Jessie Turner Woodcock

Edie: Jessie Turner Woodcock was interviewed in her Trinidad Home on 8/20/84 by Edie Butler for the HSU oral history project. Jessie’s association with the University dates back to 1915. She enrolled in 1915, graduated in 1917, was employed as secretary to the president around 1919 and held a variety of positions until her retirement in 1951. She was instrumental in the creation of the Alumni Association and has been an active member ever since then. Jessie was conscious of the tape recorder and was uncomfortable about it throughout the interview.

Edie: Where did you grow up and attend school before you went to Humboldt?

Jessie: Well I was born over in Casper, Mendocino County. That was the home of the Casper Lumber Company and my Dad ran the train hauling the logs from the woods down to the mill and into the big old pond, dumped there you see and then the boats came out. There was a big log thing out there that the boats came to. They ran these logs out that way and took them down below or whatever they went.

Edie: Did they have a high school in Casper?

Jessie: No but I left there when I was 4 years old. My dad being a railroad man, he wanted to go on still further in the railroad, so we went to Tiburon. That’s down across the bay from San Francisco. That was the terminal then-for railroads. You know, you had ferry boats running back and forth from San Francisco and all the trains and things came there to this great big terminal, it’s not that way anymore, it’s changed. We stayed out there about a couple of years and he got the run up at Guerneville in Sonoma County. He ran the little ninety-nine train that went up and down the Russian River with passengers. In the summertime people from San Francisco would come to camp. There were no automobiles. So, he ran this little open air train back and forth. It was an old engine made for hauling logs that ran on a narrow gauge road. I was there until, there during the earthquake in 1906. Then, we left there in 1908 and went to Willits. Then he ran the big Shae locomotive that ran up and down to Sherwood and hauled the logs down to Northwestern which is now Brooktrails, it’s all changed there too. I finished grammar school from 5th grade on in Willits and then went to high school. And, of course, I was quite an athlete. In those days girls weren’t athletes. I was about the only one who played with the boys.

Edie: Did you really? What sports did you participate in?

Jessie: I was basketball captain and when the boys were practicing, we were practicing. When they were short a boys I would go and finish up the...

Edie: Did you ever get to play in a game?

Jessie: Oh yes.

Edie: On the boy’s team?
Jessie: No, not on the boy’s team. Then, I was quite a tall baseball player. I played with my brothers. We had a track going. I used to put the shot and do all the same things that girls do now. I don’t think that girls put the shot even now.

Edie: I don’t know.

Jessie: They don’t throw the discus and do all that stuff. My brothers trained me pretty good.

Edie: Sounds like you were pretty willing.

Jessie: Yeah, and we played baseball. They always called me Ty Cobb.

E: What did they call you?

J: Ty Cobb, that old famous baseball player from years ago. Do you remember him?

E: No.

J: You wouldn’t remember him. People can’t remember all these things can they?

E: No they can’t.

J: Well, I graduated from Willits in 1915 and President Van Matre came down and talked to us about how wonderful it was up here, just like the ocean was next door to the college. The way he talked we thought we were going to be right along the beach.

E: Did he come and talk to the whole school?

J: He talked to the whole senior class. So, this other girl and me talked to our parents into finally letting us go. So, we got ready all summer long, getting our closes and had a big time you know before going to Humboldt County.

E: What year was that?

J: 1915.

E: The school was quite new.

J: Yeah. The railroad was just opened in 1914 to Eureka.

E: That’s right. What was the other girl’s name?

J: Noelle Dolson. We bawled all the way up, cried all the way up leaving home.

E: Oh really? Anxious to go, reluctant to go.

J: Of course my mother didn’t like me to go either. You know, she was lonesome.

E: Had your mother gone to college?
J: No no. She was married when she was 16 to my father who was 29. I was born April Fool’s Day in 1896 and mother had me all by herself because the midwife never got there. That’s why I’m so healthy now. No doctors. We stayed at a boarding house. Mrs. Gainer ran this boarding house for Normal School girls.

E: This was in Arcata? What street was that on?

J: That was on the corner of 14th and P or K street where I built my own home across from there in later years because that’s where I met my husband, on that corner. A boy and a girl, her name was Turner, same as mine. I had just met her. They had brought her down to meet me and another girl and her boyfriend. The four of them had come to visit us and look us over cause I think the two girls were scared that these new girls might take their boyfriends away from them. So we met them then. This one boy brought Leighton up later on several months later afterwards. Leighton, my husband. Then the school was down on the corner of 11th and M streets in the old grammar school. The old old grammar school. Then they had wooden buildings they had put up in a hurry to have for manual training and the gym.

E: Still down there on the corner of 11th and M?

J: 11th and M yes.

E: Describe those buildings cause you’re the first person I’ve talked to who actually was there.

J: Yes it was the old school building.

E: There was a large two or three story grammar school right next door. Correct? Right across the street next door at the time?

J: No, we just went right into the old grammar school building that was our house.

E: Oh you were in the house.

J: Yes. Those other buildings were temporary buildings for the manual training and for the classrooms and for gymnasium.

E: Were those the ones that were moved up to where Founders Hall is?

J: Yes, in 1916, some of them were moved up there. Of course I only went there that half year until 1916 and we had the training school there. We had to treat scratches, teach the kids that went to school there too. Then, they had some buildings right across the street that they used for the little kids, training school kids. Then, in 1916, January, we moved up on the hill and they had the temporary buildings all ready.

E: Now, these are the ones for the training school.

J: Yes. Well the gymnasium and all those, they took them apart and moved them up there.

E: Okay, so all of those temporary buildings were all that you had up there?
J: Yes. They had additional stuff that they built at the time too.

E: So they added more temporary buildings at the time.

J: The President’s office was in the front of them and the secretary.

E: Back down at the grammar school, where were the grammar school kids going to school when the college students moved into the building?

J: The grammar school started up again down there. They took it back over.

E: So those students were the ones who you taught in the training school?

J: Well, yeah. I remember, I taught them.

E: Okay, here’s the main grammar school building where you college students had all your classes and then all around were the temporaries.

J: Yes.

E: Now the kids who used to attend that grammar school went and attended the training school.

J: Then they had a school up on the hill called Pleasant Hill where the old labor temple is.

E: Was that labor temple the same building as the one that had been used for this school?

J: No no.

E: They tore down the school and then built the labor temple?

J: Well it was over in another part of town.

E: Now I’m confused.

J: The labor temple is up on the end of 11th street. And, that was called Pleasant Hill School.

E: Okay, was it the same building?

J: And they had a school there too at the same time we had the practice kids too.

E: The thing I am confused about, is the building that was the labor temple the same building that used to be the school?

J: Yes.

E: Okay, that’s what I’d always thought, cause it was still there when I first moved to Arcata.
J: Later on, when we were making the change to dormitories and everything, we temporarily had our training school over there again at Pleasant Hill before we go this tall building which was the new elementary school.

E: That was built about 1920 wasn’t it?

J: 1930.

E: That was after you were working?

J: Uh ha. Afterwards yeah. See because there was nothing up there but these old temporary buildings when I was going to school. And, even after when I got my job as Secretary to the President, those old wooden buildings were there but no, then they started building the other in 1919, just about the time I got the job as Secretary, where Martha had been.

E: So it was Founder’s Hall that had been built?

J: Yes, Founders Hall was built while I was getting trained up for the job.

E: Okay, let’s hold that for a minute and go back to student days. You lived in the boarding house. How many?

J: About 8 or 9 girls and this woman was a widow. She had several daughters.

E: Were her daughters students?

J: No, one of them was just in grammar school and the other was in high school, and the other one was down going to Cal, University of California. The second one was up there after I had been there a year and she graduated from normal school too.

E: What do you remember about those days as a student? What comes to mind most?

J: Of course I was in love with my husband to be and I did not pay much attention and neither did he. His folks didn’t want, they wanted to break, now you want this in there?

E: Well, it will be on tape for Dr. Tanner to hear. Is that okay?

J: Well, yeah. I don’t want to get people involved but, they wanted us to tend to our studies more and of course he was always coming up to see me and throwing rocks at the window for me to sneak out.

E: That went on then too.

J: Oh yes.

E: Did you have a curfew at Mrs. Gainer’s home?

J: Well yes, she tried to keep us under control. I don’t think the other girls were different than me anyway. They were quieter. I really didn’t study much at all. It is a wonder I ever got the job.
E: So the two of you spend a fair amount of time together?

J: Well yes, but see his sister and all of them didn’t want us to even go together.

E: A local family.

J: One of the most prominent families. Is that in there?

E: Yes.

J: They are all dead and gone anyway. Is that going in there too?

E: It picks up everything.

J: Dr. Tanner will think I’m terrible.

E: No he won’t. Everybody’s life contains all kinds of tid bits of things.

J: Well anyway, we didn’t do an awful lot of studying. I helped him to get his books arranged and his notebooks ready for when he turned them into the classes. By mistake he copied mine completely and Dr. Van Matre called me and said, “Jessie Woodcock you’re going to get a failure in your horticulture because you let Woodcock have that book and he copied it and he is failing too.” So we both failed in that subject.

E: So did you take it over?

J: Yes I had to take it over again. But, I had a beautiful notebook with drawings and everything you know. But I had to get him through because his folks were thinking that I was keeping him back.

E: So everybody found out when out came grades. How long was it before you two got married?

J: Not until 1922. See WWI had come on in 1917, just after he graduated. That spoiled his whole career for ever being a teacher or anything because he was gone several years and we were engaged and all that. We wrote back and forth all the time. Then I graduated, got my school and taught down in Spy Rock, Mendocino County for a year, or 8 months it was, for $78 a month, paying $35 a month for board out of that. That didn’t leave much to live on. But, where I went was just an old nothing, just a store and a railroad station and I lived two miles down the track at these old people’s house. I had to walk to my school every day, two miles down the railroad tracks. There wasn’t anything in the school house when I got there, not even a desk or a blackboard.

E: What did you do?

J: I just taught out of my head. In those days you didn’t have automobiles so when you went someplace you took your trunk and everything with you.

E: So you had some books with you?
J: I brought books and paper and pencils and stuff like that. So, I really at the end of two weeks, without desks or anything, my throat was worn out. I had twelve kids and all the grades but one, at 19. My first school, imagine getting that pushed on me. And then to top it all off, this old couple where I lived, the house had bedbugs in it. I never had bedbugs before and then fell on the ceiling on me and old skunk had come in the window and you’d smell all that. This old man that stayed there was an old funny fellow from the Azores, just like an old... I know he was called something like that and he sat opposite me at the table. He’d go wa wa wa. And, I had no lock on my bedroom door so I had to pull my trunk over it every night. The old man and old lady lived next door and snore.

E: It was a rough job wasn’t it?

J: Yes, then at 4 o’clock in the morning he’d say, “time to get up, lots of work to do, my feet are killing me.” There happened to be a little area there where she raised grapes. I got there in July when things were starting to get ripe, grapes and figs, cantaloupes and all that. So, the first day she gave me my lunch, she gave me biscuits and when I got to school they had mice dirt in them. So after that I took a large pail and went out and got fruits because I just could not eat the stuff. She made nice jam but the ants were always crawling around the tops of the bottles.

E: Did that stuff bother her?

J: No I don’t think she could see. They were old people. I don’t think she knew it. I wouldn’t tell her. I was too bashful in those days. There was no electricity and no bathtubs so I went down to the Eel River to get my bath every Saturday.

E: That could be pretty cold in the winter.

J: In the wintertime we weren’t there cause it snowed and there was no school.

E: So you had school in the summertime.

J: Yes, we started in July.

E: What was the school year like?

J: You’d go in June and not start again until March. You see it was only 8 months. Then in the last half of the year I moved down with the station agent. He had a little house right across from the station. The only thing there was that. And, I move in. He let me have his front room with an old cot and I had a little old stove, a tiny old oil burning stove I’d cook on. My dad was a railroad man so he got me a pass and about every 2 weeks I went home. I’d bring stuff back with me, down to Willits back and forth. Mother wouldn’t let me bring my clothes in because she figured they had bedbugs in them.

E: So you had to wash them outside.

J: I had them out in the alley. I left the suitcase out in the alley and she went through it.

E: That’s quite an experience. Sounds like the second place you lived was a little better.
J: Oh yeah, she was more modern. In those days the older people never used slang or anything but she’d say gosh or damn, which was more like me. I felt right at home with her. We’d go over to the station in the evenings and learn Morse code telegraph and so we’d telegraph up and down all of the stations, to Santa Rosa and all around. We had an old handcar that belonged to the place, the railroad, and we’d get on that or we’d go in and see if the railroad clear down to Dos Rios was free or not with no traffic. So then we could pump. She was a nice one, I had a lot of fun with her, she was a young more modern person. So I taught there until that time, then I went back to school in June. I came to Humboldt cause I knew so many people up here after having lived here at the dorm and stayed with those people for a while. Then I got myself a job in the barrel factory. They were taking women on then, the first time they would take women. So for the next month I worked there. Then I called a call from from Willits Post Office that the mail carrier was drafted and they wanted to know if I wanted the job. I said sure and I went back to be with mother and got the job and I walked 8 miles every day. I was the first girl mail carrier in the west. Nobody wore slacks in those days. The first 2-3 weeks I walked 8 miles every day in the dust in the long skirts you wore in those days. So one weekend I decided to make a whole outfit out of this khaki cloth and gee I was the talk of the town.

E: Because you had trousers?

J: Yeah, it was terrible.

E: But you were more comfortable.

J: Oh yeah and people got used to it in time. I had that for a whole year until a mail carrier came back. So then after that Leighton was home from war. He was up here. So I came back up here as fast as I could and went to business college for about a month and a half I guess. Then, Martha got pregnant so she told them to ask Jessie Woodcock, Jessie Turner, my name then, and so he called me up and wanted me. I said I couldn’t do that. I only had short hand typing for about a month. He said “You can do it.” So, I decided to do it. The day after I had been there one day, after Martha had talked to me all day and telling me all the stuff, I

E: Did she talk as much then?

J: Yeah. Everybody talks about Martha that way, she’s alright. So, the next day I said I can’t hold that job, I just can’t do that job. He said, “Jessie Turner you’ll stay and you’ll do that job.” And, I was always grateful that he did that.

E: Why did you want to back out that first day?

J: Because it looked like too much for me. It was fortunate, that summer was the only they never had summer school session there and he went back to Chicago and he was gone all summer and left me in charge. So I had the typewriter there and I practiced everything, studied the shorthand and took care of the correspondence that came, as good as I could. Of course it wasn’t like it is now. I typed up stuff he left, a whole lot of minutes of meetings of the board. I had a chance to study Martha’s bookkeeping. I liked bookkeeping. I liked mathematics.
E: So had you been Martha’s assistant, helping out?

J: No no. I knew her though. Her father was a professor at Humboldt State. Daddy Beer they called him.

E: Did you have him as an instructor?


J: Our book, Leighton’s and mine, we had to put... I don’t know. I never did learn how to do it.

E: The new way of teaching?

J: Yes, there was a book published, Martha would know because she has the book.

E: So he published the book?

J: I don’t know if he published the book but he went by that book.

E: So what was he like?

J: Oh, he was a nice guy, very nice man. In fact I lived at their place when I came back that time, in an apartment underneath their house. They had moved into where this lady had left that had the boarding house and the Beers moved in there when came from back east. The corner of 14th and K. Her brother, Sam Beer, an insurance man. When we got married, we lived there in that same little apartment underneath there, it’s still there. Then when my mother and father got sick, we had to find a bigger place. I think we moved three or four times before we got the place we wanted.

E: And that is when they came up and joined you?

J: Yes. I got $55 a month as secretary. My husband was getting $75 where he was. He was a butcher. His brother-in-law owned the butcher shop. So that was the wrong thing to do. He should have gone out on his own, back to his teaching or something. After you’re in the Navy, I guess you change your ideas on school teaching.

E: So that changed his career?

J: Well he got a different idea of the world and didn’t want to be a school teacher when he got back.

E: What was the name of the butcher business?

J: J. C. ... Co. He worked there about 10 years.

E: That is when it was on the Plaza?

J: Yeah, where the old Alibi is now. Then he worked for various other meat places after that until he retired. His health gave out so he had to quit. I was just thinking, we had $55 a month, well you could buy everything with that. We didn’t get married for 2 years after he got back from the war. I paid them
$20 for rent which left $35. I only had one or two dresses and one or two pair of shoes. You’d change them from one week to the next. People don’t realize that. You could buy everything in those days.

E: What were the costs for a new dress, the kind appropriate for work?

J: You made your own. I bought material and made my own. Mother was a dressmaker. When she was sick, she learned to make dresses when she was sick in San Francisco. When we were little kids she was gone for a whole year. My father took care of us. My oldest brother took care of us. He was 11 and I was 8. Of course, we missed our mother all that time. She had a serious operation in San Francisco for kidney trouble.

E: Did she make her dresses for you?

J: Oh yeah.

E: What did it cost for fabric?

J: Maybe 15 or 20 cents a yard, for 4-5 yards. You could do a lot with your money in those days. We all sat down with a phonograph. We’d like to have this or that but you couldn’t afford those things that people have now.

E: Yeah, they take a record player for granted.

J: You went without a lot of things compared to people now. Of course there were rich people in those times too. After that, I worked at Humboldt State all of the time.

E: How many years were you working at the college altogether?

J: Thirty-one, from 1920 to 1951.

E: Were you involved since 1951?

J: I was in the Alumni Association for a long time until about 66-67. Of course I’m still a member of the Alumni Association. I was secretary for a while then I was treasurer. Our Alumni Association just didn’t hardly hold together well, when we first organized in 1924. Then, people joined for 50 cents a year, I think. So by me hanging on to it, I think it kept together, by me holding that job all the time because I was interested in it. I went and collected dues at the institutes and things like that, tried to get people interested. I also was interested in the banquets that we gave.

E: So you were a one person membership committee.

J: Yes, and at the all the activities I had to do all of the collecting of the money. I went to all of the football game and even collected the tickets.

E: Was that in addition to the Alumni?
J: Oh yes. All the student body things. I went to all the football games. We got so much money some times that we went down to the sheriff’s office and left it there before I came across from Eureka.

E: That’s when the games were held in Eureka?

J: At Albee Stadium. That was extra time that I put in.

E: You didn’t get comp time for that? Just part of the job.

J: No. You had to. They had the lyceum which went around and gave plays. I went with them to the local spots and sold the tickets.

E: Now they went out of town also.

J: Yeah, Crescent City and they went...

E: That took a lot of time.

J: Well people don’t realize that nowadays people wouldn’t do that without getting paid. My husband never suffered from any of my jobs.

E: How do you know?

J: He had is breakfast, he had his lunch. I went home as fast as I could go, put his lunch in the warming oven, came back to work, got home and he would have his dinner. I’d come back to sell tickets or something.

E: Did you walk back and forth all that time?

J: Before we had a car, yes. In 1923, we got the car, 1924. Then I drove. I used to be up there until midnight doing bookkeeping lots of times.

E: He got his meals, but you weren’t home in the evening?

J: No he was left alone a lot. And I’ll be thinking of that too.

E: Did other people work such extended jobs and consider that as the way it was done or was your job unusual?

J: I think it probably was, I don’t think a lot of people would do it.

E: Even then.

J: Unless they were afraid of losing their jobs. Of course that is another thing, you’re afraid that if you didn’t do it... nowadays people are protected are protected by rules and things and they speak up. Of course I liked it. I liked all that.

E: Was it a burden?
J: Well, no I don't think so. I liked it.

E: Who became president in 1920?

J: Mr. Van Matre was still there until about 1924. Then came Ralph Swetman.

E: Did each of those men expect you to put in that extra time, was that just considered normal?

J: Oh yeah. We never talked about it. That was just something I was supposed to do, treasurer.

E: Had Martha been treasurer?

J: See what I was, was treasurer, registrar and secretary altogether.

E: That meant secretary to the president?

J: Secretary to the president, handled the bookkeeping and did the registering of the kids.

E: Over the years as the college grew, by 1951, it was a far different place than back in 1920, how did the job change through all those times?

J: Well, like when Swetman came, we were starting to get a little bigger and growing and so he gave me my chance to take the Registrar job or they made a job called financial secretary and the Registrar and secretary to the President. So, I took the financial because I liked that. Then I moved out of that place across the hall into my own private office.

E: This is up at Founder's Hall.

J: Yes.

E: Where was that office?

J: You know you came in the front door, that was the President's side and my side.

E: So right in that immediate front area, you were over to the left.

J: Yes. I liked that job too. Then they gave me the job, I was 3/4 financial secretary and 1/4 superintendent of buildings and grounds. So, I had charge of all the janitors, which was two, and one gardener. So I had to take a loss in my salary because the superintendent of buildings and grounds had less pay than mine, so take 1/4 of that, you see how it works.

E: I don't understand why they needed to do that.

J: I was getting superintendent of buildings and grounds salary, 1/4 of what it would be and my wages were higher, so I only got 3/4 of mine.

E: Yeah, okay, they still do stuff like that up there.
J: I guess so. After that I became Comptroller, in 1930. Then later on they got more. See, we were under the State Department of Finance, State Department of Education and worked through them for everything. They began having a lot of red tape and stuff like that I had to learn. I had to learn an awful lot of stuff.

E: Now during that time, I believe Dr. Balabanis, in his book, when he came and talked to the class that was doing the interviewing, he mentioned that the college came close to being closed.

J: Oh yes.

E: That there were lots of financial troubles. What about all of that?

J: What year was he talking about?

E: Well, I got the feeling there was one time during the Depression and another time during WWII or shortly thereafter.

J: WWII, that’s when I got mad and quit. That shouldn’t be in there.

E: Sure it should. I think so, but not yet. Let’s go back to Comptroller in 1930.

J: In the middle 30s and the end of the 30s. I’m afraid that thing is running and not getting used.

E: Not getting used? What do you mean?

J: When I don’t talk.

E: Oh don’t worry about that. Not at all. People can’t listen any faster than it works.

J: Well let me see. Of course, we pretty near lost it during the Depression. During the Depression years it was terrible. We didn’t have money for anything I had to make all of the budgets and do all that stuff and even do the typing of them cause I had no help.

E: You were a one lady office.

J: Yeah until the World War. Then they started to give me a little help but they didn’t give me help for quite a while after that. We had to get dormitories, places for... to come and live with their families. We got Quonset huts and we got all Army supplies, stuff we went down below with our trucks and they allowed us one truck there. We never had any trucks or automobiles around there that belonged to the state. That was out first little truck that we got. We went down and bought surplus stuff from the government you know, like typewriters.

E: Down in the Bay area?

J: Yes.

E: During the Depression, what do you recall about financial troubles and negotiations with the state?
J: We just couldn’t have anything.

E: But there was some threat to the college closing wasn’t there?

J: The enrollment went down, the main thing. Just before the war too and then when the war came it was worse because the boys were all gone.

E: So it was the same thing that happened both times.

J: Yes.

E: The enrollment down, the state revenues down.

J: Yes.

E: What saved it? What kept the college from closing?

J: Well, I suppose influence from the business people around the town and the county.

E: They wanted the college to remain?

J: Yes. Then getting back to after the war. They pushed so much onto me and then gave me some extra help. I interviewed one woman and she came and the auditors came at the same time which made it rough, these are the auditors from the state. She sat in there and she couldn’t even check a bank statement and she talked to the auditor all the time in the back room. I went in and said, “Haven’t you ever checked bank statements?” She said “I never had to do anything where I worked, down at Hamilton Air Force Base, and all I had to do was sit on the officer’s lap and kiss him.” I said, “There’s the door.” And, she went. She went over to the President and he gave her a job with a girl who was sitting in a training school office playing her radio all day, to go down and help her play the radio. I went over and I said, “President Gist I’m giving you 30 days’ notice. I’ll have everything ship shape, everything will be just perfect, but I’ll be through.” Oh he got down and he, I don’t want him to hear, they would never publish it cause his wife is still living.

E: He’d take – he’d be careful. He didn’t want you to quit.

J: Oh no he said you just can’t quit.

E: What year was that?

J: 1946.

E: But you were so infuriated that he would put someone on the payroll that wasn’t going to work.

J: Well it wasn’t that so much as why shouldn’t he back me up and tell her to get off altogether – after she said that to me. He was supposed to back the people who worked for him. After all my years that I had been with him.

E: Did he know she had said that to you?
J: Sure I told him. And, I said as long as she stays on the campus, but I’ll give you 30 days’ notice because I want my work perfect before I leave. I want everything right so nobody can say anything about me. So I stayed the 30 days, worked hard nights and days and he got everything right up to the minute. See all those years I was in that job, I was the only woman in any of those jobs in the state. When the auditors came they all said my work was the best of any. They always liked to audit my books. So I always felt proud about that. I did work hard for that... that was my life. I loved that job. It really was a wonderful job for a woman to have cause it really was more of a man’s job. I had the supervision of all the janitors and we had more janitors then, more gardeners.

E: Yeah, campus was really growing.

J: Then we had the WPA come on and the put that under my office, hiring people under the WPA, the National Youth Authority, another thing for young people. They put that in my office. I had to hire about 60 kids a month.

E: You were busy.

J: I had to find them little jobs around. I had all the housing, to find places for people to live – faculty members and everybody. I ran the dormitories and had charge of the cafeteria, the menus, helping them with the menus and getting the dormitories ready each year. I even went down myself on Sunday to help the janitors get the beds ready.

E: It was your life.

J: I spent many a Sunday up there working, cause I wanted, it was pride and I didn’t want anybody to think I couldn’t do anything.

E: You were going to prove it. So you didn’t quit then though? Did you rescind your resignation?

J: Yeah, at the end of 30 days I quit. I was gone 6 months and I got a job the next day downtown in a bookkeeping place but then they started calling me about things up there, I just told them my boss down here did not like people calling me about thing up there and to go ahead and do it themselves. They hired a Dr. Tinsley, a man to take my place. He didn’t know anything about the job. He didn’t know a thing about it and they gave him two girls that just sat around and did nothing. This one girl, I knew her folks and everything, called me and wanted me to help her. I used to go up there in the evenings and try to show her how to do her bookkeeping but it didn’t work because they didn’t do anything for 6 months. They did some bookkeeping but that man didn’t know anything about it. They called me from Sacramento at the end of 6 months and told me to come down because they wanted me to take the job back. So I flew down there. I went back up there then.

E: What prompted you to go back.

J: That was my job and all the time I was out I said nobody can take that job away from me because that is my job and that is my pride and I belong up there. I worked hard and nobody can step in now and wipe that off the slate like that. You know. Cause I really sacrificed a lot – home life and everything to
keep that job going. So I went back and went up there and we fired those two girls, they weren’t doing anything. Then, they started giving me some extra help. Did you know Gene Flocchini? He worked in my office. He was working in my office. He was a wonderful fellow. He graduated there and he had come back from the war. He is retired now. He had a job with the state from that office. Then they gave me a property clerk, other clerks, and secretary to myself.

E: Was your office still up there in Founder’s Hall.

J: Yes. In the vault, the walk-in vault, was all the bills they hadn’t paid when I was gone. One woman didn’t get her pay at all for the whole... in my front bedroom, desk in there and adding machine and worked every night until 2 o’clock. I went up there by 9 o’clock in the morning, each morning and then Saturdays and Sundays I worked. My poor husband just – I don’t know how we got along.

E: Did he get exasperated?

J: No he wasn’t that kind.

E: So there wasn’t pressure from him.

J: He wasn’t making much from his work anyway. It was a matter of getting along too. I mean financially. Things were kind of tight in those days. So anyway I got all of those bills paid and some of the teachers had gone downtown and bought things and charged them to the state. Well you can’t do that because there was a regular system. In those days you had to go through the State Department of Education with all these typed up bills, I mean orders and then the purchasing agent had to okay them and the whole rigamarole and they hadn’t done any of that yet so there was $18,000 worth of bills down there that I had to put through the normal procedures before they would pay them in Sacramento for me.

E: Was Dr. Gist aware of the state of things when you returned and how much you worked?

J: Mrs. Gist still writes to me and says I saved them. I mean she still appreciates what I did because when they left the people turned against and I didn’t even after all that. I felt sorry for them. I felt sorry because he had had some sickness, had cancer and had been sick right after that. That caused a lot of his trouble too, worry about that job. I felt so sorry, when they left nobody told them goodbye. I talk to her on the phone. She lives in Piedmont. She is a lovely person and he was too. They were really wonderful people. He wasn’t much of a businessman. Working out the budgets and all that with me. Of course after a while we got organized later that the set up was so different, didn’t have to go through him so much. Each head of a department had more to do with presenting things to me.

E: He was pretty interested in the students becoming good competent teachers. Getting employed in the field.

J: Yeah he was really an educator and he was more that type, not the business end of things.

E: Yeah I’ve heard lots of very fine things about him.
J: Then President Siemens came. He was a real businessman. When President Siemens came, we just got over the war and all that stuff and they were giving colleges everything. He was a smart man and he directed it all. But I don’t think, looking at it from my standpoint, the way things were in past years all along that he should get all the glory coming out the way it did because he hit it just right. They’d never give us anything to build. We had lots of ideas about our campus. We had all kinds of ideas but could you get it? No. When President Siemens came, the war made a difference. They were ready to give everything to the students, Vets coming back and all.

E: So he was in the right place at the right time.

J: I think so too. He was a smart man though. I liked President Siemens. I only stayed 2 years after that because I was tired of the whole works. I was 55 years old. I quit when I was 55 and took my pension and then I went to work downtown.

E: So it was easier to quit 6 years later than the first time. How come?

J: Well I thought I’d served my purpose and in fact I wasn’t too well at that time either. I knew I could jobs anywhere else. Everyone knew I was thorough, I had job offers from several little companies, did their bookkeeping. I worked for the Arcata Union for a year doing their books. I was acting City Clerk when the City Clerk was sick. He was an older man and he was having a lot of trouble getting stuff done so I offered to help him for nothing really. That was the kind of person I was you know. So it worked into a job. He was laid up for quite a while so I was active as a city clerk for about one year. Then I quit altogether. I decided my health was getting too bad. I was 55 years old when I retired from Humboldt.

E: So then your health picked up again and you’re healthy still.

J: Oh yeah, all but one leg. Its got arthritis in it.

E: Was Siemens Hall built by the time you left?

J: No it was being built. No plans were all ready for it.

E: Was it called the Administration building? Because it is only recent that it has been called Siemens Hall.

J: Oh yeah I got what you mean. Yeah, cause I was surprised when they finally got it to Siemens Hall. ... went down as Gist and Van Matre went someplace too. I don’t know if Swetman did or not.

E: What about Dr. Swetman. He was only there a few years.

J: Yeah, after Van Matre got fired.

E: Will you tell me about that?

J: Well, of course I’ll be dead a gone pretty soon.

E: I don’t think so.
J: Well, turn that thing off a while.

E: Dr. Tanner needs to hear it. I can’t take complete enough notes and I wouldn’t trust myself to be accurate.

J: Well he was a very smart man, really, and everybody liked him.

E: Swetman?

J: Yeah. But the whole thing was kind of a scandal. Well he had to fire Laura Herron, our physical education teacher because people reported her for having students in her “home” drinking and all kinds of wild parties going.

E: That was during Prohibition too.

J: Yeah, I even went to one of the wild parties. So then they called me in to take notes when he fired her. And I sat there and I was so scared she was going to say Jessie was at my house too. But, I was only there one time. But they used to have real wild parties I guess and so he fired her. Then another teacher, Home Economics teacher, got in a mess with one of the other teachers, man teacher.

E: Was that not okay at that time for faculty to date each other?

J: No that was wrong, lots different that now. I tell you something after you turn that off. Over that whole thing – that trouble erupted that Swetman got fired and I don’t know if the town knows that he got fired. They think he quit I guess.

E: I think that is the official version. I knew that there was some shadow over Van Matre’s departure but I didn’t know that there had been a shadow over Swetman’s.

J: Did you know that...?

E: No not yet.

J: When we have this off I’ll tell you something then you’ll see if you want that or not.

E: That’s two things, okay.

J: Well I know the Enquirer knows all these things. A lot of these publications that come out tell everything.

E: I don’t know if the Enquirer would be interested in this.

J: No I mean those things come out, things that you don’t think you would tell anybody.

E: Yeah so you want to be careful, okay.

J: Well I wouldn’t want to hurt some people, some are still around and I would never want to hurt them.
E: I know there is a delicate balance between having an accurate record for history and not wanting to hurt people who shouldn’t take any hurt on from things that others have done. What was Dr. Swetman like? Who worked for him?

J: He was a good administrator. He was really very good. Van Matre was a good businessman too but Swetman really made the difference between the town and the college.

E: How?

J: Well they were always fighting you know.

E: Even back then?

J: And Eureka of course had the big fight to get the place there, that all held over. And, so when Swetman came he really got communication with the town.

E: Including Eureka?

J: Yeah everybody looked up – they were different than normal people.

E: The people from the College? The students and the faculty?

J: Yeah. So, he really got people in town interested – like the Rotary clubs and all the clubs and the businessmen. Of course, we had the backing of the businessmen for years.

E: Yeah because there was that board of directors. But, the everyday person on the street didn’t have such a good feeling for the College. And, he did a lot.

J: Yeah.

E: Why were they considered different back then in the early 20s.

J: Oh I think people thought the faculty were a different brand of people.

E: Is it because they moved here from out of the area?

J: That might be or because they were more educated probably too – with their doctorate degrees and different degrees.

E: So they were kind of a different element in the community that what had been here. Did the college coming here change the politics in Arcata?

J: Not while I was there but I think later on it has quite a bit because the students can vote and that made a rift.

E: So there weren’t enough faculty and staff members to impact the ballot box?

J: No.
E: But the ideas of them being there did create a separation?

J: Yes. But I think in recent years...

E: I’m not sure anymore.

J: It was for a time but I haven’t heard much about it lately. I think it’s calmed down.

E: There aren’t as many students, the student body isn’t growing.

E: Who came after Swetman? Gist? What was he like to work with? You worked with so many administrators. I’m trying to get a sense of what they were like to work for and how they were different from each other in their running of the college.

J: Well I don’t know how to explain it. They were my bosses and I knew enough that you can’t change people – one type of person to another. You know Gist was more... sat in his office and read and studied. He wasn’t as active as Swetman had been or Van Matre.

E: You had to change your style to accommodate each of these incoming people.

J: Yeah.

E: How were financial decisions made under each of those administrations?

J: We had a board (me, some of the department heads and the president) and we discussed all those things.

E: So there was a committee.

J: The President’s Council.

E: Under those different administrations, did the members of the council have differing amounts of influence or power with those different individuals?

J: They had that council thing until President Gist was there and before that they just came to me with all their wants.

E: You would be the one to say or no? The money is there or not?

J: Well I always said, “State what you haven’t.” I was noted for that. I had a budget, you made your budget out and you pull all these things in it and you had to abide by it and you couldn’t spend money you didn’t have. I believe my own finances, I’ll show you later. If you haven’t got the money you can’t spend it and some of them couldn’t understand it. Really, the faculty couldn’t understand it and so I got the habit of saying, “No you can’t do it because it isn’t in the budget and the state won’t let you have it.”

E: So then what they had to do is get it in their budget for the next year.
J: Next year, got all their things, they you went to the President and some of the head ones went over all these things. Of course, naturally you had to study the whole thing before you got the final budget so that things that weren’t necessary were eliminated and of course you went by the student enrollment—full time enrollment figure, the amount they gave you in Sacramento to multiply by and that would be the amount of money you could have for your enrollment.

E: Were things pretty stable over all those decades or did you have different formulas and rules that you had to keep adjusting to.

J: Oh yeah, every other day.

E: Okay. Things haven’t changed much.

J: I had an awful lot of things I had to study that nobody up there realized. The study that came directly from Sacramento and State Department of Education and the Department of Finance. Now you see, it is under the different regimes of power.

E: But it seems like it is the same in the end. There is lots of rigamarole always.

J: See that was changed after I left. We went right to Sacramento, now they don’t, now it is down in San Diego.

E: And it gets to Sacramento.

J: Yeah.

E: Different departments would come into being while you were there. Like you were there when it was just Education majors and by the time you left there was Engineering, Liberal Arts, all sorts of... was Nursing in existence yet?

J: I think. We had a doctor who came from town while I was still there. He served in the Health Department.

E: With those different departments wanting buildings and equipment and blah blah, how were those decisions made and agreed upon amongst the various departments? Because not everybody could have everything and when those budgets went in they had to be reasonable.

J: Well of course for buildings you had to go to the State Division of Architecture before there was any progress at all.

E: Was that in your department?

J: Well, the President and the head of the department that wanted it.

E: Were there struggles between departments for wanting a bigger chunk of the budget for a piece of equipment or faculty members?
J: I really don’t remember any big trouble like that. They were pretty good about abiding by what was said and what was decided by the President.

E: It seems there was a sense of fairness.

J: Yeah you really only had so much money and they had to agree.

E: What were the students interested in? You must have seen umpteen student organizations come and go. What kinds of trends?

J: Well of course in our day they were old fashioned people. It wasn’t like it is now. I don’t know how to explain it – you didn’t have so much say, nobody had much say in things like they do now. The younger people are brought into more, the student body and all that. They gradually grew and grew and now they are pretty good.

E: So then it was the faculty and administrators saying this is the way it will be.

J: Yes.

E: It doesn’t seem there was a push for that.

J: No we’re different type of people, the way we were brought up I guess.

E: When did you start to see that changing?

J: Probably with Swetman, a little bit then, in the late 20s.

E: What happened – anything you can attribute that shift to? What other kinds of activities did the students become interested in as they got to have more say?

J: Well the first big thing was the Lyceum, that was in the late 20s and of course all the athletics, they grew more and more and became a more prominent of the programs and things. The student body grew and it really became an organization itself. That started in the late 30s. In the early days you just went to school and you had no say in anything. Our programs were all made out, we never had a chance to say – you just got your slip and went to classes. The big changes came when Siemens came. Of course I wasn’t there much longer so I don’t know anything about that.

E: You were there the first two years and what kinds of changes did you see?

J: The whole campus was going to change, the outlook of the whole place, new buildings. I figured there was going to be a big change because of the way it was going to be administered. Siemens was a different type of person. He had a lot of pep. He was full of ideas and a very friendly man, very nice man.

E: For the kinds of activities that the students were interested in – cause you were in charge of finding all these vets housing, being treasurer for student activities and all of that...
J: They changed that and got their own student body office. That was right after veterans came back and then they had the co-op and different things.

E: What was the co-op?

J: They had the bookstore separate from mine too, at first I had the bookstore. I started the first bookstore in 1922.

E: Where was it?

J: You’d come the front door of Founders Hall – these two little cubby holes right there, one on each side. We took those and put shelves in them and started getting books and faculty would order books they wanted for their classes. I used to have to go out there and sell those books. Of course, finally, we had to get a bigger spot at the other end of my office down across the hall around the corner from there. Then they finally got the co-op. The co-op was out in the old buildings. There was a fountain. At noontime the students lounged around and had sodas with the faculty and people could go and get something. That was a new thing entirely that we took on. After WWII, under the student body. This girl that worked for me was moved over. I trained her in student body and bookstore and they moved her across the hall. Margaret Brookins was her name. She had charge of that and the student body funds, took them out of my office.

E: So as things got bigger and bigger, things broke away.

J: Yes.

E: Were you still supervisor?

J: I was supervising for as long as I was there I guess. She was good, Margaret was a good girl. It got so she was really independent of my office towards the end.

E: What other changes – the campus was these temporary buildings up on the hill and by the time you left it was starting to be a sprawling…

J: When we moved up there to the temporary buildings – then we got Founders Hall finished in 22 and moved into our offices in Founders Hall from the old buildings and then later the old buildings were moved down to be Sunset Hall dormitory back where Nelson Hall is now, all wooden buildings.

E: Those buildings really got used up didn’t they?

J: Yeah and each girl had her own stove and they had one shower they went to – one little lounge room with a fireplace. The stove was just for the heat and they had one laundry place where they could do their clothes. Ordinary homes.

E: And it was wood heat?

J: Oh yeah, I had to order the wood every year.
E: Who did you order the wood from?

J: There was an old guy I knew who had this and that and he would cure it and he has been dead and gone a long time. He used to bring me the oak wood and then from the California Barrel Co. they had these staves and I’d order and they would have it up there on time to get in the woodshed.

E: The faulty staves they weren’t going to use in their barrels?

J: Yes, everybody in town used all that stuff.

E: What happened to those temporary buildings when they stopped being used as dormitories?

J: Well they had them first for training school, then for dormitories and then tore them down the last I heard of them. The janitor lived in one, at one end of one for a while.

E: Was that building still up there on Campus?

J: Yes the old wooden building back of… it’s kind of hard to remember.

E: Let me go back to your student days again. What kinds of activities other than the classroom studies were the students interested in?

J: We didn’t have anything?

E: No clubs? Drama groups?

J: Oh they put on plays and we had music and we had gym. We just came and went.

E: So it was a commuter school.

J: Yeah they commuted back and forth from Eureka. We really didn’t take part in anything.

E: What kind of town activities were available? Cause you came from out of town so you didn’t have your support group here for you from Willits.

J: We didn’t do much in Willits either. In those days young people didn’t get out and around like they do now. You just stayed at home. I never went to anything until I was 19 years old when I came up to Humboldt. In Willits I never went to a dance. When I got up here I had a good time.

E: What kinds of things up here?

J: Well the girls and I had a lot of fun at the dormitory, where we lived at that house, boarding house and did things like go out to the river, swim and things like that. Dance once in a while.

E: Would Mrs. Gainer go on any of these activities?

J: Yes she also went down to the river with us in a horse and buggy.

E: Was this the Mad River?
J: Yes, out to what they call shells crossing. You go out north of Arcata on the way to Blue Lake. Just before you take off to West End road you go right over to the river. Every Sunday we went out there and the boys, Leighton, would come and all the boys and we’d have fun that way picnicking. We did have things like they do now.

E: What kinds of courses did you take?

J: I just took what they told me which were penmanship. I was good in penmanship. I took manual training and made myself a hope chest and a desk and a little bookcase. Girls took in those days. We had to take horticulture, agriculture, history and pedagogy, psychology. Those were all new to me.

E: Did all of that prepare you for the job down at Spy Rock?

J: No. Then we did practice teaching after we did one quarter, then you had to do a class every – of practice teaching. That used to scare me. The supervisor would come in and check. I was always backward in those kinds of things.

E: Did you like teaching?

J: No.

E: Why?

J: There was nothing else to do except be a telephone operator. In those days there weren’t girl secretaries.

E: After that one year of teaching you never thirsted to go back.

J: No.

E: What prepared you for that teaching job out at Spy Rock?

J: I often think that myself. I think because my aunts had been teachers it was expected that was what we would be. There was nothing else for you to do really. People don’t realize there were no jobs like now.

E: Yeah job opportunities for women were minimum.

J: Oh yeah. It just seemed like women had to be teachers in those days.

E: Is there anything they could have taught you or exposed you to at Humboldt that would have helped you with that job out there?

J: Well I think the whole thing is – you do understand – of course I was there to have a good time. I didn’t understand what it was going to be like or what they were trying to do to teach you.

E: You went through the motions.
J: Did what they told us and studied the stuff. You weren’t free with teachers like they are now. You never got acquainted with your teachers like they do now. You didn’t have confidence in them... I don’t know. You never called them by their first names. You never felt familiar with a teacher, friendly. It certainly is lots better the way it is now, maybe overboard a little huh?

E: What else from those days when you were a student? Were there any world events or national events that went on during the time that you were a student? I guess WWI was breaking out?

J: The time I graduated.

E: That were felt on campus that kind of had an impact on Humboldt.

J: No, President Wilson was President when the... I don’t – maybe it was very innocent compared to the way the world is now.

E: Simpler.

J: Yes.

E: Any questions I didn’t ask that need to be or should be known by someone writing a history of the College?

J: No, there were so many different angles, you don’t know what people would be interested in. Of course with history you are supposed to deal with facts.