brooks, as I indicated, was very cordial, in fact he leaned over backwards I think to be one of the boys. He didn’t help himself any that way. He was largely responsible too for encouraging the faculty to have a senate instead of the council. The old Faculty Council was designed primarily to see that the Code was enforced. It was in a way a watch dog function, principally. But, with the creation of the Faculty Senate, increased jurisdiction was given to political matters, to setting up course requirements, new courses and so forth. That, of course, can get bogged down, too And to have the Faculty Senate to sit and listen to and consider every new course offered, I think that can become very weary. But, the Faculty Senate evolved out of the Faculty Council with the blessing and encouragement of the President...Brooks. Of course with the change in the name of the college a change in function did come and many departments have been aided. For instance, before Brooks came there was no one in anthropology and now it’s quite a sizable department compared to some others. I’m sure that many other departments have been aided. I just don’t know a lot about what’s been happening in the last six years.

Mr. Overland: During your years in Ellensburg how would you say the relationship between the school and the town has evolved?

Mr. Mohler: I think that they have improved. McConnell just wasn’t liked downtown by so many men, I think that has improved quite a bit. I think when I came here if a college person had run for the City Council he would have not have been elected...just that feeling among the local people, ‘We don’t want the college running our business.’ There is still some of that feeling about college people, but college people are elected. Irene Rinehart, wife of a college...well, she has taught at the college, too. So, relations are better, I would say. But, there is still some tension.

Mr. Overland: You mentioned that the Trustees had grown from three to five, how is the relationship between the Trustees and the President in the school been changing through the years as far as power structure?

Mr. Mohler: I don’t think I should comment on that, because again there have been changes since ‘69 when I retired that I’m not really conversant with.
Mr. Overland: Let’s say the 1960’s, the balance of power, has it pretty much leveled out? It seemed that McConnell used to have a great deal of power and the Trustees were not so powerful.

Mr. Mohler: It is true that for many years the Trustees took McConnell’s word as to what ought to be done. The Trustees were busy men. Mr. Bouillion was President of the Bank; Mr. Tunstall in Yakima, who was on the Board many years was an attorney who had a full time practice. It is true that the Trustees pretty much took the word of what the President said, as they are doing now, as I understand...well, what I read in the paper too, of course. My impression is that the Trustees take Brooks estimate in things and o.k. them. That certainly was not true in the last years of McConnell, they questioned everything he was doing. As indicated, he felt very unsure of himself.

Mr. Overland: So, since that time there has been a real improvement as far as the relationship is concerned?

Mr. Mohler: I presume so. Again, this is one of those questions I ought not comment on.

Mr. Overland: If I could ask you...how would you compare a Central graduate of 1970 to a Central graduate of 1950?

Mr. Mohler: I don’t think that can be done. People are people, they their individuals and I don’t believe we have average graduates...I hope not. There would be a chance for a graduate of 1970 to have been exposed to more different areas of learning, certainly, could have been that chance. Of course as long as there were so many education courses, that did a lot to determine the student...say, of the 1950’s, they were all teachers. I don’t believe that can be done, at least not by me. I think I knew the students of the 1950’s much better than those of the ‘70s or late ‘60s, because there were not nearly so many of them.

Mr. Overland: As far as skills developed during your years, would you say they were pretty much similar in ‘60s and ‘50s?

Mr. Mohler: Well again, there is such a wide variation as I’ve indicated. Our good students are as good as anybody’s, we just don’t have as large a proportion as some of them, relative to those of the average, mediocre and poor quality. I don’t believe that’s changed from what I’ve heard. We still have some top students and a lot who are not top.

Mr. Overland: When did you begin formal work on the history of the college?

Mr. Mohler: Oh golly, 1945...something like that. I don’t even like to talk about it, but it was off an on, in and out, for 20 years. As I have indicated, several times I said, well that’s all I can do with it. Now somebody is going to publish it, I’m not, I couldn’t afford to. By the time the Trustees said, ‘Oh it ought to be published, we should do this,’ but there wasn’t funds. After two or three more years there would be more talk of publication, so I would start in again. I would of course have to re-work a lot of it. I suppose all together I spent as much as two years. That’s just a rough estimate...I have no idea.

Mr. Overland: Do you have any interesting anecdotes you would like to relate to your work on the book?

Mr. Mohler: Oh, I don’t suppose so.

Mr. Overland: Nothing stands out in your mind?

Mr. Mohler: Not in connection with the book, no.

Mr. Overland: How well was the book received when it was first put out?
Mr. Mohler: I think rather well. Of course we never know these things. No one has written a savage indictment of it. I have heard many a nice things said about it. I never worried much about that, because as I indicated, the publication was done by the college, I had done my part and that was that. I believe 2,000 copies were printed and I understand they are about gone. How many of those were given away, how many were sold…I have no idea. I never looked into that angle of it.

Mr. Overland: When was the book published?

Mr. Mohler: 1967.

Mr. Overland: What was your philosophy of education then and now?

Mr. Mohler: I never tried to put it down, I’m not sure that I could. I have been intellectually curious all my life…I’ve wondered about things, I think that’s one reason….why I was willing, at least I did it to work up all these new courses, things that I didn’t know. As long as there was something I didn’t know I wanted to find out. I’m not sure that’s a philosophy of education, but at least that’s a plan in which I worked. Always something new, something that’s got to be discovered you know. So much depends on the students you have. A small group of half a dozen of excellent students will do things for a professor that a lecture course of 160 won’t, or 200…I think. There you get the impression that your just spraying with a hose, a little of it will light, a little of it will do good, most of it probably will evaporate. Towards the last, I had a feeling that much of what I was doing was not very effective...too much spraying, not enough understanding...between the professor and the students. Not much communication, just s-w-i-s-h. I used the lecture method not because I liked it, but with large classes what else can you do. That was always rather frustrating. I like a small intimate group of people who can talk things over, but you don’t get that in your classes very often. At least I didn’t.

Mr. Overland: Yes, that usually comes at the graduate level, your seminars.

Mr. Mohler: The irony of it is...this puzzles me, for a freshman you may have 30 students to a professor. I’m not sure what the ratio is, say 30…for upper division students you may have 20 or 15 to a professor. A graduate student you will have five or six. Well heavens, if anybody should be able to go it on their own it should be the graduate students, and the freshmen at the bottom level, they are the ones that need the help. This is absurd. I have said so in department meetings.

Mr. Overland: Of course that’s kind of tradition, that exists in most colleges.

Mr. Mohler: Yes, it is.

Mr. Overland: What do you think the college must do to keep pace with changing society in the job market?

Mr. Mohler: I have always said that not everyone should go to college. I think there have been a lot of good mechanics ruined by going to college. A lot of people who could do good work with their hands, dirty work, are spoiled because they go to college, get a degree so they can get a white-collar job and not have to work as hard as their parents, which I think is most unfortunate. I think that’s passing by the way...slowly. I’m not sure that Central should do it, but I think there is room for increasing vocational training. Not University engineering courses, say, but electronics. There is a great shortage, an awful shortage of people who can repair tv’s and people who can do a good job of repairing automobiles. I think that is changing. Junior colleges are doing this kind of thing now and not everybody is looking for a white collar job. As I say, I’m not sure that Central should become a technological institute. I think they are doing some good work there in that general area, technology and industrial education. That’s mainly for teachers isn’t it?
Mr. Overland: I think it’s called technology and industrial education. I think it is maybe for teachers who are going on to teaching.

Mr. Mohler: Well, I think there is going to have to be a lot of revaluation as to what college education ought to be. I don’t know what it ought to be. I think too much of it has exalted the white-collar job, and there aren’t that many white-collar jobs.

Mr. Overland: What can the history department do, if anything, to meet these changing needs?

Mr. Mohler: I think that a sizable part of the population, student and otherwise, is generally interested in the history at least of this country. I also think that historians can make it the most awful, uninteresting and boring. If I were a member of the present history department I would say something like this, ‘Look, the jobs for history majors are not so many that’s it’s going to build up enrollments here. The number of history majors that go on to graduate school is not overwhelming either. What we ought to be doing is to introduce freshman and sophomores to history as something interesting, something vital, not as a job, but as something to enrich their lives. Don’t insist that they all make “A”s, that their term papers are perfect for the general run of students make history interesting and fascinating and then tell the kids, ‘Look don’t go into history as a vocation, but as an interest, as an avocation, as a hobby. I saw that when I was in the department still, but no one else seemed to see it, but I think it’s real. As I indicated the number of graduate students that major in history is declining because the jobs are not there. The graduate schools can’t place their graduates either, but History as an interest, as an enrichment, is still valid, in fact I think it’s highly important. But, I’m afraid that’s not being done.

Mr. Overland: That’s perhaps something you could work towards in the future, because I think society is demanding a change right now. You might be right on there as far as the future. What is your stand on unionization of college professors?

Mr. Mohler: I think they have the legal right, but I can’t see the strike as a professional thing to do.

Mr. Overland: Do you think it could be a detrimental move or maybe a positive?

Mr. Mohler: I frankly don’t know. I was a member of a teacher’s union in Seattle for a very brief time I couldn’t see anything then that was very professional about the union. Times are changing...it may come to that, but I think it would be unfortunate. I think it would be detrimental. The college professor ought not have to go on strike. I don’t think it does his profession any good. He has got a right to...legally I would say that he has every right, but from the standpoint of strategy I think not. I think he loses more than he gains if he goes on strike. I think this is...well, just watch this thing over here in the school district...where was it, the one where they had the long strike last year...

Mr. Overland: Clover Park?

Mr. Mohler: Yes, they didn’t vote its levy.

Mr. Overland: That’s right, they came back and they didn’t pass its levy. The year before they passed the levy. I taught there last year. I figured that’s why I didn’t get a teaching job. What would you consider the personal highlights of your career?

Mr. Mohler: I don’t know...So many things one should include of course. One should include ones childhood background, one should include ones college and one should include ones marriage...ones friends, I don’t know...

Mr. Overland: Is there anything that you would change?
Mr. Mohler: A lot of things I would change, some of them I’m not too proud of. I don’t know...I have never set those down in ink. I might say this, I’m not one of those who always looked forward to retirement, to the time when one didn’t have to work anymore. Retirement was not one of my high points. Fortunately I’ve developed hobbies over the years...last 15 years I never taught summer school, I remodeled houses and enjoyed my work in my shop. I work down at the Museum now. If you been in the Methodist church you’ll notice a lot of the scroll work that I did. So, but I’ve always led a very full life, interesting life.