

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Fred B. Kniffen

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0032

**IDENTIFICATION:** [1901-1993] Professor of Geography at LSU, 1929-70

**INTERVIEWER:** Susie Crews, Assistant, LSU Recording Services

**SERIES:** University History – Distinguished Faculty & Administrators

**INTERVIEW DATES:** May 19, 1977; May 26, 1977; June 9, 1977

**FOCUS DATES:** 1929 - 1970

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 37**

Birth in Britton, Michigan; family history, father's, mother's, immediate family; mother's influence; father a lumberman for the Wabash Railroad; life in southern Kansas; primary education; life in Superior, Wisconsin; high school; undergraduate education at the University of Michigan; Dr. Carl Sour's influence; decision to go north; the trip to Spokane, Washington; Washington weather; the move to Portland, Oregon; Kniffen's first trip to Alaska in 1923; journey to Fairbanks, Alaska; Al LeClair; prospecting with Oscar Pearson, winter in the Arctic circle; graduate education at the University of California at Berkeley; deciding what to study; decision to come to L.S.U. in 1929; arrival at L.S.U.; dissertation work in Mexico; work with the Cocopaw Indians; development of the cultural geography program at L.S.U.; prep school tradition of teaching physiography; Kniffen's ability to obtain grants; television lectures.

**Tape 38**

Military service in World War II; work with Indians at Berkeley; note taking skills in the field; communications with the Cocopaw Indians; career outline while at L.S.U.; Kniffen's studies in Germany in 1938 and 1939; changes in lifestyles as the World War II approached; living environment in Munich; Kniffen's first book, Culture Worlds; attitude toward writing; the spread of fairs and covered bridges in the U.S.; America's housing development, housing followed the path of migration; photographing and gathering information on this phenomenon; cultural geography at L.S.U.; following one's interest in research; definition of cultural geography; influence of Berkeley on geography department at L.S.U.; evolution of the barn as it moved south; Kniffen's work on Louisiana Indians, Natchez, Caddo, Avoyelles, and Tensas tribes; disappearance of the Natchez tribe; W.A. Read; true scholarship; James Monroe Smith and the university scandals.

**Tape 39**

Definition of systematic geography; where an ambitious geography student should begin; relationship between regional and systematic geography; services geographer provides public; lack of study

relating to cultural aspects of earth; areas of concern in geography today; mathematics and geography; becoming recognized authority in the field of geography; work with National Commission on Humanities; Kniffen's methods as a teacher; ways students have changed since Kniffen's arrival at L.S.U.; teaching students to work in the field; history of geography; assigning thesis subjects; Kniffen's advice to the university; the golden age of the university; funding for the university; lack of faculty unity; Kniffen's eating habits; Kniffen's musical preferences; gardening; protestant work ethic; preservation of historically significant structures; Kniffen's definitions of culture and cultural boundaries.

**TAPES:** 3 (T37, T38, T39)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 3 hours, 20 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 125 pages

**ADDITIONAL MATERIAL:** Copy of obituary

**RESTRICTIONS:** None