Narration: Welcome, I am Jessica Miesner, a UW-Madison library and information studies practicum student in the UW Archives Oral History Program, and I will be hosting this mini-movie. Today, we offer a perhaps, little known story from the long career of Emeritus UW President Edwin Broun Fred, known as E.B. In this, you will find firsthand accounts from his life and career as told primarily by Dr. Elizabeth McCoy and Dr. Martha Peterson. As you will hear, McCoy and Peterson discuss their work and personal interactions with Fred, focusing on his support of women students.

E.B. Fred served as UW President from 1945-1958, but he started out in the bacteriology department. Fred came to the University of Wisconsin in 1913, and took a position teaching in soil bacteriology. Later, he became the dean of the Graduate School and then the dean of the College of Agriculture. Here, Fred discusses his first years and work as a professor of bacteriology.

E.B. Fred: (Fred, E.B. #113, Tape #7-00:03:45-00:44:23) I was brought to Wisconsin, directly from Germany, where I had my degree was from the University of Gottingen, and asked to work in microbiology, especially in connection with the preservation of food products, canning industry, dairy industry, and so forth, in addition to general instruction. Although in instructional work, I was teaching, what was called at that time, soil bacteriology or soil microbiology.

Narration: Dr. Fred was a great proponent of women students in graduate studies and on the faculty. Here, Dr. Elizabeth McCoy, UW professor of bacteriology remembers her first meeting with Dr. Fred.

Elizabeth McCoy: (McCoy, Peterson #634, 00:00:51-00:01:49) I think I was a senior at the time I first spoke with him, in the chairman’s office, I had just been offered a position in Washington at a fabulous salary, as I thought of it then, Dr. Fred called me in that day and gave me a pep talk about graduate work, and then offered me the salary of $60 a month. I think I must have hesitated because immediately after talking with Dr. Fred, Mr. Hastings called me in again and he told me that this was an opportunity that I should really consider, because he said Dr. Fred was the genius of our department and that I could not work with a genius every day of my life, it didn’t take me very long then to decide that Mr. Hastings was right and that I would choose graduate work and go on.

Narration: Elizabeth McCoy and Fred continued working together for many years. McCoy would go on to be one of the University’s great scientists and leave an indelible mark on her field of study in bacteriology. Here, McCoy speaks about Fred’s policies in teaching women students.

Elizabeth McCoy: (McCoy, Peterson #634, 00:05:51-00:06:22) Well he did take us as individuals, he never raised the point of our being women or men, as I remember it. He always
challenged us to think, as a person, and of course to think scientifically, and so I’m sure that at that time, his interest in each graduate student was in his potential to develop into a scientist, regardless of sex.

Narration: Martha Peterson served as the dean of women students for two years while Dr. Fred was president. Here, she speaks of Fred’s concern in the lack of women faculty and graduates in the sciences.

Martha Peterson: (#246, Tape #4- 00:56:30-00:57:11) When I came to the university, E.B. Fred, and this was 1956, was concerned that the university should be doing more for women, he was concerned that most women were enrolled in nursing and physical education and home economics, and yet the woman he admired most was Elizabeth McCoy in bacteriology and he wanted young women to be doing those things and he talked to me a lot about how to open up other fields for women, and he cared about it.

Narration: Fred speaks here of his pride in having had a student like Elizabeth McCoy

E.B. Fred: (Fred, E.B. #113, Tape #3- 00:54:01-00:54:35)

I still brag the girl that I had Miss McCoy over in my department, I think probably the top student we ever had.

Narration: Here, Martha Peterson shares some personal memories of Fred.

Martha Peterson: (McCoy, Peterson #634, 00:08:47-00:09:45) I think I came to the University of Wisconsin because of Dr. Fred, I knew of the fine reputation of the university, I came here for an interview and went home after the interview and spoke little of the university, but a great deal of what fun it would be to work for a man like Dr. Fred, he convinced me in just a couple of hours of his sincere interest in women, in women students at the university, and I knew that working with him in the particular area of the dean of women’s responsibility would be a great deal of pleasure and after I had been on campus just a short time, I had much evidence of it. The first Sunday I was here, I went to dinner with the Fred’s at Slichter Hall and it seemed to me that even though this was a summer session, he knew something about almost every young woman, and talked with them and visited with them and I thought this was wonderful.

Narration: We hope these clips offer a glimpse into a lesser-known aspect of President Fred, and his focus on the support of women students. We will now conclude this look into a piece of Fred’s campus history. For more information about UW Madison’s Presidents and Chancellors, contact the UW-Madison Archives or go to our website at archives.library.wisc.edu. I’m Jessica Miesner; and thank you for listening.