



## INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM "Bill" S. WHITE— JUNE 24, 2015

*Our State of Generosity*, a project of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (JCP) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), in partnership with the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA), Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC), and GVSU Libraries' Special Collections & University Archives present:

An interview with William S. White on June 24, 2015. Conducted by Kathryn Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*, and Dorothy A. Johnson, president emeritus of the Council of Michigan Foundations. Recorded at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Flint, MI. This interview is part of a series in the project, *Our State of Generosity* (OSoG). OSoG is a partnership of scholars, practitioners, and funders from four institutions – the Johnson Center; CMF; MNA; and MCSC – that collectively form the backbone of the state's philanthropic, voluntary, and nonprofit infrastructure. OSoG's mission is to capture, preserve, analyze, and share the developments, achievements, and experience that, over a period of 40 years, made Michigan a State of Generosity.

**Preferred citation:** Researchers wishing to cite this collection should use the following credit line: Interview by Dottie Johnson and Kathy Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*, 2015. "*Our State of Generosity*," Johnson Center Philanthropy Archives of the Special Collection & University Archives, Grand Valley State University Libraries.

**Abridged:** The following interview has been edited to assist readability. Extraneous verbal pauses and informal personal conversation not related to the topic of Michigan philanthropy have been deleted. Footnotes to the transcript have been added clarifying any factual errors in the memory of the person interviewed.

**Kathy Agard (KA):** I'm Kathy Agard. I'm interviewing Bill White, the [chairman] and CEO of the Mott Foundation with his permission for the program called *Our State of Generosity*. That's a little formal introduction, Bill. Dottie, I think, was going to kick us off.

**Dottie Johnson (DJ):** Bill, tell us how you got started in philanthropy.

**William "Bill" S. White (WSW):** How I got started in philanthropy? I married the boss' daughter. [Laughter] Let me amplify that. I guess I graduated, barely, from Dartmouth College. That was an MBA from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth. Then I spent a little time working on Wall Street for a specialist in the New York Stock Exchange after a little volunteer duty in the Army. Then I worked for a management consulting firm for about 10 years. My father-in-law, who was Harding Mott, then president of the Mott Foundation and, obviously, his father was Charles

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Stewart Mott, who founded the Foundation. And so he asked me to come up and help him. That’s how I got started in late 1968 as a consultant.

(KA): Did you know about philanthropy before that? When you went to Dartmouth, was it part of your family background, or did you know anything about it?

(WSW): I don’t know. I once ran a youth recreation center when I was in high school because they were trying to keep me out of trouble. [Laughter] That’s what they did. I’ll elaborate a little more about how I got started because I’m going to answer a question you probably won’t ask. I’ve got to read, and so I’ll put on my glasses. “You say truly Michigan is a state of generosity over the past 40 years. Michigan’s philanthropic leaders have developed an integrated framework to support the nonprofit sector growth – both a statewide geography and over time. How was such a dynamic powerhouse of philanthropic giving, volunteer human capital, and nonprofit management training created, and can the lessons be replicated?”

When I first read that, I said to myself, “You need to start before 40 years ago. You need to go back, let’s say, almost to the founding of the State of Michigan. Or, for purposes of my story (which is the only story I really know), is that C.S. Mott, the founder of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, was born in 1875, and he died in 1973. Some people said he was a “second century man.” Think about it – in 1875 – that’s the second century of the United States. As far as some people talk about recently, the American century was coming up. It was a short century with a couple of World Wars in there.

Anyway, C.S. Mott came out to Michigan in the early 1900s. We’re saying maybe about 1903, in that period or earlier, and sold Ransom Olds an order for 500 axles. Then as he told me, he said, “I had never made an automobile axle. So I went home,” because he was a bicycle manufacturer, the type you pedal. He said, “I went home and sweated blood,” but he said, “I built an unbreakable axle.” That led, of course, to his company becoming the largest axle manufacturer in the world. Then he was invited by Billy Durant (who was the founder of General Motors, though it hadn’t been founded yet) who was running the Buick Motor Car Company at that time, or owned it, to come to Flint, Michigan. Then later (I’m jumping forward now), after merging his company with General Motors over a course of a couple of years for a stock in General Motors, he then went on the board of the General Motors Corporation in 1913 and stayed on the board until his death in 1973. At one time, he was the chief of staff of General Motors (which would be the chief operations person).

The key story here is he was a very successful industrialist. He was also a banker. He owned utilities. He did all sorts of stuff. He was a true entrepreneur. Maybe he was a real venture capitalist. I don’t know. This little town he came to called Flint, Michigan, had about 13,000 people in 1900. By 1920, it had about 100,000 people. In that period, he ran for mayor – and he was mayor, I believe in 1912 and 1913, and then a third term in 1918. Why mayor? Because he knew that the infrastructure (we talked about infrastructure today) was built for 13,000 and couldn’t support the people that were coming here for jobs. As a result, they had to build the houses, roads, sewers, and school systems. That was some government service. He did run for governor,



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but was not elected. The other thing that occurred is that, if you look at the history of all the major social service, charitable organizations in town, you'll find out that he was one of the founders. He was there because of the infrastructure that existed for 13,000 people – don't forget this town had been through fur trading, to lumbering, to carriages, and now automobiles.

(KA): Did he ever talk to you about his philanthropy? When he was recruiting you?

(WSW): No. I don't know if he was recruiting me. [Laughter] I was just the leftover choice for it. Anyway, the thing is he was a major volunteer. He realized that the whole – what we call, nonprofit sector, social service sector, health, education – everything was absolutely essential. He did all of these. We didn't talk about it, per se, but he founded the Foundation in about 1926. If you think about what was happening, I think – I don't have the exact dates, but I think Kresge was formed in 1924. I think Kellogg was 19 – I don't know – 30s I think.

(KA): Same year.

(WSW): Ford was also in that period, and just go down the list. What I'm trying to say is you cannot separate our generosity or divorce it from the donors, and Michigan was a very dynamic place. It didn't have the natural abilities. The entire automobile industry should have been, as he said, on the East Coast, but they didn't have the entrepreneurial spirit, the creativity, and the stick-to-itiveness – big word, you know what I mean – to do it. In Michigan, there were a bunch of sodbusters, as he used to put it, and now we get into the agriculture. We had a lot of things happening in that period. I believe, probably, if you go through every Michigan town, you'll find another Mr. Mott, who made their fortune in agriculture, or made it in products that came off the farm, or retail, or something else, or automobiles. That is unique, I think, because all these communities were growing fast, and services had to be provided. I think it became ingrained in the culture of the state (and I'm not from Michigan) to help others because *they had to* in those early days. It was just the right thing to do. No one told them at age 78, or whatever age it was, to go out and climb a ladder and start hammering shingles back on the house when the tornado came through. It was ingrained in the nature of many of these founders and donors that we talk about today.

(KA): It's a really good point though. That got transmitted to you. I know you've been really instrumental internationally in looking for those opportunities. Can you talk a little bit about what you have encouraged happening in other parts of the world in terms of transmitting this? One of the things we're trying to get at is how do we make sure that the next generation understands those same values.

(WSW): Yes.

(KA): You've been doing it all over the world. Can you talk a little about that?

(WSW): Okay. I'll go all over the world then I'll come back.

(KA): Okay, that's a deal.



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(WSW): Because the story also begins before 1975. Let me, real fast, come back to that, and then I'll go all over the world. When I came out here, I said it was late 1968, as a consultant. I watched Mr. Mott prepare his (voluntary, I might add) testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee at hearings, which led to the famous, infamous, or whatever you wish to call the Tax Reform Act of 1969. I would say this whole State of Generosity project begins with that Tax Reform Act. As I watched, and as I listened to what occurred, the field didn't know how to handle it. They were unprepared, totally. No one really knew anybody. It was obvious that some of the top names in the philanthropic sector couldn't speak for the whole sector because they didn't know each other.

Anyway, that occurred, and that, to me, was one of the key takeaways. Really, all we had in those days for the sector head was a new Council on Foundations, which was community foundations and some others who joined together around the Foundation Library Center. There wasn't much else. No data. The Foundation Library Center had some, but not data analyzing the operations.

Okay. I remember next – and I don't remember the date or the convener – going to a meeting at Meadow Brook Hall. I think there were about 11 or 13 people there. From our place, I think we had our financial vice president [in the 1970s], Bob McCullough. I think we had Harding Mott, who was then president of the Mott Foundation, myself.... and I'm trying to think who the third person was. I think it was Frank Manley, our long-term executive director, about 13 people. Bill Baldwin of the Kresge Foundation might have been one. I don't know, and I can't remember who was there.

People from Kellogg were there, and some others. My takeaway from that meeting – a nice, polite little luncheon with 13 people. We really didn't know each other. Then I'll jump forward. Then there were some informal meetings that I can't remember. For a couple of years, I think Russ Mawby at Kellogg had brought them together [the group], informal meetings of what became the Council of Michigan Foundations. Then I remember, I guess it was the first meeting in 1975 or someplace in there, of the Council on Foundations. And to me, probably the most arresting, which gets to your question (which I've been avoiding) – the most arresting platform speaker I have ever heard was former Congresswoman, and former Lieutenant Governor later in life, Martha Griffiths. She was on the House Ways and Means Committee (I think fourth-ranking member), when the Tax Reform Act of 1969 was passed. I forget who put the question to her. Maybe it was Dottie Johnson. The question was, “Congresswoman, was it the intent of Congress in 1969, when they passed the Foundation Tax Reform Act, to put foundations out of business?” “Yes,” but she says, “I need to say that is no longer our feeling.” “Oh, thank you very much,” I thought to myself. [Laughter] I would say that gave an impetus to everything in the next few years that the Council of Michigan Foundations did. It was really good. I think Leonard White was the first chair and did a marvelous job.

One of the things I remember the Council doing – one of the first tasks – was to create a legislative agenda. After all, at that time the excise tax, I believe, was 4%. Since then it's been lowered to 2% and, obviously, we'd like something different. The payout rate was a fluctuating rate. At that time, at least at the Mott Foundation, we were invested because it was a high-yield period and we had a lot of bonds. We were invested to earn over 7% and we were having to spend 5% or 7%. It was a fluctuating rate, and it was just killing us. We couldn't stay in business. So the



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Council of Michigan Foundations, under Dottie Johnson’s wonderful leadership, started this legislative agenda.

Now, we’ll jump forward a little bit. I’m sitting upstairs in my office, and my father-in-law, Harding Mott (we had opened the offices then; we’d torn down the walls, etc.). [Laughter] He yells, “Bill, come over here. I want you to meet somebody.” I yelled back, “I’m too busy. I can’t.” He says, “No. You need to come over here.” So I come in, sleeves rolled up, my tie unloosened, and he says, “I want you to meet Chuck Chamberlain.” Chuck Chamberlain said, “Hi, good to meet you Bill. Blah-blah-blah.” I said, “I’m sorry. I’m just so busy.” He says, “Well, if I can ever help you, you just let me know.” I said, “Okay.” Harding says, “Chuck used to be the Congressman from...” I think it was the Lansing area, and he also knew him very well. “He used to serve on the Ways and Means Committee, and he’s now our lawyer working on Capitol Hill.” Okay. “You said if you can ever do anything for me?” I said, “I’ll tell you what.” I said, “I’ve just been to a meeting with this group, the Council of Michigan Foundations, and they’ve come up with this little pamphlet you can stick in your vest pocket.” It was the legislative agenda. I said, “Here, you can really help me. Here’s the Council of Michigan Foundation’s legislative agenda. If you can get that passed, you’ll really help me and everybody else in the State of Michigan.” [Laughter] Well, little did I know, I think he lived next door to Dave Durenberger, who was a Senator from Minnesota. There was a nascent Council of Foundations in Minnesota, and they were after a flat tax. Durenberger believed in the flat tax. There was also (I forget his name) a congressman from there, too.

The next thing I know, someone has placed the Council of Michigan Foundation’s legislative agenda – I believe the entire thing – in the Congressional record. [Laughter] Yes. Little did I know, and I may have it mixed up, but he also knew Senator Moynihan from New York. Well, no. First, I got the story wrong. First he said yes on this 5%. It might be good to have some analysis or something. Our investment office and Bob Swaney [Robert E. Swaney Jr.], who was then our chief investment officer, put together their own payout study. This was way before we knew about Cambridge. Cambridge may not have been there. He put together this payout study, and believe me if you could – he knew what he was saying. By the time he reached the end, all I remember is the Foundation could only afford to pay up to 4.2%, 4.8% -- we could live with that (and of course, that was closer to 5%), but we couldn’t pay more than 5%. He had studied the long-term returns. Sinquefield – and I can’t remember the details – they do the work still, the firm.

I gave that to Charles Chamberlain. The next thing I know he had given that to Senator Moynihan, who had put it into the Congressional record. Okay. Then I know, in the meantime – and maybe about this time – our financial vice president then, Larry Doyle, and I went down to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and we met with the people at the Council on Foundations. We were complaining about the payout rate. They said sort of, in effect, “You don’t know what you’re dealing with. That’s very nice, and we’re worried about it. Yes, nice of you to come in.” They were good people. When we walked out the door, we looked at each other and said, “Let’s do it.” [Laughter]

We came back, and, with Charles’ efforts, I remember meeting with (he was Republican) all the senators on the Republican side of the aisle on the Senate Finance Committee. I remember



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meeting with some of the leaders on the Democratic side. Then we suddenly reached the point where, I forget who it was, and Dottie Johnson would remember, but we reached a point where – it was Durenberger who wanted to put something down on the 5%. They had to know and so, at that point, the Council of Michigan Foundations got involved, and they’d been running around Capitol Hill. I think Ranny Riecker – or maybe it was Dottie Johnson – they went and got hold of Bob Griffin, who then was out of office I believe, but to go in and talk with Dole, or whoever was running the Senate in those days and say, “Durenberger will offer an amendment for a flat 5%, assuming you’re willing to take it.” That’s how we got the 5%.

The key point is I remember going around with Dottie, and I forget who else. At one point, Chuck Chamberlain picked us up, and we fit in one car, okay? We were going around to the Michigan delegation – “Hi.” “Hi.” And boom, boom – telling our story back in those early days. I may have the time sequence a little wrong here. We began the tradition, way back then, of telling the story. Today, that’s Foundations on the Hill. We still regard that as the third commandment. “Thou shalt go – [Laughter] - to the Hill once a year and tell your story.”

I just want to say sometimes people say, “What does a regional association do?” *Think* about it. Every foundation in the country, their payout rate is 5%. I don’t know – is that impact investing? That’s huge. That’s results. That’s return on investment, and only a regional, a statewide, or a regional group of grantmakers can do that. No one else can do it. You can’t do it from Washington because each regional association has a broad range of members from the smallest foundations to the largest. When they come together in common cause, we appreciate each other. I don’t care if that foundation only has a few assets and a small single-person grant-giving program; but they may really be delving deeply and have a lifetime commitment to that giving program. They’ve got good ideas. I can learn from them. We can learn from each other, and that’s our strength.

Guess what? Every congressman or congresswoman, person, and every senator has a foundation that they represent. No other organization has a membership like that. No one can duplicate. The real thing is, yes, we go to the Capitol Hill, but the main thing is today every one of us (at least, I think, in Michigan), we’re meeting with our representatives – whether it be in Washington or in Lansing in the State House – telling our story or partnering with them. If I could get one message across, it began out of that ‘69 Tax Act and realizing that we needed to do a lot. One, communicate. We needed to communicate with our elected representatives and not view them as an adversary, but as a partner. Also, we came out of business – an industry as I describe with Mr. Mott or Mr. Kellogg or Mr. Kresge – we needed to join to get our Ransom Olds for them. [Laughter] We needed to join with business and partner with them. Since every one of them (the people I’ve named) has been involved in the social service sector, education, health, the arts, yes, we needed to both personally, as well as philanthropically, support a strong, strong infrastructure.

I’m sorry. I took up so much time going into the period before the 40-year period. Now, we’re in the 40-year period, but out of that, of course, volunteer centers merged in to become the Independent Sector. The Filer Commission occurred. The Donors Forum occurred, and that became NCRP [National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy]. The Foundation Library Center



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became the Foundation Center, and Guide Star emerged from there. BoardSource emerged, etc. The Panel Standards began, over this 40-year period, and come into place. You have the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector that I know Dottie Johnson was a part of. I was a part of it, and others were a part of it. I think Sam Singh from Michigan was also on it. That was critical. Of course, the Council of Michigan Foundations tried – not tried, they DID [laughter] – have the standards project for community foundations. Of course, in Michigan, we’ve all really supported community foundations. Of course, we had a little role in that.

I may have skipped some things forward, but I can go back to the international, if you want.

(KA): Yes. I want to set the site – we want to come back to it. While we’re on the topic, I have always been impressed with how well all of you, all the top leadership in Michigan, have gotten along and worked together. I have been impressed with what I think of as inspired leadership that you all have created and that I had the fun of being a part of. Now, we’re looking at the next generation coming up.

(WSW): Yes.

(KA): I’m worried about that generation. Can you pinpoint why or what happened that you all got along so well? How did so many of these – and we’ll go through this project in a second, but how did you all – you didn’t quit after the ’69 Tax Act. You said, “Okay. What’s next?” [Laughter] What do we want to transmit to the next generation, Bill? What do you want those college kids to know from your experience?

(WSW): Well, start with Mr. Mott, sweat blood occasionally. [Laughter] Secondly, trust the people in the other organizations. I think, in terms of leadership, you’ll have to learn to become a witness on the sidelines – or someone in the stands applauding great work. You’ve got to learn to recognize great work and trust. At times, you may want to hit them on the head, and that’s fair, but you’ll have to trust them. I think that’s one of the things. It’s trust and respecting the opinions of others.

We wouldn’t have had a good legislative agenda had it not been for Bill Allen talking about using the agricultural term of parity. That got into a whole discussion of community foundations versus private foundations, and should they be the same. That was one, just one of the things that led us into the whole community foundation field. Not a fight over money. There’s plenty of wealth. Get that one behind. The other thing I would say, besides trust and good management principles, you can’t get too carried away with yourself. [Laughter]

(KA): Yes. Because it looked to me like you all had a lot of fun, that you had fun together.

(WSW): Well, when you’re creating something, it is fun, and – of course – so is being on a winning team. We had the great fortune in Michigan of having two great leaders for the Council of Michigan Foundations. Dottie Johnson, who trained (and I had a little bit to do with it because he worked for us) Rob Collier, and we’ve had a continuity of leadership. I think continuity of leadership – and also of vision, a purpose – it’s not been about the person. It’s been about, “Let’s



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work together to solve a problem.” Philanthropy should be about helping society come together – all parts of society.

After all, as I once told the brand new Polish president (when he just became president of Poland, in his first 60 days), “There is no separation between a Mr. Mott, who was an elected public official, who was a financier, industrialist, a business person, and a nonprofit person. No, you cannot, Mr. President, separate the sectors. They’re all part of each other. If you don’t get that point, you miss it. They need to be together.”

No. You can’t cut Mr. Mott into three different pieces. No. But then, *how it works*, because all three sectors come together, one way or another, in most people’s lives.

(KA): Well, you have talked about – I mean, Mott was instrumental to what happened in Michigan. Let’s segue a bit to the international piece.

(WSW): Okay.

(KA): You all made the decision to support community-based philanthropy in a way that hadn’t been done before. Then you translated that internationally. Can you tell us a little bit about why? Why did you do it? Also, what are the important lessons that you got from that experience, in terms again of philanthropy, that you’ve passed on to some others?

(WSW): Well, prior to doing it, we’d had a little planning exercise. I won’t go into detail trying to identify the big issues facing us. They were education. They were the environment, values, ethics, and leadership, and the other was – of course, Flint was there. The other was nuclear war. Don’t forget, in those days, the Soviet Union and the U.S. were locked [laughter] in a conflict of ideas. We changed – we knew we could do nothing about nuclear war, but we needed [to do] something about building community. That’s what I’ve been talking about, building community. That’s something I would say to leadership – to a group of students. Yes, it’s about building community and successful organizations.

So we changed it to the pursuit of peace. The next thing you know (and I had been on the Council of Foundations’ trip with a couple of my trustees, incidentally, to Russia) and about that time, the Soviet Union disintegrated. It just appeared to me. Never in my lifetime did I believe that this would occur. I couldn’t dream it. I thought, “I don’t know what we can do,” but I likened it to a grain of sand on a beach or a drop of water in the ocean. It only may be one drop, it may not be very significant, but I want to be one of those drops. I want to be there. This is the greatest thing that’s occurred in my lifetime almost.

Anyway, off I went. I ran across some people. In fact, I was sitting in the back of a bus at another time; this was my first time to Poland. I don’t know when it was, even, or where it was – and trying to sleep early in the morning on top of a bunch of bags, and this guy midway up the bus is talking about the European Foundation Centre and how great it was. He became my fast friend, John Richardson (former executive director of the European Foundation Centre). I’m trying to sleep at 7:00 in the morning, and we’ve been waiting for an hour for Sylvie Tsyboula from the Foundation of France to get done with breakfast so we can go to Warsaw. We were down in Krakow.





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[Laughter] I finally yelled out “Shut up. I’ll buy it.” [Laughter] That’s how John and I met and formed a strong [friendship]– he was the executive director. It was basically – they never really had a meeting, seven European foundations coming together to form what became the European Foundation Centre. Today, it has a couple of hundred members from all over Europe, as well as international members.

So, having just been through ’69 and the Council of Michigan Foundations, and developing Independent Sector (I was on one of the early boards of the Independent Sector), I think I had the privilege of serving under Brian O’Connell, Sara Melendez, and Diana Aviv. I said, “This is something we have to back. We want to help the nonprofits, which are beginning to emerge in the former Soviet Union, and they need someplace to go. They shouldn’t be coming to the U.S. all the time. They’re European, and so they should be meeting with Europeans.” So we backed the European Foundation Centre very strongly, and we still do. That was in the day when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. We’ve been supporting them, and I think we were on, until about two years ago, their board from the day it officially organized (and I think we’re back on the board now). Anyway, then there were other organizations coming out of that, so we supported the WINGS organization, we supported CIVICUS. In fact, we [still] support it – one of five people in the room that developed the idea that led to CIVICUS. There were other things – the Global Fund for Community Foundations. Way back, when the Flint Public Trust was formed in 1950, we gave a big grant to it then. It was a dormant community foundation. There were a lot of those in this country... communities or cities of significant size to support a community foundation that didn’t have any [resources]. We said, “This is a great idea. It’s wonderful. Think about it. You create a philanthropic fund in a local region and then those people not only can dream, envision and plan, but they can have some money and resources to put behind their vision. That’s great. That’s wonderful.”

We supported, first – Eugene Struckhoff had been the former president of the Council on Foundations in Washington. He became the “Johnny Appleseed” of community foundations. There were a few others, different approaches. Then there were a bunch of consultants, and the next thing you know, Michael Brophy of the Charities Aid Foundation in the U.K. had asked us to partner with him. When we started there were about a handful community Foundations in the U.K. Today, the entire U.K. is covered by community foundations. I think the assets are more than a billion, and I forget what the level of giving is in the U.K. Doug Jansson [former interim director of CF Leads] used to be, I think, with the Minneapolis and the Rhode Island Community Foundation – both of them– he was a consultant. That was the greatest story of leverage I have ever seen in the philanthropic world. We put in a few bucks, and we’re continuing to support the U.K. Community Foundation’s trade association, if I may use that word.

Then that led into the Global [Fund for] Community Foundations. I just think people talk about, as I said, impact and results, return, but just think about it – 100 years ago, 102 years, or 101 now, [Frederick] Goff in Cleveland developed the first U.S.-based community foundations, the first in 1914. We just celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Today, there are over 1,800 – probably close to the 1,840 – community foundations worldwide, with more occurring outside the United States.



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We had helped in Canada. We had helped in, besides the U.K. and also in Mexico, South Africa, Russia, the former Soviet Bloc. Germany has a lot, Italy, the Netherlands – other places. They are developing because it’s a great idea. I think the story, State of Generosity, it’s about good ideas. That’s what it’s all about, a good idea. You can’t keep it down.

(DJ): Bill, who talked about good ideas? The Michigan AIDS Fund was basically your idea. Tell us what you can about that.

(WSW): It was my idea? I didn’t remember that. Let me just tell my story.

(DJ): Okay, good.

(WSW): If I am teaching a student, everyone is going to walk along the sidewalk with their head in the skies like a peacock, and they can either slip on a banana peel and fall down or, like a peacock with their head pruning their feathers, are going to get run over by a truck. The great story is getting yourself up – getting yourself up, and dusting yourself off, and continuing. I think Edison did that, and Babe Ruth. He probably struck out more times than he hit homeruns. So great ideas, and it takes a while to implement great ideas – but it requires persistence, sweating the blood, the hard work, and I would do that.

On the Michigan AIDS Fund, it was obviously something that was occurring on a nationwide basis. I know the Ford Foundation had also supported some things, and it seemed the appropriate thing to do here in Michigan. I was not close to that because we had a staff member who, for years – let’s go back again. His name was Elan Garonzik. He was wonderful, and he still is a wonderful person. He worked for Tom Buckman at the old Foundation Library Center, and the European Foundation Centre was just being formed in Brussels. They needed someone with the knowledge like Elan had at the Foundation Library.

So he went over to Brussels, and we supported his salary over there for a long time, and then he decided to return to the U.S. So we hired him as a staff member. He is openly gay, and has been for a long time. He was our staff member at the AIDS Fund. I think one of the stories here is, yes, we’ve been involved with a lot of activities that occurred in this 40-year period. We funded some of them. In some, we were quiet partners. In other cases, we had staff members. So I’m not the right person to ask about it because we’ve had people on the board of the Council of Michigan Foundations, from Rappleye [Richard Rappleye, former vice president and secretary/treasurer at the Mott Foundation], John Porter, a [former] trustee. I don’t know about Libby [Olivia] Maynard [current trustee]. We also had Phil Peters [retired vice president of Mott], Neal Hegarty [vice president of programs at the Mott Foundation], Maureen Smyth [former vice president of programs at the Mott Foundation]. So, yes, you don’t build a movement all by yourself. That’s another leadership thing. You’ve got to depend on others. You’ve got to trust staff. You’ve got to have good staff.

(KA): Let me look a minute here. We’ve covered a lot of ground. So let me see, but very helpful.

**Kathryn Thomas:** Bill, you mentioned to me that you also wanted to talk about the Office of Foundation Liaison at some point.



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(WSW): Oh, I did?

(KA): Yes. This would be a good time because that’s another example of where you have supported someone like Elan being placed somewhere else. Thank you. That would be a good segue into that one.

(WSW): Okay. Well, you asked about the Office of Foundation Liaison at the governor’s office. It occurred during the Granholm administration. I believe some people from other foundations had a great idea. I think it was Dave Egner and the late Dave Campbell, I believe, had a great idea, and that there ought to be someone in the governor’s office – in the cabinet, really – who knows about foundations but can serve as the liaison between state government and foundations. It just so happened that we had a staff member who had experience in state government as a budget director, I think, and was looking for a change. And yes, it fit right in, Karen Aldridge-Eason, and I think Neal Hegarty or Maureen Smyth, I’m not sure which, has been – because Maureen has now left us, retired – have been the staff... on the advisory committee. It’s gone through two administrations, this office. Guess what? When we were having some problems in Flint, I didn’t know who to call. Do I call the governor on this? Do I call a budget person? Do I call the environmental protection person, whoever the – who do I call? I’m suddenly thinking, “Oh, there is Karen Aldridge-Eason, the Foundation Liaison.” So I picked up the phone and called her. She came right back and said, “Yes, we’re looking at this problem. Thank you. Yes.”

(KA): Good. Let me look here a minute more. Dottie, do you have anything? I’m going to turn the page here, but I want to give you a second if there is anything you wanted to pursue.

(WSW): Not really.

(KA): Okay, nothing else that you want to go into. Okay. Then I know that Mott has been very involved in the Great Lakes Environmental Protection Fund. Do you want to talk a little bit about your environmental funding?

(WSW): Well, I don’t know where the original idea came from, but Maureen Smyth, who ended up being our vice president of programs, was in charge of our environmental program for part of her career here. The idea, there was a \$25,000 grant she gave. Then it was followed up with another several hundred thousand dollars. Out of that grew the Great Lakes Protection Fund, which is one – a huge, huge leverage or return on investment because it continues today. In fact, my son, who is now the fourth president of the Mott Foundation, and one of our program officers, Jumana Vasi, last weekend, went to Quebec City to a conference of the Great Lakes governors and the premiers of all the Canadian provinces bordering on the Great Lakes ecosystem.

My son was blown away by the meeting and the conference. This is about 10 to 15 years after the fund was created. It’s huge, probably one of the most important things that a lot of foundations, and others, and Council of Michigan Foundations was involved in a little bit. It, and some community foundations, was created around the Great Lakes to work in concert on common problems and the like, to have [input] on other issues like Neighborhood Small Grants, race, and other issues. It was a great program. Here it is, years later, bearing a lot of fruit because it is 20% of the world’s freshwater and absolutely essential.



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(KA): Yes. It’s only going to get more important, I think. Thank you. That was really good.

(DJ): Bill, in terms of community foundations, you really provided technical assistance throughout the world but particularly in Michigan and extended that nationally. You seeded community foundations in major cities. Tell us what your thinking is about community foundations.

(WSW): Well, as I said earlier, it just is a great idea, the idea of creating a vehicle, an investment vehicle, a giving vehicle, in a community which is controlled by community members. Also, I don’t care where you are in the world. There is wealth. After all, if you read the Bible, you read about the widow with her two mites – pennies – and how important those two mites were. It can bring the widow with the two mites. It can bring a bunch of school teachers or students together to honor, let’s say, a teacher that they all admired and create a fund in that person’s name. That can occur in any community. As a result, you can create these bodies or places where you can convene. That is one of the purposes of a community foundation: bringing people together, collecting assets for the benefit of the public and the community, and then figuring out what some good ideas, practical ideas that a community foundation can fund. One of the nice things about a community foundation, it’s not like the Mott Foundation where we can parachute into, I mentioned Poland, and fund for a while. They’re now part of the European Union. They no longer need our money. Bye-bye. A community foundation stays in the community. That, to me, is that idea Goff had years ago and it’s just a great, great idea.

Now, behind – I have learned, over the years, that if you’re going to have a successful operation – I don’t care if it’s a business operation; I don’t care if it’s government (I need to remember to come back to NEI and Detroit Institute of Arts). I don’t care if it’s government, business or nonprofit, social service. You need a strong back office. You need to be able to keep records. You need to be able to convene people and keep track of what took place. You need to be able to handle the money ethically [Laughter], and efficiently, and effectively. You need to be able to do all that. That’s often overlooked in our conversations. You can create a great organization, but you better make sure you have a good board, followed by good leadership; and then, you better make sure someone is – knows how to add up the numbers that are being entered into the code of accounts, on the balance sheet or the profit and loss. I’ve learned the hard way that you always must pay attention to that. As a society, we’re learning as school districts begin to go into bankruptcy. Cities go into bankruptcy. One of the things I’ve said, “... Remind me of NEI.” I think one of the reasons there is this New Economy Initiative down in Detroit, helping Detroit revitalize itself. I think one of the reasons it was possible for that group to come together and do that was we had all been working together at the Council of Michigan Foundations. It was a spinoff that the Council necessarily didn’t have to cause, but a lot of the same actors. And the governor, at a celebration party about the Grand Bargain that was created to save the Detroit Institute of Arts, their art collection, to protect it forever, hopefully, from bankruptcy. As the governor pointed out, that couldn’t have happened had NEI not already been there. Maybe NEI wouldn’t have been there if it hadn’t been for the Council of Michigan Foundations. So this idea of understanding you don’t have to have the bright idea, and that’s also a lesson to teach – if someone has a bright idea,



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sometimes you need to share that idea with others. As long as you get the job done, it doesn't matter who gets the credit. My son says that all the time. [Laughter]

(KA): It really is about relationships and trust. You hit it right on the head with that. I'm going to skip a little bit because I want to honor your time. We've talked about some of these.

(DJ): Bill, is there anything you want to tell us?

(WSW): Oh, the Grand Bargain. No, not particularly. There are probably other things. I think the importance for us and staff in all this, because the Council of Michigan Foundations has had so many things occurring. One thing I do want to say, we've had a lot of staff in various parts of it, but the other thing I want to say, if I could get one message across. We need to continue to support, not only in Michigan, but every state ought to have a strong association of grantmakers. It needs to be there. It's just fundamental.

The other, yes, and we have in the State of Michigan. We're fortunate. In fact, I told Kyle Caldwell, who is coming to, I believe, the Johnson Center. Hey, Michigan is – with his going to the Johnson Center – Michigan is back where it belongs. “Hello, Dolly, you're back where you belong.” Think about it. We have the Council of Michigan Foundations who, I will say, is the best.

Number two, we have the Michigan Nonprofit Association and the lot have been – I would put it right up there at the top as a meeting ground on a lot of different projects where the Council of Michigan Foundations has been involved, as well as state government. Obviously, state government was involved in helping shape what it is today, and now [we have] an academic center that promises to be as good as it gets. How fortunate are we in the State of Michigan to be able to have three essential prongs?

(KA): Thinking about what you just said, that you had talked with Kyle and I'm thinking also about your son, Bill. When you are coaching people on the work and you're thinking about your own programs – how do you – what do you say to people about doing this work of grant making or doing this work of philanthropy? What their approach ought to be or what they ought to be thinking about or what values they should reflect? What are you hoping [to see] from that generation, again, that's taking over the foundation?

(WSW): Well, I'm hoping that generation doesn't screw it up. [Laughter] So that's number one. In that generation, I don't know what the problems are going to be because I'm a dinosaur. I don't know what my password is. I don't know how to turn on a computer. I don't use it, period. I don't have a cell phone, really. So I'm a dinosaur from a different age. I don't know what the problems are going to be and what new creative ideas are going to be needed to meet the problems. After all, Flint was the largest city in the world, I think (at least, according to the literature), supporting the development of horse-drawn carriages. Then we had to become a center of the automobile industry. I don't know what the challenges are going forward. I don't know where electronics, social media, and all that is taking us; how it will change us because we have gone from the agrarian, to the Great Lakes, to a place. So much of what we've done is about place.



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All of a sudden, the Iron Curtain came down and we all thought, “How can we help them?” Now, we are saying that the World Bank and the other Bretton Wood Institutions may have seen their best days because you now have China growing, developing, creating Asian development banks or the BNDES Bank down in Brazil and others. They have more money than the World Bank has – huge amounts of money. The Chinese economy is growing. The Indian economy is growing these. The world is changing rapidly. So we have moved, it seems, from a place space to a global. I don’t know. On the other hand, I sense that many young people today, rather than working for big corporations or something else, might want to return to place and might want to improve their little corner of the world. It’s pretty hard to be Atlas and hold the world up, but you can do something in your own little corner of the world. So it’s up to the next generation to figure out how they’re going to address the huge, huge challenges.

(KA): What do you worry about, about sector? Do you have concerns about it as you look forward?

(WSW): Well, I think very few people were there when 1969 occurred. They did not see how it can change your operations. I was in a small group recently. To them, a regional association of grantmakers wasn’t one of the five essential infrastructure organizations. Yes. These are some people who are heads of some very large foundations. They don’t know or appreciate what infrastructure is – the key to infrastructure are the local people, local organizations coming together. They think it’s all about, “Well, how can we be a little more effective?” or “How can we do this?” or get a little more data? Big data. Sometimes, didn’t we wish we had some even little data back in 1969?

They don’t understand or appreciate why the infrastructure we have today seems appropriate. No. There may need to be changes, and there will be changes. The good thing about the Council of Michigan Foundations is that, I think, one – it’s rooted in place with a global vision. You’ve had people from the former Soviet blocs and elsewhere in the world come out to Michigan to study how it’s done or visit Michigan’s community foundations. It’s place-based. It’s trust-based. It’s “We’re in this together,” and “Let’s make it work.” As long as we have that fundamental idea and appreciation and trust of others, I think we’ll be okay. I do worry, like everyone, that there is – everyone equates the wealth of Wall Street. I know C.S. Mott had nothing good to say about Wall Street because, don’t forget, he had to help save General Motors in 1920. As Pierre du Pont (chair of the General Motors Board of Directors in 1915) said, “C.S., if it weren’t for you – Sloan (Alfred P. Sloan Jr., former president and CEO of General Motors) in New York, you running everything in Detroit, and Bassett (Harry H. Bassett, assistant manager of the Weston-Mott Axle Company), who is the head of Buick – General Motors would not have survived in 1920.”

So, yes, we need – I think, at least, in Michigan – we’re always going to have some very rooted, practical people who have some good ideas, too. Then occasionally, we’ll take time to go out and maybe canoe or kayak or something and smell the water and the trees.

(KA): I’d like to do just one more, not two, because we – I want to honor your time, Bill. You gave us the beginnings of your philanthropic biography starting with Harding and meeting your wife. Could you go back just a little bit and talk more about your own sort of commitment to the field?



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Did your parents volunteer? Where has philanthropy been in your life pre-joining the Mott Foundation?

(WSW): I wouldn't say it's been conscious. My father was a very successful newspaper guy. He, for many years, was business and financial editor of The Christian Science Monitor, and he traveled the world for that – in that job, too. He later became in our church (which is the Christian Science Church), a lecturer and speaker, and my mother also. So they traveled the world trying to help people. So there was that. I don't know. That's about it.

(KA): Oh, good. You ended up. Anything else...?

(WSW): Prior to coming here, I did serve on some boards of things or volunteered.

(KA): Well, thank you. Is there anything else you want to make sure that we get on tape about philanthropy, about Michigan, about Michigan philanthropy, about where things are headed? Our mission is exactly what you stated, which is to try to capture some of this so that we can make sure it continues. Is there anything else?

(WSW): Yes. Well, we've had just some really great people. We've been blessed with great people. Think about Ranny Riecker, I mean, just a wonderful person. Russ Mawby. Leonard Smith. I mentioned Bill Baldwin. I didn't mention Ted Taylor. We've had great, great people and yes, my current colleagues at other foundations. I think I mentioned Egner. Okay, let's also think about bright people who just keep on every day. Mariam Noland at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, who was sort of the den mother who brought everybody together around NEI and DIA. So we've been blessed.

I think it's a state which is large, is blessed with natural resources, has a diversified economy, has diversified political beliefs. So it's large enough to have an impact and it's got great – I haven't mentioned them – universities like where you are, great universities. We're not so big. I'm a New Yorker to a degree or lived in Boston, other places like that. Wall Street is all about how do I get to the top percent or tenth of 1%. How do I get to that? It's all about that.

I don't think this state is about “Me.”... There are people in Detroit and in other cities who are investing their money back into their communities. That's what C.S. Mott wanted – to invest back in the people and the place that helped him make a fortune. He felt indebted to them. I think that feeling still exists. I know C.S. Mott once, in his biography, he said (if I can remember – I haven't looked at it recently), “Every person is in an informal, perhaps unconscious relationship with every other person in the quest for civilization.” Yes, I think that's embedded in the DNA of the state.

(KA): Bravo!

(WSW): [Laughter]

(KA): Well done. Thank you so much.

(WSW): Okay, great. Thank you.

- End of Recording -

