

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN STAHR

INTERVIEWER: Samuel C. McCulloch
Emeritus Professor of History
UCI Historian

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SM: This is an interview with John Stahr in my office, Humanities 360, after a luncheon at the University Club on Monday, June 15, 1992. The first question, John, as I said here, I made 105 tapes, so this will be 106 of the oral history of UCI. I have interviewed a number--not too many, but a number of the community--who have been very helpful and friendly to UCI. But I need your comments, in view of what I have read in the correspondence of Dan Aldrich and Jack Peltason, who not once, not twice, but more than, say, several times have written to you.

First, I'd like to know about that picture, which was obviously taken, that you showed me before we opened, and I take it had to do with Stanford helping, or the crew helping, or what was it?

JS: Well, this is good that you're doing this interview before you do the one with Duvall Hecht, because perhaps it will assist you in formulating some of the questions for him.

SM: Thank you.

JS: Is it all right to continue?

SM: Yes, it's perfect, it's going very well.

JS: I had been aware of the plans for UCI and the early construction efforts from a variety of sources. My father-in-

law lived in Orange County at the time. Elizabeth and I did not move down here until 1972, but he had been in the county since the mid-fifties. I also knew the gentleman who was appointed to be the first Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Dick Balch.

SM: Oh, Dick Balch, yes.

JS: He had come from Stanford and was a particularly close friend when he was Dean of Students there, and then after I'd been in the navy, when I went back to law school at Harvard, why, Dick was the Director of Athletics at MIT at that time. We spent some time with them at their home in Wellesley while we were still trying to locate a place to live.

In any event, I had carefully monitored the reported plans about the opening of the university, and one day one of my close friends in Los Angeles, Duvall Hecht, who was then acting as my securities broker, called and said he wanted to have lunch and to please bring my checkbook. (laughter) I was very suspicious about going to any lunch where I was invited to bring my checkbook, but what Duvall had in mind was the creation of an organization called the Friends of the Crew at Irvine.

Duvall had gone down prior to this luncheon, and, not having ever known Dan before, had made an appointment and walked into Dan's office and introduced himself and told Dan that he'd been giving some thought to the problems of creating a new campus and a new undergraduate student body. He thought

that it was very important for a new university campus to be able to compete in intercollegiate athletics at a very early day in the life of the institution, and to that end described his own rather considerable credentials as an Olympic oarsman.

SM: A gold medal winner.

JS: A gold medal winner in the Olympics from Stanford, although he was competing for the United States while he was in the service. He volunteered to Dan to not only serve as the first unpaid crew coach, but to organize the entire effort, including raising the money to construct and equip a boathouse and all of the attendant activities to create that facility and to create a crew in the very first year of the university's operations. I was one of the people who lent some money and some time to that project, and the people that are in this picture are some of the others that were at that point involved in that.

SM: What date is that picture?

JS: Well, I don't know. The originals have disappeared. I gave them about two years ago to the man who was then the staff person for the Chancellor's Club, who was very interested in them, and he wanted to make copies and get them back to me. Well, he, unfortunately, left his position and we've never been able to locate the pictures. (chuckling) I don't have the originals anymore. I have had Suzie [Peltason] look for them when she was in the course of doing her book. But one of the photographs that's the most interesting is we're down on

the banks of the [Newport] Back Bay at relatively low tide and we're looking, with Dan Aldrich in the center, at plans of the Back Bay. Because at that point in time--this is probably 1964, maybe 1965--the County of Orange was going to dredge out portions of the Back Bay and create on the western slopes a big park land. One of the things that they were going to do was to put the end of a 2,000-meter rowing course right up at the very dead-end of the Back Bay.

SM: Yes, I've seen plans of that.

JS: Well, we're down there looking at that, and next to Dan Aldrich in the picture is Duvall Hecht, and on the other side is Harry Baker, an executive then of large WTC Freight Forwarding. This gentleman is Frank Jameson, who is a lawyer in Los Angeles and had been a crew coxswain at Stanford. This is William Lund, who, you probably know, is a very well-known developer and very active . . .

SM: This one here?

JS: This one right here. Active in Orange County as one of the major fund-raisers for the Performing Arts Center. I'm next in line, and this is Dennis Murphy, the son of Senator George Murphy, and the last gentleman, who I did not know until I asked Duvall to identify him, is Robert Sawtelle, a promoter of rowing in Hawaii and an aficionado of rowing generally.

SM: Well, tell me something, if you continued as the Friends of the Crew, they obtained the use of the Shell Acre, or . . . it's an island, is it, where there put . . .

JS: Shellmaker Island.

SM: Shellmaker, S-H-E-L-L-M-A-K-E-R?

JS: Yes.

SM: And you built the boat shed on it? Is that correct?

JS: That's right.

SM: Well, if it's an island, how do you get across to it?

JS: Well, there's an isthmus going across.

SM: I see.

JS: So it's not really an island. There is an isthmus going across and you can drive onto it. John Lusk and the Lusk Construction Company contributed largely to the construction of the original boathouse, which is still there and has been a very functional steel structure.

SM: And Duvall is using it right now, is he?

JS: Duvall is using it right now in his efforts to revitalize the UCI crew. So, with that, you'll be able to have a much more meaningful interview with him.

SM: Well, I'm glad. That's helped me a lot.

JS: But there were a lot of people that were involved in that effort and were promoters of the UCI crew, including Dick Balch, and another one that you see in here, my father-in-law Burgess Dempster . . .

SM: This is Elizabeth's father?

JS: Yes, now deceased, but he's a Berkeley engineering grad from the twenties and a staunch supporter of the University of California. And Horace "Benny" Benjamin, who is a well-known

bank trust officer here, well-known over the years, that grew up down on the Newport peninsula. So UCI had a lot of friends in its early life that I think are still its friends.

SM: Well, that is true, John, and we are very appreciative. I, having come, being appointed in 1963, in December, I'm now the oldest senior person around here. Dean Steinhaus is dead. I was the second Dean and he was the first.

JS: (inaudible)

SM: Of course, he's gone and Dan's gone. Well, I appreciate the friendship around us, and they continue. Why I would like to talk to you, you have been very generous to a lot of . . . not only Irvine, but I notice that in the South Coast Rep[ertory Theater] you are very high up. The Center for Music, you've been involved.

JS: Yes.

SM: But you're a big name, as I said, on the South Coast Rep. I notice that the Baroque Festival has only one person at the top who has watched . . . (chuckling) I know it isn't Patron, it's some very nice name, only one, I was interested. That was very generous, and I know you've been working on the library with Elizabeth, the public library.

JS: And we're generous to our alma mater, too.

SM: I was going to say, as a Stanford man, you've certainly helped us a great deal. (chuckling) Tell me a little about what you personally have experienced with first the Chancellor's Club, then the Daniel G. Aldrich Club, which you add on about \$1,000

to \$1,500, and then, on top of that, is Number One, where you bring in Friends. Do you have meetings? I'm going to talk to the person who is sort of secretary to you all and try to get some information from him. But what's your recollections of things that this club, this Chancellor's Club has done?

JS: Well, Dan initiated the Chancellor's Club here in the very early years of the university. We did not become members until we moved to Orange County in the early seventies, and I think I've been a member since, oh, probably 1975 or 1976. But it is patterned after similar organizations on other campuses, and it is a sort of Town and Gown function, where the people who are members are town persons who want to support their local university, and do so through regular annual gifts in the form of dues that are paid to the UCI Foundation and are used at the discretion of the Chancellor.

SM: Well, there's another organization you've been generous in giving help and service to, the Foundation. You've been on the committee . . .

JS: I'm on the Foundation Board, yes.

SM: On the board. I don't mean a committee--board.

JS: The Board of Trustees, yes.

SM: That's very important, and that money goes to scholarships, does it not?

JS: Well, the Foundation acts as the recipient of all the private monies that are given to the university for any purpose. If they're given for a building, if they're given . . .

SM: Oh, so something like maybe a building?

JS: That's right. But to get back to the Chancellor's Club and the Daniel G. Aldrich Society, there have been a continuing number of wonderful friends of the university, and that organization has built . . . I think probably at the peak membership was maybe 200 and some--you can get the accurate numbers--and I would guess that there are probably maybe 150 members now. But this provides the Chancellor with monies that he can use to fill in the gaps wherever he needs them. If he needs money to host someone that we're recruiting for the faculty, you can use it for that. He's traditionally used it for additional undergraduate scholarships, or graduate scholarships, because there never seems to be enough money to go around. The functions are all social or academic, and generally both Chancellor Dan and Chancellor Jack have been very appreciative and participated in these functions regularly. So it's been quite a . . .

SM: Well, I was looking at the letters, as I told you, of Jack Peltason. He would say, "Well, I think the Chancellor's Club ought to go to this play we're putting on." They were given seats, special seats.

JS: That's right.

SM: And I think that's just the right way to go.

JS: Well, one of the purposes is to keep the members informed about things of interest that are going on on the campus and then it has happened that way. I believe during the

stewardship of Walter Gerkin as the Chairman of the Chancellor's Club that he initiated the founding of the Daniel G. Aldrich Society, and this was about the time that Dan was getting ready to retire the first time. It was a means of honoring Dan's name and his service as the initial Chancellor here.

SM: I'm interested to know that because I don't know that much about it, and I thought they had done it after his death, but obviously not.

JS: No, no, this was well in advance of that. It's just a different gift category within the Chancellor's Club. There are some separate functions but they're just basically all the same. It is a higher annual gift contribution level now.

SM: Now, following up a bit on the Foundation, you are quite right, that's where every money goes. I've been giving some-- not much money--but I always made it out to the UCI Foundation. That's a very large amount of money. For instance, take Athelie Clarke. She gave \$2 million, Jack told me just last Friday when I saw him. I asked him what she'd done. She only gave \$2 million to convert the Nelson Building to what's now called the Irvine Building. I think the bill was around \$4 million and she gave \$2 million. And would she put that \$2 million in your foundation?

JS: Yes.

SM: Marvelous.

JS: The foundations, as you may have been reading, in addition to the organization called the UCI Foundation, where there was a separate foundation called the UCI College of Medicine Foundation, and that was sort of an historic [anachronism] because of the way the university acquired its medical school. The medical school already had its own foundation at the time it was acquired.

SM: Well, she would have put the money in there, I suppose.

JS: On the thirtieth of June of this year, those two foundations will be merged and they will continue under the name UCI Foundation with present assets of approximately \$30-some million invested.

SM: That's impressive. Tell me, as a Stanford man, they have the same sort of approach and mechanism of raising money and so on, do they? Do they have a foundation the way we do?

JS: No, they do not. They do not need to because the university itself is a non-profit entity, and the foundation here has been set up as a means of providing private support for a public institution. And Stanford, the checks are just made payable to the Trustees of Leland Stanford, Jr. University.

SM: That's how they do it?

JS: That's how they do it.

SM: I was a great admirer of Wally Sterling, whom I knew when I started out for my Ph.D. He was teaching history.

JS: Had come from Canada.

SM: Yes, he came from Canada.

JS: Well, he actually had come from Canada through . . .

SM: Stanford.

JS: Well, no, he'd come to Stanford but from southern California. He was head of the Huntington Library in San Marino.

SM: Yes, this is how it went: He went for his Ph.D., which he got at Stanford. He was at Manitoba to begin with, then he went to Stanford, then he came to Cal Tech as the History Department Professor, and he offered me a job in 1944, but it was better for me to go to Oberlin because his was . . . Both were temporary but I had to teach economics as well as history. But he was very persuasive. Then, as you say, he was made director of the Huntington Library. He was first approached for Stanford but just felt he should take the Huntington Library. He got fed up . . . Well, let's put it this way: He got tired of the trustees, who were resistant to things he wanted to do. So, when Stanford came at him again, I think a year after he accepted . . . He told me this because I would chat with him at history meetings and so on, and I talked with him on the phone some, and I was a great admirer. He was a very good man.

JS: Oh, he and Ann were very good friends of ours.

SM: Well, you couldn't have had a better man than Wally. He told me an interesting thing, which I guess it won't matter if we put it on the tape. I said, "How is it, Wally, that you're such a good speaker?" And he was a good public speaker.

JS: He had a wonderful, booming voice.

SM: And then, on the other hand, he has worked . . . I think it was for Columbia. He did the United Nations. He was the number one commentator on the West Coast, worked with Edward R. Murrow. I said, "Well, how is you're such a good speaker, Wally?" He said, "I'll tell you. My father was a clergyman and my father always said, 'Always keep something in reserve when you're speaking.'" And he said, "That's always worked out very well." So Wally was a wonderful fellow, and my daughter thought tremendously about him.

Now, what other recollections do you have? You came, you say, about 1972 to Orange County, and you've been very friendly and supportive of us for . . . let's say, 1973, 1983, 1993, twenty years, nineteen years?

JS: Not counting that early period before the university was even opened.

SM: Yes, well, that day we opened, of course . . . I came in 1963 and we opened in 1965 and you came in 1972.

JS: Right, but the Friends of the Crew, you see, was in that early, early period in 1964.

SM: Yes, that's right. Well, I'm looking forward to interviewing Duvall. I went to a farewell party for Ray Thornton, who was the second Athletic Director at Irvine, and Duvall came. And he's again doing it for nothing, he's not charging anything.

JS: Right.

SM: I don't know what help he's got to put his equipment in order, but . . .

JS: Well, he's out raising money again for that purpose.

SM: Well, bless his heart. A fabulous man. Well, what other recollections do you have as you've watched our university grow? As your group who are from the community, are there any particular events that come to your mind?

JS: Well, I've gone to many university events, both held on and off campus, and I can't think of any that particularly stick out over that period of years. There have been a number that are semi-sweet memories. We particularly enjoyed going to the farewell dinner for John Miltner a year ago and then, just this last week, to a farewell dinner that the campus friends put on for Jack and Suzie [Peltason].

SM: Well, that's nice. I don't know a thing about it. Tell me, it must have been a very moving occasion?

JS: It was a very moving occasion. It was done up at the Montessori School on a beautiful evening. The couple that head that school are the current co-chairpersons of the Chancellor's Club. There was a mixture of people from the university and from the local community who are all good friends of the Peltasons. During the course of the dinner, some of us got up to talk a little bit about Jack and Suzie and had some very interesting things to say. Jean Aldrich was one, Mary Roosevelt another, Elizabeth and I, Elizabeth and Tom Tierney, Dick Simm from the Irvine Company, who has been a very staunch supporter of the Chancellor's Club and a former chairman of the Chancellor's Club.

SM: Was Ray Watson there?

JS: Ray was not there, at least not to my knowledge. I would have recognized him, I'm sure, had he been there. And a lot of university people.

SM: Very good. I'll tell you an interesting fact. When Jack came as Academic Vice Chancellor . . . Well, he came as Dean, and for one month--I know the thing was incorrect in the book of *The First Twenty-five Years*--he came on duty June 1. July 1, he was told Ivan [Hinderaker] was leaving to be Chancellor at Riverside. So the story was, "A change of plans," Ivan says to Jack. Ivan said, "Well, I'm going to be Chancellor of Riverside." And Jack said, "Well, who's going to take your job?" Ivan said, "You are." (chuckling) Which is what we did: the Deans all recommended Jack immediately. But he could have been told this. Ivan could have told him this is happening but don't say anything for a month, and so he went from being Dean, knowing maybe that he would be the Vice Chancellor. That's a possibility and you could therefore stretch it to what was said in *The First Twenty-five Years*. But when Jack came to UCI, his oldest boy, Tim, was in high school. His oldest is a girl and she was in college, in the Middle West, but the youngest, Jill, was only four or three, so they put her in a Montessori school. It must be the same one, I suppose.

JS: Well, it was not on campus at that time.

SM: No, no, it was down in Costa Mesa at the time. But they always liked the . . . I think Jill was there at least two years, maybe three. So that was a very nice thing, the final dinner, the farewell dinner for Jack.

JS: Well, I'm not sure it's the final one. I know that Gavin Herbert is hosting an event in early July at Casa Pacifica, the old Nixon home--his home now--down in San Clemente as a celebration of Jack's appointment as President of the University. So that will be, I'm sure, a very wonderful evening.

SM: Oh, I'll bet, and I hope you have the same day and you could look out on the ocean. (chuckling) But I'm going to miss Jack a lot, not that I saw a lot of him but I saw a fair bit of him. [I would have seen more of him if] I'd been Chair of the Academic Senate, which I was from 1978 to 1980, Dan was Chancellor at that time. That was in Dan's day. But I'm going to miss him a lot. I think there's no better person to have up there who can handle the legislature than Jack Peltason.

JS: Well, it's also interesting that having had Chang-Lin Tien as his Vice Chancellor here, he will now have him as the Berkeley Chancellor, knowing that well.

SM: Well, Jack was a very gracious person and a very diplomatic person. Personally, I was unhappy that [Tien] came down because I think he did it in order to go back, that he wouldn't have been Chancellor at Berkeley if he hadn't gone

away. So he went away, and he didn't sell his house, and many people said, "Oh, I think he'll make Chancellor." And he did. So that set our development in our programming all back.

JS: Well, perhaps.

SM: That's why Jack got an extension of time from David Gardner because we had to get picking up. So Jack was given beyond sixty-five--go to seventy, we figured. Well, now, of course, he's sixty-nine and I suppose he'll . . . I think it'll be more open-ended, it'll be a three- to five-year term. There is no limit.

JS: Well, I became a friend of Chang-Lin's when he came down here. I believe there was no expectation on his part that he was going back to Berkeley in any official capacity. I think that he wanted to save their home there. They brought all of their things from China, from her family in particular in Taiwan, and that they planned on that being their retirement home. They had no necessity to have to sell it, and that was the reason they maintained the house.

SM: That was a very good reason. But a lot of the friends I have up in Berkeley were betting on his being made Chancellor. So I think I'll accept what you're saying about the house. But I hated to lose him after two years.

JS: Yes.

SM: We were just getting going, and he was very able, he put through a very fine ten-year plan, got it all squared away and

everything. But we did lose momentum when he left. We've now picked up a bit. Any other recollections you have, John?

JS: Well, the thing that has impressed me the most about how UCI has fared, and we should bring this to a halt so that I can get back to work and you can get on to your meeting . . .

SM: Well, let's give it five minutes. Any recollections? Because it's nice, as you go along things come to your mind, you know.

JS: Well, the thing that comes to my mind is the incredible good fortune that this campus had with the selection of its first two Chancellors, of Dan Aldrich in particular, in the initial planning of this campus. He planned from the very start for a campus that won't reach its full maturity until we're into the next century.

SM: The next century.

JS: And the campus is of the proper size to accommodate that expansion, and the amenities that he put in on these barren hills in the planting of the trees and the gardens and the wonderful walkways through, the preservation of the central campus as a park, I think have given this campus a character that is surpassed perhaps only by that of Berkeley. It's really quite a tribute.

SM: I think you're right. At this seminar that I have attended on writing the history of a university, Berkeley in particular, but others, and comparison even with the European ones, and it's been interesting how they have . . . One professor of architecture gave us the full story of the architecture of

Berkeley. They were two weeks or three weeks apart. Then the next seminar was on planting and all the different trees and shrubs that they have at Berkeley and how that's changed. I just love that section as you go up to the Faculty Club . . .

JS: With the redwoods and the little stream?

SM: With the redwoods and the stream coming down. You can block out, you think you're in the country. It's so nice. Well, we're doing very well, we've still got some . . . Any other recollections?

JS: Well, let me think here if there's anything that immediately pops to mind.

SM: Did you ever attend some of the plays and musicals?

JS: Oh, heavens, yes.

SM: I know all the Chancellor's Clubs, I think, went to *My Fair Lady*, and that was around 1977 or 1976.

JS: Oh, I've gone to many, many productions here on the campus and have enjoyed them. One of the most interesting that sort of pops back into mind was that a very distinguished organist, the organist I believe at the UC campus in Santa Barbara, Jim Welch, came down. They found a portable organ, which I had never seen before. It's a great big thing that . . .

SM: I've seen it.

JS: Have you seen that? It's located somewhere here on the campus.

SM: It's stored in the music hall, the concert hall.

JS: Well, it's a very, very unusual organ.

SM: Well, let me tell you a story of that. It's a very good baroque organ.

JS: Yes.

SM: It was purchased by Clay Garrison in Austria, so it was sent over by freighter in parts. Just all the parts were packed into boxes, and that whole lot was put on this freighter. But the three workmen, who were Austrian, they put in a couple cases of wine, very good wine, because they knew they were going to take three weeks to a month to assemble it and they wanted . . .

JS: And they were coming over here to do it.

SM: But there was a strike in America, so they had unloaded at Ensenada, and it went forward to our Customs, and they found these boxes of wine and we were fined. The university was fined I've forgotten how much. (chuckling)

JS: For trying to smuggle it.

SM: Oh, yes, they were smuggling in good Austrian wine. That's a true story. The organ that the Berkeley fellow--maybe this is the one you're talking about--gave the concert on, which I thought was great, but they don't use it anymore. It's just tucked away there. It's on wheels and they move it all around.

JS: Yes. Well, it's very unusual and it takes, I think, an organist of peculiar skills to play it.

SM: Well, the fellow from Berkeley was very good. I'm keen about organs, as you know, and I'm sorry that they don't give more

concerts. Well, I think they cannot get a big enough audience, I guess. Well, is there anything more?

JS: No, I think not. Why don't you close it.

SM: I will close the machine and thank you personally. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW