

Ralph Prator, Track 3

Tape 2, Side A

JB: We're talking about direct responsibilities and delegated responsibilities, and you're pointing out you didn't make a direct interest in finance or detail; you left detail to Wilson and finance to Warner Masters.

RP: And in the early years of the campus, it was, these were highly critical areas, particularly finance, because the state colleges were somewhat on their own. Each institution had to fight its own battle, as it were with the agencies in the state and that had control. So we had Warner make numerous trips to Sacramento, of course, to work directly with the Division of Finance, which had a tight rein, as it were on all state colleges. And in addition to that, Warner began to be very effective with members of the legislature, who were representatives of the San Fernando Valley. So we entertained on the campus as frequently as they were available. These legislators pointed out to them what our particular needs were. We felt two things. One, we felt that we have to get a lot of help as quickly as we could because we're going to grow so rapidly. Secondly, a number of the other state colleges were in the same venue that we were. They had to grow rapidly, too, so we were competing, in a sense, one with the other. Now, one of the things that militated somewhat in our favor. Was that we had a large number of representatives, considering the whole Los Angeles concept, to help us with our problems, as against say, they're ones up in Humboldt and some of the other places. But this was one of the reasons why we, I'm going to shut this off for a minute.

JB: Although it's very sensitive.

JB: Let me ask you, did you have a distinct, what you would refer to as a distinct administrative style? Was there a Prator style to administration?

RP: I don't know that I could call it a style per se. It might have been the approach. I had a feeling that initially at least. I better keep a fairly tight rein on as much on the campus activity as I could, because it was so relevant to the history of the institution. I already mentioned the land base, for example, and the organizational structure. But we had an opportunity to have a very high quality institution, if we didn't make too many mistakes in these early years. First of all, the population was there. Secondly, the San Fernando Valley is a fairly elite section of the Los Angeles complex and was at that time, at least, so that the opportunities we had were evident, and we need to be as sure as we could be that we didn't make any serious errors in terms of alienating the community, and hopefully in making also some inroads on the concept of the kind of prestigious necessary to have for an institution to be the quality we envisioned.

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JB: Did you have an institutional model, for example, you've spent ten years at Colorado. Was that a model for you, or was there any singleness, to this model?

RP: Well, I think that you got to bear in mind John, that I was a major in school administration at the University of California and, during the time that I was a graduate student, not necessarily there. In conjunction with getting my degree there I was in the splendid position to study higher education and all of this parish ramifications, my doctoral thesis was in the area of admissions, what it required to do college work, where having the university work and also the kind of administrative structure that was necessary to get the job done. Byway of illustration, I found out that it took when I became director of admissions and records at University of Colorado. I found out that it was taking approximately three hours for students to start and finish the registration process, and this looked like a abnormally long time. So I set about immediately selecting a member of our staff in the office of admissions and records, had that person goes to a number of institutions that were particularly successful in doing this quickly. And then we began to make modifications to the extent that within a year so we were able to register student in forty five minutes. This was the kind of back ground encouraged me to do a number of things in administration that related to the kind of explosive growth we were going to have at the San Fernando Valley State College, I'm usually listen to administration.

JB: You went back to teaching after you left the presidency. How active were you in shaping the (curriculum while you were President?

RP: As I mentioned earlier, I envisioned the university complex for our institution, and my feeling was that we had a tremendous opportunity, particularly in the practical sciences. University of California was obviously entrenched in the theoretical sciences. The University of California is interested in preserving their role in the higher echelons of graduate's services and studies, for instance. They were not particularly sympathetic to the practical areas. Now the practical areas were business and engineering, and although they had strong schools in this area they were mortgaged it in the in their research and the kind of exploratory growth of these disciplines than they were in turning out engineers, for example, in sequins, people in business. Nursing is another area in which they were not, that the university was not interested. My feeling was we have to move into those areas as quickly as we could, and I'm speaking about the system as a whole, not necessarily our campus. And pick up whatever opportunities were there for us to develop strong majors in these fields. And we were successful in drawing a number of people to our campus from the University of California, who were disillusioned by the universities, disinterest in more practical aspects of the campus, and

more interested in the theoretical our people who were interested in the practical, not steeped in theoretical concepts as it were.

JB: There was a great deal of emphasis placed on, at least among the faculty, on becoming a liberal arts institution with a strong stress and traditional disciplines. And I'm gathering that you had a very different concept on that.

RP: I didn't think I certainly doesn't oppose to the liberal arts, I was a liberal arts graduate at the University of Colorado, in both the baccalaureate and the master's degree. No, I didn't have any contingent with the concept of a strong program here, but I didn't feel like this was going to be one of our, one of the areas in which we could make a lot of progress in the face of the kind of competition we had. We're surrounded by institutions who excelled in the liberal arts, the whole. Clermont College concept, for example, strong areas in the liberal arts of course at UCLA and as I pointed out they were trying to hold the advantages they had in this area. As against the kind of competition they felt would be coming from the state colleges. So my thought was our great opportunities were gonna be working and lie in the more practical field. In this connection I was probably not especially sympathetic to Glenn Dumke's emphasis. He was interested in our becoming strong liberal arts institutions. And, as you say, a number of our faculty were and some of us in the state college presidents, were sympathetic to the idea. But as I've explained, we didn't feel that this was going to be our strong suit.

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JB: As a matter of finding a role between the two preexisting sectors, community colleges, on the one hand, with their strong local support and the University of California, with its constitutional charter.

RP: Right.

JB: As you described to Justin Garner, in 1980.

RP: Yes.

JB: So this was partly matter of fashioning a role for us.

RP: That's right.

JB: Why?

RP: That way had to make a place for ourselves. And we had to do it rather quickly, because this explosive growth wasn't an encouraging concept. In this context, we also had several unique advantages in the San Fernando Valley for example the whole movie industry is

located in that area, the emphasis on music, for example, and drama gave us unique opportunities so early in the history of our campus. I was encouraging Clarence Wiggins who was a member of our staff who would come with me from Bakersfield to get cracking at getting as many contacts that he could make with people in this area and of course early we brought onto our advisory board Steve Allen and Francis Letter and Livie who were all in these arts programs as it were, performing arts. And they were helpful giving us contacts that we could draw on and a number of part time people that were able to draw on the campus we're magnificently qualified to perform in these areas. Now this was one of the unique places for us among the state colleges even, because of our location.

JB: You brought Paul Walker and Clarence Williams with you from Bakersfield?

RP: Yes.

JB: I understand they were given others that wanted to come but did not get invitation.

RP: Yes.

JB: You were very careful in who you choose.

RP: Yes in the case of in the case of Wiggins, I've already pointed out, he was a strong person in the field of music and is just a strong person to, and same could be said for Paul Walker. But Paul had some rather unique qualifications for us. He was able to bridge this gap between the liberal arts, as it were, and the practical arts. He was, his rapport with people in the liberal arts was excellent, and I felt on occasion he probably was contentious with my point of view, in this consideration. But I think he understood why I was pushing so hard in these practical fields. And he was good at communication, excellent at communication, and soon made good contacts for us, among the press and the media, television, and radio.

JB: Could I raise just a couple of impressions,

RP: Sure.

JB: Which would come from my conversation with Paul and other observations. One is that you and Paul, for example, could fight hard over an issue having to do with campus and walk away from it, close friends.

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RP: Yes.

JB: It didn't really matter to your friendship at all.

RP: No.

JB: It had to do with what was going on in the office,

RP: Right.

JB: The institute,

RP: Right.

JB: Another impression I have is you could delegate with confidence and ease, and you did a good deal of delegating, so long as you have people you trust to delegate to.

RP: True and in this context, I was marvelously blessed. Del Oviatt was a strong supporter and a strong factor on the campus, and I could delegate a tremendous amount of responsibility, he always followed through. The same with Warner Master, I felt close to them as colleagues. They were very dependable colleagues, and like the episodes between Walker and me. We had the same thing with Oviatt and with Warner. And the end result was I suppose this, that as soon as we got all the information on the table and a decision had to be made, they didn't like, we made it, and they followed through. It was no backpacking at all among these people that we were marvelous lucky in the light of the explosive growth that we had. And the contentious times, sixties were a bad times in higher education for everybody not only did we have activist in the faculty; we had tremendous activism and questionable students.

JB: We'll talk with you about both of those. Why don't we start with the faculty, take them in that order. What did you see as the faculty's role in shaping a new and explosively growing campus? And did they live up to that role in the end?

RP: Well, I think I pointed this out an another interview. That early in my life experience I've found that faculty were primarily interested in their discipline that the institution as a hole was down the letter of importance as far as they were concerned. And therefore, to keep the concept of the institutions as a hole in the foreground, the members of the administrative staff had to take a very strong position with respect to this idea, sometimes in conflict with what the factory would like. Also, we had to divide up the spoils as it were, and where history might think they needed certain library allocation. We had to decide whether it's going to go to history or geography, or one of the other disciplines. And we couldn't be terribly concerned about hurt feelings. It's, just one of the facts of life. We wanted to stay friends with everybody, and I think, for the most

part, did. And this is where people like Oviatt and Walker, and Masters were very helpful. They could bridge these gaps, as able to as anybody I have ever seen.

JB: Early on in the late fifties they were faculty meetings once a week.

RP: Yes.

JB: Did you preside over them?

RP: Yes, not the faculty meetings, the faculty meetings per se. When we, to back up a bit, one of the things that we mentioned earlier the administrative structure, I felt early in our association with the institutional advisor and with my association with the institution that we had to downplay the general faculty per se and get a represented group that could meet more frequently and be more facile in terms of response. So we needed the senate concept and then the senate was then supposed to be representatives of the faculty when I came the general faculty met, the whole faculty met and deliberated and obviously we're gonna have several thousand people this was not a feasible plan, so we had to have a representative group. I suggested we have a senate concept and, turn this problem over to the committee of seventeen that we mentioned earlier and we concluded that we would have sixty members of staff who would be on the senate. Because I didn't want this thing to get out of focus in terms of what our objectives were I insisted on being the presiding officer of the senate during the early years. I don't think this was particularly popular at the time, but it was acceptable and it was a marvelous way for me to keep my association with the faculty sharp. Every week, meet and we debated a lot of issues. And it was an opportunity for me to explain to the faculty representatives why it was essential that we have adequate land based, for example. Why was it essential to have strong people in positions of leadership for recruitment purposes. And although these were not issues that were part of the agenda, they would creep up into discussions of other items that were on the agenda. And for the most part, I felt it was an opportunity to hear what the faculty had to say about critical issues. And they were pretty outspoken.

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JB: I'm sure they were. I got called by the time I came on board. They certainly were. What kinds of decisions were the faculties included in and what kinds of decisions were they not included in? And what came before the senate, what didn't? Anything different from today, you perceived or different at least from the time of which you retired?

RP: Well, I think in the early years, we were involved with a great deal of detail more than we were involved with philosophy, as it were. I think later, we began to take a much more

mature outlook on the role of the faculty, for example, in development of the institutions, they were critical in terms of the hiring process. They were the key people who would not only help bring to the campus outstanding leaders, but they were critical in terms of retention of the best of the ones that we were able to recruit. Also the Faculty, of course, the old line of the institutions is torn between research and teaching. We had to emphasize in our case, and not just the administration, team members of the faculty that our role had to be pretty much emphasizing teaching as against research, in the early years. We had to make a name for ourselves as a good teaching institution. Research was necessary to be good, teaching, and to be good at teaching, but the teaching was a highly significant factor with us, and therefore we tried to wrestle with how to do measure this concept of teaching. And, of course, that's a perennial problem in institutions of higher education. What constitutes good teaching? Well as a member of our faculty says, it's a kind of an inherent thing and you know who the good teachers are. You just know when the students know who they are. And the poor ones, they know who they are also. Now, in our case, we had to get rid of the poor ones if we could.

JB: How successful were we at that?

RP: As a matter of fact theirs probably more successful than we thought. We had a kind of rule of thumb, if there's any doubt in the early years, we had to let it go. That meant that we probably let some people go who were very good. But this was kind of a rule of thumb, that if there was any doubt in anybody mind and we had a critical examination process that started and worked its way up through the echelons to primary Oviatt's concerned. If there was any doubt in any one of these levels, serious doubt, then we let them go and faculty became greatly involved in this process, of course. They were not only involved, they were insistent on their role, and I think rightfully so.

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JB: In your interview with Justin Grener two years ago, you referred to the faculty as difficult to manage.

RP: Yeah.

JB: That parse struck me, and you've just said almost the same thing, a moment ago. They were contentious?

RP: Right, and I think practically all college presidents would agree with that feeling. As I said, it stems from the fact that their primary concern is with the discipline and the larger

administrative concept to school and the college or university as a whole is less important.

JB: We've talked a bit about land acquisition. I want to talk to you about students too, but perhaps we can talk about land acquisition, just a bit. That was a crucial priority, and we dealt with it in part, and you dealt with it in part with Greener. And of course, I have transferred to that. We know it was a key priority, and I know essentially what strategy was, talking with you and having talked with Warner. We wound up with something over three hundred acres, what was your ultimate goal to get what we wanted?

RP: I felt that if we can get the Devonshire Downs property, that gives the lien on the property in between the Devonshire Downs and the existing campus at that time, and as you probably found out from Warner, with the last acquisitions of the campus came pretty expensive.

JB: Yup.

RP: We needed an integrated campus now, by way of illustration. Somewhat early in the process of using what influence we had to get what we felt we needed, we invited, or I invited, the Governor down, Governor Pat Brown, to the campus. And we took a little trip around what I hope to be the ultimate campus and stopped near Lesson Street to look out over this expanse of that time, we had just a few buildings underway. I pointed out to the governor that within a relatively short period of time, this would be a complex of institutions, similar to the sort of thing at UCLA. Many buildings and some of them have had to be high rise buildings because of the nature of the potential growth. This comment was very interesting, he said; boy are you quite a dreamer, aren't you? And I said well with your help we can make these dreams come true, and he was helpful from that point on, of course it also helped having Julian Beck as his administrator assistant.

JB: Did he brush on any reservations about where the money was gonna come from?

RP: He did indicate that there were a lot of calls on the finances of the state. And then we'd have to take our place, and my response was, well I hope we could take our rightful place in this context. And he seemed to be impressed, I don't know if he was necessarily impressed to the point where he helped us any more than anybody else. But he was, he was sympathetic, to put it that way.

JB: Spoke on campus, not too long ago.

RP: Oh did he?

JB: The year before last, yes. Let's touch on something we've, again, already brushed on. That is your trips to Sacramento; you've talked with Greener a good deal about this because, of course, his focus was on the system.

RP: Yes.

JB: And that was very useful from my standpoint, I understand you have something like seven or eight times a year.

RP: That's Right.

JB: On average. I know how it, approximately, how it operated. And I know from Warner what he did up there, and how he approached it, and we're just about to go off tape. So I'll hold this question in thin air until we reverse these.

RP: Okay.

[End of Track 3]