

Robert Williams, Track 2

Tape 1, Side B

JB: Good, we were talking about Howard McDonald.

RW: Yeah. The thing is that McDonald was president over both LA State and LA City College. I don't know whether you know the history of LA State, how they got there.

JB: Can we talk a little more about that? Let's do it. (Both talking at once)

RW: Well, Los Angeles City College was a really nationally known community college, in the sense that they had a faculty of academic stature that was probably without parallel for what we then called junior colleges. Real scholarly people, and there was a tremendous movement in Los Angeles to create a city college, a municipal four year college. And certainly, they probably deserved it. But there was a reluctance up in the political arena to create a third system of four year schools. We had the state colleges and we had the UC system. So, it was a compromise was made to put an upper division campus there, and they gave it a common president, vice president, and dean of students, the idea being that that would satisfy the community.

JB: With the combined junior college, the lower division, and the state college with the upper division.

RW: But really, only common at the top instead of at the bottom: president, vice president. But, when you start getting down to the instructional level, there was complete separation. There was no cross-fertilization of faculty or anything else. So, it was just, and it became apparent fairly soon, that it wasn't going to work, at least from a four year school standpoint. But it did work, and probably could've worked. It'd be no reason why—in fact, I think some of the new campuses that are actually starting as upper division campuses. But we had, just an aside, we had three administrators at the time, at LA State. We had vice president Chet Milham. He was common to both. We had Mort Renshaw, the dean of students. And we'd have, well, I guess it would be McDonald. Mort Renshaw had a wooden leg, and you didn't know it except when he was walking it made a particular noise. And McDonald was death on smoking, him being a Mormon. And it wasn't just for fire prevention, he just was death on it. And we'd be waiting for a staff meeting or something or, for those three who were going to be there, and we can all put our cigarettes out because Mort Renshaw's leg made certain noise coming down the hallway. And we used to refer to them as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. (Both laughing)

JB: (??). A.C. Lambert. He was executive dean.

RW: Yeah, yeah.

JB: What sort of person was he?

RW: Where did you know him from?

JB: He left a very interesting memoir of the founding of the first building on this campus; the library structure, the South Library. And, the memoir is in the University Archives, and it's long. He copyrighted it. And the more I read it, the more curious I became about him.

RW: Well, A.C. Lambert was a pudgy, older fella in that time. Very, not gifted with a personality that was, made him, you know, gracious. He was a very tough guy, tough talking guy. Very, very much an egotist. Very egotistical, but very bright. And I guess he was the building coordinator or something like that. I think he—I'm not even sure whether he was in any of the departments, possibly in the School of Education, I think he'd come from some administration background—but he was a bright guy, and I hadn't realized that he would—I guess he would've been involved in the pioneering of some of these buildings.

JB: This document is very forcefully presented.

RW: Yeah. Yeah, he's a very forceful person.

JB: I've been curious about him, just (coughs) would've guessed that, from the way in which he presented this story. Quite a long one.

RW: Oh, by the way, one of the other things that you can't ignore if you haven't already been told this, you know, is the tremendous role that Warner Masters played in the very early days.

JB: You know, I'm going to interview Warner. In fact, I was on the phone with him just the other day. But it would help me, since I only know part of the story, if you could outline what he did. I'll ask him to elaborate on it, but basically, what was his function? What was his role here, you know what I mean?

[00:04:56]

RW: Well, Warner Masters had come out here having been the chief financial officer of LA State, and he came here after Prator arrived. Prator interviews him, I think, at the airport, and wisely chose him. He just was a kind of a fellow that could fight those battles off-campus for budgets and things of that sort. I'll never forget, I happened to be up in Sacramento for a conference at the same time that budget hearings were going on for LA State. That was the days, remember now, when the presidents made their own negotiations. And it was a hot day, and that night, and I happened to walk down the hallway and the door was open because they didn't have any air conditioning, and Dr. McDonald was sitting on the side of the bed in his shorts, tired, it looked like he was a hundred and ten years old. And there was Warner Masters sitting next to him with the budget (both laugh), line by line saying, now, tomorrow—(??) And Warner was the guy that could do that sort of thing. And he's the fellow that, you know, had the vision to start the Foundation here, started the credit union, I'm sure. He thought big all the way along. He just sure was a major player.

JB: I think that, what I'm coming to find is that he was far more important than anyone seems to imagine. He was partly behind the scenes.

RW: Yeah. What you didn't know, you didn't really know how the thing worked until you finally got into the inner circle. I could remember how furious I was when I was Director of Admissions. I'd take work home every night. There were times when I didn't know where I could get a hundred bucks to pay the student help, you know, for their last day's work. And I always did pretty well, having Dwayne(??), Del and Warner, I figured, you know, I got more than my share of the money. But one time when the dean of students couldn't attend, they asked me to sit in for him at one of those top management meetings, and I did. And that's where I saw them just shuffle thousands of dollars, right and left, you know, from Dave Buck in plant operations, and over here and yon. And I really was very furious in my own heart. I said, "Geez, I had no idea that there was that much flexibility."

JB: Really.

RW: Because I had, you know—and I was a pretty good political player. Don't misunderstand me, I got my share. But I did establish in my mind some real anger that there were many a night that I worried about how we were going to get the job done. Because to me, a hundred bucks was big money in those days. But there's shuffling goes on, and of course, those are the things that you have to do, and that's why Del and Warner were flexible enough. It was never for any personal benefit. So that's probably a plus. But all I'm saying is, at my end, I remember how it would hit me.

JB: And you were in administration.

RW: Yeah. But I was second level, don't forget.

JB: Do you think the faculty was aware of how the money was divvied up and apportioned?

RW: Probably. They don't probably know that the first librarian came here in a faculty position. I happen to—I don't whether you plan to interview Stan McElderry or not.

JB: No. I've never met him, as a matter of fact.

RW: Yeah, I was having dinner with him last week. I saw him for the first time in ten years, and he told me the story. Del hired him to be head librarian, and there was no budget slot. And they wanted him because he very, he had great knowledge. And, Del said, "Don't worry about it, we'll find a way." And they hired him as a professor of English. Worked out a deal with the English department chair. So, the two of them knew about it, but I doubt that a lot of people knew about it.

JB: Was that more or less typical of the way things went in the early years? A lot of executive decision making?

RW: Oh, I think so. I think that as far as the curriculum was concerned, right from the very beginning, that's been heavy in the hands of the faculty. There never was any things related to the academics. But I really think that as far as the financial end of things, in the early days anyway, it was not that much involvement with the faculty. And there were probably what we used to call bootlegged positions, but I think that's a lot tighter now by, in partially by, faculty vigilance, and because of, probably, state-wide audits.

JB: You were upset by the way in which you saw this happening. Do you think the faculty was, or did they care? Could you tell, whether the faculty was concerned about decision-making processes, or did they seem satisfied with the way it was?

[00:10:07]

RW: Oh, I think—this would've been in '67—and I think the momentum was still going to where everybody was feeling still darn good about the place. I suspect they would've been though, and I'm not saying that the chairman division—I guess we used a, I can't recall when we got deans, and we had division chairmen up to a certain point in our time, and I suspect they were somewhat involved in it. But I doubt they were involved in the kind of shuffling that I'm describing.

JB: You mentioned there were three committees, three committees that were very important to the campus in the early years. Since we don't have that on tape, we were discussing it over lunch, maybe you could again relate what those committees were called, what they did.

RW: Yeah, we had the Academic Standards Committee, the General Education Committee, and the Curriculum Committee. They're pretty self-explanatory, although I was looking through some minutes recently and was surprised to see in the early stages, as early as '58, '59, questionnaires to the faculty on trying to get agreement on the meaning of an A grade, or a B-grade, asking about teaching methodology. If you stop to think about it, you've got one group that devotes time to rules and regulations, maybe evaluate whether this rule is working or not working, hearing student petitions.

JB: Academics—

RW: (Both talking) Academics. That kind of stuff. Then the Curriculum Committee, free to review curriculum proposals, future and present. And then, of course, a separate General Ed Committee, because in those days, that was considered important enough to be divorced from departmental curriculum. So, when, as you probably know, at some point in time, that was all scrapped into one committee. A very important, possibly too important, committee, the Educational Policies Committee. And I think there's something to be said for efficiency, but I think it mitigates against constant, not necessarily as a development in most things, but the evaluation assessment of the existing things. Just a sheer volume of, maybe we have, we don't need a new General Education Committee, but we probably should not have to be in this position to say, we're not going to have any changes for two years. And this is primarily probably

because of time constraints. So, I personally think that we, well, could have an Educational Policies Committee, maybe as a final arbiter of things, but I suspect it's been a loss that we don't have more daily attention, or regular attention, being given to the curriculum.

JB: Having served on EPC, I couldn't agree more. We're shifting back and forth a good deal in terms of focus, but maybe we could talk just a bit more about President Prator in relation to those committees. Now, he stood back from those, established a certain distance from those committees, didn't he?

RW: Um-hm. Um-hm.

JB: What did he see, or what do you see, his role as having been as president? What do you focus on?

RW: Well, I think that President Prator was a hands-off administrator. At least, if you were going beyond a very tight-knit circle, it would've been him and Warner Masters and Del Oviatt and Leo Wilson. I think he had a tremendous interest and concern about the reputation of this school. I recall in his very first talk to the faculty in a meeting, he said, "If there's doubt in your mind as to whether the student earned a B or a C, give the student a C." He really, I don't know whether coming out of a community college, he was—But he came from a very, by the way, very highly regarded academic community college, Bakersfield College. So, he had a real interest in that. I remember when I was Acting Dean of Students, I had occasion to hire a counselor. And we had an opening, let's put it that way. And I recall I had to take this counselor in, that's one of the, probably the only time I ever met with Prator. I met with him twice, by the way, but that was the one time I brought him in so that Dr. Prator could meet him and quiz him and assess him. So, I'm sure he had a more active role in the choice of personnel than a lot of people realized. And he watched the minutes, and I think that he listened to, he probably got counsel and suggestions from Del and Leo, but he never would've been, like you might say, Reagan's accused of—he would've listened to these people, but he's a very independent thinker. He was a very distant person, however. Never entertained. Never was a cocktail party, to my knowledge. In fact, I'm told, was told once, that even Leo Wilson had never been in his house. But I did hear that he cried when Leo died.

[00:16:02]

JB: And that was early on.

RW: Yeah.

JB: He had brought Leo Wilson in from Bakersfield, as I recall.

RW: Well, Leo came from, I think he was Director of Admissions at Fresno State.

JB: I see.

RW: In fact, that was something that really was interesting to me. I was, as you know, Director of Admission, and I was in an uneasy spot, where Prator's historical background, he'd been Director of Admissions at the University of Colorado. And I knew that when he brought Leo in, whom I'd known as sort of a colleague, although Leo was much more experienced in administration than I was, certainly in those days. So, I always felt a little uneasy about those two guys, but to their credit, and mine I guess too, we never had any questions. Never any intrusion in my role. (Pause) Let me give you one other little story on Prator, though. He was not a political animal at all. He never, he never gave a call to me as Director of Admissions, other than to say, he told me, he said, Red, if I have a case that I really have to ask you about, I will call you. Otherwise, I don't want you listening to any of these political pressure deals. And there was one case of, well, it was Judge Beck's daughter. She came in to see me, after we were closed for enrollment and I was admissions director, and she asked me if, she wanted to register, and I said, "Too late." And she looked at me and she said, "Would it help if I told you I was Judge Beck's daughter?" And I said to her, "Wouldn't help you with me, but in all honesty, it might help you with some of the people higher up." So, Judge Beck called President Prator. Now, Judge Beck had done a lot for this school. You know, he really had, and Judge Beck didn't want to make an exception—umm, not Judge Beck, but Prator. He's just wasn't that kind of a guy. "Hell no, she's no different," I remember him saying, "She's no more—no different from the kid across the street." And I said to him, I said, "You know, you're right, but really, the guy has done so much for this school, and in this particular case, I think it would be okay." And he did. As long as I said, but if I had, boy, if I'd been against it, he's the kind of guy—And you have to remember, that takes guts in a political—Do you think that could happen today? Probably wouldn't be able to do it now, if he were president. But that's the way he was. He didn't depend on that kind of stuff.

JB: Do you know how Del Oviatt was chosen to be dean of this campus, originally?

RW: Uh, Del was simply assigned out here by President McDonald, to get the thing going. I don't think he had a particular title. Might've had some modest title. That's my memory of it, when they started the campuses in the Valley. And he'd just sort of start running, and I have to go back to look at the historical, what his job titles were, but that's why I say that this other administrator's mouth dropped when I mentioned—well, Del will, you know. Because I don't think by then, even, his position was officially recognized. So, I think frankly, it was pure coincidence that he had—shoot, I'm trying to think now. I know he lived over there and lived in the Valley, but I think he did that after, you know, after he was located here.

JB: He was the odds on favorite to become president of this university.

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RW: Oh, yeah. Hundred percent. Hundred percent.

JB: Who was behind him? Who were his leading supporters?

RW: Faculty. Hud Fleming, Mal Sillars, Mitch Marcus. Any of it, anybody that, Del Stelck, you name it. Everybody. He was—

JB: —It was unanimous.

RW: It was a hundred percent! As I'm told, and I believe it's true. I don't believe there was—I'm talking down to the secretaries.

JB: What happened? What derailed his presidency?

RW: Presidency. I think several things. I think that there was a desire in the system to have a community college person be president. There were already two Mormons. One at LA State and one at San Diego State, I mean, at San Jose State. Those are probably the real reasons. The other was that, there was probably an overkill in the lobbying from people here to the State Board of education, which made the choice. I know, I was told by a person whom I knew, he was dean of students at UCLA and also a member of the state board. Barney Atkinson's his name. He told me that they were simply overwhelmed with phone calls, and late at night, and all kinds of letters and petitions and things. And it made them suspicious. But I don't think that's the overriding factor. I think that the fact that there were two Mormons, and there'd never been, or at least there was pressure for more community college—with Langsdorf over at Fullerton, I think either came at the same time, was also a community college person. But that, I think, was the major contributors.

JB: Was there an attempt—in the community college dimension, in particular—was there an attempt to integrate the system through a trade of executive personnel? Why did they particularly want a community college president to be president here?

RW: Oh, it's just a matter of recognition! The Catholic Church hierarchy was putting tremendous pressure on the system at one time, because there wasn't a Catholic president. San Francisco area, particularly. And so, Leo Kane, a prominent administrator—and he happened to be a Catholic, I think, I'm sure—was one of the things. I'm sure other qualifications, of course, made him president of Cal State Dominguez Hills. And this is the same thing. It's symbolic, just as its very important to the system now to have minorities presidents and women! And those are just little other kinds of—because it was important to the community colleges who have, you know, have a constant struggle for recognition.

JB: I see. So, this is an earlier version of what I would call a kind of loose affirmative action.

RW: Exactly.

JB: I see.

RW: Or political action, maybe. I wouldn't call it affirmative. I wouldn't give it the same morality.

JB: (Laughs) Political affirmative action will do. (Laughs) Interesting. Interesting. There was a Mormon dimension to it, as well.

RW: I suspect. I have no evidence on it, but it just stands to reason. You have Dr. McDonald, and Wahlquist, I think was fella's name, at San Jose State. You know, if I were casting around, that would probably be something that I would have to think about.

JB: What was the response on this campus, when it was discovered that Oviatt wouldn't be president?

RW: Just, very, very disappointment. Short-lived, in the sense that he didn't let it slow him down. And when Prator came, everybody turned, too. So, I don't think there were long-term repercussions other than, you know, people just felt that Del deserved, sort of the, the idea achieved of good guys don't win.

JB: Did it damage the morale of the campus, here?

RW: I think, at first. But don't forget that we were still small. And there was plenty of opportunity for Del to be seen and to participate and to lead. So, I don't think so. I think, had he been a lesser man, it could've been chaotic.

JB: That original cadre of faculty coming over, thirty, forty faculty coming over from LA State—how were they chosen? What went into the choice of who would come and who would not? As I recall, there were two hundred faculty over there, and half of them wanted to come, and only half of those eventually made it. Uh, what happened? Who did the deciding and how was it done?

[00:24:53]

RW: Well, I think, I think the big decision-maker for the most part was Del. Although it certainly, in my opinion, was not true that only the quote stars were taken. I mean, everyone, all of us that were there were not necessarily hand-picked by Del. I'm sure there was an element of horse-trading. I think for Del to get Mr. X, he might've had to take Mr. Y. There was a certain element of that. Bargaining and negotiation probably between Al Graves and Del. And maybe, just maybe, Dr. McDonald was involved. But I really, all I know is, I made my wishes be known. I was fortunate in the sense that, when I had roomed with Del, met him, we were both rookies in LA State in 1950 and knew each other very well. That wouldn't have gotten me out here, I know—at that time, I was very competent and was right for that particular job. But I'm sure I wouldn't have, administration would not have been chosen, if it hadn't been for Del. And then other people, Warner Masters, was somewhat influential in the business side of things, like the book store manager. And, by the way, some of these people, the university outgrew them. I always felt at least a little pleased that I, you know, I voluntarily left the Director of Admissions job in '66 and I think, I'm sure I couldn't handle it now, because of the

technical ends of things, the computer technology, but there were others that, you know, the bookstore changed dramatically. But most people survived. But I think it was probably Del and Al Graves. I don't know whether the—because I don't think they had the department chairs. That would be interesting, if you can—a guy that you might talk with, perhaps, is Ray Rydell. He lives in San Diego. He's getting quite old.

JB: But he might know.

RW: Oh, sure. Del would know. I mean, Ray would know, I'm pretty sure of that.

JB: One thing I heard—

RW: —And Warner would probably know. (Both talking at once) But Warner actually, see, Warner didn't come here until after Prator. Completely, but he was undoubtedly working behind the scenes. I'm trying to remember who was it—oh, Bill Graham was the accounting officer here. He came from LA State.

JB: You posed a great question, to Warner, too. It is a question in my mind, what that horse-trading process was. I have heard or read—it's been remarked and I can't recall a source at the moment—that Del took some troublemakers from LA State.

RW: Well, I know, for example, one fella actually in Student Affairs down at LA State, bought a home, moved himself lock, stock and barrel and bought a home up here in Granada Hills, on the idea that would enhance his chances, sentimental or something, in his favor. He never made it here. I know of another person, I'm sure it's true, who ended up here in the School of Business who literally got down on his knees in tears to Del Oviatt, begging for an appointment. And he did get it. And I'm pretty sure there was, like I told you, in order to get—if you want so and so, you have to take so and so. And I suspect there were at least one or two instances. Not troublemakers. Not troublemakers. That would be better. But just not so sharp. See what I'm saying?

JB: And some were known as liberals, weren't they? That is to say, who might be viewed as troublemakers by conservative—

RW: —I don't know, I'm trying to think of-

JB: —Del Stelck, perhaps—

RW: (Both talking at once) Well, Del wasn't LA State.

JB: Okay.

RW: I think Del came strictly out of the, you know, new. I don't think he was an LA State person. Mitch Marcus, now, Mitch could've been—

JB: His name also comes to mind—

RW: —Mitch, Mitch, you know, knowing Mitch, maybe somebody thought of him as a troublemaker. I never looked at him that way. But he was certainly a vocal—I think it is true that one of the reasons things moved so fast here, is I don't think there was anything like the faculty involvement at LA State. There probably is plenty of it now, but I don't think in those days there was the kind of faculty governance, you know. So—

JB: That was new over here, in this—?

RW: Oh, I think so. I think that would've been probably your main catalyst. Because probably very refreshing.

JB: We need to talk about that... Change tapes, and we'll do just that.

[End of Track 2]