

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES GANTT FAUSETT

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Southern Polytechnic State University Series, No. 17
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TS: The interview today is with Jim Fausett, a longtime member of the faculty at Southern Tech and then Southern Polytechnic State University. Jim, let's start by asking you about your background, where you grew up, where you went to school, and maybe some mentors along the way.

JF: Tom, I appreciate your contacting me and giving me the opportunity to share some of my life and experiences in architecture and education. I'm a native of Georgia. At the age of ten my family moved from Macon, Georgia, to Coral Gables, Florida. My dad had graduated from pharmacy school back in the twenties, and he opened the first pharmacy on Miami Beach. He did well for several years, and then the Depression hit, and he had to sell the drugstore and move back to Georgia. That's where he opened a pharmacy and he and my mom were married. I'm an old-timer who was born in the late 1930s and enjoyed elementary school in Georgia and then middle school and high school in south Florida. I think one of the great mentors of my life was my dad. He was an extensive reader. He loved architecture and construction. He was a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright. I did not know who Frank Lloyd Wright was at the time when I was a teenager, but every time he had the opportunity to share something he had read about Frank Lloyd Wright, he passed it to me. I also liked to draw and sketch.

One interesting thing is that when we were still living in Macon, my next-door neighbor was a very talented artist. She would get the kids together around her breakfast room table, and we would draw and paint after school frequently on weekdays. She kept pointing to me, and she said, "You really have some artistic talent. You need to develop that." So I wanted to become more proficient in drawing and sketching. So my parents went to the head of the art department, Professor [Emil] Holzhauer [professor of art, 1942-1953] at Wesleyan College.¹ Amazingly, he looked over my work and said, "This young man has talent. I'm going to see what we might do for him through the college." He was teaching an afternoon class of college students, and he said, "I'm going to make an exception, and I'm going to admit you to that college class." I think I was about nine years old, and at the time I was not impressed with the value of what he did for me. But I went two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, and studied under Professor Holzhauer.

I mentioned that we moved to south Florida. In high school I took art courses along with some other things that would prepare you for architecture. My high school art teacher said, "You need to study architecture. I think you have a bright future." So with my father's mentoring and my high school art teacher, I decided to search for architectural

¹ "Emil Holzhauer: Evidence of His Macon Life," article about upcoming art exhibition, January 27-March 4, 2011, *Wesleyan Magazine*, Winter 2010.

schools after high school. The summer of my junior year we visited the University of Florida, Georgia Tech, and Auburn. The University of Florida's Architecture Department was in some old World War II buildings that looked like they were falling down. That didn't inspire me as a young student. Georgia Tech was right downtown. I had grown up in the Miami area, and I really wanted to go to a smaller town. So Auburn seemed to be the perfect place to study. I'm pleased that I went there. I went through their five-year program. It was an accredited program at the time. I was also in ROTC and was commissioned in the Air Force and served through the Vietnam time. While I was at Auburn, I thought, "If you could practice architecture and also teach architecture, it would be a wonderful career." I was married at the time I was in the service. After leaving the Air Force, we returned to my wife's home town of Albany, Georgia, and I became an intern in a firm. I became a licensed architect and a partner in the architectural firm of Gaston & Fausett. We had about twelve employees, and that was large for a firm outside of Atlanta. I felt like I got well-grounded in architectural practice.

TS: What year would you be getting out of the Air Force?

JF: I got out of the Air Force in '68.

TS: So you were about thirty years old by that time?

JF: That's correct. I mentioned earlier that I had a keen interest in practicing architecture and teaching, so I contacted Georgia Tech. They asked me to come up for an interview in the spring. They said, "We have a place for you, and we'd like for you to come back in the summer." I went back during the summer of '71. They talked to me, and they said, "You have been a practicing architect with experience. We have a new bachelor's degree out at Southern Tech, a branch of Georgia Tech, and we feel like you would be in a proper place if you were to teach there." My wife and I came up, and we went out for an interview and were very pleased with the people we met. I decided to sign a contract to teach. That was with Georgia Tech at that time. In the fall of 1971 I became a professor. I can't recall the title. I think it may have been an associate professor at the time. The architectural curriculum was in the process of being developed because the institution was going from two-year associate degrees to four-year bachelor's degrees. I was given the responsibility of developing a number of architectural engineering technology courses.

TS: Did you have a separate department of architecture?

JF: We had an Architectural Engineering Technology Department. We could not call the program architecture because it required a higher level of accreditation than Southern Tech had at that time. So it was wonderful to be on the ground plane when the four-year bachelor's degree came about. We were teaching students primarily to work in architectural firms. Many of the graduates would go into construction. It was a very practical program where we were trying to teach the nuts and bolts of architecture. We stressed very heavily building materials; we had structural design; we had electrical,

mechanical, and then some courses in drawing. I actually introduced the design courses, which would allow students initially to start out designing residences and then go into more complex type buildings. Then they would do a senior project, which was a very comprehensive major building project.

TS: What happened to your firm in Albany?

JF: It continued. Some other people stepped in and took my place after I left. It was very prosperous. One very interesting thing when I was there: The governor's office needed to be renovated, and Jimmy Carter had been elected governor. We knew him because he lived just a few miles up the road in Plains. He hired our firm to redesign the governor's office in the state Capitol. Fairly recently, I visited the Governor's Office and it looks very similar to what it did back in the 1970s. They've updated a few things. That was a fun project.

TS: Did you remain a partner in the firm even though you were up here?

JF: Well, I terminated the partnership. One thing that was very encouraging here at Southern Tech is the administration encouraged the faculty to practice their professions. I really think that was a wise thing to do because I felt like I could not be an effective teacher unless I was practicing in my profession. I learned a lot, and then I could bring that to the classroom.

TS: I did an interview with Charles T. "Hap" Holladay over the phone. He's down on the coast of South Carolina. He did the same thing. He continued to work on the side until the side work became so much that he left teaching to do his practice. A lot of faculty at the time seemed to be stronger on practical experience than having a whole lot of degrees after their names.

JF: That is correct. We had mostly faculty with bachelor's degrees. Some had a master's degree. We didn't have anyone in architecture with a PhD, but there were some on campus.

TS: Right. So you were really building a program. What did Southern Tech offer in architecture before you got here as a two-year school? Did it offer an introduction to architecture or what kind of courses were they offering?

JF: It was mainly training people to be draftsmen or drafters in offices. They had a lot of drawing courses. They had some in building materials, but there were no design courses.

TS: So you developed the original design courses?

JF: That is correct. I had the good fortune of being the originator of the design courses here.

- TS: Why don't you talk about what it was like on campus back in the 1970s in those early years? You've got a four-year program, but you still aren't independent of Georgia Tech and have a relatively small student body and relatively small faculty. Talk about what it was like.
- JF: Well, there were 1,700 students when I came in '71. I believe there were about five of us in the architectural engineering technology program. Chester R. Orvold headed the program and Bob Myatt taught the structural courses. We had Eddie J. Muller who taught the drawing courses, and George Melvin, who was a practicing architect, was also on the faculty, and Doug Newman and myself. I think that brings us up to about six faculty. I think Orvold may have been the original department head when the institute was over in Chamblee.
- TS: Yes he was a charter faculty member. Seventeen hundred students is a pretty decent size.
- JF: Seventeen hundred was campus-wide. We had several hundred in architecture.
- TS: What about the students back in the 1970s?
- JF: The students have always been wonderful here. I think many of them have been very serious about getting a degree and being able to practice the profession which they were trained for. We had mostly Georgia students, many in the metro Atlanta area, but some from other parts around the state. We had two dormitories at the time, and they were for the students that were in our programs and lived on campus.
- TS: I know by the 1970s Kennesaw had a tremendous number of non-traditional students. We may have had more than you because most of our non-traditional students were female. I don't think you had a whole lot of females on your campus.
- JF: You are correct. We had very few females here. Fortunately, that has changed over the year. It seems to me in my early years I counted seven females in all of the classes I was teaching.
- TS: Not too many in architecture at that time, I guess.
- JF: There were not. It has changed drastically.
- TS: You talked about going from art to architecture. I would think there would be a lot of females that might want to take that route.
- JF: I don't think females were encouraged to study architecture back then. There were a lot of other curriculums they were advised to pursue. Fortunately, that has changed, and today we've got a number of females.
- TS: What about ethnicity? Were they all white or did you have a few blacks in architecture?

- JF: Initially we did not. We had all Caucasians, white males and a few females, but over a period of time that did change. We got African Americans, and I can share with you that during the Iranian conflict there were so many people that left Iran and came to the United States that we had a massive influx of students here on the Southern Tech campus. In fact I made the comment that I could call class roll and say “Muhammad,” and 50 percent of the class would answer. That is pretty much a true fact. We had a great rapport with these students. They were extremely strong math students. They had gotten a good background. But I think they struggled with the design somewhat because this was a whole new experience. They had been living in a culture of Middle Eastern design, which is what they were familiar with. We were probably much more a modern and contemporary here. But they began to grasp those concepts and studied some history, and they became good students.
- TS: Wow. We had quite a few on the Kennesaw campus as well. I guess they were mainly math majors and science majors, but they had to take the general education courses. So I saw plenty of them in U.S. History classes. They were much stronger in math than they were in English skills at that point, but they were a hard working group. If you gave them a little bit of help, they’d take advantage of it.
- JF: That’s right. They were very dedicated students and anxious to get an education.
- TS: Do you remember the bathtub races on campus?
- JF: Very much so. That was a highlight of our year. Different student groups would take a cast iron bathtub and place it on wheels. I understand originally these were pushed by hand, but when I arrived they were motorized. The bathtub race was something that we all looked forward to. I have heard that some years into the bathtub racing era we had as many as 10,000 people on campus. I actually had friends contact me from other places, even other states, and say, “We’re coming up to see the bathtub race.” It was a big event.
- TS: I know where the road runs now, but how did the road run for the bathtub races?
- JF: When I came to the campus it was one big loop all around the campus, and all the buildings were inside that loop. Well, the bathtub race was a continuous race around that loop. I don’t know how many laps they had to run, but they would stage the bathtubs, and people could come down and look at them before the race started. Generally, different organizations on campus built these bathtubs. I think we had some fraternal organization that would compete. Maybe mechanical engineers had a tub in there. I think the architects volunteered as assistants with the others. We weren’t quite clever enough to build our own bathtubs.
- TS: That was for the engineering technology students.
- JF: You are correct. There were some great tubs.
- TS: I know somewhere along the line they decided there was an insurance liability issue.

JF: Yes, there was. Unfortunately a lady was hurt. I think she stepped out in front of a tub and was injured and was hospitalized.

TS: I would hate to be run over by a bathtub.

JF: That would be a once in a lifetime experience. After that they began to look at the liability, and they discontinued it.²

TS: The Architecture Building now isn't where it was then, is it? Where were you before the new building opened?

JF: We were up the hill in one of the original buildings that opened in October 1961. When I arrived, we were a very small campus, and there was no student center. We had the original academic classrooms and the two dormitories, and I believe the gym may have been in place when I arrived. I can't recall.³ We identified the buildings alphabetically. I'm trying to think of the building letter we were in, and I can't actually recall, but the architectural building was between electrical and mechanical.

TS: Have any of the original buildings been torn down?

JF: I believe all the originals are still in existence, Tom.

TS: On the Kennesaw campus we've never torn anything down either. All the original buildings are still there, and I thought it was the same here. So this building opened up in 2001, I believe.

JF: You are correct. It was amazing to get this building. The architectural firm of Heery, a very well-known firm internationally, had its main office in Atlanta. They were given the commission. They met with students and faculty and got a lot of input in terms of what was needed for the new Architecture Building. It was shelved several times because of not having the finances to build it, but finally in the late 1990s it got under construction, and we occupied it in the fall of 2001. We didn't realize how cramped we were in that other building. We had a large enrollment at the time, and when we got the new building, it just opened up space that was fantastic for both faculty and students. I have visited many architecture schools at universities across the nation, and this truly is one of the finest architectural buildings in the nation. I would rank it before Auburn, and I've been there several times. One interesting point, on the day of the opening of the building we had some state legislators come out. There was a ceremony. I heard Judy Manning [Georgia representative, District 32, Cobb County, 1997-2013] come into the building, and she says, "Oh my goodness, we didn't have money to finish the building!" We had

² The motorized bathtub races began about 1966 and ended permanently in the 1991-1992 academic year. Richard A. Bennett, *Southern Polytechnic State University: The History* (Marietta: SPSU Foundation, 1998), 161, 169.

³ The gymnasium/auditorium opened in 1966. Bennett, 64.

to inform her, “This is a building that educates students, and that we’ve left certain areas like ceilings out where students can see the mechanical, the heating and air conditioning and plumbing. They can look up and see them in their place.” So the intent was that it would be a learning experience, and it has certainly served its purpose.

TS: And she thought that you just didn’t have enough money for the ceiling tiles?

JF: For the tiles to go in. She was worried and made that statement. Backtracking a little, Tom, several years after I came the students wanted to form some type of architectural organization. There was a national organization for students that was sponsored by the American Institute of Architects in Washington. They called it the Student Chapters of the American Institute of Architects. Well, our students asked me to inquire, and when I inquired to Washington, they said, “We offer this to architectural programs in colleges and universities that have accredited programs by the National Architectural Accrediting Board.” We were somewhat insistent that we wanted to become a chapter, and we appealed. We were the first architectural engineering technology program to receive a charter from the American Institute of Architects for a student chapter. That was a major plus for our students. Georgia Tech had a chapter and had had one for many years. Our students were extremely active, and built a really good chapter. They sent students to a national conference called Forum every year. We had a good delegation to go year after year. In the mid-1980s our chapter was nominated for Chapter of the Year, and we received that award. That was quite a distinct honor.

TS: Were you involved with the student chapter?

JF: I was a faculty advisor for the chapter.

TS: Wow.

JF: So there are many success stories regarding the students’ involvement in the American Institute of Architects. Each year we took students to the AIA national convention, and that convention rotates around the country to major cities. I would say at times we may have had more students from Southern Tech, Southern Poly, at the AIA national convention than any other college or university across the nation. We were well respected. They made a very prominent name for the university nationally. The AIA national convention has been held in Atlanta in 1975, 1995, and then 2015 just this past year. Our students have always been involved and have generally had the opportunity to display their work. I recall in the mid-1980s, there was a national competition. Architectural students are frequently invited to enter these national competitions, and this particular competition was called Bridges of Steel. It was sponsored by the National Steel Institute. We had several entries into the competition, and our students were notified that they were some of the top contenders. I walked in the front doors of the AIA [American Institute of Architectures] convention. I think this was in San Antonio. And the first thing I saw was student work, and three of the bridges had been designed by students here at Southern Poly. That was quite rewarding to see us in the national limelight.

TS: Which courses did you teach over the years? What were your main courses?

JF: The one that I taught maybe the longest was called Building Materials and Construction. We had an extensive collection of building materials in the classroom, and we could pull these off the shelf and show the students what the product looks like. Several of the faculty taught that course also, but I remember developing that one initially. I taught Professional Architectural Practice, which generally trains the student to be aware of how an architectural firm operates both on seeking work and how the business aspect of an office should operate. Then we talked a lot about contracts in relationship with clients and your legal obligations regarding building codes. So it was a very good course. I think because I had practiced architecture and continued a small practice, I became aware of changes in the profession and was able to bring that to the classroom.

TS: Right. So those were the two main courses that you taught?

JF: Mainly Design and Architectural Practice and the Materials and Construction.

TS: So three main courses?

JF: I did teach Mechanical and Electrical Equipment and others if we needed it.

TS: How many courses did you typical teach back in the quarter system?

JF: Generally we had four. Sometimes we wound up with more than that. One thing that I should share with you is my master's degree was in Passive Solar Energy at Georgia Tech.

TS: Oh yes, I wondered about that. When did you get your master's?

JF: In '76. Passive Solar Energy was dealing with trying to heat buildings during winter months and doing things that would make them cooler in the summer months. There are a lot of systems that are in existence that you can use on a building that brings solar energy into the building in the winter months and shades it out during the summer months. We taught that as a course for several years.

TS: So they don't teach it anymore?

JF: They have integrated that in with the design courses now; it's not a separate course.

TS: Talk about movement to separate from Georgia Tech. Was that something that happened over several years' time? I know it happened in 1980, but was there a build up to it or was the faculty strongly in favor of separating or were you divided over it?

JF: When I came in '71 I think we seemed to be very satisfied being a unit of Georgia Tech and especially going from associate degrees to bachelor's degrees. So I think there was a

lot of contentment in the early 1970s. Later in the '70s we found that it was difficult to get funding here. I heard the word many times that we were a “stepchild” of Georgia Tech. They got the major funding and major attention from the Board of Regents, and we got what was pretty much left over. So there was a movement on campus to begin investigating separating and making Southern Tech an independent college in the university system. To my knowledge we had almost unanimous support by the faculty. [English professor] Bob Hays was one of the key people in promoting that and stepping forward. We had many faculty meetings and faculty senate meetings discussing that. The faculty finally, I think, came up with a resolution that we wanted to be separate from Georgia Tech. I don't know all the nuts and bolts, but it did happen. I assume the Regents had to make a vote on separating us, and we did notice a difference. We found that when we were at the table with Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia and other institutions, we got more recognition and more funding. That was exciting.

TS: So would you say the faculty was unanimously in favor of the separation by 1980?

JF: Pretty much so. Personally, I don't recall any opposition. I'm sure there was some.

TS: I know in some people's minds a concern with the consolidation with KSU was whether this campus would go back to a stepchild status.

JF: You're right, and even though I had retired there was a concern of that nature.

TS: We'll talk about the consolidation a little bit later on, but, hopefully, Dan [Daniel S.] Papp is doing his best to make sure that this campus doesn't think it's a stepchild.

JF: Well, you know Dan Papp was an interim president here.

TS: Right, would you talk about that? I know there were some controversies where some department chairs were fired. Did that include the department you were in?

JF: We had some challenges, but to my knowledge it was not under Dr. Papp's tenure here.

TS: No, before he came.

JF: Before he came, yes. Let me see if I can go back and highlight a few things—the highlights of my career, and this relates to architecture. I was at the state Capitol with an architectural committee back in the mid-1980s. Barbara Wilkinson was the Executive Director of the State Examining Board for Architecture. At that time a graduate with a four-year degree from Southern College of Technology had to intern seven years in an architectural firm before they could sit for the examination to become licensed.

TS: I was wondering about that because I've heard from engineering technology folks that it took a lot longer for the engineering technology students to get professionally licensed than it did for people who got a straight engineering degree.

JF: Georgia Tech had a four plus two, Master of Architecture Degree. You went four years to get a Bachelor of Science degree. You applied to the graduate school of Architecture, spent two years, and got the Master of Architecture. The criterion was you would intern two years and sit for the examination, which was a total of eight years. Our students, if they went four and had to intern seven, from the beginning of their education to becoming able to become licensed was eleven years. Barbara said, “Jim, I want to share something with you. I wish you would look at your program out at Southern Tech and see if you would be interested in adding a fifth year and going for NAAB accreditation.” That is basically the highest level of accreditation.

TS: What does that stand for?

JF: The National Architectural Accrediting Board accredits architectural programs across the country. I said, “Barbara, we have over six hundred students, and our students are getting jobs. We’re very satisfied with our Architectural Engineering Technology Program. I personally never thought of it.” She said, “Well, Jim, you need to look at that. We’ve got a lot of states that have more than one accredited program in architecture. You go to Louisiana, and there are five accredited programs, and five in Texas. You have other states that have a lot of options to get an architecture degree. I feel like that Georgia should have more than one option of getting an architectural degree.” I said, “Barbara, I’ll take that back to the faculty, and we’ll discuss it.”

We had a faculty meeting and brought it to the table, and the faculty said, “We need to survey the architects in the state of Georgia” (there were several thousand of them at the time, maybe three thousand) “to see if the architectural profession would support that.” So a survey was developed. We were able to mail that out to every licensed architect in the state. They responded back, and 87 percent said, “Yes, you need to go for the five year program.” That was astonishing to us. So we said, “Okay, the profession supports this, so let’s investigate that.” We contacted the National Architectural Accrediting Board and asked what the criteria were. They were extensive. This was in the late 1980s. We spent several years of investigating our program and seeing what we needed to do to meet the accreditation criteria. In 1990 we became a candidate for NAAB accreditation.

Now, you go through three years of probation meeting their criteria, and they send an accrediting board team to your campus to see if you’re really going to be candidate for accreditation. This was in ’93 the board came and reviewed our program and praised it and said, “Go forward. We’ll set you up for a full accreditation visit in ’95.” Backtracking, we needed to have a dean for the program. We’d only had a program head prior to that time. A national search was done. I was on the search committee as were some other faculty. We also had some professional architects outside the campus to come in. There were some other faculty members around the campus. There were over twenty applicants for that position coming in from all over the country. The president had asked us to narrow it down to three candidates, and we did. Of those three candidates, one was on campus. The other two were from other institutions. There was

only one candidate that had a PhD. So the three recommendations went to the president, and he selected the PhD to be dean of the architectural program. That was our first dean.

TS: What was his name?

JF: [P.] David Pearson.

TS: From where did he have his PhD?

JF: He received a master's degree in architecture from Columbia University and a PhD in arts from the University of London [according to *The Sting*, January 29, 1991, p. 4]. He had come from City College of New York.

TS: He was on the faculty at City College?

JF: He was on the faculty of City College. He came here in [January] '91. I think we began to pursue the probationary period for accreditation in '90.

TS: So in '95 you get full accreditation?

JF: In '95 we got full accreditation. We had an interesting scenario during that time. Dr. Pearson came, and he was looking at the program in a different light than what we [envisioned]. I really need to backtrack here. When we announced that we were going forward for the five-year accredited program, Georgia Tech, of course, was informed. The information I got was that the dean there was concerned about us being competition for Georgia Tech. He had called some of his advisory boards and some of the leaders of major architectural firms in the Atlanta area. He basically said, "We've got to stop Southern Tech from getting that five-year program. That will become competition to us." Well, that got back to the Board of Regents, and it eventually got back to the state legislature. The state legislature had to approve this through its education committee.

There was concern, and the education committee of the state legislature contacted the campus. Dr. [Stephen R.] Cheshier was president at the time, and we were asked to go down to a hearing. Dr. Cheshier was there and Walter J. Kelley Sr., who was an assistant to the president; and I was asked to go down to testify. Well, E. Culver Kidd Jr., from Milledgeville, was the chairman of this [senate] education committee. The first question he asked was, "Why are you trying to duplicate what Georgia Tech is doing?" I said, "Senator Kidd, we are not trying to duplicate that. We are going in a totally different direction. We are not a research university. We are trying to teach architecture where our graduates will be able to practice once they leave the institution and serve an internship and become licensed. We are teaching building materials. We are teaching design. We are teaching history. We are teaching mechanical equipment and everything that an architect needs to know to practice. We do not want to become a research university and compete with Georgia Tech." He said, "If you'll have your students and parents stop calling me, I will approve this program." So he did and that's when we went forward.

TS: Wow. Well, when you say a five-year program, it takes five years to get a bachelor's degree?

JF: That is correct. The minimum number of years that the National Architectural Accrediting Board will give the accreditation to is a five-year program. Now, when we received that, the five-year program was still called the bachelor's program, and it still is today. Some institutions have been allowed to call the five-year program a master's program. Savannah College of Art and Design calls theirs a masters. We have now in the state of Georgia the five-year bachelor's at KSU. Savannah College of Art and Design calls there five-year program of master's. Then you have the master's at Georgia Tech, which is a four plus two. So there are now three choices in the state of Georgia.

TS: So it takes six years to get a master's at Georgia Tech?

JF: That is true.

TS: Do you have a master's in architecture here?

JF: There is a master's program related to architecture that has been added since I retired, and I don't know the details.

TS: Do you think there might be a doctoral program in the future?

JF: I can't foresee that in the immediate future. Very few schools in the nation have doctoral programs in architecture. They are gaining. I think when I retired there were probably only about five. There are probably more now.

TS: So the master's is considered the terminal degree?

JF: It generally is. That is correct.

TS: Student go through a five-year program, and then once they have graduated how long does it take them to take the test for professional certification?

JF: They intern under a licensed architect for three years, and then they can take the exam. There is some fine tuning going on right now regarding that. They are now letting students—and I think this has just happened this year—to begin taking parts of the exam after graduation and then taking a major portion of that exam after their internship. I should say that Georgia Tech does have the doctoral degree in architecture now. They've had it a number of years.

TS: For professional licensing you said eight years with Tech, and also eight years with Southern Poly?

- JF: That would be correct. They would do the four plus two and two years of internship, and we have a five year program and three years of internship. So there is equality now.
- TS: That's good. I know I've heard from people in civil engineering technology and such as that that their students had to take longer to get a professional license than say a Georgia Tech grad. Was it a five-year program you went through at Auburn?
- JF: I was in the five year at Auburn, and then I did the two years at Georgia Tech to get the master's.
- TS: Right. And you were practicing before you received your master's.
- JF: That is correct. I got my license after interning for three years after Auburn.
- TS: So that was eight years all together.
- JF: I was licensed in the states of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida when I came to teach.
- TS: Great. Well, we were talking about the firing of the department chairs in '97, which was still Dr. Cheshier and Harris T. Travis, the vice president for academic affairs. Were you involved at all in that? I guess everybody was to some extent.
- JF: I was not. You would hear things. I can't recall if Dr. Cheshier resigned. I think he stepped down.⁴
- TS: Oral histories are firsthand accounts, so if you weren't involved, we'll go on to other things. Dan Papp comes in. How did he do as interim president?
- JF: We were enormously pleased with him. In fact, I think there was certainly an effort to get him to take the job permanently. I think it was just not a time in his life where he felt like he could do it, but we had great respect for him. He was a wonderful person to work for.
- TS: Then Lisa A. Rossbacher comes in in '98, and I guess nobody on campus had the opportunity to meet her before she came.
- JF: Tom, I'll have to share this with you. When a position is filled on a university campus, usually there is a search committee formed of faculty and administrators and others. We were told there would not be a search committee to replace Dr. Cheshier, and everybody

⁴The University System of Georgia issued a press release on February 26, 1997, entitled "Cheshier to Retire from Southern Polytechnic; Interim President Named." The press release claims that Dr. Cheshier would embark upon a new career that involved "a year of learning and preparing to return to teaching." By 1997 he had thirty years in the retirement system. In a 2014 interview Dr. Cheshier said, "I was not asked to resign, was not forced out, and the faculty didn't run me off, none of that. I just went down to the Chancellor one day and said, 'I'd like to talk about me retiring.'" Later that year he became the executive director of the Cobb Education Consortium, a post he still holds. Interview with SPSU President Emeritus Stephen R. Cheshier, conducted by Thomas A. Scott and Kathleen Harper, May 16, 2014, SPSU series, no. 6, Kennesaw State University Oral History Project.

was kind of shocked. We heard that the Board of Regents had hired a professional firm to select our next president. When they announced it was Dr. Lisa Rossbacher, a female, the first reaction, I said, "Oh, she's always going to be in Betty Siegel's shadow. Betty is such an outstanding president! How can anyone compete with her?" Well, I was so wrong. Lisa Rossbacher was a fantastic president! She promoted the university, she supported her faculty, and did a wonderful job for us. I can only praise her.

TS: Great. Let's see, this is also a period when you got university status in '96. Could you talk about how that changed things on this campus?

JF: Well, I think it brought us to a higher level. I didn't really have anything to do with that, but I think the faculty and students were very much in support of doing that.

TS: Kennesaw got university status the same year, and a whole bunch of other institutions. It was pretty much a top down thing from the chancellor, I think.

JF: Was that Chancellor Stephen R. Portch?

TS: You're right, it was Portch [chancellor, 1994-2001].

JF: Yes. He wanted to elevate the colleges around the state to university status. I believe he was the one to bring on the semester system.

TS: Yes, in the fall of 1998. How did that affect your program? In architecture do you have co-ops the way you do in engineering?

TS: Years ago when we had the architectural engineering technology program, we did have co-ops. We were on the quarter system, and our students would go to school one quarter and then work a quarter and then come back. With four quarters in the year that worked quite well. We tried to make course offerings for students who were in the co-op. I taught a number of the co-op students. To me that was quite a plus. Most of the time they got jobs within the profession of architecture and engineering, and they would come back and be able to perform better and share a lot of things that they had learned in professional practice.

TS: So going to the semester system was not necessarily a good thing in terms of the co-op programs?

JF: It was not. I think it ended our co-op program here in architecture.

TS: I guess that was another top down thing that we didn't have too much input on whether we were going to change.

JF: You're correct.

- TS: It seems like we spent a lot of time trying to adjust to the change. I think we had to reevaluate every program on the Kennesaw campus. I guess you did here on the Marietta campus too.
- JF: I liked the quarter program. I felt like you could teach a certain amount of material and then have examinations and move on. It seemed like the semester was a longer period of time, and a little more difficult to adjust the material and that type thing.
- TS: Did you lose any courses with the transition?
- JF: We did have to consolidate some courses.
- TS: Why don't you talk about what kind of jobs the students were getting when they got through the program here?
- JF: Actually, from the time I started until I retired and even after retirement, I had been in contact with a number of architectural firms, construction firms, and all types of construction industry firms. They've always praised our graduates. I don't know that I've ever heard a negative comment. I get phone calls frequently, probably within the last week, "Can you guide me to someone who is a graduate or a student graduating that I can hire from KSU?"
- TS: So they're coming to you instead of you having to go out to them. I gather the students didn't have any trouble getting jobs.
- JF: They did not. Now, of course, after I retired due to the recession the jobs were certainly not as plentiful, but they're coming back. In the last two years there's been a great influx of projects and firms and a great need for our graduates.
- TS: Well, why don't you talk about your business on the side? How much time per week would you devote to private practice, and what kind of work were you doing?
- JF: My work was mainly small commercial work. I felt like I should stay in the commercial realm because most of our graduates were going to firms that did commercial work. I did some residential, and we had some graduates that specialized in residential architecture. I was fortunate to have a variety of work, and most of my work was done on Saturdays. Initially, I would tell the students, even though I had a little home office, I would come up on Saturdays and stay in my office on campus. I said, "If you want to come in on Saturday and meet with me in the labs"—we call them studios now—"I will be there, and I'll be glad to assist you in any way I can." So a number of times I would come back very frequently and work on Saturdays here. I was very fortunate in my firm in Albany, Georgia, I did a number of branch banks. We did some university work and work with schools and various types. When I relocated here some way I got connected to the banking world, and I did a number of branch banks around the state even over in Alabama. I have done some education work actually for the Marietta School System.

I've done a number of church projects and some retail stores. I mentioned residences and restaurants and quite a variety of types, mainly small projects.

TS: Was it a one man operation or did you have a staff?

JF: Well, it was generally one man, and fortunately many of the students would want to work with me during the summer, which I was pleased to have. Since that time I've only hired graduates from our program. I don't think I've had anybody from another university work for me, but generally it's all been part-time. I've had some clerical help too.

TS: Talking about working on Saturdays. About how many hours a week would you put in to the private practice?

JF: Probably about six hours on Saturdays. Unless there was a holiday or family vacation or something I was usually here on campus. I then gradually took that home. I had a drawing board in my office. You can look around this office. There's not a drawing board. I think once we moved in this building I did not try to practice from the campus. It was not conducive here on campus. Our offices don't have space for a drawing board, and I still do a lot of hand drafting. I've continued to practice and still have some projects today.

TS: Was that work honored in terms of tenure and promotion decisions?

JF: You know, it was. In fact when we used to put our packages together for promotion and tenure, you were encouraged to include anything you had done professionally.

TS: You were talking about not being a research institution. Were you involved in any research?

JF: There were a few items of research we did over the years. I think other faculty did more than I. Many times material manufacturers would come to us and ask us to test products and even do research on products—things of that nature. One interesting thing I can share with you. I mentioned that when Dr. Pearson came he had a different view of our program, which we really heavily weighted on technology. We wanted our students to understand building materials, how a building was put together, the structural, mechanical, and electrical systems, and those type things. I taught this materials course on the first floor of the old building. I came to campus one day, and there was a big front-end loader outside the window. The window was open, and all of my materials that were lined up here were being put in the dumpster from outside the door. I asked and Dr. Pearson said, "This is not what we're about. We are a design and history theory institution." And that really shocked us as a faculty because our focus was just the reverse.

TS: Did that create a controversy?

JF: It did. The faculty was very concerned, but we were not allowed to bring those materials back in. Since that time we do have in this building a materials room where building materials are displayed.

TS: How long did Dr. Pearson last?

JF: Less than two years, from January 1991 until the summer of 1992.⁵ When the accreditation team came to review us as a candidate there was concern both on the part of the students and the faculty that we were not being led in the right direction. So when the team left, they recommended new leadership, a new dean.

TS: Well, if somebody was taking stuff out my office without me having any input in it I think I would have been a little bit unhappy about it.

JF: Of course, that was a classroom; it wasn't my office.

TS: Well, it's still the same.

JF: We had worked on building that up for quite a few years. We had an excellent array of building materials that students could see and feel and visualize how they would go together in construction.

TS: Who replaced Pearson?

JF: Professor Harry Kaufmann. He taught structures and some other courses here. The faculty was very much in support of him. He had been one of the three recommended to the president for the initial dean's position.

TS: I see. How long had he been on the faculty?

JF: He'd been here a good number of years. I can't recall exactly how many. He was an excellent structures teacher.

TS: Did you ever have any aspirations for being in administration?

JF: Well, let me see, let me go back through the scenario, when Dr. Rossbacher came Harry Kaufmann stepped down, and the dean's position was open. A number of the graduates asked me to send in a resume for that position, and I did. I was not selected. We had Dr. Bill Barnes as the dean, and he did an excellent job for us. His background was in construction. He had taught in construction programs. The school was reconfigured where we had architecture and construction management all under one dean. Prior to that time we had had the School of Architecture.

⁵ Dr. Pearson's resignation was covered in an article by Marc Pruitt, "Dean Pearson Resigns as Architecture Head," *The Sting*, June 2, 1992. President Cheshier had just accepted his resignation, but he continued on the faculty on annual leave until the end of summer quarter.

TS: Talk about your service activities in the community as well as on the campus. You've already talked about being an advisor to a student group.

JF: Yes, I'll have to share this with you, Tom. The Atlanta chapter of the American Institute of Architects in Atlanta, Georgia, had been the wind beneath our wings. To share a story with you, I mentioned that our AIA student chapter had gained national recognition as the chapter of the year. It was shortly after that time that the consideration of the five-year program was to take place. We were trying to gain support for that program. John A. Busby Jr., an Atlanta architect with the firm of [Henri] Jova, [Stanley] Daniels, became the national AIA president in 1985-86. He was a Georgia Tech graduate. The students wanted to meet with him because of his position, so they invited him to go to lunch. I as their advisor went along to meet with him. In that lunch meeting he said, "Well, I feel like Georgia Tech has got a handle on architecture education here in Georgia. They have a good program, they have a master's degree, and I personally don't feel like we need that five-year program at Southern Poly." The students said, "Well, we wish you would support us." He said, "Well, my allegiance is to Georgia Tech."

I think the students made an impression on him. Two weeks later I got a two-page letter from him saying he had changed his mind, and he was in full support. That helped us out a lot. When he retired, he contacted me. He said, "Jim, I'd like to teach at Southern Poly." It's interesting when he applied to teach, he only had a bachelor's from Georgia Tech. They said, "No, we are going to require that you have a master's." I said, "Well, this man has years of experience and practice with one of the major firms; he has been national president of the American Institute of Architects; we need him." So they did an about-face, and he taught Architectural Practice for three years here. He's still in great supporter of us today.

TS: That's great. Talk about some of your community service. I know you were involved with Old Zion. Why don't you talk about that and talk about maybe some other things that you recall.

JF: Let me bounce back to the American Institute of Architects. I was very fortunate. I was asked to serve as the academic advisor for the AIA Georgia chapter in the late 1980s. By having that position I was able to bring a lot of education to the state board. They asked the Georgia Association of American Institute of Architects to make a recommendation for someone to serve on the state examining board. We had never had a Southern Tech graduate serve on the state examining board. I nominated Eddie R. Bray from Macon, and he was selected. He was our first Southern Tech grad to serve on this board. That board really is the board that oversees the licensing of architects in Georgia. That was as really a plus for us. Then we brought other members of the faculty onto the boards of AIA Georgia and AIA Atlanta, and I had the privilege of serving as president of AIA Georgia in 1996, the year the Olympics were here. That same year I was selected as the National Architectural Educator of the Year. In 1998 I was elevated to Fellowship in the AIA.

TS: Great. Did you often get involved on a volunteer basis with any kind of projects out in the community?

JF: We did a lot. Frequently, business owners would come and ask us to have a studio project that was a real project all over metro Atlanta and even outside the state. We would design the project, we'd work with the owner, and we would get the project to the student to design in a semester setting. They would many times be able to go to the site. They would be able to meet the owner. This was great to have some projects that had some reality to them. There were quite a few competition projects that were offered to the students over the years, and we did well with those projects.

TS: I believe you had a thirty-two year career here, is that correct?

JF: You're correct.

TS: And then retired in 2003.

JF: That is correct.

TS: What kept you here for all that time?

JF: Well, I enjoyed it. I felt like I was truly blessed to be here at the beginning of that four-year program and to see it transition into five. I enjoyed teaching and practice also. The combination of the two was great. I felt I was blessed with a great career. Seeing the students successful was truly rewarding because you would encounter them in professional meetings in different settings around the state in our area. They were well respected as architects and by people working in architectural firms.

TS: So in 2003, I guess you certainly had a lot built up in the Teacher Retirement System and what-have-you? So you decided that was time to retire?

JF: I figured that after thirty-two years it was time. There were a lot of young people wanting to teach. So I felt like perhaps I had served my purpose, and I needed to step out and let the younger professors come in. We had a lot of good ones that came aboard with much newer knowledge than I had had.

TS: What have you been doing since 2003?

JF: Tom, I tell people that retirement is the hardest work I've ever done, but the most fun. You can pick and choose what you want to do. You've probably experienced that. I do a lot of volunteer things. I still stay very active with the American Institute of Architects. I had the good fortune of serving as president of the AIA Atlanta chapter in '05, and have stayed active. Currently, I'm serving on the Architecture Foundation of Georgia. Its prime purpose is to generate scholarship funds for students in the three schools of architecture in the state. You may be aware that we've had an advisory board for the architectural program for many years. In 2003 John Busby became chair of our advisory

board here on the campus. We had a lot of architects and others serving on it. At the time he said, "We need to generate some scholarship funds for architectural students. Let's look at the option of having a golf tournament, and let's name it the Jim Fausett Golf Classic. Because he's taught so many people over the years, he can go back and contact them and ask them to sponsor and play in the tournament." So we have just completed the thirteenth annual Fausett Golf Classic.

TS: So every year since you've retired?

JF: Yes, since I've retired. We've been fortunate. We've had some good committees and good support in carrying it forward. Every year we've been able to offer scholarships. About the last seven years we've been able to offer two scholarships.

TS: How big are the scholarships?

JF: In the two we have a \$3,000 to \$4000 scholarship, which will just about pay tuition for a year, which is certainly beneficial to students. Fortunately, I had done some architectural work about '05 or '06 for a bank client. This was some volunteer work that I did for the city of Woodstock. They had developed a community center, and they wanted a map of old downtown Woodstock. So I drew this map. The person that asked me to do it said, "How much do I owe you?" I said, "I volunteered to do this. I don't want anything." He said, "I want to do something for you." I said, "We've got a scholarship fund in my name at Southern Poly. If you'd like to make a contribution to this fund, I would greatly appreciate it." Little did I know that he wrote a check for \$10,000! So that started an endowment fund. Tom, that endowment fund has grown over the years, and there is about \$170,000 in that fund now, which will fund scholarships indefinitely.

TS: Wow. I was trying to do the math; \$170,000 should come close to generating enough interest to give someone a full ride for a year doesn't it? Of course, you're giving two scholarships.

JF: Right, we actually take some scholarship money out of that endowment fund to fund the scholarships. So that endowment is invested, and the \$170,000 is a corpus. The profits are the scholarships.

TS: Do you pay their tuition for them or do you just give them the money?

JF: We've asked it to go to tuition. We felt like it would be best to channel it that way than to simply give the student a check.

TS: Well, that's pretty significant endowment.

JF: We're very fortunate. I think I've heard that's about the sixth largest endowment. I think there are over thirty endowments on the Marietta campus for the architecture and engineering programs, and it's about the sixth largest.

TS: How is it going to work with the merger of the foundations?

JF: Well, right now I think you are aware that we have the Polytechnic Foundation of KSU, Inc. Monies that are given to that will be channeled to the Marietta campus to the architectural and engineering programs. That's the way it's currently set up.

TS: When did you first hear about the consolidation of Southern Poly and Kennesaw State?

JF: It's interesting. That discussion has been going on for many years. I'd say as far back as ten years it's been brought up. I think each time the Board of Regents brought it up they either tabled it or voted against it. One thing that has concerned me is that when the announcement was made several years ago, I understand that Lisa Rossbacher got a phone call or message from the chancellor's office saying that SPSU and KSU were going to be merged. I think this was like on an afternoon, and the next morning the headlines of the newspaper said KSU and SPSU are going to be merged. Well, that was a big shock to the students and faculty and alumni and every place else. I personally think the regents didn't handle that properly. If you're going to merge two corporations, you usually get the top people together, you discuss it, you build consensus, and you let that trickle all the way down through the organization. Then you make the announcement when I think everybody is in consensus. Today it's still a shock to me the way they approached this.

TS: Well, I still don't know who was actually asked for input, but I know that neither president was asked for input.

JF: That is a shock.

TS: So I presume some local legislators and people of that sort that were the insiders of it all, but this had to be one of the best kept secrets of all times, I think.

JF: I agree with you.

TS: In all the consolidations it's been true. It was a well-kept secret by those who knew what was going on. We've got an interview with Lisa Rossbacher where she tells how she was informed about it.

JF: I don't know if I'm totally accurate, but that's what I'd heard.

TS: Well, I've got different stories, and I'm still not entirely sure what really happened, but I do know that nobody knew much ahead of time. I guess the secrecy has concerned a lot of people. What are your views now on the consolidation?

JF: Mine are quite positive. I think having a major university, and I've been told when the two universities were consolidated there are 34,000 colleges and universities in the nation and KSU now ranks forty-seventh in size. Have you heard that?

- TS: I know we are in the top fifty largest public universities. We are a large university nowadays, which I guess is a positive. I don't know. Do you see that as a positive?
- JF: I think there can be more publicity from a large university. I think the KSU name recognition is important. Both universities have outstanding records, and with the combination I think there are positive things that look good down the road. I think the student enrollment will grow.
- TS: Apparently it's held its own. It's continued to grow modestly this year either because of or despite of the consolidation. Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College both lost enrollment this year. I don't know whether it was because of consolidation, but they both lost enrollment while both the Kennesaw and the Marietta campus grew. The growth of the two combined was by 2.3 percent [from 32,500 to 33,252].
- JF: I had heard that. I knew that here in architecture we grew.
- TS: Really? So presumably students are not going elsewhere because of the name change.
- JF: I recently talked with faculty and students. I think they have reconciled the merger, and the new students that are coming in are very pleased because they like to be a part of a big university and having that recognition and name recognition.
- TS: As best I can tell they can still be separate from the Kennesaw campus if they want to be. They can take all their courses down on this campus if they want. I think it's neat that we see on the college website now students winning engineering contests at some competition. I hope that's true that they are reconciled to the change.
- JF: I think the main concern was with graduates and perhaps faculty and retirees that had worked hard to build a name recognition over the years and then not have some technological reference in the name of the institution.
- TS: Well, anything you think we should add to this interview that we haven't talked about?
- JF: Tom, I can't think of anything. I think you asked me about a few architectural projects. I did have two interesting historic projects. The Zion Church in downtown Marietta called on me to do a historic preservation of their original building, which was the brick building a couple of blocks off the square. Originally, the Zion Church was part of the First Baptist Church. The members actually worshipped all in one sanctuary. In 1866 they separated and the African-American congregation moved and built their original church building. Then when it burned, they built the brick building in 1888 and worshipped there for many years. Then they moved and built a larger church which was designed by a couple of our graduates, the firm of [Bill] Chegwidden [Don] Dorsey [Chuck] Holmes.

In fact Dr. Harris Travis, our vice president of academic affairs, is the pastor of that church and is retiring next month. It was nice to be able to be connected to that church

and the congregation and see their old building restored. Then a banking client contacted me. There was a building that I admired for many years called the Old Lost Mountain Store and that was out on Dallas Highway on the corner of Mars Hill and Dallas Highway. They had acquired the property, and they wanted to build a bank. Then they decided, “Why don’t we save the old building and make that the bank.” So I had the good fortune of being able to work for the bank. The building had to be moved. It was a brick building and a challenging move, but it worked out to be a great little [branch] bank [for United Community Bank], and it was saved.

TS: It didn’t move far, about 100 feet or something like that.

JF: That’s correct. There was a shopping center and supermarket to be built behind it. They jacked it up and put steel beams under it and moved it with no difficulty and put it on a new foundation.

TS: So you did the design for that?

JF: I did, the renovation of it, and I think it got an historic preservation award.

TS: Yes, that was great that that building was preserved, even if it did lose the context of its original location.

JF: Yes, I had been there many times when it was a store sitting on the corner. I did have one interesting thing. When I first came to Southern Tech to teach, I was contacted by an architectural firm here in Marietta. They had been awarded the design of the new Cobb County Civic Center, which is on the corner of Fairground and what used to be Clay Street. Now it’s South Marietta Parkway. They asked me to be the design consultant for it, so I designed the sports arena and the performing arts building.

TS: Oh the Jennie T. Anderson Theatre? So you designed those buildings?

JF: I did, yes.

TS: They’re doing a major renovation of Hudgins Hall, the sports arena and site for gun shows and other events.

JF: Right, and some of our graduates are working on that. They put in a new entrance and some office space. So it was nice to be involved in that project.

TS: Wow. Anything that you want to add about any of those projects?

JF: It was quite interesting, on the project for the Civic Center. The county had appropriated a million dollars to build that building. So we were designing in the realm of using that one million dollars, pretty conservatively. That was for the sports community. Well, the fine arts community came forward and said, “We need a building also.” So they commissioned the architectural firm, and I was part of that, to design the performing arts

center with the stage and seating and lobby area. Little did we know! We were asked to estimate the cost of those two buildings. We said it would run one million and a half dollars to build the two. Well, the county put the project out for bids, and the bids came in, and it was right at a million and a half dollars. Well, it was interesting to see that the *Marietta Daily Journal* put, "Architects Overshoot County's Budget." The county was hoping they would get two buildings for the price of one. It did not happen. So that was not good publicity for architects, but anyway the country raised the money, and both buildings were built. We were fortunate to have both.

TS: That's for sure. Anything else that we should add?

JF: I think we've covered a lot, probably more than you wanted to hear.

TS: No, no, this was great. Well, we'll call it quits at this point.

JF: I appreciate you coming in.

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