

11-23-1983

Interview no. 693

St. Clair Halbert

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Recommended Citation

Interview with St. Clair Halbert by Rebecca Craver, 1983, "Interview no. 693," 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: Halbert St. Clair
INTERVIEWER: Rebecca Craver
PROJECT: History of the University
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 23, 1983
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 693
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 693

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Business Manager, Vice President for Business Affairs,
1960 - 1980.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

How he came to the university; growth and changes of the university;
peace corps training; trust funds; various presidents he worked
with; greatest satisfaction he has gotten from working at UTEP;
problems at the university.

Length of interview: 30 minutes Length of transcript: 14 pages

Halbert St. Clair
by Rebecca Craver
November 23, 1983

C: I'd like to know when, Mr. St. Clair, you came to the university.

S: I came to the university in September 1960.

C: And why?

S: I came with the University of Texas system in 1955, I was in public accounting in Corpus Christi. And I worked with the office of the Comptroller and I was the only auditor in the system travelling out of Austin to the various branches, including what was then Texas Western College at the University of Texas. And of course now they have dozens of auditors, at that time I was the only one. And of course I couldn't spend a lot of time at a branch, I couldn't really do a complete audit always.

I first came to Texas Western College at the University of Texas in 1956 as an auditor, spent three weeks here. And I remember I did an overhead study to determine overhead on government contracts. And I was very much impressed with the campus the first time I'd been on it. I just liked the natural beauty of it with all of the arroyos and the hills and things on it, and a lot of the natural beauty impressed me. And of course I thought it was beautiful then, but it's very beautiful now with all the landscaping and everything that developed since I've been here. So when a vacancy came up here in 1960--I think Mr. Smith resigned, he was the previous

business manager--I came as business manager at that time. That was about July, but I didn't get to come out till September the 1st, the time the job was filled. So I applied for it and was chosen at that time. So that's the reason I was here.

C: And when did you retire?

S: I retired at the end of August 1980.

C: Twenty years.

S: So I was here exactly 20 years, yes, in administration.

C: And who was the president when you got here?

S: Dr. Joseph M. Ray. He had come just about a month before I did. Of course I just barely knew him, we weren't coming together. He didn't choose me exactly, I was really chosen out of the Comptroller's office in Austin at that time. But, yes, Dr. Ray was president for a number of years and we had a real fine relationship during some of the largest and most phenomenal growth at the university, I'd say.

C: Do you want to start telling me about how it has grown?

S: In 1959, the latest enrollment figures when I came September the 1st, they had registered about 3850 the previous fall; and the time I left, 20 years later, they registered 15,800. And I think that is the highest. Now, they've leveled off a little bit, and of course they'll probably surpass that pretty soon. And then the total budgets--now that includes the state budget, the trust fund budget, the contract services budget, auxiliary enterprises, and all the budgets we have-- what I named is just

about all of them--when I came it totalled \$1,870,000. When I left it had gone up to a figure of \$37,037,000 in 20 years.

And of course the name had changed. Texas Western College of the University of Texas was dropped or was changed to the University of Texas at El Paso in 1967. And that Texas Western College had been the official name, Texas Western College of The University of Texas, which everybody called Texas Western College. That had been in effect since September 1, 1949. And at that same time I believe the Board of Regents changed the names of all the institutions. And as you know now we have what we used to call Main University, the University of Texas at San Antonio, El Paso and so forth. Now that enrollment fee here, that had gone up 400 percent.

Now one of the things that I remember that was real exciting in 1961 was that we were awarded the first contract to train people for the Peace Corps, the very first contract given to any university. And we were excited about that. I remember I had to go to Washington to help negotiate the contract, and it was real exciting. We didn't have people that were qualified in all those areas to teach the various languages and so forth they needed, so we had to get some people from other places, so we got several from Austin to help us under the contract. And I believe one or two of them stayed on and became permanent faculty members here.

C: What country were the Peace Corps members going to?

S: They were all going to African countries. I remember we had to teach them some Swahili language.

C: What other kind of training did they have?

S: They trained them in certain types of engineering I think, some basics of engineering, and I just don't recall all the subjects they trained them in at that time because I wasn't too close to the academic side of it.

C: You don't know how many were trained?

S: I believe that first group, it seems to me probably about 40 or fifty. Now, whether it grew during the time we had the contract, I don't recall. But I was reminded of that recently because this year is the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy, and he's the one who set it up. In fact, he took a very personal interest in that and I think it was a great thing. It still is, of course, it still works.

Now, the physical plant grew in that 20 years. The cost that we had expended for the various buildings was \$6,900,000 when I came. When I left it was \$91,400,000. And I might speak about some of the local funds that we had that enabled us to do quite a few things we wouldn't have been able to do without them, because we didn't always have enough state appropriation to do what we wanted to do. When I came here the Frank B. Cotton trust was in existence, it was an endowment, and at that time it's principal was \$510,000. When I left it's principal was \$4,575,000. Now, one big increase in that thing, in fact the biggest single increases of all the time that I was here, the single year, was, as I recall, 1967, when the Chamizal question was settled. And you know, the Chamizal

was the _____ of Mexico about the boundary, because the river had changed its course over the years and so there was a question about the boundary. Part of the Cotton trust was farm land right on the border and we had to give up... when they changed the boundary and cemented in the new course of the river so it can't change now, we gave up, I believe, around 160 or 170 acres of Cotton land, and they paid us \$2,290,000 for it, and that settled it. So that really helped the Cotton trust and of course that helped the university tremendously when we invested that money. The earnings are so much higher now than they were.

Then in 1970, when Mrs. Josephine Cardy Fox died, she gave her net estate, after income taxes and any debt that might exist at that time, to the university. I think we received that in about 1970, and now it amounts to \$3,180,000, and it includes quite a bit of real estate in El Paso. It was valued at cost in that year. It's value --the actual market value-- would be much higher, and as well as some cash and some articles of furniture and pieces of art, paintings and so forth.

Now, then we've got other larger, very large endowments, the _____ Stevens bequest. Now, that came to us in 1956 before I came to the university as business manager. The endowment amounts to \$418,000, but that is value of real estate at cost. It includes the Walgreen building downtown on Texas and Mesa Street, which has an income of around \$40,000 or more every year, and that's where we get the Stevens scholarships.

It's specified in Mrs. Stevens' will that those scholarships would be given to young men, and in fact a few of them have been able to go to the university with that aid. They're very nice scholarships.

Then the next largest endowment fund is \$448,000 at the present time, the student general property deposit. It has built up over the years and every year it's built up by funds that have not been redeemed or not been asked for by the students that graduate. If after four years they haven't asked for it, well, then it goes into that fund. Now, the total endowment funds, then, at this time are well over nine and a half million, and the income from these funds has been a tremendous value because we are able to do some things and finance some programs that we wouldn't have been able to do with state funds, because we didn't have any.

Now, I might say that I very much enjoyed working with the faculty that might have had contracts where we dealt with the budget. But I always remembered the first paragraph of College and University Business Administration, and of course this was published in 1952, they've written a new one and it's changed some. But the very first paragraph in the first chapter says this: "The major objectives of an educational institution are to provide instruction and to add to knowledge through research. It follows up, therefore, that the real strength of an educational institution lies in its faculty. The primary purpose of administration is to serve and to aid the

faculty in the concept of an institution's objectives. Thus, the most effective administration in a college or university is that which best serves and aids the interests of scholarship." I always tried to remember that because this is the first book I read after I came with the system in 1955, and so I've always remembered that. And I enjoyed very much working with the faculty and I think I have a lot of friends on the faculty now.

Now from time to time, during the 20 years I was at the university, we had citizens of El Paso, and even maybe some of the faculty and students were wondering or would maybe advocating that the University of Texas at El Paso dropping out of the University of Texas system and have its own board. Many of them said that the university here in El Paso was a stepchild. And I'd like to say that the university system over the years has exerted a lot of influence for the University of Texas at El Paso for state appropriations, and I think as a result of what they've done, and they're still doing, that our appropriations are higher than possibly they would be if we were separate, had a separate board, because we have the influence of that entire system. Now, we have offices in the university system that help us tremendously here. The system of administration offices, or say, the Comptroller's office, they help us with accounting and records of that nature, accounting and all control of fixed assets and current assets and so forth, and they're always available to

help us and confer with us when we need them. Also, the law office. In the last few years I was there, the last five years at least, you almost had to have a lawyer on your staff or available to you, and of course that's a tremendous help. And Facilities Planning and Construction is an office out of Austin that helps us with all the buildings and it of course still exists and is still assisting with the building that's going on since I was there. But I think it would have been a mistake if we ever dropped out of the system, so I would hope that in the future they'd quit thinking about that and drop it, the ones that had been advocating it.

All the time I was active at the university, I served on the Scholarship Committee, the Athletic Council, and other committees from time to time, and since I've retired I'm on the Heritage Commission. I think maybe all retirees are now, but I have been active with them.

C: When they changed the name from Texas Western College, do you remember any people complaining about it that didn't want the change? What was the feeling?

S: I seem to think that there was some, but not very many. I can't remember any specific instances, but it seemed to me there were some that still wanted to maintain the old name. In fact, I understand there was quite a bit of opposition to making the first change, making the change from the Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy to Texas Western College,

but of course I wasn't here then. That happened in 1949. But I don't believe there was too much opposition. Now, there could have been, maybe I wasn't aware of it. But maybe some other sources can tell you more about that, but I don't recall. Seems to me there was something in the paper, occasionally some individual would write a letter to the editor or something about a name change. But I wasn't aware of any big opposition.

C: Now, you served under how many presidents?

S: Five--Dr. Ray, and then Dr. Leech, and Dr. Smiley, Dr. Templeton, and Dr. Monroe for six weeks, because he came in July and I retired in the following August.

C: Do you remember what their major goals were, each individual? And how did their goals affect your job?

S: Well, Dr. Ray, of course we didn't have the office, we didn't have the staff we really needed, so it was a little bit tough at times. I know the business office staff was pretty short then but we didn't build it up right away. And even some institutions then had already moved to having four or five vice presidents, vice president for administration and maybe a vice president for academic affairs and a vice president of development. We didn't do that. We never had two vice presidents until Dr. Templeton appointed me as the vice president, I changed my title to Vice President of Business Affairs in I think it was about 1975, but we always had one. When I came there were, outside of the president, only deans.

The deans were more or less there as _____
for anybody that was a student.

- C: Were any of those presidents that were after increasing enrollment, or were there any particular ones that were for building programs? I'd always heard Templeton was really big on building.
- S: Building. Well, that's true a large extent, I suppose. But the building in his administration wasn't any, I don't believe, any greater than it was in Dr. Ray's and Dr. Leech and Dr. Smiley, because in those years we were short of space and so forth. We were growing so fast and we just didn't have the facilities to take of it adequately. We never did turn anybody away because of that.
- C: What were some of the new buildings in the early sixties? The Liberal Arts came after you arrived?
- S: Liberal Arts was under construction when I came here and it was finished about maybe six months after I came, I think something like that. And then of course we built. . . . Let's see, Memorial Gym was I believe under construction at the time I came, and then of course we expanded the Union, I believe, during Dr. Ray's administration, and we built or at least had started the fine arts center. I believe it took five years before we finally got it complete and got the use out of it, but it seems to me it was one of the larger. . . . at the time we built it, it had more square feet than any other building on campus. Of course now the Engineering and

Science Complex had more after that, and of course now the new library that will be completed in '84 sometime is the largest thing. But I remember when Dr. Monroe came, when he was here interviewing for the job, why then of course they let him see me. And one thing he asked me, he said, "What do you think is the next building [] we should have []?" I said, "Well, it's the library." And I think he probably got that same answer from [] other people [], so that's really the biggest part of building that's been since he's been here.

Of course we did expand the stadium, but of course that was completed after I left, because it's been about a year, year and a half ago. But it was started at least. They were talking about it when I retired. I'm not sure that it was actually approved before. And that's another reason that I think that we were much better off with staying with the University of Texas system. We have access to the Permanent University Fund, those bonds. And those bonds are the biggest part of what we built, that's where they came from. And then the Permanent University Fund is an endowment fund. The principal can't be expended, but the income from it, which includes quite a bit of all income, is used to pay off the Permanent Fund bond. And that's the biggest part of the extended _____ over the years. Now, we issued some of our own bonds, but that wasn't enough to build the facilities that we actually needed.

C: You said you served on the athletic committee?

- S: Yes, on the Athletic Council. That's what they used to call it, and probably still do, I guess. I suppose they figured the chief business officer should be on that.
- C: Do you remember any thing exciting happening at any of those meetings?
- S: Of course the most exciting thing in athletics, at least the first 10 years I was here, would be the Miners winning the National Championship in basketball in 1966, and of course about that same time Bobby Dobbs came here, and we had two teams in the Sun Bowl and they won both games in a three-year period there--'65, '66, '67, I guess. But anyway, at that time it seemed that athletics was at its highest, the interest at least for the city and then of course for the campus. And I think you'll find that if you go back and look at the increases in enrollment, the highest percentage increase happened in the fall of 1966 after we won the basketball championship. I think that was true when I was there.
- C: Is that right?
- S: But that was interesting because so many people got to know us. We got more out-of-state students that knew who we were that [we] didn't have before.
- C: Now, didn't they feature Texas Western College on the cover of Sports Illustrated?
- S: I think they did, but we got some bad publicity out of that because they, well, of course they didn't think that we should be knocking off Kentucky, the most powerful university

in basketball for years and had won more championships. Even yet I think they have won more championships than any other school probably, so anyway, it got us some bad publicity, some writers came from the East and West _____.

C: Well, looking back on over your career down here, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?

S: You mean just of what I did, or the overall picture?

C: Both.

S: Well, I guess it was really, I felt like I've kind of grown up with the institution--now so many years, but things had changed so much in higher education in those years, and I think it was just I enjoyed going with it, seeing it go like I did. And of course I'm a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, but I've kind of forgotten them because the University of Texas at El Paso is my university now, even though I never took any courses there. Now my wife was a graduate of UTEP.

So I think it was just seeing the institution grow and develop over those 20 years. It was phenomenal, and so that was the most interesting thing, the most satisfying thing about this, to feel you had a part in it.

C: What were some of the other changes that you saw besides the building and more students? I mean, there began to be a parking problem. With size comes a lot of problems.

S: Oh, yeah, it brings on some problems, sure. Well, as far as parking is concerned, I guess we've had griping about

parking for years. It was always bad, because so many people wanted right near where they work or go to school. But it seems to me, the universities that I know in our system, that we probably have more parking for our size than Austin or any of them. I know you go to a football game, and many of them have to park [very far] away and walk. I've done that myself, when I was a student. And now out here, when you look at other institutions I think we're very well off as far as parking is concerned.

I'm trying to think of other things. Of course we had just some small dormitories when I came. Now, the dormitory system of course was _____ the highrise, and I believe were finished in 1969, although then of course we had more students living on campus. We had very few, and of course we still don't. I still think we need more probably on the campus to have a campus spirit here. Possibly--I don't know if that's true. But quite a few other things. As I say, you've got so many legal problems now. And that's not only in school--everywhere it goes. I think the time is not very far away when you'll have a resident lawyer on campus, because day to day you have problems. I'm not talking about just student problems, probably you may have faculty and you may even have problems where you feel like you need them with contractors, building contractors and so forth.

C: I think in a way that's a shame.

S: I think some of it is. It takes a lot of time.