

Interview with Warner Masters, track 2

WM: He was to come to my so-called retirement party and he became ill and one of the people from Cal State LA were gonna pick him up and bring him over because they had a— Del Stelck was the chairman of my retirement committee, and, my god, they packed 'em in, I had three hundred fifty people showed up at the country club out there, including Glenn Dumke and his wife and so it was a great honor that they all paid to me. And so, but I had suggested a few people that I thought that might want to come and one of them was Howard McDonald. And Howard sent a nice note saying, "I sure appreciate the invitation," and that sort of thing, but he was just unable to be out at that time of the night. He was not well. So he died a couple of years later.

JB: We're talking about land and, uh, the acquisition of land. We started with one hundred sixty acres.

WM: That's right.

JB: Here. That's what was allotted by the state.

WM: Um-hm.

JB: It surely isn't one hundred sixty acres now.

WM: No, it's about three hundred sixty acres now. (laughs)

JB: You were deeply involved in the process of expanding this space. How did it occur, how did you do it, what did we pay for the land as we brought it on, what happened?

WM: Well, basically, when Ralph Prator became president, he was a president without a campus, so to speak. Ralph was appointed president in 1957, I believe, and, uh, the institution was operated by the, under the budget of Cal State LA until July first, 1958. So from 1956 to '58, uh, we were operating this campus under Cal State LA and I was still in Cal State LA. I stayed there. Del came out here in 1956 in the temporary buildings and was called Dean of the San Fernando Valley Branch of Cal State Los Angeles. And so it stayed that way for a full year, and then the next year there was a bill to separate the institutions, effective July first, 1958 and Ralph Prator came on board I think about mid-semester, probably in September, October of 1957, and he started doing the planning for the

institution when it separated. By this time, I'd indicated to Howard McDonald that I would prefer going to the Valley, and, but that still was in Vermont Avenue until July the first, 1958. But so Prator—I actually thought that Del Oviatt might be appointed president of this institution. [doors opening and shutting] What is—

JB: Students looking for space.

WM: Oh, is that right?

JB: Students looking for a place to study. There's no internal lock on this door, so—

WM: (laughs) Oh, I see.

JB: I have visitors now and then.

WM: So at any rate, I thought Del was a shoe-in, you know. But that was not the way things work, you know.

JB: Why?

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WM: Oh, I have no idea. That was the decisions made in Sacramento. I had no idea why he wasn't selected. I got an, you know I got hunches, like everybody else had, that McDonald hand-picked him, they're both Mormons, and all that nonsense. Whether it was so or not I haven't any idea, but Del had a tremendous amount of support of the faculty and everybody else to be president. He would've been an outstanding one, I'm sure. But that was not the way it was supposed to happen, and so the, Roy Simpson, I guess—I think it was still Roy Simpson that was director of education—at any rate, he was selected by a committee in Sacramento, the headquarters at the State College system and Ralph came on board during the '57-'58 year without authority to do anything except plan. In '58, he officially took over the reins of the institution as it was separated and then I, officially, was chancellor. I put in two budgets in 1957-'58 for two different institutions, and then I came out to San Fernando Valley and I was Chief Financial Planning Officer.

JB: What was your title here originally?

WM: Well they had the, uh—the first place, the titles were working titles and titles of pay titles were a problem in the state system. They had everything by one, two, three, categories one, two, three. So they had business manager one, two, three. So three was equivalent to a major dean, salary wise. So I was a three. And, when, I came out here. Then, Prator changed it to Executive Dean, so I became Executive Dean, and then Cleary promoted me to Vice President, and that was because of Harold Spencer retired from vice presidency here. And so they had a search and screen committee and all that kind of stuff, but I wound up with it anyway. So that's how I became so-called Vice President. I didn't do anything different. (laughter) Yeah. That's what I—the . ??) committees said, "I don't know what we're meeting for" (laughs) Says, "Well, what are you gonna do if you're hired?" I said, "Well, I'm gonna find something else to do." I said, "Whoever you bring in here is gonna do what I'm doing, but I must be doing something else." So I said, "I'll just simply, I'll just resign and I don't have any tenure anyhow." (laughs) So anyhow, but I got it, so, the committee decided the _____(??) all the faculty and deans around here, it was almost a stacked committee, if I could say, in that sense.

JB: They obviously thought you were doing a good job.

WM: Apparently, well, apparently I was, I liked all the faculty, I mean, not all the faculty but—I liked to work with them, you know. And I had committees all over the place, and I could never understand why the administrator did not want, or felt threatened by a faculty committee. I said, "For god's sake, you can use all the help you can get," you know. And I had all the, any kind of, uh, repercussions or any kind, you could bounce all kinds of ideas out on them and they'll react one way or another to it and you got a sounding board, and if don't know more about the job than those people do, then what I'm supposed to be doing, I don't have to do it, you know.

JB: Let me ask a question that bears directly on that. You welcomed faculty input, you designed the buildings.

WM: Yeah.

JB: How much faculty input was there in the shaping of the actual physical structure of our campus?

WM: A great deal. I mean, as far as I was concerned, I had hard time with anything, badgering someone into actually doing something, you know, because, well, that's a foreign element to many people. As I said, they don't have three-dimensional minds. A guy says, "Oh, I'd like to have a room two hundred by two hundred feet for fifty students." Well, that isn't the way it works, you know, and so I'd give them formulas and everything else and

say, "Now, here's what we can get," you know, "Do you want large classrooms or small classrooms? And why?" And then, of course, it had to go through an educational policies committee because there was an argument over whether or not a large classroom or lecture type instructional effort was better or worse than small teacher-student ratio in a rather intimate situation.

[00:10:24]

JB: That already went on across the campus, did it?

WM: That went all across the campus, everywhere, yeah. And, in fact, I had two lecture halls planned that seemed to be, to me, a rational approach, at least out of a big institution as large as this, that there might be some real practical use for bringing in outstanding lecturers and something like that—who knew we'd have such a thing as an outstanding professorship in various, in, by school or something of this sort, I don't know. Any rate, it seemed to me that that might make some sense. Well, I bounced it out there and they discussed it and discussed it and discussed it, and finally said, "No." So, okay, that was the decision, I mean, that was, we didn't have the lecture hall.

JB: Was it made in the EPC, was it, the Educational Policies—[Educational Policies Committee]

WM: Uh, well, yes it was kicked around all over the place, you know.

JB: But it was basically a faculty decision not to have large lecture halls.

WM: That's right, absolutely. Yeah, they were the ones that—"they," I mean, whatever the consensus or at our composition of the decision-making process it was in the academic area as far as making that decision and it obviously came through the—well, I had a very large campus planning board composed of faculty, had one student on it, usually president of the student body or somebody like that and then if it was a student building, of course, like the Student Union, we used a large cadre of students on that planning board. And so then when it was with the School of Education, I went to the school meetings, said, "Look," you know, "We're gonna plan a School of Education building." We never got it built, but we got to plan it, you know. (laughs) And now, what do you want, scaling the School of Business, we tried to design a, oh we had a beautiful building for the School of Business, and I don't know what happened to it, but it was all designed and everything else, but never could get the money for it. But, anyhow, the School of Engineering, went to each one of them, when we had a specialized Building of Science, anyway. The original science building here was taken over from the Cal State LA science building. We'd gone through the—and that was one of

the first buildings to be built. And so there wasn't a science faculty here except a very small nucleus and so they did not, I don't think they got the kind of a building they would like to have had at the time, but there was a tendency in a part of the state of California to duplicate the buildings.

JB: Um-hm.

WM: For instance, that library building down there is a duplicate of the one in Cal State LA. And that one, those two, the third one was built in Hayward. The Fine Arts Building, which was done by Richard Neutra, when the state bought the plans from Neutra, they got permission to duplicate the building wherever they pleased, so they put another one just exactly like it up in Hayward.

JB: Is that right? Two Neutra buildings in the system.

WM: Yeah.

JB: I understand that Neutra's relationship with the state architect was cloudy, that they had a falling out or something like that.

WM: Well, honestly, Richard Neutra was a tremendous guy. I really enjoyed, he invited me over to his home and everything like that and had a beautiful home over in, uh, not Westlake, uh —

JB: Silverlake?

WM: Silverlake. Had two houses over there, his son had one of them. His son was Dominic(??) and he had (??) and, uh, that's where I learned to eat goat cheese. (laughter) I still remember him serving me this brown cheese and I was like, "What in the world is this?" And it tastes like caramel. Have you ever tried it?

JB: Yes, I have.

WM: I like it. (laughs) I liked it.

JB: It is an acquired taste.

WM: Yeah, it is. But anyhow, he was a great guy. The problem was is Richard Neutra must've been close to eighty and his back-up staff were simply not really very good. They were not good technically. For instance, that building had a flat sill. You don't build a building with flat sills, for god's sake, water's gonna come inside, and it did. There was more cost of items to complete on the Fine Art's Building at this campus than any other two buildings put together.

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JB: Is that right?

WM: Um-hm.

JB: Just because of misdesign?

WM: Well, it just, uh, I would say it was execution, yes. The design itself was fine, from a designer's point of view, if you had just plopped down things and say, "Is a nice design?" then yeah, nice Fine Arts Building. And it looks nice, it also functions well. But for instance, in the ventilation systems, these odors from the toilets permeated the corridors and into the classrooms and now what in the hell is the matter with that? So when we got it, sewers had opened up, we knew we were in trouble. So the planned operation, when we got together was that, "What about, number one, increasing the size of the exhaust sections in the lavatories?" They said, "Well, were not gonna be able to do that because we're going up through limited access points." I said, "Okay, let's build a high-speed electro-fan at the top and see about that." And, well, that helped a little bit. Then we said, "Well, let's try something else." I said, "We're gonna air condition these buildings." The duct work was not designed to take air conditioning. You have to have, incidentally, air conditioning, it takes a greater cross-section, volume of air to cool the building than it does to heat one. I don't know why, but it does. But so consequentially!!!!, the duct size has to be oversized in order serve both air conditioning and heating. So we had to alter a number of the major ducts and increase their size. When we did that, I said, "Let's increase the capacity of the fan and get a plus, uh, pressure inside the building. Because once you air condition, you close the windows, you know, and seal them. So now the building is closed, sealed, and you get the fan, big fans, to bring in outside air. You can either circulate inside air and keep circulating and filtering it, or you can bring in a percentage of outside air. The more percentage of outside air that you bring in, it's got to get out. You just can't keep putting it in, because it's got to escape somewhere; you just keep blowing up a balloon. So you create a plus pressure of two pounds, of two pounds per square inch. Now we cut holes, and if you go up in there in the Fine Arts Building, you'll see at the bottom of every one of the lavatory doors is a screen cut into the bottom of it. Now the plus pressure plus the exhaust, the odors will not come out because the plus pressure in the corridors goes through those screens into the

lavatory rooms and the fan on the top pulls the odors out. So you've got air pushing and air exhausting.

JB: All having to be retrofitted into the building.

WM: Um-hm.

JB: Did he, was that building his inspiration, but other people's execution, or did he lay out the design?

WM: Neutra, in a big company like, uh, architectural company, what you do, is you have several designers that, let's say, fit into your philosophical point of view. Neutra, one, we do not have any promontory sticking up out on the top of the building. If we cut anything up there, we build a parapet so it is not visual to anyone walking around on the campus or in the area. That's a must in order to design buildings. It's a good one. Who wants to see all those darn, all that junk, sitting on top of the building, anyhow? So he was very aesthetically inclined in looking at something. He'll say, "Is that pleasant? Does that make you feel good?" That's what he used to tell me all that time. Says, "Does that make you feel good?" He says, "How do you like that?" (laughs) And, you know, he's an Austrian Jew. Just a fantastic guy, you know? (laughs) And he'd say, "Do you like that? Make you feel good, yes?" (laughs) You know, I've got nothing. But, anyhow, then he would, from that philosophical point of view, which was composed of a number of things, palettes and everything else, colors, any kind of façade of treatment, that sort of thing. Then, your designer tries to work it out. Now, the first go-around for that building was unacceptable, had all kinds of technical problems, so what I did is wrote a critique of it—well, Tom Tramel—you know Tom Tramel?

[00:20:49]

JB: I've met him.

WM: Yeah, Tom and I set out and wrote a critique of that building, and here we had the art faculty out, Sudlow, and a whole bunch of the art people. And so we sat down at my dining room table and wrote out a critique on these plans, they call these plans. Said, "My god," I said, "Here this corridor's six feet wide and here's two doors opening for two classrooms." Bang. Hell, you'd bet, if you were walking down the corridor, I'd bet you'd have to weave your way between doors, if the doors were open, and the danger of getting slapped in the face for going out, you know.

JB: Flying out in the hallway.

WM: Flying out in the hallway and bang it'd hit you. So we forced them to redesign the corridors and open the corridors up and offset doors so that there were not any classrooms were doors were opposing each other. Technical, there are some things we should've seen in the beginning, you know. Another thing is corridors zig-zagged all over the place and the reason they have that, and it's not a bad reason, was that what they could do with the end of a corridor is they could use it as a display area for artwork or for mural or something of that sort. And that's a nice idea, provided, you know, you stay within the limits of your allowance, for what is known as, you have a net usable factor in the building. Say, in a commercial building, you talk about net rentable space. The net rentable space is fifty percent, the rest of it is just so much cost. So the rents have to go up. So in university buildings and hospitals and that sort of thing, you look at the production side of the equation, versus the access and other types of space. And this constant zig-zagging these corridors threw us into a cost factor that was just, uh, would not work. And the building was four stories high and it just continued to set back like this; each floor was less. And that was—

JB: It was stair stepped in.

WM: Stair stepped in.

JB: Oh, I see.

WM: And that is not too bad, because it reduces your elevator load, but from the standpoint of the fact that you've got a roof that's not doing anything, in a sense, that is structurally can support more space, uh, you get, you lose some utility in the building. So, when we went through the critique with Neutra, Neutra went at them one at a time, you know, so-and-so and so forth. We had a guy by the name of Pierce, who was head designer for this building. He says, "Why did you do that?" He went down to the next one. Says, (unintelligible). I'll tell you, we had about twenty-one points and Neutra accepted about sixteen of them.

JB: Right.

WM: You know? And he made him redesign them.

JB: He balked on the other four.

WM: The other four, I can't remember.

JB: Do we accept them then as he had designed them?

WM: I think so.

JB: So there was no—

WM: I can't remember what it was; there were a whole flock of technical points there.

JB: He cooperated until the end, though, there was no falling-out at all?

WM: No falling-out at all.

JB: I heard a legend that there was a falling-out, but obviously that's false.

WM: I don't know what it would be, unless some of the—unless, the one thing we didn't catch was the flat sills and maybe the Division of Architecture—the thing is, what happened is, the State Division of Architecture's responsible for supervision of construction. Now, a lot of things could've occurred that we wouldn't know about, in the technical aspects of the building of the building, that could have been friction between the design section of the director and the state division of the executive supervisory staff of construction. That wouldn't necessarily involve us. If it didn't have to do with function, it would not involve us.

[00:25:24]

JB: Okay.

WM: So we didn't comment on the flat sills, in fact we didn't even see them. It wasn't the kind of thing that—I certainly looked at them awhile after that time. That experience was enough for us; no more buildings with flat sills. (laughs)

JB: They leaked that way.

WM: Oh, leaked, I'll tell you, water was coming down inside the classrooms. Well, you have to watch that in a house, for god's sake, you find some people who build a damn house with flat sills.

JB: Or a threshold, or a door with the—

WM: Oh yeah.

JB: How did the state happen to engage an architect of the stature of Neutra in the first place? It's a major architectural landmark.

WM: What had happened, uh, about that period of time, there was an enormous amount of construction going on in the State University system and the University of California. It was actually more than the state division architecture could handle in their design sections. And what they did is they, uh, the legislature said, "We will contract out for certain buildings." So, consequentially!!!!, when they decided to contract out, there, it for the first time gave us something to say about who in the heck was appointed. Because now we're going into the private sector and so we had a good working relationship with the head architect of Los Angeles. A good guy down there. And he'd call us up, say, "Look, we're thinking about doing so-and-so and so-and-so. What do you think?" And he'd call me up, you know, and we'd get together over a cup of coffee down there or some place, and we invited him out to dinner and all that stuff, you know, get some good relationships going. And so he would say, "This is what we're planning on doing. You got any objections or do you have any suggestions or anything like that?" So we, uh, when we started talking about Neutra, we, of course, were very positive on that, you know, we thought that would be an excellent—for a Fine Arts Building to be a Neutra? What the hell! (unintelligible, both laughing and talking) We're not gonna turn him down here, you know. Now, it's true, we did turn down architects.

JB: How much—

WM: What I'd do is run around—when they'd call me up and say the Board of Trustees did that. I had a friend on the Board of Trustees, too, and Luckman wouldn't call me, but this other man did—isn't that awful, what the heck was his name? Anyhow, he would call me and he was on building committee and he would say, "What do you think of this architectural service?" I said, "I don't know, but I'll sure tell you a bit in twenty-four hours." And immediately, I'd go jump into an automobile and find all the buildings this guy designed, go around, and then I knew some of the, he designed some savings and loans buildings. So I called up the president of savings and loans whom I happened to know and said—anyway, in another case, it was the head attorney for a savings and loan, and I called up, and asked him if he'd find out something for me. And so I can report back by that afternoon. Said, "We've had a lot of problems," or, "Oh, he's done excellent, excellent job, we've had no problem with the building, these designs were—" You know, I'd get these

kinds of responses. Then I'd parrot those back to, in this case, to the head architect in Los Angeles, or, in another case, to the board member.

JB: You're looking at the buildings from the standpoint of practicality, obviously. Aesthetics, it sounds as though aesthetics is playing a major role.

WM: It is; it was. I thought that the state buildings looked like hell. (laughs) Generally, you know? And there wasn't a good reason for them to be that bad, you know?

JB: So the person who was principally responsible for signing off on architecture and on structural design was yourself.

WM: Um-hm. That's right.

JB: Up to the time of your retirement.

WM: Up to the time of my retirement, I approved every single building that you see on this campus, except the original group which were forced to take.

[00:30:01]

JB: Which group is this?

WM: The library, we were forced to take. It was the first building put on campus and they said, "If you want a library, you're gonna have to take one that's already planned." So we took the LA one. That was the only one. That, and the science building.

JB: But from there on.

WM: From there on. This was the best one.

JB: The Oviatt. Where we're sitting right now.

WM: And this one was Floyd Rible, designed this one. And was really, he—well, let's put it this way: we got good cooperation, this was a State Division of Architecture building, but we got good cooperation between the State Division of Architecture and consulting architect Floyd Rible. Floyd Rible's passed away, by the way. But Floyd, he and I travelled around the state and looked at buildings, library buildings and stuff like that. Some pretty good ideas over here, some pretty good ideas over there, and so forth. Now let's see what kind of a building we should have. Then we get the librarians in on the thing, and talked to them and said, "Okay, what do you think of this idea, what do you think of that idea?" and so on and so forth. And, of course, a lot of times, you get a head librarian that these librarians are gonna go along with him because of his status with them. And he may not be worth a damn, you know, as far as design is—