

Interview with Dr. James H. Halsey, Jr. i June 1986 in Birmingham, Ala.

Before the tape began, Dr Halsey told me that he had finally read his father's paper which was to have been the basis of his doctoral dissertation, and agreed that it did not show the best picture of his father.

Additionally, Jim told me that his father had told him that Jim Sr. had shown the paper to Cortright, who was not too happy, especially with the description of Corty as "despotic".

Allen is speaking: And he had just raised the question about how I was going to treat the Halsey/Littlefield relationship and he was about to tell me his side of the story as he heard it at home.

Jim: well, this is just my own perception and maybe the years since my father's death will give me some opportunity to have a little more perspective, and I'm influenced by the article in the Bridgeport Post, that I mentioned to you, and I take into account just some observations of some scenes between my father and mother. Some things my mother had told me about it at one time. And then my own family perceptions of my father as a person. One of the striking things that is, in all my recollections, comparing my own and my brother's perceptions of my father, were how my father seemed to be perceived by everybody else. We always thought of him as extremely well organized, extremely competent administrator, and somewhat unimaginative. Whereas the picture that comes to us through the perceptions of other people, including that Bridgeport Post article, maybe I'm overly influenced by that, but also hearing conversations with other people subsequently, was that my father was perceived by others as extremely imaginative, a dreamy idealist. He once told me in an argument with Henry Littlefield before the Board of Trustees about whether to build a new building or not. His saying to Henry that we have never built a building for which we had the money, and that sort of supports this perception, this vicarious perception, that comes to be through conversation with others. That he didn't really worry too much about administrative detail and was more the imagination to dream great dreams and the dream of a great university and the details somehow took care of themselves. I remember hearing him say many times that he was criticized for never closing a deal with a fund raising account and he said, well if you thought that his great contribution was finding the contacts. Any lawyer can close a deal. I'm saying that in kind of a derisive way. But plenty of unimaginative people-. The picture came through of Henry Littlefield as being relatively less imaginative but probably a more capable administrator. And maybe that was why Henry eventually took my father's job as the president.

My mother told me a story once about how when my father was appointed president in 1943 or 44, whenever it was, that Henry, I guess they were both vice presidents at that time, equal in authority, but my father had been there a little longer, so the announcement was made my father was going to be president and Henry vice president and Henry threw a terrible temper tantrum and threatened to resign and my father took him out to dinner and begged him to stay, saying that there is plenty of work here for both of us, and I need you, and perhaps he thinks of that as the worse mistake he ever made in his life considering all of the problems that occurred thereafter. That's was really the basic perception that I have and really about all that I can add. My mother was very possessive and jealous about my father's position as president and she took the change, I think, harder than he did. He seemed to adjust reasonably well and I think it was very threatening and upsetting for her. Once they settled down I think they were happier together, then subsequently, when my father retired one of his hopes had been - He had two hopes, both of which were disappointing. One was that he be made a trustee and that was a great disappointment to him, the other was that the university would retain him as a chief consultant in fund raising, concentrating on especially large accounts and apparently they didn't want that. So those were both disappointments to him, but in the end it may have been better for him and my mother as a couple, because they then concentrated all their efforts and energies on the HISP program and in that they were working together co-equally. Very productively working together in the house and the office was there in the home, I think, in the home on Park Place, and they travelled together and did a lot of travelling together, that was involving the HISP program and my perception was that those were the happiest years of their life together from his retirement until his death, whatever number of years that was. That seemed to be pretty productive and a pretty happy time and it was sort of a remarkable thing, I think, you know I've only vicariously seen a sample of the HISP program and they sort of built another family life for themselves after all of us had grown up and moved away, and some of us were a little jealous and miffed sometimes that the HISP children would have more play in the Christmas post card than we did.

Allen: We all remember those Christmas post cards. As a matter of fact we were talking about it just today coming up. (machine turned off and picked up with Allen speaking about MacJannet connection was the source of the international)

Jim: When he graduated from college he worked for his uncle, based in Chicago in some kind of export-import business and my father was his European representative. He traveled all over Europe in 1928-29, then the company went out of business with the stock market crash and the depression, and then my parents were married right about that time, 1930. They taught at Hammond High School, Hammond being the suburb of Chicago, for a year and were looking for other interesting things to do. I think my father,

maybe my father worked for Mr. MacJannet one year before they were married and in the meantime, my mother had just about gotten a job as a teacher in the Philippines. She said, either you may me now or I'm off on the next boat, and he caved in, I guess, and they were married and then they were both hired, I guess, by Mr. MacJannet and went to Europe then in 1930 and stayed for three years, when I was born, and we came back in 1934. They were then teaching at the MacJannet in Paris in the international school, catering to English speaking, you know the Diplomatic Corps in Paris, people didn't know what to do with their children, didn't want to put them in French schools and what do you do with children in summer when school is out, so Mr. MacJannet, pretty imaginative himself developed a summer camp, and all the teachers were camp counselors including my parents. So I think it's from those contacts that those experiences that the international interests. Mr. MacJannet, himself was always interested in teaching. He was a great teacher of one on one. He was never a professor of anything, but he was a great one on one teacher. That was how he developed his school where he was living in Europe and just to make the kind of money to buy food he began tutoring children and students. He had one and pretty soon he had two, and then pretty soon he had a whole school. That helped so that's how the school came about, and just the contacts, the international contacts, catering to these kind of people, diplomatic people, a lot of them were very interesting, stimulating, exciting people, and I think that experience impressed them and gave my parents this international outlook. And they couldn't do anything with it when the war came, but after the war, I think again, our first trip to Europe after the war in 1949, I think, we went to the MacJannet camp. And that sort of re-started the, I think restirred their interest in these international contacts and perhaps then my father began to see opportunities for the university and recruiting of students for international programs. One thing lead to another and that lead to the United Nations people and Harold Wilson and Indira Ghondi, Golda Meier, those kind of people that they brought to the university, and I think adding to the stature of the university. I know how proud my father always was whenever he heard Harold Wilson talking about "his degree" and how he wants to go and visit his alma mater as an alumnus of the Univ. of Bridgeport.

Allen: As a matter of fact that came up in some correspondence which I had with him in trying to get him to speak at one of the international meetings.

Jim: Harold Wilson?

Allen: Yes. He was busy at the time and we just couldn't make contact, but he had some very, very favorable comments.

Jim: Of course I was away all of those years, I never met any of those people. Vicariously, I enjoyed hearing about them and hearing about Bridgeport. I can remember in my later years, it became, has become less and less necessary for me to explain

where Bridgeport is. And that is some kind of gratification.

Allen: And if you travel overseas you will find it's even more well known, particularly, well I can speak for Asia, but I've done some work in Europe, mostly in Greece, where we have developed a considerable reputation.

Jim: Apparently my parents had a very gratifying trip to South America a few years before my father's death. They were very well received by all the cultural ministers throughout South America. I guess we have had a lot of South Americans.

Allen: Yes, and I recall that, particularly important was Argentina. (machine turned off again)

Jim: My father's experience at the urban school, I think this must have been 1937-38 when I was just four years old. As I understand it, he was on some kind of commission which was determined by how many students that he recruited. Well, he was so successful in recruiting students that he broke the budget of the school and they refused to pay him what they owed so he resigned and this is one of the reasons why we came to Bridgeport. He was at the same time a graduate student at Columbia Teachers College, and it was there that he noticed that Mr. Cortright had posted an ad on the bulletin board looking for an assistant. That was where the contact, I think it was because of the disgust with the urban school situation where he wasn't being rewarded for his contribution, he came to the Jr. College of Connecticut and I remember traveling with him when recruiting students was one of his major jobs in the pre-war years.

Allen: I don't know whether you know about it or don't. Your father resigned from the Jr. College at one time.

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Jim: Yes, he was going to be the President of a jr. college in Salisbury. In fact, he resigned twice. On two successive years, this same article appeared in the Bridgeport Post, almost a year apart.

Allen: When was the other one?

Jim: The same place, he resigned twice to go up there. This was in the war years. I don't remember the exact dates and I don't know what it was all about, but I don't know what the dissatisfaction was or whether he just saw himself as vice president or assistant president and was going to have his own university. I remember that.

Allen: Do you remember why he did not go there?

Jim: No. I don't know anything about that. As a place, it was pretty little. I remember going up there with my parents as an afternoon Sunday drive and it is way out in the country where there are farms, stables and barns and I don't remember any

modern classroom buildings or anything like that. And I have a vague recollection of asking my father and he said well, it's not financially sound or didn't have adequate financial support. I don't know what has ever happened to that college.

Allen: I don't either. Well, it was a secondary school at that time and your father was to have developed a jr. college out of it, but it had very poor finances which he didn't discover until after he had made the commitment.

Jim: That's approximately my recollection, but why he went back, I'm almost certain that he did it a second time but sometimes it's hard to get recollections separated or reality separated from recollections of dreams, but I have this clear sensation of seeing the same article in the Bridgeport Post a year later. My father, who I see as the crisis of his career, the decision of accepting the presidency of the Univ. of Bridgeport when he hadn't earned his PHD, cause I-. How much of this is my projecting my thoughts into it and how much he actually said I don't know anymore. But accepting the presidency of the Univ. of Bridgeport is obviously is a full commitment. He had to give up his graduate studies with no possibility of a PHD so his whole life then was married to the Univ. of Bridgeport. There was no possibility of becoming a president of anything else in higher education. He had to make a go at UB or not, or to not accept it and to go on with his graduate studies and hope to get some other opportunity someplace else.

Allen: I gather then that already there was the aspiration on his part to become a college president.

Jim: I would presume so. He hadn't done any classroom.- He never did any college classroom teaching. He only taught secondary school teaching where he was the coach of the swimming team at Hammond High School and things like that. I don't believe his degree, his Bachelor's Degree was in English, I think, and a Master's Degree from Columbia Teacher's College, and I think he went also to the School of Education at Yale. I think this was leading toward Administrative years. I'm sure that was his, George may know more about this.

Allen: I hoped to be able to get to talk with him. O.K. I think what we'll do at this point, Jim, is turn this off. (machine off)

End of Tape.