

Interview with Henry W. Littlefield on Feb. 25, 1986

Littlefield: In looking at an old book that I have here we all know that the Univ. of Bridgeport, the Jr. College of Conn., succeeded only because it had the backing of a community, not only in terms of individuals, but in terms of organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce, The Rotary Club, and other such leading groups and then, of course, that corps of people who became attached to E. Everett Cortright, and became members of the Board of Trustees, and any evaluation of that original Board shows its strength in the community. These were not just anybody. They were people that had prestige, they occupied positions of tremendous importance and all, and then to go forward with this Board of Associate idea and to get together a group of 80 people or whatever they had at that particular point, and as I was reviewing the names of these people, no matter what aspect of life you wanted to look at in the community you found it here. If you were talking about leaders of industry, they were here, if you were talking about the bankers and the heads of the banks, you're not talking here about people that might have occupied a secondary or third rate position, you're thinking of the legal profession, the medical profession and when I say medical, I'm including dental because that was a very, very significant part. And this was what impressed me and these people were willing to give up time to this thing which was a neophyte idea as far as the northeast was concerned, to make it go because they realized that here was the Bridgeport area, which was one of the largest population areas of the country without a post secondary institution such as was visualized in the Jr. College. I believe they did have vocational education and some of that, both secondary and post secondary, but you're talking now about an academic program and if you look into the Jr. College catalog of 1942-43, and if you recall that the United States of America was involved in World War II, and that these people would come in and get behind the Jr. College idea, and the quality of these people which is revealed by just looking at the list of individuals. I just wanted to get that idea across to you.

Allen: There are a couple of other things on this too. I have noted in looking at this, that many of the original Board of Associates went on to become Trustees.

Littlefield: That was a part of the idea, that in order to become a member of the Board of Trustees, the Board of Associates was thought of as a training ground for advancement to that group. Fine people like Harry Alison Goldstein and others. He was on the original Board of Associates.

Allen: John Pullman became a trustee.

Littlefield There are several people there and there's time

Allen: Donald Sammis

Littlefield: Yes, Don Sammis. As time went on it was very definitely the thought in the minds of the people

Allen: George Waldo.

Littlefield: Those were some examples. There are probably some others there. Now one of the things I want to say to you about the organization at this point, and I always considered it a major mistake, not that I want to be quoted on that but just to give you the overall point of view, and that is that Pres. Cortright promised these people that they would not be dunned for contributions. You may have come across that material.

Allen: Yes, you told me this.

Littlefield: They were not dunned, to be dunned for financial support, although as we know, there were people on the Board that did support the university some into a small or greater extent, and, but this may have been one of the reasons why it was so easy to get their support and he was so anxious to have it.

Allen: Now when did that change?

Littlefield: I think that didn't change until sometime after I came aboard, probably, and even a little bit later than that, because it was difficult living with this.

Allen: We were talking about the Board of Associates and when it changed from position of not being asked for money until being asked. Would that change be made by the Board of Trustees?

Littlefield: I don't think any official action was taken. One of my responsibilities when I came aboard was the Board of Associates and I'd go down and talk to Parker Seeley of course at some length, and try to see if we couldn't get the board more actively involved, but then as time went on, we decided to get the board become involved in making an annual contribution to the board and then, what was the chap's name?

Allen: Judge Ted Steiber

Littlefield: Judge Steiber, he took the ball and he went after this idea of having a membership on the board and theoretically, if the person paid the amount of money involved, \$1,000, that would, they would supposedly not be asked to give any more. However, it's something which I really, as a youngster, never thought of in terms of fund raising. I always thought if I came to you and asked you for money and if I got it, that was the end. But it isn't true.

Allen: No, it's not.

Littlefield: Basically, and people seem willing. They made an investment in something and they'd like to see it move ahead, and the like, and so we found this to be true as far as many of the Boards of Associates and then with the aggressiveness of Judge Steiber, we just go so many members and increase. I think at first it was our idea that the Board of Associates would be a select group of people and that it would be, let's say, limited to 100. Not over 100. That was definitely in our thinking but then when we put this opportunity to have a life membership on the board at a specific fee and with the aggressiveness of people we got over 200.

Allen: Now this \$1,000 membership, where did that go, did that go to the general fund or was it a special fund for the associates.

Littlefield: That was a special fund for the Board of Associates, originally, and the board used that for, first they were going to have some activities and programs which they would sponsored and secondly, they would support some scholarship assistance for the students so you see you really got them involved in what may be an institution fix. So, but I think this was finally recognized. I don't recall, but there might very well have been, a positive action taken in terms of this.

Allen: By the Board of Associates or the Board of Trustees?

Littlefield: I don't think the Board of Trustees ever took any action, and I don't think it would have been wise for them to tell the Board of Associates, and I think it just sort of slid into this other process because no one wanted to break faith with what had been told to those original members, but the original members, if they didn't wish to take on a life membership, they didn't have to do it.

Allen: O.K., the reason I ask the question as to where the money went, one, I know that there is an endowment for the Board of Associates, but a few years back in the financial funds crunch, the money went instead of into this endowment, went into the general fund.

Littlefield: Oh, it did?

Allen: And then there was an attempt to raise the life membership to \$2,000. They got nobody, so they put it back to a \$1,000. and got a whole slew of people. The money, still, as I understand it, goes into the general fund and this endowment is not, unless there are specific bequests to the endowment, is not growing but they do support various activities with this endowment.

Littlefield: Do they still support any Board of Associates scholarship.?

Allen: I don't think there is a scholarship now, I think from what I gather at this point, most of what they do is specific projects.

Littlefield: So this then is pretty much as I recall the area of developments of the group. Of course, the Board was in existence when I

Allen: Yes, it was formed in 1936. It was the one thing in Mr. Coburn in American City Bureau did in a fund raising program that was any good. The program, itself, was a bust and as a matter of fact there was a law suit over payment for his services because the payment for his services would have been more than he raised. But he did recommend this and Cortright and the Board hopped onto this idea and started it in 1936 and it has been a going factor since then in many ways.

Littlefield: I think Jim Halsey was supposed to have been given time in part of =

Allen: That was part of his job when he first came and then I noticed that when you had a division and you came , that you got it.

Littlefield: I was supposed to help develop it and expand it.

Allen: Now after, in later years, who took over that responsibility?

Littlefield: Well -

Allen: John Cox?

Littlefield: In later years it would have been John, but as my responsibilities expanded in terms of the inner development of a university and all of the problems there, I think it really got into Jim's bailiwick working on the outside and then using whoever was assisting him with the Board and the PR business was pretty much there. This was thought of very close to PR, and eventually it did come under John Cox and the Parent's Association and the whole bit and he spun those off to director's groups and activities.

Allen: Now W. Parker Seeley was the first Chairman of the Board of Associates?

Littlefield: But when I, he's listed here, but this is in 1942, I do not know who the first one was.

Allen: He was.

Littlefield: Oh, he was.

Allen: From the very beginning.

Littlefield: I had forgotten that.

Allen: Now there was a time when he was, it was voted in the board to ask him to become a trustee. Evidentially he declined because he did not come on the Board, but he remained as chairman of the Board of Associates.

Littlefield: I see. David Day did come on the board but-

Allen: Was David a chairman of the Board of Associate? Who succeeded Parker Seeley?

Littlefield: That's what I'm trying to recall. I cannot recall.

Allen: O.K. I can look that up.

Littlefield: You should check to see who that was, but David Day was the kind of a person that I could go into the office and talk to him at any time about any problem that the university might have, although as you know our legal coverage was excellent from Harry Goldstein and then later from Herb Cohen's office, and but there were times when I wanted to get another opinion, so called and I'd go in and sit down with David and he was really very much interested in the Jr. College of Conn. but he just wouldn't take the time to go to meetings.

Allen: Now he subsequently came on the board.

Littlefield: Yes, he was on before, I think he was on before (?) right in the beginning.

Allen: Yes, he's here in '42.

Littlefield: And he stayed on the board, I think right up to the end, and then you know his wife established this David Day

Allen: Professorship.

Littlefield: Professorship in History. AND this Collier held. So we do have that. Now regarding some of the trustees. I really. Mrs. Oppel was very loyal in attending meetings. I think she was a teacher, as I recall, and Jeanie also recalled it. And it did seem to me that she was making modest contributions to the institution, but I never got the feeling that they were significant, but I have no record.

Allen: O.K. now in the early days in, long before you came, she made some very significant contributions, ten and twenty thousand, and I tried to figure out where her money came from and what her connection was.

Littlefield: I think her husband was gone when I came on the scene, so I really am not very helpful.

Allen: All right, I'll have to find out from the later board minutes when she died, and then go to the obituary in the newspapers and see what I can find out.

Littlefield: You might also be able to get her heirs, through her will, and find out whether there was any significant sum. There ought to be a record in the university if there was a significant contribution but these records are not very clear.

Allen: I've asked, they may have some records on individuals, but probably not from the Jr. College. I've got to do a little more work on this. This brings up another question. I cannot find any files, other than Board of Trustees minutes, from the Jr. College. The Jr. College files have disappeared someplace. The faculty minutes, meetings, and so forth, I cannot find. They have disappeared. Now whether they have been thrown out, because we don't have a Jounior College anymore, or whether they have been moved to some basement or attic someplace and I haven't run across them, and I don't know, but they would have been invaluable.

Littlefield: You have really delved into that in the vault?

Allen: I have not gone through everything in that yet, because, but I have a general idea of what is there, and I have been confined primarily with this area and so I have been in two files plus your historical file while you were there, and you have very nicely several files labeled Historical Material, which is quite helpful by year, but there are no Jr. College minutes, no Jr. College files. I keep arguing for-

Littlefield: Now I may not be on the right track, but you know, Ropp was so interested in having the early background of this institution and you know he kept files and catalogs and things like that, and then there was a time when he was going to do this thing, this job of writing the history and whether he got a hold of this material and then it has just dissipated that is a possibility.

Allen: He remembers nothing of this period and of course they recently cleaned out their apartment last summer, that they had in the Atlantic apartments and they don't find them there. And he did not find any materials and he remembers virtually nothing.

Littlefield: And there's no financial records for that era?

Allen: Unless again they are stored away in a basement closet someplace. I have to get things from this period completely from the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees minutes, a little bit of the historical files that you have so far, plus the Scribe .

Littlefield: Bill, have you ever been up in the attic of Cortright?

Allen: There is a tremendous amount of stuff up there. I've done some work up there but it is one god-awful mess.

Littlefield: You see that, the move from 1001, of records, Corty's records, and everything is placed in that building. That has to be the source if the way you would normally look for it, it hasn't gone and I know that we put in the attic, materials that just didn't seem to make sense, and when moving you know you put things in the attic.

Allen: Right, I do have more work to do up there.

Littlefield: I don't recall putting things of this nature in the basement, and of course you see this was a move which involved both Jim Halsey and (?) to that building but here again if they can give you a little bit of money so that you could hire someone to kind of go through some of that stuff, but as you say it's a very difficult process but if I had to make a guess, if it's not in that major vault in Waldemere, that would be the spot I would look for it.

Allen: I've got a lot of work to do up there yet. I'm waiting till it warms up a little bit. And then I have to do it before it gets too hot. O.K., Mrs. Cooper?

Littlefield: Well now, as I recall, Mrs. Cooper was the widow of this man who was head of Howlands, the store at that period. I think she was a Christian Scientist, and she was a lovely person and I think we had a group of people during World War II who would come to the Jr. College Bldg. and do Red Cross work or something, and I think she had some of them up to her home. Now, Sara Cooper, she was really a very delightful and intelligent person and I'd say dedicated trustee of the university, and of course as we know when she died, her estate on Clinton Avenue or Brooklawn, she gave us that property. I think in the back of her mind she kind of thought it would be a president's home, but as I recall the request was not that specific, and naturally with money as tight as it was, and so forth and so on, and because it just seemed the Jr. College needed the money for other things more than a president's home, of course that was always my

attitude, we had so many places to put it, let's forget the president's home and see what happens as time goes on. And so we did want to recognize her contribution, that's way we called Cooper Hall after her. I can't tell you much more about Sara Cooper.

Allen: O.K., Sumner Simpson.

Littlefield: Well, of course, Sumner was really one of those people that was right at Corty's elbow in those early days and really meant so much not only because of financial support which he would give, I haven't any figures on the extent of the gifts.

Allen: Well, he shows up as being the top donor in every fund drive that are reported, that I have.

Littlefield: That would be my impression too, but he was right there in the program, and when we had ideas that we wanted to develop, and so forth, he was right there with help on it. Now I don't know whether there would be any value, but I think it would please him anyway, but if you tried to get in touch with Bill Simpson, if you haven't already done so.

Allen: I haven't tried yet but I'm going to because I'm waiting just for the time when Bill Simpson came on the Board. Do you know how long, when Bill Simpson came on the Board. Do you know how long he came on the Board after his father died?

Littlefield: It wasn't very long. We must have the minutes from that time.

Allen: Yes, I just haven't gotten that far.

Littlefield: I think it would please Bill Simpson.

Allen: My approach to Bill is "Hey look, your father was in the founding part and paid a big role and there's been a Simpson associated on the Board of Trustees one way or another from the beginning to now excepting for this short period." And then we'll take it from there. I want to make that appeal to him when I start out.

Littlefield: He was a very, very significant factor in the continuity of the the institution. Without the kind of help and inspiration that he gave, I think it could very well have folded.

Allen: All right now in his obituary, he was referred to as Bridgeport's number one philanthropist. And I know what he did for the Methodist Church and for Bridgeport, but he only shows up a couple of times as being or attending board meetings.

Littlefield: Well, you see, that's why I emphasized this businss

of David Day. And you've heard of the four "W's" And effective board member is one who will give you work, wealth is the final one, participation in board meetings, I did have them at my finger tips, well anyway, there are four "W's" and my attitude has always been that if you can get one or more of these four "w's", you don't have to have all four. Now, therefore, a person like Sumner Simpson or a person like David Day, these two men were just as effective members of the Board of Trustees as though they were at every Board meeting, so that it would have been a big mistake for any chairman of the Board or a chief administrator or officer of the institution to have taken the position, all right, unless you attend 75% of the Board meetings, we're going to take you off the Board. But you take a person like Bradley. Now that fellow would put his name on anything and everything, never attend anything, never give anything, or prestige is another one, you would take prestige, weight, now I've got three of them. And so, but some of the people would give us work, would give us weight, would give us wealth. But if they don't give Board participation, I never would throw them out.

Allen: O.K. Did you talk with Summer Simpson is the same way you did with Day?

Littlefield: Yes I went over to his office on occasions and talked with Sumner Simpson.

Allen: What type of problems did you take to him?

Littlefield: Well, I think probably in the days of, when we were in the process of, - it must have been 1945 or 46 that we brought Martz and Lundy in and to raise money for the gymnasium on Fairfield Avenue and we failed in that, and so it was to talk to Sumner about this whole idea and to see if he felt we had any chance of going ahead, and so on, and the need for this kind of facility if the institution was to be competitive and, of course, that's why you have the big field houses today and skating rinks and so forth and so on, to be competitive, but and he was available and as busy as that man was, he was available, and I went over and saw Bill Simpson when he came on, and talked with him about some of these things. Now I forget just when, during Sumner's last days, we didn't bother him, he was getting on and I can't remember going and talking with him about the decisions to move to Marina, but he was terrific. Any good thing that happened in Bridgeport, he was the key, active person. Now later on it was the Bannows and the Steinkrauses and so forth that took this kind of leadership for us.

Allen: O.K. I suspected as much on this situation with regards to Simpson, but I just wanted to have it from you to verify my suspicions.

Littlefield: I think this is absolutely right.

Allen: Once you get a suspicion and find it verified, you begin to trust some of the others. I've still got some work to do on Mrs. Oppel and Mrs. Cooper.

Littlefield: Yes, I think it would be well to get in, now I don't think, I don't recall any close relatives of Mrs. Cooper. I have to use the word recall in the same way with Mrs. Oppel. Jeanie said, why don't you look in the phone book and see if there are any Oppels there, but, and but you see you lose these resources you can't call up an Ike Schine and, but look, here you have Ike Schine and Goldstein and Oppel from the Jewish Community, but the Jewish community was certainly supportive of the institution and the like. Now, then of course, as we get towards the end of the Jr. College period, now you see Carlson doesn't come into the picture until we're a university, so he really doesn't. But somehow or other in the back of my mind, I have these feeling Lou Jacobson gave us a small amount of money, but in those days a small amount of money went a hell of a long way, for a scholarship in Journalism and I think the first scholarship we had which had financial backing of that type was from Lou Jacobson. Now I can't be sure of that, there may be some but (machine turned off and Littlefield is speaking but it is garbled). You see there were and are, some scholarships which are exercised by the town or by an outside foundation but the scholarship is not given to the university, it is given to the student and there may be a distinction here, but I'm not particularly anxious to try to find ways to say that we were the first and the greatest and so forth and so on, we were the greatest in pushing potatoes with our noses where nobody else ever did it, but and, but I want to be extremely cautious to say that this was the first or whatever, cause it isn't fair and one of the ways you can always cover is to say one of the first and forget this damn business of being the first in the East..

Allen: You didn't find anything on Christie's relatives?

Littlefield: No, you see, I don't have any way, but as I say, my suggestion to you is that you go into the records. I wrote a letter to those people at the time, and when they came up I went up to the house and spent the evening there. It was a horrible experience. Jeanie went with me and oh, it was horrible.

Allen: Henry, these are the questions which have come to me up to the present time and as we had agreed before I will from time to time come to you with a series of questions. You have been most, most helpful so I'm going to come to the end of this tape.

"Corty's Bumble Bee Story" in which the bumble bee is ignorant of the laws of thermo dynamics (aero dynamics) according to his wing spread, his body weight, etc. he can't fly but being ignorant of the laws of aero dynamics he goes ahead and flies anyway and

makes a little honey on the side.!!

Note to Bill from Ruth: I heard the bumble bee story from my father many years ago. Did "Corty" get it from my Dad??