

Oral History

Interviewer: Dr. Daniel Doyle

Interviewee: Mr. Jim Bressler

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Dr. Doyle: Jim became the dean of applied arts which, in effect, was responsible for ninety-five percent or better of the students: all the students in the vocational technical programs as well as the students who were in the high school area vocational technical school. Today we're going to focus on Jim's role with the agricultural program in what is known as the Brock Farm. Jim, prior to coming to Williamsport in 1945 to start an agricultural program for the Williamsport Technical Institute, what was your involvement with agriculture and agricultural education before then?

Mr. Bressler: Well, I graduated from Penn State University, which is the institution that prepares educators in agriculture. It is the — it is the land grant college that's responsible for education in agriculture, as well as the Extension Service. After graduating from college, from Penn State, my first assignment was in Sugar Valley at Loganton. And we were there, there was a vacancy, and we were there a short time; that constituted our so-called practice teaching (*laughs*), but we really had no one to work under. So, we were sent out to take over the — the department and do it. After that, I was asked to go to West Sunbury in Butler County, and I was there for a good while. While I was there, they too had a situation where there was a vacancy, and no one really was responsible for the administration of the school. So, um, I had to do the work of a — the work of a principal. But nevertheless, during that time I was drafted — this was during war time — I was drafted, whereupon you do what you have to do. I resigned my position, I loaded up my car; and, on the way out of town to report for — for the draft, I turned in my key at the post office box, and there was a postal card from the State Selective Service that I was to remain where I was until further notice. So that was the — there I had to go and retrace my steps. But anyway, after I was at West Sunbury for a while, then came the request to go to Chester County, where they had an even worse situation at Cochranville. And so that was my next assignment; I went down to Cochranville, and in all these cases we had no one to report to except the principal of the school. And from there on, it was a matter of improvising and going ahead and establishing the program. And while I was there in 1945, I remember distinctly when Roosevelt died, the occasion was felt by everybody; and then came another request, and that was that the Williamsport Technical Institute was preparing for a program in veterans' training. And they asked me whether I would go up — up to Williamsport. Well, that's — that's the beginning of that story. And when I came to Williamsport, I reported to Dr. George Parkes at the high school building; he had his office in the — what is now the academic center over here; that was the high school then. And the program was really under the Williamsport school board. They — it was a unique thing; in fact it was typical of the kind of work that George Parkes did. George Parkes was quite an innovator; he was a visionary; he had an unusual vision of what he wanted to do in vocational education. It was rooted in the Depression era when things

became desperate, and especially when it came to training people for basic skills in making a living. The basic jobs that — that were available in Williamsport at the time. And so after reporting to him he took me over to the — what were then the shops on Susquehanna Street. We went down into the basement and next to the welding shop was this huge space just full of junk and dirt and grime and grease. And he said, “Now, if you’re the man I think you are, you’re going to take this and make a department out of this.” Now there was a challenge, and that was the — the beginning of that. If that wasn’t enough, when we had — finally, when we had things in a pretty fair shape and functional so that it could be used for instructional purposes, in 1946, along came the high water — that’s before the flood protection was completed. The dikes were not in place. Well, anyhow, the high water completely inundated the Technical Institute shops: everything in Williamsport, in fact. I remember distinctly, I remember we got into a row boat — I forget now whose it was — but anyhow, we rowed down Susquehanna Street to the shops and the windows were open and we saw fish swimming in and out of the windows. My shop, of course, down below ground, was completely under water. We rowed over to the top steps of what is now the academic center and got off at the high school building. Well, that just put the end to everything that we had accomplished. But everyone dug in with their own departments. Just imagine what the machine shop looked like covered with a layer of greasy mud. But no one complained; we did what we had to do. And we cleaned up and, in time, moved on. So that was the introduction to Williamsport.

Dr. Doyle: That was quite an introduction. Just for a frame of reference, the shops you’re talking about are what are currently at the Technical Trade Center in Susquehanna Street —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — below Third: would be what is now the pedestrian walls reaching down to the Advanced Technology Center. You had grown up on a farm prior to coming — prior to going to Penn State, is that correct?

Mr. Bressler: Oh, yeah.

Dr. Doyle: So, you did have that part as a background.

Mr. Bressler: Oh, oh, yes, I wouldn’t want to tackle agricultural education unless I had a background for it. It is too involved.

Dr. Doyle: So, when you came here in July of 1945, the war was still on —

Mr. Bressler: It — yes, the final stages.

Dr. Doyle: In the Pacific, it was —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — it was over in Europe. But it shows that Dr. Parkes and others were thinking ahead to the returning veterans.

Mr. Bressler: Oh, yes.

Dr. Doyle: Uh, were others involved in that process besides Dr. Parkes and yourself? Particularly relative to the agricultural program?

Mr. Bressler: No, no. I had things — there they were. Take it from there. And of course, I'm not exactly a stranger to that sort of thing, because every job I ever had, I had to start from scratch. I had to organize it, form a framework organization, and set goals: what — where do you want to go; what is — what is to be achieved? The, uh — if you want to have an answer to how I got into the Brock Farm deal, I can, I can, uh...

Dr. Doyle: Okay, let's start, let's go in that direction because, then, fairly, within a year, the Brock Farm emerges.

Mr. Bressler: Well, we were just nicely getting underway, and we had to — we had to think carefully about what — what are the needs that these people will present to us. And how can we fulfill those needs? They were talking about new programs, new approaches. The agricultural education with a high school group was, was pretty well-established because that's what we were trained to do. But when it comes to veterans' training and seeing where we're going in this world, that's a different story. We decided upon a program of agricultural mechanics, training, training for agricultural equipment and repairs for veterans. And also, for training in farm production. About that time, S. Dale Furst, attorney S. Dale Furst, he was — I forget now whether he was president of the Williamsport School Board or a member — anyway, he was a very influential person on the Williamsport School Board. He was also the attorney for the Brocks, Henry G. Brock and Mrs. Brock, so that he had her interests in heart as well as the interests of education. And they got this idea that, "Well, why don't we offer this farm to the school district for the use of their training program?" Now if you're, if you're an educator, you understand that education by itself is enough challenge, but when you add a farm to this, you're at a new dimension. And farming is — what shall we call it? — it is a, a dangerous occupation; it is one that requires seven days a week attention. And it is — the family farm, of course, is used to that because that is the way it works out, but when you put the two together, it's an unknown as to how it will work. And there were many said that if we use the farm for instruction in agriculture: that is a challenge; we question whether you can make that work. That's too much. You can either farm or you can teach, but you can't very well do both. Well, the challenge was that we were going to do both. And that's the story of the Brock Farm. The rest of the story is in these reports that I gave you. It was also a very new thing in the annals of agricultural education. And that formed the basis of my master's thesis.

Dr. Doyle: A proposed program for organizing and developing departments of vocational agriculture in cities.

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: Ahhhh.

Mr. Bressler: Now here again you have nothing to go on. It is — in a master’s thesis, how do you proceed with that sort of thing? And my advisor at Penn State, who thought this would be a good topic to pursue, used the “committee of experts” technique in order to gain the necessary input for a basis for — for recommendations on the establishment of such departments. This was something new; it had not been done before. And that’s the story of my life. Anyway, then the challenge came now: come up with a plan for integrating education with practical farming of the Brock Farm. Well, theirs not to make reply, theirs but to do or die. So that’s how the Brock Farm plan came to being. In 1946, as I recall, we did our first work on the Brock Farm.

Dr. Doyle: As you wrote a report in 1946 the plan for an agricultural program —

Mr. Bressler: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: — for the Brock Farm. Again, for frame of reference, the Brock Farm is what is now currently called Muncy Farms, and that is —

Mr. Bressler: It was called that before.

Dr. Doyle: — and it is directly across the road from the current Lycoming Mall.

Mr. Bressler: Yes, it is.

Dr. Doyle: And it stretches, as I recall, you said approximately a mile with three farm properties. Is that correct?

Mr. Bressler: The Brock Farm had three properties, yes. We termed them units one, two, and three for reference purposes. Yes, and it’s a total of 750 acres. And it had to be slowly revamped into a facility that could be used for instruction and for production as well. We were in a full-scale production mode there. But production was not the chief aim of things. But how are you going to cut the two apart? If you don’t produce something that’s salable, it becomes prohibitively costly. And we needed also to arrange for farm managers that could keep the place going while we were doing our thing in education.

Dr. Doyle: Did the Brocks have farm managers already?

Mr. Bressler: No, no, they had nothing. We had to organize that.

Dr. Doyle: Um, if we go back to the Brock Farm, and did you have interactions with Mrs. Brock in that period?

Mr. Bressler: Not very much. She did — there wasn't too much that could be done because she had no real equity in the thing. She owned the place, but she was just interested in having it operated, otherwise it would revert to brush. A farm cannot be laid idle; it needs attention.

Dr. Doyle: Do you know whether the school district and the Williamsport Technical Institute were paying her rent for the farm? Or were you just using it?

Mr. Bressler: The, uh — I don't think there was any rental involved in it. But the business end of it, that part, the contractual end, I was not involved with that so I don't know. S. Dale Furst was the one who did all that.

Dr. Doyle: Now in order to go into production and also use it for instruction, which was the primary purpose, you had to refit some of the buildings and build new buildings. Is that correct?

Mr. Bressler: We didn't get everything done. When you do a plan, you put a rubber band around it; it's very flexible. But yes, we had to do buildings. It so happened at that time, that after — right after the war, that Dr. Parkes was able to get in a position to get surplus war material of every description. We hauled into the Technical Institute millions of dollars' worth of equipment, for almost every department. And in agriculture we had to make do, but we got some prefab buildings that, that yes, we put up, and others had to be reorganized in order to make things functional for education. So that, that yes, we had to do a lot of building revamping. And, for instance, for a dairy plant, you can't just — (*coughs*) 'scuse me — go into a dairy business. You're operating under very strict sanitary regulations. So in order to become a production dairy, you have to have a dairy plant that is — that is free of dust; it has to have a, uh — the milkers, the plastic lines have to have a provision for cleansing daily, the milk is tested whenever it is sold, and if it has too high a bacteria content, you are rejected. So that in order to comply with the regulations, you have to do a great deal of work to — to make it comply with the regulations, and in that respect we had to do a great deal of work. But that was part of the educational process. And we had — did everything with students. And that's what we did. The, uh — however, to get the students to the place, that presented another problem, because now you had a scheduling problem. When, uh — an ordinary school day, as you know, is divided into so many hours. But that doesn't work when you have students — when you have to bus them to the place where they work. And you can't run back and forth to Williamsport to the school district every couple hours. So, there was devised under Dr. Parkes' plan what was called the Watsontown plan, where students came there for two weeks uninterrupted, and then spent two weeks in their home school in the academic phase of their work. When we had that, now we could bus them from the place where they came in from, from the different school districts; they were then, we bused to

Brock Farm. Then we had them the whole day where we could do some work, because it takes — it's just impractical to have them there for an hour at a time.

Dr. Doyle: The Watson town plan would be an example for high school students —

Mr. Bressler: That's right.

Dr. Doyle: — and the veterans then would have been...

Mr. Bressler: Veterans were on an entirely different thing. They were there all the time.

Dr. Doyle: Where did they do their academic classes?

Mr. Bressler: Well, that — I cannot speak for that except that the academic classes that related to their trade, we did.

Dr. Doyle: So, you had a facility out there at the Brock Farm for that?

Mr. Bressler: For a while — yes, we used what was at one time the old train station at Halls' Station. And we had a spacious room there and we used that. And I can't remember all the details; it's too long ago. Nevertheless, the veterans — we had some in agriculture, but then I had to supervise the agricultural equipment and repairs program at the same time. And they spent all their time here in the facilities on Susquehanna Street.

Dr. Doyle: The machine shop, and —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — and welding —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — and things of that type.

Mr. Bressler: Yes, we assigned them. The nice thing about that program was that we really didn't know how much work there was in agricultural equipment and repairs. However, they became proficient in a number of trades including machine shop, auto and diesel, electric, and welding. And when they had entry level skills in goodly number of areas, and a lot of them branched out from there into industries on the basis of their training they received here.

Dr. Doyle: Was the equipment program for veterans only or is that for —

Mr. Bressler: That was for veterans. Dr. Parkes' idea of how agriculture production and agriculture equipment and repairs were the two areas that I was involved with.

Dr. Doyle: Were the veterans more drawn to the equipment program or the farm production program or didn't matter?

Mr. Bressler: The equipment program seemed to draw quite a few of them. That was probably the, the better of the two.

Dr. Doyle: And some of them had prior experience either on farms themselves or during the war, the type of assignment they had during the war; had that possibly influenced their choices?

Mr. Bressler: That — I can't really answer that. But some of them had some experience but they wanted to test their, uh — the field of agriculture. I guess they had enough turmoil they wanted something — more peaceful.

Dr. Doyle: I've seen photographs in the archives here at the college, particularly in a scrapbook for the Future Farmers of America, in which you're making some new equipment. Did you and the students make much new equipment for the farm?

Mr. Bressler: We did some. Most equipment was bought. One good example of cooperation between industry and the school was Dr. John Shuman — John Shuman, he was with the auto shop for a while. But anyway, John Shuman brokered a deal with — I forget, was it New Holland? — that if our drafting department would draw up all the parts of this two-row mechanical corn picker, then if we put it back together, we could keep it. So, the agricultural department got a corn picker, which is a massive thing, and we had the power to run it. And the welding department got their experience of doing the drawings for a manual, which is the idea in the first place. And the people at the factory, the New Holland people, they got — they got their material for the manual. So, everyone came out on top. But that was one of those, where, yes, we had to put those things together, but in our shop, of course, we were equipped to do repairs on equipment. But for the most part, minor repairs took place on the farm itself.

Dr. Doyle: Now, what did you do on weekends and during the summer, and vacation periods if you have a farm that's in production? You have a dairy herd, et cetera.

Mr. Bressler: We had farm managers. We hired farm managers. Gordon Hiller was in unit two; he was an experienced dairyman. On unit one, we had Fred Colburn, he was a veteran. And Fred Colburn ran the poultry and hog plant. They managed the thing during the off periods, when there were no students involved. And then we had veterans' instructors. Russell Brookhart, Russ Brookhart was one of them. Uh, gosh I — but then, we also had, and this is where it becomes confusing because I can't remember them all — you see, I was a trainer for Penn State, that is, for the six weeks that they do in so-called practice teaching. They sent them down here and we always had a complement of student teachers from Penn State, who helped out with many of the aspects of supervising students while they were here. And then we also had guests sent in from all over the

place. WTI, we hosted people from — oh my gosh — Afghanistan, of all people, and China, or Taiwan. I'll never forget that. One of those — they came in here dressed — coat and tie to come down to do farm production work. And they didn't know anything about tractors, but I put one on a big Farmall tractor and told him we'll give you a chance to do that furrow. It looked so funny seeing this full dress suit sitting on this farm tractor in all this dirt. Off he went with it, but he was proud to have operated a tractor in America. But they didn't have anything like that in their country.

Dr. Doyle: You also had observers from Germany, which would have been — that would have been shortly after the war, correct?

Mr. Bressler: Oh yes, I don't know how many. But they were sent in all the time, I guess, somewhere — they were to observe our methods of farming. This is post war. These were not people who were so enamored of Adolph Hitler; we didn't want any of those. But anyway, we had guests from all over the world.

Dr. Doyle: Let's talk about the Brock Farm property and the types of crops and livestock, et cetera, that you had there as that evolved. How did you decide what type of emphases you wanted to have at the Brock Farm? And then where did you turn to sort of understand how to just develop, essentially, what I assume was a model farm in this part of the state?

Mr. Bressler: That's right; we did a lot of experimental work with Penn State — that is, crop experiments. They would come down and use our fields for that purpose. The needs of the farm or what we were going to emphasize was largely determined by looking at Lycoming County and seeing, where do our boys come from? In those times, you see, we had — the family farm was still key. There's been a great revolution in farming since then. And, the, but at that time, our basis for decision-making was, well, what do these boys need? What do they need if they're going to have a farm in operation, what skills do they need that we can furnish? And so we decided on dairy, of course it's very important here; poultry farming was underrepresented; hog-farming was completely changed from what it was, but those were some of them. And then was the growing of crops, the rotation, the soil conservation, how to operate your farm so that it doesn't end up in the Chesapeake Bay. And the palmology, or the growing of fruit trees, we also dabbled in nursery work, ornamental horticulture; these are all outlets that are represented in Lycoming County, to which our students might turn or might grow into at that time. But since then, and the reason that we don't have the emphasis on agriculture anymore, is because the family farm is disappearing, almost. Except for those where they can still make a go of it and dairying is one of those. But you see, the ability to make a living in farming, is pretty much determined by the price of the product you are going to sell and the market that's available to it. And the moment that you mechanize something, and are able to produce something at a lower cost, that becomes the standard. And if — for instance, the price of eggs in the store right now, I can simply not see how they can do it and still buy the feed for them. But it is a matter of scale, and the family farm with its little acreage cannot do that. They cannot operate on a large enough scale. Hog-farming,

which is in the news lately, is a very expensive thing to start up because of the equipment that you need. And therefore, you have to have a large-scale operation. Well, this large scale operation has become the norm; everything is now mechanized. The computer is now an indispensable part of the dairy farm. And the, the whole business has so — has become almost a corporate enterprise. Well, there is no opportunity for most of our people to enter that. And therefore, how can they compete? Even the Amish, as old-fashioned as they are, now have to go out and work somewhere else because they cannot compete in the modern technical world.

Dr. Doyle: When you think back to this period in the 1940s, late '40s and early '50s, were many of your students coming from farms that were still using animal power rather than, let's say, tractor power?

Mr. Bressler: No, the John Deere tractor is synonymous with that time period in Lycoming County, because it was so well-suited to work in these hill farms. But there were other makes like Farmall and International Harvester and Massey-Ferguson and all of those. But, no; horse power is hardly used at all except among the Amish, which do it for a different reason than economics.

Dr. Doyle: So, at that time, mechanical power had pretty much —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — been established locally.

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: Had you, did you have many students or did you eventually have students who came from other parts of the state, and did you have any international students?

Mr. Bressler: No, we had international students, but not from other parts of the state because they have their own district. You see, agricultural education is organized in an entirely different way than other forms. You have — we were all trained in the same institution at Penn State. You have a county — most counties have their own supervisor who coordinates the work of the teachers in that area. And they in turn report to the state office. So that you have a very tight-knit and closely-organized system of education. And the FFA is the youth organization that represents vocational agriculture. And the peculiar thing is, now, in the whole business, is that girls are taking over the field of agriculture. I just received the latest report from Penn State where the number of women who are now full-time operators of these things is at the highest that it ever was.

Dr. Doyle: Did you have any female students back in the '40s and '50s?

Mr. Bressler: A few, but not very many.

Dr. Doyle: Was it difficult for them because there were so few women who were...even though on the family farm —

Mr. Bressler: We didn't look forward to it because the facilities were not proper.

Dr. Doyle: Did they suffer any harassment, do you think, from the students, or...?

Mr. Bressler: Not really, not — we didn't have time for that business.

Dr. Doyle: Let's turn to some of the livestock you had. Let's talk for example about the hogs. How did you get involved in that, and where did you turn to get involved with hogs?

Mr. Bressler: Well, we decided that since that is a business that can be fairly easily-controlled, we're going to deal with purebred livestock. On one of my summer vacations I stopped at a place in Iowa that I had heard of so much. And I saw purebred Berkshires being raised there and I decided that would be a good source of stock for us. And it came — they had a show in Ohio, and they were going to show some of their boars there. Well, we got notice of that, and so what we did — since there was a little airport right next to the show place — we took our aviation department under Frank Pannebaker, we took our, one of the school planes and we drove — we went out there. We bought this hog and then it was shipped in to us from Purdue University. And we bought this hog and it came back again. It stayed overnight out there, but that shows the way we were operating. But now we had a purebred sire, and then we bought some purebred gilts: those are pigs that haven't become mothers yet. Anyway, that was the start of that. But the Berkshire pig is a lard hog, and, even then, lard hogs were becoming sort of frowned-upon. We now were dealing with long, lean bacon hogs. Well, the Yorkshire is the — is the main word there. So, we got some purebred Yorkshire and we started to raise purebred pigs. And we had — we had quite a time with them. We had this purebred boar we bought from Iowa, from the Wollrab Farms; he was quite a character. And but once we had sire — litters from him, now we had to get rid of him. Because you don't breed the — that would be, in human terms, incest; you don't breed little pigs to the boars, so we had to buy new stock. It was the Yorkshire boar; we had him in a pen next to this whole row of sows. Here in the spring they all came in heat — that is, they were ready to breed. Well, one day we looked out and there's this big old boar — he's missing. He was missing all right. We found out that he jumped into every one of the pens. And these hog wires are only a couple feet high, but he got out of that. And he bred a whole bunch of those pigs. We found him in the end pen. And he was a little bit worn out by then. But anyhow, we had a good time and very successful adventure with our pigs. We needed new facilities; we needed a farrowing house; it kept me up at night so we were carefully — we had to watch them, because they came — they bore their litters in the winter time, and you had to — you didn't dare let them get chilled or they would die; not only that but when they're born, you rub their noses with a bit of clean sod, now don't ask me, this is not hexerei — this is a way of giving them enough iron in their blood, which is essential to — you can

do it now with injections. But we didn't have all those things in those days; we used just sod. Trace minerals are so important to the newborn pig; we had to give them a dose of it.

Dr. Doyle: Did you give the — did you report on the adventures of the boar in your usual reports to the board?

Mr. Bressler: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And we had, we had a number of problems. Not in the piggery so much, but with the steers; we were raising beef cattle. That's another adventure I didn't mention. We had beef cattle, but they broke out of their pen, but we also had a young bull that we were raising, it was going to be a herd sire, and these steers broke out — now what do you do? You know how we found them? We took our planes and flew out over the area; we found them out at Pennsdale and brought them back. But the little old bull, he stayed at home, he didn't join them. I — I remember putting into that report that the little statement, "A little bull is better than a bum steer." Anyhow, we got them back and beef cattle. We gave our students enough — what shall we say? — experience so that they could take it from there, they knew what to do. We also — crop-raising, of course. We used the rotation that was then in vogue and crop rotation because that — to maintain soil fertility, and from a conservation standpoint so that your soil stays in place. If you don't watch out and you have your field completely exposed, you're going to lose your good soil to erosion.

Dr. Doyle: What crops did you rotate?

Mr. Bressler: Well, we had wheat, corn, oats, and hay. And the oats are planted in the spring, whereas wheat is planted in the fall. And then, some fields — it's now changed completely; the technique of farming has changed completely. They don't even plow anymore for corn, it's called no-till corn-raising. There're different methods. But where a crop is not needed, we didn't — wheat and corn we could use and we used oats, we used those on the farm. And a good deal of it then, we had so much acreage, we sold as a cash crop. But a cash crop farming is not Lycoming County. So we didn't — that wasn't our emphasis.

Dr. Doyle: Where did you sell the produce of the farm, both livestock and the crops?

Mr. Bressler: Well, see, our poultry farm for example: you don't go out and sell it by the dozen; we sell it wholesale. We had a firm in, in Bloomsburg that came in every week to pick up their — it was our business to prepare the eggs daily, store them in cold storage, and then they got picked up. This is a contract. And with milk farming, it's the same way with dairy farming. A tanker truck comes and takes samples. See, they have to be very careful and so do we. When we, when we put cows on the pasture, we cannot let them get out into pasture that has garlic in it; all they need to do is eat one stomach full of, of, of grass contaminated with garlic, then the milk becomes garlic. And the driver of the truck, who gathers the milk, who collects it — he has to sample that, he has to test it for odor and for — they take a sample of it, which is then tested for bacteria, and also for butter fat content, which we also taught our students to do. But so that it's — it has to be done

by contract. Others are — livestock is sold differently: at the livestock auction, where it goes to the highest bidder, or in case of purebred livestock where you sell it for breeding purposes, that's, that's done by dealing, the best you can.

Dr. Doyle: What was the response of family farms and other farms in this area to the Brock Farm property and the WTI program?

Mr. Bressler: That's the question I couldn't answer, because we didn't ask them. Although we did have an advisory committee to, to keep us straightened out. Because here am I — I don't know everything; I, I know very little. But that wasn't the point.

Dr. Doyle: Were they concerned about competition in the sale of produce?

Mr. Bressler: No.

Dr. Doyle: What were your areas of — what did you enjoy the most in the areas of farming operation?

Mr. Bressler: Working with the kids. Working with the kids. It's, uh — some of them, it's a very difficult thing to explain. But when you're dealing with farm machinery, you're dealing with danger. You take those power takeoffs; all you have to do is get a sleeve caught in that power takeoff, and you've lost an arm. Because it doesn't stop, it wraps you right around it, it's a powerful thing. And working with any corn picker, for example; if you — one mistake, and it won't forgive you — it will take your arm right off. So that — it is very difficult. At one time, for instance, to show you the danger of this thing, one kid came up the road with a tractor and we couldn't, I don't know why we used the berm of the highway, but anyhow he was trailing his plow and it began to fishtail, and when it began to fishtail enough, it finally broke its boring and went out on the road. A truck hit it and that turned him upside down. So, there we go, see: every move you make has a warning sign on it.

Dr. Doyle: Did you have some injuries and how did you deal with them as far as students?

Mr. Bressler: Not very many. I remember one who tried to crank a Fordson tractor we got on war surplus and it kicked; there was a broken arm for you.

Dr. Doyle: Is it a hand crank?

Mr. Bressler: Yes, that's — it had — we got these things from war surplus, and that's the only injury that I can think of. But we were training everyone to be alert to safety and open takeoff — power takeoffs; we tried to cover every one up so you couldn't get caught. But, then again, we got a sawmill on a war surplus. We had a man on our faculty that was in the CBs [Construction Battalions] and he had set these things up and knew

how to do it. But a sawmill is not something to be toyed with if you value your limbs, but we didn't get hurt. We had a sawmill.

Dr. Doyle: Was that Clyde Brass, who —

Mr. Bressler: Clyde Brass, yes. Yeah, Clyde Brass died recently; we miss him.

Dr. Doyle: Um, you — what about the problem of supervising all these students over these 700 acres of the, of the property?

Mr. Bressler: That was a problem; that was a problem. Because the nature of the job dictated where they're going to be. If you're going to plow over on the island, that's a mile away from unit one. You're going to have to be there. At the same time, you have people working on unit one. So, our farm managers were all brought into the act, and then we had the veterans training people, they were with their veterans. And that's the best we could do: run from one to another.

Dr. Doyle: Where was the island?

Mr. Bressler: Directly across from the Brock house, directly towards the river. And we had to go through what is called the gut to get to the island, but it's, it's a big field. Very historic, the whole place is historic and prehistoric as well.

Dr. Doyle: The old canal, the West Branch Canal, would have come through that area.

Mr. Bressler: The canal went right by the barn. Oh, yes. That's just below what was at one time Fort Muncy.

Dr. Doyle: You referred to prehistoric because you, of course, quite famous both in the state and locally because of your archeological efforts for American Indian —

Mr. Bressler: Oh, yeah.

Dr. Doyle: — pre-history. Did you do any of that while you were on the farm?

Mr. Bressler: Indeed, I did; in fact, I did a lot of it. That is, Indian artifacts, I have a large collection from there; however, when I'm done with it, I've already donated everything that was found there to the Historical Society. I want that to remain public property.

Dr. Doyle: That's the Lycoming County Historical Society, right?

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: In a 1952 brochure for the agricultural program, I assume it was a recruitment brochure. It referred to student projects that could be performed either at their family

farm or the farmland used by the WTI. It said that they could lease or rent land; do you recall any of that?

Mr. Bressler: Well, that, that was part of the original plan, but that fell apart. Because it is just about impossible for somebody who lives far away to do, to do, to take care of it, to watch it, or to harvest it, or do anything with it; it's just too far away for that. You cannot be a — an absentee landlord. You have to, have to be there, or somebody has to be there to watch it and to take care of it.

Dr. Doyle: So, you had originally thought of each student having demonstration plots —

Mr. Bressler: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: — but you moved away from that?

Mr. Bressler: No, we didn't get into that; of course, we weren't there long enough. We had about ten years of the Brock Farm and then, by that time, the veterans program was now receding, and that job was done. And the agricultural opportunities for people to get into farming — this is the time as I told you, that the, the whole system of agriculture is in a drastic revision. The family farm has a rough time of it, and so very few people could get, could get their own farm to grow into. Farming enterprise is a lifetime proposition. It is not a come-and-go; it is — you have to stay with it; it's a way of life.

Dr. Doyle: Even in that first decade after the war by the mid-50s, the family farm is in rapid decline.

Mr. Bressler: That's exactly it and our Williamsport, what was once farmland, is now houses. And your, your city grows like a tree — it grows outward, and the land that our constituent students came from is rapidly becoming more valuable as real estate than it is as farming property. So, the opportunities to get into farming have just evaporated. And there are some, yes; some of our students — one of the large hog farms — they got a start there. And on our orchard, we had a small orchard, we had a small this and that. You have the Dincher tree surgeons — that's where they got their start; we taught them how to prune trees. And then it's something they like to do and how they got into it, I don't know, but there they are. Now they're big business.

Dr. Doyle: Did some of the programs that you started with the agricultural program, did they become the forerunners of programs that later emerged as separate programs such as forestry or landscaping?

Mr. Bressler: Yes, yes, the, the landscape ornamental horticulture, that is an offshoot of it; forestry of course, is an integral part of the farming business. We, we taught forestry, yes. So that is what remained of it; I guess that's still going.

Dr. Doyle: Yes, in the Earth Science campus —

Mr. Bressler: The Earth Science —

Dr. Doyle: — and there's a sizeable sawmill there —

Mr. Bressler: — but you see it's metamorphosed into different — according to what jobs are available. There's no point in training somebody if there's no job available. And especially ornamental horticulture. That's a big field and a good one — lucrative one where there's money involved. I can't think any of the others that are direct offshoots of it.

Dr. Doyle: You had — 'scuse me — landscaping, there were photographs of landscaping being done by your students in front of Unit Six. The former administration —

Mr. Bressler: In our time, we — everything was lifting ourselves by our own bootstraps. We didn't have facilities as you now have. We were very crude. The, uh, since we had a small — we had a nursery down there; we had ornamental horticulture. We raised some materials and our boys were called upon to do some landscaping. I know we did some landscaping up at Roosevelt Junior High; we did some up at Curtin, and I can't identify the exact plot anymore where — in front of Unit Six; that was the old trolley barn, but we did that. Wherever we were asked to do...George Parkes, he put us to work.

Dr. Doyle: Did he visit the Brock Farm property very often?

Mr. Bressler: Not very often, but every once in a while. George Parkes was a pretty stern taskmaster. But he was one of a kind, with great vision and great persistency.

Dr. Doyle: Let's talk about George Parkes for a few minutes. When he gave you this charge to start the agriculture program, did he manage you carefully or did he give you free reign in doing it?

Mr. Bressler: No, he assumed that you didn't need mama anymore, that you were — here is your job, do it. That was his entire philosophy. He was only interested in results. And he was a great stickler for safety. If he saw anything that looked a potential source of trouble, he let you know in no uncertain terms. It was a good thing he did. The WTI, I do remember, was famous for that. In fact, we had a program that trained rural electric co-ops in safety in their work, in the electric line, transmission line work. So that he was very much — if he watched you do, sharpen a tool on an emery wheel without a goggle, you were in trouble. That sort of thing.

Dr. Doyle: Do you recall anything in particular that he charged you...encouraged you to...?

Mr. Bressler: No, not in particular, maybe it's because I want to forget it, I don't know. If I crossed the line, he let you know. Good thing he did — that was his business.

Dr. Doyle: You talked about his vision, is there anything else you would like to talk about his vision regarding not only the agricultural program but vocational education in general?

Mr. Bressler: Well George Parkes in my, in my — from my perspective is the founder of vocational education around here. He had at his — at the center of, of, of his work, was the economy of the area; and anyone who's lived through the Depression, and to which I can well relate, will understand the importance of training, of vocational training, because it was a time especially when the movement from the farm to the city for work in, in manufacturing was the common thing. And during the Depression, when, when you had no skill, you were left out in the, in the cold, the only thing that they had was government make-work, like — well, WPA, Work Progress Administration. And, but — he looked forward to getting people to work. And the same held true for people who were handicapped. So, he, he had this vision of: "Well, we've got to train them, and we have to train them under people who know what they're doing." So, he was able to go out and pick those people that were experts in their field. It didn't make much difference how many degrees they had, but how skillful they were in training others to perform that skill, and that skill then gave them entry-level into work such as what was then Avco. It wasn't Avco then, but Lycoming — I forget now what it was. But anyhow, he — his first set up as I recall, and I may be wrong with this, was under the bleachers which were directly in back of the Bardo Gymnasium, and they, he was able to improvise, to make do. And that philosophy pervaded everything he did. We were able to improvise. Well, when war surplus came along, that of course helped the situation; we didn't have to improvise so much. But auto mechanics and all of that was start-from-scratch, and that's how this institution got started. He had the vision of: "Well, let's get an expert electrician in here, we'll train electricians under an expert. When we get him, now we make a teacher out of him, now we'll give him the training on how to communicate with students." And, it's — that's the basic philosophy under which all the trades came into being. And then of course you have to have your eye on the economy itself: What's the trend? What are the jobs that are going to be open? And now you have a much simpler system. But the, uh — in those days it was a matter of "What does this town need?" I think US Rubber moved out and you had a constant shifting of the economic base. Well, he was in tune with that, and he could vision what those jobs were that were going to employ these people who were not now employed. And that's the philosophy under which WTI was born, under which it prospered, and the whole world looked to it after a while. I know we had people in our aviation department; he saw that as a coming thing. I know we had — we trained people for, what was it, the Taiwan. They had a whole bunch of them over here in aviation maintenance. So that he was able to visualize the trend in which you're going, how to get people to do the training that were recognized experts in their field, and then the greatest gift of all, persistency. When you have your goal, stick with it, no matter what. Even though it looks like everything is going to pop. But he had that philosophy and he was able, he was able to do that with his faculty. He would give you an idea, and then make you believe it was your own. He had that knack of — of training people. We

were a close-knit family, we were all together, and we would die for each other. But we had a very close-knit family as a faculty, and it proved successful.

Dr. Doyle: Approximately how many faculty were involved in the agricultural program? A handful or more than that?

Mr. Bressler: Oh, there were only two of us. Joe Sick came in later. It was...see, we had this problem of two weeks about. And we had just too many places to be at one time for one person. And at — while all of this was going on, I was doing that.

Dr. Doyle: Doing your thesis.

Mr. Bressler: Yeah, well, not only that but all the work before that.

Dr. Doyle: Right. You completed that in 1949.

Mr. Bressler: Yes. That's the way it was. Uh — I wouldn't want to do it again.

Dr. Doyle: Very stressful.

Mr. Bressler: Well, it's, it's — stressful isn't the word for it; that's not the only thing. At the same time we were running Young Farmers at night. We had — the shop was going at night. We had them bring in machinery to repair and build things. The Young Farmers was a program of continuing education from the people that we — from our high school days.

Dr. Doyle: Is that different than the Future Farmers of America?

Mr. Bressler: Yes, oh, indeed. A lot of those people were sent here when they made loans. I forget now what the — the loaning institution, government loans. They were asked to go and take night school training. But Young Farmers meeting was also a place where they compared notes. But we had Young Farmers classes at night. Now, how much time do you have to live after you get all this done?

Dr. Doyle: So, this was all-consuming then. Where were you living in relationship to the Brock Farm? You talked about transportation.

Mr. Bressler: I started — I went down there — at first it was the proper thing to do to be there to look after things. But then when we got Fred Colburn in as farm manager, then I moved out so he could move in there, so he was right with his work. Oh yes, the — that was, that was a lot of fun, but it was a drafty old house and I don't regret getting out of there.

Dr. Doyle: You talked about Dr. Parkes having a sense of persistence and commitment to a program —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — that he valued and saw that the merits of it for the local economy and community and so forth. Um, I assume that that was really crucial in the agricultural program, because it began very small, is that correct? Maybe two students and then eight students?

Mr. Bressler: Oh, I don't recall how many students there were, but by the time that — in a year's time we had a whole lot more than that. We had a, we had a functional class. Oh yes, you see we had this plan, even Jersey Shore sent all their ag. [agriculture] students in here. But it became a real problem because Jersey Shore is such a big area. They had students let's say from Cammal get on the bus in the wee hours of the morning, it seems, and come down to Jersey Shore, take another bus and come down to Williamsport and take another bus and go down to the Brock Farm. That's a lot of busing. But — so it became cumbersome in a sense, but this is the way we had it. We had students from all over.

Dr. Doyle: Which was more essential to maintaining the program? The high school students or the veterans?

Mr. Bressler: That's a matter of opinion. The, uh — essentially, we were looking after a veterans program, we didn't know how the other program would grow, but it did. It was, for a while, it was fifty-fifty.

Dr. Doyle: Were the other school districts that you've mentioned Jersey Shore, Williamsport of course, Watsontown, any others?

Mr. Bressler: I just can't remember that.

Dr. Doyle: Sullivan County, possibly?

Mr. Bressler: No, you see, Montoursville had a similar program, so they absorbed that area in there. No, but we had students from — ours — they motored for a good long ways as well. And I forget what all the school districts were that came in, but I know Jersey Shore was one of the bigger ones.

Dr. Doyle: If I can just go back a minute to the Young Farmers, that was the actual title of the program?

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: Was that an international or local program?

Mr. Bressler: Well, it's, it's all over the place. It's — in our training this is part of the plan is that you are keeping your farm constituency for life. Even — but the old folks aren't up for coming but the young farmers, yes. It was not entirely instructional for them, I think; it was partly social. They compared notes with their fellow farmers. But yes, Young Farmers Association was an important part of the continuing education.

Dr. Doyle: The Future Farmers of America, the FFA, that was for high-school- age students, is that right?

Mr. Bressler: The Future Farmers of America, I'm partial, I guess, but it is the model institution. There is none other like it when it comes to leadership training. These people are trained in leadership skills like no other. And they get a thorough training in parliamentary procedure, how to run a meeting, in public speaking. I know we have contests, and the contests give them some incentive to excel. In one case the highest we ever got was the national. We had the second or third place in the nation in public speaking. That means you have to win the county contest, you have to win the regional contest, you have to win the state contest, and then you are entered into the national. For that we — he spoke in the arena out in Kansas City, Missouri. And he did quite well.
(laughs)

Dr. Doyle: The FFA scrapbook from the '50s and, and possibly even earlier than that is in the college archives, and I've seen photographs and news clippings dealing with the FFA in State College and at the Farm Show in Harrisburg. Do you recall anything in particular about either of those settings?

Mr. Bressler: Well, the Brock Farm, we always entered into the egg exhibit. And we knew what to do. We, uh, Sunday morning when the judging occurred Sunday evening, the fresher those eggs are, the higher your score, because the little egg air cell in the end of the egg is measured. And we did our selection on a Sunday morning, rushed them to Harrisburg. And that's why we had all these huge banners on the wall: "Grand Champion in Egg Display." Those are Brock Farm eggs. The — we had a number of exhibits, and the exhibits at the Farm Show, which I gave you a picture of one of them, the other one was having to do with fielding farm ponds. I don't have pictures of that. But anyhow, this gives you an idea, these exhibits were some agricultural practice, safety or some new thing that you considered important to, to, to — as a show piece, and then it was a matter of design, setting it up. And uh, oh yes, we, uh — I forget what all we did exhibit, but we were active all over the place.

Dr. Doyle: Am I correct in understanding that you began the FFA program here in Williamsport?

Mr. Bressler: Oh yeah, sure, yeah, that goes with it. You're the advisor, and it's, it's now becoming that girls pretty much — not pretty much, but girls are very prominent now in there in the officers. And they're entrepreneurs in, in large-scale farming. It's amazing, it's a direction I would never have expected them to take, but there they are.

Dr. Doyle: Are you still involved with the agricultural and agricultural ed. programs, education or anything like that?

Mr. Bressler: No, I'm too old for that. I can't, can't keep up with it — oh, I keep up with it —

Dr. Doyle: You keep up with it, your interest is there —

Mr. Bressler: — oh, my gosh, yes. You can't take, uh, you can take the boy off the farm but you can't take the farm off the boy.

Dr. Doyle: What was your own sense of connection or feeling of satisfaction as natural-resource-related programs expanded at the Earth Science campus as the community college was created?

Mr. Bressler: Well, you see, you're going after my time. We didn't — I wasn't involved with the earth science at all. Joe Sick went over there. And he's the one who would have to answer that part of it.

Dr. Doyle: Okay. Did you have any thoughts when the college started briefly the dairy management program in the 1980s?

Mr. Bressler: Well, that, of course, is after my time here.

Dr. Doyle: What was your thought when you heard that the college was going to do that?

Mr. Bressler: Would you repeat that?

Dr. Doyle: Did you have any reaction or thoughts when you heard the college was getting back into agriculture with the dairy management program?

Mr. Bressler: I didn't know they were.

Dr. Doyle: Well, that was back in the 1980s, it was briefly involved in that.

Mr. Bressler: No, I'm not even aware of it.

Dr. Doyle: As you look back at your role at the agricultural program and laying the foundation for natural-resource-related programs, what are some of the primary satisfactions you have?

Mr. Bressler: I'm sure I'm not quite clear on that one.

Dr. Doyle: As you look back on your career, the first phase of your career, which was the agriculture —

Mr. Bressler: Yes....

Dr. Doyle: — what points of satisfaction do you take regarding that?

Mr. Bressler: Well, it's hard to say. The biggest satisfaction that I ever got out of education was the effect I had on the students. Every time I go somewhere, someone comes up to me, this old man comes up to me, a much older man, and reminds me of the fact that he was my student and they're still my friends. And I find that they have made successes of themselves, they have become good citizens, productive, and that somehow along the line you had a little tiny influence in causing that. That is the biggest satisfaction of anything, is the fact that you meet students and you have helped them in some way to become productive citizens. There is no greater satisfaction than that.

Dr. Doyle: Well said, Jim, very well said. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the history of the Williamsport Technical Institute and your role?

Mr. Bressler: No, there's, uh — this is so long ago that my memory is hazy, and when I left the school, retired, things weren't as they should have been. I went into, of course, a lifelong interest of mine, and that's archaeology. And I am now on the Register of Professional Archeologists. And I have made a career of it, in fact. It's a costly one but, it's, it's — it has been very satisfactory. We were able to accomplish a great many things.

Dr. Doyle: Yes, you've left — you have created a legacy for the state and for this area regarding archaeology.

Mr. Bressler: Well, maybe that's not so hard to do because, uh — if you know how much it costs. (*laughs*)

Dr. Doyle: It has cost you and your body, I know —

Mr. Bressler: Well, it cost me two hip replacements. (*laughs*) But, nevertheless, probably the biggest thing there is that Canfield Island was quite a thing, and it is now on the National Register of Historic Places. So that gives us a recognition of the fact that something important does exist here.

Dr. Doyle: Yes, that's, uh — Canfield Island is in Loyalsock Township on the Susquehanna River —

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: — where you've done for many years Indian archaeological —

Mr. Bressler: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: — digs. Now there's a nature walk dedicated to you.

Mr. Bressler: Yes, that's the Heritage Trail.

Dr. Doyle: Right.

Mr. Bressler: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: If I could close with going back to the agricultural program and the Brock Farm —

Mr. Bressler: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: — I think we need to wrap that up by talking about its closing down. Uh, what — when the decision was made to end the program there, what was involved in that end?

Mr. Bressler: Well, when, when there are signs that it is no longer an efficient operation from the standpoint of the number of veterans, the training, the bulk of them have gone through their — their training phase, that they were eligible under the GI Bill. When you have that base in the past and your family farm is going south as well, then you have to think twice as to how much of a facility can you afford to devote to training in agriculture. And that was the time period when — what we did then is hold a public auction where we sold many of the things that the school district no longer had need for. And that, then, became the end of that deal, then we worked our program that remained entirely from here. And it was there after then that I completely got away from the ag. program to begin with, when I came over to the English department.

Dr. Doyle: Did the technical institute have to remove any of the buildings it had constructed on the farm?

Mr. Bressler: Well, what construction was on the farm and was solidly-based, that stayed there. That's, that's part of the way you deal with, with things of that nature. You don't move the immovable. (*laughs*) The, uh — what they did with it after that, that's none of our, our doings. But...

Dr. Doyle: How did you feel about this coming to closure of the — a program that you had introduced?

Mr. Bressler: Didn't even have time to think about it.

Dr. Doyle: Because you moved on to English in teaching that.

Mr. Bressler: Well, I was — I was busy, yes.

Dr. Doyle: That's another story that we hope to continue in another, in another interview.

Mr. Bressler: Well, there isn't really a great deal I can — it didn't — there's nothing thrilling about the thing except that I loved it. I loved it, especially technical writing. Now I've done a lot of it since. I've written five books on archeology, you know, and I've written a lot of articles and papers in magazines.

Dr. Doyle: So, you began yet another dynamic phase in your life.

Mr. Bressler: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time today to help us establish more of a record and understanding of the agricultural program at the Williamsport Technical Institute, and your crucial role, your vital role in starting and maintaining in helping that program flourish at a time that, um, agriculture was in, as you've already established, a very transitional stage, not only locally here in Lycoming County, but actually in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. So, thank you very much.

Mr. Bressler: Well, I, I'm the one who's indebted to you, for a long time I've been away from the college here; this is completely strange to me here. That much of what has happened goes unrecorded. And that's sort of against my religion, so that's, that's, that's why some of these things I registered with the historical society, the Lycoming County Historical Society, so that it doesn't all go unremembered. And there are other things also that I was involved in that were unremembered that I had to document. Let me just give you quickly an example of that. The, uh — when you go out into the wilderness of Pennsylvania, now, you find wild areas, that concept was hatched right here. And how was it done? The wild areas, natural areas, that's what I documented. The, uh — even the report has a request in it to do this thing.

Dr. Doyle: Did you do that while you were part of the agricultural program, or did that come later?

Mr. Bressler: Well, I was still involved, sort of, but just after that, yes.

Dr. Doyle: So, by wild areas, um, in my mind I'm thinking of Pine Creek, for example, as a designated wild area.

Mr. Bressler: McIntyre; the — what we called Beulah Land, Brown Township, and all over the state. It's a statewide thing.

Dr. Doyle: And the documentation for that is in the Lycoming County Historical Society?

Mr. Bressler: Yes, the whole documentation.

Dr. Doyle: Well, I, I agree, I think a good way to end this — this interview, at least, is the point you have raised: that it's important to understand the history that has preceded this point in time of the college.

Mr. Bressler: Exactly

Dr. Doyle: And that you and others established a crucial foundation that allowed the Williamsport Area Community College and now the Pennsylvania College of Technology to evolve into the institutions that they became.

Mr. Bressler: Well, I don't know how crucial it was, except that it is a phase. And you might remember the statement that was made by the, oh, that famous poet, "Behind every great institution stands the shadow of one man." That was Dr. George Parkes; that is the man. But as beautiful a place as you now have, and as functional, and nice a job as you're doing here, it wasn't always so. It had to have its growing pains; it had to evolve out of something small. But now you, now you have something that is, I cannot really relate to it, but I think every student that comes here ought to at least be cognizant of the fact that you grew out of something before this. And that's the way most institutions grow. They have a start and a man of vision behind it, and that was Dr. Parkes.

Dr. Doyle: Well, thank you, Jim, I agree with that statement, but I would modify it slightly. There were people of vision, and you were one of the ones essential to that.

Mr. Bressler: Well, I don't know about that, but —

Dr. Doyle: Thank you.