

OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW

WITH

Ted H. Willhite

Interview conducted January 8, 1999

by

Linda Weimer

SUMMARY

In this interview, Ted Willhite, nephew of Dean Emeritus Richard B. Dillehunt, reminisces about his uncle, sharing anecdotes about his life, his medical career, and the many physicians he befriended.

Willhite begins with some biographical information about himself before moving on to a short history of the Dillehunt family. He gives a brief summary of his uncle's medical education and early years at the University of Oregon Medical School before his service in World War I. He recalls his version of the events leading up to the purchase of "Mackenzie's Folly"—the parcel of land atop Marquam Hill where the Medical School now stands.

Dillehunt was appointed Dean of the Medical School in 1920 upon Dean Mackenzie's death. Willhite talks about Dillehunt's dual role as Dean and private practitioner. He describes his perceptions of Dillehunt's management style and recounts stories about two unusual fundraising events. He also shares his impressions of some of Dillehunt's colleagues at the Medical School, including Dr. Edward West, Dr. Tom Joyce, and Dr. Howard Lewis. He confirms the impression that the early history of the School was dominated by the dynamics of the "old boys' network" among local physicians.

Willhite also describes Dillehunt's personality and talks about the "alter ego" he assumed in his frequent letters to *The Oregonian*. Dillehunt had been plagued with poor health, primarily heart problems, and retired at the age of 56 on the advice of his personal physicians, Dr. David Baird and Dr. Howard Lewis. Willhite talks about the negative effect of retirement on his uncle's health, and about his death at the age of 67 in 1953.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Information	1
Dillehunt Family History	2
Education of R.B. Dillehunt	2
Kenneth Mackenzie	3
Dean Dillehunt	4
Work at Shriners Hospital	6
Personalities on Marquam Hill	8
Dillehunt's Management Style	10
Unusual Fundraising	11
AKA Kenneth Nesbitt	13
Health and Retirement	14
Honors for Service	15
Town-Gown Relations	16
Dillehunt's Legacy	17
Index	20

Interview with Ted H. Willhite
Interviewed by Linda Weimer
January 8, 1999
Site: History of Medicine Room
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

WEIMER: This is an oral history interview with Ted Willhite, who is the nephew of one of our former deans, Dean Richard Dillehunt. It's really quite an honor to have you here talking about your uncle, and also about yourself. The date is January eighth, and we're in the History of Medicine Room at OHSU.

We always ask our interviewees for a little biographical information, so I'd like to know where you were born and raised.

WILLHITE: I was born in Decatur, Illinois, same place as my uncle was, and that's where I was raised. Graduated from high school there, and came out here in 1940, which kind of dates me because I was born in 1922. My uncle at that time was quite active in his practice and his Shriners Hospital and his position as Dean of the Medical School. I stayed here and, of all things, he told me after looking at my high school record that I didn't know anything [laughter], and sent me back to Lincoln High School for one year of school; and we also played a little golf at the same time.

But I then went back to Illinois from there, after that year, and that was the year 1941 in the summer that my uncle had his first heart attack and was put down for about three months at that point in time, much different than they treat them today. In fact, from where we're sitting, he was just over across the Hill here in what was at that time the Portland Clinic hospital.

WEIMER: Oh, I think that's what we call now Gaines Hall.

WILLHITE: I believe you're correct. I believe you're correct. Yeah, the front room on the left hand side as you're facing the building, in the corner.

WEIMER: And did he spend his entire three months there?

WILLHITE: He spent a good portion of it—because the attack was in July, if I recall correctly, and I was back here sometime in September because I wound up going down to the University of Oregon at that point; and he was still in the hospital at that time when I came here in September.

WEIMER: We're getting a little ahead of ourselves. You came out here as a teenager, and then you went back to Illinois and then came back. Tell me about the Dillehunt family.

Your uncle was also born in Illinois?

WILLHITE: He was born in Decatur, right, in 1886.

WEIMER: Yes, let's talk about that family.

WILLHITE: Well, I happen to have letters, as a matter of fact, going way, way back in the family—at least to me way, way back—into the 1820s, that even talk about the fact that they were in the grain business at that particular time. There were eleven children in my grandfather's family, and he was born about—well, he was nine years old and went to Lincoln's funeral, Abraham Lincoln's funeral. I remember that.

My grandfather was born, if I recall correctly, in the area of Decatur. My grandmother was born in Pennsylvania, and she was Pennsylvania Dutch. The family, as I said, was in the grain business. In fact, at one particular point they were called the Shellabarger Dillehunt Mills, and those mills are today owned by the Archer Daniels Midland Company. Unfortunately, we have no interest in that situation [laughter].

But Unk was—I call him “Unk”—my uncle was born in 1886, July the tenth it was, and he was the third in the family. There was an older uncle and an older aunt that I have, and then my mother, who was his youngest sister, was born in 1893, and all of them were born in Decatur. And then my mother stayed in Decatur, met my dad on the steps of the library, and my dad was so impressed because he thought he'd met a girl that was interested in libraries [laughter]. And my mother, I think that's the only time she was ever in there in her whole life.

But the Dillehunts, my grandfather was in a hardware business back there called Morehouse and Wells Hardware Store. He was the secretary-treasurer, did that for years, and worked, in fact, until his death at eighty-one years of age, right up to the end. And my uncle, on the other hand, went to Rush Medical School in Chicago, and then interned, I had thought, at the Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, but according to the material here, they called it, I think, something else in one of these books that we were looking at.

WEIMER: I think it was Cook County?

WILLHITE: Cook County Hospital. Whether it was Cook County or Rush Medical, maybe they're the same thing, just a different name. And then he finished his internship or residency combination, which at that time was only two years, in 1912. And he came out here as—whether it was professor or assistant professor, I don't know, because I don't even know how many faculty people they had at that point—but anyway, Professor of Anatomy. And then according to this one book here from the University of Illinois, it shows that he was Assistant Dean in 1916 or before. Now, when that particular official capacity prevailed, I don't know.

WEIMER: I'm curious, because your family was in the grain business, what made Richard Dillehunt become a doctor? What was the influence there, do you know?

WILLHITE: The only practical answer I can give you is I don't know. To the best of my knowledge, there was no one else in the family that was involved in the medical field at all. Now, that may or may not be true if I knew the whole history, but there having been eleven children in my grandfather's family, and I think it was five or six in my grandmother's family, there may have been a doctor or nurse or whatever that I don't know about.

WEIMER: Right. Well, he graduated from medical school and did his internship residency in the Chicago area; do you know what made him come out to Oregon? That, to me, seems like a big trip [laughs] during those times.

WILLHITE: No, I don't remember quite what it was, possibly opportunity. But the one thing I do remember is that he was staying at this hotel at the top of 23rd and Burnside, and he said he finally got so sick and tired of the rain that he decided he would go back to Illinois [laughter]. And he said, all of a sudden, the morning that he had packed to head back to Illinois, the sun shone through and Mount Hood was there in its magnificent splendor, and he never left.

WEIMER: We do have good days here occasionally [laughs]. When he was out here, and Assistant Dean fairly early on, the Dean was Kenneth Mackenzie.

WILLHITE: Yes.

WEIMER: Did he ever have any stories about Mackenzie, or did he ever talk about him?

WILLHITE: Well, not so much Dr. Mackenzie, although Dr. Mackenzie's home is down in northwest Portland and is now a—it's not a halfway house, by any means, because it's a magnificent place down by the old Couch School. It's still there, but I believe it belongs to the Episcopal Church or something. And I've been in there, and if you want to see beautiful, beautiful woodwork and things, you should go in and see that place.

But no, evidently he died about the time that the war was over, something in that particular vicinity, and the only stories that I ever heard were about Dr. Mackenzie's son who was named Kenneth, Junior, in fact, and evidently he was a pretty wild guy. And I knew him. I met him here in town, and he used to sell cars, as a matter of fact, for Dick Niles Lincoln Mercury downtown. But other than that, I didn't know of any stories about him.

Well, I take that back. The only story I did know, or that my uncle had told me, was of the land acquisition here, and that Dr. Mackenzie was on the board of a railroad or was the doctor for a railroad, and that the railroad, according to my uncle's story, had bought the land here on a map that had no contour lines on it. So the proximity to Portland, if you don't have contour lines, looked beautiful. But for a railroad, this is a pretty hilly place. But the railroad, as I understood it, donated this land for the medical school purpose to the University of Oregon.

WEIMER: During this period, World War I, did your uncle participate in the war?

WILLHITE: Yes, he was in—I think they called it Base Hospital 26 or something. It was sort of a World War I M.A.S.H. type of hospital.

WEIMER: Right, I think it's Base Hospital 46.

WILLHITE: Forty-six.

WEIMER: Yes.

WILLHITE: I still have the booklet on it. I couldn't find it to bring along today, but I still have the booklet that was put out listing the doctors and the nurses that were in the unit, and I'll get that for you.

But yes, and he used to tell me some interesting stories. He came out a major and was in France. I don't know exactly how long in France, but I know that I do have a number of postcards and other things that he evidently procured while he was over there. But he really didn't tell us stories specifically about his experiences that time.

WEIMER: I find that very often with military people they don't talk about their experiences.

[Pause.]

Well, we have him back here after the war. He's back in Portland. Kenneth Mackenzie had the dream of building a medical school here on top of Marquam Hill. He died rather suddenly, and your uncle became Dean.

WILLHITE: Right. Now, I'm not exactly sure as to the timing of this, whether they had actually started up here or not before Dr. Mackenzie died. That I'm not quite sure about. But I know that the School itself was down in the vicinity of 23rd and Lovejoy, something down in that area by where Good Samaritan Hospital is today, and obviously had outgrown its facilities—you know, didn't have the facilities. So they had gotten this land. And what the chronology of all this was I really don't remember specifically. It's probably someplace around here in the archives and things. But I believe the School up here was started in 1921, if I recall correctly.

WEIMER: Yes, I think they started building, if I remember, very late in the teens, but didn't get up here until the early '20s. Did he ever tell you about his work? What would be a typical day in his life?

WILLHITE: Well, when I first came here, it was in the summer of 1940, and my uncle, for whatever reason, I've forgotten again, but he very seldom ever drove the car

himself, he always had someone drive for him. He had had some disorder back in the '20s, as I recall. In fact, he went to the Shriners Hospital at that time instead of Emanuel where he was primary physician because he liked the kids so much.

But I drove for him, and a typical morning was being at the hospital about seven o'clock in the morning, and coming home about 7:00 to 7:30 that night from his office in the Medical-Dental Building downtown. And it varied a little bit as to whether or not he went to Emanuel or the Shriners, but I drove to both of those places, and picked him up, of course, where we parked the car in the library garage at the Portland Medical-Dental Building. And then we would go home, but it was late.

Fortunately, he always had home help. At that particular time, he had a Filipino fellow that was his, as we then called them, houseboy. And Tommy always had dinner ready for us when we got home, but usually we didn't eat dinner until 8:00, 8:30, something in that range.

WEIMER: Sounds like he put in very long days.

WILLHITE: He also read during the night, I know that, because I remember coming in one morning, and I looked in, it was about 2:00 or 2:30, something like that, and I peeked in and I said, "What are you doing?" and he said, "Oh, brushing up on a little surgery I have to do tomorrow."

WEIMER: Well, this is the time when the Medical School wasn't that large, and there were still part-time deans. Did he come up almost on a daily basis to the Medical School, or do you remember?

WILLHITE: I can't honestly say that. He depended a great deal upon the business administrator of the hospital, whose name was Ralf Couch. I remember that. As a matter of fact, I don't recall how much, but I do recall that my uncle supplemented Ralf Couch's income during the '30s because he thought he wasn't getting enough money.

But his office—I'm pointing to it right over there [demonstrates]—was on the first floor; it wasn't on the fourth floor yet.

WEIMER: What we now call Mackenzie Hall.

WILLHITE: Yes, it was on the first floor. You went in to the right, and it was the first office on the lefthand side. I remember bringing him up here several times, but I don't recall exactly how frequently. But Ralf Couch, I think, was his right arm in the situation.

WEIMER: Like an administrative assistant?

WILLHITE: Yes.

WEIMER: What was Dean Dillehunt's personality like?

WILLHITE: Oh, gosh, he was a great guy. He was a great guy. He had a tremendous sense of humor. He could switch on you from brilliance to humor in no time at all. He had the adaptability of working with everyone. I remember driving the president of the University of Oregon, Erb, around several times. I think the Governor's name was Sprague or something, if I recall correctly, and I remember driving him around some. And Unk got along beautifully well with them or, if the guy happened to be a longshoreman or a ditch digger, he got along great with him, too. He had that type of varied personality. He was a very social person—and he was also political, I'm sure of that. I don't have any proof of that, but he couldn't have done what he did without having been political. But he was just a very well balanced individual in those directions.

Personally, the only thing is that he lived very much unto himself after hours, so to speak. In other words, when he went home, which as I say was eight o'clock at night type of thing, he kind of sacked in, as we might say today. If we'd had TV today, I don't know that he would have turned it on and watched it or not. At that time, because—well, let's face it. He had to be up by 6:00, 6:15 in the morning, the next morning, in order to get someplace and do some surgery.

WEIMER: What was he like physically? A tall man or...?

WILLHITE: Yeah, he was about six two and, as a matter of fact, he was a little more slender than I am. I remember he weighed 185 pounds, and I can still remember, as he got older, he used to comment, he said, "My God, I'm shrinking" [laughter]. But he was about six two, and my other uncle was about six three. They were both pretty tall guys.

WEIMER: You brought a picture of him with his little bow tie.

WILLHITE: Yes.

WEIMER: He did a lot of work with the Shriners Hospital. Did he ever talk about that?

WILLHITE: Oh, yes. I asked him one time if there was any phase of medicine in which he would be willing to forego everything else, and he said, "Yes, children's care," because he loved the kids. I went on rounds with him several times at the hospital and, as he used to say, he said, "You cut their legs off, and they still love you."

And the most thrilling time that I think I ever personally experienced was when Christmas came, and we went out there for Christmas and Santa Claus came along, and Santa Claus at that time was Tommy Luke in the Shriners. Of course, the hospital was out on 82nd. And those little kids, their eyes were as big around as cans, you know, and they just loved him. He was humor with them, too. He used to squeak his nose at them and make funny noises with his mouth as he'd turn their arms and legs, and somehow that was always a distraction. He loved the Shriners Hospital. He opened that, I think that was about 1921 or '22

also.

WEIMER: Well, after the Shriners, Doernbecher Hospital opened up in '26 up here on the Hill; how much did he have to do with that?

WILLHITE: I don't know. I don't know. I know he spoke—he knew the Doernbechers. As I say, he was quite a socialite. And how much influence he had upon the establishment and money aspects of the Doernbecher Hospital, I honestly don't know. In fact, to tell you the truth, that's something I want to find out. I'd like to be able to dig into some archives myself and see if I can't find out how that all came about. I don't know.

WEIMER: It was a wonderful start of the children's hospital and, as you know, we have the new one across campus, a wonderful legacy of everybody involved.

WILLHITE: Oh, it's a magnificent place.

WEIMER: After World War I, we had the Depression in the '30s. Were you still in Illinois at that time?

WILLHITE: Oh, yes. I didn't come out here until 1940.

WEIMER: I was wondering what the effects of the Depression were on the family at all.

WILLHITE: We as a family were, and I'm very thankful for it, we were almost blessed. My particular dad didn't make a lot of money, but he had a steady job. My uncle in the insurance business in Illinois was frankly quite successful. In fact, he was listed in the *Decatur Herald & Review* as one of the high-income people in the town. My grandfather, the hardware business seemed to have done very well, and I know of no adversity at all in that respect. We never went without a meal; we never went hungry; and we always had clothing and shoes and this sort of thing, so that from the standpoint of deprivation of one sort or another, I personally didn't experience it.

WEIMER: Then comes World War II. Was your uncle involved in that, or did ill health prevent him?

WILLHITE: Well, unbeknownst to me, he had already set up to enlist in the Army Medical Corps, and he was going to go in as either a major or a lieutenant colonel, I've forgotten which. But I still have his uniform; in fact, I've thought of giving it to the Civic Theater or something of this nature, they might be able to use that—and I have his hat and that sort of thing. But the heart attack knocked that out of the ballpark.

WEIMER: Earlier when we had a conversation, we talked about some of the personalities up here on Marquam Hill, and we've already mentioned Ralf Couch, and I was going to ask about Edward West.

WILLHITE: Dr. West, yes.

WEIMER: Because you brought a book up here. Did you know him personally?

WILLHITE: Yes, I knew Dr. West. He was a great guy. He was just a wonderful person. And he wrote this book [*Textbook of Biochemistry*] and gave my uncle a copy of it in 1951.

But he was the Professor of Biochemistry here, as I recall, and he came, I don't remember the exact dates, but I think it was something in the late '30s, to here. If I recall correctly, he came from Washington Medical School in St. Louis, but he was originally from West Virginia, and all you had to do was talk with him about two minutes, and you picked that up.

WEIMER: Is he the one that I see in pictures with the pith helmet?

WILLHITE: Very possibly, and a long Sherlock Holmes crooked type of pipe, yes [laughter].

WEIMER: Were they good friends?

WILLHITE: Yes. Yes, they were. I remember one time driving up here in the round in front, and Dr. West came out and they got to talking about amino acids, and my uncle rattled off all of the amino acids, and Dr. West stood there in absolute amazement. He said, "I have students that can't do that" [laughter].

WEIMER: Another person prominent up here on the Hill at that time in the medical community was Tom Joyce.

WILLHITE: Yes. Now, I didn't know Dr. Joyce as well as my cousin Janet, that I'll refer to you sometime. Dr. Joyce and my uncle were almost exactly the same age. I don't remember if they had gone to school or anything together, but they became very, very good buddies here in Portland. Dr. Joyce, of course, was with the Portland Clinic and one of the founders of it, as I recall. And my uncle being outside that was—they were just good personal as well as professional friends. He was kind of the taskmaster of surgery around here for a long time, and whether that was good or bad, I don't know, but it was [laughter], and there's nothing we can do about it now. But I remember when he died, it was in the late '40s, as I recall, and my uncle at that time was just devastated by the fact that he had lost his good friend, Dr. Joyce.

My aunt, who was not the doctor brother's wife, but was my insurance uncle's wife, she came out here and lived here after my uncle died, in about 1949. She came here and lived in Portland, and she and Mrs. Joyce were very good friends until they both passed on.

WEIMER: Another one of the personalities up here was Guy Strohm.

WILLHITE: Yes, Dr. Strohm. Once again, Dr. Strohm is one of those that I don't remember that well. I remember his nickname being Dusty, and how that came about, I don't know [laughter]. But again, that was a name that was quite frequently in my uncle's conversations.

WEIMER: He also had at that time, your uncle, an Assistant Dean, David Baird.

WILLHITE: Yes.

WEIMER: What was their working relationship?

WILLHITE: Well, I'll tell you. Having a bit of a negative concept on this myself, it probably isn't fair for me to put out a lot of information. I simply know that it was not particularly good. To the best of my knowledge, Dr. Baird never contacted my uncle once he retired. And inasmuch as Dr. Baird and Dr. Lewis were my uncle's doctors, I suppose in the field of law, you would say there was a certain conflict of interests in their caring for him.

But that has absolutely nothing to do with Dr. Baird's position here at the School. To the best of my knowledge, he did an excellent job of administering the school and running it, and that's more important than whether or not they got along. Obviously, they got along reasonably well or my uncle would not have had him around.

WEIMER: You brought up another name, Dr. Lewis, Howard Lewis; people called him Hod.

WILLHITE: Yes, Hod, yup.

WEIMER: Did you know him?

WILLHITE: Dr. Lewis gave me my first physical.

WEIMER: He did?

WILLHITE: My uncle sent me up there for my first physical. And then some years later I was adviser for a group of Hi-Y boys at Lincoln High School, and I had Dr. Lewis' two sons, Tom and Dick, in my Hi-Y Club, and they were both excellent young men, and I understand at least Dick is a physician someplace today; I don't know where. They were fine, fine young fellows.

And Dr. Lewis was—in the club, for example, if anybody came to meetings and things where we requested parents to come, he did; he always showed up. I know of nothing other than great admiration that my uncle had for him. He thought he was an excellent physician. And he gave me a good physical [laughter].

WEIMER: [Laughing] Very good.

Another person I would like to talk about, and I don't think he gets enough recognition here for his contributions, is John Weeks, Dr. Weeks.

WILLHITE: Yes. Well now, once again, I didn't know Dr. Weeks, but my uncle obviously knew him. And the story as I recall was that Dr. Weeks put up, I think it was a third of the cost of this particular building [Library/Auditorium], and I think the state government and the federal government or grants of some sort put up the balance of it. And he was an ophthalmologist, as I recall, from New York who had come out here. And he died while writing his autobiography, and ironically my uncle finished the last three chapters of Dr. Weeks' autobiography. So it's really a combination Weeks-Dillehunt book. But Unk never took any credit for it, as I recall.

WEIMER: And he, although instrumental in starting the fund raising for the Library—we do have a plaque here after his name, but it is not named after him. We heard the story that it was because he was too modest, but it's one of those stories we'll have to—

WILLHITE: Dr. Weeks?

WEIMER: Yes.

WILLHITE: I don't know. You'd have to get that from another source. I don't know. But, from what little my Unk said, yes, that would fit, yes.

WEIMER: One of the highlights of your uncle's career was following the footsteps of Mackenzie and his dream of building a first-class medical center up here. As we mentioned, Mackenzie had an unexpected death, and your uncle took over the reins. Did he ever talk about his vision for a medical center up here on Hill with his family?

WILLHITE: [Pauses] No, not really. Now, once again, my cousin Janet being several years older than I am, she might remember some things that I don't. But I don't recall anything. My feeling, looking back upon it as an adult, an older person now myself, I see that he was a good person for the School at the time. It took someone with a combination of capabilities: administrative, medical, political, social, et cetera, to be able to get this small school on the map, and in that respect I think my uncle was at least a very fine person for that job. Could there have been a better one? I don't know, but he did the job and got the School in public recognition at a time when it was very difficult to do so.

WEIMER: Were you close enough to know about his management style?

WILLHITE: Well, I asked him one time, I asked him to what he attributed his success, and I remember he said the first thing was that he did not dilly-dally around making decisions. When he had a decision to make, he made the decision and lived with it unless he

had to change it. He said, “I didn’t spend a lot of time procrastinating.”

He said the second thing that he felt he had always had the ability to do was get people to do things for him who could do them better than he could do it himself, and he said, then let them do the job. So from that standpoint, maybe some of that should be transferred over to present-day people [laughter] in whatever capacities—to make decisions, live with them, and then get people to do a better job than they think they can do it themselves.

He never looked down, let me put it that way. He never, he did not look down upon anyone. Unk either looked them in the eye or looked up to them.

WEIMER: Did he ever talk about his image for the Medical School at all, what he wanted it to be?

WILLHITE: No, I can’t honestly say that I know anything in that direction.

WEIMER: I know we’d talked earlier, and you had some wonderful stories that you could tell me, and I was wondering if you could repeat one for us on tape; it was the story of the man who had his leg amputated?

WILLHITE: Oh yes, oh yes. Mr. Walter Beebe. I remember yet because—Walter Beebe, Jr., may still be here in Portland someplace.

WEIMER: I’m going to hold you for just a moment because we’re going to switch the tape.

[End Tape 1, Side 1/Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

WEIMER: And we’re on side two of tape one of our interview with Ted Willhite, and you were just going to relate the story of the man with the leg.

WILLHITE: Yes. Well, please remember that this is my memory recalling, and that we’re talking about a long time ago, and so there’s the possibility of some distortion or inaccuracies involved in it. But the general concept was that Mr. Beebe was a very wealthy man in Portland. He made a lot of money in World War I in something, shipbuilding I believe it was. And he had been out hunting, and lo and behold, in some way he shot himself in the leg. And he came to my uncle and my uncle had to amputate his leg. As I recall, it was just below the knee, if I remember that.

So Mr. Beebe came up to my uncle’s office at one point and asked about his bill because he hadn’t received a bill at that time, and my uncle said, “Well, it’s going to be \$5,000.”

Well, this was in the mid-30s [laughter], when \$5,000 was probably like \$50- or

\$60,000 today. And I can still remember him saying that Mr. Beebe just about had a conniption because he thought it was so much money, and my uncle said, “Shut up, or it will be \$10,000” [laughter].

So he wrote the check out for \$5,000, and according to what my uncle said, Unk turned the check over and endorsed to the Medical School as a donation.

WEIMER: It’s a good story. There’s another story you were starting to tell me, and it was about Dr. Knox and the Knox Liquor Law.

WILLHITE: Oh, yeah. In fact, there’s an article in here on “Liquor by the Glass: Battle to Finish” in this newspaper.

I remember Dr. Knox pretty well, and he was kind of a slight fellow, and bespectacled and such. But just in a way kind of the individual you would have sort of expected to have initiated a liquor law whereby, at that time, you had to take your own liquor into the establishment, a restaurant or anything, and that they served it to you; you gave it to them, and they gave you a number.

I can’t remember the exact detail, but I do remember one doctor friend of my uncle’s coming up to the office, and he brought a bottle with him [laughing], and they evidently sat there and had a couple of drinks, and the subject of the damn Knox Liquor Law came up, you know.

But that law was repealed ultimately by the Legislature here in the state. Whether it was good or bad, I don’t know. The intent of it by Dr. Knox was very good. It was to reduce drinking circumstances, and if we could pass a Knox Liquor Law today, maybe it would help. I don’t know.

WEIMER: There was another thing that you mentioned when your uncle, Dean Dillehunt, went to New York. This was in the mid-‘30s also, and he got a grant from the Rockefellers. How did that come about?

WILLHITE: How it came about, I don’t know. But it was a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to the University of Oregon Medical School. And my uncle, for whatever reason, either needed to go back personally or chose to go back personally. And I remember him saying he took the train to Chicago and then on to New York, and he said he got in a subway in New York and took the subway to apparently Rockefeller Center, and then took an elevator up to whatever floor it was on, the Rockefeller Foundation in the Rockefeller Center, got the check for the three and a half million dollars—that it was the amount to—that day, which was a lot of money then, and got back on the elevator, went downstairs, back into the subway, and was never on the streets of New York [laughter] at any time, getting the money for the Medical School.

WEIMER: I think that’s quite a story because now you have to go through so much

to get a grant. But just to go out there—

WILLHITE: Well, I have no idea what he went through to get it, but as I say, he was political. There's no question about it. And by that, I don't mean any put-down. I mean, he was a positive political person. He thought positively in that direction.

I remember him saying to me one time, which might be of interest to you, I came home from something, and I said, "Gosh, I don't think I can do that." And my uncle leaned back in his chair, which was a great Turkish rocker, and he said, "I can't help you," and I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I never took on any job that I didn't think I could complete successfully."

So he had a tremendous amount of self-confidence and, fortunately, he had the ability to along with it.

WEIMER: We've mentioned this before, and other people have mentioned it, that your uncle was a great letter-writer, particularly to *The Oregonian*.

WILLHITE: He wrote to *The Oregonian* both under his own name and under the name of Kenneth Nesbitt, N-e-s-b-i-t-t, maybe an E on there, I'm not sure. The interesting thing is that there is a Kenneth Nesbitt in our family, and I still have stationery that he wrote with Kenneth Nesbitt on it and the same address as his own.

In fact, the way that they found out about it was that he goofed one time and put a Kenneth Nesbitt letter in a Richard B. Dillehunt envelope and [laughter]—but they didn't reveal it. They were very honorable about it. They didn't reveal who he was, so that it didn't get out all over town.

But he enjoyed writing letters, principally on political and moral issues. He would have a ball game today, I'll tell you that, with what's going on [laughter].

WEIMER: How would you classify him, as a conservative or a liberal, in his views?

WILLHITE: I would classify him as a conservative in his views. If you go back to my comment about Mr. Couch and my uncle supplementing his income, I think that's a liberal concept. So in many respects, he was of that makeup. But as to government and this sort of thing, no, I would say he was conservative.

I remember him telling me once about going back as an orthopedic surgeon to meet with President Roosevelt at Warm Springs or something of that sort, back in Georgia, I believe; and he was really not particularly impressed with him, with the President at that time. Now, that doesn't, again, detract from what accomplishments the President made, but Unk—he didn't vote for him, I'm sure of that [laughter].

But I never knew him to let anything of that nature affect his medical thinking or his

medical activities. In that, he was, to the best of my knowledge, absolutely and totally dedicated to perfection.

WEIMER: Speaking of his medical capabilities, was there anything that he mentioned of why he went into surgery, his discipline?

WILLHITE: No. No, I really can't recall. But I remember when he came to Portland, he told me he was the third orthopedic surgeon here in Portland. This probably isn't very complimentary, but I still remember him saying that that orthopods were the carpenters of medicine [laughter].

WEIMER: People have mentioned, and you have, too, his sense of humor, and I understand his nickname was Dilly.

WILLHITE: Yeah.

WEIMER: I'd like to know—it's a derivative of his name, I assume, but how did that come about?

WILLHITE: I don't know, but everything—in fact, I was showing you this one letter here, and all of it was, you know, it was all toward the nickname of Dilly. When this was written, I don't know, but there was a man named Dilly in this one little poem, and that was just there all the way along. When it began, I don't know, but it was there until he died.

WEIMER: Do you know if it was during childhood, or something that came later?

WILLHITE: No, I have no idea. My mother always called him Richard, and my grandmother called him Richard. So, to them, he was Richard.

WEIMER: [Laughing] I don't think that's too unusual for parents to call you by your full name.

One thing, unfortunately, that happened during his career is that he was plagued with ill health. How did that affect him?

WILLHITE: Not well. My uncle did two things that are not beneficial for good health: he smoked and he drank. In fact, one reason I never smoked was that he showed me, and I think I told you, the two cadavers up at the Medical School, and the one cadaver's lungs were black from smoke, and the other cadaver's lungs were nice and pink, that had never smoked.

That image never left me. I have often thought if that image could be presented to a lot of younger people, it would work. But my uncle smoked, as was the case with, I would say, a majority of the physicians—because I had lunch at the Arlington Club and the University Club and played golf with him at the Waverly Club, and I saw the other people, too, and he was right in the crowd in that respect.

But having a drink was always there. I never knew him, in the time that I was with him, to have any kind of a drink before he was to do surgery. He just simply abstained completely. I think that the problems that developed later on came about subsequent to his— what I will call retirement, which was apparently suggested by his doctors, and I have personally often wondered if they didn't trigger greater problems than they had at that particular point.

WEIMER: With early retirement?

WILLHITE: Yes. He was only 56.

WEIMER: And that was brought about because of the heart attack?

WILLHITE: The heart attack, yes, but today we don't retire people for that sort of thing.

WEIMER: You don't treat them that way. So basically on the advice of his physician, he just completely quit?

WILLHITE: He was very respectful of other physicians' advice. For example, Dr. [Laurence] Selling was a very good friend of his, and I remember him referring to him. And in those days, you didn't get a second opinion on things, so that when a combination of Dr. Baird and Dr. Lewis were my uncle's doctors, to get someone else's opinion would have been sacrilegious. But later on, I talked with a couple of friends of his, whom I will not specifically refer to at this point, who felt that the recommendation for retirement was very inappropriate.

WEIMER: He was still at the height of his—

WILLHITE: He was only 56 years old.

WEIMER: He had a portrait made, painted of him by Sidney—

WILLHITE: Bell.

WEIMER: Bell, right. Did he have any comments on that? Some people—

WILLHITE: No, [laughing] the only thing I remember is his comment that it made him look like a stuffed shirt, is the way he put it. But that was the type of thing that I guess maybe was in mode at that particular time, and Sidney Bell was quite a portrait artist. I think he did the one of Dr. Weeks out there, too, if I recall correctly. So it was the style.

WEIMER: One of the things you brought with you, I forget the exact name of it, like a diary, a journal, and Dr. Dillehunt was writing about the honor he felt when they proposed

naming the Medical School Hospital after him. If you could just read that in the record, I would appreciate that.

WILLHITE: Sure. That was in 1953 when the hospital, which is directly across from the main building over here [points] now, was built, and I copied this out of an item that my uncle kept. It's called "Scene and Heard," which he wrote in almost every day. It was sort of a diary on his own part. My cousin has this today. But his comment in this was that—it was written October 30th, the day before he died, and he said, "I am honored beyond my power to express, by the resolution of the Oregon State Medical Society and by the action of the Oregon State Board of Control that they should think my name eligible for so signal a place in the history of medical education in Oregon. But the hospital will not be so named because a bylaw of the State Board of Higher Education prohibits naming a unit for anyone living. It is not enough to be half dead. One must be completely so" [laughter].

WEIMER: A bit of humor at the very end.

WILLHITE: Yeah, even his last words.

WEIMER: But it was a lovely honor to be thought of, and that was our first teaching hospital up here.

WILLHITE: Yes. Yes.

WEIMER: You also talked to me about his last day, and that your granddaughter was visiting him on his last day and was asking for her usual handout of—

WILLHITE: Oh, my daughter, who was his grandniece, in fact.

WEIMER: Grandniece, all right.

WILLHITE: Yes. Incidentally, Julie is probably one of the few little girls that's ever been in the men's bar at University Club [laughter]. He took her down there a couple of times with him to show her off, his baby, as he called her. But Julie—Uncky was just her idol at that point. She was just three years old, a little over three years old, and her pet situation was to go up to him with both her little hands out cupped together, kind of like the Allstate good hands thing, and her comment was always, "Uncky, I don't have any candy in my hands" [laughter] and Uncky would call to the housekeeper, "Monty, got to have some candy in here for the baby."

WEIMER: There have been several references to the various clubs, Arlington, University Club, and it has also been said, particularly in those days, and not only of the medical environment, the Medical School, but of the social world in general, that there was an old-boys network, particularly true of physicians. Were you aware of that?

WILLHITE: At the time, no. Now, yes. And I would say without any question, there

certainly was, yes. My uncle, Dr. Joyce, going back, Dr. Lewis, Dr. Selling, and I can think of others that, at that particular time, they just, as my uncle would have put it, ruled the roost here in Portland. There were probably no more than fifteen or twenty of them that were the dominant physicians in the city of Portland.

Now, what my uncle had done very successfully was he had gotten a number of these people up here as part-time instructors at the Medical School, and that was part of what helped—because he got top-flight people in the community to come up and help out at a time when the school needed it. Had they hired, or tried to hire, full-time people at the time, financially, I don't know whether they could have managed it or not. And many of these people basically donated much of their time, as far as that's concerned. But it was prestige for them, and it was certainly prestige for the school. And it took a personality like my uncle, again, I think, to draw these people to the place.

WEIMER: I should give you the opportunity, if you would like to add something that I haven't asked. I should put out for the record that we've already had a wonderful conversation earlier, previous to our taped interview, and sometimes when you start thinking of stuff, you think of other things.

WILLHITE: Oh, Linda, I'll undoubtedly think of other things for weeks afterwards. But, in fact, one of the things that I want to do, I want to sit down at the computer sometime for quite a while and write out kind of a verbal summary of what we talked about, or add to it. I've kept a number of my uncle's things; many we haven't. I still have his desk that he had in his office, and his chair and, of course, as I showed you, these articles from the *Sunday Journal* at that particular time, and *The Oregonian* on his death.

It was a great blow to me. His housekeeper called my home. It was on a Saturday morning, and his housekeeper called my home and said that she thought, as she put it, "I think the doctor's gone." Well, I went up there. Why I went up in a hurry, frankly, as I look back on it, I don't know, but I drove up there way too fast and everything, and when I got there, it was obvious he was gone.

So I called Dr. Arthur Berg, who used to practice here in town—in fact, I went to Art for a long time myself, and Art was the physician who actually pronounced my uncle dead. Art unfortunately is now gone himself.

But I have nothing really but fond memories of my uncle. I speak of him all the time. I have little quips that he used to make and comments, some appropriate and some less appropriate [laughs], but all basically pertinent and pointed in situations. So as long as I'm around—and in fact, my daughters feel the same way; they both speak of him as their Uncky and this sort of thing even today.

But he just left great memories with us. He was a great person. He had an ability and a combination of characteristics that are kind of required at a particular time. It's kind of like, in all phases of history, it seems that someone has come forth at a particular time to be a builder

and a creator, and Unk was not a taker. He was not a taker in any way, shape or form. He was a giver and a contributor.

One of his last things, in fact, he did in later years was he headed the then Red Cross drive for the medical profession to get doctors to donate to it, and UGN [United Good Neighbors], and he was often amazed at some of the physicians around who had large incomes at that time who didn't want to give very much, or didn't want to do anything at all.

And in fact, if I look back upon it, I'm sure that instead of donating, if he'd put it in a trust account he had at the Bank of California, he'd have been much better off than he was personally. But he left a trust that will come some day to the Medical School. How much it will be at that time, the market and other factors will have to determine. But it's still there forty-five years after his death, and is dependent upon the death of a couple of other members of the family, including myself, and I don't plan to go real quickly [laughter].

WEIMER: I hope not.

WILLHITE: But I've already talked with the folks over in the office about it, and they know about it, and so one of these days I hope that they will put it to some memorable use in his name.

WEIMER: Dean Dillehunt—and I always think of him as Dean Dillehunt.

WILLHITE: Yeah. That's what they used to call him a lot of places.

WEIMER: He had a remarkable career. He was a builder. If it weren't for him, perhaps this institution wouldn't be where it is or in the present condition. What do you think—I'm asking you as his nephew, what do you think he'd be most proud of during his long tenure as a medical professional?

WILLHITE: [Pause] I guess I would have to say two things. One, assuming that he was a factor in both the growth and continuity of the Medical School, that. But the second would most certainly be his activity at the Shriners Hospital. I think those two would be his crowning achievements.

You see, the fact that the Portland Orthopedic Clinic, which he originally founded along with Dr. [Leo] Lucas and ultimately Dr. [Eldon] Chuinard—Dick Zimmerman, Dr. Zimmerman is head of that today. I don't know what they have, forty-five doctors in it or something like that. In fact, one of them is going to be operating on me again shortly—already has a hip replacement.

But that wasn't dependent upon—somebody just started that. But the Medical School and the Shriners were different stories. They had something to do in the beginning with his personality and capabilities.

WEIMER: It's a lovely tribute for Dean Dillehunt, as it would be for any medical professional.

I'd like to thank you. I think we're going to talk again. I know I'm going to talk to your cousin, I understand, and perhaps we will continue this conversation. But I would like to thank you today for sharing your memories and bringing us some lovely photos and the newspaper articles on the death of your uncle—it was front-page news for *The Oregonian* and *Oregon Journal*—and some of his books. Thank you.

WILLHITE: Well, it has been a pleasure.

[End of Interview]

INDEX

B

Baird, David W.E., 9, 15
Berg, Arthur W., 17

C

Chuinard, Eldon George, 18
Cook County Hospital (Chicago, Ill.), 2
Couch, Ralf, 5

D

Depression, Great, 7
Dillehunt, Richard,
 biographical information, 1, 5, 6, 13-14, 16,
 17-18
 career, 4, 10, 14, 18
 education, 2
 health, 1, 7, 14-15, 17
 military service, 4, 7
 retirement, 9, 15
Doernbecher Memorial Hospital for Children, 7

E

Emanuel Hospital, 5
Erb, Donald M., 6

F

46th Base Hospital, 4

G

Gaines Hall, 1

J

Joyce, Thomas, 8, 17

K

Knox, William S., 12

L

Lewis, Howard (Hod), 9-10, 15, 17
liquor laws, 12
Lucas, Leo S., 18
Luke, Tommy, 6

M

Mackenzie, Kenneth, 4
 family, 3
 residence, 3
Medical School Hospital, 15-16

P

Portland Clinic, 1, 8
Portland Medical Hospital, 1
Portland Orthopedic Clinic, 18
Presbyterian Hospital of the City of Chicago, 2

R

Rush Medical College, 2

S

Selling, Laurence, 15, 17
Shriners Hospital, 5, 6-7, 18
Sprague, Charles A., 6
Strohm, J. Guy, 9

U

University of Oregon Medical School
 administration, 5, 10-11
 art, 15
 buildings, 10
 faculty, volunteer, 5, 17
 funding, 11-12, 12-13, 18
 geography, 3
 move to Marquam Hill, 4
 town-gown relationships, 16-17

INDEX

W

Weeks, John E., 10

West, E. S. (Edward Staunton), 8

Willhite, Ted H.

 biographical information, 1-2, 7, 9

World War I, 4

World War II, 7

Z

Zimmerman, Richard C., 18