This interview between Drs. Culbertson and Dr Bonsett with Rick Brandt and Wally Sumpter of the IU School of Medicine film unit took place in Fesler Hall, Dean’s conference room, December 3, 1976.

Interviewer - What we’re doing, we started out over a year ago to start tracing the history of the Medical Center and we did a film on the first 100 years of Medicine in Indiana, starting roughly in 1800 and we stopped when Indiana University School of Medicine finally was established and the schools consolidated. Now, for this project, we’re picking up roughly 1910 to the present. We’re using Dr. Richey because, well first of all because of his reputation and his abilities, but also because he was one of the graduates from the old Senate Street school and remembers much about this campus during its formative years when there was nothing here but Long Hospital and the Medical Building.

Dr. Culbertson - I don’t know what year he started in.

Interviewer - Near as I can trace it, he started in the Medical School in 1914 because he graduated in 1918.

Dr. Culbertson - No, he was here during the war. And it was during that time I think the Medical School had a fire down there didn’t it and they had classes out here at City Hospital.

Interviewer - The place is really a far cry from what it was when you first came here, isn’t it?

Dr. Culbertson - Yes, it’s much worse now. It use to be a nice place. Where it was an intimate sort of thing and a lot of fun. It’s so big now that it’s like going to New York City. (Lots of laughter) which ain’t any fun.

Interviewer - That’s what I’ve heard. The Big Apple isn’t so good any more.

I read about you in Thurman Rice’s . . .

Dr. Culbertson – Yes, well Thurman Rice probably did more to preserve the history of this place than anybody else. Matter of fact, this thing that (Meyers?) wrote, about half of it is left out if you notice.

Interviewer – Yes, it is very slim when you get into . . . .

Dr. Culbertson – Yes, well he had a lot of people he didn’t like and he didn’t put them in there. There was a tremendous rift between this place and the Bloomington end during this time and so this is the problem you have. There’s a lot of things that happened that this sort of throttled it down. I had no notion of what he was writing because I know when he was writing this he never did come up here or talk to anybody and he just wrote it like he wanted to. So it’s a really useless thing and I suppose that anybody that writes
the history without a lot of documentation is going to come up with .... And I told my wife last night, I don’t think very much of people who just write something as a history of something personally because their recollections are not that accurate you know. And their apt to be strongly prejudiced about things. So the only way you can go at it, is to get a rather broad sample of the thing and try to put it together very critically as to what really happened. It’s pretty difficult to find.

Interviewer – It is. We’re experiencing that. He never really talked to you or anybody?

Dr. Culbertson – Who do you mean?

Interviewer – When Rice was doing this.

Dr. Culbertson – Oh Rice. Of course Rice was a very close friend of mine. I knew all about what he was doing all the time. He was in my office, I suppose, if not everyday, every two or three days, most of the time I was here because... so I know all about him now I’m talking about Meyers.

Interviewer – What kind of reactions do you remember when the Meyers book came out?

Dr. Culbertson – Well we were all quite disappointed with it because it didn’t really say much. It just talked about more or less what had happened at Bloomington. You see they started the Medical School at Bloomington because they didn’t have room enough for the first year down there and they thought moving it up here for about 25 years. And this was a very controversial and bitter sort of a thing. I was put on a committee one time to move all the Medical School up here and as soon as I read my report off, I was a persona non grate from then on. And this didn’t bother me particularly. I didn’t stay very long after that. I went down to Lillys. Bloomington was, well what I said was, they ought to have the whole Medical School in Bloomington or have it up here, one of the two. Obviously the hospital facilities in Bloomington for the Medical School so this was somewhat an academic point. However a number of states have built the medical centers out in the wilderness like that you know, like Iowa State and all that. I remember when they built that in Iowa City there wasn’t much of anything. But the University was there and we were rather amazed, of course, when that went out there. But we were rather amazed at how they managed it. They got a fleet of ambulances and hauled all the patients to Iowa City or wherever they wanted them, all over the state. And I guess, of course now, that isn’t such problem. They’ve got other big medical centers there. That’s what they would have to have done at Bloomington. Of course the Bloomington Hospital now is fine, small hospital. It has a great advantage over these great big ones. It’s not such a rat race.

Interviewer – It’s more the small community people.

Dr. Culbertson – That’s right. It’s run by the women in Bloomington. That’s the reason why it’s a good hospital. They’ll not have a lot of monkey business.
Interviewer – My records show that you graduated from IU in June, 1931.

Dr. Culbertson – That’s right.

Interviewer – And it was rather a unique situation in that right out of school you got an appointment to the head of the central lab.

Dr. Culbertson – Well this is a situation that was, well it was unique, because I don’t suppose anybody else ever did this kind of thing in recent years particularly. But they used to have a situation in pathology and bacteriology department which is the same department, it was combined. They had student assistants and they’d take on the student in the sophomore year and the junior and senior year and what you did, you had two more years to go at end of the sophomore year you see. Well they’d tell you, if you will take your last two years in three and spread your work out and spend about half your time with us as a student assistant. I think they paid you $500 the first year, and $600 the second year and $750 the last year. So you actually spent an extra year of your life in Medical School. This was not only an extra academic year, it was an extra calendar year because you had to take clinical work in the summer time. You couldn’t be in the class in the morning and attend those you see. So along about the time I agreed to do this after I finished the sophomore year, I was offered a job over at the Methodist Hospital as an extern. And so all during this three years, I worked over there at night. So I worked out here in the daytime and went to school and worked over there at night. And I was relative strong person and didn’t have to have much sleep and I didn’t get much. I was up most of the night usually and worked most of the day. I didn’t ever go to sleep in class actually. After I graduated I went to hear a lecture one time in medical jurisprudence and went to sleep. And I said to myself, you see you got to have somebody back of you all the time to keep you some stimulus or else that’s what will happen to you. But the history of this thing from my own point of view goes a little bit back of that. Dr. Virgil Moon, who was a professor of pathology here and ran both of these departments left here and went to Philadelphia the year I was a freshman medical student in Bloomington and I was always kind of a microscope and bug hunter type of individual according to my classmates and Eddie Dyer who was my roommate and is an ophthalmologist here in town, showed me a picture in the paper, I remember this very clearly, this had a little to do with it maybe. Dr. Moon announced that he was leaving the medical school here and going to Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia and Ed said to me one evening, I will never forget this, it was down in the South Hall at Bloomington. He said, Culbertson you ought to go into pathology, I think you just got a type of person that would like it. Of course, I didn’t know what pathology was. I had not had any yet. I was just studying embryology and things like this. Well that sort of began to build up on me a little bit and I had gotten through zoology and other things. When I got up here, I of course took courses like pathology and bacteriology and this kept in the back of my mind. Well when they came around and offered me a job as a student assistant, I was kind of interested and that’s the reason I did it. Interviewer, I really had a yen to go into neurology. Neuroanatomy under Dr. Bonnager, and I bought a lot of books on neurology and studied them when I was a student and that would have been my second choice I think if I hadn’t gone into pathology. So I got through Medical School you see
with a good deal of extra work and pathology and bacteriology. I did autopsies at the Methodist when Dr. Banks was sick. And another thing I did, Dr. Forey during this time developed tuberculosis and was out for a year down in Albuquerque and of course the student assistant carried quite a lot of teaching responsibility in getting material and examining students and so on. We did almost what you do as a full time instructor after you got to be a junior and senior. Well, Dr. Forey had the job part time going to Anderson, Indiana to the St. John’s Hospital and he went up there once a week. When he was here, he went twice a week. He came to me and asked me if I would go up there on Saturday and do the pathology and pick up the specimens and bring them down here and they would section them and make their reports. Of course I was doing it under his supervision but he was in Albuquerque. So I would drive up there and get there at noon on Saturday and bring the stuff back and do anything that was needed. They’d collect specimens. I remember one time they had a specimen in a tube and I said, Sister what is that? And she said well that’s a spinal fluid and I said it’s tuberculosis meningitis isn’t it and it had a beautiful web in it. And she said the doctor wanted you to see this patient. He thought he had a stroke. And I said did you look for tuberculosis fluid and it was that kind of thing you see. And they got used to bringing all their problems in their when you got up there. That’s what they did with Dr. Forey. So I had that as a background the last two years. Every week I would be up there and of course I had people here that, if I ran up against some histophylogenial thing that I couldn’t do, I had Dr. Banks I was working for at the Methodist and Dr. Rice and Dr. Dobbs and anybody that would help on these sections, we’d do it for Dr. Forey. I didn’t get as much money as it cost me to drive up there for doing this I might say but it was fun. With that background you see, at the time I graduated, I had done a lot of work for Dr. Gatch and he had known me as a student. As a matter of fact, I was one of the people he liked to hit over the head in the class. If he knew you, you were a marked man. He would come in… he came in one day and said, what is a locusmenorusrestastenchae Mr. Culbertson? And I said, Dr. Gatch I didn’t understand what you said. If you had know the answer to what I asked you, you would have understood what I said. And that was the way it was! (Lots of laughter) I didn’t have a chance you see.

Dr. Boset – I understand Dr. Gatch was quite a colorful person and we’ll get into him but before we get to far.....

Dr. Culbertson – Well that’s the reason I got this job you see. He knew me and when he became Dean at the Methodist Hospital, I’ll just tell you this and then we’ll stop rambling. I was over there about the time I graduated. I had an internship at Billings Hospital in Chicago and the woman I married was going up there in the nursing thing and we were all set to go. And Dr. Rice insisted that I stay here. And I was still on the horns of a dilemma at this time and about June I decided I wouldn’t go up to Chicago and would stay here and work for Dr. Rice. About the end of June, just after I graduated actually and I hadn’t started to work out here, I was still working at the Methodist and Dr. Gatch came in, this was around almost the first of September. I was about ready to start to work here and I had worked for Banks in the summer. This was an extra person up there. I was doing a lot of things by that time. Of I knew the hospital pretty well and all the doctors. Well Gatch came in one Sunday morning and I was doing some
chemistry for the Sunday people and he said, Culbertson I want you to go out to the Medical School with me and I said I’m busy, I can’t go now. He said, well I asked Dr. Banks and he said it’s all right, they’ll take care of it. So we got in his little old Ford that he had and we drove out here and he said now I’m going to be the Dean of the Medical School as of September 1st. I want you to organize a clinical laboratory. We don’t have an efficient clinical laboratory at the Medical Center and it’s taking a long time to get the patients through because they wait so long on laboratory work and it’s not done very well and I want you to organize the laboratory. I said I’m supposed to be working for Dr. Rice and he said well I’ll take care of that. And I want you to come out here Monday morning and start in. The administrator knows about this and we’re going out there now to tell you where we want the laboratory located. They had a bookstore in the basement of the Medical School at that time and they had a man by the name of Rolands, they called him George Bungle. He was always stuck with the blame for everything that was wrong. He was running the bookstore of course, and I went over to see him and I said, Mr. Rolands we’re going to have to move the bookstore. I was just a medical student, I just got out. He said, what do you mean? I said, well you go see Dr. Thompson, he was the administrator. He’ll tell you about it. Well, I’ll be damned if we’ll the bookstore and I said maybe you will. By that afternoon they started to move it. And Dr. Emerson was still the Dean, sitting upstairs there, right above this. There was not plumbing in this place. Not a faucet or drain or anything. No electrical connections to amount to anything. It was right underneath... it was on the other side of the Dean’s office. I don’t know what’s there now. Well the fellow came over there from the power house and they started digging up the floor beating up the terrazzo making a big noise. Dr. Emerson came down and said what are you doing doctor. I said well I’m starting a laboratory down here Dr. Emerson and he said, yes, yes, yes and walked away. Gatch wasn’t Dean yet you see. Emerson was going on a trip to China for the Presbyterian missionary boards and Gatch was supposed to take over but it hadn’t been announced anywhere. Well Gatch said now I’m going on vacation and I will back in two weeks and I hope you’ll have this thing going in two weeks. He said you just do what you ... you get this person out of this lab and this one. I got Mezznee. Boy there were a lot of people that didn’t like this. A good many of them just tickled to death though to get rid of their routine responsibilities. Like Harger? for instance, he was doing the blood chemistry. He enjoyed it but he didn’t want the routine responsibilities. I’m sure he just had a medical student doing it. In an unbelievably short period of time we were in business. I got a girl that worked for me at the Methodist that I knew could be my secretary, Mrs. Bailey. And she stayed with me all the time I was here and didn’t retire until a number of years after I left. Of course she was one of my main people. That’s the way we got into this.

Dr. Boset – What I’m concerned with is according to Thurman Rice, the real movement towards a lab was on the part of Dr. Emerson. He was the one who really believed and pushed for labs in the first place.

Dr. Culbertson – Well yes in a way but you see he was in charge of laboratory at Hopkins. And he was a laboratory man of the old school. He believed in every clinician doing his own laboratory work which is a good idea. But when laboratory work gets so