

11-1-1983

## Interview no. 681

Ralph Coleman

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### Recommended Citation

Interview with Ralph Coleman by Rebecca Craver, 1983, "Interview no. 681," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Ralph Coleman  
INTERVIEWER: Rebecca Craver  
PROJECT: History of the University  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 7, 1983  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
TAPE NO.: 681  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 681

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Engineering professor, 1940s-1960s; Professor Emeritus of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Recollections of administrators and tuition fee; the building of the Schellenger Research Lab; St. Patrick's Day activities of the Engineering students; different sites of the Engineering Department; evolution of the Engineering Department; how the first Union Building was built; campus dances; pranks played by students and faculty; athletics.

Length of interview: 1 hour, 10 minutes      Length of transcript: 26 pages

RALPH COLEMAN  
by Rebecca Craver  
November 7, 1983  
Tape I

C: Now go ahead and just start with that, that will be a good place to start.

RC: Well, I came here in 1947, and when I came at that time there were 16 buildings on the campus. Dr. Wiggins was president and Prof. Puckett was the Dean of Arts and Education, and Prof. Thomas was Dean of Engineering. Judson Williams was Dean of Student Life and Mrs. Caldwell was the Dean of Women. A gentleman by the name of Hutchins was Registrar at that time, and Mr. Pennington was the Business Manager. Most everybody is familiar with the name of Pennington. He did such a wonderful job while he was with us here. Baxter Polk was the Librarian and Dr. Waller, who is now deceased, was chairman of the Graduate Council. Colonel Tomlinson was curator of the museum, and Dr. Jenness was in charge of the health service office. There were 87 faculty members, two visiting faculty, 23 administrative assistants and three people on the dormitory staff. You can see that's quite a change from the present number that we have as administrators and visiting faculty and also assistant administrators. Of course I imagine everybody knows the beginning of the College of Mines and I imagine you'll have that listed in a number of interviews you have. But it did start by an act of the Texas legislature in 1913 and it created what was then called a State School of Mines and Metallurgy. It became a branch of the University of Texas in 1919.

Dr. Nelson, L. A. Nelson, was chairman of the loan committee we had at that time, and \$100 dollars was the maximum amount that a non-resident student could borrow, and a resident student could borrow

\$50 dollars. This fund was operated entirely by Dr. Nelson. Where the fund came from I never did know, but it was money...probably it was donated much the same as the Matrix Society donates money now. And for students who were a resident it was a \$25 dollar fee for 12 or more semester hours. That was the tuition. And a non-resident did have to pay \$150 at that time, but that was the maximum for 12 or more semester hours. Then there was lab fees added to most all courses, \$2 dollars to \$4 dollars per semester was the usual amount charged. Room and board was \$233.75 per semester, that was room and board in the dormitory. At this time 144 semester hours were required for a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical and Civil Engineering. That's been cut down to 131, 132 hours approximately.

It was not until 1954 that the University system abolished the Chancellor system that they were operating under and then they had the president as the chief administrator. The change called for an administrative officer of the system. I was quite surprised, really, when I found this out. I thought they would have a president of the University of Texas since it was organized, but this was not the case until 1954.

I think one of the greatest assets we have here was established about that time I was hired. It is the Schellenger Research Lab. It was a gift from a gentleman by the name of Schellenger and he was of course an engineer, and it was to be used for endowed research. It wasn't a great deal of money. As I recall, it was only about \$50,000, maybe \$100,000--between \$50,000 and \$100,000 dollars. But that was the fund that was set up to establish the Schellenger Research

Laboratory. The first director was Dr. Barnes, Thomas C. Barnes. The other members that served on the Board were Dr. Berkman, Prof. Schumaker, who is still here with us; Prof. Decker and Prof. McMahan. They had a staff of more than 50 faculty members working in Schellenger Research Lab, and there were five installations on the campus that was part of the Schellenger Lab. Those five installations were electronic research laboratory and data analysis center, environmental chambers, which was built in the Physics building. I designed those personally and had a great deal of fun in doing so. I found out we needed to take the smoke and gases from the building. I attempted to duct through the wall to the outside of Old Main. To get the duct through, I found out that the walls were approximately four feet thick, solid rock and concrete. So instead of going through the wall, I went down the edge of the wall and piped the fumes out from the climatic chamber to the trees just east of Old Main. This created quite a disturbance because people would come out and see this pipe sticking up out of the ground with smoke and fumes coming out of it. They were always curious to find out where this was coming from and why. We had to wait for the delivery of the climatic chamber and the other equipment to go in the building. To speed-up installation, I took the drawings that were furnished by the company that was going to send us the equipment and built the platforms, concrete platforms to set them on, and everything fit except for one little pipe that was off center when it came in. The company did a good job of sketching their plans.

Then in addition to the environmental chambers we had the acoustic research chamber, and that one is still on the campus. I don't know whether it's being used at the present time or not, but it is the finest

one between Dallas and Los Angeles. In fact, it's the only one that I know of, and it was built by the faculty under the direction of Dr. Barnes and Prof. Schumaker. We were building this at the time Dr. Smiley first decided to come to UTEP, and he came down to visit. The acoustic elements were built of fiberglass wedges about three feet high and sloped off to about six inches to the bottom. These wedges were placed on the ceiling walls and floor. We had to have a place where you can walk and set your instruments. This was a wire mesh floor over the wedges. And this work was being done in the summertime, if you can imagine how hot it was in there. So Dr. Barnes brought Dr. Smiley over and he never forgot me after that particular time. If you've ever worked with fiberglass you know how that can sting you. It's really worse than stinging nettles, if you know what I'm talking about. You couldn't see in the room; so when they opened the door, what light came in almost blinded us. Dr. Smiley came crawling through the door and Tom Barnes said, "This is Dr. Smiley," and I made a terrible remark, but he never did forget it. I said, "The hell with the president." (Laughter) Dr. Smiley and myself joked about our first meeting each other for about as many years as he was on the campus.

But anyway, we set that acoustic chamber up. The design of the door was very intriguing to me because if the door didn't shut so that you cut out all noise, you'd have a useless chamber. So the design of that door was what really intrigued me, and I think it's still over there. I haven't been back to that place in 10 years or longer, and I don't know whether it's being used, but it was a really fine acoustic

chamber. And incidentally, it was located at Kidd Field, under the north stadium seats. Then we had the optical and mechanical test center also, and that was located down about where the physical plant is now. There was a building down there with various and sundry equipment.

The Schellenger Lab was able to receive enormous grants. In fact, the first two or three years we had \$2 million dollars in grants. That may not sound [like] much in today's prices, but if you think back to 1948-49, \$2 million dollars would be equivalent to \$6 or \$8 million, or \$10 million dollars a year in grants at the present time, which I don't think we're getting. However we could be, but I don't know of it. And I really think that that was one of the biggest assets that was added to the University, and it has deteriorated. I shouldn't maybe say that, but that is my personal opinion. After a few years Dr. Barnes was out of it. Prof. Fugate was Dr. Barnes' accountant and technical writer.

Our secretary, who just resigned from Civil Engineering, worked for Schellenger Lab as the secretary for many years--don't know how many, five, six or eight--and that was Mrs. Childress. Then after the Schellenger Lab, she came to Civil Engineering. The people that could work in the Schellenger Research Lab had to have high secret clearance, top secret clearance.

C: What kind of contracts were they?

RC: They were government contracts with White Sands, William Beaumont Hospital. One of the first grants that we received was from William Beaumont Hospital. It was a machine for testing hearts. I suppose it would be much the same as our electrocardiogram machines that we have today, except the peculiarity of this machine. It was about five feet

high and four by four, and you never saw so much wiring and tubes. It worked. That grant was somewhere around \$50,000 to \$75,000. Prof. Cervanca, who also is deceased, was teaching drawing at the same time, and he and myself both worked for Schellenger Research Lab nine years. It was part-time, 20 hours a week. Prof. Cervanca was an excellent draftsman and first class machinist. He designed a microphone that could pick up the most delicate sounds and noises all the way from Oro Grande to Kidd Field Stadium. In fact, there was quite a bit of testing done on sound waves and upper atmosphere.

One of the early experiments I remember was related to computers. We had computers back then, too, but they were not as sophisticated as the ones we have today. This experiment was classified as secret. It's no longer a secret so I can tell you about it I'm sure. They were setting off certain explosions north of White Sands in the mountains. It was not on White Sands but north of it in what they call Organ Pass, some little village there. They went back into the mountains and set off these blasts, and the computers and other instruments were supposed to track the wave sounds, give us a readout. Then the problem came to me that there was no way that the Schellenger station could receive those sound waves. But this microphone that Prof. Cervanca had engineered was picking up the sound waves, and that was 35 miles as the crow flies from Kidd Field to where it was detonated. The computer wouldn't give us this verification so they brought it to me to find out what could be done and try to find out how we were getting these signals. It was quite interesting.

I went to the Geology Department which kept a good supply of maps. I believe they do at the present time. And Prof. Strain was very kind

in helping me find maps with the same scale. So we placed that down on the table, matched up scale-wise and otherwise, and since the sound traveled in a straight line, that it was hitting the top of the Organ Mountains and bouncing off. That was why the computer could not determine that we were getting sound waves. So the graphic analysis, which is my specialty, showed exactly what was happening. I took the landscape and the height of the mountains and the type of rock and material that was there under consideration. And when the sound wave hit a certain portion, a certain spot, it would bounce off to an adjacent mountain and then bounce again. So through the multiple number of bounces, it reached Kidd Field. That was quite an interesting little project.

Then of course in tracking, I did quite a bit of work in setting up tracking devices that were established at White Sands where they were firing various missiles. And all of this was done through the Schellenger Research Lab, which is what makes it interesting to me. It was more or less a community type of thing benefiting our own area. I'm very sorry to see that Schellenger is not that active. It could be; I've not been connected with it for a number of years.

C: No, I think it's about closed down. Tell me about the green line in the early days when you first got here and what kind of activities on Saint Patrick's Day went on.

RC: You know, I believe that the green line was being painted even before I came here in 1947. I know it was an annual occasion, and most of the St. Pat's celebration started early in the morning before daylight.

C: What would start? What would they do?

RC: A blast, a big blast in the gulleys and arroyos around the dormitories. They'd always set off a bunch of dynamite and wake everybody up. That [was] against all rules and regulations. The culprits would disperse and they never did know particularly who was doing it. It was always some of the engineering students, mostly seniors. One of the most interesting things that happened happened close to Old Main. The chairman of Civil Engineering Department, who hadn't been here very long, was an ex-paratrooper, very daring type of individual. He was the culprit this time.

C: When was it? Can you think of the name?

RC: I was afraid you was going to ask me that. Well, Mr. Hassler can tell you his name. I wasn't in Civil Engineering at the time, but this chairman and myself were good friends. One of the things that the chairman did was take some dynamite to the hillside just north of Old Main. He set the blast off up there. You know what happened. It was probably a little stronger than he had anticipated. It blew out all the windows on the north side of Old Main. (Laughter) That's the one I remember the best because that one, they knew who did it. It didn't seem too good. Course he had some help. He had a bunch of seniors and students doing this with him. I might say he paid for the replacement of the windows.

My first experience with the initiation was at Oro Grande. They used to hold all the initiations at the old mine shafts and tunnels. Dean Thomas always delegated me to be one to go. I recall that Dr. Nelson, Dr. Quinn, Dr. Strain, and a large number of the faculty went the first two or three years, and then it started dwindling down to where it was one or two faculty members. I'm thankful that the

initiation is no longer held at Oro Grande. I was always afraid somebody was going to get killed because there was beer drinking and sometimes even hard liquor even though it was against the rules and regulations. The last time, Dean Thomas told Prof. Carol Walker, who had come to us from Douglas McDonald in California, to teach Design and Graphics, told him and me that we would be the chaperones for this St. Pat's Day. He and myself were the two faculty members that were up there. We had anywhere from 100 to 250 students attend. It looked like it was becoming very dangerous to me. That is the reason why I said I'm glad that they stopped going up there. I know in some instances some of the students got a little bit too much to drink and chances are they were driving cars back to El Paso. Fortunately, we never had a wreck, nobody even got hurt, nobody even got hurt at the mines. So it turned out very good. But I think if it had gone on much longer it could have really proved a disaster.

C: Do you remember what year the last year that you had it at the mine?

RC: No, I don't. Somewhere around '50, about 1950 I would guess, maybe '51, right close to that period.

C: What would the initiates have to do at the mines?

RC: Oh, they went through about the same process they do now. They would crawl through the mine and kiss the Blarney Stone, and always had a big bean feed afterwards. Then after the initiation was over, one of the difficulties I found in having it there was not enough faculty as chaperones. The students would disperse and walk all over the area where there were many shafts that are quite dangerous. There used to be an old turquoise mine that Tiffany operated, and about that time you could still find a certain amount of turquoise if you looked properly

in the old mine. Everybody knew that the mine did exist and they were always hunting for it. It was a mile or a mile and a half away from the initiation site. This made it a little bit scary because you didn't know whether those people were going to actually make it back or not, or what might happen up there.

Then there was an occasion or two when we noticed that there were one or two people who'd either had a rifle or a pistol and wanted to do a little target practicing. That could become very dangerous. When we found that out, Prof. Walker and I stopped that as quickly as we could. We did hear several guns go off. I think it would have still been all right if we'd had 20, 30, 40 faculty, but the faculty just didn't want to drive that far and take their Saturdays off, and we did hold the initiations on Saturdays.

C: Do you know how the term "Peedoggie" originated? What have you heard about it?

RC: (Laughter) No, I really don't. I really don't. Come to think of it, I don't even know what the word means. Well, I know how its interpreted. Anybody that's not taking engineering is a Peedoggie. But to save my life I don't know how it originated.

C: Dr. Strain told me the other day that he'd heard that Cap Kidd originated the term.

RC: That I don't know. Now, Cap Kidd wasn't here when I came here. I came, I guess, about two, maybe three years after he had passed away. But I did get here in time to see the seismograph built on the side of the mountain near the Engineering building. Fact, my name's on the plaque over there that was done through contributions from people downtown, the community, and the faculty, and it's a very fine piece of equipment.

C: Well, where is it? I've never seen it.

RC: I guess there's not over 200 people or maybe 500 people that know the seismograph is even in El Paso. It is located near the east side of what used to be the Engineering building, the Geology building now, you just remember as you go towards the football stadium, instead of making a left turn around the building it's directly in front of you, and it's built right into the mountain. It's very inconspicuous, but it's a nice seismograph. Prof. Slusher in the Physics Department was more or less a monitor of the seismograph, and I'm sure that if you check the record you'd find that it registered the quake that we just recently had in Idaho.

C: Really?

RC: It's very sensitive. I think it's dedicated to Dean Kidd. It is called the Kidd Seismograph. There is a plaque on the outside. When you go in the door to your right there is a plaque stating who was responsible for making some of the contributions.

C: Well, when was Engineering moved out of that building?

RC: Oh, gee whiz. That was where it was when I came here in '47, and we stayed there and added on to it. I designed the first addition to the Engineering building. I had asked Dr. Wiggins for \$7,000 for lights and new desks. They couldn't dig up that much money. I used to go to the end of one of the old drawing rooms and look out over the old power house. I saw a vacant space back there and I thought, "Gee whiz, you know that could just go on up and put a roof over that, build another drawing room." So I designed that one and put in my request through Dr. Wiggins and he said, "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea." So they came around with...I think it was \$77,000.

C: Oh dear.

RC: I guess the moral there is, if you want something don't ask for \$7,000, ask for \$77,000! It was the first addition to the old Engineering building. It was over what used to be the old power plant. The second addition was the wing that went to the south, which is still there. Prof. McDill, who was in Civil Engineering at the university at that time, or College of Mines or Texas Western, whatever name, he and myself designed...he being an engineer and me more or less his assistant and draftsman.

/PAUSE/

Later the University of Texas at Austin hired their own architects, system architects, and they did take our plans, plans McDill and myself had drawn and executed. They took our plans and I guess you could say refined them just a little but not very much, basically exactly like we had designed it. Carrol & Noble did the architectural work on the second phase of the Engineering building, and that gave us a very nice Engineering building. Then this building became too small and we had to move to Globe Mills across the Freeway.

C: Did you teach all your classes down there at Globe Mills?

RC: Yes, all my classes. Fortunately, I didn't have to stay down there very long. I had one summer down there and I believe one Fall, and then we moved back to the Education building. And all Engineering... I say all, I'm pretty sure this is correct, moved on the first floor with offices on the second and third and so forth. That was right after they built the Education building. I wanted it to be called the Education and Engineering building but the Education Department

overruled us and they just called [it] the Education building. I did have the pleasure of designing the two drawing rooms that seat 100 students, and I was disappointed in the final outcome because even back in those days I could see the computers as being the wave of the future and I designed both of those rooms for closed circuit T.V. The conduits were all set in there with the overhead conduits for the cameras so that you could actually teach from the office, and then each room had 15 or 20 outlets for the monitors. They were monitors designed for feedback, so that if you were lecturing and telling a student that this is what is to be done, and that particular student didn't understand it, they could talk right back to you and then you could reillustrate it right on the T.V. Computer Aided Design would have been a natural hook-up.

At that time I had big ideas that maybe the public schools would tap into this and we could actually help the public schools out in their drawing. I tried to get grants for all that equipment. At that time it wouldn't have been but about \$110,000. I couldn't get any grants from anybody, anywhere. Even went so far as to try Sloan Foundation, and they said they didn't make grants for that purpose. Then I went to each department and asked that each of the four or five departments in the College of Engineering contribute, say, \$5,000 or \$4,000 per year and pool that so we could get a start. All the Engineering could use the equipment. Instead seems like what really happened is that everybody started going their own way, and pretty soon they got recorders and monitors that they could use to make their own programs. I am sure that the total expense was much greater than what

it would have been if we had pooled our efforts and had a central area for working computers and for recording lectures, play back for review purposes. I never did get my idea across.

Then we moved out of the Education building back to this building here, and I must say I didn't have a thing to do with the design of this building. I guess one reason I didn't have any input was I thought I'd be retired before it ever opened its doors, but it turned out I was here four or five years afterwards. I guess you could say I'm still here in a way.

I think the evolution of the Engineering Department is very interesting. When I first came here there was no degree, believe it or not, in Engineering, and I saw the influx of all the G.I.s returning from World War II. Fact, my classes ran 45 to 50 of mature people who knew what they were coming to school for. In fact, those years were the years I had the best students, and many of them are now doctors and teaching in the Engineering Department. Dr. Roser, now deceased, was one of my former students.

C: I didn't know that.

RC: And...who is the assistant dean now? Nice looking young man.

C: Oh, yes. Stafford.

RC: Stafford. Yes, Dr. Stafford was one of my students. In fact, Carlos McDonald, Dr. McDonald...oh, I could go ahead and name a dozen more, and they all turned out pretty good. I think they've made excellent faculty members. Quite an honor to think that I even had anything to do with their education. And I see so many people in town nowadays and they say, "Oh yeah, I had you in class way back in 1950." When I was

asking some favor from them, such as to rent some piece of equipment or something, I would say, "Well, I hope I passed you." They would usually answer, "You did," or, "No, you didn't, but I deserved to fail." The students knew what they were going to school for.

And as I said, there was no degree plan in Engineering. Prof. Decker and Dean Thomas (but mostly Prof. Decker) said for me and Prof. Guldemann to get busy and set up some degree plans. We went to work on CE. We chose the CE degree because Prof. Guldemann was a Civil Engineer. We secured catalogs from all of the engineering schools that we could possibly locate--some 70 or 80. We then sat down and analyzed their courses and then set up our program. The University system approved the Civil Engineering Degree and the Electrical Engineering Degree. Then about the following year after that, other faculty got busy on the Mechanical Engineering Degree. I didn't have much to do with the curriculum in Mechanical Engineering.

The reason why I mention that, it was such a surprise to me when I first came out here, not having taught in a university or a college before, to find that we had that many students taking Engineering. They'd take two years and leave. I just couldn't see that type of thing happening to El Paso; so I did suggest that degree be established. I'm sure it was in the minds of Prof. Decker and Dean Thomas and probably Dr. Wiggins also at the time to set up degrees in those areas. I said, "Mr. Decker, we can't permit these people to leave here. Let's give them a four-year degree plan." So that's really how it got started and that was about 1947, 1948. I think the degree offerings have done quite well.

C: It sure has. Well, what other changes have you witnessed besides the

big growth? The students have changed, do you think?

RC: Not basically. I find out that students want to get an education. All you got to do is to lead them and challenge them. Course one difference that I would say is that most of our students that came back after World War II, not most of them but a large portion of them, were married and were even raising a family, and they knew if they wanted to get anywhere they were going to have to get that education. Now we get high school students who don't have that firm a commitment, I would assume. Not all of them. I would say 80 or 90 percent know what they are going to school for today, and all you have to do is to point the way to them and you won't have any trouble with them. They always said I was a hard taskmaster. My son graduated from this institution. I thought if it is good enough for me to teach in, it is certainly good enough for him to go to. And he came here by choice. I told him all he would ever get would be his education, he could go wherever he wanted to. So he selected Texas Western as it was known at that time.

I think we've had a good school from the day I came here, really. We were much smaller. I remember when I first came to El Paso, and this is 10 years prior to my coming here, that I saw the headlines in either the Times or the Herald-Post, "600 students enrolled at the College of Mines." It made the headlines. I mean that was the principal headline in about one-inch high letters. I wish I had that copy but I don't, and I imagine it could be found in the files of either paper. But I look back at that and think only 600 people! The streets weren't as good as they are now. As a matter of fact, I came to El Paso when several miles of the road east of El Paso were

dirt roads. That shows you how old I am! I just never did come out to the College of Mines very much. I knew Dr. Wiggins. I came out here when I was teaching the public schools. I came out here and took several night courses. I still get literature. I'm sure it's because they think I graduated from here. There has been just a slow, steady growth. I haven't seen many big things happen at this school except for the building program.

C: Well, in the earlier years when you first got here, because they were smaller, did people know each other better, the faculty?

RC: Yes. I knew everybody, not just the staff and faculty but also all the janitors, by their first name and their last name. I did make it my business to do that. I think I may have mentioned to Dr. Monroe one time that when Dr. Holcomb came here and they hired either 35 or 45 new faculty members, I more or less said to myself, "Well, I'm just not going to keep up anymore." So, since those days there's many, many faculty members here on the campus that I don't know. All of the old heads have either quit, retired or passed away, many of them such as Dr. Nelson, Dr. Quinn. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Quinn and myself used to have great conversations in the coffee shop.

C: Where was the coffee shop?

RC: Well, when I first came here, if you could call it a coffee shop, it was a bookstore and they sold you a coke and sandwich, and that was in Old Main. Dr. Nelson was the sole operator. I think it was strictly on a private type of thing. I would say a contract or a commission or what have you. Then we built our first Union building, and I spoke about that a little bit at the meeting that Dr. Monroe had six weeks

ago in the auditorium. The first Union building, we had about... and I wouldn't want to be quoted on the exact amount of money, but it was somewhere around \$100,000 to build the first Union building. That wouldn't build a good three-room residence now.

But anyway, it was built where there was a large rock pile. It had to be dynamited and leveled. Dean Thomas was an expert in the field of mining and dynamiting, so he called me in the office one day and said he would like to have some help in determining how much rock was going to have to be moved so they could put down the foundation for the Union building. And I thought, "Well, what am I getting into now?" But being rather new here, I decided I better help the dean out the best I could. So we got the tripods and everything and went down and took very, very close surveys of the elevations--I think they were even around five foot elevations--and determined the number of cubic yards of rock that would have to be removed from the area. The reason why Dean Thomas had to have this done is because the contractors had        to give an estimate of the cost, including        the removal of rock. It was to cost, I think, \$4.25 a cubic yard to remove the rock to get ready for the foundation, which was ridiculously cheap even at that time. We had to know how many cubic yards of rock was going to have to be moved. It cost us about \$17,500 to remove the rock before they could start pouring any concrete. They still built the first part of the Union building and stayed within their budget. The Union was added onto the second time. What made me think of that was when you asked me where we had our coffee shop. We moved our coffee shop to the new Union building. There was a little recreation area in the bookstore, not a great deal of room really, as you can

imagine. It was less than one-fifth of what we have over there now.

C: Well, tell me about some of the dances. Did they have dances in the Union ballroom?

RC: Oh, yes.

C: Would all the faculty go?

RC: No. Kind of funny question to ask, you know. All faculty don't always do anything.

C: That's the truth.

RC: They'd rather do something else. But, no. The thing that I remember the most was the Hard Luck Dance. The dances were held after the Saint Pat's initiation and was quite an affair and attended by a few faculty, and practically all of the student body.

C: Well, was this a formal occasion?

RC: No. The Hard Luck Dance, you know, you would just wear anything. You could dress like a tramp or an Aggie. This was before the days the students started wearing long hair and beards. We always had a beard growing contest. We would have a judging, and an award would be made to the longest and the prettiest beards. It was quite a nice thing to take place each year.

We did organize a square dance club, which was kind of novel, I guess, for this institution. It didn't last but about a year and a half or two years. Dr. James was quite interested in square dancing, and Prof. Ballentine, who was in Mechanical Engineering at that time, could actually do the calling. And then of course we had records. There was 12 to 15 faculty members who belonged to the club, and 20 or 30 students. They would teach students who wanted to know how to

square dance and we had a lot of fun. The square dances were held in the ballroom in the first part of the Union building.

C: Oh, I bet that was fun.

RC: The formal dances I don't know too much about.

C: You've been a member of the Two-Decade Club, haven't you?

RC: Yes. After 20 years I think anybody can become a member. We have no formal organization there whatsoever. We have no secretary, we have no president and no recorder. It's just a meeting with a group of the older faculty members and staff members, and don't forget it includes the staff. Quite often we talk about faculty and don't think about staff, which is probably more important than the faculty.

C: Yeah.

RC: So, that's still going on. They did meet at Furr's Cafeteria, but since it's closed they're more or less looking for a new place. Unfortunately, I didn't get to make all the meetings, the dinners. I usually forget them is what happens, and then somebody'll say, "How come you weren't there?" I say, "When was it, this Thursday night?"

C: Well, who else do you think I should talk to, Ralph? Give me some names that you think would be good.

RC: Well, have you talked to Wally Scruggs?

C: No.

RC: He's still here, I believe, and I'm pretty sure he's going to retire before too long. In fact, I think Wally came to the College of Mines one year before I did. And of course Schumaker, Prof. Schumaker came here one year after I did, I believe, and I think he's still around. Mr. Schumaker's eyesight is not as good as it formerly was, but he certainly would be able to give you some information. And of course

Dr. Barnes, I don't know where he is now.

C: He's here in town.

RC: He certainly is one who could give you some wonderful information, probably recall much more vividly than I can certain things that happened on the campus, such as the alligator situation.

C: What's your version of the alligator story?

RC: Oh, I really have no version of it. I know I came to school that morning and Dr. Quinn's office was still in the Engineering building, believe it or not. Part of Geology was in the Engineering building. Maybe they hadn't moved any of their stuff to the newly remodeled Geology building. It was not too long after the alligator incident until they did at least move some of the specimens in the nearest cases over there. I came to school that morning and I noticed there was quite a commotion. I went up to Dr. Quinn's office, which I believe was on the second floor after you go up the stairway in the old Geology building, and they had not removed the alligator at the time. I think there were some security people there, maybe campus policemen. They didn't have many campus policemen at that time. I saw I didn't need to be around there very much so I went on. I had a class to start soon anyway. That's about my only recollection of it, but I did see the alligator in Dr. Quinn's office.

C: Was it really six feet long?

RC: Oh yeah, it was one of the big ones down at the old Plaza Square.

They used to have about four or five of those six-footers down there.

C: What other pranks do you recall? Any students play tricks on you?

RC: No, they never did. I guess they were afraid of me. (Laughter) I don't know what else. No, they never, never did play any tricks on me.

The only tricks that I ever had played on me was by faculty. We used to smoke in the classrooms if we wanted to. Course I cut it out in my drawing rooms, but I had one gentleman here, Fred Sheats, who was helping us out with drawing, made a very excellent drawing teacher. But he liked to smoke. He knew I smoked a pipe. They would take my pipe and put powder in the bottom of the pipe or cut up rubber bands and fix my pipe up. Well, this kept going on and on and on. At that time I was also smoking cigars, so they would get my cigar box and put these little explosives that you can buy in the store, you know, and so they'd set those off and every once in a while one would go off in the office or something. They got a big kick out of that. I finally found out who it was. It was Prof. Fred Sheats. The other gentleman that they'd brought in from California to teach drawing, he smoked a pipe also, but they along with Cervanca, I think, was responsible. And Cervanca smoked also at the time. We were having a lot of fun fixing each other's cigars, cigarettes and pipes.

I thought, "Well, I'll just get even with Fred Sheats." So I fixed a little load in one of his cigarettes, and he got through lecturing up at the stage and he pulled out his cigarette and lighted it and it splattered in his face. (Laughter) Course Prof. Sheats turned white as a sheet. Nevertheless, what finally stopped it was that after Christmas somebody showed me these great big firecrackers they had that had the fuse in the middle instead of the end. So I brought one or two of those out to school and laid them on my desk where the professors could see them and they began to suspicion that I was going to load their pipe or something with one of those firecrackers. I got rid of those firecrackers because they could have been dangerous since they were big ones. That just about stopped it.

The final thing I think that stopped it, I went into the office, a professor laid his pipe down and he was the one that was loading my cigars. I never could tell when I had one I could smoke or not. I bit off the head of about 13 or 14 matches and stuck it down the bottom of his pipe, and then took the old ashes and stuff that I'd poured out and put it back on top. After his class was over, he goes back down to the office. I thought, "Now is about the time to get down there." So I walked into the door just about the time he started to light his pipe, and you think Mt. Etna had an explosion. It went to the ceiling. And the poor guy liked to have died. It scared him to death. That was the last one. We never had that happen anymore.

I think another funny thing that happened, we used to, at the beginning of a semester, have to go to town to look over equipment, and the Metcalfe Company downtown sold most of the equipment to the students. They gave the students a discount of 10 percent. After a class meeting or two we'd decide what our needs were and see what they had down at Metcalfe's. Professors Cervanca and Sheats and I would go down to Metcalfe's and look over the equipment and decide what would be proper for the students to buy and see what the best price would be that we could get for the students. I had one of these cigars that had been loaded. They knew it had been but I didn't, so the lady who was waiting on us at the counter was reaching into the glass case and showing us various pieces of equipment. I took my cigar out and lighted it right over the counter and I noticed that Prof. Cervanca and Sheats had started backing up. I still didn't know why. I thought they had just looked all they wanted to. I puffed a few

times and nothing happened. I took it out of my mouth and /was/ just holding it down so the smoke wouldn't get to the young lady who was waiting on us. And boom! It went off. They were scared to death, afraid it was going to explode in this woman's face, because her face was 12 to 14 inches away from the cigar. She was reaching in the counter and I was leaning over the counter. That never happened again. But that wasn't students, that was mean old faculty. That's the way we got to know each other and got to love each other and do things for each other, I guess, partly through that type of foolishness. We did have good relationships with each other in those days.

C: Were you active in the athletics? I mean, did you go to the football games and the basketball?

RC: I worked at the gates, ticket taker or ticket seller or supervisor for a total of 21 years up here at the college. Before that I worked about 12 or 15 years with the public schools at El Paso High School, Austin High School, all of the football games, either selling tickets, taking tickets or serving as a guard and so forth.

/PAUSE/

Tape II

Although I was not on the coaching staff during high school, nearly all of the students called me coach. I used to go out and watch them practice in the afternoon, this type of thing. But as far as actually coaching, I never did do any coaching, either university level or high school level in El Paso. I did coach before I came to El Paso. I was basketball coach and baseball coach, quite a nice experience.

C: Well, when did they build the Sun Bowl?

RC: Gee now, I wouldn't want to give you a date on that, because if you use that as a fact it would be wrong.

C: Well, no, I'll find out for sure.

RC: I think in about 1952, '3, or somewhere along there.

C: So, when you first came here the games were all at Kidd Field?

RC: Yes. I used to watch them out of the windows at the drawing rooms. From my office I could watch them building the first portion of the Sun Bowl. As a matter of fact, I designed the seating arrangement of the Sun Bowl up until this new addition was added. The big charts had every seat located. They used the charts for about eight or 10 years in the athletic office so that people coming in to buy seats would know the location. George McCarthy was athletic director at the time I did that work for him.

C: When were the big years that they won football games here?

RC: Well, I was on the athletic council for approximately six years and I don't know that I can give you the exact year, but it was the year Dobbs came to us. We had approximately 25 applicants that George McCarthy, athletic director, brought to the council meeting. Of course we all had seen it or had copies of it and I saw that Dobbs had come from Canada. He was coaching the Calgary Stampeders. They had had a good record. I had actually seen some films of the teams he had coached and I don't remember another single name that was on there. I remember his name, it might have been because they were done alphabetically and his name was down the list somewhere. At the council meeting I moved that we consider Dobbs for the position before we take up any of the others and they all agreed to it. After we

discussed the others after Dobbs, we came back and elected Dobbs. So and he did bring the program around and largely through his passing game, and had about...I don't know whether it's one, two, three good years, we had an excellent team. Then it kind of faded away and he quit in the middle of a season. He just wasn't getting the job done. I don't know whether there was any other troubles or not. I think I'm right when I say he quit in the middle of a season, I believe that this is correct. I thought he was an excellent coach.

C: Looking back on your career here, what do you think your greatest thrill has been?

RC: Oh, I think there's no great thrill, /my/ being enthused about something. Just the fact that I was working with young college students and a nice faculty made the work very pleasant and very enjoyable. I enjoyed what I was doing. Fact, when I would leave and go into industry for summer employment, I'd always get an offer. "If you'll stay, we'll raise your salary this amount of money." I'm talking about in industry. And I'd think about it a little while and then always come back at less money--back to teaching, because that's what I liked. So I guess if you see any thrill to it, it's just working with young people, seeing them get an education and making a success out of their life. And that's what education is all about anyway.

C: Well, thank you.