

## Ralph Prator, Track 2

Tape 1, Side B

JB: We were talking about the trips to Sacramento. Do you recall any particularly memorable encounters or experiences there involving legislators; anything particularly memorable from a human interest story, institutional interest standpoint?

RP: We had the feeling that the Department of Finance looked upon us with great suspicion. Partially because finance and Carson was interested in getting well, as little in the way of giving us that they could manage to any given institution. And we had one rather memorable experience, I don't know who the people who were involved, but we had originally contended with the Department of Finance that we needed the land adjacent to our campus. They were not helpful, incidentally in getting Devonshire Downs transferred to us. They were, in a matter of fact, opposed to this concept. But when we got to Devonshire Downs property, then it became almost obviously necessary to get the land in between the Devonshire Downs and the existing campus. Prior to that time, finance had assumed, I suppose, that they were going to satisfy our needs by getting the land that was so called the lap of the campus that is the land between the Devonshire Downs and us, on Plumber and that general area. So they had done something that I think they probably subsequently regretted. They came and made surveys and talked to the people who were in residences there about taking over their property and how much it would cost etc. etc. etc., and make in many instances commitments. Well when we got the Devonshire Downs property, they'd already committed this other they were felt necessary to follow through you see and buy the property, and as Warner indicated, I forgot one hundred thousand dollars an acre something like this, it was very expensive gesture and finance was livid about this business. They felt we had coerced them into doing something that they just didn't want to do. And we didn't have any friends there.

JB: But they had in fact walked into it.

RP: That's, right. They fixed it so that they couldn't get out of it, I guess.

JB: Did you feel, and this raises a question, which I think, I'm inclined to ask, but it almost comes up automatically. Do you feel when we became a system we have lost something in the way of the edge of the campus?

(00:03:54)

RP: I made a note about that John. Yeah. Because, to recap it a bit. We under the Department of Education, as I say we were, felt kind of saddled with the concept of the Teacher's College per say. And therefore those of us who envisioned a institution of broader

scope, were very pleased to have a separate identity with a separate board of trustees. And we envisioned then that this would give us, not only the kind of prestige that we needed, but the kind of opportunity to explore all the possibilities that were in store for us. So, as I say, a number of us, probably all of the State College Presidents were supportive of the concept. But something happened shortly thereafter that was kind of alarming. The uniqueness by campus, tended to lose something when we got trustees per say, there was an effort, I think, on the part of the trustees to have a kind of symmetry about the places that negated against our unique opportunities. And I mentioned now, the opportunity that we had in the field of drama and music, for example, because of our location. The trustees, using this is an example, tenanted too assume that each institution would have this kind of pattern of offerings, let's say, in the area of drama and music. I'm singling this out, because it's just relevant by way of illustration. But it would not be feasible for Stanislaus, for example, to expect the same kind of major emphasis in this area that we would have at San Fernando Valley State College, for example. But the trustees as I indicated gave us the impression rather early that they were in control of the State College Presidents have had their day, as it were. Partially I suspect this was to satisfy the feeling of a number of the faculty that the State College Presidents were running these places dictatorial. And I remember a critical meeting that was held on our campuses, in a matter of fact. When some of the activists among the faculty, and I don't think there are campus it was someplace else. Raise the question about this control concept, and I remember the Board of Trustees to satisfy your evening of concern about this. Remember, the State College Presidents work for us on the day to day basis. Well, that's a kind of a shocking thing to make public, you see, and it was disturbing to the president's, I'm sure of that. And I remember it, because it seemed so unnecessary. All of us are interested in doing the very best we can by the institutions at hand. But as I say, I think this member of the Trustees that sort of carried away at that particular time to satisfy the feeling on the part of the faculty that some of the state college presidents were pretty dictatorial. Now, as it turns out, I think it has been a plus factors are much greater than the minus factors. The State Colleges have grown, immensely, more respected now than they were previously. The size of the institutions. Even is a reflection of the tremendous support State Colleges have had. And fortunately, we've had some very strong able members of the board of trustees who have been instrumental in giving a kind of prestige to the system that is very necessary. I think the State Colleges are still struggling for their place in the sun as it were. But a great deal of the groundwork has been laid for their success in this regard.

(00:09:12)

JB: So, on balance, it was a game?

RP: Oh yes, decidedly so.

JB: So we're moving from topic to topic and hope you don't mind it at all.

RP: No I don't.

JB: I've heard two stories about the origins of the architecture for the Oviatt Library, and one was told to me by Warner, and one was told by Norm Tents, and the story from Norm is that you envisioned Oviatt as a jewelry box, at night at least, the library ought to look like a jewelry box. And Warner says oh no it was designed after the Parthenon. Who is right? Or is either?

RP: I don't think either one. No, my concept with the library was and that I repeated this many times, the library should be the heart of the campuses it's a pulsating heart of the campus, as it were, and things should emanate from the library, as it were throughout the campus. We wanted the library physically placed in the position where this would be evident or would help this concept. Secondly, the library, needed to be a place for serenity of thought, where this is probably stressing it considerably. Where students, with that in mind, to come together and get acquainted with really good friends, like Aristotle, so a setting that would be remarkable important in their subsequent lives. Now then, Mackleberry, who was the library at that time, marvelous person incidentally, did you know Stan?

JB: You know I did. But it was only barely I heard stuff about him.

RP: Well, he went onto very considerable heights, speaking from my brain, University of Texas, and he went from there to the big ten but I forget which institution of the big ten. He was a highly regarded person in library circles. I spent a lot of time talking with Stan about the role of the library in the kind of context that were just speaking about what is it. What kind of emphasis does the library have on the campus as a whole. And, generally speaking, I think he envisioned it this way. Now, then Tennis maybe has picked up this idea and sort of given it extra aura of respect, but the captain was very fortunate of having two people, like these two people, they're not a like, necessarily, but they certainly have given the feeling that the library is the most important adjunct to the total campus there's no question about that.

JB: And that was your sense of things.

RP: Yes, that's right. I felt of the place of the library was, as I indicated, that it needed to be the heart. Let things emanate from the library, as it were.

JB: We have yet a third metaphor here. You realize now, that we've gone from jewelry box to Parthenon to heart. I'll take you as a final source on this.

RP: Well, no broader course, you got to bear in mind, Waters was interested primarily, not primarily, but largely in the physical show of these things. You see, well these librarians are more interested in the philosophical facets here, the underlined influence of the library on campus as a whole, there. The difficult part of this is less important, I say, then the major role the library places in the lives of these people.

JB: We've talked about some of the ways in which you went about realizing your priorities as President and a couple came up, which I hadn't planned to ask you about, they cover conversation as we began and before we went on tape. But now I very much want to. One is the emphasis you placed on your administration, members of your administration joining service clubs and the life in The Valley, street outreach, could you talk a bit about it.

RP: Oh, I'm delighted to because it was so essential, as I indicated earlier, we were a Johnny come lately, not only in State College circles, but also as an institution in The Valley itself. So we had to make our impact as quickly as we could to get two ideas across. One is we wanted The Valley to feel like the campus was an integrating influence. Now you bear in mind, The Valley had something like twenty six chambers of commerce, for example.

JB: Is that right.

(00:14:47)

RP: And I don't know how many rotary and kiwanis and lions clubs and so on. Innumerable members, and to some extent there only in a rivalry role with each other, you see, Sherman Oaks is against whether they [inaudible] All right, we from the start, probably better put, I from the start felt that we needed to try to, bring our emphasis to bear on uniting all these various and sundry avenues of concerning interest. So at one of our early meetings, we advised the administrative staff to pick out an area in which they want to make their contribution in influencing the community. And participating in community activities, so, Del Stelk joined the Reseda rotary club, for example. Willard Edwards became a member of the kiwanis club of, I think, Van Nuys. It was a big club and became our representative on the integrating of Chambers of Commerce, but I forgot what they called this, he was, Leo Wilson took on the industrial association. And then Del Oviatt took on the parent teacher association, which is a very big organization in the valley. Warner became a member of the Northridge rotary club, and so. Then Leo Wilson joined the kiwanis club over in San Fernando. So we spread ourselves around in

the community as it were. They're started organization called the executive dinner club, and I joined this, and I was already a member of the Van Nuys rotary club, which is, if it wasn't one of the biggest club in The Valley was one of the biggest of the rotary clubs in the Valley. I've been a member of the rotary club, president of the rotary club in Vegas, as a matter of fact. So this was an easy transition for me. Now a kind of a sideline, one of the things that we hoped to emphasize partially was to get them involved in a project, a cohesive project where they all could get involved. So in the early years we thought an area would be too single out field of the role of the institution developing potential leaders, not only form The Valley but for the state of California or whatever. And in this connection than these service clubs could play an instrumental role and we were going to try to emphasize the moral and spiritual values concept of leadership, which is the theory. Willard Edwards took on the responsibility and we held on the campus a number of workshops for all these clubs, the rotary clubs were always there, that I'm speaking about, and they were pretty enthusiastic about this and these sessions were all day Saturday for example, we had students, members of the community, and members of the faculty that participated. Unfortunately we just ran out of steam because so many things going on we couldn't push this idea too it's maximum possibilities. But the associative chambers of commerce, the industrial association were also integrating influences in The Valley and we had to be very active in both of these organizations. So my feeling was that we could make a contribution and we could do the institution a great deal of good, in terms of good will, by participating, and by participating I mean actively participating, became officers in these clubs, and I became president of the executive dinner club, for example, which is a valley wide organization. I participated in the Fernando awards programs, which is these programs, if you're not familiar with them.

JB: I'm not.

(00:19:31)

RP: The Fernando award is made each year to the person who's judged the outstanding citizen of the San Fernando Valley, and it's a big dinner affair in which the mayor of the city and a lot of other notables come and participate. And I was the so called historian door to about five or six of these when Robert Fuller was made, Fernando award, Russ Quisenberry and so on. People who were involved with us, I did the background, as it were, the relating of the history of The Valley to the accomplishments of these people who are being honored. So I say, all of us had a role in this.

JB: Did it work, was it helpful?

RP: I think it was, I think it was very helpful. I haven't any way of measuring the help, of course in this connection. But, well, one of the evidences we looked at the pictures earlier. It was the reason why Hubert Humphrey came to the campus. It was the one place where he could meet all people of The Valley. It was the reason why Rockefeller came to the campus why Linda Johnson came to campus. Why Cabot Lodge came to the campus. The campus was the center for activities of The Valley, and I think that maybe these, haven't used that just detailed, we're helping in making the campus this kind of center for The Valley.

JB: Interesting, because we tried over the phone to put that together. That strange. You mentioned summer administrated workshops,

RP: Yes.

JB Each year. We've come to a thing since the mid-seventies, so called long range planning. I believe it was first implemented in 1977, did you have long range planning in the face of this explosive growth, or a long range model with year to year plans unfolding? How's the planning done, in other words?

RP: These administrative workshops were both short and long term oriented workshops. We tried to plan in some detail what we were going to get accomplished in the year ahead. But at the same time we wanted what we're accomplishing in the year ahead to relate to our ultimate goal. For instance, we knew early that we were going to reach twenty thousand students in ten years. Now then what kind of an institution is required to handle twenty thousand students? You see, when we're at three thousand students at the moment. So progressively we had to, we had to build the campus, to match the challenge, you see. Now then, as I indicated, I better go. We also envision that if we were left free to grow without any restrictions, that we could be a mammoth institution. All right, with that involved we had to have so many acres for parking, but getting that number of acres of parking we had planned on double decking that parking, at least double decking it. There may be some instances instead of double decking that we would have high rise parking facilities. We had to have residence halls of some consequence. We ran into some unfortunate problems there, but all of these things had to relate, you see, and we had to keep them in the planning process, because it was inevitable that we were going to have this confrontation at sometime in the future. What we going to do about this, we better plan from let's say part A instead of waiting until we get to C or D to start thinking about it.

JB: Can we just touch a minute or more on your forecasting tools. Because I know there's a brigade of resistance to the idea that The Valley was going to explode the way that it

did, with the Department of Finance. They didn't want to allocate the land or the money to grow. How are you proving to them that this was coming?

(00:24:24)

RP: Well as I have said we had the evidence of institutions like the telephone company that was projecting its needs. The California Department of Water and Power, for example, had a number of projections, and this is one of them here, of the Los Angeles headquarters of city development association, which I served as president for one year. Their resources were magnificent, in projecting the kind of growth that was essential you see. So by participating in this agency, which was largely the creature of the Department of Water and Power, we were able to draw on their resource you see, for a lot of help. And they gave it to us in terms of what they thought the population was going to be and the nature of the population that is whether they're going to be professional people or other sorts of people in this context.

JB: The reason I asked that question is because you seem to have had better forecasting tools than were available when we reached steady state since the seventies.

RP: Very possible because you see it was necessary, we just didn't have any, there were no alternatives. They were not necessarily mattered about wanting to do this, we just had to do it.

JB: We've talked about your priorities as president, I've liked to ask you what you view as your greatest achievements as president. And, if any, what your greatest disappointments are about the ten years you served in that role?

RP: That's a pretty hard question to answer John. The achievements were not my achievements; they were achievements of the total community. I think we did realize the goals we set for ourselves that is being able to accommodate the students as the need came. We were able to get sufficient physical resources in the way of buildings and grounds, to match the kind of anticipated growth that we had. That's never quite exactly what you'd like to have, but it's adequate to this time. And as I say that achievement could be accredited to a very, very large number of people, our advisory board the press of The Valley, the media that helped us, these various agencies that we've test upon, of course, the tremendous dedication of the staff and the faculty, the faculty and the students. We had some students who are very, very competent, like this Vince Berava, for example, who's made a very considerable name for himself as head of the Census Bureau and a lot of things; he was president of the student body. And incidentally, to divert just a bit, every week I met with the student by the officers, too luncheon.

JB: Oh really?

RP: Yes, we had lunch in the conference room, the Presidents conference room, every, I forgot what day of the week, I think it was Tuesday. Every Tuesday they came and had lunch with me. And we tried to get problems of the students, you see, aired and whatever resources we could bring to bear to solve the problems with those sessions.

JB: Throughout your presidency?

RP: Yes, so that those were the achievements. Now the disappointments, I think that we were not able to realize the significance of the institution in certain areas. For instance, in the performing arts, we had opportunities that we didn't really match. We could have done probably better than we did. In Certain disciplines we had opportunities to be among the very best. And somewhere along the line we either lost some of the people or we lost some of the incentive to realize that. Take the field of geography, for example. See we started off with a magnificent advantage in geography, and attempted, I won't say taper off. But it tended to level off instead of our being able to climb ahead as we probably could have done if we have really taken advantage of all opportunities and kept some of the people that we lost, for instance. So in these specific instances, in a few cases, I think engineering is another one. That we had a running start in engineering and I'm not sure that it's lessen any, but it probably hasn't reached the kind of level that we might have reached if it had been left to grow as it started to grow. Now then,

JB: We got you out of tape here.

RP: Ok.

[End of track 2]