

Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

0064: Marshall University Oral History
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

1979

Oral History Interview: Leo Oxley

Leo Oxley

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history

Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-181, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.



ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, Leo E. Oxley, the undersigned, of
Huntington, County of Cabell, State
of West Virginia, grant, convey, and transfer to the James E.
Morrow Library Associates, a division of The Marshall University Foundation,
Inc., an educational and eleemosynary institution, all my right, title,
interest, and literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
February 1, 1979, to be used for scholarly purposes, including
study and rights to reproduction.

J.S.D.
initial

Open and usable after my review.

initial

Closed for a period of _____ years.

initial

Closed for my lifetime.

initial

Closed for my lifetime unless special permission
is gained from me or my assigns.

Date February 1, 1979

[Signature]
(Signature - Interviewee)

525 - 6th Street
Address

Huntington, W. Va. 25701

Date February 1, 1979

[Signature]
(Signature - Witness)



AN INTERVIEW WITH:

Leo Oxley

CONDUCTED BY:

Mark Pope

PLACE:

Huntington, West Virginia

DATE:

February 1, 1979

TRANSCRIBED BY:

Robert R. Ratcliff

Leo Oxley

MP: This is an interview with Leo Oxley, who is a practicing attorney in Huntington, West Virginia. The date today is February 1st, 1979. We are at Mr. Oxley's law office on 6th street in Huntington, West Virginia. My name is Mark Pope.

MP: Mr. Oxley, I wonder if you would mind if I begin by asking you when and where you were born?

LO: I was born in Hurricane, West Virginia, Putnam County, in the year BLEEP. (laughter)

MP: Hurricane, Putnam County. So you are a native West Virginian by birth. Where did you pursue your primary and secondary education?

LO: Well, I began school in Milton and then we moved to Florida and I took about four or five years in Florida and then we returned to West Virginia and I had a year in Hurricane again and then high school in Huntington at Huntington High School.

MP: I see, all three years?

LO: Right.

MP: Were you required to work during your early years in school? In high school? Often we think of West Virginia as a rural society and we think of people working in addition to going to school.

LO: No. I never did work while I was in school.

MP: You were living in Huntington when you graduated from high school, so that led to your going to Marshall University?

LO: That is correct.

MP: Had you decided before you entered Marshall University that you wanted to become a lawyer?

LO: Yes, I thought of and decided I wanted to be a lawyer a good many years back, probably even before I entered high school.

MP: Did you enter Marshall University the same year in which you graduated from high school?

LO: I entered Marshall in 1934. No, I think there might of been a year or two gap there, I'm not sure.

MP: If I might ask this, in that you have mentioned 1934. That would have been in the depression. Were there any peculiar circumstances with regard to your entering Marshall University, in that you did enter in the depression years? Was it very difficult for you to enter?

LO: Well, I don't think so. Of course those depression years were not easy years economically, but I don't remember any particular circumstances or significance in connection with my entering at Marshall.

MP: Mr. Oxley, what was your major as an undergraduate?

LO: Political Science.

MP: Do you recall any of the kinds of courses that you took as a Political Science major? Were there specific Political Science courses that you remember?

LO: Oh, I took most of the Political Sciences courses available from the primary elementary up through American National Government, American State Government and on to more advanced courses in the three and four hundred series, the junior and senior series.

MP: Where did you live while attending Marshall University?

LO: I lived in Huntington.

MP: You went to Marshall, lived at home and did your studying there?

LO: Right.

MP: You were at Marshall University in the late thirties. Were there any professors that stand out in your mind today that were of particular help or encouragement to you?

LO: Well, Dr. Conley Dillon was head of the Political Science Department and of course if you're a Political Science major you tend to get closer to the department heads. I would say Dr. Dillon was an encouragement. And then Dr. M.J. Burnside who later went on to become a Congressman for several terms from this district. He was also in the department and I had a relationship with him. Then I had a lot of speech courses and Professor A. Otis Ransom was an instructor in the Speech Department, at some time maybe in the Drama Department. I never had anything in that but I was on the debate teams and went several places to various speech meets and he usually took the groups, so I had a little closer relationship to Professor Ransom.

MP: Were these debate meets or speech meets? Were most of them in West Virginia or were they sometimes out of the state?

LO: Well, I can remember one in South Carolina. I think Rock Hill, South Carolina at Winthrop College. That's the only one I remember off hand out-state. Others were in Fairmont and others places I don't recall now.

MP: What year did you graduate from Marshall University?

LO: 1938.

MP: What were the circumstances under which you attended the University of Kentucky Law School? Was there any special reason why you went there as opposed to another school?

LO: Well, I had a number of partial scholarships but money was kind of a tight commodity in those days and I think I may have stayed out of Marshall, out of school for a year after graduation. I would have gone to West Virginia University if for no other reason than that you could be admitted to the bar without examination upon graduation from West Virginia University. But because of the character of the winters one could expect in Morgantown, I decided that I would prefer Lexington. Inpart because of that and inpart because I was more attracted to the community of Lexington than I was to Morgantown. Inpart because it was more accessible. Back in those days Morgantown was hard to get to. So, those were some of the reasons why I went to Lexington and the University of Kentucky.

MP: How long were you in Lexington?

LO: Well, I went on a year-round basis. I was there about two and a half years.

MP: So, the course was generally a three year course but you finished in two and one half years?

LO: Three years course. That's right. I went summer terms as well, in order to get through.

MP: Where did you live while in Lexington?

LO: Well, I lived on Maxwell street the first year and then the second year we were married and lived a couple of places in Lexington. On Oldham avenue and I think Lincoln avenue. We had apartments.

MP: Were your apartments close to law school?

LO: Well, the first one was close. But the second one was not particularly close. It was on the east side of town. It was probably a couple of miles from law school.

MP: Mr. Oxley, knowing what you know now about the practice of law and law in general, do you feel that the quality of legal education at Kentucky was notable or impressive?

LO: Well, I think Kentucky had a good law school and still does but those were war years and during at least most of that period when I was in school the enrollment was sharply reduced because most everybody had gone into the armed services. So that was probably not a typical time for a law school anywhere.

MP: What were some of the courses you took in law school?

LO: Oh, it was the general prescribed curriculum of the basic courses. Property, Contracts, Torts, and Constitutional Law. Just the usual run of basic courses. That's all you have ever [take].

MP: Many of the same courses you would probably take today?

LO: Oh, yes.

MP: Did you use the case book method at that point?

LO: Right. Of course they had text books with abbreviated cases. They would excerpt them and then instead of a long opinion you'd have maybe a, whatever was involved in that particular case, this would be the portion of the opinion that was incorporated in the case book.

MP: Were there any professors at U.K. Law School that particularly stand out in your mind, as being of particular help to you?

LO: Well, yes. There was a Roy Morland who taught in the field of criminal law and domestic relations and there was Frank Murry who taught in Contracts. Of course you remember perhaps undergraduate professors. I wasn't close to many of them. I was probably closer to those two than to any others.

MP: Were these professors men who were full time professors or were they individuals who were employed part-time and then practiced law on the side, to your knowledge?

LO: I think all the faculty was full time. Then I was involved with the Kentucky Law Journal and in that capacity worked closer with some of them than others.

MP: Did you feel at the time of your law school studies that you had been prepared adequately by your undergraduate education at Marshall?

LO: Oh, I think so. I think it was a typical education. A typical prelaw course. I never got into the science courses much. I wasn't interested in those and that wasn't the field I was planning to get into so, I think the Marshall program was entirely adequate.

MP: Did you feel that you were able, let's say, to compete with the other students in law school from other schools?

LO: Oh, I think so. I think I did well enough. I don't remember all those grades but it was predominantly A's and B's with a sprinkling of C's along the way.

MP: When did you graduate from U.K. Law School?

LO: That would have been in forty-two, I think.

MP: We understand that you did your undergraduate work at Marshall. Subsequent to that you attended the University of Kentucky Law School. You graduated very successfully as your record indicates and then you had an opportunity to begin your legal career in New York City. Would you mind explaining how that came to be and what your experience was there?

LO: Well, on graduation, this was in the midst of the war and there was a good deal of interest in lawyers. I'd always heard that getting into the practice of law was sort of a starvation process, so I had more in mind getting into a law department. So I wrote a number of letters to various corporations where I thought there might be an opening, among them Ashland Oil. There was also a man in Lexington who had an office there, who was head of the Ashland Oil law department. Of course Ashland Oil was much, much than it is today. But among those that indicated an interest was Ashland Oil, so I started soon after graduation, with a job at the law department of Ashland Oil, in the Ashland Oil home office in Ashland. And there I dealt mainly with leases and lease renewals. It wasn't terrible legal, the type of work. It was semi-clerical I suppose. It was a beginning in learning how they and renewed their leases. I stayed there not too long because I lived in Huntington. It was to find housing and then I had some housing responsibilities in relation to my mother particularly. And it wasn't all that convenient to make a living transition from Huntington to Ashland. So in part, because I wasn't all that enamored with the, the type of work and in part because of family requirements, I put in an application with Sylvania-Electric. It had a large operation in Huntington at that time. It was war related. So, they hired me on as sort of a legal advisor in the Huntington plant. That's where the C & O now has their headquarters. They had several thousand employees. There I did various things, more legal really, than I had done at Ashland Oil, like leases and gun permits for their guards and, more particular, involved with labor relations. I worked some with the people in New York, out of the New York office that were in charge of labor relations and workman's compensation. It was a scattering of things that might come up in connection with an operation of that sort. But it was more a legal thing. I had a little cubicle office of my own. And of course I wasn't there too long until the war ended and when the war ended I was transferred, or had an opportunity to transfer, to the New York home office because they tried to place, I suppose, some of their people. And I stayed there, not very long either, about, maybe a couple of months. I wasn't really attracted to either the prospects or the living prospects in New York, so after, really about a couple of months, which were perhaps insignificant, it was more just a matter of trying to get your feet on the ground, get oriented. There wasn't really much responsibility during that period of time. I decided to come back to Huntington and make a break for an office of my own, which I did.

MP: So you returned to Huntington to practice law privately. That was your goal and you'd had some experience by that time in working with a couple of companies in legal capacities. How did you come to be reassociated with Marshall University?

LO: Well, I opened an office and of course you open an office and you hope and expect that may be some business will come your way. I did know people in Huntington. Pretty soon there was a little trickle of business. But by that time the war had ended and there was a big influx of veterans. So they had some need for. They had some part time instructors at Marshall in the Political Science department teaching evening classes and one of those instructors happened to drop out for reasons of illness or some other reason and Dr. Burnside knew that I was in town and of course knew of my connection with the department as a student. He asked me to come on to the Marshall faculty as a member teaching one or two evening classes, to take the place of this man who had dropped out. This I did, perhaps in the spring of the year. Finished out that semester into June, probably into June. And then the influx of veterans continued, and the next fall. I guess it was, perhaps for that, the following year, beginning in September and then the following years, I taught a full load at Marshall in the Political Science department.

MP: And at the end of that year, was that pretty much the end of your experience as an instructor at Marshall?

LO: Well, two years.

MP: Mr. Oxley, what were some of the courses you were involved in teaching at Marshall?

LO: Well, I taught the basic Political Science 101 and 102. One--oh--one is sort of a basic elementary orientation course and 102 was, at that time, more or less a public affairs. It was really almost an orientation course with reference to news and its political implications. And then the second year courses were, the basic ones were National Government 201 and maybe what they called 202, State Government, which are probably still basic and then I taught some more advanced courses, like public opinion, and I think we had one in propaganda. But of course these basic courses had a huge influx of students. There'd be fifty or more students in these courses. The main load was these early elementary courses.

MP: Did you keep your law office open while you were instructing at Marshall?

LO: Yes I did. I was able to arrange a schedule, I guess with their co-operation, and I put most of the classes on two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday, which made those very heavy days. I'd start in at eight o'clock and go almost straight through to about three and maybe an evening course or so, but because of the concentration of the teaching load on two days a week, I had the other days

relatively free. And then, of course, whatever remained of Tuesday and Thursday.

MP: And, as now, you were then practicing law on your own, private practice?

LO: Right.

MP: Did you have to take the bar exam when you returned to practice in West Virginia?

LO: Right. I had taken the Kentucky Bar. Kentucky provided and allowed students to take the bar examination, I believe at the end of their second year. So, of course, students from the University would take it at the first opportunity and I took it and passed the Kentucky bar. And then when I came back to West Virginia, I think they gave it twice a year. One time was in September. I took it then and passed it. That had to be before you could practice here.

MP: What kind of legal services have you been generally involved with in your private practice?

LO: Well, the first work experience in the beginning was with title work, that's checking titles, examining titles, deeds and writing deeds, deeds of trust and wills and that sort of thing. And of course in those days you'd get a smattering of various things. Some criminal stuff, which I never really wanted to get into. Some trial work. But so far as the office portion was concerned, I was concentrated, I would say, more in real estate and adoptions and that sort of thing. And of course I could have had a lot of divorce work if I'd wanted it but I've always shyed away from that. And there was some domestic relations back in those early years that tended to be shuted aside and I don't do any of that now. I could have developed a lot of that.

MP: Domestic relations, meaning...?

LO: Well, divorce. Divorce practice.

MP: Have the kinds of legal services that you provided, as to their nature, remained pretty much the same over the years?

LO: Right.

MP: Can you think of noticable changes in the legal system or the practice of law that you've witnessed over the past, lets say, twenty years?

LO: Well, of course one big change in that period of time has been the simplification of the pleading process. They've gone from the old style pleading to the modern simplified pleading. That probably is one of the significant things that has happened in that period of time. Where you just state in ordinary simple English what your complaint and answer is. Course they've gone to rules of practice and procedure modeled or patterned after the federal rules. These are some of the changes that I've seen in that period of time.

MP: Have you had much experience with the Cabell County Court House as an institution that holds records and that sort of thing? Is this one reason why you've located here?

LO: Oh yeah! Most lawyers tend to locate with some proximity to the Court House.

MP: And have you been here since your early years in law practice?

LO: Well, I've just been in two places. I was in a building at the corner of ninth street and sixth avenue in the beginning and then, sometime probably in the late fifties, I moved to this location and I've been here ever since.

MP: It's generally believed that the practice of law requires a constant lifestyle on the part of the lawyer that would require him to keep up with all the latest information that is coming from courts and legislatures. Has this been your experience in the practice of law?

LO: Well, I'd say it's virtually impossible to keep up really and adequately with all. And there is such a torrent of stuff that comes through. You can just hope to do the best you can. You just wish that you could do it better. And I think there's an increasing tendency to specialize in the practice of law just like there has been in medicine. I think in earlier days people tended to be general practitioners but without anybody particularly holding themselves out to be that; I think circumstances tend to put people into fields where they tend to specialize.

MP: Mr. Oxley, do you consider yourself as being a general practitioner today and have you been over the years?

LO: I think I would be classified as that but in these later years there's been a tendency to have a greater proportion of work fall into the prolate realm.

MP: Having to do with wills?

LO: Right, and estates. So that a larger proportion of work has fallen into that category. But then there's enough other things, like real estate, corporate work and that sort of thing, that would make it, I suppose, really a general practice. So there is specialization in that sense. I mean there is generalization in that sense.

AN INTERVIEW WITH:

Leo Oxley

CONDUCTED BY:

Mark Pope

PLACE:

Huntington, West Virginia

DATE:

February 1, 1979

TRANSCRIBED BY:

Robert R. Ratcliff

Leo Oxley

MP: This is an interview with Leo Oxley, who is a practicing attorney in Huntington, West Virginia. The date today is February 1st, 1979. We are at Mr. Oxley's law office on 6th street in Huntington, West Virginia. My name is Mark Pope.

MP: Mr. Oxley, I wonder if you would mind if I begin by asking you when and where you were born?

LO: I was born in Hurricane, West Virginia, Putnam County, in the year BLEEP. (laughter)

MP: Hurricane, Putnam County. So you are a native West Virginian by birth. Where did you pursue your primary and secondary education?

LO: Well, I began school in Milton and then we moved to Florida and I took about four or five years in Florida and then we returned to West Virginia and I had a year in Hurricane again and then high school in Huntington at Huntington High School.

MP: I see, all three years?

LO: Right.

MP: Were you required to work during your early years in school? In high school? Often we think of West Virginia as a rural society and we think of people working in addition to going to school.

LO: No. I never did work while I was in school.

MP: You were living in Huntington when you graduated from high school, so that led to your going to Marshall University?

LO: That is correct.

MP: Had you decided before you entered Marshall University that you wanted to become a lawyer?

LO: Yes, I thought of and decided I wanted to be a lawyer a good many years back, probably even before I entered high school.

MP: Did you enter Marshall University the same year in which you graduated from high school?

LO: I entered Marshall in 1934. No, I think there might of been a year or two gap there, I'm not sure.

MP: If I might ask this, in that you have mentioned 1934. That would have been in the depression. Were there any peculiar circumstances with regard to your entering Marshall University, in that you did enter in the depression years? Was it very difficult for you to enter?

LO: Well, I don't think so. Of course those depression years were not easy years economically, but I don't remember any particular circumstances or significance in connection with my entering at Marshall.

MP: Mr. Oxley, what was your major as an undergraduate?

LO: Political Science.

MP: Do you recall any of the kinds of courses that you took as a Political Science major? Were there specific Political Science courses that you remember?

LO: Oh, I took most of the Political Sciences courses available from the primary elementary up through American National Government, American State Government and on to more advanced courses in the three and four hundred series, the junior and senior series.

MP: Where did you live while attending Marshall University?

LO: I lived in Huntington.

MP: You went to Marshall, lived at home and did your studying there?

LO: Right.

MP: You were at Marshall University in the late thirties. Were there any professors that stand out in your mind today that were of particular help or encouragement to you?

LO: Well, Dr. Conley Dillon was head of the Political Science Department and of course if you're a Political Science major you tend to get closer to the department heads. I would say Dr. Dillon was an encouragement. And then Dr. M.J. Burnside who later went on to become a Congressman for several terms from this district. He was also in the department and I had a relationship with him. Then I had a lot of speech courses and Professor A. Otis Ransom was an instructor in the Speech Department, at some time maybe in the Drama Department. I never had anything in that but I was on the debate teams and went several places to various speech meets and he usually took the groups, so I had a little closer relationship to Professor Ransom.

MP: Were these debate meets or speech meets? Were most of them in West Virginia or were they sometimes out of the state?

LO: Well, I can remember one in South Carolina. I think Rock Hill, South Carolina at Winthrop College. That's the only one I remember off hand out-state. Others were in Fairmont and others places I don't recall now.

MP: What year did you graduate from Marshall University?

MP: YES.

MP: What were the circumstances under which you attended the University of Kentucky Law School? Was there any special reason why you went there as opposed to another school?

LO: Well, I had a number of partial scholarships but money was kind of a tight commodity in those days and I think I may have stayed out of Marshall, out of school for a year after graduation. I would have gone to West Virginia University if for no other reason than that you could be admitted to the bar without examination upon graduation from West Virginia University. But because of the character of the winters one could expect in Morgantown, I decided that I would prefer Lexington. Inpart because of that and inpart because I was more attracted to the community of Lexington than I was to Morgantown. Inpart because it was more accessible. Back in those days Morgantown was hard to get to. So, those were some of the reasons why I went to Lexington and the University of Kentucky.

MP: How long were you in Lexington?

LO: Well, I went on a year-round basis. I was there about two and a half years.

MP: So, the course was generally a three year course but you finished in two and one half years?

LO: Three years course. That's right. I went summer terms as well, in order to get through.

MP: Where did you live while in Lexington?

LO: Well, I lived on Maxwell street the first year and then the second year we were married and lived a couple of places in Lexington. On Oldham avenue and I think Lincoln avenue. We had apartments.

MP: Were your apartments close to law school?

LO: Well, the first one was close. But the second one was not particularly close. It was on the east side of town. It was probably a couple of miles from law school.

MP: Mr. Oxley, knowing what you know now about the practice of law and law in general, do you feel that the quality of legal education at Kentucky was notable or impressive?

LO: Well, I think Kentucky had a good law school and still does but those were war years and during at least most of that period when I was in school the enrollment was sharply reduced because most everybody had gone into the armed services. So that was probably not a typical time for a law school anywhere.

MP: What were some of the courses you took in law school?

LO: Oh, it was the general prescribed curriculum of the basic courses. Property, Contracts, Torts, and Constitutional Law. Just the usual run of basic courses. That's all you have ever [take].

MP: Many of the same courses you would probably take today?

LO: Oh, yes.

MP: Did you use the case Cool method at that point?

LO: Right. Of course they had text books with abbreviated cases. They would excerpt them and then instead of a long opinion you'd have maybe a, whatever was involved in that particular course, this would be the portion of the opinion that was incorporated in the case book.

MP: Were there any professors at U.K. Law School that particularly stand out in your mind, as being of particular help to you?

LO: Well, yes. There was a Roy Morland who taught in the field of criminal law and domestic relations and there was Frank Murry who taught in Contracts. Of course you remember perhaps undergraduate professors. I wasn't close to many of them. I was probably closer to those two than to any others.

MP: Were these professors men who were full time professors or were they individuals who were employed part-time and then practiced law on the side, to your knowledge?

LO: I think all the faculty was full time. Then I was involved with the Kentucky Law Journal and in that capacity worked closer with some of them than others.

MP: Did you feel at the time of your law school studies that you had been prepared adequately by your undergraduate education at Marshall?

LO: Oh, I think so. I think it was a typical education. A typical prelaw course. I never got into the science courses much. I wasn't interested in those and that wasn't the field I was planning to get into so, I think the Marshall program was entirely adequate.

MP: Did you feel that you were able, lets say, to compete with the other students in law school from other schools?

LO: Oh, I think so. I think I did well enough. I don't remember all those grades but it was predominantly A's and B's with a sprinkling of C's along the way.

MP: When did you graduate from U.K. Law School?

LO: That would have been in forty-two, I think.

MP: We understand that you did your undergraduate work at Marshall. Subsequent to that you attended the University of Kentucky Law School. You graduated very successfully as your record indicates and then you had an opportunity to begin your legal career in New York City. Would you mind explaining how that came to be and what your experience was there?

LO: Well, on graduation, this was in the midst of the war and there was a good deal of interest in lawyers. I'd always heard that getting into the practice of law was sort of a starvation process, so I had more in mind getting into a law department. So I wrote a number of letters to various corporations where I thought there might be an opening, among them Ashland Oil. There was also a man in Lexington who had an office there, who was head of the Ashland Oil law department. Of course Ashland Oil was much, much than it is today. But among those that indicated an interest was Ashland Oil, so I started soon after graduation, with a job at the law department of Ashland Oil, in the Ashland Oil home office in Ashland. And there I dealt mainly with leases and lease renewals. It wasn't terrible legal, the type of work. It was semi-clerical I suppose. It was a beginning in learning how they and renewed their leases. I stayed there not too long because I lived in Huntington. It was to find housing and then I had some housing responsibilities in relation to my mother particularly. And it wasn't all that convenient to make a living transition from Huntington to Ashland. So in part, because I wasn't all that enamored with the, the type of work and in part because of family requirements, I put in an application with Sylvania-Electric. It had a large operation in Huntington at that time. It was war related. So, they hired me on as sort of a legal advisor in the Huntington plant. That's where the C & O now has their headquarters. They had several thousand employees. There I did various things, more legal really, than I had done at Ashland Oil, like leases and gun permits for their guards and, more particular, involved with labor relations. I worked some with the people in New York, out of the New York office that were in charge of labor relations and workman's compensation. It was a scattering of things that might come up in connection with an operation of that sort. But it was more a legal thing. I had a little cubicle office of my own. And of course I wasn't there too long until the war ended and when the war ended I was transferred, or had an opportunity to transfer, to the New York home office because they tried to place, I suppose, some of their people. And I stayed there, not very long either, about, maybe a couple of months. I wasn't really attracted to either the prospects or the living prospects in New York, so after, really about a couple of months, which were perhaps insignificant, it was more just a matter of trying to get your feet on the ground, get oriented. There wasn't really much responsibility during that period of time. I decided to come back to Huntington and make a break for an office of my own, which I did.

MP: So you returned to Huntington to practice law privately. That was your goal and you'd had some experience by that time in working with a couple of companies in legal capacities. How did you come to be reassociated with Marshall University?

LO: Well, I opened an office and of course you open an office and you hope and expect that may be some business will come your way. I did know people in Huntington. Pretty soon there was a little trickle of business. But by that time the war had ended and there was a big influx of veterans. So they had some need for. They had some part time instructors at Marshall in the Political Science department teaching evening classes and one of those instructors happened to drop out for reasons of illness or some other reason and Dr. Burnside knew that I was in town and of course knew of my connection with the department as a student. He asked me to come on to the Marshall faculty as a member teaching one or two evening classes, to take the place of this man who had dropped out. This I did, perhaps in the spring of the year. Finished out that semester into June, probably into June. And then the influx of veterans continued, and the next fall. I guess it was, perhaps for that, the following year, beginning in September and then the following years, I taught a full load at Marshall in the Political Science department.

MP: And at the end of that year, was that pretty much the end of your experience as an instructor at Marshall?

LO: Well, two years.

MP: Mr. Oxley, what were some of the courses you were involved in teaching at Marshall?

LO: Well, I taught the basic Political Science 101 and 102. One--oh--one is sort of a basic elementary orientation course and 102 was, at that time, more or less a public affairs. It was really almost an orientation course with reference to news and its political implications. And then the second year courses were, the basic ones were National Government 201 and maybe what they called 202, State Government, which are probably still basic and then I taught some more advanced courses, like public opinion, and I think we had one in propaganda. But of course these basic courses had a huge influx of students. There'd be fifty or more students in these courses. The main load was these early elementary courses.

MP: Did you keep your law office open while you were instructing at Marshall?

LO: Yes I did. I was able to arrange a schedule, I guess with their co-operation, and I put most of the classes on two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday, which made those very heavy days. I'd start in at eight o'clock and go almost straight through to about three and maybe an evening course or so, but because of the concentration of the teaching load on two days a week, I had the other days

relatively free. And then, of course, whatever remained of Tuesday and Thursday.

MP: And, as now, you were then practicing law on your own, private practice?

LO: Right.

MP: Did you have to take the bar exam when you returned to practice in West Virginia?

LO: Right. I had taken the Kentucky Bar. Kentucky provided an allowed students to take the bar examination, I believe at the end of their second year. So, of course, students from the University would take it at the first opportunity and I took it and passed the Kentucky bar. And then when I came back to West Virginia, I think they gave it twice a year. One time was in September. I took it then and passed it. That had to be before you could practice here.

MP: What kind of legal services have you been generally involved with in your private practice?

LO: Well, the first work experience in the beginning was with title work, that's checking titles, examining titles, deeds and writing deeds, deeds of trust and wills and that sort of thing. And of course in those days you'd get a smattering of various things. Some criminal stuff, which I never really wanted to get into. Some trial work. But so far as the office portion was concerned, I was concentrated, I would say, more in real estate and adoptions and that sort of thing. And of course I could have had a lot of divorce work if I'd wanted it but I've always shyed away from that. And there was some domestic relations back in those early years that tended to be shuted aside and I don't do any of that now. I could have developed a lot of that.

MP: Domestic relations, meaning...?

LO: Well, divorce. Divorce practice.

MP: Have the kinds of legal services that you provided, as to their nature, remained pretty much the same over the years?

LO: Right.

MP: Can you think of noticable changes in the legal system or the practice of law that you've witnessed over the past, lets say, twenty years?

LO: Well, of course one big change in that period of time has been the simplification of the pleading process. They've gone from the old style pleading to the modern simplified pleading. That probably is one of the significant things that has happened in that period of time. Where you just state in ordinary simple English what your complaint and answer is. Course they've gone to rules of practice and procedure modeled or patterned after the federal rules. These are some of the changes that I've seen in that period of time.

MP: Have you had much experience with the Cabell County Court House as an institution that holds records and that sort of thing? Is this one reason why you've located here?

LO: Oh yeah! Most lawyers tend to locate with some proximity to the Court House.

MP: And have you been here since your early years in law practice?

LO: Well, I've just been in two places. I was in a building at the corner of ninth street and sixth avenue in the beginning and then, sometime probably in the late fifties, I moved to this location and I've been here ever since.

MP: It's generally believed that the practice of law requires a constant lifestyle on the part of the lawyer that would require him to keep up with all the latest information that is coming from courts and legislatures. Has this been your experience in the practice of law?

LO: Well, I'd say it's virtually impossible to keep up really and adequately with all. And there is such a torrent of stuff that comes through. You can just hope to do the best you can. You just wish that you could do it better. And I think there's an increasing tendency to specialize in the practice of law just like there has been in medicine. I think in earlier days people tended to be general practitioners but without anybody particularly holding themselves out to be that; I think circumstances tend to put people into fields where they tend to specialize.

MP: Mr. Oxley, do you consider yourself as being a general practitioner today and have you been over the years?

LO: I think I would be classified as that but in these later years there's been a tendency to have a greater proportion of work fall into the prolate realm.

MP: Having to do with wills?

LO: Right, and estates. So that a larger proportion of work has fallen into that category. But then there's enough other things, like real estate, corporate work and that sort of thing, that would make it, I suppose, really a general practice. So there is specialization in that sense. I mean there is generalization in that sense.

But where you think in terms of domestic relations and bankruptcy and criminal practice, almost none of these are in it so in that sense, and by reason of that, there some specialization too.

MP: Do you still think there's a place for lawyers, especially in West Virginia, who would desire to practice individually and work by themselves?

LO: Oh, I think there is, but I would suppose that a group or partnership practice would probably be a little easier and a little more lucrative than an individual or solo practice would be. Of course, everybody has to do it there way, I suppose, but if I were advising somebody else I would suggest that if they could make a group arrangement or partnership arrangement, it would be desirable rather than a completely solo operation.

MP: What have been some of the most rewarding moments in your legal career?

LO: Oh, it would be hard for me to really look on any particularly memorable moment. It's been a satisfying thing but I don't think of any great heights or any great achievements that I would count as such because I have had other diverse interests and I wouldn't really site any great moments of achievement. I've enjoyed doing it.

MP: Having taught at Marshall for a brief period, having gone to school there and having practiced law in West Virginia for these many years, do you think it's a feasible prospect for Marshall University to establish a law school?

LO: I would tend to doubt it to be perfectly honest because I would suspect that there are probably a lot of lawyers. That the pipeline is probably pretty full of them. I just seriously doubt that there is any really need. Not that, maybe, a successful law school couldn't be set up here but I doubt if it is a need that is really critical. Because there are other schools. Not only West Virginia University, but there are other schools like the University of Kentucky. Course, it's hard to get in an out of state school. It's hard to get in an instate school for that matter, now, because they're probably swamped with applications and they have to be more selective. So, in the sense that it might provide opportunity for more students, this may be justification for a school at Marshall and if Marshall had a school and if it farmed out graduates, then they would do as well as, probably, graduates of other schools. It be just a matter of supply and demand.

MP: Do you think it would be rewarding for you to teach law?

LO: Well, no, I haven't really given any consideration to that because I think in order to be qualified to teach you'd have to have an advanced degree. I think you'd have to have something beyond just

a law degree. And, I would enjoy teaching probably because I could find some enjoyment in teaching generally. But I've just never had any particular thought of doing it. And accept as I would enjoy teaching in a general sense, therefore, if an opportunity, I might enjoy teaching law, but I just never felt that I was sufficiently trained to find that satisfying.

MP: Thank you very much Mr. Oxley. This concludes our interview with Leo Oxley, a practicing attorney in Huntington, West Virginia.

January 21, 1994

Dear Mr. Oxley,

On February 1, 1979 you were interviewed by Mark Pope for the Marshall University Oral History Office. At this time, we would like to get your approval to make the interview available to the public. If you would like to review the transcript, please let us know and we would be happy to send you a copy. If we do not hear from you, we will assume that you do not wish to review the transcript and we will make it available in the Morrow Library Special Collections.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Barbara Smith, Director
Oral History of
Appalachia Program

AUTHORIZATION FORM: (Please check one of the following options and return to Marshall University Oral History Department, Smith Hall, Care of Dr. Barbara Smith, Huntington, WV 25755-2678)

- _____ Release the transcript without my review
_____ Release the transcript and send me a copy
_____ Send a copy of the transcript and wait for my review

Signature _____ Date _____



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

JAMES E. MORROW LIBRARY
ASSOCIATES

ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, Leo E. Oxley, the undersigned, of
Huntington, County of Cabell, State
of West Virginia, grant, convey, and transfer to the James E.
Morrow Library Associates, a division of The Marshall University Foundation,
Inc., an educational and eleemosynary institution, all my right, title,
interest, and literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
February 1, 1979, to be used for scholarly purposes, including
study and rights to reproduction.

L.E.O.
initial

Open and usable after my review.

initial

Closed for a period of _____ years.

initial

Closed for my lifetime.

initial

Closed for my lifetime unless special permission
is gained from me or my assigns.

Date February 1, 1979

[Signature]
(Signature - Interviewee)

525 - 6th Street
Address

Huntington, W. Va. 25701

Date February 1, 1979

[Signature]
(Signature - Witness)