

3-18-2004

## Francis Borkowski oral history interview by Mark I. Greenberg, March 18, 2004

Francis T. Borkowski (Interviewee)

Mark I. Greenberg (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo\\_oh](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh)



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Borkowski, Francis T. (Interviewee) and Greenberg, Mark I. (Interviewer), "Francis Borkowski oral history interview by Mark I. Greenberg, March 18, 2004" (2004). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 69.  
[http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo\\_oh/69](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/69)

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Historical University Archives at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

# **COPYRIGHT NOTICE**

**This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.**

**Copyright, 2008, University of South Florida.  
All rights, reserved.**

**This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.**

**For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.**

USF Florida Studies Center  
Oral History Program  
USF 50<sup>th</sup> History Anniversary Project

Narrator: Dr. Francis T. Borkowski  
Current Position: Retired

Date of Interview: March 18, 2004  
Editor: Danielle E. Riley  
Date of Edit: April 29, 2004

Interviewer: Mark I. Greenberg  
Location of Interview: Tampa  
Campus Library  
Abstractor: Jared G. Toney  
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

## TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

*Dr. Borkowski was the president of USF from 1988-1993.*

### *Family history; hometown*

He was born in the steel town of Wheeling, West Virginia, but his family made their home across the river in Steubenville, Ohio. Both his mother and father were born in the United States, while his grandparents all came from Poland, migrating to the U.S. in the early twentieth century. He recalls his hometown being “a very diverse community – though nobody ever called it that.”

### *Youth; early education*

Dr. Borkowski attended an elementary school in the community associated with the Polish church, where he learned to speak the language of his ancestors, and then went on to Catholic Central High School in Steubenville. He was one of the first in the family to finish high school, and part of the first generation to go to college. “They simply ... went into the mills and worked, so they did not go to school.” Still his parents emphasized a formal education for young Borkowski, believing that it was the “way to a good life.”

He was not an exceptional student in school, though he became interested in playing the accordion at the young age of nine, performing on various occasions in the community.

### *Growing interest in music*

When he had a serious back operation during his high school years, he began reading biographies of composers, recalling, “I got sort of enamored, I think, with the romance of the composers.” As a result, he began taking formal classes in music and music history, as well as attending related summer camps.

### *College*

He considered colleges such as Cincinnati, Ohio State, and other schools within the region. He was “really taken” with Oberlin College, impressed by their music conservatory as well as their liberal arts program. He attended Oberlin from 1953-1957, earning a Bachelor’s of Science and Music Education.

### *Commitment to music*

As a college student, he planned on finishing his degree and then going on to teach music at the high-school level. However, mid-way through his college years, he attended a music festival in Aspen where he was able to study with a prominent international clarinetist by the name of Reginald Kell. As a result of the experience, he decided that he “would very much like to play professionally.” Though he had been formally preparing to become a teacher, Borkowski began to consider dedicating himself to the clarinet, “to learn how to play this instrument seriously.” Upon his acceptance to Indiana University, he was given the opportunity to do just that. He also had the good fortune of meeting his future wife while studying music at IU.

### *Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra*

In December of 1957, there was an opening in the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, so he decided to apply. “Really, I went to the audition ... for the experience of auditioning ... and, I got the job ... it was very quick, my whole career changed.” He continued to play in the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra while completing his studies at Indiana University.

### *Marriage; Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra*

In 1959 he and his wife Kay were married, at which time he finished his M.A. degree and resigned from the Orchestra in order to accompany her to her new position with the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. Once in Jacksonville, he started a high-school music program while teaching history courses. Before long, Borkowski was asked to join the Jacksonville Symphony along with his wife.

### *Doctorate at West Virginia University*

After spending two years in Jacksonville (1959-1961), he decided to pursue a doctoral degree at West Virginia University. In the late summer of 1962, he became the marching band director at the University, while simultaneously participating in the concert band, teaching clarinet, and working on his doctorate. His doctorate was in music education with a minor in musicology, and he completed his doctorate degree in 1967. Borkowski’s dissertation was about “the relationship of success in undergraduate work to success in teaching as measured by the performance skills of students ... teachers ... rankings ... [and] student’s knowledge.”

Borkowski was a full-time faculty member at West Virginia University from 1962-1967, “and I don’t recommend it for anyone ... because my colleagues ... were also my committee members and advisors for my doctoral work.”

### *Tenure at Ohio University*

In 1967 he went on to Ohio University, where he was given the opportunity to teach a different style of courses in music theory and research. In 1968, he was elected to the faculty senate, a time he remembers was particularly difficult in part because of the war in Vietnam. In 1969, Borkowski was asked to join the central administration at the University, but was deferred because of his commitments in the school of music, where he had been chosen to serve as the assistant director of the School of Music.

### *Administrative experience at Ohio*

The following year (1970), Ohio University was closed a week after Kent State was shut down. “It was a very tumultuous period ... I was asked then to join the academic area of Ohio University as Assistant Dean of Faculties,” a position that was considered the second in the administrative hierarchy at that time. A few years later, he was appointed the Associate Dean of Faculties. Borkowski was comfortable and confident in his role as university administrator, recalling favorably that, “The principle points of excitement were really the opportunity to really enhance and better the learning environment on campus ... I enjoyed working with faculty and students ... it was not unlike conducting an orchestra.” During this time, Borkowski continued to practice music, though he had to focus primarily on administrative obligations.

### *Purdue University*

From Ohio, Borkowski took the opportunity to become the first vice chancellor at Purdue University, where he worked to “meld two diverse institutions [Indiana Univ. and Purdue Univ.] into one.”

### *South Carolina*

He then moved on to South Carolina in 1978, where he served as Provost. It was in this position that he “relished meeting major international figures,” yet he did not give any thought to aspirations for the presidency until midway through his tenure there. “I was happy being chief academic officer, but I began to think that [the presidency] might be the way to go.”

### *University of South Florida*

A former librarian had nominated Borkowski for the position at USF, and he soon received a letter containing a great deal of information about the University. He submitted his credentials, “Never really thinking that I would have the opportunity of landing the job.” Upon his initial visit, he recalls being “very attracted to the campus [as a place with] many opportunities.” He was also compelled by the notion of being involved in shaping the future of a young university with very little established tradition. The arts were also strong in the area, something that was particularly important to both Borkowski and his wife.

### *Interview process*

The chancellor of USF went to the campus at South Carolina to interview Borkowski, also making various inquiries to people on the campus and in the community. He came to Tampa for a round of interviews and met with the search committee. Following the interviews, he was informed that he was on the “short list” for the position, and was offered the job by the Chancellor at a meeting in the Atlanta airport.

During the open interview process, he stated that one of his goals at the university would be the establishment of a football program. “There was no question that that did not go over well with the Chancellor.” He believed, however, that the program would help bridge the gulf between the university and the surrounding community as well as facilitating the development of a more exciting campus life. Raising private money he

also believed to be a high priority at USF. Borkowski saw the possibility for building and expansion at the medical school.

#### *Impressions of USF*

Aesthetically, the campus seemed “pretty barren” to Borkowski, and he believed in the importance of improving the physical appearance of the University. Also high on his agenda was the development of a center to accommodate the growing body of alumni at USF. At the time of his arrival, administrators were also pushing for the construction of a new president’s house to serve as a place of congregation in order to better facilitate the development of community among university faculty, students, and parents.

#### *Goals at USF*

His goal was to make USF one of the top twenty-five public universities in the country. He believed part of that success required that the University be much less of a commuter school than it was at the time. Additionally, he hoped to build up the College of Public Health and the Medical School. A good quality athletic program would give the school national visibility that it needed and deserved. He was certain that with “good solid funding,” and a burgeoning student population, USF could quickly become one of the top public institutions in the nation.

#### *Football initiative at USF*

Borkowski’s football initiative faced opposition from the Board of Regents which was “dominated heavily by the Gators and the Seminoles ... South Florida did not have strong representation at the Board level.” In the final year of his presidency, he believed the University was being penalized financially “in a number of subtle ways” because of his push for a football program. “The University was not actually getting its fair share relative to the other institutions because of football,” so Borkowski faced the decision of either abandoning the football initiative entirely, or leaving the school after laying the foundation for the program; “There was no way for the two to be compatible.” Borkowski chose the latter.

#### *FMHI; H. Lee Moffitt Center*

Early on in his tenure at USF, attempts were made to move the Florida Mental Health Institute and the Moffitt Cancer Center into positions of independence. Borkowski felt strongly that it was “very important” to keep the institutions as an overall part of the university “so that they could bridge and capitalize on each other.” He espoused a program of strong autonomy for the centers, while maintaining them as part of the health science complex at USF.

#### *Relationship with Chancellor Charlie Reed*

Borkowski felt that Chancellor Reed’s priorities and energies were invested primarily in Florida and Florida State Universities. “I don’t believe that he was interested in ... seeing a third large, comprehensive research university established here.” He feels that Reed was never really supportive of the medical institute, and did not see USF as a major contender among the state universities. Borkowski, however, believed that the University could be one of the top twenty-five in the nation, and believed in establishing close relations with

the community. Among his accomplishments there, Borkowski formed a Latin Advisory Committee, “which has been very successful ... that built immediate bridges to that segment of the community.”

Despite significant differences of opinion between Borkowski and Reed from day one, he was selected to serve as president of the University. “The decision to come was difficult ... we thought long and hard about it ... we [he and his wife Kay] saw the obstacles that we saw ... and the difficulties that we would have here.” Citing a broad base of support, particularly from the faculty, Borkowski and his wife made the decision to come to Tampa.

#### *Conflict in athletic department*

During his presidency, there were charges of rape leveled against a player of the University’s basketball team, forcing Borkowski to become involved. He believed the issue grew to such prominence in part because of the rise of “women’s and feminist issues” at the time. Secondly, he sensed that there was a strong anti-athletic sentiment towards USF throughout the state at that time because of the successful programs at other state institutions. Third, Borkowski believed that the incident gave his opponents the opportunity to suggest his departure from USF. In order to ameliorate some of the tensions, Borkowski formed a committee to investigate the charges, and later established an office on campus to deal with similar issues that might arise in the future. Despite the atmosphere surrounding the incident, Borkowski believes that, “By and large ... I think it was handled about as well as it could be handled ... it was a very unsavory kind of issue.” Despite the controversy and personal attacks, Borkowski managed to weather the storm and continue on for a couple more years at USF.

#### *“Trading places” day at USF*

Borkowski took a day in which he walked in the shoes of a USF student, while the student sat behind his desk in the president’s office. “I really had a good time doing that. It was a lot of fun.” He went through the student’s schedule of classes, took “copious notes,” got into classroom discussions, even stopping occasionally to drink coffee and play billiards with students. Borkowski believed it was a good experience for all involved, though the student finished the day in exhaustion, telling the president, “You can have your headache back now.”

#### *Physical improvements to the campus*

Borkowski was pleased to get a research facility built on campus near the College of Engineering, as well as enhancements of the dance and theatre buildings. He also worked to improve the aesthetics of the barren area between the administration building and the University Center, dedicating the plaza to Martin Luther King, Jr.

#### *University Center; Special Events Center*

At the time, Borkowski recalls, the University Center was “not a very hospitable place.” He worked to renovate the facility, establishing a forum for both faculty members and students alike. Borkowski also saw the construction of the Special Events Center, something he felt was particularly important in the development of a more lively campus

life. Though there were some initial protests by students seeking to preserve Crescent Hill as an open gathering place, they were quickly dissipated by the benefits of the new Center.

### *Lifsey House*

During his tenure, Borkowski saw the establishment of an on-campus housing for the president in order to make the office closer and more accessible to the university. Though he expressed some reservations as an incoming president building a new house, the initiative was taken by the USF Foundation to build such a facility. While Borkowski was still in negotiation for the position, he asked that the Foundation announce construction plans prior to his acceptance of the presidency, so that it would not be misinterpreted as a selfish move on his part. All the funds for the project were raised from private sources and then turned over to the state. A sizable donation of \$800,000 came from Jim Walter, of Walter Homes, for the construction of the house, with the expectation that it would be named after Julian Lifsey, who was a very close friend of his. The rest of the money came from private contributions from interested individuals. Borkowski recalls that, although there were a number of options, there was a substantial consensus to build the house at its present location near the entrance to USF, with the idea that it was highly visible and provided easy access to the campus.

The plans for the area adjacent to the Lifsey House included a forthcoming Alumni Center, the development of walkways, and the erection of a Picasso statue situated at the corner of the plot, just inside the front entrance to the campus. “The idea was to make the whole campus a sculpture court.” Though the buildings went up, the Picasso statue never became a reality at USF because of a breakdown in negotiations.

A competition was held in order to determine the best design for the facility. The design was selected in hopes of finding something distinctive that fit the context and purpose for the structure, while being “open, accessible, and friendly” to guests. Though construction of the Lifsey House was “well on the way,” it was not completed during Borkowski’s tenure at USF.

### *Budgeting and Finance*

Statewide budget cuts impacted the university tremendously, compelling Borkowski to initiate a number of committees to effectively deal with the diminishing resources. He recalls that the general public was under the mistaken impression that the Florida Lottery System actually provided a significant amount of money to education. “That of course is not the case ... isn’t today and never has been.” In his memory, 1992-1993 was the most difficult year financially, and required a great deal of cutbacks and effort to maintain the quality of the university while handling the reductions. “We ended up freezing new positions ... equipment wasn’t being repaired, travel budgets were cut ... it was really demoralizing.”

### *Regional campuses*

“I felt that there could be an excellent interrelationship among the campuses ... My view was that the campuses should be given as much autonomy as feasible, but to ensure ...

academic integrity on all of the campuses ... and that resources could be shared.” Borkowski protected New College as a separate entity in many ways, being a part of USF while maintaining some distinct autonomy apart from the other campuses. His goal in Ft. Myers was to really expand the campus, “but for political reasons that didn’t fly, and then Florida Gulf Coast University [was] established in place of it.” A decision was made by the Board of Regents during Borkowski’s final year at USF to “terminate all the faculty at Ft. Myers and to have a campus with no tenure ... We had some difficult discussions over that, and I did prevail.” As a result of Borkowski’s efforts, the faculty were transferred to Gulf Coast University while maintaining their tenure, “so their security was guaranteed.”

#### *College of Arts and Sciences*

Another of Borkowski’s accomplishments was the merger of several colleges into the College of Arts and Sciences. The unification gave the colleges an empowered collective voice in the operations and governance of the university.

#### *Endowments and federal grants*

There was not much of a history of fundraising prior to Borkowski’s arrival at USF. After three and a half years of a five-year campaign, \$116 million had been raised for the university, surpassing the pre-determined goal of \$111 million. By the campaign’s completion, over \$120 million had been raised.

#### *Departure from USF*

Though Borkowski could have stayed longer, he believed that by late 1992, early 1993, “actions were simply being taken that were punitive to the University of South Florida.” He cites actions by the Board of Regents as compromising the best interests of the university, including pressures to drop notions of a football program. He had a candid meeting with the chancellor in which, Borkowski recalls, “He was very clear that he was not interested in my continuing ... So we decided that it was in the best interests of the University to look for another position.” Borkowski left the University of South Florida in 1993, and went on to a position as Appalachian State University, where he and his wife “fell in love with the mountains.”

#### *Proudest accomplishments*

He believes the development of a relationship with the Latino community was one of his major accomplishments at USF, as well as the enhancement and strengthening of the undergraduate program. He also feels that the establishment of a football program ranks among his greatest endeavors at the university, as well as his actions regarding the relationship between the medical school and the research institutions on campus. “I certainly think the university enhanced its visibility and reputation during that period, not only in Tampa but in the state and nationally as well.” He is also proud of the amount of research and outside funding generated during his tenure at South Florida. “The quality of the people that were being attracted here ... I take great pride in.”

#### *End of Interview*