**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Phyllis Braunlich**

Interview Conducted by

Karen Neurohr

December 14, 2015

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Karen Neurohr

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Phyllis Braunlich is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on December 14, 2015.

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**About Phyllis Braunlich…**

Phyllis Braunlich was born in Hammond, Indiana, and she grew up with a deep-rooted love for libraries, books, and writing. After a year of college at Indiana University, she put college on hold when she got married and started a family. Later, she took night classes in writing at the University of Tulsa (TU). While completing her degree in Editorial Journalism, she became managing editor of a literary magazine, *The Lost Generation* Journal, when the editor and publisher, Dr. Tom Wood, took leave from the TU faculty to teach for three years at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Like many undergraduate students, she had volunteered to help with the magazine, for the experience. During her time at the journal, the professor suggested she look into the Oklahoma poet and playwright Lynn Riggs, and what she found at his casual suggestion for an article led to a years-long fascination with him. After *Lost Generation*, she earned her master’s degree in English and began teaching college freshman classes. However, in 1984, she decided to quit teaching to research Lynn Riggs and write his biography. She traveled the country with her husband to do her research, and after an initial rejection and lengthy rewrite, her book was published by OU Press as *Haunted by Home: The Life and Letters of Lynn Riggs*. She also has had a collection of his poetry published and has written two other biographies: one on missionary C. Telford Erickson, and another on composer and entertainer Ralph Blane. In her interview, Phyllis discusses the long and winding path she took in the development of Riggs’ biography, and she shares some of her favorite memories and discoveries along the way.

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| **Phyllis Braunlich**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Karen Neurohr  December 14, 2015  Broken Arrow, Oklahoma |  |

**Neurohr** *Today is December 14, 2015. My name is Karen Neurohr, librarian at Oklahoma State University, and I’m in Broken Arrow today interviewing Ms. Phyllis Braunlich. This is for the Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project. Thank you for allowing me to come into your home and interview you today.*

**Braunlich** You’re welcome.

**Neurohr** *Let’s start with this question. Could you just tell me a little bit about yourself?*

**Braunlich** Yes. I don’t know where to begin, but you asked about my career in writing. I realized that I can look back to my childhood and connect the dots as to where I went with my writing, ending up writing some biographies. When I was a child, I was the luckiest kid in the world because Mr. Carnegie had built a library at the end of my block.

**Neurohr** *What state were you growing up in?*

**Braunlich** It was Indiana, Hammond, Indiana, a suburb not far from Chicago. I grew up spending much of my time at that library branch. Loved books; loved stories. I was fascinated with them, and I grew up loving books. Also, I had a father who was a printer for a large company that was called Conkey’s [W. B. Conkey Plant] in Hammond, eventually bought out by Rand McNally. I was fascinated watching him work with the type and the big machines and so on. I was in love with books and writing and wanted to write. You want me to go on with this for a while?

**Neurohr** *Yes, just go ahead.*

**Braunlich** When I got to eighth grade, I was in a new school for seventh, eighth, and ninth, and we started a newspaper for the junior high. I was the editor in eighth grade just because I wanted the job, I guess. (Laughs) It was mimeographed and no big deal, but I wrote a lot of it every week. Thoroughly enjoyed it. I was beginning to go along a track here. Eventually, though, I wasn’t able to go straight through college because I married at age twenty. I figured out that many of the writers that are contemporary, that I know, in the 1900s and since spent some time on newspapers as part of their lives before they went into writing books, such as Hemingway. I always wanted to go to college. I always wanted to meet the professors who write the books. I had a year at Indiana U, and then when I was raising a family with my husband, I took a lot of classes at the University of Tulsa. I tried writing freelance for magazines while my children were growing up. [Two] f my journalism classes at University of Tulsa were taught by Dr. Tom Wood, who was one of my favorite professors.

He published a magazine called the *Lost Generation Journal*. The “lost generation,” of course, refers to between World War I and II. The journal is about American writers, musicians, and artists who lived in Paris part of that time. That included Lynn Riggs. I was always looking for ideas for articles. I wrote articles about James Thurber, one of my favorite humorists, and Robert Hillyer and a bunch of writers who were college students at the time of World War I and went into the Red Cross Ambulance Corps, drove those old Fords over the roads and picked up the wounded from the battlefields. I got into a lot of interesting stories doing that. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Dr. Wood and his wife went to Egypt, Cairo, Egypt, where he was a visiting professor for three years, and he asked me to be the managing editor of his magazine while he was gone. I have here some issues of the magazine so you can get an idea. It was a slick magazine with a lot of pictures. This is the one about World War I and a salute to the Ambulance Corps. I don’t know if you can tell anything much about this.

**Neurohr** *Maybe just a little bit more. You served as the managing editor for three years?*

**Braunlich** Yes. I have a plaque here which he gave me when he came back.

**Neurohr** *Oh, that’s nice!*

**Braunlich** I enjoyed it thoroughly. It didn’t pay anything, but I enjoyed getting articles from professors all over the country who wanted to be published in the magazine. Yes.

**Neurohr** *How frequently did it come out?*

**Braunlich** Three times a year. This is the James Thurber issue, if you remember James Thurber and *[The Secret Life of] Walter Mitty* and “pocketa-pocketa-pocketa.” Really funny cartoon for the cover of that one. Each one had about five major articles, four or five, on different subjects. This issue was dedicated to Henry Miller, and he’s the man that wrote a lot of what a lot of people would call dirty books. He lived in California, and on a trip to California, I visited his home. He didn’t want to be visited, but his son did let me in the door and talked to me for a few minutes. That was interesting to me. This one talks about the reception that Lindbergh got when he landed in Paris, as quoted by a lot of writers at the time. A student did the drawings for that for fun. This one is a lot about John Dos Passos; was one of my favorite writers. You can see there was a lot of variety there, and I thoroughly enjoyed working on that. Well, Dr. Wood said, “Why don’t you go over to Claremore sometime and see what they’ve got on Lynn Riggs?” I never heard of Lynn Riggs. I went over there looking for subjects, and I found very little there. There were things in their library but nothing personal.

**Neurohr** *Was this the public library or the college library?*

**Braunlich** No, at the college, at the—what do they call it now? They’ve changed.

**Neurohr** *It’s Rogers State University.*

**Braunlich** Rogers State now, yes. I don’t believe it was then. It was Claremore Junior College, I think. They had memorabilia. They had two footlockers and a closet. One of them had unpublished manuscripts, and the other had a whole lot of photographs, unidentified. That was enough to be intriguing for me. I decided to look up his family. He had a niece and nephew, his sister’s children, and his niece in Muskogee was very welcoming to me.

**Neurohr** *What was her name?*

**Braunlich** Bernice Hodges, H-O-D-G-E-S. She had four huge scrapbooks of Lynn’s, about this big, and they were full of clippings, playbills, interviews that they had given over many years. She was kind enough to let me come to her home, bring my portable typewriter, work at her dining room table whenever I could while she was at work. She left the door open for me in Muskogee. I learned so much about where Lynn was, where, when, what he was doing, some descriptions of him, some things about his friends.

**Neurohr** *Were these scrapbooks that he kept or scrapbooks that her mother kept?*

**Braunlich** I think that they were clippings that he kept, but I think it was a friend who lived with him who put them in the scrapbooks because Lynn would leave them in a chest, like the pictures that were unidentified. They were very worthwhile, and you ran into some interesting things. One is that Bernice didn’t want her brother to know that she had the scrapbooks. Her brother, [Leo Cundiff], was Lynn’s literary executor, along with his agent from New York, Lucy Kroll. He started a Lynn Riggs Museum in Claremore. …he was not an academician, but he started a museum in Claremore about Lynn Riggs. Sometime earlier, Claremore named a street after Lynn Riggs, but I didn’t know who he was. I was learning a lot about him. He wrote twenty-one plays, and he wrote a lot of poetry.

He published much in a poetry magazine while he was in college and published a book called *The Iron Dish*. Those were mostly poems about Santa Fe. I’m getting more into Lynn’s life now, but I wanted to tell you how my path went from one to another. It went from college to volunteer help for *Lost Generation Journal*, and studying journalism led to that. Then that led to Lynn Riggs. I got a master’s degree in English and was teaching on the college freshman level. Then in 1984 I decided I couldn’t finish the biography of Lynn Riggs unless I quit teaching. I couldn’t get both done. It took me many years and a lot of travel to learn more about Lynn Riggs, but I eventually published the book *Haunted by Home*, which meant that Lynn had always in his head the people of his childhood.

He wanted to write the truth about the people of early Oklahoma, what their lives were like, and that’s something that we could discuss at length. He was trying to publish and have produced mainly tragedies. He did not write many comedies, but he did write some. That didn’t go over very well in Broadway because they were, at the time, used to Cole Porter and tuxedos and dancing girls. Lynn didn’t write anything like that. Well, Lynn got various helps, and he eventually got a fellowship, a Guggenheim fellowship to France. He was one of that lost generation who were in France for a year, and that’s where he wrote a play called *Green Grow the Lilacs*. It was about people he knew, not specifically named as their real names. He had some girl cousins that he was very fond of and an aunt Mary Bryce who was the model for, is it, Aunt [Eller] in *Green Grow the Lilacs*. He used as music the folk songs that he knew. He loved the old folk songs, and he played guitar and sang beautifully. He used them as part of *Green Grow the Lilacs* and also onstage between acts. Well, that appeared in New York in 1931. I can’t think of the name of the group that produced it. [The Theater Guild]

**Neurohr** *I think it’s covered. Let’s go back for just a minute to the* Lost Generation Journal *that you worked on for three years. Was this the only literary journal that was being published at the University of Tulsa at that time?*

**Braunlich** It might be. I don’t know. I don’t know when they started the one they have now.

**Neurohr**Nimrod*, I think is the one they currently have.*

**Braunlich** *Nimrod*, yeah. I think maybe that was later. I’m not sure.

**Neurohr** *You were inspired to learn more about Lynn Riggs from your work on this project and from your professor at the University of Tulsa. You went to Claremore, and you found the items there. At what point did you decide this should be a book about Lynn Riggs? Were you exploring with the thought of doing an article at first?*

**Braunlich** Yes, I was going to do an article for the journal, and the more I looked into it, the more fascinated I became with Lynn Riggs, who he was, and what he was trying to do, and his life experiences. I thought for a long time and said, “This should be a book, but it’ll be years. It’ll require a lot of research.” It took me more than ten years to put it together.

**Neurohr** *Did you have any biographical models that you, that felt like influenced the way that you organized the book or your style in putting it together?*

**Braunlich** I can’t think of any, except that I read generally and widely. The first thing I did was to arrange things by dates. I had a lot of information from the scrapbooks, so I put together Lynn’s place here and here and here in different folders. I came up with a rather long book at the beginning, and I went over to see the editor of OU Press (couldn’t think of who I went to see for a while there) to ask him if he thought they would be interested. He said yes, he thought they would, and to get back to him when I finished the manuscript. That was very encouraging, and I worked a couple more years. I traveled a great deal all over the country, and that’s a long story. I spent a lot of time in Santa Fe, which he loved, but I also was in Hollywood, where he wrote for screenplays.

I was in New York and talked with his agent in New York, who was very uncooperative with me. Then I talked with her ex-husband, [distinguished musician Nathan Kroll], who was sweet as he could be and told me a lot of things about Lynn Riggs. (Laughs) I went to University of North Carolina and visited with Dr. Paul Green, who was a well-known playwright in his own right and a close friend of Lynn’s for many years. Lynn would visit him a lot and some other friends who were there and teaching at the University of North Carolina. That was very helpful to me. The more I traveled, the more I enjoyed, and the more information I had.

I put it all together and sent it over to OU Press. It came right back with a rejection slip. I nearly fainted because I thought, “They should be the ones to publish this. He’s an OU graduate, and he’s an Oklahoman, certainly.” I went over to see Dr. Arrell Morgan Gibson and talk with him. In the meantime, I discovered that the original press director had moved to, I think, University of Arizona Press, so he was no longer there. The way things usually work, that all manuscripts go through a preliminary reader, and many of them are rejected at that point and never really get a good reading. Dr. Morgan Gibson, [OU historian and author], looked at my manuscript, and agreed to read it, and advised me that it needed a stronger storyline. It needed to be more Lynn’s story rather than fact after fact after fact. I rewrote it, and took it over, and submitted it, and told them my story. That time they accepted it.

**Neurohr** *How long did it take you to rewrite it? Do you recall?*

**Braunlich** I think another year went by, maybe. It took a long time. Then they accepted it, and I was delighted. They published it, and I believe they still have it for sale. I think it has done quite well, and I was so pleased.

**Neurohr** *Your research started then. It sounds like the scrapbooks were a key element in your research. As you were learning about him and the places that he lived and the people that he encountered, how did you make the arrangements for going to visit those places and trying to set up and schedule with the different people that you were able to talk with?*

**Braunlich** I did a lot of telephoning, and most of that was informal. People were very helpful talking about Lynn Riggs, and a lot of people loved him. They said he was a prince of a fellow. I’ve heard that more than once, and he was. He was the kind of man that was so generous, if he had two dollars left and you needed one, he’d give it to you. Just would do all he could for other people. You can see how I came from wanting to write, to having opportunities to write, to having a challenge to write a book. I never thought that I would write a book, but I was so in admiration of people who did. I thought it was wonderful. I’ve since written two more biographies.

**Neurohr** *Let’s talk about that in a little bit.*

**Braunlich** A little later?

**Neurohr** *Yes, I have some questions I was going to ask you about that. What were some of your major decision points as you were writing a biography about Lynn Riggs?*

**Braunlich** I had a lot of puzzles to figure out. One of them was that his family story was that when Lynn was at OU, he fell in love with a beautiful girl. She dumped him. He never got over it, and that’s why he never married.

**Neurohr** *That’s what the family would say?*

**Braunlich** Yes. I didn’t buy that. I mean, grown up people in college fall in love, and it doesn’t work out, and it doesn’t ruin them for marriage for the rest of their lives. I learned a lot more about Lynn, and he was definitely gay. There’s no question about it. He had various partners during his lifetime, but he was a fine person. His nephew (Leo was his name, Leo Cundiff) was furious that I stated that in my book, but I thought it was so obvious from his lifestyle story that any reader would figure it out. OU Press wanted me to name it, so I did. Leo never got over that. Lynn had various other partners in his life who came and went. One of them died suddenly at age forty-two, which really hurt him. He was a gentle person, and he had a lot of women friends.

In Hollywood, there were a couple of people, women, who said, “Lynn Riggs is my best friend.” I read in Hollywood some reports about Lynn Riggs, and there was something that I saw a clipping for in Claremore that said Lynn Riggs was dating Bette Davis. I thought, “What? No. What is this about?” In Hollywood, I read in one of those gossip sheets, Bette Davis’ husband was a musician and was in New York working with a concert orchestra. He said, “For those of you who might be worried about Bette Davis going out with Lynn Riggs, her husband wrote and said she has his permission to go anywhere she wants to go anytime with Lynn Riggs.” I laughed and laughed and laughed. (Laughter) It was not a problem. She loved him. He was a very good friend of Franchot Tone and his wife. Was it….

**Neurohr** *Joan Crawford?*

**Braunlich** Joan Crawford. Franchot Tone played Curly on Broadway, one of his first roles, which is amazing because Franchot Tone later always appeared in his tuxedo with a cocktail. He played Curly. He was a guest in their home much of the time, very close to them, was there at their wedding. This reporter said, “I’m going to have to look into this guy. So many women are saying that he’s their best friend.” He was tall and slender and graceful and loved music, loved dancing. I mentioned visiting Dr. Paul Green. I had written him in advance and asked him some questions about Lynn, leading questions to see what he would say. Then it turned out that I made a trip to visit him and go also to New York.

He invited me to his home. He worked in his home. He was a professor in the theater there at the University [of North Carolina] for a long time, and they produced a lot of Lynn’s plays. He and Lynn were good friends, I know, and it was lovely to be in his home, meet his wife. I was there for lunch, and he also invited Jacques Hardre, who was a Frenchman teaching at the university and a very good friend of Lynn’s. I knew that Lynn had stayed with Jacques and his partner whenever he visited Chapel Hill. I was interviewing Dr. Green. He referred me to Barrett Clark’s papers, which were up at Yale, and said that he thought there was a lot of correspondence there for Lynn, and there was. Barrett was Lynn’s agent. I was glad to know about that.

He said to me that Samuel French Company was having a big anniversary party at Lincoln Center the next night, and since I was going to New York, was I going there. Well, I didn’t think so. (Laughs) He thought he might be there. The next night, I was in New York, and I put on my best dark suit and went up to Lincoln Center and walked in. There were lovely ladies having people sign in. I said, “Is Dr. Green here yet?” “No, he isn’t here yet.” I looked down there, and there were people chatting, and waiters with trays of cocktail glasses. I thought, “I can’t think of a single thing I could say to anyone down there,” so I left. (Laughter) While I was at Dr. Green’s, we looked out the window, and Jacques Hardre was coming up the walk for lunch. Dr. Green was saying to me, “Some people thought that Lynn was homosexual because of the way he acts, but I never thought so. Do you?”

Here comes Jacques Hardre up the walk. I did not want to have this discussion in front of him. I said, “Yes, I do. I do think so, yes.” (Laughter) I thought that was pretty funny, and he couldn’t have been more gracious. Lots of people were. When I went to Santa Fe, I was told I could call the [widow] of a young man who was a good friend of Lynn’s in Santa Fe. Her husband, [Jimmy Hughes], and Lynn made a home movie called *A Day in Santa Fe*, which is in the archives of the museum in Santa Fe. It was a rough home movie in black and white, but a lot of celebrities lived in Santa Fe and were in the park and enjoying each other and having a good time. He had a little burro coming down the street, and he wrote captions. It was like an old black and white movie with captions.

**Neurohr** *Did you watch it? Were you able to see it?*

**Braunlich** Yes, you can see it there in the museum. I talked to her about Lynn, and she told me a lot of things that they did and fun that they had and that they really enjoyed Lynn. He was great. She couldn’t have been nicer. She told me a lot of things that I didn’t know about, and people to go and see and so on, and what it was like. When Lynn was at University of Oklahoma, he had a wonderful time. He edited some things, and he published some poetry. Then he had this breakdown, and he left before the end of his senior year and went to Santa Fe. People said, “He was so depressed and melancholy, and we thought he might have tuberculosis,” which was common in those days. He had friends in Santa Fe, some writers that he knew, and he went to the sanitarium up on the mountain in Santa Fe, which had tuberculosis patients.

Most of the people were sleeping outdoors in tents, but they also—I went there. I saw rooms such as he would’ve stayed in, and they had sleeping porches. They had a living area and sleeping porches outside French doors where he slept in the fresh air. He stayed there a while, and he found that people in Santa Fe accepted him as he was. There were a lot of different kinds of people, and it was avant-garde. They didn’t care how unusual you were. (Laughs) He had a good time, and he made this movie. He built a house and had a great time there. When he did some movie work, he commuted from there to Hollywood, and he’d work a while then come home. He had a friend, Spud Johnson, who would drive him there and back. I don’t think Lynn ever owned a car or drove.

**Neurohr** *Did you try to visit the places that he lived when you were doing your research?*

**Braunlich** Yes, yes, but the house that he lived in wasn’t there anymore. I was surprised to learn that stucco houses (is that what they call them)…

**Neurohr** *Adobe?*

**Braunlich** …adobe houses don’t last. The weather wears them out, washes them out. I went to his address, but the house wasn’t there. I accidentally sent some other people there, too. (Laughs) The house wasn’t there, but I thoroughly enjoyed Santa Fe. I went to spend the night in the La Fonda Hotel on the main square where I knew Lynn had stayed, and I think it looks just the same. They still have the Indians at the Palace of the Governors laying out their jewelry for exhibit to sell. I knew that he had stayed in a chicken coop there and looked after the chickens for a farmer, and he wrote a play about it, one of his comedies.

**Neurohr** *How did you hear that story?*

**Braunlich** I think I heard it from Emily [Hughes], the friend who was telling me all about Lynn and things he did. She also told me that people at that sanitarium, a lot of them did not have TB (tuberculosis). They were having a good time! It was like a spa, you know? They had a lot of sunshine. They had ping pong tables. They had programs. They had speakers come and talk about their writings. They were having a great time. Lynn couldn’t afford to stay there real long, but I think he left after about three months, and he worked at various places until he got established and began to sell things. Also, doing work in Hollywood helped a lot of writers during the ʼ30s.

**Neurohr** *Is that place still there that you know of, that was the sanitarium?*

**Braunlich** Yes, yes, it was called Sunmount [Sanatorium], and it was for a while an Army hospital. When I was there, it was a convent, and I was able to go in and visit the whole thing. It had the pierced tin lamps around and all of that kind of Santa Fe décor that’s very attractive. It’s very up high on the mountain. Santa Fe was really his saving.

**Neurohr** *When you interviewed people, were you taking notes, or were you recording your interviews?*

**Braunlich** I took notes, lot of notes, yes. No, I didn’t record interviews much, but various people were just wonderful to me and happy to talk about Lynn. I did go to their archives there, the [New Mexico] archives, and I found things there that were important and some pictures of the people who were there. Oh, there was a woman there that was very prominent, literary, with her literary salon, and I can’t think of her name right now. I will soon. Want to give me a minute to look? [Mabel Dodge Luhan]

**Neurohr** *Oh, I’m sure it’s—I think I remember reading something about that.*

**Braunlich** Yes, it’s in my book.

**Neurohr** *You interviewed his niece in Oklahoma. Were there other family members you were able to meet and talk with?*

**Braunlich** No, there are a couple of more distant relatives in the area, but I never did interview them or sit down with them, talk about Lynn.

**Neurohr** *Do you think they might not have known much about him?*

**Braunlich** Yes, Lynn wasn’t in Claremore much after he got out of high school, and he was not happy in Claremore. His mother died when he was two years old. His father remarried within a few months, a woman who was intelligent and educated but did not like the children from many reports that I heard. She was especially hard on her little two-year-old, Lynn, who was probably like most two-year-old boys. They’re a pain. (Laughter) She was very severe with him, and he was glad to leave there as soon as he could. Of course, he did very well in school, and he sang for a lot of occasions.

**Neurohr** *Have you heard recordings of him singing?*

**Braunlich** No.

**Neurohr** *Are there any? Do you know? Are there any recordings of him singing?*

**Braunlich** I don’t think so. He sang in a quartet at OU, and they traveled a lot. They had a wonderful time traveling the country and singing, and in his hometown, he sang in the movie theater before the shows. I think he had a nice tenor voice and loved to sing and play the guitar.

**Neurohr** *How did you come up with the title for the book?*

**Braunlich** Well, I thought that the people of his childhood, of around 1910 or so, haunted him. They were in his mind. He wanted to speak for them. He spent a lot of time at his aunt Mary Bryce’s house, and she had a bunch of girls. He had these girl cousins, and he understood women because he spent so much time with his girl cousins and had so much fun with them. Of course, his aunt Mary was wonderful to him. She was really like a mother to him. He wanted to speak for those women, and he wanted to speak for the people of Oklahoma who were struggling. They came in as pioneers or were already there as Native Americans. Lynn’s family was both. His mother was Native American; his father was non-Indian. He understood both sides of that question. We destroyed the Indians’ way of life because we destroyed the buffalo and because we thought the Indians should adopt European culture.

They took away a lot of the children and put them in schools to learn to speak English, that sort of thing. We’re knowing the effects of that even today because we promised them sovereignty, but it can be a problem. Lynn knew how the people felt on both sides of that equation and what the problems were, and in his plays. He speaks to one man who was going with an Osage girl who was getting a lot of oil royalties, and she was keeping him in nice clothes and cars. His main star in the story said, “They’re building a new highway out there. Why don’t you go out and see if you can get a job?” They were building Highway 66. There’s a lot of history, and Lynn used local culture. He talks about the pump organ that a woman had in her living room. They wouldn’t have electricity, and he talks about what they wore, what they did. He talks about the cream in the well, particularly, in one play.

They didn’t have refrigeration, so the way they kept cream from spoiling is to put it down in the well where it was cooler. There were a lot of things like that. He is the only place I’ve seen that talked about a feed yard in town in one of his plays. It took place in Claremore, and there was a feed yard. That was a parking area for people who came into town in a horse and buggy or a horse and wagon or whatever they had stayed in the feed yard. It was right near the railroad tracks. Lots of times, the train was delayed or they had to wait a long time for someone to come or leave so they could feed their animals. In his play, which I love, somebody’s bathing a child. Somebody’s cooking over an open fire. It’s amazing, amazing what went on there. When you think about it, coming to a little town, all those shops are lined up along Main Street. You can’t park a wagon sticking out in Main Street. It’s probably pretty muddy there, anyway. I never heard of that, and I think it’s a custom that people haven’t heard of. It’s very old and very rare.

This is the sort of thing he wanted to preserve. He wanted people to know what it was like, and particularly young people who wanted a better life, wanted an education, you know, wanted to move ahead and were lonesome the way they were. He spoke for those people. He had a hard time with New York because they couldn’t understand the accent. They couldn’t understand the expressions. At one time, they were doing a play in New York, and it called for Levi jackets. Nobody had any in New York. He went to Santa Fe and bought Levi jackets to be part of the costumes in the play. He had a whole area of culture here which was totally ignored. We had the idea that the pioneers went out there and made a farm and did good. It wasn’t that easy. I’m fascinated by it, and he was fascinated by the people of Oklahoma and their spirit, their gumption. He does praise them sometimes in what he’s saying.

**Neurohr** *Did you do the index yourself?*

**Braunlich** Yes.

**Neurohr** *You did.*

**Braunlich** Yes.

**Neurohr** *What about the illustrations that were included in the book? Were you able to get those, the ones in that you cared the most about?*

**Braunlich** I think so, yes, and I like the picture on the front, of Lynn wearing his Concho belt.

**Neurohr** *The quote on the cover is from Bette Davis?*

**Braunlich** Yes.

**Neurohr** *How did you find that?*

**Braunlich** OU Press wrote to Bette Davis, and she responded. Celeste Holm called me at home one day and talked to me. She played Ado Annie in one of the early productions. She thought it was wonderful and thoroughly enjoyed it. Paul Horgan was a friend of Lynn’s and a playwright, and so was Mary Hunter Wolf. She was an important director, I think, of plays in New York, but she was also in Santa Fe a lot of the time. She and Lynn were good friends and used to sit on the porch and sing songs to his guitar. They came from various places, but one person said he changed the American Western. He particularly changed the image of the cowboy.

We had movies where it was cowboys versus Indians, chasing each other and killing each other. Lynn was both a cowboy and an Indian. He could ride a horse, and he could round up cattle, but he didn’t like that life. He said Curly was the best expression of a cowboy that he had ever done, who was in *Oklahoma* and in *Green Grow the Lilacs*. The cowboys were like athletes that are so proud of their skills. They’re braggarts, and they’re flirts. They have a good time. Then they round up the cattle, and go to the end of the trail and get paid, and drink up all that they got paid. (Laughter) No, he loved the cowboys, and I think that love shows through. He wrote some script for Gary Cooper in *The Plainsman*, which is one of the most famous Westerns. He was trying to tell the truth about Oklahoma and the people here.

**Neurohr** *You mention that you had a lot of puzzles as you were doing your research. Does anything else come to mind that hustled you about Lynn Riggs?*

**Braunlich** Well, when I think about it, but I can’t think of anything right here.

**Neurohr** *One of the sections of the book, pages seventy to seventy-two, that you included was a section in which Lynn Riggs articulated his goals in a letter to Barrett Clark.*

**Braunlich** Yes, I think he says that he wants to give voice to these voiceless people.

**Neurohr** *Do you think that his goals changed over the course of his career?*

**Braunlich** No, I don’t, but I think he might have felt that he had done all he could for that, and he didn’t live real long. He did get lung cancer, I think, if I remember correctly. He was just in the early days of television. He had one play on television. He would have been good on television because he was mostly interested in character, and character is best if you see people up close. It’s harder to put across on a big stage. He would’ve done well, but he didn’t do much with television.

**Neurohr** *When a biographer is writing a book and as extensive as your research was and for such a long period of time, are there things that you make public and that you don’t make public? Are there stories that you wouldn’t or couldn’t include? Were there things that OU, that the press took out that you can talk about or….*

**Braunlich** No, I don’t think so. I was surprised that they were so frank about his homosexuality. I thought they might turn the book down on that reason, but that didn’t bother them at all. They had other things that they might have been concerned about, but, you know, we’re in a different time now. We know that this happens, so I don’t think so. I think that just about everything I know about him I have told. I gave some thought to what I learned about writing biographies. What did I learn from doing that? I wrote biographies of three people: Lynn, and then—Lynn was my father’s generation, born around 1900. I wrote about [C. Telford] Erickson, a missionary to Albania who was my grandfather’s generation, and I had his diaries. All three of these men were dead before I knew about them. Ralph Blane was from Broken Arrow and a famous songwriter, and he’s best known for writing “Meet Me in St. Louis,” songs for Julie Garland, including “Merry Little Christmas” with his writing partner, Hugh Martin.

I learned a lot of things from writing biographies. You’re speaking about what do you learn that you don’t publish. I learned that nobody leads a perfect life, that everybody has disappointments and troubles, and that often they don’t want people to know about that. They don’t want people to know about their disappointments and troubles. They just want them to know the good stuff, but those things that happen to us are what make us who we are in the end. Because we have trouble, disappointment, you have to deal with it. I want to mention troubles that people had. Of course, with Lynn it was that he was homosexual. Nobody in his hometown would mention that, but they all knew it. In that time, it would ruin a man’s career in Hollywood if it was published. A lot of people out there were never exposed publicly, but everybody knew it.

Then with—let’s see. Who am I talking about next? Erickson, Erickson was a missionary in Albania. His wife was emotionally unstable, and they had to put up with many hardships and were in a strange land, strange language, and culture, and customs. They kept having children, which people did in those days. That was a couple of generations ago. She was unstable, and she could not help him and share his burdens as a missionary. He had to deal with politicians, including the king of Albania and the ambassadors from the US and a lot of important people. His wife had better not appear when they were around because she was unpresentable. Eventually, she went into an institution before she died, but he did his best for his wife and family. His work was very important to him.

Ralph Blane had a mentally disturbed, cruel, and demanding son who made his home life miserable. Ralph would never have said that publicly, and it took me a while to figure out what’s going on with this son. You know, I was reading about him and all the things he had done and the trouble he got into. He didn’t keep a job, and that wasn’t like Ralph at all. The son was seriously off and threatening at times. What do you do with an adult son who will not behave, who is not mentally balanced? You can’t put them in jail. You can’t lock them up somewhere. They tried to live with him all their lives. He outlived them. Nobody has a perfect life, but the things that give us problems are those that make us think and make us wise, as the old saying goes. We think, we become wise, and wisdom helps us to have hope and move along. That’s what I’ve learned from writing these three biographies. It was a lot of work, and I’ve loved doing it.

**Neurohr** *Were you traveling alone when you visited the places out of state?*

**Braunlich** No, no. Most of the time, my husband and I called it our vacation, but I did go to Santa Fe alone several times. I went to New York with a woman writer who was also working on some research. Didn’t like New York at all. I mean, I wasn’t comfortable there, but I did learn a lot, and so did she. My parents lived in California, so when I visited them, I rented a car and drove the freeways and stayed up by UCLA. I drove to the campus. I don’t know if I could have done that later on, (Laughs) but I just wasn’t aware that it was going to be really dangerous. It is. You know, the traffic is famous. I pulled up to the gate in the morning at UCLA. It’s right in the middle of Los Angeles, and I thought it would be probably high-rise buildings. It wasn’t. It’s just kind of a green campus with Spanish-style architecture. I pulled up and said, “I want to go to the library. Where’s the library?” He said, “Which one? We have nine.” (Laughter) I did get to the right library, and it was very helpful. Sometimes I had no fear. (Laughter)

**Neurohr** *You said in your preface that you examined hundreds of clippings and you would like to hear from those that you might have missed. Did anyone contact you later?*

**Braunlich** No.

**Neurohr** *Did you learn about anything later that you would have included?*

**Braunlich** I don’t think so. Quite a bit of time had passed since Lynn had died. Once in a while, I would meet someone that knew him. His brother Edgar, his older brother, stayed in Claremore and worked with his dad, I think, in the bank and the ranch and was much admired in the town. The man who told me that said he was a wonderful guy. Lynn never felt at home in his hometown. He didn’t follow the pattern that was expected. His father remarried late in life to a young woman who had been taking care of him. His second wife died. They came to visit him in Santa Fe, but I think generally his father did not appreciate his status and his abilities and what he had achieved. I think he finally gave up on that.

**Neurohr** *Do you think that was because of his father’s lack of education, perhaps, if that were the case?*

**Braunlich** Well, this is a man who’s a rancher, which means he’s got a lot of cattle and is doing well, and a banker. He was president of the bank in Claremore. No, he’s not ignorant. He raises this kid who wants to be a musician and actor. How would you feel? You can give him a job at the bank. You can put him in charge of the ranch. He wants to go to New York and try to be on the stage. You know, a lot of parents have experienced that. You get one kid who’s different from the others. It doesn’t do to try to mold them into something they’re not. It’s better to encourage them and try to guide them a little bit. His father didn’t send him to college.

He went to Los Angeles, among other places, and worked on a newspaper. A bomb went off one day nearby, and he got the story firsthand. It covered a lot of pages for different newspapers, and he got three hundred dollars and put him back, himself, in OU. That’s how he went to college. He washed dishes and waited tables in the fraternity for his board and room. His father could have afforded to send him, but he didn’t care. This is one of the reasons that I sympathize so with Lynn. My parents didn’t think a girl needed to go to college. They would say, and I quote, “She’ll just get married.” (Laughs) I kind of thought marriage was a good thing, and so was college. It took me twenty years, but I did it.

**Neurohr** *Do you have a favorite play of his that he wrote?*

**Braunlich** Yes. I love *Some Sweet Day*, and it is about a town when the Halley’s Comet is returning in 1910. The people are all disturbed, and they think it’s going to be the end of the world. It takes place in the feed yard. This is where I learned about what the feed yard is. A bunch of people are waiting for the train. Now, this boy in the play is running away from home because of his wicked stepmother and going to his grandma’s in Sapulpa. He’s waiting for the train, and a cowboy named Buck kind of takes him under his wing and looks after him. He meets a little girl whose parents turn out to be midgets. This play may be a problem to produce, but I love it. Her parents are midgets, and there are other midgets with them. They’re going on the train to their next performance with the circus.

It’s just charming, and it has songs. The script I have does not have the music. One version of it, I think, was done on television sometime, probably a very small version. I would love to see it produced. A lot of songs are so good, and they say, “Maybe it’s going to come around the next time.” It did around 1986, something like that, and people were worried about it might be the end of the world. The star in the play says, “If you’re going to take it for a sign, take it for a good sign. There’ll be plenty of work and plenty of grub, and nobody’ll tell us what to do.” Well, that would be a good thing. (Laughs) We’re still working on all that, aren’t we?

**Neurohr** *Yes. What is your favorite scene in that play?*

**Braunlich** Favorite scene? Well, let’s see. I haven’t read it for a while. I don’t know that I can say that. People in the feed yard slept—the men slept under the wagons. The women slept in the wagons. The feed yard also had a warming cabin with a stove in it in case it was freezing outside. All of that becomes part of the play. I don’t remember, but I remember the scene where he was talking to the cowboy, Buck. Buck didn’t want to encourage him to run away from home but could understand what he was doing.

**Neurohr** *The feed yard, is that central to the whole play, then?*

**Braunlich** I think so. As I recall, it’s the only scenery. I think it’s like *Wizard of Oz* without the wizard. He runs off and meets all these strange people, and they dance, and they sing. He gets on the train and goes to his grandma’s house. I love it. I put some copies of the play in a couple of places and saw that it was copyrighted in the name of his niece and nephew, who are now gone. I don’t know if anything will ever come of it, but it’s in some libraries.

**Neurohr** *Do you have a favorite Lynn Riggs poem?*

**Braunlich** Yes, I do. There’s one about—it takes place in Santa Fe, and it’s about the woman washing her hair next door. I think I can find it here. It’s short.

**Neurohr** *Could you read it for me?*

**Braunlich** Sure, if I can find it here. I like a lot of them. I really enjoy his poetry. I should look in the index; maybe I would find it. Can you give me a minute here?

**Neurohr** *Yes.*

**Braunlich** Nope, need a little more time to find it here. I’m sure it’s in here. May be in his other book, but I don’t think so. Might help if I put on my glasses. There’s so many that I really like. Well, I can’t find it. I can read another one that I like, also. I don’t know if it’s in the other book or I’m just not seeing it. It must be in the other one because there are more about Santa Fe. He’s on his patio, and this woman is next door washing her hair at the well. You can imagine. Her name is something like Lucinda. I assume she’s Mexican and has that long, shiny, black hair. Want to hear the other one?

**Neurohr** *Yes.*

**Braunlich** Okay. This is called “The Shaped Room.”

Guitar on yellow wall is good.

The room receives you, takes you in,

and the stove is tongued with pinion wood

less for the spirit than the skin.

The ginger lamp is honey light.

Two tables start their disarray

right at the edge of waxen night –

man cannot work who cannot play.

Pause if you must (and mustn’t one?).

Plumb precision with a pole

thrust at the point of star or sun,

else wake to wallow in a hole

but momentary. Foot and ankle

captain the heart – look where they lead you.

Now you are in, let nothing rankle,

let nothing now dismay or bleed you.

Aware of waves of little blisses,

the nerves receiving what they can

of titillation and some kisses —

this is the ultimate, this is man.

But only note, beyond the shadow

another room not lyrical

whose air is something else than meadow

bright with sun and madrigal.

The wall is hardly there to see

within that inner utmost lair.

Step in, and if you will, with me,

or if alone no one will care.

Alone you must be in the end;

the inner room upends unto

whatever wood or mud you bend

to the shape of room whose shape is you.

Kind of a loneliness there.

**Neurohr** *In the preface for your book* Haunted by Home *you say that you hoped through this book that you would regain for Riggs a well-deserved place in American literature and theater history. How do you feel about that?*

**Braunlich** Well, it’s much better than it was. He is published and talked about in many places, and he’s much better known. I think he’s still undervalued. He was called father of the folk play. I don’t consider them a folk play. People who looked at *Green Grow the Lilacs* said, “Why, it’s just a bunch of milkmaids dancing.” No, it’s much more than that! I quote some woman who says that the servicemen who were home and came to see *Oklahoma* in 1943, standing room only, to them it meant home, family, finally being where you belong. That’s what it is. Actually, the Europeans were the immigrants who came here. We were the immigrants, and the Native Americans were the natives who had to give up and make room. The same thing has happened, I think, in every country in the world. Immigrants come looking for a place to call home, a place to live a better life, something that would suit them better and help them more. Other people have to make room, and they have to accept each other. I think that that’s what this book is about. The cowboy and the farmer must be friends, and the cowboy would much rather have the open range. They’re still fighting about that in the West.

**Neurohr** *The University of Tulsa has the archival materials that you donated as part of the collection there. Actually, I found the finding aide online. You probably have seen the finding aide for that collection.*

**Braunlich** No, I haven’t looked online, so I probably have not.

**Neurohr** *I know that you went to school at the University of Tulsa and earned your bachelor’s degree and your master’s degree there, so what was your decision about archiving your research materials and your intent?*

**Braunlich** I tried to put there things that would be of interest to people in this area, more personal things like photographs.

**Neurohr** *Were these photographs that people allowed you to make copies of, or they gave them to you?*

**Braunlich** It’s been a very long time. Yes, I spent a lot of time with a contraption to take pictures of pictures, but I did not have very good equipment. I put the pictures on the ground and took the pictures of them and a lot of slides. I had some slides from productions. That’s how I came out with a lot of pictures. I think that’s probably where most of these came from. Then there’s correspondence. Paul Baker was a head of a department, theater department in Trinity University of Dallas. I visited him. Lynn was there one semester as a visiting professor, talking about writing drama. I talked to him about how that went. Lynn wasn’t there very long, but it’s mentioned in my book. Let’s see. Bette Davis’ correspondence to me, carbon copy of a typed letter. That must be her comments about Lynn’s work. Oh, Noel Kaho was a dentist in Claremore. He, I think, shared with Leo, taking care of Lynn’s papers. Noel Kaho was a booster for Claremore.

When *Oklahoma* the play came to Tulsa, he invited the whole cast out there for a barbecue. I don’t think this is in my book. He was roasting a cow or pig all day long on a fireplace, and he had a bus go get them. Then he had the bus stopped by robbers, and they got in the bus with kerchiefs around their nose. People thought they were being robbed. Then they came up to have the barbecue. About that time, the meat got so done that it fell off into the ashes, (Laughter) so he sent out for steaks. They all had steaks. (Laughs) His daughter, Sally Kaho, ended up with Noel’s papers. Noel did the best he could to sell some of Lynn’s works, but it didn’t happen. I found Sally living down on the Gulf Coast. She still had a box full of materials at that time, so she sent me all that her father had. That’s where I got a lot of things that was part of his work. Noel Kaho was trying to help publicize these things and get them better known and did the best he could.

**Neurohr** *Did you archive things in other places besides the University of Tulsa?*

**Braunlich** What is the question?

**Neurohr** *Did you add things to other places besides the University of Tulsa, or did you put everything there? That was the one place that you….*

**Braunlich** I put some things in the University of Oklahoma because it had more to do with them. I scattered his information as far as I could if it was appropriate. My Erickson book, I gave a copy to the Yale library because his correspondence is there, and I gave a copy to a retirement community in California where he lived at the end of his life. I tried to scatter things around like that a little, but mainly I gave papers to OU and to TU. I thought that was appropriate.

**Neurohr** *What advice would you give to scholars who are researching Lynn Riggs?*

**Braunlich** Well, I don’t know that I can give advice. I feel like I wrote everything I could. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Are you aware of ways that your book has been used?*

**Braunlich** I can’t say that I am. There are people like Rob Riley, who was one of my students and became interested in Lynn and made the big collection of Lynn’s works, which he gave to OU. He also helped Leo, the nephew, set up that museum in Claremore. Rob was very artistic. He was active in theater, so he helped that to come about. He worked pretty hard on that. I’m aware of that, but I don’t know. I think the poetry book has traveled pretty far.

**Neurohr** *How did the poetry book, how did that project come to you? It says on the cover it was a Diamond Jubilee Memorial, 1982.*

**Braunlich** Yes. I worked hard to get the Diamond Jubilee Memorial committee to sponsor this publication as part of their celebration. I thought it was appropriate. They gave me creditation. They gave me this seal which I could put on it. They never gave me a dime. They never even gave me any publicity. They did not list me in their projects. Too bad. I got from Noel Kaho the manuscript, and the pictures which had been done by Ray Piercey, and Ray Piercey was a distinguished artist in Claremore. I don’t know that I would have chosen a Western theme as he did, but I think it’s beautiful. I think it’s well done. Someone had taken the manuscript (this might have been his agent in New York) and took out all the punctuation and capitals like e. e. cummings. I thought it was very confusing. Lynn’s work, his poetry, is not smooth reading anyway. I added it back as best I could where I thought Lynn would have had it, and took the titles from the poems themselves.

**Neurohr** *Was this originally designed to be a collection of poetry that would be published?*

**Braunlich** Yes. [Lynn had selected the forty poems. The only changes I made to the poems in typescript were to restore essential punctuation and select titles from the poetic diction. With them were twelve beautiful illustrations by Pay Piercey, black sketches with a golden yellow glow in the backgrounds, suggestive of Oklahoma’s sun, soil, and sky.

I grouped the poems according to movie-like themes: Locations, Love Scenes, Gothic Plots, Settings, Battles, and Dramatic Monologues, each with an introductory critical paragraph. I wrote a two-page biographical introduction to the book about Riggs’ life and concluded with a short biography of artist Ray Piercey. I titled the book like one of the poems: *This Book, This Hill, These People: Poems by Lynn Riggs*. I copyrighted my contributions separately.

**Neurohr** *You talk about it being a manuscript, so it was a cohesive group of poems.*

**Braunlich** Yes. I think that Noel Kaho tried hard to get it published, but it didn’t happen. I published it in Tulsa with a very excellent publisher. It cost me a lot of money which I never did get back, but I couldn’t bear to throw it out. I think it’s wonderful, and I was able to sell quite a few of them to libraries. They told me this was perfect binding. It’s not exactly perfect binding because it’s not flat there, but the reason they did it that way is they had this illustration in the middle which covers both pages. That’s a good thing. I think people think it looks more like a book with perfect binding, but I haven’t done much publishing. (Laughs) I tried to get a group in Claremore to pay for publishing it, but they were in the midst of acquiring some other things of historic value and not able to do it. We did it ourselves, and when I didn’t sell all of them after a few years, I divided them up among the family. A lot of them were at the museum over there and sold from there. Did that answer your question?

**Neurohr** *Yes. Yes, I mean, the Oklahoma Centennial, of course, was not that long ago, and similar types of state recognition and things were going on, as you describe. I don’t know how the Diamond Jubilee compared with the Oklahoma Centennial. I don’t remember.*

**Braunlich** What is Diamond, seventy-five years? [1982]

**Neurohr** *Yes.*

**Braunlich** I tried to get some help from Oklahoma Arts and Humanities, and I put on the application that I had a master’s degree with specialty in community college teaching, which I did. It was fifteen hours extra. I did not understand how these things work. Apparently, that fifteen hours is meant to lead you toward a doctorate in teaching. It didn’t really count as an end. I needed a master’s degree in order to teach on the junior college level or the college level anywhere. I called and said, “Don’t I have a degree in English here? I’d seen it listed otherwise.” They said, “Well, you had this community college thing.” I said, “I got to have a master’s degree, and I’ve done all the work.” I got that, but when they read about this community college specialist at the Arts and Humanities Council, they evidently figured that it was not the right degree for what they needed. They turned me down. A lot of help comes if you know what you’re doing and you know the people involved and what they want. I didn’t. I didn’t get much help, but to me it was worth every cent.

**Neurohr** *You persevered.*

**Braunlich** Yes. Yes, and doing the biography meant so much to me. As I said, I learned a great deal from all three of these biographies.

**Neurohr** *This book of poetry was published before your biography.*

**Braunlich** Yes.

**Neurohr** *You were already working on the biography when you were working on this, too, weren’t you?*

**Braunlich** Yes, and I was advised not to waste time on the poetry book and go ahead with my biography. I had a friend with a doctorate who kept insisting that I get a doctorate with my book, make it be my thesis. One thing, I didn’t want to do two more years of classwork. For another thing, I wanted to do my book! (Laughter) I didn’t want supervision. (Laughs) That’s how it came about. I did interrupt it a little to do this little book, but I love this little book. I am fortunate that as a writer I could afford to do what I love doing. I never made enough money to keep me in groceries. Fortunately, I had a husband who didn’t care. (Laughter) A lot of the traveling we did was vacation combined with pleasure.

We went to Harvard at one time, and I did research at Harvard Library in the commons in Boston. We had to stay outside of town and drive in. The library was open from eight a.m. to five. In the worst traffic of the day in Boston, my dear husband drove me to Harvard Yard and going on all those roundabouts where you have to know where to get off. He got lost many times, and the river runs through the middle of it, which didn’t help. Then he’d have to get back there at five o’clock, and I’d be on the corner waiting. (Laughs) We were there three days. Then we went to Yale, and at Yale I was doing research on Erickson at the divinity school. Same thing: three days, drive back and forth, but not the Boston problem. I can tell people I’ve been to Harvard and Yale. (Laughter) It was interesting to me to see that.

**Neurohr** *It would be. It would be.*

**Braunlich** It’s an expensive hobby.

**Neurohr** *Yes. I could see that, too. Let’s talk about last year at the Claremore Museum of History when there was a dedication of the literary landmark honoring Lynn Riggs. The dedication had actually previously been done in 2003, and the museum is fairly new in Claremore now. My understanding was the collection was in a place that was maybe inaccessible to people at one time, the Lynn Riggs collection.*

**Braunlich** It was in a lot of places, yes.

**Neurohr** *Anyway, now it seems like it has a permanent home in this museum of history with some beautiful displays and exhibits about his life. What does that mean to you after all this time and all of your effort?*

**Braunlich** It means a great deal. I think at the first Claremore did not know a whole lot about Lynn Riggs, just maybe the play. I don’t know. When I started out, I found the papers in the library, which had built a new foyer for the surrey with the fringe on top. Before that, the surrey was outdoors next to the chamber of commerce building, and the papers were in boxes on the stairway for a long time. Then later I found that they moved the, I think they moved the surrey over to the college, and they moved the papers over there in an unaccessible place. They were not available to people, and I just thought it was a terrible shame. At one time, somebody wanted to give the surrey to the University of Missouri or something. I wrote a letter to the editor, “Oh no, that’s our surrey!” (Laughs) It’s actually from the movie.

They also had the dress that Laurey wore in the movie, which Shirley Jones gave to us. These things were piled over a couple of trunks in the closet with the dress laying on top, and it was getting very little care. I guess this often happens with papers and memorabilia from people who later become important, but at the time, nobody thinks, “Oh, we don’t want that. What in the world will we do with it? Where will we put it?” I think that the building that this, if I have this correct, the building that the museum of Lynn Riggs is in now was the chamber of commerce building where these things were a long time ago. They were not cared for, and they were not arranged so that people could use them. I could be mistaken, but I think that’s interesting how things, what goes around comes around. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *A few things that you said in your speech at the dedication stood out to me, and I jotted them down. I’ll just share those and see if you have any comments to add here.* *One of the things that you said was, “We need to allow people to preserve what’s best in their own background, customs, skills, and language.”*

**Braunlich** How did I say that again? (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *“We need to allow people to preserve what’s best in their own background, customs, skills, and language.”*

**Braunlich** I’m not sure what the context was of that, but I guess I would agree with that.

**Neurohr** *I think it was, of course, in reference to Lynn Riggs and his writings.*

**Braunlich** Yes, and a lot of people said that people don’t want to watch dramas about poor people or ignorant people or people who don’t know how to talk right. They said you can’t have these things in your plays. You can’t have in your plays that men are drinking liquor and gambling because Oklahoma was a dry state. That’s not true. Ha ha ha. (Laughs) They didn’t live in Oklahoma, and it was very true. He wrote a play called *The Domino Parlor* where they did a lot of gambling and drinking. Some other things they said, “Well, you can’t write about a play that suggests incest.” Well, he did. It wasn’t emphasized. It wasn’t visible, you know. You didn’t see these things, but you knew bad things happened that people had to deal with. A lot of things. Curly and Judd get in a fight at the end. Well, did Judd set fire to the haystack they were on as originally written, or did Judd fall off the haystack and fall on his knife and kill himself? The play ends a couple of different ways. I think that in *Oklahoma* Aunt Eller calls for a kangaroo court and proclaims him not guilty so he can go off on his honeymoon. In *Green Grow the Lilacs*, he has to go to jail and stand trial. These things happen.

**Neurohr** *You also said we need to accept people as they are, and then you said, “People need understanding and acceptance. Understanding begets respect. Respect begets hope.”*

**Braunlich** Yes, yes. We still have a lot of problem with gay people. We still have a lot of people who don’t want to touch anybody that’s gay or allow them in their store or ever see them. We still think that maybe they just need some good education. People are people, and we understand these things better. They need acceptance, and they’ll do the best they can, but they can’t deny themselves. It’s very hard to know that people everywhere you go look down on you and don’t want anything to do with you. I guess that’s what I meant there.

**Neurohr** *Do you have anything else that you want to add for the record of the interview?*

**Braunlich** I think that I’ve been able to say it all. I’m glad I got in that bit about all that that branch library did for me as a child. It was a magic kingdom. It was wonderful. I read everything in it and loved it, and I can look back and see that it influenced the whole rest of my life. I hear people talk about closing branch libraries because we can do it all online, and I’d be sad to see that. A library is a meeting place, too, and a lot of other things. I hope we never completely do without books, but then, that’s my generation. Y’all think over that and be careful. (Laughter)

**Neurohr** *Well, thank you so much for your time and for the interview and for helping everyone understand more about your tremendous work that you did to share Lynn Riggs’ story, but then also the other biographies that you have done, as well. It’s been really interesting to visit with you and learn more about everything.*

**Braunlich** Thank you. I’ve enjoyed it.

**Neurohr** *Thank you.*

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*